

Operation London Bridge Communications Plan

Introduction

Operation London Bridge is the codename of the plan for what will happen in the days following the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

This is a sensitive subject, and one your organisation should plan ahead for.

Operation London Bridge has significant implications for social media, digital publishing, lobbying and campaigning, PR activities, event planning, security at venues, events and employers.

The impact on the country and the economy will be significant.

For at least 21 days, between her passing, the funeral and beyond, Britain will grind to a halt. It is estimated that this will cost the economy between £1.2 and £6 billion as banks, businesses and the stock market close, to say nothing of the organisational costs.

There will be cultural changes to prepare for, and significant public grieving. The vast majority of British people have never known life without the Queen, and she polls at 82% popularity.

Whatever sector you are in, and regardless of personal opinions about the monarchy, Operation London Bridge is likely to have an impact on your organisation and audience, and planning ahead should be part of your operational and communications risk assessment.

If you don't respond in a timely manner, you may face unnecessary business disruption, and without a communications plan in place for the event you could face a backlash if you have any scheduled content or communications that may inadvertently be seen as disrespectful.

As risk and crisis communications specialists, 181st Street has prepared this guidance to help inform your planning.

Inside, you will find a guide to what will happen nationally throughout this period of time, along with some considerations for your operations and communications.

If you would like support preparing a bespoke risk assessment and response for your organisation, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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Current popularity of HM Queen (based on multiple polling sources)

The Queen currently has an 82% approval rating across the general population (with unfavourable at 7%). Her lowest positive group polls at 60% favourable (that group being 18-24 year olds - with unfavourable at 20%, the highest of all age groups), and those aged 50+ polling at over 91% favourable.

Social grades break down at ABC1 at 84%, with unfavourable at 7%, and C2DE at 80%, with unfavourable at 7%.

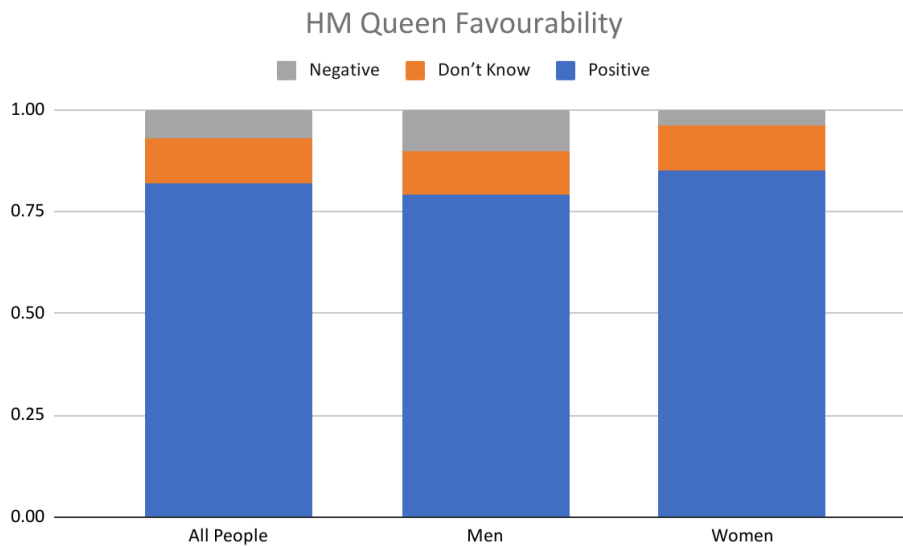
With remain voters, her favourability is 84% with 7% unfavourable. With leave voters she polls at 90% favourable, 5% unfavourable.

With Conservative voters, 94% are favourable, 2% unfavourable.
 Liberal Democrats are 89% favourable, 9% unfavourable.

