

This Safe Method of Operating was agreed by Bristol Area Quaker Trustees at their meeting on 10th July 2020. It needs to be read in conjunction with the specific notes and Risk Assessments for each Meeting House (MH) carried out by Acorn Health & Safety Limited. It will be updated as we learn from experience.

Hall users means employees, visitors, hirers and volunteers under the health and safety legislation throughout this document. Where there are specific controls for a user group, this is noted.

Executive Summary

- Distancing rules should be established for each MH to encourage one-way systems where they are practical, set maximum occupancy numbers and limit active use until the infection rate is low enough for there to be a low likelihood of transmission.
- Hygiene procedures should be maintained to encourage regular hand washing and contact point surface cleaning to limit the risk of surface transmission. Historic England have published guidance on the cleaning of historic surfaces to reduce the risk of damage. This may be relevant to Frenchay and Portishead MHs.
- Awareness should be maintained through regular communication. Pre-visit communication should be used where possible to ensure that hall users understand the controls in place.
- The individual assessments of each MH should be used to implement controls and to manage hirers when Trustees decide it is appropriate to allow hirers back into their facilities.
- As hall users are made up of a potentially higher percentage of vulnerable persons (whether due to age, ill health, ethnic origin or other reason) a cautious approach has been adopted with use for Meetings for Worship first. The time between such Meetings allows for a considerable reduction in risk from any surface transmission. It may be appropriate to have separate Meetings for Worship for more vulnerable individuals.
- While face coverings are not currently required those attending meetings should be encouraged to wear them. Wearing a face covering can reassure others, especially if distances have to be reduced below 2M because of the building design. They do not protect the wearer but may prevent the wearer from infecting someone else. They cannot act as a replacement for any of the risk management controls highlighted.
- MHs are as a Place of Worship, Workplace and a Community Resource. The main focus is on distancing, hygiene and awareness with additional checks on other risks such as water systems, ventilation systems and welfare.
- The COVID-19 WG will continue to monitor developments, and is open to new ideas which would allow further safe use of a particular MH. All such ideas will be judged against the relevant Risk Assessment. Wardens will be asked to agree between them to share the task of keeping the WG up-to-date on changes in legislation and advice.
- The names and contact details of everyone attending all Meetings (including those for Worship) have to be recorded and kept for 21 days.
- There will need to be a protocol for Doorkeepers to follow if too many people arrive for a Meeting.

Travelling to Work and Meetings

Public transport represents the highest risk of transmission when travelling.

Guidance should be issued to all hall users advising avoiding car sharing with others from different households as well as public transport where possible and providing information on vehicle cleaning and refuelling using *Pay at Pump* to minimise contact.

Where hall users are known to frequently utilise public transport they should be advised to ensure face coverings are worn in line with government guidance.

The Meeting House

Each LM will need to take account of layout of its own MH. These have been drafted to best create an environment that allows **distancing** at all times, identifies potential locations for **hygiene** stations and considers signage to maintain **awareness**.

While managing social distancing in a small area may be difficult at times this is the biggest contribution to the risk of transmission of infection and robust attempts to limit close interaction should be made. The controls required for each area will apply to all users in one form or another. Where a full one-way system is not possible internal and partial one-way systems need to be considered. A one-way system for the flow of people throughout each MH will reduce the risk of close interaction. There is a potential for reduced security with the opening of alternative access points and this will need to be considered as the use of MHs increases back to pre-lockdown levels.

The main principles are:

- Limit face to face contact
- Limit potential contact time at less than 2 metres.
- Remove excess furniture if possible, to increase available space and encourage distancing.
- Ensure regular cleaning of contact points to support good hygiene. Cleaning with soap and water is fine. Alcohol gels and sanitising wipes can be used where washing is difficult but basic washing and cleaning is effective.
- Promote awareness and maintain routines for distancing and hygiene.

Entrance areas

There should be clear signage placed on the front door of the MH informing visitors that the Covid-19 risk assessments are complete and requesting that control procedures are followed. The *Staying Covid-19 secure in 2020* poster should be displayed along with instructions to follow upon entering the building.

Where there is adequate space at the front of the MH there should be some form of control for planned visits to ensure distancing is maintained. This could be temporary markers (such as cones) to mark spaces which can be stored away when not required or a volunteer marshaller to guide visitors.

Hand sanitiser dispensers should be provided at or close to the entrance to encourage hall users to sanitise hands and reduce the risks of surface transmission.

Literature and reading material should be removed from entrance halls and lobbies.

Toilets and shower facilities

To limit the potential for close interaction and encourage maintaining distancing the use of these facilities should be restricted to one individual at any time. This will prevent gathering or queueing at sinks or in the doorways. To aid the control of the restricted access it may be necessary to add an additional engaged signs or locks to the doors entering into the toilet areas.

Where taps, toilets and showers have not been used for some time there is a potential risk. To prevent the risk of legionella bacteria developing a regular flush will need to be introduced.

