

COMMEMORATIONS AND CELEBRATIONS - PCC POLICY

Chief Executive Department – DRAFT Document



PURPOSE

The Council commemorates or celebrates a significant number of special days every year. Some are associated with well-established events in the Civic calendar. Others are days, weeks or even months designated by organisations and are aimed at stimulating public awareness.

The Council marks some of these days by holding events, lighting buildings, with moments of silence or by flying flags. There is set protocol for the flying of the Union Flag, the St George's Flag, the Devon flag and the City of Plymouth flag. However, the Council also receives several requests throughout the year in response to local, national and international events for flag flying or lighting up public buildings. As a welcoming city, flying flags is one way in which we commemorate significant events or celebrate the diversity of our city. The Council may also choose to commemorate or celebrate significant days or occasions by holding a community event or through communication such as a social media message or a press release.

The Union Flag represents our national shared values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. The Plymouth flag not only represents our founding constituent towns, but it also carries our city's shared vision of being 'one of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone'.

This policy sets out our protocol in accordance with the Government's guidance regarding the use of flags and other symbolic gestures in recognition, celebration or sympathy. The policy will ensure the consistent, respectful, and meaningful use of flags and lighting in line with our civic values.

PRINCIPLES

Under the Localism Act 2011, the council may spend money on any activity, project, or service that benefits the community, if it is not specifically prohibited by law and all other financial, and transparency requirements are met. The council cannot use this power to override existing legal restrictions, or statutory duties, such as:

- **Political neutrality** – the legal basis for political neutrality comes from the Local Government Act 1986 which prohibits the use of Council resources to affect public support for a political party. In the interests of maintaining trust and credibility among all residents, regardless of their political beliefs, the Council must not endorse or promote any political party or viewpoint when commemorating or celebrating events.
- **Inclusivity and Community Cohesion** – the council has a statutory duty set out in the Equality Act 2010, specifically under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This duty requires public bodies, including councils, to have due regard to the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. For the purpose of this policy this includes:
 - Ensuring all communities feel represented and respected, regardless of background or beliefs
 - Actively promoting understanding and positive relationships between different groups
 - Valuing and celebrating the city's diversity through symbolic gestures (like flag flying or lighting buildings) that unite rather than divide
 - Carefully considering the impact of commemorations on all communities, and avoiding symbolic gestures that could be seen as exclusive or inflammatory

- Avoiding actions that could be interpreted as taking sides in foreign conflicts, when this could risk alienating or upsetting sections of the local community with ties to the involved countries.

I. FLAGS

I.1 It is important that there is due consideration about when and why we fly flags or decide to celebrate or commemorate a particular day or event. While this policy sets out the principles and criteria for fair and consistent decision making in relation to how commemorations and celebrations are marked, it remains at the Council's discretion to approve or decline any public requests specifically relating to flag flying.

I.2 The Government and the British Flag Institute issue guidance for flying flags from public buildings. The Council will follow this guidance which can be found in full [here](#). This guidance has recently been updated to encourage more flags to be flown from public buildings, particularly the Union Flag, the flag of the United Kingdom. The Government recognise the Union flag as a symbol of national unity and pride.

I.3 The government guidance covers the following areas and lists pre-approved flags:

- Condition and maintenance of flags
- Relevant permissions (Planning Authority)
- Positioning of flags, restrictions and criteria including a summary of location options

List 1 - The following flags do not need consent to be flown:

- Any country's national flag, civil ensign or civil air ensign
- The flag of the Commonwealth, the United Nations or any other international organisation of which the United Kingdom is a member
- A flag of any island, county, district, borough, burgh, parish, city, town or village within the United Kingdom
- The flag of Saint David
- The flag of Saint Patrick
- The flag of any administrative area within any country outside the United Kingdom
- Any flag of His Majesty's forces
- The Armed Forces Day flag

List 2 - The following flags do not require consent as long certain conditions are met:

- House flag - flag is allowed to display the name, emblem, device or trademark of the company (or person) occupying the building, or can refer to a specific event of limited duration that is taking place in the building from which the flag is flown
- Any sports club - but cannot include sponsorship logos
- The Rainbow flag - 6 horizontal equal stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet
- Specified award schemes – Eco-Schools, Queen's Awards for Enterprise and Investors in People
- NHS flag
- Certain environmental awards - Green/Blue Award Schemes

I.4 The Council respects everyone's individual liberty to fly their flags on their own property. Any flag not identified or covered in list 1 or 2 above requires express consent from the local planning authority before it can be flown.

