

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

The Advisory Group met yesterday to take stock of the First Minister's announcement to the Scottish Parliament which confirmed the specific levels in the Government's new tiered framework in which each of Local Authority has initially been placed. These take effect from Monday 2 November.

The Advisory Group will in the course of the coming days be revisiting and reissuing its guidance. It does not anticipate the need to make major revisions but some clarification will be necessary. In the meantime, it wished to draw immediate attention to the following:-

1. In the new tiered framework it will be important for congregations to be clear about which level in the framework their Local Authority area has been placed. The Government has made clear that these will be reviewed on a weekly basis (the first such review to be announced on Tuesday 10 November, with any changes taking effect on 13 November). You can find out which tier your own Local Authority has been placed in at the following link: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/>
2. No Local Authority has, for the moment, been placed in Level 0 or Level 4 which means that, as far as worship is concerned, church services can continue subject to the overall existing cap of 50 (and the other established requirements of social distancing, the wearing of face coverings, observing appropriate hygiene etc). Similarly weddings and funerals can continue, as at present, subject to a limit of 20 in levels 1, 2 and 3.
3. The new framework has implications for travel. The First Minister has made clear that if you live in a level 3 Local Authority area or, in future, in a level 4 area, you should not travel outside the Local Authority area you live in - unless required to do so for essential reasons. Also, if you live in a level 0, 1 or 2 Local Authority area, whilst there would not appear to be restrictions on travelling within those areas, you should not travel into a level 3 or level 4 area except for essential purposes. Essential purposes comprise a limited range of matters but include work. The Advisory Group interprets this to mean that worshippers living in a level 3, or future level 4, area should not travel into a different local authority from the one they live in for the purpose of attending public worship in person. For those who might be inhibited in that way, there remain the regular weekly offerings of provincial worship, as well as many online services offered by local churches. The Group is of the view that the work exception allows clergy, lay readers and paid church employees to travel over a Local Authority border where necessary for the purpose of taking a service, undertaking essential pastoral work or other necessary work functions.
4. Generally the Advisory Group continues to encourage contingency planning – for example to be prepared to make any changes which might be needed if the Local Authority area in which a church is situated is subject to an alteration of its level status – perhaps from Level 3 to level 4.
5. Finally, the General Synod Office has received the request below for premises which might be available for use as walk-through Covid test sites. Whilst we think it unlikely to be relevant to most churches, if you have premises which you might wish to make available on the basis set out below, please make contact direct with Jack Holden, whose contact details appear below.

Kind regards

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