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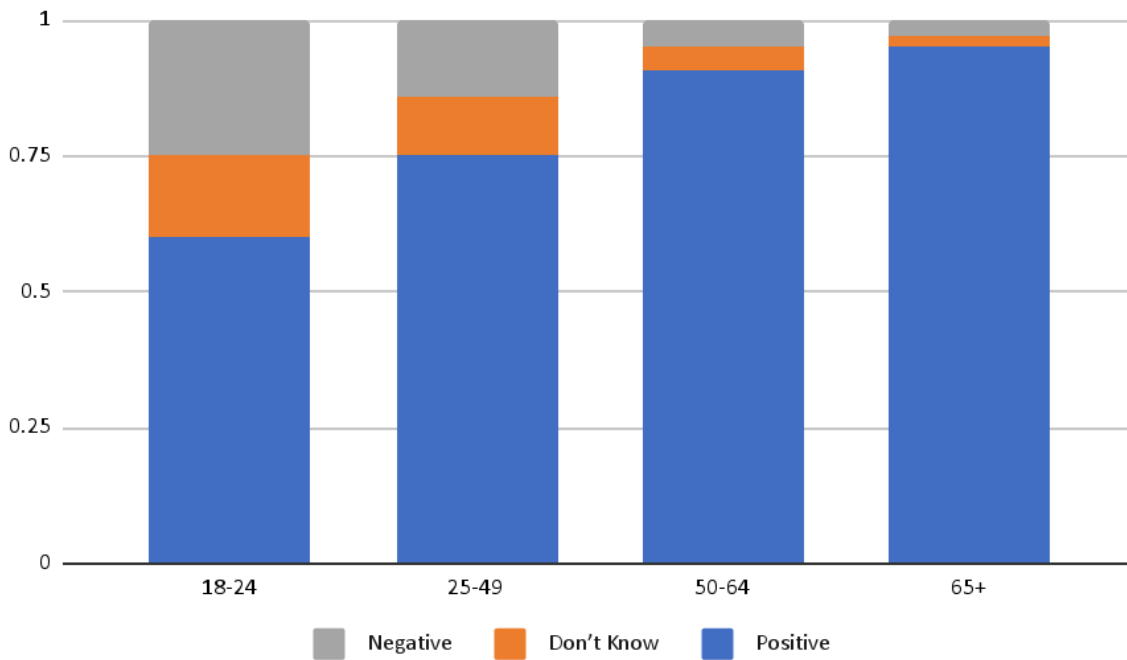
Labour voters poll at 77% favourable, 10% unfavourable.

This matters because history tells us that polling data regarding favourability tends to underestimate positive sentiment by up to 12%, in moments of national or public grief or celebratory events regarding the Royal Family. Given the recent Jubilee and the fact that this data is from May 2022, combined with the expected level of grief forecast by Government planners anticipating visitors to London during the mourning period, the Queen’s popularity is likely to increase significantly during this time. As a result, businesses that may consider their target audiences not to be pro-royal may find themselves exposed to significant pressures, should they not take at least basic actions regarding Operation London Bridge.

