

CIVIC OFFICE OF THE YEAR AWARD 2008

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

1. As befits a large, active, and diverse county, the civic office in Nottinghamshire County Council is a busy place providing support to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Council across the range of their functions.
2. Nottinghamshire has a population of some 770,000 and covers an area of 805 square miles with a distance of over 70 miles from north to south. It is important that the Chairman of the County Council is seen by communities everywhere in the County.
3. Over the last year we have had over 600 events ranging from the high profile (including a Royal visit to open a large PFI scheme, and a reception to honour the Dalai Lama) to community events (such as school councils from around the county meeting in the Council Chamber and then being entertained in the civic suite).
4. The Chairman of Nottinghamshire County Council is a working member. During 2008/9 the Chairman, the Hon Joan Taylor MBE, has been more active than most balancing her civic responsibilities; her role as a member; and her outside interests (as well as being the County Council's Champion for Older People she has been appointed by the LGA as the National Local Government Champion for Older People and is the representative on the UK Board of Better Government for Older People). The Civic Office provides the support that allows her to discharge all these roles.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

5. The Chairman is the embodiment of the civic life of Nottinghamshire and most people see this in events that the Chairman attends across the county and the activities, receptions etc that the Chairman hosts and the civic office organises.
6. The nature of the demand for civic representation is such that both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman have extensive diaries. Both of them attend and host events and are pro-active in promoting the County. In some circumstances the demand has been such that the previous Chairman has been called upon to attend some events.
7. During the current year the Chairman is expected to attend over 430 civic engagements and some 120 meetings. The Vice-chairman has a separate diary and will attend some 130 civic events over the year and 145 meetings.

8. Some examples of events the civic office has organised are given below.

Traditional Events

9. Over the year the civic office has organised 68 “traditional” events. In addition to events such as the civic service and civic dinner these have included the following.
 - 9.1. National Holocaust Memorial Day. We have been holding this event for seven years. The 135 guests this year included the Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Civic Heads from Nottinghamshire and surrounding counties, members of the Royal British Legion, military, and residents from elderly people’s homes. Representatives from different faiths are invited to share an afternoon of education and reflection.
 - 9.2. The Lord Mayor of Nottingham and Chairman of the County Council jointly host the Annual Legal Service. Some 80 guests, including the judiciary, attend the event and reception to mark the beginning of the legal year.
 - 9.3. Receptions to celebrate local recipients of New Year and Birthday Honours. The Chairman hosts one table and the Lord Lieutenant hosts the other.
 - 9.4. Recently the retirement dinner for the Chief Constable was held at County Hall. This large event, which attracted 240 guests, was jointly arranged by the City Council, County Council and Police Authority.

A performance by the Police Band took place during the evening and the Chairman, the Lord Mayor of Nottingham, and a representative from the Police Authority made presentations.

Community Focused Events

10. In addition to the traditional events we will run some 300 community focused events during the year. Examples include
 - 10.1. School Council Visits. Twenty-five schools a year hold a school council meeting in the Council Chamber. Our Chairman gives the Chair of the School Council the Chain of Office to wear while chairing the meeting (from the rostrum). The Chairman of the County Council takes part in the meeting as an ordinary member and shows due deference to the Chair of the meeting. After the meeting the pupils are provided with lunch in the civic suite and each presented with a gift as a memento.
 - 10.2. Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The civic office arranges and hosts the annual awards ceremony for each of the districts in Nottinghamshire at County Hall. Previously the awards were held in individual districts but the volunteers had to organise the events and pay to hire the room,

refreshments etc. We took the initiative with the organisers and suggested that the events could be held at County Hall and the civic office would help with the organisation and arrangements. The County Council meets the cost of hospitality.

The presentation ceremonies are typically each for 100 recipients plus parents and guests. Consequently around 300 guests attend each presentation.

