

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

A brief update from the Advisory Group following the First Minister's announcement earlier this week: –

1. The levels in the Government's tiered framework at which local authorities are placed changes today in a number of cases. In particular, those who have been in level 4 for the last few weeks are being moved to level 3. The principal implications for churches are that the cap on numbers permitted to attend a service of worship increases from the maximum of 20 (for level 4 areas) to 50 (applicable for all other areas). Also, in levels 3 and below, it is permissible for individuals to cross local authority boundaries in order to attend their "normal place of worship".
2. Comment was made in our update of 27 November in relation to the Government's permission for the festive season "bubbles", which confirmed that household bubbles could attend places of worship together. Government guidance in relation to bubbles generally is that 2 metre social distancing should be observed within the bubble (subject to an exception for children under the age of 12). In a church setting, therefore, the concession in relation to bubbles makes little practical difference except that in levels 3 or below it allows a person in a bubble to attend a place of worship which is not their "normal place of worship". The fact that bubbles may be present church does not alter the maximum permitted number of 50.
3. There is no change to Scottish guidance in relation to singing, choirs and carol singing all of which remain very restrictive. Carol singing outdoors is a possibility in level 1 areas but must comply with the Government's Events guidance (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-events-sector-guidance/>), which includes the stipulation that the audience must be seated. Indoor carol singing by professional singers in level 1 is a possibility, in compliance with the performing arts guidance (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-performing-arts-and-venues-sector/>), but the indication we have received from Government is that a choir can only be regarded as "professional" where the singers in question are "professional" in the sense of earning their living from that activity.
4. Government Guidance for Places of Worship has been updated to reflect the festive period guidance issued by Government, but there have been no other material changes recently. It is available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

Kind regards

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