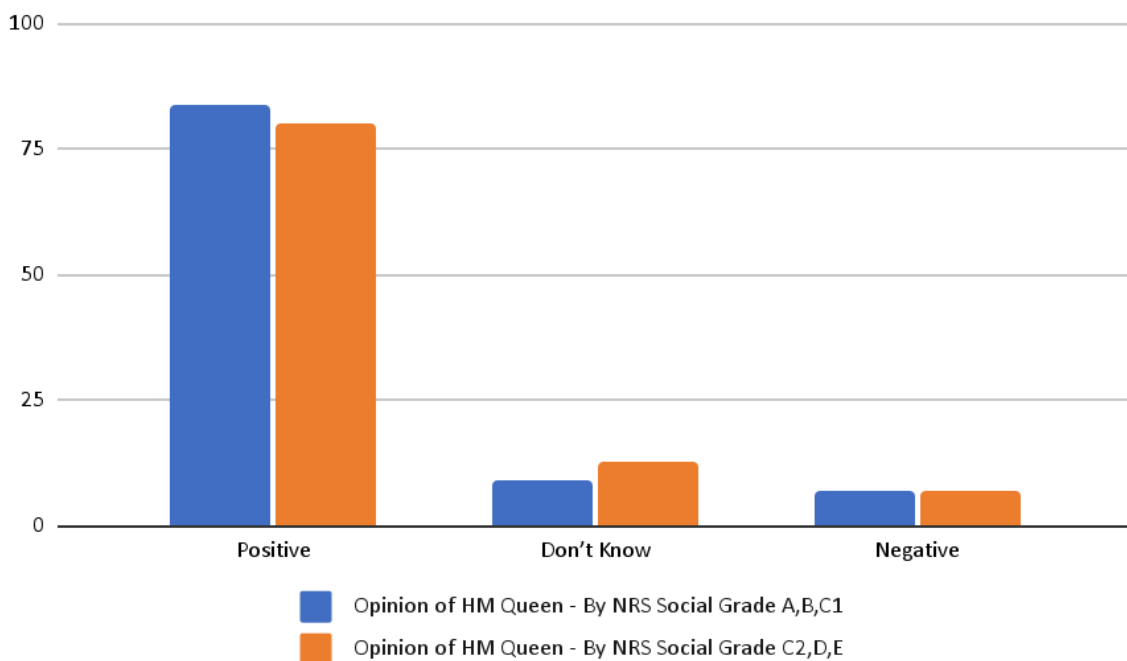


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Opinion of HM Queen - By Age group