- 10.3. The Chairman hosts events at County Hall for students in Nottinghamshire who have achieved 100% attendance during their school life. They and their parents are entertained to afternoon tea with the Chairman and presented with a certificate and a photograph for their school.
- 10.4. Garden Party. The civic office arranges the Garden Party at Rufford Country Park to thank people who have contributed to the wellbeing of their communities. We plan for 500 guests.
- 10.5. Back to the Floor. We have organised a range of opportunities over the year for the Chairman to work alongside staff at the frontline – for instance she has painted the lines at school sports grounds with the landscape team and spent a day delivering the post at County Hall. Naturally, she took the opportunity to feed issues raised by frontline staff with senior managers.
- 10.6. Oversees Visitors. The Chairman makes a point of welcoming parties of international visitors. For instance, this year she has received teachers on exchange visits organised by the British Council from China, Brazil, Poland, and Romania. Former Child Migrants visiting the UK frequently see a visit to County Hall one of the high points of their visit.

Receptions

11. Over the year we will typically organise over 100 receptions. As well as using the facilities of County Hall we organise receptions at outside venues where this is important to ensure that people across Nottinghamshire can attend.
- 11.1. Olympic Flag Raising. In partnership with the East Midlands Development Agency we organised the flag raising ceremony at County Hall, to mark the closing of the Beijing Olympic Games and the launch of the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics

The innovative programme on the riverside included:-

- a) Entertainment from the Chinese “Lion Dance” Group
- b) Arrival of the Olympic 2012 flag on a Dragon Boat accompanied by a flotilla of boats and canoes along the River Trent.

- c) The flag being handed to the Chairman supported by a squad of young gymnasts in their GB kit
- d) Buglers from the Robin Hood Rifles sounded the arrival of the flag. To mark their 2008 anniversary a member of the TA hoisted the flag.

Following this brief ceremony 250 guests, representing local businesses, sports clubs and associations, and local authorities were invited to the Assembly Hall to watch the live coverage on large screens of the closing ceremony in Beijing.

The council was asked to organise the event with only 3 weeks notice. We used the civic office's experience, knowledge, and contacts to organise a successful event. We worked with the County Council's sports service and other partners (including British Waterways) to organise a successful event. We managed to get many staff to work on Bank Holiday Sunday to help us.

- 11.2. Olympians and Paralympians. It was important this year to celebrate the outstanding success of Nottinghamshire athletes in Beijing, many of whom had been part of sports squads supported by the County Council. We invited the athletes their guests and coaches, sports clubs and associations, businesses, the media and civic dignitaries from across Nottinghamshire.

This was a popular event with nearly 400 guests. To handle this number we tried a different format at the reception. We arranged large screens in the Assembly Hall so that the Olympians and Paralympians were interviewed during the evening and this was relayed on the screen for all the guests to enjoy.

The centrepiece was a large cake with the Olympic rings iced onto it, which was cut by two athletes and the Chairman. Overall a very successful evening – no less than our athletes deserved.

- 11.3. Reception for Hablame Project. Hablame is an international school linking project that promotes mutual understanding between children from Nottingham and Coahuila (Mexico). This project enables children to develop a better understanding of local and global issues relating to citizenship and sustainable development.

- 11.4. Military Receptions

A reception to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the formation of 504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron was attended by 300 guests. The band from RAF Waddington played during the evening on the upper level of the Assembly Hall – at 2130 there was a parade of the Colours and a spectacular march off. All civic heads in the County were invited together with Lord Lieutenants of Nottinghamshire and Rutland. RAF Cottesmore brought a display of rifles and their

commemorative silver. The Chairman cut a celebratory cake with a ceremonial sword to officially mark the 80th Anniversary.

We worked with the civic office at Nottingham City Council to hold a joint reception for the newly formed Mercian Regiment. Nearly 400 guests attended a service at St. Mary's Church followed by a reception in the Council House.

A reception to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Territorial Army at County Hall was attended by 275 guests.

A reception to mark the Veterans Celebrations in 2008 was attended by 260 guests including war veterans from the 2nd World War and up to present day conflicts.