I.5 If a flag is flown that does not have express consent it may be subject to enforcement action. The local planning authority will make an expediency assessment taking in to account the matters of amenity and public safety.

1.6 The Council reserves the right to take enforcement action on anyone raising, flying or painting flags on other people's property, including Council property (buildings and street furniture), in line with Government guidance.

1.7 Convention states that only one flag may be flown on any one flagstaff. However, regulations allow for the Union Flag to be flown with a guest flag from the same flagpole, provided certain conditions are met.

1.8 In no circumstances may any flag be flown in a superior position to the Union Flag. The superior position is defined as follows:

- The highest flagpole.
- The centre flagpole when a number of poles are of the same height.
- The left-centre pole when the number of poles is even, when viewed from a position facing the building.
- When two flagpoles are of the same height, the Union Flag should be flown on the left-hand side when viewed from a position facing the building.

1.9 **The Union Flag** - The Union Flag is normally flown at full mast from a civic flagpole at the Plymouth Civic Square outside the Guildhall and at the Council House every working day of the year. It is also flown at Ballard House and the Mayflower steps. The Union Flag will be flown at half-mast in accordance with national protocols following the announcement of the death of the Sovereign until the funeral. In the case of a death of a member or near relative of the Royal Family or the funeral of members of the Royal Family, the flag will be flown at half-mast.

1.10 The Union Flag may be flown at half-mast on other occasions, either following advice from Government, or based on a local decision made in accordance with this policy. When the Union Flag is at half-mast, other flags on the same stand of poles should also be at half-mast or should not be flown at all. Flags of foreign nations should not be flown, unless their country is also observing a period of mourning.

1.11 **The St George's Flag** - The St George's Flag is normally flown at full mast from a civic flagpole at the Plymouth Civic Square outside the Guildhall every working day of the year. Any flag flown from this flagpole will be lowered to half-mast when the Union flag is lowered.

1.12 **The Devon Flag** - The Devon Flag is normally flown at full mast from a civic flagpole at the Plymouth Civic Square outside the Guildhall every working day of the year. It will be lowered to half-mast when the Union Flag is lowered. It is at the discretion of the Council as to which two other flags are flown alongside the Union Flag on the civic flagpoles at the Plymouth Civic Square outside the Guildhall. As stated above, it is usual that the St George's Cross and the Devon Flag are flown, however these flagpoles can be used to fly approved guest flags.

1.13 **The City of Plymouth Flag** - The City Flag is flown at full mast from a civic flagpole at the Council House car park every working day of the week and at Elliot Terrace. Upon the death of the serving Lord Mayor, Honorary Aldermen, Honorary Freemen of the City or a serving Councillor, the City Flag will be displayed at half-mast from the announcement until sunset on the day of the funeral.

1.14 **Hoe Flags** – There are 18 flag poles on Plymouth Hoe. The Council's Events Team is responsible for these flagpoles. The pre-approved flags are raised on these flagpoles at Easter and lowered by mid to late September. The list of flags to be flown on Plymouth Hoe are agreed annually with the relevant Portfolio Holder. To mitigate the impact of adverse weather conditions on the appearance of the flags, two sets of the agreed flags will be purchased annually so they can be replaced as necessary.

1.15 Guest flags may be flown on council owned flag poles with the relevant permission, but only in accordance with Government guidance, the protocol set out in this policy and/or with the agreement of the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader.

1.16 For the purpose of this policy 'guest flags' means flags not set out in:

- a. Government guidance (lists 1 and 2 above); and
- b. Annex 2 – list of council approved flags.

