



The Admission of
Bridget Prentice
as an Honorary Freewoman
of the London Borough of Lewisham



Ref: 663-2a

Civic Suite, Lewisham Town Hall
7.30pm on Friday 20 May 2016

Bridget Prentice

Early life

Bridget Prentice was born in 1952 in Glasgow. She served as MP for Lewisham East from 1992 until 2010.

She grew up in the east end of Glasgow – a poor part of the city – with her parents, two older brothers, younger sister and extended family nearby. She describes her childhood as a mix of good and bad times. She recalls realising at a young age that some of her friends were even less well off than her family.

“My parents instilled in us a sense of what was right and wrong. They taught us that there were others worse off and instead of moaning about our own predicament, that we should help others.”

This early development of Bridget’s social consciousness would eventually propel her into a career in politics.

Bridget’s parents saw education as the way to move on in the world. Bridget enjoyed learning things which gave her a life-long enthusiasm for education and encouraged her to become a teacher.

“I think teaching is the most important thing anybody does. Seeing young people suddenly ‘get it’ is just the most exciting moment.”



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Top: Election night 2005
 Centre: Bridget with Sybil Phoenix
 at the unveiling of the opening
 of St Mauritius House
 Bottom: Representing the UK
 at the Chile conference in 2003

Entering politics

The political bug hit Bridget quite early in life. "I suppose my very first political act was when I was about 11. I judged everything by whether it was fair or unfair so I sent a postcard to Nelson Mandela because I'd read that he'd been imprisoned and to my 11-year-old eyes, that wasn't fair."

Bridget got involved in politics after moving to London to do her teacher training. She became a Hammersmith and Fulham councillor in 1986 while she was teaching in the borough. Unhappy with some of the education policies of the time she was persuaded to stand for Parliament to try and make a difference. She successfully stood in Lewisham East, becoming its MP in 1992.

Bridget held several key posts during her time in Parliament. She was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice (formerly the Department for Constitutional Affairs), with responsibility for a number of policy areas including legal services, coroners, youth engagement and electoral administration. Bridget was also a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee and had been Parliamentary Private Secretary to senior ministers. Looking back at her many achievements while in

office she recalls one she is very proud of, the introduction of the Coroners' and Justice Act 2009. Bridget led this through the legislative process.

"It was particularly significant because it introduced reforms to the rather archaic coroner system. I had met so many people in bereaved families who'd had a bad experience under the old system because coroners weren't necessarily legally qualified. They were a mixture of people and were independent individuals. The new Act brought structure to the system and, crucially, allowed for appeals."

Changing the legal system so consumers get a better deal and lawyers could work with other professionals was another huge achievement. "It was very controversial but absolutely necessary."

"The other thing I'm pleased about is reducing the age for standing for Parliament or local government to 18. We did a lot of work trying to encourage young people to become engaged in politics. That's why I think the Lewisham Young Mayor programme is fantastic. I constantly used it as an excellent example when I went around the country talking about young mayor systems. It's a really effective way of engaging young people."

Bridget addressing a packed House of Commons on the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Labour Party

Very proud of the introduction of the Coroners' and Justice Act 2009

People make Lewisham the great borough it is



Over Bridget's 18 years as an MP, she has always ensured there were opportunities for local young people to get involved in democracy. During that time she invited about 30 young people from schools in Lewisham East to work as apprentices in either her constituency office or in Parliament.

"Some have gone on to become involved in politics. This is great but even if the young person wasn't politically motivated, I just wanted them to get engaged and see how important it was to be politically aware."

After politics

Bridget retired from politics in 2010. She still lives in Lewisham, with her partner Kevin (and three cats), and plays a key role in supporting a number of local organisations. She is a trustee at two charities – Age Exchange in Blackheath and For Jimmy in Lee. She specialises in governance and advises on the most appropriate ways to work with local and central government and the private sector. Bridget is also chair of governors at Trinity, Lewisham Church of England School and is an Electoral Commissioner, overseeing the proper conduct of elections.

"Seeing Lewisham grow and change over the years has been exciting. What's great about that change is that it's still keeping its diversity. We must never lose that because people make Lewisham the great borough it is and it's been my absolute honour and privilege to represent them as an MP. If I can continue to do so as a member of the community than I shall."



