London Borough of Lewisham

REGISTRATION SERVICE
SERVICEPOINT (SP)
CUSTOMER SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Citizenship Ceremonies

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1. Introduction

This document outlines the objectives of the Registration Service to provide professional Citizenship Ceremonies in Lewisham in order to meet our statutory obligations to our community. It explains how the Citizenship Ceremony creates a sense of belonging and how people’s differences and similarities are recognised, valued and respected. The report demonstrates that equal life opportunities are open to people from all backgrounds and how people are encouraged to interact with each other, sharing experiences and working together with common values towards a mutual vision.

2. Background

Since January 2004, successful applicants for British Citizenship have been required to attend a ceremony in order to make an Oath or Affirmation of allegiance to the Crown, pledge their loyalty to the United Kingdom and receive their naturalisation certificate.

The first of these new Citizenship Ceremonies took place in Brent on 26th February 2004, and I was lucky enough to be able to attend. Nineteen people including three children, from 10 countries, took part. Home Secretary at the time, David Blunkett and Prince Charles also attended. The ceremony began with an introduction by the Mayor of Brent, the Rev Peter Lemmon, followed by a speech from Mr Blunkett. He said, “I think the new ceremonies across the country will be the answer to those who fear difference, who fear the diversity which comes with migration of people coming across the world to live in our community and sends a very clear message that those who choose to be part of the family are committing themselves.” After the applicants had pledged their allegiance, they were formally welcomed by Prince Charles. He told them that he hoped the ceremony added something to the significance of acquiring British citizenship and that it had reinforced their belief that they belong here and were very welcome.

3. Registration Service Objectives

It is recognised that all local authorities have to deliver Citizenship Ceremonies as a statutory duty, and Lewisham have enthusiastically embraced the concept. The Registration Service strives to make its ceremonies welcoming and friendly whilst maintaining the expected level of professionalism.

4. Information about Citizenship Services

4:1 Application for Naturalisation

In order to be granted British Citizenship applicants must provide proof of their residency in the United Kingdom for the relevant qualification period to the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). The period is usually 5 years if the applicant is not married to a British Citizen and 3 years if they are. They also need to have indefinite leave to remain and provide proof of their identity. All applications for
citizenship have to be accompanied either by a certificate confirming they have successfully passed the Life in the UK test or attended an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course at an accredited college. Applicants can send their application forms directly to the UKBA in which case they would need to include the original documents (e.g. passport) with the application.

4:2 Nationality Checking Service

Many people choose to use the Nationality Checking Service (NCS) to submit their application. NCS is a partnership between the UKBA and local authorities and was designed to reduce the proportion of incorrectly completed applications submitted for Citizenship.

It is worth pointing out that NCS is not a fast-track method, but has distinct advantages in that for an administration fee the checking officers ensure that the application form is correctly completed and that the application is validly submitted and the unwaivable requirements for citizenship are met. NCS has been very popular since its introduction in 2005 and the statistics prove that 98% of applications made this way were successful. This compares with 90% refusals for other applications. The officers also verify that they have seen original documents thus allowing the applicant to retain their valuable documentation reducing the possibility of it going missing. Ceremonies in the UK are organised by local authorities. The applicant can choose which borough they would like to have their ceremony with, so if a resident from a neighbouring borough attends Lewisham NCS they can still elect to have their ceremony with us. Lewisham prides itself on the quality of their ceremonies and extra income can be achieved from the number of people attending ceremonies, ensuring that this is a good option both for the applicant and Lewisham Council.

