

APPENDIX PC16

OPERATION LONDON BRIDGE



Philip Peacock PSLCC, Town Clerk to Huntingdon Town Council, explains the national planning for the passing of Her Majesty The Queen

Throughout the country there is one event which will affect the whole community, from the largest city to the smallest hamlet. With the date of this event still unknown, we all need to be prepared as this will only happen once and we all must get it right first time!

That event is Operation London Bridge – the code name given to the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth the Second.

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 the date of the full state funeral in Westminster Abbey, unless D10 falls on a Sunday, then the funeral will be held on the D11 Monday.

It is recommended that all councils prepare themselves and be mindful that there may be pre-arranged council events which may have to be cancelled during the 10-day period; which you cannot insure against and your council will have to carry the cost of cancelling your event.

An example of cancellation being if Remembrance Sunday this year falls within the 10-day period, Remembrance Services will continue as normal with added prayer etc. But if you are planning to take part in the National Beacon Lighting & or Bell Ringing, these will have to be cancelled as they are a sign of celebration. Likewise, with Christmas activities; carol services, markets, light switch-on etc – these will all need to be considered for rescheduling or cancellation.

There are several elements which each council will need to consider and to what extent they wish to engage with regards to: Flags, Website, Portraits, Condolence Books, Areas to Lay Flowers, the Proclamation, Church Services and Public Holiday.

Flags – If you have a vertical flag pole, the Union Flag should be flown at half-mast throughout the period of mourning, except for D2 Proclamation Day, when the new King is Proclaimed (Operation Spring Tide). If your flag pole is at an angle the Union Flag should be flown to full mast, with black cravats attached (contact your local florist for a role of black floral ribbon). All flags / flag poles to return to normal by 9am the day after the funeral.

Website – Be prepared with suitable words to put on your website, from the Mayor or Chairman of council. Do not try to be too corporate on this occasion, emotions can be allowed in your comments. You may wish to consider your Home Page being over written with a black page carrying a portrait of HM Queen and associated tabs below to the Councils Home Page and other tabs you require during the period of mourning.

Ensure that you detail everything what will be happening during this period, including those events cancelled or postponed.

Portraits – Many councils already have a portrait of HM Queen within their Council Chamber or meeting room. You may wish to consider if you need to replace this with a suitable portrait, especially if you will be having Books of Condolence. The portrait



Her majesty at her 90th birthday celebrations (photo courtesy of the Press Association)

should have a black ribbon placed diagonally across one top corner (again use florist ribbon). The portraits in chambers / meeting rooms should remain in situ with the black ribbon for one month, being the period of Royal Mourning. After this time the portrait of the new king should be put in place, with an alternative position for HM Queen's portrait found.

Condolence Books – Whilst it is practical to use a hard-backed condolence book, a loose leaf is more efficient. Here in Huntingdon, a hard-backed book will be used for; Members of Council, District and County Members and Offices, plus any visiting Officers of the Crown Lord Lieutenant and Deputies, High Sheriff, Judges etc, and Church dignitaries. Loose leaf folders with condolence sheets will be made available not only for signing at the Town Hall and places of worship, but also taken to schools and care homes. The reason for loose leaf is if any pages are defaced or unsuitable comments written, these can be removed accordingly. Following D11, the folders can be collated and bound, with a letter to the Private Secretary at Buckingham Palace sent advising that the Book of Condolence is held in the Council Archives.

Area to Lay Flowers – The current trend following any notable death or tragic incident is for flowers to be laid. An area pre-designated for this purpose needs to be agreed in advance so that it does not block access routes etc. Ideally flowers should be unwrapped and not left wrapped 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. In Huntingdon, we have arranged for our Town Mayor to pick up the first bouquet and place in on the back of the council truck, then the Deputy Mayor, Mayor's Chaplain will do likewise, followed by

councillors and any members of the public gathered. These all will be removed for composting, with the compost then used to plant a commemorative tree.

Proclamation – The National Proclamations will be read in London (St James Places and the Royal Exchange), Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff, along with County Proclamations read normally by High Sheriffs. You may also wish to have the proclamation read by the High Sheriff (if available) one of your Deputy Lieutenants or your Mayor or Chairman – check with your local Lieutenancy Office for procedures they have in place already. Flags for Proclamation reading must be at full mast.

Church Services – The Church of England have nominated the Precentor of St Paul's Cathedral to lead on this area of service format prayers etc. Each Diocese will issue to incumbents this information and arrange civic services. Dioceses will be arranging full Civic Services in cathedrals and major churches on the mid Sunday of the 10 day mourning period with local parish churches encouraged to hold services on the eve of the State Funeral. Ideally, start discussions with your local clergy now.

Public Holiday – The day of the State Funeral will be a Public Holiday, unless D10 falls on a Saturday. Be prepared for implications this will have on the workings of your council and if extra pay will be incurred.

A very similar process will be followed for the death of HRH Duke of Edinburgh, apart from the Proclamation. If both HM Queen and Duke Edinburgh pass away together, it is highly likely that a full State for HM Queen will proceed, with a private service at St Georges Windsor, later the same day for Duke of Edinburgh.