

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

The Advisory Group has met this week to take stock of the First Minister's announcement on Tuesday, 3 August 2021. In that announcement, she confirmed that with effect from Monday 9 August, Scotland will move "beyond level 0" in the Scottish Government's Strategic Framework. In general, the move entails the lifting of most of the remaining legally imposed restrictions, and the key issues arising from the changes insofar they affect Places of Worship, are as follows: –

- The restrictions regarding physical distancing and the limits on the size of social gatherings are removed. This means that for churches there will no longer be a legal requirement to maintain 1 m social distancing. We assume, but have not had confirmation, that this will also mean that the requirement to display the maximum Physical Distance Based Capacity will no longer apply.
- The law will continue to require the wearing of face coverings in indoor public places. Consequently, the wearing of face coverings in church continues to apply (that likewise applies for congregational singing).
- Churches continue to be encouraged to maintain a record of contact details for those attending services.
- Government generally encourages the continuation of measures to mitigate risks including maintaining good hygiene, practising respiratory hygiene, ensuring good ventilation, getting vaccinated and continuing to engage with Test and Protect.
- Given the removal of restrictions on numbers meeting households, church house groups and other similar bodies will be able to resume.

The Advisory Group recognises that for some the removal of restrictions will be welcomed. Others, however, will feel apprehensive. Consequently, whilst the various requirements mentioned above are removed, congregations may wish for the time being to continue their existing practices (for example in relation to physical distancing) if they consider that it would be advisable to do so for local pastoral reasons.

The Advisory Group is waiting to hear from Government as to whether it intends to withdraw or substantially modify its own Places of Worship guidance following the move beyond level 0 and once further information is available, the Group will issue a further update. In general, we anticipate that the relaxation of restrictions will mean that a less prescriptive approach will be required in future but that congregations will nevertheless need to apply general principles in the way they operate.

Kind regards

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