4:3 Approvals to Become a British Citizen

If the applicant is approved for British Nationality, they will receive an invitation letter from the UKBA. The letter advises them to get in touch with their chosen local authority in order to book their ceremony. They have 90 days from the date on this letter in which to attend a ceremony. Children under 18 are not required to take a Citizenship oath or affirmation or to attend a ceremony, but are very welcome to attend with their parents if they wish. When the citizen arrives at the venue registration staff check their identity, that they have their invitation letter from the UKBA and that the details on the certificate are correct. The certificates arrive at the Register Office already printed, meaning that if any details are incorrect they have to be returned to the UKBA by the new citizen after the ceremony with proof of the correct detail.
4:4 Citizenship Ceremonies

During the ceremony, applicants are required to swear or affirm an oath of allegiance to the Queen and make a pledge of loyalty to the United Kingdom. The difference between the Oath and Affirmation is in the very first line - When citizens choose the oath, they swear on God’s name or declare and affirm if they choose the affirmation (Please see appendix 1:1 and 1:2)

All citizens then have to make a pledge of commitment to the United Kingdom (Appendix 1:3)

Once this is done, they receive their naturalisation certificates and stand for the playing of the National Anthem. They can then apply for their British passport.

5. Life in the UK Tests and Alternatives

If the applicant’s English skills are at or above ESOL Entry 3 level (a very limited basic understanding of English), they will need to pass the ‘Life in the UK’ test before they can apply for naturalisation. This test is to demonstrate the applicants’ knowledge of language and life in the United Kingdom.

The test consists of 24 multiple choice questions based on information in the handbook “Life in the UK: A journey to Citizenship”. Applicants will be asked questions on migration to the UK, population, regions of Great Britain, customs and traditions and how the UK is governed. (Please see Appendix 2 for further information.) The test costs £50 and must be taken at one of approximately 65 test centres around the UK where they will be asked to produce photographic identification. If they pass the test they receive a pass notification letter which must be included in their application.

If the applicants’ English skills are below ESOL entry 3 level they must take an ESOL course in English with Citizenship content and obtain a relevant qualification before they can apply for naturalisation. The requirements as shown on the UKBA website are:

- The course must include Citizenship materials
- The applicant must have attended their ESOL course at an accredited college
- They must obtain a relevant ESOL qualification from an approved awarding body
- They must demonstrate that they have made relevant progress
  - To demonstrate “relevant progress” the college must confirm that the applicant has progressed by at least one level from the level they were assessed at when they started the course.
6. Citizenship Ceremonies in Lewisham

In Lewisham we believe that becoming a British Citizen is a significant event and should be celebrated in a meaningful way.

6:1 Preparation

The certificates are received by the local authority weekly from UKBA and the invitations are sent to applicants a couple of days later, so by the time the applicant contacts Lewisham to book their ceremony, all their details will have already been loaded onto our database. We offer the applicant the next available group ceremony- we host two group ceremonies every two weeks at the Civic Suite. We check if the citizen has any special needs or requirements that we need to be aware of on the day of the ceremony, for example we acknowledge that there are ladies in some cultures who feel unable to shake the hand of a man and we respect their wishes. We ask if they want to take the oath or affirmation. We then check that we have the correct address to post out written confirmation of the place and time of the ceremony. Included with this is a handwritten commemorative invitation which citizens can keep as a memento of the day. If they prefer, the applicant can pay to have a private ceremony at the Register Office and this can often be booked for the following day depending on availability of ceremony rooms.

When confirmation letters are sent out, citizens are asked if anyone has a special story about their citizenship journey that they would like to share with the other ceremony participants. Those who have accepted this invitation have made the ceremony extra special as it was particularly interesting for the other citizens to share a similar experience to their own.

6:2 The Lewisham Ceremony

Although every local authority has to provide a similar ceremony using virtually the same words, we have added a few extra touches to make our ceremony more welcoming. At each group ceremony there are approximately 40 new citizens along with their children and guests. The team from the Register Office consists of 3 people and to ensure the smooth running of the ceremony requires a great deal of organisation, making sure that citizens are seated in order, that everything required is taken to the Civic Suite, that refreshments are set out etc.

