

Requisition for an Extraordinary Meeting of Worthing Borough Council to consider a Motion to reintroduce the use of the Mayoral robes and the consideration of provision of alternative robes.

In accordance with Section 4.1 of the WBC Constitution, the undersigned call on the Mayor to call an Extraordinary Meeting of Worthing Borough Council to consider this single item of business.

Single Item - By consent of this Chamber reinstatement of the use of the Mayoral robes and consideration of provision of alternative robes

This single item is made up of two separate parts both relating to the one single item.

Part 1 - Immediate reintroduction of the use of the existing Mayoral robes

Part 2 - A separate workstream to consider the opportunity to secure the provision of an alternative Mayoral gown that does not contain animal fur or other like products that may cause any incumbent Mayor not to wish to utilise them.

Signatories to the requisition:

- Cllr Kevin Jenkins
- Cllr Daniel Humphreys
- Cllr Noel Atkins
- Cllr Heather Mercer
- Cllr Russ Cochran

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Part One

In July 2023 through Councillors Walker and Taylor-Beale, this council's ruling Labour group brought forward a motion to desist with the use of Mayoral and Councillor ceremonial robes in all public engagements.

The claim was that this was part of an ambitious agenda for change as part of their aim to be a 'Council for the Community'. In their presentation to this chamber they suggested that this action would encourage greater public participation, particularly amongst the young in the life of the council, in public debate and engagement in this chamber in democracy. Since July that increased participation at various council meetings or in this chamber has not materialised.

The councillors spoke of research, but none was presented in any measurable detail. Nor was there any tangible evidence of public consultation on this proposal with the residents of Worthing. In fact the emphasis of the motion was slanted such that it seemed to favour 'young people' to the exclusion of others and many have since argued that it was discriminatory in that it failed to take account of the views of the wider Worthing population and equally of 'older people' in our town.

The decision to remove all ceremonial robes from public engagements, attracted huge public attention and was widely condemned across many platforms. This council received numerous questions and was subject of a concerted campaign by interested parties. There have even been reports from well respected quarters in our town that the Deputy Leader has promised to review and consider reversing that decision.

One of the biggest groups who were dismayed by this decision was our Veterans. Men and women of all ages and backgrounds, along with their families and friends, who very strongly and passionately felt that discarding the use of the Mayoral robes at the annual Remembrance Parade ceremony was an insult to those who had served, been lost, had returned from service and those that still suffer from their injuries today.

Mayoral robes have been worn by the Mayor of our town since 1890; after 133 years of historic tradition November 2023 will be recorded for prosperity in the history of our town as the year that that tradition was broken and the enduring bond between our council and the veterans was fractured.

As a council we need to show that we are listening, listening to the voices of those that we represent. They are telling us that the decision in July 2023 was wrong, that it was not welcomed and should be reversed. We should be willing to seek to heal that fractured bond and rebuild the trust with residents.

This is wider than simply Remembrance, there are many other key events in the life of our town that are marked by the visible and visual presence of our Mayor.

There are some who have suggested that the Mayoral robes should be altered and the animal fur elements be removed and replaced with a synthetic alternative. We do not agree, the robes as they are, are a historical record, legacy and artefact of our town. To alter them in any way is tantamount to 'historical vandalism'.

When a Mayor takes office they should do so understanding the full weight of the expectation of our town upon their office. That there are traditions and values to be upheld and none should take on that role if they cannot aspire to meet that high standard.

By reversing the appalling decision of July 2023 we can start the healing process in our town and continue the celebration of our heritage. This motion entails no additional budgetary cost to the Council, it simply reinstates the consent of this chamber for the mayoral robes to be worn.

Therefore this requisition proposes, by way of a motion, that the use of the Mayoral robes be reinstated and that these should be worn by the town's mayor, at their discretion, at all public engagements and especially those of significant calendar note in the life of our great town of Worthing.

Part 2

In the 21st Century it is well documented that people's desire or liking of wearing animal furs or similar materials has significantly changed.

To alter the existing Mayoral robes would to many be seen as destruction of our town's history and an act of 'historical vandalism'.

Therefore this requisition proposes, by way of a motion, that a separate workstream to part one above is implemented and that it is tasked to consider the opportunity to secure the provision of an alternative mayoral gown that does not contain animal fur or other like products that may cause any incumbent Mayor to choose not to utilise them.

Together these two parts allow our history as a town to be visibly worn and celebrated, whilst allowing any incumbent Mayor the personal choice as to which gown to wear alongside their chain of office.