1.17 Only in exceptional circumstances will the Council consider approving requests for raising guest flags that do not adhere to points a & b in Section 1.16 – this includes national flags of other countries. See section 4 for criteria and process in relation to receiving requests.

1.18 The Council owns and maintains several flag poles across the city. Annex 1 of this Policy lists all Council owned flag poles and their associated flags where relevant. Council owned flag poles are maintained in accordance with best practice and appropriate records retained by Facilities Management 1.19 Council owned flags will be kept at the Council House under the care of the Lord Mayors Office and will be checked to ensure that they are in good repair and are unsoiled. An audit will be undertaken annually to ensure the list of council owned flags is up to date, that all flags are in good condition and that they are being stored appropriately.

1.20 A small budget is allocated to flags on an annual basis. This budget is held by the Events Team and can be accessed to replace any old and worn flags as required. Contact: Venuehire@plymouth.gov.uk

2. LIGHTING COUNCIL BUILDINGS

2.1 Lighting up Council-owned buildings e.g. Smeaton's Tower and the Guildhall provides an opportunity to celebrate, commemorate, or raise awareness of significant occasions. Lighting will be used to mark occasions of local, national, or international significance, reflecting Plymouth's civic pride and commitment to equality and inclusion. While this policy sets out the principles and criteria for fair and consistent decision making in relation to how commemorations and celebrations are marked, it remains at the Council's discretion to approve or decline any public requests specifically relating to lighting buildings.

2.2 In addition to the criteria set out in Section 4, the following specific criteria will be applied when considering requests for lighting, ensuring decisions are fair, consistent, and aligned with the Council's values.

2.3 Lighting may be approved for:

- National days and awareness events featured in the Council's Equalities Calendar (e.g., Pride, International Women's Day, Black History Month).
- National celebrations (e.g., England winning a major sporting event such as the Football World Cup).
- Local civic events or local commemorations (e.g., Plymouth Armed Forces Day, Mayflower commemorations).
- Royal or State Occasions (e.g., Coronations, Jubilees, periods of mourning).
- Charitable or community Campaigns where there is a strong local connection and alignment with Council priorities.

2.4 Approval of a request does not establish a precedent for similar future requests.

3. COMMEMORATION

3.1 The Council will observe:

- The nationally recognised 2-minute silence on Remembrance Day when it falls on a working day.
- Other periods of silence on receiving advice from the Government or with the agreement of the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader.

3.2 Books of condolence will be considered in line with guidance in Section 4.

4. RECEIVING REQUESTS AND CRITERIA

4.1 The Council receives several requests throughout the year in response to local, national and international events for flag flying or lighting up public buildings. Public requests in relation to flying flags, commemoration or lighting buildings will be considered in line with national guidance, the protocol set out in this policy and/or with the agreement of the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader.

4.2 The Council will exercise its discretion in exceptional circumstances, for example where a decision may be made to show solidarity with – or sympathy for - another nation experiencing a significant loss by flying their national flag.

4.3 In situations where there is internal or external conflict in a foreign nation, the Council will consider the impact the flying of its national flag might have on all communities in the city, and where appropriate, may fly a peace flag instead.

4.4 Any further requests made by a member of the public or a community will be considered on an individual basis. The following **criteria** will be applied:

- Requests made by an individual or community outside the city will not be considered
- Appropriate permissions and consent are in place
- The request/guest flag is not party-political
- There is alignment with our corporate values and our statutory equality duty, in particular our duty to facilitate community cohesion, i.e. the guest flag does not convey inappropriate language or symbols that have the potential to cause offense or which might raise concerns about public safety
- The request/guest flag is meaningful and proportionate in relation to the community it represents
- There is no undue financial burden to the authority – all requests may incur a charge
- Requests may be approved if they are linked to a significant anniversary or commemoration for the requesting community and where all other qualifying criteria are met
- Approval of a request does not establish a precedent for similar future requests, particularly those that may not align with this policy.

