

## **BEATING THE BOUNDS AND COURT LEET**

Beating the Bounds and Court Leet are ancient historical ceremonies dating back at least 800 years.

Both ceremonies take place in Southampton every year on the first Tuesday after Michaelmas, or on such other date to be determined by the Sheriff, following the Beating of the Bounds.

### **BEATING THE BOUNDS**

The custom of Beating the Bounds was revived in 1957 after a gap of over 100 years. Originally, the Mayor and Sheriff, accompanied by other civic dignitaries, toured the boundary of Southampton on horseback to check it was intact.

More recently, this responsibility has been undertaken by the Sheriff of Southampton and Service Director, Legal and Governance; however, it is now undertaken by car rather than on horseback. Although the route for the ceremony is chosen by the Sheriff and may alter slightly from year to year, some of the historic, ancient boundaries are still visited, along with some more modern ones.

In recent years, Sheriffs have encouraged participation by local school children. At various pre-chosen boundary stones, the children assemble and, together with the Sheriff, beat back some of the undergrowth to make the boundary clear.

After the boundary has been toured and checked to be intact, the Sheriff returns to the Civic Centre, where he/she takes on the duties of Foreman/Madam Foreman of the Jury at Court Leet.

## **COURT LEET**

The history of the Court Leet in England probably began well before 1066. In theory, it was a royal court, where free men met to deal with minor local criminal cases and raise other matters of concern. Later, it often merged with the manorial court which looked after the use of the common fields and pastures, as happened in Southampton.

These courts often disappeared in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but Southampton's remained. The City was one of a few allowed to keep its ancient court when Courts Leet generally were abolished in 1972.

The earliest surviving Court Leet books for Southampton date from 1549. At that time, the meeting place was the Cutthorn Mound on the Common, but the court finally moved indoors to the Guildhall (then in the Bargate) in 1670.

The main officer of the court was the Steward. Aldermen and Councillors, the Town Clerk and Jury members also attended, along with members of the public. At the Cutthorn, a feast was provided for all who attended, though this was not possible in the Guildhall.

The business of the court in the late 1500s included presentments on subjects such as water supply and rubbish control, proper measures for beer and weights for other goods. Other matters of local concern could also be raised.

Today, although it has no powers, Court Leet provides a valuable opportunity for any citizen or group of citizens in Southampton, to make representations (called Presentments) about matters of local concern, which might not normally come to the attention of the City Council.

The Court comprises of a panel of jurors made up of Honorary Aldermen, Past Mayors, Past Sheriffs and others considered by the Sheriff to be suitable and appropriate persons to serve on the Jury, the Steward of the Manor of Court Leet (the Service Director, Legal and Governance) and the Foreman/Madam Foreman of the Jury (the Sheriff).

Once the Court has been formally opened and the official speeches and swearing in of the Jury have been completed, the Steward will call for the presenters in turn. After the conclusion of each, the Jury will vote on whether to reject or accept the presentment (this decision is normally based on whether the presentment is within the City Council's remit). It is interesting to note that even in the 16th century, some presentments were not accepted by the Jury.

