

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 March 2023
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Flag Flying and Bell Ringing Arrangements

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To agree the lists of annual flag flying and bell ringing commitments and approve a minor amendment to the Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendations: That the Cabinet resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree the List of Annual Flag Flying Commitments attached at Appendix A; 2. Agree the List of Annual Bell Ringing Commitments attached at Appendix B; and 3. Approve the minor amendment to the Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing set out in Appendix C to this report. 	

Appendices	
Appendix A	List of Annual Flag Flying Commitments
Appendix B	List of Annual Bell Ringing Commitments
Appendix C	Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing [with proposed minor amendment]

Introduction and background

1. On 13 March 2019, City Executive Board (*now Cabinet*) adopted the Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing and agreed the lists of annual flag flying and bell ringing commitments. The Protocol provides that decisions on annual or regular flag flying commitments must be considered by Cabinet. Decisions relating to one-off additional flag flying requests are delegated to the Head of Law and Governance in accordance with the Protocol. The Protocol provides that one-off

bell ringing requests will be considered by the Head of Law & Governance in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

2. Following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the list of annual flag flying and bell ringing commitments has been reviewed and it is proposed that a number of dates be amended to reflect the new Sovereign. The amendments have been taken from the guidance¹ issued by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). The guidance includes the designation of two additional days for the Union Flag to be flown – His Majesty’s Wedding Day (09 April) and the Official Birthday of His Majesty the King (17 June). Other flag flying dates have been taken from the Flag Institute. The revised recommended lists of annual flag flying and bell ringing commitments are set out at Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

Governance framework

3. The Council’s arrangements are governed by the Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing.
4. A minor discrepancy has been identified within the Protocol, in that it does not currently specify that decisions on annual or regular bell ringing commitments must be considered by Cabinet. Oxford City Council’s Constitution Part 4.5 (39) sets out that ‘*agreeing annual or regular flag flying and bell ringing commitments*’ is a decision reserved to Cabinet. It is therefore recommended that the Protocol be amended to reflect the Constitution (see *Appendix C*).

Financial implications

5. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Legal issues

6. There are no specific legal issues arising directly from this report. The responsibility for flag flying to mark events and occasions lies with Cabinet under the Local Government Act 2000 as it is not specifically reserved to Full Council. The flying of flags is not the subject of statute across Great Britain and advice is issued by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the flying of national flags from government buildings. The advice relates to government buildings only, but many local authorities, such as Oxford City Council, also follow the advice on a voluntary basis (either in full or in part).
7. Under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007, there is a requirement for the Council to obtain planning consent in order to display certain flags.

Level of risk

8. Flag flying on civic buildings is a sensitive issue that can attract controversy and the attention of the press and public. The recommendations in this report do not seek to alter any annual flag flying or bell ringing commitments previously agreed by Cabinet – only the dates to reflect the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

¹ [Union Flag flying guidance for UK government buildings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/union-flag-flying-guidance-for-uk-government-buildings) [accessed 09 February 2023]

Equalities impact

9. Flags are emotive symbols that have the potential to cause controversy or create tensions between communities or interest groups whose views and interpretations may differ. The Council has a responsibility to carefully consider the potential impacts of flying flags on communities, equalities and protected characteristics.
10. The Protocol allows for the Council to fly flags on events or occasions that promote equality and diversity. The recommendations in this report do not propose changes that will adversely impact on equalities or serve to disadvantage any groups.

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Background Papers: None

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