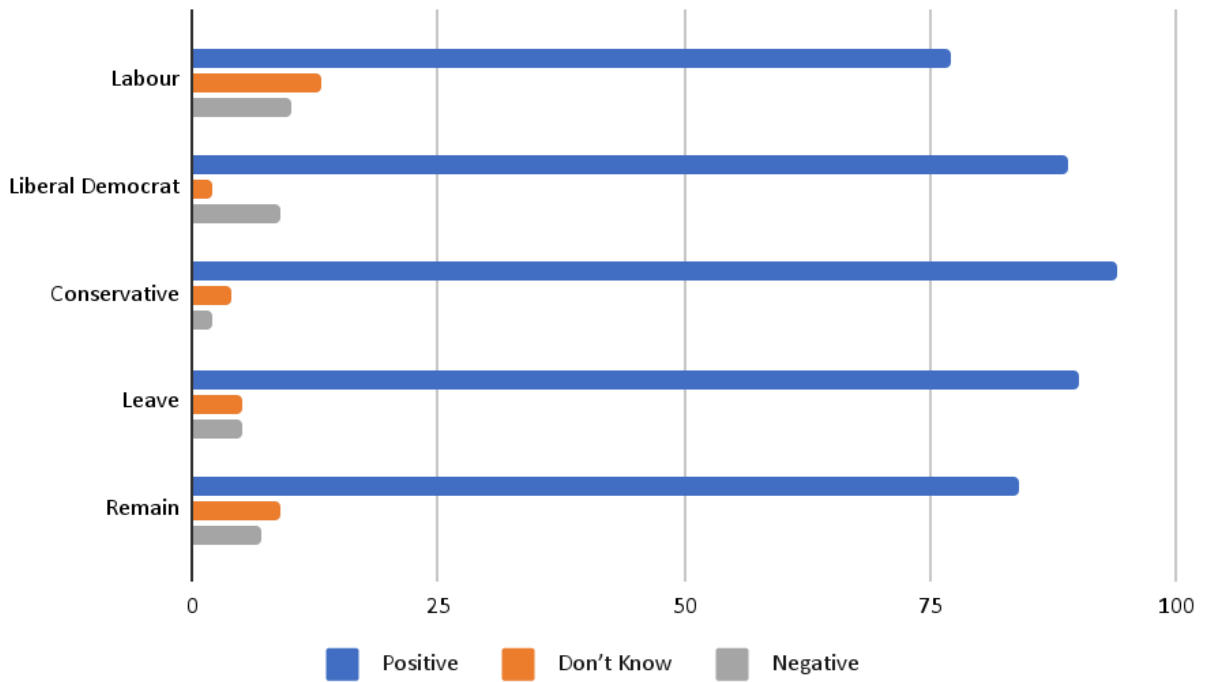


Opinion of HM Queen - By NRS Social Grade

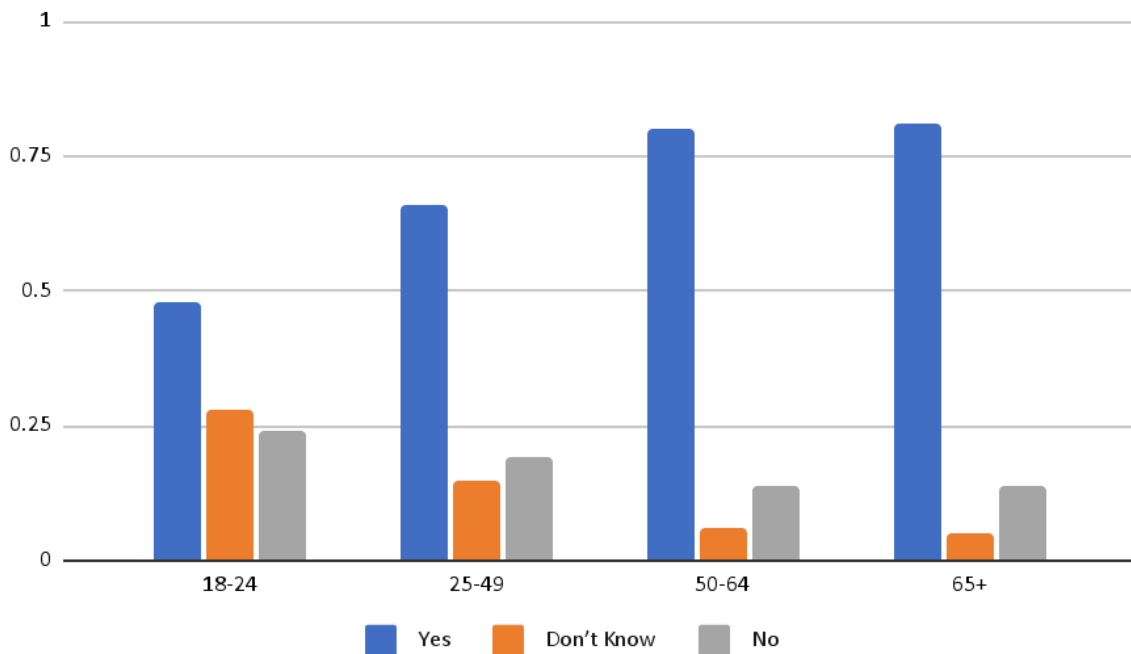


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Opinion of HM Queen - Voters Political Position



Should the Monarchy Continue - By Age group



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Official mourning period - events

Upon the Queen's death and after the Prime Minister is informed, the Royal Family will announce plans for the Queen's funeral, which is expected to be held after the official mourning period of ten days.

Inside Whitehall, the day of the Queen's death is referred to as "D-Day" and each subsequent day of the official mourning period is referred to "D+1," "D+2" and so on.

The official mourning period is expected to be 10 days, unless D+10 falls on a Sunday, then the funeral will be held on D+11 Monday.

D-Day

In the hours after the Queen's death, a "call cascade" will take place informing the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary (Britain's highest-ranking civil servant) and a number of the most senior ministers and officials.

The royal household will issue an "official notification" delivering the news to the public.

Departmental permanent secretaries will break the news to their ministers, who will be told that "discretion is required."