- 11.5. Battle of the Somme Commemorations. As the commemorative service was held at Southwell Minster we arranged lunch in the Great Hall, Southwell. The 100 guests included the Lord Mayor of Nottingham and the Mayor of Derby plus visitors from Foncquevillers. The Order of Service was produced in French and English with an interpreter at the service to make our visitors feel welcome. The menus were also produced in French with French flags, the Union Flag, and the County Council flags on the tables,

Visit of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso to Nottinghamshire

12. The Chairman, Councillor the Hon Joan Taylor MBE is clear that the highlight of her year in office was the visit of the Dalai Lama. This was a high profile visit from someone who is revered by many but for others is a controversial figure.
13. To reflect this dichotomy, the civic office took the lead organising this event with the help of external agencies and internal departments. The visit was treated as a Royal visit. It was important that we balanced diplomatic protection and security with the expectations of people to be able to access His Holiness.
14. We needed to do a considerable amount of research – eg how to address His Holiness, dietary requirements, dress code etc. We consulted the Indian Community Centre and had a specific and appropriate outfit made for the Chairman – long embroidered coat and trousers. A gift was required to be presented to his Holiness. Although we were recommended to present an oak sapling from Sherwood Forest our research indicated that this would not be acceptable at customs. Instead, the civic office commissioned a local wood turner to make a small acorn from wood from Sherwood Forest to commemorate his visit to Nottinghamshire. We also commissioned a piece of glass called Unity. This was three separate pieces united as one, which could be used for meditation.

15. The civic office also organised pieces of fresh coconut to be offered during the ceremony by a representative from the Buddhist community. This was similar to communion. His Holiness commented that this was a very thoughtful gesture uniting everyone together.
16. A CD was produced of the visit – which guests could purchase and the proceeds donated to the Chairman’s Charity.

CIVIC SUITE

17. We are fortunate in having an attractive and flexible Civic Suite at County Hall. The Civic Suite is on the ground floor alongside the River Trent. It includes:
 - an area for entertaining, we can accommodate up to 60 people for a sit-down meal and more for a buffet
 - an office each for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman
 - accommodation for the civic office team
 - cabinets to display civic gifts received from other organisations
18. In order to make better use of the riverside, an outside patio has been laid with French doors directly into the civic suite. This enables us to make better use of the riverside and has increased the range of activities we can provide – plans are in hand for an evening of “poetry on the patio” in the spring.
19. The area around the patio is well landscaped. This year we have introduced tree-planting ceremonies for some events – we have used this to mark the Dalai Lama’s visit and the anniversary of child migration.
20. The older person’s day in 2008 showed how flexible the civic suite can be. Activities for older people took over most of the public areas of County Hall (Committee Rooms, Assembly Hall etc). The civic suite was designated the “chill out zone” with a massage area and yoga sessions.
21. We are conscious that County Hall is located in the south of Nottinghamshire and can seem distant from the communities in the North and East. To overcome this we have started taking some events out and about. The County Council has recently refurbished the Talbot Suite at Rufford Country Park which provides an excellent alternative venue.
22. The civic office is well resourced by the County Council, for instance the two chauffeurs have access to three civic cars, including a people carrier, which are available for the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and other members and senior officers on official duties.

