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Operation London Bridge: Leeds City Council and the City's response to the passing of the late HM Queen Elizabeth II

Date: 23 November 2022

Report of: Chief Executive

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This largely retrospective update report summarises the response across the council and the city during the 10-day mourning period which marked the passing of the late HM Queen Elizabeth II, known as Operation London Bridge. The response was in-line with Government guidance and aligned with West Yorkshire Resilience Forum and other partner plans to ensure a city-wide partnership response that was appropriate and respectful given the late Queen's service to the public and connections to the city.

During this period the accession of the King Charles III took place including the Proclamation for West Yorkshire and the city of Leeds.

The report also updates on plans for to permanently commemorate the life of HM Elizabeth II across the city and to progress lessons learnt into future Bridge protocol and implementation.

Recommendations

Executive Board is requested to

- a) Note the key impacts and wider response to Operation London Bridge.
- b) Thank our staff and partners for their efforts, which ensured a timely and appropriate council and city response.
- c) Consider and support plans for permanent commemoration to mark the life of HM Elizabeth II.

What is this report about?

- 1 This retrospective report covers the planning and significant activity in September 2022 across the council and city partners to commemorate the death of the late HM Queen Elizabeth II and the marking the accession of King Charles III.
- 2 The report also includes an update on permanent commemorations to mark the life of HM Elizabeth II.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 3 The passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II, the UK's longest reigning monarch, was a significant milestone and event for the country, the Commonwealth, and the world. It was essential the council marked the event in-line with Government guidance, the wider national context and in-line with the mood in the city utilising our well-established city and regional partnerships.
- 4 The council's London Bridge protocol had been in place for a number of years with officers working within the Lord Mayor's Office, Chief Executive's Office and the Communications and Marketing team regularly updating the protocol and plans in line with guidance from the Government, the Royal Household and the National Association of Civic Officers (NACO).
- 5 Following the passing of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in April 2021, a review of council's London Bridge arrangements was undertaken, and led to the establishment of a cross council Silver Group with representatives from key council services and including partners such as West Yorkshire Police (WYP), led by the Chief Officer, Strategy and Improvement. The Silver Group led on ensuring a whole council and partnership response could be implemented quickly and effectively when needed.
- 6 In April 2022, reflecting national lessons learnt and the changing Covid context, further guidance was issued by Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) along with complementary guidance from NACO. The council's London Bridge Protocol was purposefully updated to ensure that an agile and dynamic response could be resourced and flexed depending on the national and local context at the time that Operation London Bridge would be implemented.
- 7 The key workstreams of the protocol mirrored national guidance in terms of planning for key national and local events over the national mourning period including civic and ceremonial activities, flag flying, books of condolence and memorial sites, arrangements for the county and city proclamation, community engagement including different faiths and parish and district councils and communications both internal with members and staff and externally with residents, businesses and partners across the city. With this range of aspects to the protocol, combined with national and local variables that would influence options (such as timing in relation to other events and the mood of the nation), this was a complex protocol to prepare given the need to be ready for a range of different scenarios.
- 8 On Thursday 8 September 2022, it was announced at 6.30pm that HM Queen Elizabeth II had died. The council's London Bridge protocol was immediately implemented and appropriate actions all taken within the first hour, including: lowering of flags to half-mast on Leeds Town Hall, Civic Hall and other public buildings which the council is responsible for; social media and public statements issued from the Lord Mayor, Leader of the Council, and the Chief Executive reflecting the Government's statements; the council's website front page was switched to a mourning page; the on-line book of condolence opened and the Civic Hall was lit up in remembrance purple. Communications to all members and MPs and staff were issued that evening.
- 9 The following morning, after official signing by the Lord Mayor and political leaders, the physical Books of Condolence in the Civic Hall were made available for the public to sign, and a

memorial floral tribute site opened on the Civic Hall steps. These remained open until the day after the state funeral.

- 10 Over the 10-day mourning period, the government issued a range of guidance covering local government responsibilities in terms of flag flying, holding a proclamation in local areas, continuation of existing events taking place in the local area, bank holiday arrangements and the screening of the state funeral. The council's extensive planning ahead of Operation London Bridge ensured that our local arrangements met these responsibilities and where needed could flex to adapt to any required changes. It was a fast moving, complex and dynamic situation.
- 11 Over the 10-day mourning period, local events were held supported by the council to allow the people of Leeds to gather and commemorate the death of HM the Queen and the accession of the new King. All these events were supported by an extensive range of council and partner services, such as Communication colleagues working to ensure clear and accurate information for the public, Facilities Management colleagues ensured a very busy Civic Hall ran smoothly and limited the impact on other services such as registrars, colleagues in IDS kept the website up to date and operated the online book of condolence, colleagues in the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Team and Park and Countryside worked out of hours to ensure the city centre floral memorial site was maintained and well managed, colleagues in WY Police provided advice and guidance about events given the dynamic national and local context. All council services asked to contribute to the implementation of the London Bridge protocol did so with the minimum fuss and the maximum impact – working in a classic Team Leeds way. The main events delivered included:
 - a) Arranged by the Lord Mayors Office the West Yorkshire County and Leeds City proclamation led by the Deputy High Sheriff, the Lord Lieutenant for West Yorkshire and Lord Mayor with local and West Yorkshire dignitaries invited, the first such event in the city in seventy years.
 - b) Coordinated by Democratic Services colleagues, a special Full Council meeting attended by the Lord Lieutenant of West Yorkshire and the High Sheriff.
 - c) Coordinated by colleagues in Safer Stronger Communities team, a multi-faith vigil, led by the Bishop of Leeds and Leeds Faith forum.
 - d) Arranged by the Events Team, a public screening of the State Funeral in Millennium Square.
- 12 Over the 10-day mourning period daily meetings were held with the Leader, Deputy Leaders, Chief Whip and the Chief Executive to provide leadership and engagement on arrangements; the Silver Group met every other day to review plans and resolve any emerging issues and a city-wide multi-agency Gold meeting was held to ensure council and partner activity was aligned. Two assurance reports were sent through to DHLUC covering local event planning and daily RAG rating returns of local events and risks was sent through to the West Yorkshire Resilience Forum.
- 13 In line with the communications plan, social media posts amplified national messaging and included details of local events and regular communications were sent through to all members, staff and partners on the planning for national and local events and any local council service bank holiday operational impacts for example on the day of the State Funeral.
- 14 Following the sad passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the council is seeking to identify suitable options for commemorating her life and achievements during her 70-year reign. Within the UK, the naming of streets, buildings or public spaces after current or former kings and queens is a common approach that helps to embed the importance of the Royal Sovereign into the everyday culture of place, as well as commemorating their reign. Notable examples of this approach in Leeds include Victoria Gardens outside the City's Central Library and Art Gallery and King Edward Street. Permission to use a Royal name or title is a mark of favour granted by the Sovereign on the advice of Government. There will be engagement with group leaders about options and once a proposal is identified, the council will write to the Cabinet Office's Parliament and Constitutional team who will consider our proposal and advise accordingly.