Ministers and senior civil servants will also receive an email from the Cabinet Secretary, a draft of which reads: "Dear colleagues, It is with sadness that I write to inform you of the death of Her Majesty The Queen."

Upon receipt of this email, flags across Whitehall will be lowered to half-mast. The aim is that this can be done within 10 minutes and they will remain at half-mast until after the funeral, though otherwise public life will continue as normal.

Parliament and the devolved legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will adjourn. If parliament is not sitting, it will be recalled.

The Royal Family's website will change to a black holding page with a short statement confirming the Queen's death. The UK government website (.gov.uk) will display a black banner at the top. All government departmental social media pages will also show a black banner and change their profile pictures to their departmental crest. Non-urgent content will not be published. Retweets will be explicitly banned unless cleared by the central government Head of Communications. The Royal Family will announce plans for the Queen's funeral, which is expected to be held 10 days following her death, unless D+10 falls on a Sunday, then the funeral will be held on D+11 Monday.

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D+1

At 10am on the day after the Queen's death, the Accession Council - which includes senior government figures - meets at St. James' Palace to proclaim the new sovereign. Hundreds of privy counsellors, including the Prime Minister and senior ministers, will be asked to attend.

The proclamation will then be read at St. James' Palace and the Royal Exchange in the City of London, confirming Charles as King (using whichever regal title he has chosen).

Parliament will meet to agree on a message of condolence. All other parliamentary business will be suspended for 10 days. MPs will give tributes in the House of Commons.

At 3:30pm, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet will hold an audience with the new King.

D+2

If the Queen does not die at Buckingham Palace, the Queen's coffin will return to the palace on D+2.

If the Queen dies at Sandringham, her residence in Norfolk, her body will be carried by Royal train to St. Pancras station in London, where her coffin will be met by the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers.

If she dies at Balmoral in Scotland, her body will be carried down to London by Royal train if possible. If not, the coffin will be transferred by plane. The Prime Minister and ministers will attend a reception to welcome the coffin.

Proclamations will be read in the devolved administrations. Tributes are likely to continue in parliament. And at county level County Proclamations are normally read by the High Sheriffs.

D+3

In the morning, the new King will receive the motion of condolence at Westminster Hall. In the afternoon, he will embark on a tour of the United Kingdom, starting with a visit to the Scottish parliament and a service at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh.

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D+4

The new King will arrive in Northern Ireland, where he'll receive another motion of condolence at Hillsborough Castle and attend a service at St. Anne's Cathedral in Belfast. A rehearsal will also take place for the procession of the coffin from Buckingham Palace to the Palace of Westminster.

D+5

The procession from Buckingham Palace to the Palace of Westminster will take place along a ceremonial route through London. There will be a service in Westminster Hall following the coffin's arrival.

D+6

The Queen will lie in state at the Palace of Westminster for three days. Her coffin will lie on a raised box known as a catafalque in the middle of Westminster Hall, which will be open to the public for 23 hours per day. Tickets will be issued for VIPs so they can have a time slot.

On D+6, a rehearsal will take place for the state funeral procession.

D+7 to D+9

On D+7, the new King will travel to Wales to receive another motion of condolence at the Welsh parliament and attend a service at Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff.

This period will see government departments absorbed in an immense amount of preparation for the funeral. The departments facing the greatest difficulty will be the Foreign Office, the Home Office and the Department for Transport, though other departments are likely to be involved too (such as the MoD).

The Foreign Office is tasked with arranging the arrivals of heads of state and VIPs from abroad. Concerns have been raised about how to arrange entry for significant numbers of tourists into the country should the Queen die during the coronavirus pandemic.

One memo warns of a worst-case scenario in which London literally becomes "full" for the first time ever, as potentially hundreds of thousands of people try to make their way there - with accommodation, roads, public transport, food, policing, healthcare and basic services stretched to breaking point. Concerns have also been raised about a shortage of stewards for crowd control purposes.

