

Town hall won't fly Union flag but will hoist 'gay' banner

By Sarah Westcott

A COUNCIL was branded "despicable" last night after refusing to fly the Union flag on the Queen's birthday.

Town hall chiefs claimed no staff were available to hoist the national flag because the celebrations fell on a Saturday.

However, Bournemouth Borough Council will raise a rainbow flag in honour of a Gay Pride event next month - which also falls on a Saturday.

The decision by chief executive Pam Donnellan was last night seen as an assault on traditional British values.

MPs, councillors and former servicemen called the move "an insult to the Queen" and the British public. Even gay groups called it "scandalous".

Insult

The Lib Dem-run council claimed it was impossible to raise the Union flag for the Queen's 80th birthday on June 17th. Officials said they would have needed to bring in at least two workers to hoist the flag and take it down again.

But they later confirmed they would be marking the Bourne Free Pride Festival on Saturday, July 8, by flying the rainbow flag at the town hall.

Bournemouth Tory councillor David Clutterbuck said: "This is not only an insult to the Queen but an insult to the public. To say they had nobody around to do it is nonsense. I would have gone down there and raised it myself.

"Why could nobody have stuck it up on Friday night and taken it down again on Monday, which is what they are going to do with this rainbow flag?"

Sean Rusling, of the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association, said: "It is despicable that the council can't make time to celebrate the Queen's birthday. To raise a flag for Gay Pride but not the Queen's birthday is just biz-



NO PRIDE: Union flag didn't grace the town hall but a rainbow flag, left, will be flown for gay event

arre. It is an absolute insult not to raise it in the first place but to raise the Gay Pride flag instead is beyond belief."

And John Midgley, of the Campaign Against Political Correctness, said: "It seems a pitiful excuse not to fly the Union flag.

"We hope it wasn't done for reasons of political correctness as is often the case." Even

gay groups were surprised. UK Gay News said: "It is great they are raising the rainbow flag but it is scandalous they can't do it for the Monarch's birthday. Gay people have always asked for equality."

The council claimed it would have breached protocol to have left the Union flag up over the weekend. But flagpole supplier Harrison's said: "His-

torically with military buildings, the etiquette is to raise the Union flag at dawn and lower it at dusk. But there is no problem on other buildings to leave it flying."

Ms Donnellan said: "There was no snub intended, we were strictly following historical protocols regarding flying the Union flag. We now realise we can be more relaxed."