- 15 In addition to a more formal commemoration, linked to the Queens Green Canopy initiative, a tree will be planted in Golden Acre Park in early 2023, near to the tree planted in March 2022 to commemorate Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. The Lord Mayor's Office are exploring the curation of a permanent display cabinet in the Civic Hall.
- 16 Members will be aware of that His Majesty The King is visiting the city on 8 November and there will be three plaques to commemorate that visit, with one in the Civic Hall celebrating the 10th anniversary of Child Friendly Leeds, one that will be placed in Jamaica House marking The King's visit to the Romance to Rebellion Exhibition, and one at Leeds Building Society marking the growth of the financial sector in the city and beyond.
- 17 The date of King Charles III coronation has been confirmed as 6 May 2023. A National Bank Holiday has been confirmed for Monday 8 May. No further guidance is currently available about plans at a national level. Once guidance is received, a cross council group will be established to ensure that any local impacts are mitigated, and the council supports the city to celebrate the coronation of the new King.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

- 18 No impacts identified.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: none

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 19 Prior to the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II, given the sensitive nature of the national and council Operation London Bridge plans, limited engagement took place with key partners including West Yorkshire Police, local Universities, city centre business, Town and Parish councils and faith groups. As part of a lesson learnt review, this has been identified as an area for improvement which will be built into the next iteration of the council's Bridge Protocol.

What are the resource implications?

- 20 On the 11 September 2022, the Chief Officer of Strategy and Improvement approved an administrative decision to support the council's London Bridge operational activity, in line with the national requirement, the council's values of spending money wisely and the financial context at the time. The decision recognised the need for the council to be able to respond quickly to national requirements and in line with the expectations of the people of Leeds and the significant reputational risks if the local events did not match the national and Royal Household guidance.
- 21 The overall spend on the council's London Bridge operational response was £32,511.77. This includes support for the local events such as the West Yorkshire and Leeds City proclamation, the memorial tribute site and associated security over the 12 days it was operational, the infrastructure associated with the public screening of the state funeral and arrangements for the multi-faith commemoration service, and also overtime costs for staff working out of hours to ensure all arrangements were in place quickly and respectfully.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 22 The council's London Bridge protocol included a risk log to mitigate any risks associated with the key elements of the national and NACO guidance and local events planned over the national mourning period. This risk log will be reviewed as part of the next iteration of the council's Bridge Protocol.

What are the legal implications?

23 None.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

24 The council's London Bridge Protocol was developed over many years and was regularly reviewed to ensure it reflected the national guidance to ensure as a council we were able to deliver a respectful and proportionate response which stayed within sensible budgetary measures. Implementation of the protocol was a clear expectation of all local authorities, so limited choice about alternative approaches. Throughout delivery, there were a range of operational decisions, such as floral site, opening hours for books of condolence etc, that were made in line with the values, the guidance and the mood of the nation and city.

How will success be measured?

25 The Lord Lieutenant of West Yorkshire has expressed his thanks and appreciation for the council's response to implementing London Bridge plans following the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II, and commented on the calm dedication and attention to detail that everyone involved displayed. The work of officers on the Silver Group and their teams especially those on the front line ensured we supported communities and residents to pay their respects; the immediate response activity was successfully implemented; and all our subsequent plans were rolled out smoothly. And our partnerships with West Yorkshire Police and faith leaders played an instrumental role ensuring the Operation London Bridge was marked appropriately.

26 However, recognising there is always need for improvement the Silver Group undertook a lessons learnt exercise after Operation London Bridge was formally stood down. This has highlighted a small number of areas of improvement which will be included in the next iteration of the council's Bridge Protocol. Work is underway to review this so the council is prepared to stand up arrangements on the event of a future death of a senior member of the Royal Family.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

27 This is largely a retrospective report. The council's London Bridge Protocol was implemented by the Silver Group, chaired by the Chief Officer Strategy and Improvement. The lessons learnt will be used to inform the next iteration of the Bridge Protocol and the Chief Officer Strategy and Improvement will be responsible for this.

Appendices

- None

Background papers

- None