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The Prime Minister and the Queen have agreed that the day of the state funeral will be a “Day of National Mourning.” The day will effectively be a bank holiday, although it will not be named as such. If the funeral falls on the weekend or an existing bank holiday, an extra bank holiday will not be granted.

If the funeral falls on a weekday, the government does not plan to order employers to give employees the day off - the documents say that is a matter between employees and their staff.

D+10

The state funeral itself will be held at Westminster Abbey. Processions will take place in London and Windsor.

There will be a committal service in St. George’s Chapel at Windsor Castle, and the Queen will be buried in the castle’s King George VI Memorial Chapel.

On the day of the funeral, bells will be tolled for the hour immediately prior to the time of the funeral service.

The day of the funeral will be marked by a two minute silence across the nation at midday.

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How the news will be communicated

- The TV and radio stations you watch will cut off their programmes
- A newsreader dressed in black will appear on your screen
- Sports games will stop
- The Stock Exchange will close
- Airline pilots will make a special announcement to passengers
- Depending on where you work, your boss may appear wearing a black ribbon (for men) or a black rosette (for women). You may be sent home early.

On the announcement of Death, Bells may be rung or tolled at the discretion of local Parochial Church Councils. They may be rung or tolled for one hour as shown below:

- If the announcement occurs before 1100hrs: noon on the day of death.
- If the announcement occurs between 1100hrs and 1600hrs: 1800 hours on the day of death
- If the announcement occurs after 1600hrs: noon on the following day

The Prime Minister will be the first member of the government to make a statement. All other members of the government will be instructed not to comment until after the PM has spoken.

The Ministry of Defence will arrange for gun salutes to take place at all saluting stations. A national minute's silence will be announced.

The Prime Minister will then hold an audience with the new King at 6pm, who will deliver a broadcast to the nation. At the same time, there will be a service of remembrance at St. Paul's Cathedral in the heart of London. The Prime Minister and a small number of senior ministers will attend. The service is planned to appear "spontaneous," according to official documents.

Prince Charles is free to his own regal title, so it's not a given that he will become Charles III. Prince Charles's given Christian names are Charles Philip Arthur George so instead of becoming King Charles III, he may choose to become King George VII, or even King Philip.

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Media & newspapers

The announcement will go out as a newsflash to the Press Association news agency, and the rest of the world's media at once.

Almost every major news organisation has pre-recorded films, articles and news segments ready to go. It is thought that The Times has 11 days of coverage set to roll out, while Sky News and ITN have already signed contracts with royal experts.

Commercial radio stations will be alerted through a network of blue "obit lights" which are supposed to light up in the event of national emergency. This gives DJs notice that they will be switching to a special news bulletin and should play inoffensive music in the meantime.

Every station, down to hospital radio, has pre-prepared playlists to reach for in times of sudden mourning.

Global impact

The Foreign Office's Global Response Centre will alert the 15 governments outside the UK where the Queen is also the head of state, and the 36 other nations of the Commonwealth for whom she has served as a symbolic figurehead. Governors general, ambassadors and prime ministers will be told.

Terror threat level

The Home Office is responsible for security arrangements, and the government's National Security Secretariat and intelligence services will be on high alert for any increased terror threat.

It is reported that there will be an increased security risk (terror threat) to all events during this period, and in particular the funeral and coronation dates.

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Travel & transport

TFL

TFL states 'It would be all hands on deck throughout London, with all lines running 'to capacity.' It seems the main disruption concern is delayed/cancelled public transport and what is expected to be a 450% increase in general traffic in the capital over the mourning period, due to the number of mourners expected to flock to London.

Transport advisors also point to an expected significant increase to security on public transport and across London as a whole.

Network rail

If the Queen passes away anywhere other than London, she will be transported to London via train, which may impact services. It is expected that trains will travel at 40mph, slowing to 10 mph when passing through a station.

