

## LIVERPOOL ROAD METHODIST CHURCH COVID 19 RISK ASSESSMENT

### BACKGROUND

The government has stated that COVID legal restrictions will be lifted on 19th July. The onus will be placed on the public to act responsibly. This modified risk assessment outlines a way forward to deal with this.

In NW England COVID has been more prevalent than many other places although the situation is dynamic and several places that were highly infected are no longer. However, there is a general responsibility on organisations to reduce risks to people's health safety and welfare in Health and Safety legislation *so far as is reasonably practicable*. This assessment shows how we approach this legal requirement.

In addition HSE's guidance in Reducing Risks, Protecting People puts the expectation that safeguards will be proportionate to the risks. Given that most adults should have been vaccinated and the effects on children are usually mild, less stringent safeguards than we have formerly used can be implemented.

It is important to note that even if a person has both vaccinations they are not immune from COVID. Also, it does not mean they cannot be carriers and pass the disease to others. Vaccination simply means that the probability of being hospitalised should someone catch COVID is reduced. There are well publicised reports of individuals who have caught COVID despite being double vaccinated and some have died. Thus, to simply abandon all the current arrangements is not a safe way forward. Thus, the balance of precautions in place changes.

### COVID19

COVID19 virus lodges in the human body's airways and lungs. It then penetrates the cells and reproduces. It is caught by breathing in the virus as a liquid aerosol. This is the best information available and is the basis of governmental guidance. However, there is a body of opinion that the virus may spread through small particles in the air which, if correct, affects the social distancing safeguard (see later) and the assessment of our gathering as a congregation in the enclosed space of the church. However, WHO do not see this as a viable means of dispersal unless there is some form of aerosol generation - which is not the case in our church.

The problem, for some, is the body's reaction to the virus which can be fatal. However, not everyone reacts like this and some who are infected are barely aware of it (asymptomatic). The symptoms are well publicised and include fever, dry cough, high temperature, sore throat, loss of taste and smell and, in more severe cases, difficulty breathing.

Thus safeguards are centred around avoiding the virus as it is exhaled, potentially infecting someone else and removing it from potentially contaminated surfaces such as hands and door handles.

The well known safeguards are:

1. Social distancing - a nominal 2 metres or 1 metre with other safeguards where 2 metres is not possible (referred to throughout as 2m)
2. Hand cleanliness - 20 seconds in detergent and water or hands cleaned in hand sanitiser having at least 60% alcohol content for 20 seconds

3. Face covering - to control the spread of droplets on the breath, potentially containing virus. This is about protecting others rather than the wearer although it undoubtedly has an effect that way also.
4. 72 hours being the maximum virus survival time outside a body - 48 hours is the minimum advised.
5. Cleaning potentially contaminated surfaces - the depth of cleaning varies depending on both time and potential contamination.

There are a number of secondary safeguards that can also be employed:

1. Coughing into a disposable handkerchief (tissue) and disposing of in a sealed plastic bag or coughing into one's elbow to keep the exhalate off hands to minimise potential virus spread. Hand washing afterwards is recommended.
2. Shouting and other such high breathing activity should also not happen. Wind instruments may be played and individual singers leading worship may lead subject to having suitable safeguards in place e.g. distancing and / or screens / shields. Distance (2 metres) is the most suitable in our circumstances. There is a case to allow congregational singing since the restriction seems to be based on a professional singer who would be expected to exhale more strongly than a non professional. Thus, non professional singing is little different to speaking which is permitted.
3. Not deliberately exhaling strongly towards another person
4. Keeping a record of attendees to facilitate track and trace in the event that someone present has COVID 19.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The purpose of a risk assessment is to show that the hazards have been identified and suitable and sufficient safeguards put in place. This is in pursuit of the obligation in Health and Safety law to reduce risks so far as is reasonably practicable - more commonly known as keeping risks ALARP (As Low As Reasonably Practicable).

HSE in its publication Reducing Risks, Protecting People (R2P2) expects that the minimum standard for controlling risk should be "authoritative good practice". This authoritative good practice is that developed from the safeguards shown in the previous section. Thus it should be possible to implement these for each of our buildings.

It is important to stress that this specific risk assessment is in addition to the general risk assessment for our church and where there are conflicts, a sensible and reasonable balance needs to be struck.