A dignitary usually attends to welcome the citizens on behalf of the local authority and to present the certificates. We have been very fortunate to have some very high profile personages, notably Terry Waite and the Registrar General as well as our local heroes, The Mayor and councillors, and the speeches are invariably very interesting and inspiring. Our dignitaries come from all over the world, and some tell of their experience of arriving in the UK with limited resources and knowledge of the country. They talk about the contribution they have made to the community, including serving as Mayor of the Borough, becoming local councillors and in some instances even receiving recognition from the Queen, so the new citizens are able to see at first hand that people from all backgrounds have equal life...
opportunities. The dignitaries usually give some background information about Lewisham and encourage the new citizens to join in the pride that members of the community feel about the borough. On occasion we also invite choirs from local schools to lead the National Anthem and perform other relevant pieces. This is very pleasant for the citizens but also, as the children learn about Citizenship in school, it gives them more of an understanding about the process and so furthers links with the local community.

The ceremony is usually held in the Council Chambers and to create a welcoming, celebratory feel to the proceedings, we provide a large red, white and blue fresh floral display, balloons and bunting to decorate the Civic Suite. There is a professional photographer in attendance and photos or a DVD of the whole ceremony can be purchased. A light buffet is supplied after the ceremony which gives everyone a chance to mingle, meet with other new citizens and perhaps talk to the attending dignitary.

At every ceremony we ask for 3 volunteers to come to the front and read a verse each of a short poem about the Union flag (See Appendix 3). This is usually a very moving part of the ceremony and it is clear that the participants feel an extra sense of belonging and pride when they read the poem.

When the citizens are called to come forward to receive their certificate, their country of birth is mentioned and people very often seek out another citizen who was born in the same country as they were, to chat to after the ceremony. A letter from the Mayor is included with each adult certificate. (See appendix 5). We also provide a commemorative register for the citizens to sign which we feel, adds to the dignity and importance of the day.

After everyone has received their certificates, we ask them all to turn to the person beside them and shake their hands to congratulate each other on becoming British. Again this is a joyous moment and the happiness and pride is very easy to see in the new citizen's eyes. As people are seated in groups at the ceremony, they tend to chat to people from other countries enabling people from all backgrounds to interact with each other and share experiences.

Together with the pack provided by the Home Office we include a form to register to vote, an application form for the British passport and information of the make up of the Union Jack, which people find quite fascinating. We also give each new adult citizen a lapel badge bearing the crest of Lewisham and these are a very sought after memento of a special day.

7. Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

Customer satisfaction is very important to us and as such we have asked customers what they have felt about the ceremonies and have had very favourable feedback. Comments received include:

*A very memorable time.*

*A dignitary who is well able to understand and embrace people from different ethnic mix can make a big difference. The councillor did make a difference to the ceremony. Excellent! Keep up the standard!*

23/08/2012 Service Brief
Thank you for all the thought that went into the ceremony. It definitely made it an occasion.

I enjoyed the dignitaries speech and felt welcomed by the Lewisham staff. I enjoyed the event!

I like the way we done ceremony so easy and nice

Very professional. This is a good strategy for community cohesion and I hope will continue.

It was dignified and nice. I was honoured, thank you

I was very impressed with the manner in which the swearing and affirming was done

The ceremony is beautiful, it will foster unity and co-operation between different nationalities.

Outstanding ceremony

It has made me even more happier being British

A very 'warm' welcoming practice

Thoroughly enjoyed myself, Well organised and presented. Very FRIENDLY & professional staff.

It’s a rare opportunity to participate in such allegiance. I pledge my loyalty to this country as a whole. God bless the members of the staff of the Civic Suite.

8. Summation

Lewisham have worked hard to ensure that the Citizenship Ceremonies we host are of a very high standard. We have recently changed the wording of the ceremony to be even more welcoming and to emphasise the inclusion of the new citizens into the community. (Please see Appendix 4). We explain that they now have the right to participate fully in civic society and wish them a successful and enriching life in their community. They are told of recent achievements in the borough such as cleanest streets, best front gardens etc and are encouraged to bring to Britain the benefit of all their various backgrounds and cultural histories to enhance the community. Many of the comments and compliments show beyond a doubt that we are achieving our aim of providing community cohesion with our Citizenship Ceremonies.
Appendix 1:1: The Oath

I (name) swear by Almighty God, that on becoming a British Citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

Appendix 1:2: The Affirmation

I (name) do solemnly, sincerely and truly, declare and affirm that on becoming a British Citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

Appendix 1:3: Pledge of Commitment

I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen.
Appendix 2: (Page 2)

Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

Population

- How many people live in the countries of the UK?
- What is the census and how is census data collected and used?
- How many people belong to an ethnic minority and which are the largest minority groups? Where are there large ethnic communities?

