

Holding an Annual Parish Meeting (APM) and Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) whilst Covid-19 restrictions are in place

In March, Bishop Libby signed an Instrument which postponed the need to hold the APM and APCM in each parish until 31st October 2020. Consequential provisions were also put in place to ensure continuity of office and a postponement of the final date for swearing in of churchwardens. That now has to be done by 31st January 2021.

The advice from the Legal Department at Church House, Westminster is that **APMs and APCMs must now take place on or before 31st October 2020**. The deadline for holding them cannot be put back again. Some parishes will already have received e-mails from the Charity Commission, asking for their approved accounts.

As we are all aware, Covid-19 is still very much a threat. Tight restrictions are in place already and these are liable to change at a moment's notice. Churches and church halls can now be used, subject to compliance with Government restrictions. There is ample [Church of England guidance](#), constantly being updated, to help us to interpret those restrictions in our own setting.

Bishop Libby has signed another Instrument, dated 17th August 2020, enabling parishes, should they wish to do so, to hold their APMs and APCMs remotely. Archdeacons will also be able to hold some or all of their Visitations remotely, too.

A few further points to bear in mind when you are working out which to adopt of the two options I give below:

- 1) The new rules about the possibility of postal voting for the APCM are not available for use this year. If you want to use them next year, you will need to pass a resolution to that effect at this year's APCM.
- 2) Remember that there is no minimum quorum for APMs or APCMs; whoever turns up form the quorum.
- 3) Don't forget you'll need to appoint deanery representatives this year.
- 4) Sidespersons are no longer appointed by the APCM but by the PCC.
- 5) Nominations for posts will need to be re-opened prior to the meetings, be thy actual or virtual.
- 6) Face-coverings will be mandatory for attendees at a physical meeting, unless an exemption applies.
- 7) Paperwork for the appointment of churchwardens was sent out from the Registry by e-mail on 12-13 March. If you need it again, please contact Natalie Hutchinson, the Registry Clerk, on nh@ewlaw.co.uk.

There are two options for holding APMs/APCMs:

- a) Physically or
- b) Remotely by video conferencing facility (such as Zoom) or other similar medium.

A hybrid meeting would be possible but it is likely to prove quite difficult to manage efficiently.

Please remember that you are not obliged to open your church or church hall for the purpose of these meetings. Even if you do wish to do so, you will not be able to unless your risk assessment shows you have sufficient capacity to hold the meetings AND your Archdeacon has signed it off.

The decision on which option to use should, if possible, be a PCC decision. In case of difficulty, please contact your Archdeacon, in the first instance.

Holding a meeting at which parishioners are physically present:

- 1) **Assess your building**, be that church or church hall, by working through the most recent version of the Risk Assessment available on the [Church of England website](#). Bear in mind that capacity isn't the only criterion which you need to consider.
- 2) Work out **how many people can be accommodated** within the rules of social distancing and safety. As the meetings won't class as 'life events', there is no restriction on numbers permitted to attend, but you will have to work out how many can safely be in the building at the same time. For some churches, this will be less than the 30 permitted for 'life events'; for others it will be more. The Cathedral, which can normally hold a thousand plus, has a Covid capacity of just 51 in its nave space.
- 3) How many do you usually have at your APM/APCM? If you could comfortably accommodate that number, whilst adhering to all Government restrictions and Church of England guidance, you can go ahead and hold a physical meeting, **but you don't have to**.
- 4) Put up **notices** in the usual way, advertise it well online and in whatever way is appropriate for your parish. Make sure you include in your notices, perhaps as notes at the bottom but not in such small print or so tucked away that people don't notice them, the following information and anything else which you consider it would be sensible to add:

Please note that people attending the meetings will be expected to:

- a) wash their hands thoroughly on entry (*delete this and re-phrase it if no such facility is accessible at the point of entry*) or use the hand sanitiser provided;
 - b) wear masks, unless a Government exemption applies to a particular person;
 - c) give his/her name, address and telephone number for contact tracing purposes upon arrival. These details will be destroyed after 21 days.
 - d) bring to the meeting relevant paperwork which will have been sent out previously to members on the Electoral Roll.
- 5) Please make sure you **check regularly** the Government's 'Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities' and the Church of England's guidance notes and be prepared to adapt your procedures, if necessary.
 - 6) Make sure **toilet facilities** are clean and well-stocked with soap, paper towels and hand sanitiser.
 - 7) Have several **hand sanitiser** stations around the church/church hall.

- 8) Try and **send paperwork** out by e-mail and ask people to print their own out and bring it with them to the meetings.
- 9) Have some **spare copies** available and try to put them in position 72 hours before the start of the meetings.
- 10) Ask people to **take away all paperwork** with them.
- 11) Have someone, who knows most people who are likely to attend, positioned to take **details for contact tracing purposes** so only one person is using the pen and paper.
- 12) Keep the meeting as **short** as possible. If you would normally hold the meetings after a Sunday service, keep that service as short as you can. Consider, perhaps, changing its format from e.g. a Communion service to a shortened service of Morning or Evening Prayer.
- 13) Read and adhere to guidance/directions on **cleaning**. There is Church of England guidance entitled 'Keeping church buildings clean' and one entitled 'Opening Cathedrals and church buildings to the public'. In the latter, it is stated that special Covid cleaning would not be required if the church is kept closed and unused for 72 hours after the meeting. This might be useful for those churches which need to be particularly careful how they clean historic fabric.

Holding a virtual meeting:

- 1) Include in the **notice** for the **APM** the ID and access code to enter the meeting. Make this a separate meeting with its own, unique ID so no-one would be able to gate-crash the APCM or, indeed, a future meeting.
- 2) **Advertise** it widely, as set out at 4) in the previous section on physical meetings.
- 3) The **notice** for the **APCM** should include the ID and access code for the **separate** meeting of the APCM and needs to go to **all members on the electoral roll only**.
- 4) If a person on the electoral roll has given you their **e-mail address**, you are allowed to use it for the purpose of notifying them of the APM and APCM because it is for the purposes of fulfilling your obligations under the Church Representation Rules.
- 5) Identify a **host** who is someone other than the Chair of the meeting and who will be in charge of the IT at the meeting. Name and give contact details of that person on the notice.
- 6) Ask that, if possible, anyone **wishing to attend** the APM notifies the host in advance. This may make it easier to check up in advance whether someone is entitled to attend.
- 7) You could add something along the following lines to your **notice**:
 - a) [If you do not have internet access and would like to attend, please contact \(name the host\) who will see what can be done to assist by way of telephone link.](#)
 - b) [For those who are hard of hearing, there may be a facility to include live captions. If this would help you to participate more fully, then please contact \(name host\) in advance of the meeting.](#)

- 8) The host of the meeting shouldn't be the Chair but should be someone whose task it is to **vet and admit people wanting to attend** and checking the eligibility of anyone they don't know. They also need to be able to **silence or remove** anyone causing unnecessary disruption.
- 9) It would be sensible for the host and the Chair to be in **contact by text** or similar as appropriate. The Chair should likewise be in contact with anyone with whom they might want a private word during the meeting.
- 10) There is the facility on some meeting providers for those without internet access to link in by **Telephone and Computer Audio** and to have **live captions** (though be aware that you may need to pay for this option) of what is being said for those hard of hearing.
- 11) If you are proposing to record one or both of the meetings (which may be helpful from the point of view of taking the minutes), make sure that you notify everyone both in the notices and at the beginning of each meeting that this is what will be happening. Say that the recording will be deleted after 21 days and make sure that is done.
- 12) Give the technology **a trial run** and be aware that you will only be allowed **40** minutes for free on Zoom when there are more than two connections to the meeting.
- 13) If you need any **help** on the intricacies of the **technology**, please try and obtain advice from within your deanery first but, if you're still stuck, Sian Kellogg, the Diocesan Executive Officer, will do what she can to help. Her contact details are sian.kellogg@derby.anglican.org.

I hope you will be able to organise your meetings but please let me know if you need help.

Good luck!

Nadine Waldron
Diocesan Registrar
17 August 2020