Department of Transport

The Department for Transport has raised concerns that the number of people who may want to travel to London could cause major problems for the transport network, and lead to overcrowding in the capital.

Public mourning rituals

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.

Flags

Vertical flag pole; the Union Flag should be flown at half-mast throughout the period of mourning, except for D+1 and D+2 Proclamation Day when the new King is Proclaimed (Operation Spring Tide).

Angle flag pole; the Union Flag should be flown at full-mast with a black cravat attached. All flags/flag poles to return to normal by 9am the day after the funeral.

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Live events

Theatre and the arts

Performances, galas, opening events, carol services, markets, light switch-ons: according to guidance these will all need to be considered for rescheduling or cancellation; however, this is at the organiser's discretion.

It is worth noting that should an event proceed, it is recommended that they undertake a one minute silence and mark both silence on the day of death, and a national 2 minute silence on the day of the funeral should they apply.

All state-owned venues will close.

Private enterprises will be under no statutory or legal obligation to close.

Deciding to close will be a decision that will be taken based on what is appropriate and acceptable for individual private enterprises. However privately owned venues will need to consider the following options:

- Close throughout the mourning period up to the funeral
- Close on the days of the funeral and the coronation
- Security assessments requiring mitigation before opening

It is suggested that Ops teams in charge of events arrange a meeting with their security providers and venues as soon as possible to understand the proposed plans, and therefore understand any possible extra mitigating plans needing to be put in place as organisers through security companies.

Remembrance Sunday

if Remembrance Sunday falls within the ten day period of mourning, remembrance services will continue as normal with added prayers etc. But if National Beacon Lighting and/or Bell Ringing are planned, these will have to be cancelled as they are a sign of celebration.

Religious services

Church of England Dioceses will be arranging full civic services in cathedrals and major churches on the mid-Sunday of the ten day mourning period with local parish churches encouraged to hold service on the eve of the state funeral. Other religious establishments may also arrange services.

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Information for councils

Websites

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 ten day period.

Councils should prepare suitable words to put on the website from the Mayor or Chair of the Council.

The website home page should be overwritten with a black page carrying a portrait of Her Majesty The Queen and associated tables below to the council's home page and other tabs required during the period of mourning, for instance a link to online books of condolence.

Detail everything that will be happening during this period and events cancelled or postponed.

Condolence books

A condolence book should be made available for signing in the Town Hall/Council Office, and places of worship. Council may also like to take these to schools and care homes.

Loose leaf pages are recommended as any pages that are defaced or unsuitable comments written on can be destroyed.

Following D+11, the folders can be collated and bound, and a letter sent to the Private Secretary at Buckingham Palace advising that a Book of Condolence is held in the council archive.

Floral tributes

The current trend following any notable death or tragic incident is flowers to be laid. An area pre-designated for this purpose should be agreed in advance making sure it does not block access routes etc.

Make it clear that flowers should be unwrapped and not left in cellophane, that flowers will be removed on the morning after the Funeral and what you intend to do with them – ideally arrange for them to be composted.

Dress Code

There will be multiple occasions at which Members and Officers of a Council may be required to be part of the public mourning process, for example during the proclamation reading and while setting and supervising the condolence books.

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Robed members of the Council should wear a rosette on the left lapel, while black armbands 3 ¼" wide should be worn at other times during the mourning period.

Public facing officers should be offered armbands as appropriate during the mourning period. Black ties should be worn by male councillors and officers. Black rosettes may be worn instead of armbands by female councillors if preferred.

According to local tradition the mace's should also be dressed with a black ribbon. Chains of office may also need to be wrapped with black ribbon.

Local Government Act

Local Government Act 1972, s 243 excludes days appointed for public mourning from the calculation of the three clear days' notice of a council meeting, or anything that is required to be done.

When HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh passed away, this was interpreted as none of the eight days of mourning could be used in calculating the three clear days. For this reason, the council may need to postpone a meeting, or giving notice for a meeting, until after the funeral has taken place.

