

FROM THE PRINCIPAL CLERK 17th MARCH 2020

This is a link to government advice issued yesterday:

<https://www.gov.scot/news/people-advised-to-limit-social-contact/>

This needs to be our guide when considering meetings of Presbytery, Kirk Session, Financial Boards and Committees. I have had a conversation with a government official and his advice was that for very small three or four person local meetings we should use our own judgement – they are not barred by law. It is when we get into bigger numbers of people in an enclosed space and using public transport that we are more bound by the advice which, among other things, says that

“people should: minimise social contact by avoiding crowded areas and large gatherings, including religious congregations and smaller gatherings such as restaurants, pubs, bars, clubs, cinemas and gyms avoid using public transport as much as possible”

For many and perhaps all Presbyteries this would mean that meetings need to be cancelled and other ways of making essential decisions be found. Some are empowering their Business Committee while others already have “holiday” provision in their Standing Orders.

You should also remember that there is the possibility of holding virtual meetings where the technology allows – see the [Virtual Meetings Act](#) It may need a bit of flexible application in these strange times.

There is a difficulty around congregational meetings which are normally held after Sunday worship for the Stated Annual Meeting or to approve a Basis of Union to elect a new Minister for the parish. If the service is not taking place this well-worn path cannot be followed but neither can we ask a large number of people to gather at another time. It may be that the SAM cannot happen and that vacancy and adjustment business will simply need to be put on hold.

The question also arises around the ordination and/or induction of a new Minister. It may be that Presbytery would wish create a small, quorate meeting to carry through the formal part of such services – the taking of vows and the signing of the formula – so that the Ministry can begin (and the Minister be paid) with a view to having a fuller service and welcome on a later date. This is simply a suggestion from us in the office and you may well have better ideas reflecting both government advice and the reading of the local situation.

I am offering this as a first attempt at some guidance. I may have missed some issues – please let me know. You may have better solutions – again let me know so that I can share them. And I may have got something wrong – please tell me.

Let’s work together in trying to sustain our decision making processes in these difficult days.

Best wishes

George Whyte