There should be adequate hand washing facilities with paper towels for drying in preference to air dryers where possible. Sanitiser solutions should be provided and hall users are required to use good hand washing techniques and to clean and sanitise contact points (door handles / flushes / toilet seats) before and after each use. Disposable cloths or paper towels must be provided for this purpose.

Care should be taken not to leave chemicals within the reach of children or where additional risks exist. Regularly emptying of bins and safe routes for waste disposal should also be considered.

Meeting Rooms

The capacities of each room have been identified for each MH based on maintaining 2 metre distancing. Government advice is 2 metre distancing but allows for 1.5 metre or 1 metre distancing when suitable mitigation is in place. The additional controls outlined in the risk assessments are acceptable mitigation. This allows some movement on the capacity numbers. If attendance is higher than expected then it should be acceptable to reduce the distance slightly without being in breach of guidance. This will require a dynamic risk assessment at the time depending on the numbers of people and the location, environment and available space. Current government guidance sets a maximum gathering number at 30.

Quaker Meetings for Worship should start first so that these procedures can be checked in practice. If they work then the resumption of hiring will be considered by the COVID-19 Working Group on the basis of information supplied by each LM. For that reason no provisional bookings should be taken until Trustees indicate that they are prepared to approve the resumption of hiring.

Where possible a potential capacity for static use and active use has been identified. Static use should be kept within the capacity numbers and distancing and hygiene disciplines should be maintained. LMs should consider how they will deal with the situation which may eventually arise when more people attend than permitted by the rules. Doorkeepers will have to have clear guidance in to deal with that.

Active use should be carefully considered before any resumption of hiring and for the time being rooms may not be used for any activities that will cause an increase in air movements. This includes physical activities such as yoga, singing, dancing and music groups involving wind instruments. Any activity where there is likely to be increased movement around the room should be avoided or kept at very low numbers. Toys and children's equipment should be removed from meeting rooms and stored.

Additional hand sanitiser dispensers may be appropriate at entrances to meeting rooms. These have been identified in the individual risk assessments.

Contact points should be cleaned between each use of the rooms. Additional care should be taken if groups that have increased contact with the floor are hiring the rooms. Floors will need cleaning between each use if a potential contact point, for example with mother and baby groups or yoga.

The names and contact details of all Friends, staff and visitors of all those attending all Meetings, including those for Worship, must be recorded with the date and time of the Meeting to aid the government's *Test and Trace* procedures. These details must be kept for at least 21 days. Hirers will be required to keep lists of their own attenders as part of their terms and conditions.

Kitchen Areas

Central Bristol Meeting House has a servery (professional kitchen) arrangement which is covered in the assessment for that MH.

Kitchens at the other MHs should not be used. All hall users should be encouraged to bring their own refreshments and to take any waste away with them.

Other Risks

Vulnerable persons

Those hall users that fall into the vulnerable groups whether staff, friends or hirers including those who should be shielding should be encouraged to consider the risks before attending a MH and supported to work from home or worship conference calls for as long as possible.

If vulnerable persons are attending a MH then the need for additional awareness should be communicated to all hall users to maintain distancing, hand washing and contact point hygiene to limit the risk to those individuals as far as possible.

Ventilation

Re-circulating air conditioning systems should be switched off where possible and fresh air ventilation utilised with windows open as much as practical.

Cash Handling

Donation boxes and cash collection should be discouraged. Gloves should be worn and hand washing procedures implemented if any cash is to be handled.

Working at Home

Working at home will usually be the safest option while the pandemic persists. The potential for transmission is significantly reduced and therefore this should be the preferred route where it is possible and practical. Wardens are able to complete the administrative elements of their work from home such as bookings and communication. Where possible this should continue to minimise the risk of contact with others.

Where it is practical to work from home a homeworking assessment check should be completed to ensure that risks related to DSE / workstation issues, slips/trips hazards, electrical safety, security and emergency procedures are considered and reduced. Short term home working may mean it is not practical to resolve all issues fully but if home working continues for a long period then more robust solutions will need to be considered to ensure that safety is not compromised.

It will not be practicable to put in perfect office facilities for every individual but attempts should be made to achieve a safe working space and to add any extra controls to limit the impact of home working. Simple controls such as limiting the time spent at a workstation through frequent breaks to walk around can make a significant difference in avoiding work related upper limb disorders.

Bookings management

All risk assessments and hire agreements will need to be updated with each hirer before they return to ensure that the risks inherent to their activity can be controlled and hygiene procedures and responsibilities agreed. Wardens may need to assess each hirer to establish a confidence level and be selective in which hirers can resume. They will need to take into account any additional time and cost for cleaning to enable the facilities to be safe for the next users. MHs without a Warden will need to consider how they will manage access and cleaning between hirers.

It may be appropriate to only hire rooms to one user at a time in a MH and to allow sufficient time between each hire for delays between cleaning and re-occupation in a similar way to the procedures being adopted by accommodation businesses.

Record Keeping

Once all measures have been established a monitoring routine so that records are kept that the controls are maintained and working.