

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

Here follows a brief update from the Advisory Group in the light of the First Minister's announcement on 22 June.

Firstly, there is no immediate change to the levels in the Government's strategic framework within which local authorities are currently placed. The Government's assumption is that the current levels will remain in force until 19 July.

With effect from 28 June, some minor changes are being made to the rules on weddings and funerals. The suppliers of wedding services, and other people employed by the couple being married, are no longer to count towards the cap on numbers at a wedding. Also, those accompanying the wedding couple down the aisle will no longer need to wear face coverings. In relation to funerals, people from more than one household will be allowed to help carry the coffin or take a cord when lowering it.

Most of the First Minister's announcement related to plans for the coming weeks, all of which remain provisional at this stage and contingent upon meeting vaccination milestones in the Government's revised strategic framework. Until now the Government's stated strategic intention has been to "suppress the virus to the lowest possible level and keep it there". Going forward, the aim is now to "suppress the virus to a level consistent with alleviating its harms while we recover and rebuild for a better future".

The key aspects of relevance to churches in the Government's forward plan are as follows:

- The intention is for all of Scotland to move to Level 0 on 19 July. The position will be confirmed one week in advance.
- That will mean, for example, that the limits for indoor household gatherings will increase and up to 200 people will be able to attend weddings and funerals.
- The general indoor physical distancing requirement will be reduced from 2 metres to 1 metre from 19 July. That will entail recalculation by churches of their capacity, including the maximum Physical Distancing Based Capacity figure required to be displayed.
- It is hoped to remove the requirement for any physical distancing outdoors from 19 July and, at the same time, that limits on informal outdoor social gatherings, in private gardens for example, will also be removed. That means that the current Level 0 rule, that informal gatherings are limited to 15 people from 15 households, will cease. Current rules in relation to "organised" outdoor events will however remain unaltered at least for a period because such events can attract larger crowds.
- The hope is that the remaining major legal restrictions will be lifted on 9 August. This could include lifting the legal requirement for physical distancing indoors. If so, that would have a major impact for churches. The issue of singing was not mentioned in the First Minister's announcement but as soon as more news on that is available we will let you know.

Kind regards

Donald Walker  
Director of Communications  
Scottish Episcopal Church  
07736 042 850