Top: Abseiling down the Citibank building for charity

Bottom: Graffiti busting Bridget



Back to school at St Mary's Lewisham

Seeing young people suddenly 'get it' is just the most exciting moment

Freewoman

In admitting Bridget as an Honorary Freewoman of the Borough, the Council is recognising her dedication as an accessible and diligent MP for the Lewisham East constituency for 18 years. While in Parliament she showed great qualities, which were recognised with a post in the Justice Department where she carried through important new legislation.

Locally, she has demonstrated her commitment to the significant part of Lewisham she has represented and where she still lives. Her availability and flexibility in undertaking work for her constituents while at the same time carrying out her ministerial responsibilities was a demanding feat she accomplished with aplomb.

There is no more a deserving person than Bridget to be awarded the highest accolade the Council has the power to bestow, the Freedom of the London Borough of Lewisham.



The scroll

The scroll has been illuminated on vellum by a local artist who has created some images that reflect the life of Bridget.

At the top is the borough's Coat of Arms and then the relevant Act to admit a person to becoming a Freewoman and then the wording of the Council recommendation passed unanimously at the Council meeting of 25 November 2015.

The images depict Trinity, Lewisham Church of England School in Lee Green where Bridget is Chair of Governors, a drawing of the Houses of Parliament, the coat of arms of her home city of Glasgow and finally, the emblem of her beloved Celtic Football Club is contained in the large letter U.

The casket

The casket has been designed and created to a particular style for presentation. It is made of silver and perspex. On the front of the casket is a silver plate that has the Council's Coat of Arms. The casket has silver ends to complete the design.

The silver plaque on the wooden base reads:

Presented to Bridget Prentice by the London Borough of Lewisham on her admission as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham.

Friday 20 May 2016



London Borough of Lewisham

Meeting of the Council Friday 20 May 2016, 7.30pm

Order of Proceedings

1. Councillors (other than those in the Mayoral party) and all invited guests will take their seats in the Council Chamber and public gallery.
2. The Mayoral party will escort Bridget Prentice, her personal guests and other key people into the Council Chamber to their seats on the dais. *Guests and Members are asked to stand please.*
3. The Chair of Council, Councillor Obajimi Adefiranye, will open proceedings, report any apologies and make any announcements.
4. The Chair of Council will welcome members and distinguished guests, and announce that the Council is meeting for the sole purpose to admit Bridget Prentice as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham.
5. The admission of Bridget Prentice as an Honorary Freewoman of the Borough. The Chair of Council to report that under Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, a borough can admit to the Honorary Freedom of the Borough 'persons of distinction and persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough.'

6. The Chair of Council will call upon Barry Quirk, the Chief Executive, to read the following resolution of the Council passed unanimously at the Council meeting held on Wednesday 25 November 2015.

Under Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, a Council can admit to the Freedom of the Borough persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough. The Freedom of the Borough is the highest honour a Council has the power to bestow.

The Council recommendation:

“It is recommended that Bridget Prentice be admitted as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham in recognition of her service to the Borough and in particular the residents of Lewisham East whom she served during 18 years as their Member of Parliament. During that time she worked unstintingly on their behalf, dealing with their individual problems and concerns and offered national leadership on issues relating to youth justice and democratic engagement. Her concerns for her constituents and their welfare was always clear as was her commitment to young people, for whom she has continued to be a champion, serving most recently as Chair of Governors at Trinity School. She is an appropriate and deserving nominee for the highest award the borough can make.”

7. Bridget Prentice will then be invited to sign the Freedom Roll of honour book. The Mayor and Chief Executive will counter sign as witnesses.

8. The Chair of Council will call upon the following to speak to the recommendation: Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham; Kay Caldwell; Cllr Vivienne Lukey; Lord Cashman; Cllr Alan Hall; Cllr Jamie Milne; Cllr Janet Daby; Cllr Jim Mallory and Cllr Hilary Moore.
9. Following the speeches the Mayor will then formally present the casket containing the Council’s recommendation to Bridget Prentice on a specially inscribed scroll sealed by the Council.
10. Bridget Prentice will then be asked to speak in respect of the honour that has been accorded to her.
11. The formal proceedings having ended, the Mayoral party will leave the Council Chamber. *Everyone is asked to stand at this point.*
12. All Members and invited guests are cordially invited to a civic reception in the Civic Suite upper foyer, giving everyone the opportunity to congratulate Bridget Prentice in a convivial atmosphere.