4.5 Process for submitting and reviewing requests:

- a. **Submission:** requests to raise a flag or light a building should be made using this form with a minimum of 2 months' notice (not applicable in exceptional circumstances or upon instruction from Government). The form should also be used to make a request for a moment of silence or to open a book of condolence. (See Appendix 2 for example form – form in development)
- b. **Review:** an advisory group will conduct an initial screening against the government guidance; the pre-approved list and the criteria set out in this policy. The Box is responsible for managing lighting requests. The Box will work collaboratively with the Council's Events Team and the Advisory Group to screen the request and ensure there is no conflict with other civic events, commemorations, celebrations or requests. The Advisory Group will make a recommendation to the Chief Executive and Leader.
- c. **Decision:** the final decision to uphold the request will be made by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council or in their absence, their deputies.
- d. **Notification:** confirmation of the decision will be sent to the requester within 28 working days (included as part of the of 2 months' notice period). If the request is declined, the reasons for declining will be communicated in brief to the requester. If approved, and in the case that the Council do not hold the specific flag, the requester will be required to provide a suitable and well-maintained flag.

5. GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT

5.1 A small Advisory Group includes officers from the Council's Civic Support Team, Corporate Communications and the Policy Team working closely with The Box, Events Team and Facilities Management Team to ensure compliance with national guidance and this Policy and the criteria set out within.

5.2 The role of the Advisory Group is to support decisions and make recommendations when required to the Chief Executive and Leader.

5.3 The Group will work together to review this guidance document and protocol on an annual basis. This includes all related documentation, such as carrying out an annual Flag Audit. Annex 1 and 2 will be reviewed annually.

5.4 To support the annual review and for transparency, the Advisory Group will maintain a log of all requests and the associated outcome/decision.

5.5 This policy will be kept under review for the first 12 months from approval.

5.6 The Council reserves the right to seek approval from the Executive to make amendments to the policy within this 12-month period to take account of feedback on the process and criteria, and to ensure the policy is working to the benefit of all parties.

ANNEX I – Council Flag Poles

Location	No.	Purpose/Notes
Civic Flagpoles		
Council House car park	1	Permanently allocated to fly the City of Plymouth Flag. Guest flag may be flown with approval
Council House roof	1	Not currently in use for safety reasons. Permanently allocated to fly Union flag once replaced (due end 2025)
Plymouth Civic Square outside the Guildhall	3	Permanently allocated to fly Union flag, Cross of St George and the Council flag. Centre flagpole is known as Drake's Drum. Guest flags can be flown alongside the Union Flag
The Mayflower Steps	2	Permanently allocated to fly the Union Flag and the national flag of the United States of America in recognition of the Pilgrim Fathers
Elliot Terrace	1	Official Guest is in residence
The Box	1	Not currently in use due to safety reasons
Other Council Flagpoles		
The Hoe	18	Display national, regional and local flags, awards flags, Armed Forces flags and flags associated with events taking place on the Hoe. The list varies depending on the summer events programme. List agreed on annual basis. Flags flown typically from Easter to mid-September
The Belvedere	1	Permanently allocated to fly Union flag. Falkland Flag is flown on the Anniversary June
The Hoe front garden	1	Permanently allocated to fly the Green Flag award
Armada Way	8	Permanently allocated to fly Union flag
Ballard House	1	
Parks and gardens		A variety of venues across the city that carry the flag of the Green Flag Award Scheme
Saltash Passage	2	Union Flag/USA related to D-Day memorial
Tamar Bridge	2	Union Flag