***It is a key assumption that those showing COVID 19 symptoms do NOT attend activities.***

## **OUTSIDE AREAS**

Social Distancing: This will be the main safeguard. It will require -

- a) Signage for the flow of people and 2m segregation in both the car park and walkways. Clear guidance on the walkways to segregate flows of individuals and requiring distancing at entrances and exits whilst controlling flows at "pinch points".

There will also need to be designated routes to entrances and exits for disabled and people with low mobility (see buildings).

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Routine cleaning for handrails and door handles is recommended. This would be best after each heavy use. Dilute bleach with a little detergent is a preferred cleaning agent.

### CHURCH BUILDING

Social Distancing: This will require -

- a) a one way system through the church. Enter through the front double doors, down the side aisles and return up the centre aisle. Disabled entrance through the vestry door and exit through the organ side door. There will need to be suitable signs and markings to ensure the correct flow of people.
- b) making the 2m spacing obvious in the foyer, aisles and pews
- c) suitable entrance and exit signage to ensure correct flow of people.
- d) the lower vestry is for preparation and prayer before services. However access and egress is into a potentially contaminated corridor so hand sanitising should be practiced when entering or leaving. The chancel side door is for any choir or musicians and having the preacher or leader enter through the door in the main church area using the steps from the lower to the higher area - not the side steps - to maintain the 2m spacing to anyone else in the chancel. The door into the main church should be held open to avoid having to use the potentially contaminated handles.
- e) chairs, if used, such as to keep a 2m separation between households
- f) the computer for the projector could be in the South transept leaving the sound desk area single occupancy or a single bubble for sound and possibly computer.
- g) toilets should be cleaned down after every use by the user and, if required, a distanced queuing system invoked. The toilet seat should be put down before flushing. Signage should be in place to that effect.
- h) to avoid people congregating in a small area refreshments after service should not happen
- j) notices about 1 metre and optional 2 metre distancing in the foyer, corridor and main church building.

Face covering for everyone who is capable of wearing one. Face masks will be available by the hand sanitising stations for those who do not bring their own (see later). Each person should take theirs home in and reuse them. For those who cannot use face coverings should exercise 2 metre distancing.

For safety, doors should be left open as far as possible after having been put into a "held open" state by the door stewards - although that may not be reasonable during the colder months.

The door stewards should be provided with written instructions on what is expected as people enter and leave.

The 2m rule does not apply to those who are from a single household or bubble but others need to be at least 1 metre away from any of them.

Communion services in their commonly understood format will not be possible and they should follow Methodist Church guidelines. Funerals are covered by government guidance which limits numbers based on our assessment in Addendum 1.

Hand Cleanliness: This will require -

- a) hand sanitising stations at each of the entry doors. This is not reasonably practicable at the vestry entry door which should be held open and that station needs to be just inside the main church building - anyone using the chancel should also use this station. There should be signs telling people that a 20 second "wash" is required and showing how this should be achieved. Hand

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sanitiser is the best alternative to keep the area clean and dry.

b) tissues should be used in case of sneezing or other similar needs. These should be taken home after use to ensure the tissue(s) are not a source of virus.

c) similarly, each toilet should have a hand dryer or paper towel and a waste bin to collect used paper towels. Fabric towels should be removed.

d) if offerings are taken the collection plate should be handled with freshly washed hands or gloves, the gathered collection placed in the safe for at least 72 hours and hands washed again before leaving the premises. Access to the count should be accessed through the vestry door and leave by the organ door.

Cleaning: Given the only planned activities are the Sunday Church services and Iona on a Thursday morning then -

a) Thursday morning Iona services should observe the same precautions as everyone else.

b) if the church is to be used for another extended activity not covered in this assessment other than cleaning and general maintenance, then that activity should have its own written risk assessment. Outside users will be responsible for managing the risks at their events.

There is no need to deep clean as the length of time between services is 72 hours or more.

Face covering: This is only relevant if 2 metre social distancing cannot reasonably be maintained.

Recording Attendees: A simple sign in sheet for each service at each hand wash station would be sufficient. This should be kept sealed in a plastic bag for 21 days, once complete, before being disposed of, if not required for track and trace. Otherwise, scanning the QR code provided at each wash station is also acceptable.

Notices are now permitted provided at least 48 hours elapse between production and distribution.

