

Considerations for re-opening our Meeting Houses for Meeting for Worship

On 23rd June 2020, the Prime Minister announced that places of worship could re-open for collective worship from 4th July 2020 in England, providing they adhere to covid-secure guidelines. This does not (yet) apply to places of worship in Wales.

It is important to note that:

- The virus is still with us, and will be for the foreseeable future. The risk is not gone. We can be safer, but not 100% safe.
- The two metre physical distancing rule still applies. The one metre + should have emphasis placed on the plus – which means mitigation such as screens and face coverings.
- A considerable amount of work is required to make premises covid-secure, including the cleaning of anything that has been touched.
- There will be changes to the experience of Meeting for Worship.

I recommend that we consider re-opening our Meeting Houses for collective worship **FROM Sunday 2nd August 2020 AT THE EARLIEST**. This allows us time to:

- Inform Friends at our next planned Area Meeting on 18th July
- Prepare our Meeting Houses (work which is undertaken partly by our paid cleaners, but also by our Premises Committees who are volunteers.)
- Prepare ourselves for the changes to both the experience of MfW and the changes in our own lives, after three months of lockdown.

It may also allow time for guidance from the Senedd / Welsh Government to permit re-opening of our Meeting Houses in Wales too.

Procedure

Liability for Health and Safety rests with your Trustees. Liaison and communication between each Local Meeting, in particular Premises Committees and Clerks, and Trustees is therefore essential.

1. Trustees recommend that Meeting Houses can re-open for collective worship from Sunday 2nd August 2020 provided that they have completed the work (including the paperwork – the risk assessment) to make the premises covid-secure.
2. The Area Meeting Treasurer consults with insurers and advises insurance requirements, and confirms that liabilities have been considered, and coverage is in place.
3. Area Meeting is informed of Trustees' recommendation at a MfWfB, and makes a Minute of Record to that effect.
4. Each Local Meeting with a Meeting House affirms this – and should provide a Minute of that decision, demonstrating confidence that the premises are covid-secure to Trustees and Area Meeting. A copy of the completed risk assessment should be attached / included, and should also be on display at the Meeting House.
5. A Local Meeting may decide to re-open, defer re-opening, or not re-open – whatever the discernment is, this should be clearly minuted with reasons for the decision.
6. The Meeting House must NOT re-open unless the necessary work has been undertaken to make the premises covid-secure, the guidance from Britain Yearly Meeting can be implemented, and the risk assessment paperwork has been completed.

Please note: Local Meetings without their own premises will need to wait until their usual venue is re-opened, and they are assured it is covid-secure. They will need to follow the guidelines of the venue.

Alternative Options

We could defer re-opening of SMAQM Meeting Houses until Sunday 6th September 2020.

We may have some Meeting Houses open, and others not yet.

Local Meetings may wish to explore holding blended MfW, or continue with additional or alternative MfW on Zoom.

Attending Meeting for Worship

One notable change in the experience of attending MfW will be that refreshments will NOT be available, not even a glass of water from the kitchen. If you decide to attend MfW, please take your own drink. You will also be expected to wash your hands on arrival, have your name recorded (so if contact tracing is necessary, you can be contacted), keep your distance, touch as little as possible (if you want Advices and Queries, Quaker Faith and Practice or a Bible, please bring your own).

Before you attend, you are asked to consider whether your physical attendance is essential. Others may have more need of being gathered in person than you. Please consider that a risk to your health is not yours alone, it affects others too. If you are displaying any covid-19 symptoms, or are feeling unwell, please stay away. For the avoidance of doubt, please stay away even if you are fairly sure your symptoms are a cold or hay-fever – as other people may be alarmed by your presence. (Please see Step 5 of the 9 Steps document.)

Please take the time to look at the documents listed below, especially 9 steps to re-opening Quaker meeting houses and worship spaces safely. They will help you to understand the work that has gone into making the re-opening of Meeting Houses for collective worship possible, and will give you the rationale for the changes. If you think you might have any difficulties in complying with what is asked of you, please consider that it may be better to stay away for now.

For all the guidance from Britain Yearly Meeting, please see this page:

www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/coronavirus-advice-for-quaker-meetings

(Please note: this does not yet include the latest guidance, published on 29th June 2020)

The documents which are particularly useful are:

- [9 steps to re-opening Quaker meeting houses and worship spaces safely \(Word\)](#)
[COVID-19 Risk assessment \(Word\)](#)

and for the wider (Quaker) context:

[Guidance is now available for area meeting trustees on issues to consider around coronavirus \(Word\)](#)

The latest guidance (dated 29th June 2020) from the Government relating to **England** may be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

and for **Wales** (dated 23 June 2020) Please note, this does NOT provide for the resumption of collective worship:

<https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html>

This is the Quakers in Wales website (though I have not found covid-19 information on it):

<https://quakersinwales.org.uk/welcome/>

Potentially useful sites for other information are:

<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/> .

<http://www.cytun.co.uk/hafan/en/covid-19-briefing-paper/>

Dated 29th June 2020

Liz Chave
on behalf of SMAQM Trustees

Please note: while I am no expert on Health and Safety, I am happy to answer questions if I can. Please contact me initially via email liz.chave@smquakers.org.uk

If there are any Quakers among our number who ARE experts in this area, please make yourselves known!