

Civic Service for The Mayor 2021/22

Planning a Civic Service during the Covid-19 pandemic has additional considerations and risks. For this reason, One Voice Wales have recommended that I make Council aware of the Welsh Government regulations for arranging an event, seek Council approval for the Civic Service to go ahead and to agree any contingency plans should Welsh Government restrictions be reintroduced for the date of the event.

In the Town Clerks report for June 2021, I noted that the staff were working towards co-ordinating a Civic Service for October 2021. Throughout the summer we liaised with the Mayor and were working towards a date of Sunday 3rd October for a Civic Service to be held at the Hermon Chapel, Nolton Street.

As the event organiser, we have a legal duty under The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020 to maintain the health and safety for those attending the event. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect people attending from Coronavirus (this includes the clergy, dignitaries, Councillors, invited guests, members of the choirs and staff). To do this we must ensure that we have appropriate Risk Assessments in place and put in place measures to manage the risks identified.

We received a Risk Assessment for the Hermon Chapel in August stating that the capacity of the church was 64. This Risk Assessment was conducted prior to the Wales Covid Risk Level reducing to from one to zero and therefore arrangements had to be made for the venue to undertake another Risk Assessment under the updated alert level zero. An updated Risk Assessment was provided on 14th September advising that the updated capacity of the church is 214 as follows:

Ground Floor	130 single people, or 65 family units.
Balcony	84 single people or 42 family units.
Stage	4 Worship group members and the leader in the pulpit.
Total Capacity	214

The Risk Assessment referred to above is for the venue itself, however as the Town Council is the event organiser for the Civic Service, we must prepare a Coronavirus Event Risk Assessment for the specific activities that will take place at the Civic Service event.

Welsh Government guidelines highlight that indoor places where people are together for a long time and indoor places where people are singing are the most risky. As such we must:

- identify what activity or situation under our control might cause or support or enable transmission of the virus (the hazards)
- think about who could be at risk
- decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed (the risk)
- act to remove the activity or situation, or if this isn't possible, control the risk by applying reasonable measure

This means that although the general Risk Assessment has provided a maximum capacity of 214, the activities of the Civic Service (e.g. duration of the event, ages of attendees, choirs & congregation singing, refreshments etc.) may result in a lower capacity.

Unfortunately, we have not had enough time to be able to undertake the Event Risk Assessment, go through the findings, report to Council, plan the event and issue invitations in time for 3rd October.

The Covid-19 guidance highlights the following:

- Adults and children over 12 must wear face-coverings in indoor public places including churches, church halls and community buildings. Congregations must remain masked to sing indoors. Face coverings must also be worn whilst seated during the service.
- Although social distancing is no longer a legal requirement, it is a very useful risk mitigation measure so it is generally recommended that social distancing measures be retained where practical. The maintenance of social distancing between persons and groups is an effective way of reducing risk of transmission through singing especially where congregations include people who have not been fully vaccinated (e.g. School choir)
- All persons entering places of worship should be asked to complete a record of attendance which records their name, contact telephone number and date and time of visit but people cannot be required to do so. These records should be kept for 21 days after the event and then destroyed (as it will be a Town Council event, we will need to arrange and staff this).
- The new NHS COVID-19 app is intended to help in this process but is not mandatory. The system involves the creation of a site specific QR code which allows people visiting to use the App. This system does not replace the physical recording of attendance set out above. It is recommended that all public church premises (including churches, halls, offices etc) should display such a QR code.
- The event organiser should provide a revised privacy notice for GDPR reasons.
- The guidance also highlights that the prevalence of cases in your community should be considered before proceeding with a service.

There is also guidance about the serving of food and drinks in churches and it is recommended that:

- A plan is needed to manage queues to avoid crowding
- People should be encouraged to sit in small groups rather than standing and mingling
- A dishwasher can wash at high temperatures so is preferable for cleaning crockery & cutlery
- Those gathering cups etc should wear suitable gloves
- Face coverings do not need to be worn when food and drink is consumed, but should be worn when people move around the building or are engaged in other activities after the service.

The Council must adhere to all Health & Safety regulations to keep people safe and minimise the risks of Covid-19 and limit liability for the Council. We therefore need to fully understand the safe capacity of the church with the above measures in place at the current Covid zero level and how this will be impacted if the risk level is increased before the service.

The Facilities and Community Engagement & Events Managers are visiting Hermon Chapel on Tuesday 21st September to undertake the Event Risk Assessment and will report back.

The numbers for the guest list will need to be in line with the safe capacity identified in the Covid-19 Event Risk Assessment and any people working in the venue i.e. the Pastor, organist and staff managing the flow of people, giving out order of service, refreshments etc. will all need to be included in the capacity numbers.

If the risk assessment suggests the need for social distancing between people or household groups/bubbles, we will need to consider how staff can monitor that.

As this event poses more risk than a normal Civic Service, we need to seek Council approval to go ahead with the event before proceeding.

Staff have reviewed current priorities, workload and resource over the next few months and propose that the Civic Service is rescheduled in the new year.