

## **Evesham Town Council Flagpole Protocol Guidance Notes**

These notes do not form part of the protocol, rather, they are intended as a guide for the Mayor and Council when making decisions related to the flying of flags.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport publishes mandatory regulations for the flying of flags on government buildings. These do not apply directly to local authorities, but the government encourages local authorities to adopt policies which broadly reflect national policies together with any specific local requirements.

Evesham Town Council's flagpole protocol is, therefore, based on national policies and informed by equivalent policies at other local authorities.

It's recommended that the town council's flagpole protocol be reviewed four-yearly, once per council term, or if the government makes significant changes to national guidelines.

### **General**

The protocol makes several references to the Mayor and Town Clerk having discretion to make a decision and/or being consulted over a decision. If either is unavailable for any reason, and the decision cannot wait until they are available, the Deputy Mayor and whoever is deputising for the Clerk should act on their behalf.

Care should be taken to ensure that a flag is never flown upside down. The Union Flag currently owned by the council uses a ring and cord fastening which, fortunately, makes it practically impossible to fly the wrong way up. But don't assume that every flag we ever use will have the same fastening!

Flags should be kept clean and in good condition. A visibly damaged flag must be retired and no longer flown. If the main Union Flag is beginning to look dirty, take advantage of a Designated Flag Day for another flag to clean it!

### **Designated Flag Days**

A flag "day" normally runs for a period of 24 hours, starting from when the flag is raised on the morning of the designated day and finishing the following morning. As a general rule, the best time to raise a flag is 10am on the designated day.

There's no requirement that the raising of a flag should be a ceremonial occasion, and it's more important that it is done at the right time than by the right person. However, as a general principle, it's a good idea for the raising of any flag for a Designated Flag Day to be attended by the Mayor (or, in their absence, the Deputy Mayor) wearing the chain of office, and other councillors invited to attend the flag raising.

If the Designated Flag is the Union Flag, and the Union Flag is already flying (which it will be more often than not), then there's no need for any ceremony.

There's no need for any ceremony on the lowering of a flag at the end of its designated day.

Unlike many other British counties, Worcestershire has no designated Worcestershire Flag Day, so there isn't a specific day for it in the town council's designated flag days. If one is

ever created, then it will be appropriate to add it to the town council's flag protocol as a Designated Flag Day. In the meantime, it's suggested that the Worcestershire flag is flown annually on or near the anniversary of it first being flown on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

At the time of writing, it's not yet known if the Official Birthday of King Charles III will continue to be celebrated on the same date as that used by his immediate predecessors, or even if he will continue to use an Official Birthday at all. So the protocol may need to be updated in the light of subsequent decisions.

The actual birthday of King Charles III is the 14<sup>th</sup> November. In some years, this will coincide with Remembrance Sunday. However, given that the flag for both days is the Union Flag, this will not create any clash.

### **Period of Local Mourning**

The protocol includes a section on a period of local mourning, and states that a flag shall be flown at half-mast to commemorate the death/funeral of local dignitaries and VIPs.

The protocol does not stipulate precisely when a flag should be flown at half-mast, but the best day will normally be that of the deceased's funeral or, if taking place at a separate date, their memorial service. This is particularly the case when the funeral or memorial service is held in Evesham, as it's appropriate for those attending the service to see the flag at half-mast if their route takes them past the flagpole.

If the person being commemorated is particularly well known, and their death is newsworthy, then it may be appropriate to fly a flag at half-mast as soon as the death is announced. However, care must be taken to ensure that a formal announcement of the death has been made. It would be extremely embarrassing to the council if a flag is flown at half-mast on an unconfirmed report of a death which later turns out to be premature. It would also be extremely inappropriate, and potentially offensive, for the family and close friends of the deceased to learn of their death from an announcement made by the council that a flag is being flown at half-mast. So, unless you are certain, it's usually best to wait until the funeral or memorial service.

There's no hard and fast definition of a "notable local public figure", so you can use your discretion. But it's better to err on the side of caution here, as there are only 365 days in the year and flying a flag at half-mast should be a relatively rare occurrence. As a rule of thumb, someone whose death makes the front page of the local media would qualify, but probably not anyone else.

### **Flying a Flag at Half-Mast**

"Half-Mast" does not mean "half way up". The rule of thumb for a standard upright flagpole of the type owned by the council is that the flag should be lowered to approximately two thirds of the height of the pole, leaving at least one full flag's width from the top of the pole.

If the flag to be flown at half-mast is not already flying (eg, if a different designated flag is being replaced by the Union Flag at half-mast) then the flag should first be raised to full

height before then being lowered to half-mast. Similarly, if a flag at half-mast is being removed from the pole, then it should first be raised to full height before being removed.

Where the date for a flag flying at half-mast is known in advance (eg, the funeral of a local dignitary), then it should normally follow the same timescale as a designated flag day – that is, fly at half-mast for 24 hours from 10am to 10am the following (or, alternatively, from 10am to sunset on the same day).

When a flag needs to be flown at half-mast as part of a period of national mourning, then you should aim to follow national guidance as closely as possible. In practical terms, this usually means lowering the flag as soon as you can after the announcement, and then returning it to full height at the end of the period of mourning on the precise date and time stated in the guidance. This may require someone to attend the flagpole out of normal office hours.