The regions of Britain

- Where are Geordie, Cockney and Scouse dialects spoken?
- What languages other than English are spoken in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales?

Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

Religion and tolerance

- How many people say they have a religion and how many attend religious services? What are the largest religious groups?
- What is the Church of England and who is its head? What are the main Christian groups?

Customs and traditions

- What sports and sporting events are popular in the UK?
- Do people tend to live in the cities or in the country?
- What and when are the Patron Saints' Days of the four countries of the UK? What are bank holidays?
- What and when are the main Christian festivals? What other traditional days are celebrated?
Appendix 2: (Page 3)

Life in the UK Test website

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Appendix 2: (Page 4)

Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

| What is proportional representation and where is it used? |
| What services are provided by local authorities? |
| How do judges apply the law? How are the police organised? |
| What are quangos and non-departmental public bodies? |
| How is political debate reported? Are newspapers free to publish opinions or do they have to remain impartial? |
| Who has the right to vote and at what age? How and when do you register to vote? |
| Who can stand for public office? How can you contact an elected member? How can you visit Parliament? |
| What are the roles and powers of the main institutions of Europe? How is European law organised? |
| What rights do citizens of European Union states have to travel and work? |
| What is the Commonwealth? What is the United Nations and what is Britain’s role within it? |

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http://lifeintheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/htmlsite/self2_70.html

31/07/2012
# Appendix 2: Life in the UK Test website

## Housing
- How many people in the UK own their own home? What is a mortgage?
- What do estate agents do? What do solicitors and surveyors do?
- How is the process of buying a house different in Scotland?
- Which organisations can people rent houses from?
- How do people apply for council accommodation? What is a shared ownership scheme? What is a tenancy agreement?
- Which organisations offer help to homeless people?

## Services in and for the home
- Where can people find information on how to pay for water, gas, electricity and telephone services? What are the different ways to pay these bills?
- How and where is refuse (rubbish) collected?
- What does local government spend council tax on? What does the amount of council tax charged depend on? Which groups of people can receive council tax reductions or benefits?
- What is buildings and household insurance?

http://lifeintheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/htmlsite/self2_80.html
Appendix 2: (Page 6)

Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

Money and credit

- What are the values of the UK bank notes? Where can people get or change foreign currency?
- How can people open a bank or building society account?
- What is a cash card or debit card? What is a credit card or store card?
- What is a credit union?
- What types of insurance do people buy?
- What is social security and who receives it?
- How can people get information about benefits?

Health

- What is the NHS?
- What is the role of a general practitioner (GP)? How can people find their local GP?
- How do people receive medicines from a GP? Which groups of people receive free prescriptions?
- What is NHS direct, and NHS direct online?
- How can people find a dentist? Which groups of people receive free dental treatment?
- What services are available to pregnant women? Which organisations offer information on maternity and ante-natal services?
- How can people register births?

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31/07/2012
Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

Education

- What are the ages of compulsory education? How does this differ in Northern Ireland? Who is responsible for ensuring a child attends school?
- What are the different stages of education? At what age do children leave school? Where can people get details of local schools?
- At what age do children go to secondary school? How does this differ in Scotland?
- What are faith schools? What are independent schools?
- What is the national curriculum? At what ages do children take key stage tests in England? At what age do children take GCSEs and A levels?
- How is education different in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales?
- What is the role of a school governing body (or a school board in Scotland)?
- What do further education colleges offer?
- What is ESOL? What are adult education classes?
- How do university students pay their tuition fees?

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http://lifeintheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/htmlsite/self2_100.html 31/07/2012
What you need to know

Leisure
- What is the film classification system? What are the classifications?
- What is a television licence? What is the licence money used to pay for?
- What is the National Trust?
- How old must people be to buy alcohol? How old must people be to go into betting shops?
- What services are offered by vets?

