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## **Mayoral Chains of Office**

Thank you for your email of 16 August seeking the Government's intervention in the dispute over the wearing of the mayoral chains of office between the directly elected mayor, Tony Eggington, and the Charter Trustees for Mansfield town.

I should first explain that local authorities are independent of central government, being directly accountable to their electorate, their auditor and ultimately the courts. Central government has limited powers to intervene in their day to day business. Ultimately, this is a local issue and those concerned should resolve any dispute in the best interests of the people of Mansfield.

The legal position is that we have no powers to intervene and that, since no parish has been instituted for the town of Mansfield, the Charter Trustees remain in existence with the same responsibilities given them under the 1970s legislation i.e. they are responsible for the civic regalia of Mansfield town – as I understand it this includes the chains of office.

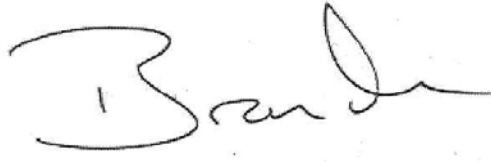
The principal role of the Charter Trustees in Mansfield is to maintain civic regalia, a collection of gifts and artefacts that were donated to the Town during its days as a Borough and other gifts subsequently donated by past Chairmen of the Council. The Trustees meet twice a year and have powers to raise a precept on the Council to repair any civic regalia, if necessary. So one of the main responsibilities of the Charter Trustees is to look after the Chains of Office and they have been doing so since 1974. However only a mayor can wear them – and I understand the directly elected mayor had been doing so until recently. I also note that there is no civic/ceremonial mayor in Mansfield.

This does not mean however that we in Government cannot express a view and I have some sympathy with your exasperation over this issue. Where councils have historic civic regalia, I believe they should be worn with pride. This Government strongly supports celebrating our country's tapestry of local historic traditions. I disagree with those who have argued that the chains should be placed in a museum. Civic regalia are a symbol of continuity, of local identity and of civic pride. Local democracy is diminished if one whitewashes all colour and ceremony in some bland, vain, politically correct bid to 'modernise'.

Indeed, my children have advised me that 'bling' is actually quite fashionable these days; this observation reflects the fact that reactionary 'modernisers' are generally out of touch with the people. I suspect the public would rather have their civic event opened by a dignitary wearing impressive chains of office than some municipal official only wearing a stuffy suit.

To be frank, I can see no justifiable reason for allowing the current elected mayor to wear them for some years and then just withdraw them, and arbitrarily change a practice which has been in place until relatively recently. Allowing the elected mayor to wear the chain seems a sensible and practical arrangement which no doubt makes sense to local people. By contrast, getting into a huff and locking the civic regalia away out of sight is plain silly.

Given the controversy over this issue, I am placing my substantive reply in the public domain to help inform the public debate in Mansfield about chains of office in local government.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon Lewis', written in a cursive style.

**BRANDON LEWIS MP**