### HALLS

This is more complex for a number of reasons:

a) we are not in control of the building users and cannot reasonably be responsible for their actions. However, we can put some constraints upon them which should include:

- ! complying with segregated entry and exits
- ! requiring users to demonstrate an adequate written risk assessment
- ! an expectation that users will follow good practice and clean frequently used surfaces before and after their activities.

b) there are multiple entrances and exits which need to be designated to optimise the flow of people and minimise pinch points.

c) the toilets are not optimally sited for social distancing.

We need to provide signage for the entrances and exits, hand washing and 2m segregation (the car park and walkways have already been dealt with above).

Entries and exits:

New Room - the entrance should be through the right door opposite the New Room inner door. The exit should then be through the food pantry outer door. Those needing toilet facilities will need to make the round journey outside to the disabled toilet by the New Room or to the main toilets by the Primary Room. Return through the New Room entrance above. Hand sanitiser should be provided at the entrance which also provides for other areas accessed this way.

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**Main Hall:** Entry through the single door foyer and the closer of the two entry doors to the hall itself. Exit through the door closest to the New Room and the facing outer door. The door towards the boiler room at the front of the hall should be used as a toilet exit and re-entry through the other door at that end of the hall with due consideration that it is also the normal entrance. Hand sanitiser should be provided in the foyer (also covers everything else accessed through this foyer).

**Toilets:** There needs to be a way to tell if the toilet is engaged and this should apply to each toilet as consistent 2m distancing is close to impossible within each room. The toilets have hand dryers which should be used. Toilets should be cleaned after each use and the toilet seat should be put down before flushing. Signage to that effect is provided.

**Primary Room:** The people routing for this facility is not as neat and well ordered as the New Room and Main Hall. It is currently being prepared for use. If needed, the main entrance used for ingress and egress is on the same corridor as the toilets and the entrance to the main hall. A segregated exit is not reasonably practicable and so care is needed when using the corridor.

**Beginners Room:** This room has been allocated to Birkdale community hub and library. Access will be under their control. In the unlikely event church members need to access this room they should liaise with Birkdale community hub and library.

**Lounge (Food pantry):** This has been cleared for use as a store for the Food Pantry. The Food Pantry should have its own risk assessment to cover use of this space (and the adjacent former office).

**Former Office (Food pantry):** Used for the Food Pantry. Its use should be covered by the Food Pantry Risk Assessment which should be in compliance this assessment.

**New Room Store & Primary Room Store:** Given the records show minimal use and significant lengths of time between uses, these is no longer any need for any further controls.

**Kitchens:** Although it is doubtful that COVID19 can be spread through food [6], food preparation (and consumption) should follow good hygiene practice. As a matter of prudence, only paper towels should be in the kitchen - no fabric towels / tea towels.

**Workshop:** Only regularly used once a week and on other occasions for a short time, there is no need for further safeguards.

Access to areas not shown in this assessment should be covered by the accepted casual user arrangement of signing out when a visit is complete. The record should be kept for at least 21 days.

### **GENERAL**

In order to optimise the premises to reduce the virus chances of infecting anyone the following are good practice:

- a) store away furniture and other articles that are not essential. However, as services are only held twice a week and the virus only lives on paper for 48 hours, books should be permitted.
- b) use a projector in preference to distributing paper to meetings of more than a few.
- c) focus cleaning on areas that are in regular hand contact e.g. door handles, light switches.
- d) singing is covered in the section on the Church building.
- f) waste that is potentially COVID 19 contaminated should be double bagged and kept sealed for 72 hours before disposal. Regular waste should be treated normally.
- g) those who feel unwell should be discouraged from attending. If someone gets into difficulty, they should be attended by one or two people, preferably with medical experience, wearing face covering and gloves whilst a decision is made about calling an ambulance.

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- h) Fire evacuation rehearsals should be avoided and fire precaution tests carried out when buildings are empty.
- i) as far as reasonably practicable, buildings / rooms should be ventilated opening windows and doors.
- j) for those who may have difficulty complying with these precautions and are accompanied by someone to assist, they should be treated as those from the same household.

### **DISCUSSION**

This risk assessment has tried to be comprehensive and takes account of relevant guidance that is freely available. What it does not show is how the safety measures / precautions should be implemented. This is a matter for the property stewards. However, the implementation would be expected to follow accepted good practice as the precautions are likely to be required for quite some time yet.