Travel and transport
- Which organisations provide information about trains, buses and coaches? Which groups of people can get discount tickets?
- How can a person get a driving licence? How long can overseas driving licences be used for in the UK?
- What is motor insurance, road tax and MOT? Where can people purchase a road tax disc? Who can provide an MOT certificate?
- What are the laws covering seat belts, crash helmets and holding mobile phones whilst driving? What are the speed limits for cars and motorcycles?
- What should people do if they are involved in a road accident?

Identity documents
- What identity documents are generally accepted?

http://lifeintheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/htmlsite/self2_110.html

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Appendix 2: (Page 9)

Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

Looking for work

- Where are jobs advertised? Where can people access advice on finding jobs and claiming benefits?
- What is a CV? Who can be a referee? What is the purpose of a job interview?

Equal rights and discrimination

- Which organisations offer information on law and discrimination?
- What can individuals do if they are subject to sexual harassment?

At work

- What are the legal responsibilities of employers? What is the purpose of a contract? What is the purpose of a pay slip?
- What is tax? How is it paid?
- What is National Insurance? How is it paid? How can people obtain a National Insurance number?
- What is a State Pension? What is the State Pension age for men and for women?
- Who can offer information on occupational or personal pensions?
- What are trade unions? For what reasons can employees be dismissed from their job? What is an employment tribunal?
- What is redundancy? What is jobseeker's allowance?

http://lifeintheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/htmlsite/self_120.html

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Appendix 2: (Page 10)

Life in the UK Test website

What you need to know

- What responsibilities do self-employed people have?
- Where can people get advice on setting up their own business?

Working for yourself

Childcare and children at work

- What is maternity leave? What is paternity leave?
- Where can people access information on childcare and registered childminders?
- What is the earliest legal age at which children can do paid work? What documents must a child have before they can work?
- What type of jobs can children NOT do? What are the limits on working hours and times for children?

http://lifetheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/htmlsite/self2_130.html

31/07/2012
Appendix 3:

A poem about the Union Jack
By James Hinton

Unfurl our flag - red, white and blue -
and greet it with your smile.
The blue is for the sea we view
around our sceptred isle;
the sea o'er which we've paid our due
in storm and wartime trial.

Raise up our flag - blue, red and white -
salute it with respect.
The white is for the purest light
that freedom can effect
and for the lasting love of right
our citizens expect.

Fly high our flag - white, blue and red -
for everyone to see.
The red is for the blood we shed
to keep our country free
and for our brave forebears who bled
in every century.
Dear ……..

Congratulations on becoming a British Citizen. It is my privilege as the Mayor of Lewisham to welcome you into our community.

The Borough of Lewisham, the place we call home, is a place where we strive to treat our fellow citizens with respect. Many of us have made a positive choice to live here – some, like myself, have come from other parts of the United Kingdom others from the four corners of the world. Working together with those who were born and raised here we are making Lewisham a place where everyone’s contribution is valued – whatever their age, race, faith or wealth.

Lewisham is part of one of the great cities of the world – a city that is growing faster than it has for a 100 years. Cities can be places of warmth and compassion but they can also be places of loneliness and fear. It is what we do that can make the difference for our neighbours and fellow citizens.

I have a dream of what our home can be – a place where good neighbours are easy to find, where caring parents help their children to grow into good citizens, a place where we understand that we are the trustees of this earth for generations yet to be born, a place where talents are fulfilled and the wisdom of elders is valued. But we will only make progress towards that dream if we work together.

London needs people with your talents, skills, experience and commitment to make sure that our city continues to grow and prosper. We also need your help in Lewisham – our community will only be strong and vibrant if enough of us make the effort to become involved – please use your vote at election time and play an active part in your local community.

With best wishes

Steve Bullock
Mayor of Lewisham
Appendix 5: Lewisham Citizenship Ceremony

Good morning/afternoon I would like to welcome………….ladies and gentlemen and invited guests.