INNOVATIONS

23. County Hall is an imposing building but we are conscious that it can seem remote and foreboding. Recent Chairmen have been keen to invite more people and a wider range of people to County Hall and to see it as the hub of local democracy. We are particularly keen to encourage young people to visit County Hall. To encourage this we have:
 - a) Encouraged school councils to hold a meeting in the council chamber. The school children are then entertained in the civic suite and provided with a “goodie” bag to mark their visit.
 - b) Increased the usage of the civic suite for less formal receptions
 - c) Held Citizenship ceremonies for the south of the County in the civic suite attended by the Chairman. The Chairman or Vice-Chairman attended 26 citizenship ceremonies in 2008, 6 of which were held in the civic suite.
24. Most people appreciate a memento of their visit to and event at County Hall. We commission a photographer on most occasions and send guests a photograph in a souvenir folder. Rebecca Adlington’s mother noted that although many photos had been taken of her daughter after she won her gold medals this was the first time anyone had sent them a copy.
25. We have developed tours of County Hall, aimed especially at young people, and have published an interpretive guide explaining the role of the Chairman, the coat of arms, and other features of the building.
26. This year we have introduced breakfast receptions in the civic suite hosted by the Chairman. These are often more convenient ways of thanking busy people – for instance we have used them to thank staff who have gone the extra mile or achieved awards.
27. Recent Chairmen have used their budget to purchase and donate trophies. So, players in Beeston Hockey Club, performers in the Selston Music Festival, primary school netball players in Newark, and entrants in the Worksop marathon will compete annually for their County Cup.
28. Instead of sending the civic chains to Fattorini’s to be repaired commercially we approached the jewellery & textile departments of one of our local colleges. The college were thrilled to undertake this unusual request, which was a good experience for the students. The Chairman went along to thank the students and presented the college with some books in recognition. This achieved good coverage for both the Council and the college.

29. We also provide opportunities for catering students to wait on tables at civic events. This provides good experience for the students and of course is of benefit to the County Council.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

30. Nottinghamshire is a two-tier area and of course the geographical county includes the unitary City of Nottingham. Consequently, much of our work involves working with the other eight civic offices across the County and with those in adjacent counties.
31. We are frequently contacted by other civic officers and are always pleased to help colleagues with advice on how an effective civic office runs. We have longstanding arrangements that we can share. In particular our chauffeurs seem to be regularly asked for help and advice.
32. As a goodwill gesture and to increase efficiency overall, recent Chairmen have been happy to share the civic car with other civic dignitaries travelling to the same functions, especially out of county events.
33. We are conscious that part of the role of the civic office is to get positive publicity for the county, the council, and the Chairman. We work closely with our colleagues in corporate communications and with the various media organisations.

CHAIRMAN'S CHARITY

34. In addition to their high-profile civic role each Chairman nominates a charity to benefit from their year in office. The events arranged reflect the particular Chairman's interests but the work of organising events naturally falls on the civic office. Over recent years we've organised a Murder Mystery Night, summer balls, race nights, golf days, fashion shows, flower demonstrations, sponsored swims, fun runs, sponsored dog walks, boat trips and a clairvoyance evening.
35. In addition to this the Chairman supports the Great Nottinghamshire Bike Ride. The GNBR consists of a series of rides of different lengths and seriousness and is an important community event as well as raising funding for charities. This nationally recognised event sees over 4,000 riders take part from across Nottinghamshire and further afield. The Chairman starts the ride at Holme Pierrepont and sometimes spends all day at the event to see the riders back. Of course, whenever the Chairman is on duty so is her Chauffeur.

ROLE OF THE CIVIC OFFICE

36. The civic office is at the heart of the county's civic life. We provide advice and guidance on protocol to any and all of the 67 elected members as well as departmental staff. We published an internal

booklet for council staff with guidance covering forms of address, how to organise an official opening, where to get unveiling curtains, scissors, etc and how to do the wording on plaques.

37. Our primary role is to ensure that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman's events run smoothly. This involves:
 - a) Managing their diaries
 - b) Ensuring that they are adequately prepared through background research and producing pen portraits and briefing notes
 - c) Writing speeches
 - d) Researching venues as necessary
 - e) Chauffeuring and accompanying the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and overseeing their safety and security.
 - f) And, because things don't always run smoothly, reacting to problems and changes "on the hoof".
38. Our reputation seems to have spread as we frequently get requests for advice from other councils and other organisations including protocol matters, event management, and where to source resources for events. We have a database of contacts including providers of equipment and people with specific craft skills.
39. For instance, at Christmas the Mercedes dealers in Nottingham approached the civic office for help in sourcing a 30ft Christmas tree for their showroom. We put them in touch with the County's Sheltered Employment Farm who were able to supply a tree.

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