

Committee(s): General Purposes Committee of Aldermen	Dated: 6/02/2024
Subject: Knocking In at the Old Bailey	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 6
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
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Summary

This report provides a summary of the history, background and current practice associated with the ceremonial custom of 'knocking in' at the Old Bailey.

Knocking in remains an important part of City tradition, and this report seeks to set out the background to this custom, to confirm the expectations around how it should continue to be carried out, and to note the support available to Sheriffs and Aldermen from the team on the ground at the Old Bailey in doing so.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Part of the centuries-old link between the Shrievalty, Court of Alderman, and the judiciary at the Central Criminal Court is the daily ceremonial custom of 'knocking in' at the Old Bailey. 'Knocking in' dates back to a time when courts could be violent and unpredictable settings for judges.
2. In both the morning and afternoon sessions of the courts, the Sheriffs at the Old Bailey would enter the court ahead of the judge to make sure that they could oversee proceedings safely without the threat of attack. At times the Sheriffs would be accompanied by Aldermen, and Aldermen would from time to time conduct knocking in on their own. A full procession into Court also included the Secondary.

Traditional Procedure

3. The full procedure was conducted as follows:

- the usher knocked to announce the opening of the Court and asked all to rise;
 - the Secondary entered first and stood just inside the Court, back to the wall;
 - then the Alderman, wearing a gown, entered, passed the Secondary, and stood back to the wall;
 - then the Sheriff, in Old Bailey garb or wearing a gown, entered, passed both the Secondary and the Alderman, and stood back to the wall closest to the judge's seat;
 - after a brief pause the judge entered and each person gave a small court bow as the judge passed (as done in the Court of Aldermen when the Lord Mayor enters and passes fellow Aldermen). When the judge had passed and was in front of his/her seat, all three turned to face him/her. The judge bowed to the Court then turned and bowed to the trio (who bow to him at the same time). The trio turned on their heels and left briskly: Secondary, Alderman, Sheriff.
4. This ceremony was conducted twice per day, per court, i.e. could be 36 knocking in ceremonies at full capacity. The Sheriffs were available for this and used the Aldermen's room behind Court 1 to be positioned for requests to knock in. There were also, from time to time, requests for 'knocking out', where things were done in reverse.

Recent 'Knocking In' Practice

5. More recently, except on special occasions or requests, knocking in has been done by just one of a Sheriff, an Alderman, or the Secondary. The Duty Alderman was expected to stay on duty until all knocking in requests had been fulfilled.
6. Since the 1990s, judges were knocked into their courts for the afternoon session only, with a Sheriff, an Alderman, and the Secondary sharing these duties among them. More recently, since circa 2015, knocking in has been most customary for those courts containing 'luncheon guests' who have been invited to observe proceedings, and for any court where the judge requested it. Judges typically request knocking in as a reminder of tradition, or as a reminder to their court, particularly in lengthy trials, that the outside world continues to pay attention to proceedings.

Current Practice

7. The Sheriff is expected to knock in courts containing 'luncheon guests' who have been invited to observe proceedings. The Duty Alderman is expected to knock in for the luncheon guests' court if a Sheriff is unavailable. The Sheriff and the Duty Alderman should welcome any requests from other judges who also wish to be knocked in and work out how to fulfil such requests themselves.
8. Support with knocking in is provided by the team on the ground at the Old Bailey, through a combination of the Shrieval footmen, the Shrieval secretariat, and the Honorary Secondary.

9. A gown is made available outside the Judges' Dining Room and should be worn by the Alderman if they are knocking in. Aldermen will also either be provided with a temporary security pass, or escorted by a member of the team, so that they can gain access to the courts as required.
10. During the course of the morning (between 9am and 10am) of each day on which a Sheriff or Aldermanic host is hosting lunch, one of the team on the ground at the Old Bailey will check to see which court or courts may provide a suitable venue for any of the lunch guests to observe proceedings in the afternoon. At times, there may be acute pressure on space in particular courtrooms, and there may be changes to proceedings in the course of a court session, so a number of options will need to be considered. This will be done by looking at the daily list of cases and liaising with the judges sitting that day.
11. During the course of the pre-lunch drinks or at lunch, the Sheriff (or Aldermanic host) should confirm with the judges which court's afternoon proceedings would be most appropriate for that day's guests to observe. They should also confirm as a courtesy that the judge is happy to be knocked in.
12. Immediately on the conclusion of lunch (as the judges need to resume court at 2pm), those guests who are able to stay will be escorted to the chosen courtroom and invited to take their seats. In some instances, judges may have agreed in advance to give guests a brief summary of the case; staff will be on hand to help with the logistics of this should that be the case.
13. The Sheriff/Alderman, meanwhile, should make their way to the judge's entrance to the court and await the usher and the judge. When the afternoon's proceedings are ready to begin, the usher will knock on the door and open it for the Sheriff/Alderman followed by the judge.
14. The Sheriff/Alderman will stop just inside the door, with the judge continuing to their seat. At this point, the judge will bow to the dock, before turning to the Sheriff/Alderman with both bowing to each other. At this point, the Sheriff/Alderman leaves the room and the ceremony is complete.

Conclusion

15. Knocking in remains an important part of City tradition and the Court of Aldermen and the Sheriffs are expected to maintain it.
16. For those Aldermen who either have not carried out knocking in previously, or who have any questions about the practice in general or its delivery that day, the Shrieval support team is happy to help.

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