My name is xxxxxxx, I am a Deputy Superintendent Registrar at Lewisham Register Office and it is my privilege to be leading this ceremony today.

On behalf of the Queen, the Government of the United Kingdom and Lewisham Council, I would like to welcome you to the Civic suite for your Citizenship Ceremony. Today I would like to give a very special welcome to our future new citizens who have come from countries far too numerous to mention here. However, there is a full list of countries represented today, in the Upper Foyer for those of you who wish to view it.

For many of you, this is the final step in the process of becoming British Citizens which will welcome you to this nation and into our community, and so makes today a very special occasion for celebration.

I would now like to invite …………………… to speak on behalf of the local community/……….

Dignitary speech

Thank you.

This ceremony is an opportunity to reflect on the widening cultural diversity here in Lewisham. I hope that you will all become involved in British life, in its social networks and in the groups, organisations and voluntary associations that connect citizens with the life of their communities.

We recognise that some of you have already lived in this country for many years while others are more recent arrivals – whichever category you belong to – we hope that you will find and make time to engage with your local communities whether it is here in Lewisham or elsewhere in Britain, and to take on the social and moral responsibilities of those communities.

We would ask that you all accept the responsibility of British Citizenship and that you give to Britain the benefit of your experience, your varied backgrounds and your
aspirations. That you, like all those who have come before you, will help to make Britain an even better place.

You have many skills, many talents and your own particular cultural histories. You should not forget any of these but instead use them to broaden, enrich and enhance your communities.

Your children will receive citizenship education at school with the emphasis on the development of citizenship values, skills and understanding. I hope that you will take pride in developing and sharing these skills with your children.

In a moment I will ask the new citizens to stand and pledge their Allegiance to the Queen. After this everyone in the Chambers will be invited to stand while the new citizens are making a pledge of loyalty to the United Kingdom.

Making an oath of allegiance to the Crown means that you promise to defend the right to live in freedom and free speech in a democratic society.

So, firstly, those of you who have chosen to swear the Oath to the Sovereign, that’s those of you with blue badges, will you please stand?

**Oath of Allegiance**

Please remain standing. Could I now ask those of you who have chosen to affirm the oath to the Sovereign (those of you with red badges) to please stand.

**Affirmation of Allegiance**

May I now ask everyone in the chambers to join us in standing while the Citizens make their pledge of loyalty to the United Kingdom.
Pledge of Commitment to the United Kingdom

Citizenship gives you the right to participate fully in the life of your community as well as the obligation to maintain your commitment to the United Kingdom, its laws and values. We congratulate you on taking your place in the community. And now, three of our brand new citizens are going to read you a poem about the Union flag. So, can I ask our three volunteers to please step forward?

Reading of the Union Flag Poem

I will now ask each of you to come forward to receive your certificate from …………………….and have your photographs taken.

Please then make your way back down the steps to my colleague at the front to sign our commemorative register and receive your welcome pack.

Citizens are called one at a time to have their certificates presented.

And now, as you all have your certificates and have completed your ceremony, why not take this opportunity to turn to the person beside you, in front of you, behind you and shake their hand to wish them well and congratulate them on becoming a British Citizen.

Lewisham welcomes you on behalf of the Queen, her Government and the people of the United Kingdom to British Citizenship by which is extended to you the right to participate fully in Civic Society.

You have each made an oath that you will be a faithful citizen under the British Crown. With others you have made a pledge to respect British law, observe British values and fulfil your duties and obligations as a Citizen of the United Kingdom. May you find your lives enriched and may you in turn enrich the lives of others and your community.

Will everybody now please stand and join in the singing of the first verse of the National Anthem. (The words are on your programmes if you need them) Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in a round of applause to welcome our new British Citizens!

That concludes your ceremony. May I wish you and your families every success in your future lives in the United Kingdom.
I am going to ask ................. (dignitary's name) to lead the way out to the foyer, where we are happy to offer you some light refreshments. If anyone would like to order photos or a DVD, please see the photographer before you leave the chambers – if not, we hope to see you in the foyer.

Invite dignitary to lead the way out of the chambers