

Risk Assessment of opening Whiddon Valley Evangelical Church to public services – July 2020.

First version compiled: 09/07/20.

Person responsible: David Berry

[Updates added 27/09/20](#)

Context:

Since March 2020 it has not been possible to hold public services in the Church Building, Lord's Day and midweek services instead being conducted on-line using a variety of platforms such as YouTube. On 23 June 2020 the British Prime Minister announced the easing of lockdown restrictions including those affecting Places of Worship. From 4 July 2020 Churches have been able to open for services. Part of the guidance issued by the UK Government was that risk assessments must be conducted prior to reopening and that the risk assessment should consider the particular circumstances of each Place of Worship.

The lockdown restrictions were intended [this document is not an assessment of the effectiveness or any other aspect of these restrictions] to reduce the risk of spreading the new coronavirus (named SARS Cov-2) that causes the illness COVID 19. This virus is understood to be spread directly through water droplets produced when people breath out (including coughing, sneezing and shouting etc) which are then breathed in by other, or indirectly by those water droplets landing on surfaces or objects which are later touched by another person.

A particular and very rare feature of this virus is that people can become infected with it, and therefore are able to pass it on, without feeling ill. Although many people who are infected with this virus will not feel ill others will get very sick and some will die.

Purpose:

The purpose of this risk assessment is therefore to focus on the risk of spreading the coronavirus because of having public meetings. It will identify which of our normal practices, during public services, carry a risk of spreading the virus and suggest alterations to these practices which reduce that risk as much as possible.

Opportunity:

The opportunity that comes out of doing this risk assessment is that we can meet together for the public Worship of God and enjoy fellowship with each other whilst at the same time reducing the risk of spreading the virus and keeping within UK government guidance.

Should there be an outbreak of illness linked back to the public meetings of the Church this risk assessment will provide the basis of protecting the Church Officers from any liability resulting from this.

Responsibility:

The responsibility of conducting this risk assessment has been given to David Berry at a meeting of the Church Council held on 3 July 2020.

It will be the responsibility of the Church Council to make those attending meetings aware of the requirements that will result from this Risk Assessment.

It will be the responsibility of all adults attending meetings to keep to the changes of practice that come out of this Risk Assessment.

Time Scale:

An initial risk assessment will be completed prior to the first planned meeting which will be the Sunday School to be held at 3pm on 12 July 2020.

Revision of the initial risk assessment may be necessary from what is learnt from this meeting and subsequent meetings that are held. The next planned meeting will be a prayer meeting at 7.30pm on 16 July 2020. These meetings are the first to be restarted as they involve the least number of people. The first Lord's Day meeting is planned for 6.30pm on 26 July 2020.

Usual practices.

For the purposes of this risk assessment the usual practices of this Church during public meetings are listed below. (This list currently excludes the ordinances of The Lord's Supper and Baptism which will be dealt with subsequently in further risk assessments. It also excludes arrangements for special meetings such as Funerals, Anniversary Meetings and Weddings and other activities such as fellowship lunches, lunches for the retired and trips off the Church's premises.)

Entering and exiting the building.

Seating within the main meeting room.

Reading Scripture.

Praying.

Preaching.

Singing Hymns.

Using toilet facilities.

Using the kitchen

Using other rooms.

Any reference to UK Government guidance is specifically to the publication: "COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of Places of Worship during the pandemic" Published on 4 July 2020 found on the Gov.uk web-site.

Entering and Exiting the building.

Usual practice: The public services are open to all. There is no booking or appointment system. Entry to the building is through a double door at the car-park side of the building. People attending are met by a steward and offered a welcoming handshake. A second steward offers a Hymn-book and Bible if needed for use by the person attending. Entry and exit to the main meeting hall is by a double door that is normally kept closed and opened frequently. It is normally for people to be standing talking in small groups for prolonged periods of time before and after meetings.

Risks: There are numerous opportunities for the spreading of the virus between people during the entering and exiting of the building, such as physical contact by shaking hands and touching of surfaces such as door handles and shared Bibles and Hymnbooks. People often stand close to each other whilst engaged in conversation.

Anyone who is ill with COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the building.

Change of practice to reduce risk:

- **Doors to be propped open to avoid need to touch the handles (this may not be possible in cold weather)**
- **No more than 6 people to be in entrance lobby at any one time to enable social distancing.**
- **The convention of keeping to the left to be observed.**
- **Only one door steward to be in place. The door steward can give a warm welcome but not shake the hands of those entering.**
- **The first set of doors (nearest to the main entrance of the building) into the main meeting hall will be used to enter that hall and the other set of doors will be used to exit.**
- ~~**Shared Hymnbooks and Bibles will not be used – instead orders of service will be printed in advance of meetings and placed on chairs for individual use – the user will be responsible for their disposal.**~~
- **Hymnbooks are now in use BUT NOT SHARED OUTSIDE OF HOUSEHOLDS. Hymnbooks are available at the entrance to the main hall on both a Sunday and for the mid-week prayer meeting. After use the Hymnbooks are placed by the user into a box where they then remain un-used for the following 7 days. There is one box used on a Sunday and a separate box used mid-week.**
- **Hand sanitiser will be available for use on entry and exit to the building.**
- **The surfaces of door handles will be cleaned before and after each meeting with antibacterial/antiviral wipes.**
- **People entering and exiting the building will do so as quickly as they can.**

