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Operation London Bridge Guidance for Community & Town Councils

Operation London Bridge is the code name given to the passing of H M Queen Elizabeth the Second.

This guidance note has been produced to assist Community & Town Councils to consider in advance the implications the passing of H M Queen would have on the activities of the Council and to help the Council plan what actions it wishes to take when the event occurs.

It gives an outline of matters a Council may wish to consider and to what extent it may wish to engage with regard to Events, Flags, Websites, Portraits, Condolence Books, Area to Lay Flowers, the Proclamation, Church Services, Bells, Floodlights, Public Holidays and Dress Code.

Following her departing and the official announcement from Buckingham Palace a period of ten days state mourning will follow. D day being the date of the death and D10 being the date of the full state funeral in Westminster Abbey, unless D10 falls on a Sunday then the funeral will be held on D11 Monday.

It is recommended that all Councils prepare themselves and be mindful that there may be pre-arranged events that may have to be cancelled during the ten-day period which you may not be able to insure against and the Council will have to carry the cost of cancellation.

The Local Government Act 1972, Section 243 excludes days appointed for public mourning from the calculation of the three clear days' notice of a Council meeting, for this reason the Council may need to postpone a meeting or give notice for a meeting until after the funeral has taken place.

Below are several matters which each Council may wish to consider. Councils should also be mindful that the County Council, usually through the office of the Mayor or Chair, may also issue details of arrangements that it may put in place that might assist a Community or Town Council in planning the actions it then wishes to take on the passing of HM Queen.

It is recommended that Councils consider the implications of the passing of HM Queen and where necessary determine in advance the way in which the Council will respond.

Events

The Chair/Mayor in consultation with the Clerk should review the Chair/Mayors forthcoming engagements to see if they are appropriate in time of national mourning.

Additionally, the Clerk should review existing Council events to determine suitability.

For example if Remembrance Sunday that year fell within the ten-day period Remembrance Sunday would continue as normal with added prayer etc.

But if the Council was planning a National Beacon Lighting and/or Bell Ringing, these would have to be cancelled as they are a sign of celebration.

Likewise Christmas activities, carol services, markets, light switch on etc these will need to be considered for re-scheduling or cancellation.

Flags:

If you have a vertical flagpole the flag should be flown at half-mast throughout the period of mourning. **

If the flagpole is at an angle the Union flag should be flown at full mast with black cravats attached (you could contact your local florist for a roll of black floral ribbon). **

** Except for D+1 and D+2 when the new King is Proclaimed (Operation Spring Tide)

All flags to return to normal by 9am the day after the funeral.

Websites

Be prepared with suitable words to put on your website from the Mayor or Chair of the Council. You may wish to consider the home page being overwritten with a black page carrying a portrait of HM the Queen with links to other sections of the Council's website where details of what is happening, what has been cancelled or postponed or to an online book of condolence.

Portraits

You may wish to source a portrait of HM Queen beforehand one that could be placed on a table that may be provided for a book of condolence if the condolence book is to be hard copy (COVID restrictions permitting).

The portrait should have a black ribbon placed diagonally across one top corner.

Any portraits in Council chambers/meeting rooms should remain in situ with a black ribbon for one month being the period of Royal Mourning.

After this time, a portrait of the new King should be put in place with an alternative position for HM Queen's portrait.

Condolence Books

COVID permitting the Council may wish to consider providing a book of condolence. Whilst it is practical to use a hard backed condolence book a loose leaf is more efficient.

The reason for loose leaf is that if any pages are defaced or unsuitable comments written these can be removed accordingly.

The Council may wish to consider whether condolence books are to be taken to schools or care homes.

Following Day+11 the loose leaves can be collated and bound and with a covering letter be sent to the Private Secretary at Buckingham Palace.

If the Council wishes to have a book of condolence it needs to identify a suitable location for a table with a cloth covering, the portrait and some pens.

Alternatively, the Council may wish to consider an on-line condolence book or if the County Council or Buckingham Palace has on-line condolence books a link on the Council's website to either.

Laying of Flowers

On the death of the Prince of Edinburgh Buckingham Palace requested that flowers not be laid, and it is anticipated that the Palace would make known its wishes on the death of HM Queen. Therefore, it is recommended that Councils take the lead from any announcement made at the time.

It is also suggested that members of the community wishing to mark their respect could be encouraged to make a donation to a charitable cause supported by the Royal Family rather than to lay flowers.

If it is anticipated that the community would wish to lay flowers an area pre-designated for this purpose needs to be agreed in advance so that it does not block access to routes etc

Ideally flowers should be unwrapped and not left in cellophane. You will need to make it clear that all flowers will be removed on the morning after the State Funeral and what you intend to do with them.

We are aware that one Council has previously agreed that the morning after the State Funeral the Town Mayor will pick up the first bouquet and place it on a Council truck followed by Deputy Mayor, any Mayor's Chaplain, Councillors, and any members of the public gathered.

The flowers will then be taken away for composting and the compost the flowers produce will be used to plant a commemorative tree.

Proclamation

The National Proclamation will be read in London on D+1 and in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh on D+2. County Proclamations are normally read by High Sheriffs on D+2.

You may wish to have the proclamation read in your area but should check with the office of the Lord Lieutenant for procedures they may already have in place.

Flags for the Proclamation readings should be at full mast and then returned to half-mast.

Religious/Church Services

Church of Wales Dioceses will be arranging full Civic Services for cathedrals and major churches on the mid Sunday of the ten-day mourning period with local parish churches encouraged to hold services on the eve of the State Funeral.

Ideally you should discuss what will happen in your area with your local clergy/religious leaders as soon as possible rather than at the time of HM Queen's passing.

The Chair/Mayor and Councillors may be invited to attend a Civic Service.

Bells

If the Royal death is announced before 12 noon on D Day every church will toll one bell for each year of the Queen's life. If the announcement is made after 12 noon on D Day, the bell will be tolled on D +1 at 12 noon.

Public Holiday

On the day of death workers can be sent home early.

The Day of the State Funeral will be a Public Holiday unless D10 falls on a Saturday.

Be prepared for implications this may have on the workings of your Council and whether extra pay will be incurred for staff required to carry out necessary actions on behalf of the Council.

Flood Lights

Flood lights on public buildings should be fitted with a purple filter during the ten-day period of public mourning or turned off.

Dress Code

On the day of the State Funeral, it would be appropriate for civic leaders, councillors and senior officers to wear black ties or arm bands as a mark of respect if they so wish.

Two Minute Silence

Where the death of HM Queen is to be marked by a Silence an announcement will be made by Buckingham Place.

Other Advice

When the Duke of Edinburgh passed away there were COVID restrictions that prevented events taking place in public. If the country is in a similar position at the time of her Majesty the Queen's passing the Council will need to be aware of restrictions in place at the time and act accordingly.

Public services and declarations may need to be cancelled or delivered online.

It may not be possible to have 'hard copy' condolence books however a link on the Council's website to an online book such as a County Councils or one set up by Buckingham Palace would be appropriate.

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