ANNEX 2 - Approved list of flags and commemoration/celebration days

Flag	Day	Date*	Note
Union Flag	Permanently allocated		See Appendix I for designated days for Flying the Union Flag (2026)
St George's Cross	Permanently allocated		
City of Plymouth Flag	Permanently allocated		Lord Mayor's Choosing and Council AGM
Council Flag	Permanently allocated		
Devon Flag	Permanently allocated		
Britain's Ocean City Flag	Summer Events programme	Easter – Mid-Sept.	Plymouth Hoe Other flags flown on Hoe flagpoles including approved guest flags over the summer period – this is agreed in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder
USA National flag	Permanent in recognition of the Pilgrim Fathers		Mayflower steps Saltash Passage
Holocaust Memorial Day Flag	Holocaust Memorial Day	27 January	Consent required
Commonwealth Flag	Commonwealth Day	March	
Armed Forces Day Flag	Armed Forces Day	June	
Flag of the Falkland Islands	Falklands Day	June	Belvedere
The Red Ensign	Merchant Navy Day	03 September	
The Rainbow Flag and Progress Pride Flag	LGBT+ History Month International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia Pride month	February May June	Progress Pride Flag requires consent

Gdynia Flag	50th Anniversary - Plymouth & Gdynia Twinning	2026	Consent required. Key anniversaries only. Plymouth twinned with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brest in France, since 1963. • San Sebastián in Spain, since 1990. • Gdynia in Poland, since 1976. Plymouth, Massachusetts, since 2001.
Trans Flag	International Transgender Day of Visibility Trans Awareness Week Trans Day of Remembrance	31 March November 20 November	Consent required

**flags will be raised as close to specific date as possible – if a date falls on a Bank Holiday or weekend, the flag will be raised on the last working day and lowered on the next working day.*

ANNEX 3 - Approved list for lighting building for commemoration/celebration days

Note: At the time of approval Smeaton's Tower is the only building available to be lit.

Day	Date*	Colour	Note
16 Days of Action/Activism?	November-December		Taking action against gender-based violence
World Aids Day	01 December	Red	International Day
Covid Day of Reflection	09 March	Yellow	National Day of Reflection
Armed Forces Day	June	RWB	
National Baby Loss Awareness Day	15 October		Observed as part of Baby Loss Awareness Week
National Care Leavers' Month	November		Allocate one day to light up Smeaton's Tower

Appendix I - Designated Days for Flying the Union Flag (2026)

01 March – St David's Day (in Wales)
09 March – Commonwealth Day (second Monday in March)
17 March – St Patrick's Day (in Northern Ireland)
09 April – His Majesty The King's Wedding Anniversary
23 April – St George's Day (in England)
06 May – Coronation Day
13 June – Official Birthday of His Majesty The King (usually second Saturday in June)
21 June – Birthday of HRH The Prince of Wales
17 July – Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen
08 September – His Majesty The King's Accession
08 November – Remembrance Day (second Sunday in November)
14 November – Birthday of His Majesty The King
30 November – St Andrew's Day (in Scotland)

Appendix 2 - Example Firmstep form for making a request. (Add privacy notice if needed)

Please submit at least 2 months before the requested date.

1. Requester Details

- **Full Name:**
- **Organisation/Community Group (if applicable):**
- **Contact Email:**
- **Contact Phone:**

2. Type of request

- ☐ Raise a Flag
- ☐ Moment of Silence
- ☐ Book of Condolence
- ☐ Light a building

3. Flag Details

- **Name of Flag:**
- **Purpose/significance of Flag:**
- **Date(s) requested for Flag raising:**

4. Lighting building details

- **Colour of light:**
- **Purpose/significance of lighting:**
- **Date(s) requested for lighting:**

5. Book or condolence/Moment of Silence details

- **Name or request:**
- **Purpose/significance of commemoration:**
- **Date(s) requested for commemoration:**

6. Event details

- **Name of celebration/commemoration:**
- **Brief description of event, including represented community if applicable:**
- **Is this linked to a significant anniversary or commemoration?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide details:

7. Compliance & Permissions

- **Does the flag comply with Government guidance?**
- **Is the flag party-political?**
- **Does the flag convey any language or symbols that could cause offense?**
- **Will you provide a suitable, well-maintained flag if required?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Community Impact

- **Explain how this request aligns with Plymouth City Council's values and promotes community cohesion:**

9. Financial Considerations

- **Are you aware that approved requests may incur a charge?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

Declaration

I confirm that the information provided is accurate and that I understand the Council's discretion in approving or declining this request.

Signature:

Date: