

To all DMPC Secretaries

Dear Colleagues

Resumption of publication of pastoral schemes

The Government decision to allow the opening of churches for individual prayer from 15th June has led us to review the moratorium on the publishing of new pastoral schemes and orders by the Commissioners or by DMPCs which we announced in Andrea Mulkeen's advice note sent to you on 27th March. In doing so we have taken account of the advice of our Legal Office and the Health and Safety Guidance regarding this limited use of church buildings published by the Government and the House of Bishops.

We have come to the conclusion that the publishing of Schemes can now recommence, where DMPCs wish to do so, as we consider that by taking some additional steps to supplement the strict requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure the effects of continuing restrictions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic can be mitigated sufficiently to make the publication and representation processes fair in the current circumstances.

The notice requirements in respect of draft schemes and published order are that:

- copies of the draft scheme or order and a notice giving the date for making representations should be served on the interested parties
- the draft scheme or order and notice should be published on the Commissioners' website and
- PCC secretaries are required to
 - (a) affix a copy of the notice stating the objects of the draft scheme on or near the principal door of every church in the parish and every building licensed for public worship in the parish
 - (b) make such arrangements as are practicable, for announcements to be made at services held in those buildings during the representation period

It has always been possible to serve schemes and notices on the interested parties by post or email and to publish them online. It has also been possible for notices to be put up at or near the church doors, but we thought it not reasonable to do this when there was no prospect of anyone visiting the church to read them. It is clearly not practicable to make announcements when no services are being held.

It is also still possible to publish the newspaper notices that are required in respect of Pastoral (Church Buildings) Schemes and in s.44 schemes for the disposal of areas of churchyard.

The limited opening of church buildings does now mean that there will be people visiting them who will have the opportunity to read the church door notices.

However, we recognise that not all churches will be opened and not all who would normally visit them will do so. We also recognise that where under normal circumstances church services would be held during the period, it is not practicable to do so at present. We will therefore be asking incumbents and PCC secretaries to fulfil the underlying purpose of the announcements which would normally be made at services which is that of *"ensuring that as many of those who habitually attend public worship there as is practicable are aware of the*

contents of the notice” by taking whichever one or more of the following steps will produce most coverage in their particular context, taking into account the need to reach congregation members who are vulnerable:-

- i) Announcements during Digital/streamed church services;
- ii) Posting copies through the doors of the worshipping community;
- iii) Parish magazine/parish newsletters;
- iv) Facebook/social media posts;
- v) Emails; and
- vi) Word of mouth including pastoral telephone calls

We think it reasonable to expect that incumbents and PCCs will be in touch with members of their congregations who are vulnerable, without access to technology, or who may be self-isolating by these means.

We also intend that all representation periods should be for a minimum of 42 days rather than the statutory minimum of 28 days to allow more time for notice of the draft schemes to be disseminated in these ways.

Although it is normal practice to display a copy of the draft scheme or order alongside the church door notice this is not mandatory so, for the time being, the notice, as well as indicating where it may be seen on-line, will say that a copy will be sent by post or email on request.

For Pastoral Church Buildings Schemes and Church Buildings (Uses and Disposal) Schemes, the notices are required to say where in the locality a copy of the draft scheme may be inspected. In these cases, the Scheme will have to be displayed in a way which enables it to be read in full without being touched. This will mean using a large notice board so that each page can be shown separately. The location will need to be agreed on a case by case basis and will need to be chosen so that the scheme can be read without breaching social distancing and health and safety guidelines (for example by erecting a temporary notice board which can be staked into the ground in the churchyard). Newspaper publication of notices should remind members of local communities that they should only visit physical notice boards where other options, such as viewing online, are not possible.

We would not intend to begin publishing until Monday 29th June. This is to allow time for churches to be opened and cleaned; to make the necessary changes to the wording of the standard letters and notices and provide more detailed guidance material; and to set up our case officers to publish from home. We recognise that with some diocesan staff still on furlough DMPCs which normally publish schemes themselves may wish to ask us to do so for the time being and will do this as requested.

We also recognise that some dioceses may not wish to resume publication or not to publish in particular cases.

Cases where representation period extended to 30th June

In order to treat cases where schemes had already been published but we extended representation periods going beyond 23rd March to 30th June in the same way as those to be published now, we will be asking incumbents and PCC secretaries to take the steps in i) – vi) above (as appropriate) and will further extend the representation period to 20th July. This should still give time for any representations arising in those cases to be considered at our Mission Pastoral and Church Property Committee meetings on 10th September or 14th October and allow those with no representations to be made in time to take effect on 1st August.

Local Consultations

The guidance which I circulated on 16th April regarding local consultations still holds good. However, we now think that where a public meeting would normally be held regarding a possible church closure it would be possible to advertise a Zoom meeting for the same purpose with a proviso that a note of the meeting would be taken and sent to anyone who was not able, for technological or other reasons, to attend so that they are aware of the contents of the meeting and can factor that into any representations which they wish to make.

If you have any questions about matters of detail please get in touch with your usual case officer contact and, if they cannot respond immediately, we will incorporate the answers into the more detailed guidance to follow.

Please feel copy this note to other colleagues if you wish.

I hope you are all well and staying safe.

Best wishes

Peter Wagon

Acting Head of Pastoral and Closed Churches