Similarly, if the four days between a council election and the day new members take office fall within the period of mourning the taking of office will be delayed until after the funeral.

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Communications considerations for your organisation

Website

- If you are posting a banner image to your website, this should be black with a grayscale picture of the Queen, and should remain in place until after the funeral. If you are using a photograph of the Queen, you should ensure you have the correct licence for this (don't just take one from Google as you could face copyright issues).

For example:



- You should review and consider pausing any scheduled blog content.
- Your official statement when the news breaks (see below) should be put up as a blog post and linked to from your home page. This is a good option if you are not intending to place a banner on the home page.
- If you are cancelling any events and/or closing your venue at any point during the official mourning period, you should make sure your opening hours are up to date and that this is clearly communicated on your website, social media and Google Maps profile.

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Social media

- When the news breaks you should pause all scheduled social media activity and review all content planned for the official mourning period. No content should go out during official moments of silence or official bell ringing, and you may wish to pause content for the entire day of the funeral, which will be a national day of mourning (other than your official statement, see below).
- When the news breaks (or on D+1), you should consider posting a black memorial banner image with a grayscale picture of the Queen to your social media (see above - you may also wish to include this on your website) - the accompanying text should include a brief, but not overly emotional, statement from your CEO offering condolences to the Royal Family, Queen's friends and household staff. If you are using a photograph of the Queen, you should ensure you have the correct licence for this (don't just take one from Google as you could face copyright issues). If you don't have an image you can use, your statement can be text-based.
- Should you have any staff members, board directors or trustees who have an Honour, such as an OBE, MBE, CBE KCBE etc, these people should put out a personal statement of their own (on their own Twitter/LinkedIn etc).
- On D+2 you should consider issuing a statement from your CEO on behalf of your team offering condolences to the new King (you should refer to him as His Majesty - don't use his name until you know what his official title is, which will be announced on D+1 as part of the proclamation) and wishing him well at this difficult time.
- On D+3 if your business operates in England, Scotland or Wales, you may wish to issue a statement as the King visits each nation to receive a motion of condolence and attend church services. If you operate in Northern Ireland, you may wish to do the same on D+4.
- D+7 - D+9: for those organisations that have had contact with the Queen and have evidence of such (photographs, plaques at venue etc), this is an opportunity to run tasteful in memoriam posts linking the Queen to your organisation. These should be approached sensitively and avoid being promotional.
- The day of the funeral (D+10) will be a national day of mourning but not a bank holiday. You may wish to put out a statement on the morning of the funeral, but no content should be scheduled during the bell ringing or official silence.
- If you have any sponsored posts or adverts running on social media, you should review the content of these for suitability and decide whether you want to pause them or not.

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- If you are working with any influencers or content partners, you should discuss your Operation London Bridge protocol with them ASAP, and ensure that any scheduled content is reviewed for sensitivity and paused if necessary.

Other external communications

- You should liaise with your PR agency about pausing press release distribution, as media outlets will be changing their publishing focus during the official mourning period.
- You should review any scheduled email marketing campaigns and consider pausing these if necessary. No emails should be sent during any official bell ringing or silences, and you may wish to avoid sending any promotional emails on the day of the funeral, which will be a national day of mourning.

Internal communications

- You should consider how you will communicate the news with your staff if it happens during work hours, and whether they will be sent home/given the rest of the day off.
- You should decide whether staff will be given the day off for the funeral - which will be a national day of mourning but not a holiday. If you have a location in London, you should consider travel disruptions for staff coming to and from work during the mourning period, as well as staff safety during this period.

Other useful information

- You can find [helpful information on addressing members of the Royal Family and their official titles here](#).
- You can find free 'limited reuse' licences of images of the Queen here - <https://www.defenceimagery.mod.uk/>
- If in doubt, or should you require further information call us on - 0330 133 5484

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