

The Advisory Group of the Scottish Episcopal Church met yesterday [1 October] and has decided at this stage not to make revisions to its issued guidance as such but wished to draw attention to the following matters:

1. **First Minister's update:** it noted that the First Minister in her report to Parliament on 1 October 2020 simply noted that the indicative date of 5 October 2020 for the resumption of certain activities has now been deferred, without a new indicative date being set.
2. **Guidance regarding children's activities:** in the most recent edition of the Group's Phase 3 Guidance (Version 5, issued on 24 September) congregations were directed in section G.3 to the Government's guidance on organised activities for children, outwith an act of worship. At that time, the Government guidance remained "provisional". The guidance has now been finalised by Government and, unlike the provisional guidance, now contains certain specific restrictions on numbers of people at such activities. In particular, the following extract summarises the limits which apply:

Organised activity indoors

- set a maximum number for indoor organised activities to 10 people (all ages included, no more than 5 adults)
- set a maximum number of households for indoor organised activities to 5

Organised activity outdoors

- set a maximum number for outdoor organised activities to 15 people (excluding under 12s,)
- set a maximum number of households for outdoor organised activities to 15 – this includes the under 12s.

The finalised guidance is available on the same web link as indicated in the Group's Phase 3 guidance and it is recommended that this be considered in full:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/>

3. **Congregational Annual General Meetings:** many congregations traditionally hold their annual meetings at this time of year. The Government's restrictions on gatherings in general make meeting in the normal form very difficult. The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) has prepared a webinar addressing many of the questions which charities may face in holding such meetings and there is also some written guidance available on the OSCR website. The webinar and guidance available at:

<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/video-ask-oscr-virtual-meetings-and-agms/>

<https://www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/covid-19-guidance-for-charities/3-charity-meetings-and-governance/>

In considering the question of the annual meeting, reference should be made to the congregational constitution. Many congregations will have adopted the SEC Model Constitution. That allows for the possibility of an annual meeting being deferred, with the consent of the Bishop, beyond any time limit that might otherwise be provided for in the Constitution, if the Bishop is satisfied that "special circumstances have arisen". At the present time, it is expected that most congregations will wish to defer the holding of their annual meeting. Whilst it would be possible to hold a meeting on Zoom or a similar medium, it may be that not all church members wishing to participate would in fact be able to do so. If a meeting does not take place at this time, it is of course still possible to keep congregations informed and involved by providing accounts and the usual reports to members and to invite feedback, for example, by email. If a meeting is deferred, it is also assumed that the terms of vestry members will be extended until the point at which it is

possible for an annual meeting to take place (and under the Model Constitution, the Vestry has power to fill any “causal vacancy” which arises in its membership). Notwithstanding any deferral of the annual meeting the vestry ought still to approve the accounts in the normal way and lodge them with OSCR in accordance with the normal timescales. The Model Constitution envisages that the annual meeting will “receive” congregational accounts and that can still be undertaken when the deferred annual meeting eventually takes place.

4. **Risk assessment:** the Advisory Group wishes to remind clergy and vestries that risk assessment in the current climate needs to be seen as an ongoing process. Simply because a church may have reopened for public worship does not mean that the process of risk assessment ceases. It will be important to consider, for example, in a church has reopened, whether the arrangements for public worship are operating satisfactorily, whether those attending are observing the requirements for physical distancing, face coverings, hand sanitising etc. The future remains uncertain and it cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy at this point whether further local lockdowns or more stringent national restrictions are likely to be introduced. Congregations are reminded to maintain vigilance. Ongoing risk assessment may mean that, in some circumstances, the view is taken by a vestry that public worship, having been resumed, needs to cease for a period. That may be appropriate if there is concern at the level of risk to which those attending church might be exposed. If the vestry considers that re-closure is necessary or appropriate, it is encouraged to confer with the Diocesan Bishop and also to consider its contingency planning so that pastoral support can continue to be provided, even if public worship is temporarily discontinued.

In addition, please find attached a letter regarding spiritual care from Professor Jason Leitch, the National Clinical Director, addressed to faith and belief leaders and representatives.

Kind regards

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