Seating within the main meeting room

Usual practice: There is currently seating for over 100 people in the main meeting hall. Seating is arranged with a central aisle. The seating all faces towards the front of the hall. At the front of the hall facing the seated congregation is a pulpit from which the minister conducts the service. Meetings generally last for over one hour and throughout this time the people in the congregation remain seated on their chair or standing in front of it (except when exiting the hall to use toilet facilities)

Risks: The gap between each row of chairs is less than 1 metre – as they are currently arranged social distancing cannot be maintained. The central aisle is also only approximately 1 metre wide.

Change of practice to reduce risk:

- **Some chairs will be removed from the main meeting room to reduce capacity and enable social distancing.**
- **Family households (including supportive bubbles) can sit together without social distancing in the same way as they currently do.**
- **Individuals from different households will have to sit 2 metres apart from each other.**
- **The requirement to be 2 metres apart has been relaxed to 1 metre but only because mitigating factors are in place, namely face coverings being worn and not sitting face-to face.**

Reading Scripture.

Usual practice: Positions of scripture are read by the minister from a pulpit Bible. Individual people in the congregation can choose to read quietly along in their own copy of the Bible or a copy of the Bible given to them on entering the building.

Risks: There is very little risk with this practice. The only possible way of spreading the virus would be by the use of a shared Bible.

Change of practice to reduce risk:

- **Shared Bibles are not be given out on entry to the building.**

Praying.

Usual practice: Prayers are made out loud by the minister from the pulpit and silently by those in the congregation.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this practice.

Change of practice to reduce risk:

- **None required.**

Preaching.

Usual practice: Preaching from the word of God is conducted by the minister from the pulpit.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this practice.

Change of practice to reduce risk: None required

Singing Hymns.

Usual practice: The singing of Hymns by the congregation is regarded as vital part of the worship of God. Hymns are sung whilst standing.

However, the UK government guidance states the following:

“Activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided in worship or devotions and in rehearsals. This is because there is a possible additional risk of transmission in environments where individuals are singing or chanting as a group, and this applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.”

Risks: The usual practice if continued would be a clear breach of the guidance issued.

Change of practice to reduce risk:

- **Recordings of congregational hymn-singing are available and have been used in the recording of services currently being produced which is uploaded onto YouTube.**
- **It is the intention to continue to live stream services to YouTube and to do so these recordings would have to continue to be used.**
- **It is possible to play these recording over the PA system.**
- **The congregation will be invited by the minister to remain seated during the playing of these hymns and the congregation will be free to read or sing in a quiet voice from the words on the order of service provided.**

Using toilet facilities

There are three toilet facilities within the Church building.

All three are small and are accessed via single doors.

The toilet for use by people with disabilities is designed for single use anyhow.

Cleaning facilities will need to be in place in each facility to be used to wipe down touched surfaces after use.

Parents of small children will need to ensure the facilities are clean after the child has used them and before anyone else uses them.

Only a maximum of 2 people will be allowed to be within the two main toilet facilities at any one time.

Using the kitchen

Apart from the fetching of a glass of water if needed the kitchen will not be used at the current time.

Using other rooms.

Usual practice. In addition to those rooms already mentioned there are currently three other rooms that are used.

They are:

The office adjacent to the main meeting room

The middle room accessible from the entrance lobby.

The end room at the end of the corridor (This room also contains a fire exit)

The office. This is a small room. Only one person will be able to be in it at any one time. The Church offices who meet in this room for prayer before the Lord's Day services will have to relocate to the end room.

The middle room. This room will be used as a temporary store for chairs being removed from the main meeting hall.

The end room. This room can continue to be used for a variety of uses, however to comply with social distancing restrictions a maximum of 6 people can use this room at any one time.

The services are relayed to this room and during the meeting priority of use should be given to parents with small children.

This room contains a Fire Exit and it will be essential that access to the Fire Exit is maintained at all times.

This initial risk assessment is unlikely to cover every eventuality and it will be necessary to keep the changes to normal practice under review.

Face Coverings

- All those attending the meetings, except those with a legitimate exemption as set out by UK government, are required to wear face coverings during the entirety of the services.
- A supply of face masks have been made available at the entrance hall.

Track and Trace

- All visitors to the services are required to write their names and a contact telephone number on a form for this purpose located at the entrance to the building.
- Attendees to the services are encouraged to down-load the NHS Covid 19 app and to use the QR code which is located prominently in the entrance hall to check-in each time they visit.

Rule of Six

- Church services are exempt from the “Rule of Six” but attendees are reminded that this requirement does apply on the journey to and the journey from the Church building.

Baptism and Lord’s Table

- To this point (27/09/20) neither of these important Church practices have been observed since the recommencement of services in July.
- However, both of these practices are being planned for 04/10/20.
- Separate risk assessments for each of these will be completed this week and be circulated when done.