Plainly, as indicated before, the COVID19 situation is changing quite rapidly and this is reflected in the authoritative good practice emerging from the government. This results in the following:

- a) this risk assessment may become out of date if authoritative good practice changes.
- b) it may also change if the Methodist church significantly changes its approach.

Thus, reviewing this risk assessment should be driven by either of these events rather than by time, as is more common. As places of worship are permitted to open, this risk assessment is being regularly reviewed in line with use of our premises.

### **CONCLUSION**

This assessment forms a basis for operating our church premises.

## **ADDENDUM 1 - Church Capacity Assessment**

### **BACKGROUND**

On 21st June 2021 the government changed the rule for how many people could attend a funeral or other comparable event from 30 to a number determined by the venue manager. The guidance then puts the onus on the organiser of the event to do the same thing. In other words, the responsibility is unclear. This short addendum is intended to short circuit this uncertainty and give some degree of consistency to our approach.

Our church is a large building but it is not well ventilated - effectively a closed box. Therefore to a first approximation, every effort should be made to minimise the length of time people are together in the building.

### **ASSESSMENT**

**The assumption is either that a pew contains only 1 bubble of 2 people / family group or 2 individuals sitting at least 1 metre apart.**

As currently laid out there are 42 seats available with 1m spacing maintained provided participants wear a face covering (often a mask). In addition there are seats across the front (assuming the very front seats remain unavailable for distancing reasons) which gives another 8 seats spaced as per the notice. Making 50 in the pew area.

There is further seating capacity in the seats in the transepts and assuming people sit in twos that allows a further 8 to be accommodated. If necessary the chancel may be used where there are another 19 seats and the organ seat.

That then gives the maximum participants as 77 which will not include those who administering the event.

There are then up to 2 seats available at the sound desk, 1 at the video seat, 2 in the chancel (organist / keyboard player and leader) and up to 4 in the vestibule. It is assumed that these are people "administering" the event. Thus administration seats total 9 maximum. Plainly, chancel seats and administration seat in the chancel may be interchanged.

Thus the total in the building excluding any in the vestries will be:

Participants - up to 77 if the chancel is not used or 86 if it is.

Administrators - up to 9

### **CONCLUSION**

For the purposes of funerals and the like where the church is to provide a risk assessment for attendees, this document provides it.

The absolute maximum attendees including those who administer the event must not exceed 84. This will be reduced if there are those who cannot wear a face covering and suitable adjustments must be made to accommodate this

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## **ADDENDUM 2 - Summary and Changes to the Risk Assessment**

The main ways for COVID (or Flu) to transmit is by hand contact and on the breath. Thus there should be suitable and sufficient safeguards to prevent inadvertent transmission in these ways. Thus the following are reasonably practicable:

- a) social distancing: The one way systems and segregated entrances and exits should remain as should the warning signs throughout the site. 2m spacing is expected outside, 1m with face covering.
- b) face coverings should be worn inside to allow 1m separation between bubbles/ households and individuals.
- c) hand sanitising / disposable gloves should continue to be available at entrances.
- d) we should continue the track and trace arrangements

However, singing has been forbidden which is a disappointment to many and as a key part of what we are. There is a case to allow singing since the restriction seems to be based on a professional singer who would be expected to exhale more strongly than a non professional. Thus, non professional singing is little different to speaking which is permitted. Therefore, the following should be permitted:

- a) singers in the chancel (treated as near professional) with at least 2m spacing to anyone else in front of them (within a 180 degree arc). The same constraints should apply to wind instrument players and evening services in the chancel should take comparable precautions
- b) non wind instrumentalists at 1metre spacing with face covering or 2 metres without.
- c) congregation permitted to sing in a measured voice with face covering.
- d) use of books, formerly not used as a matter of prudence, are permitted provided they are allowed to remain unused for at least 48 hours.
- e) cleaning certificates no longer required but the expectation that that cleaning will be required should be made clear to users.
- f) kitchens use should be allowed provided good hygiene practices are followed. This was always permitted but our former risk assessment prohibited it as a matter of prudence.
- g) paper notices are permitted as there is at least 48 hours between printing and distribution
- h) access to the stores in the halls complex will no longer be controlled by a sign in sheet. Records show they are infrequently used.
- i) the cellar (workshop) is only routinely accessed once a week and casual access is normally short and infrequent. Thus normal precautions should be sufficient.
- j) the access and egress arrangements for the primary room have been changed. The previous arrangements proved unnecessary.