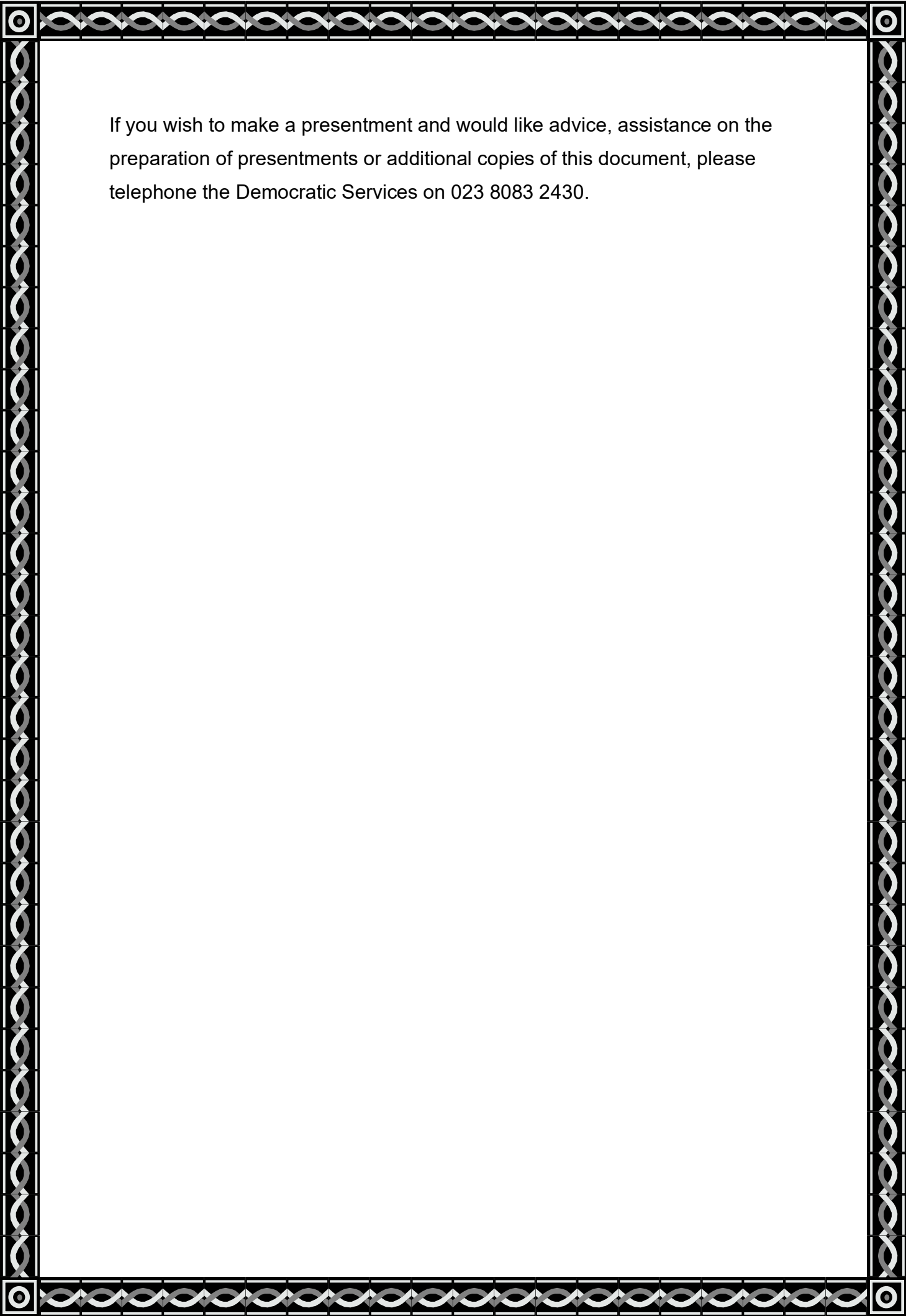
Should the Jury accept the Presentment, the Service Director, Legal and Governance will arrange for the Presentment to be forwarded to the Cabinet Member. All Presentments received by Court Leet will then be reported on block to a future meeting of the Council's Cabinet (Executive) approximately 4-6 weeks after Court Leet. Presenters (and those interested in the Presentment) will have an opportunity to attend in accordance with the normal procedures, subject to the discretion of the Leader / Cabinet Member chairing the meeting. Any Presentments not capable of being addressed at that meeting of the Cabinet will be referred back to a further meeting of the Cabinet.

#### How to Make a Presentment

The Presentment must be submitted in writing, along with the presenter's names and address to the Designated Officer. This may be either before Court Leet or at Court Leet, at the discretion of the presenter.

There is no limit on the number of Presentments that any one individual or organisation may make. The Sheriff may, however, decide to either consolidate linked Presentments or to rule that the content and/or number of Presentments are vexatious or excessive.

The Steward shall call presenters to make their presentments and presenters are requested to keep their Presentments to the point. The Sheriff will rule if in his/her view the Presenter has exceeded an appropriate time or has departed unduly from his/her presentment.



If you wish to make a presentment and would like advice, assistance on the preparation of presentments or additional copies of this document, please telephone the Democratic Services on 023 8083 2430.