

CABINET

14 July 2026

Oxfordshire County Council's Protocol for Flag Flying

Report by Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - a) **Review and approve the Protocol for Flag Flying (Annex A). The Protocol incorporates recommendations made by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

Executive Summary

2. This is a proposed Protocol for Flag Flying for Oxfordshire County Council, which establishes a clear and consistent framework for the display of flags on Council buildings and land. The Protocol has been developed to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and national guidance, while recognising the cultural, civic and symbolic significance of flag flying.

Background

3. The Protocol sets out the Council's approach to routine flag flying, including arrangements for existing flagpoles, established annual commitments, and the management of flag displays during the transitions between County Hall, Midland House and Speedwell House. It also defines roles and responsibilities, delegating decision-making to the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, with appropriate consultation, to ensure decisions are fair, transparent and aligned with the Council's values and Public Sector Equality Duty.
4. In addition, the Protocol provides detailed operational guidance on the appropriate use and positioning of flags, compliance with planning regulations, and procedures for flying flags at half-mast. It also introduces a structured process for considering one-off requests, including clear criteria to ensure that requests reflect the Council's values, avoid political or commercial use, and are sensitive to community cohesion.
5. The Protocol seeks to balance the role of flag flying as a means of recognising significant events and communities, with the need to mitigate potential controversy and ensure consistency in decision-making. It reinforces that flag

flying is one of a wider range of ways in which the Council demonstrates support for communities and occasions throughout the year.

6. The draft Protocol was considered by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 June 2026. The Committee made three recommendations, which have been incorporated into the Protocol.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

7. The Council has had due regard to its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty in developing the Flag Flying Protocol. Flags are recognised as important civic symbols which can support inclusion and cohesion but may also give rise to different interpretations across communities.

The Protocol provides a clear and consistent framework to ensure decisions are taken fairly, transparently and with sensitivity to the views of all communities.

This approach is intended to support community cohesion while managing the potential for adverse impacts on individuals or groups with protected characteristics.

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

9. There is no specific statutory regime governing the flying of flags by local authorities. However, the Council must comply with relevant planning legislation, including the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended), and have regard to national guidance on flag flying. Decisions under the Protocol will be taken within a clear, consistent framework to ensure they are lawful, proportionate and transparent, and must also have due regard to the Council's wider legal duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Comments checked by:

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Annex A: Oxfordshire County Council's Protocol for Flag Flying

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