



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Scottish Parliament Written Answers

Coronavirus: Places of Worship

S5W-30968 Alexander Stewart (Conservative): To ask the Scottish Government, provided appropriate social distancing rules are followed, what plans it has to review to 50-person limit on the number of people permitted to attend places of worship as part of the easing of the COVID-19 lockdown measures to allow more people to attend in (a) rural communities that are primarily reliant on the size of their church congregation and (b) large-capacity buildings.

Aileen Campbell: I recognise how difficult it has been for Scotland's faith communities to be unable to come together in places of worship at this challenging time, and understand the important role of congregational worship in supporting spiritual wellbeing. We do not want any restrictions to last any longer than is necessary but must ensure that people who enter places of worship to undertake congregational activities will be safe.

Our guidance on safe capacities for places of worship reflects evolving scientific and health advice and has been developed in discussion with our faith communities and we will continue to work closely with our faith communities as we move towards fully reopening places of worship as soon as it is safe to do so.

The 50 person limit will be reviewed on 20 August as part of our commitment to review restrictions every three weeks, as outlined in the Framework for Decision Making.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-30968>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

Coronavirus: Places of Worship

S5W-31084 Donald Cameron (Conservative): To ask the Scottish Government on what basis it determined that the number of people who can attend places of worship for communal services and prayer should be limited to 50.

Aileen Campbell: I recognise how difficult it has been for Scotland's faith communities to be unable to come together in large groups within places of worship

at this challenging time, and understand the important role of congregational worship in supporting spiritual wellbeing. We do not want restrictions to last any longer than is necessary but must ensure that people who enter places of worship to undertake congregational activities will be safe.

Decisions about what restrictions to place on sectors or activities on our route out of lockdown have been guided by the principles set out in our Framework for Decision Making. We have sought to reduce broader health, economic and societal harm, but always with the necessity to suppress the virus. This has led to some difficult decisions about how best to balance the various harms.

For many of our faith communities, places of worship are also community spaces where individuals meet to worship, pray and interact with others from across their congregation. To support this, places of worship are not caught by the same restrictions on household gatherings as, for example, hospitality settings such as pubs and restaurants.

In order to limit the risk of transmission of the virus, we must take a cautious approach and ensure that the total number of people interacting with each other within places of worship remains at a manageable level. This is currently set at 50 people at a time. Our guidance on safe capacities was developed in discussion with our faith communities and we will continue to work closely with them as we move towards fully reopening places of worship as soon as it is safe to do so.

The 50 person limit will be reviewed on 20 August as part of our commitment to review restrictions every three weeks, as outlined in the Framework for Decision Making.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-31084>

The Framework referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making/>

with further information at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-further-information/>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

Coronavirus: Marriages and Civil Partnerships

S5W-31015 Mark Griffin (Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to adopting the Northern Ireland Executive's guidance for venues and couples organising marriages, civil partnerships or other celebratory events during the easing of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Ash Denham: In Scotland, we are currently advising that no more than 20 people should attend a marriage ceremony or civil partnership registration, provided they can be accommodated safely with physical distancing in the chosen venue. Receptions or other celebrations related to a marriage or civil partnership must continue to comply with the restrictions on public gatherings under the Health Protection Regulations and in guidance.

This position will continue to be kept under careful review and we will continue to consider various approaches, including the approach taken by other jurisdictions such as Northern Ireland. Any further changes to the current restrictions will depend on public health advice.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-31015>

Coronavirus: Weddings

S5W-31017 Mark Griffin (Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on allowing more than 20 guests to attend a wedding should the venue permit safe distancing.

Ash Denham: With effect from 15 July, Scottish Ministers amended the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 to remove the restriction on the number of households allowed to be present at marriage ceremonies and civil partnership registrations.

At present, we are advising that no more than 20 people should attend a marriage ceremony or civil partnership registration, provided they can be accommodated safely with physical distancing in the chosen venue. This limit will be reviewed again at the end of August.

Our position will continue to be kept under careful review and we will continue to consider ways to permit marriage ceremonies and civil partnership registrations to take place safely. Any further changes to the current limit on numbers will depend on public health advice.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-31017>

Church of Scotland with CST, Nisa Nashim, Alliance of Jewish Women, and others

Faith leaders call for action to tackle online hate speech

... As faith leaders and heads of faith-based organisations we stand in solidarity with all those who have faced abuse and hatred on social media.

The events of recent weeks are another painful reminder of the extent of real world harm that can be caused online. The prevalence of racist, antisemitic, Islamophobic and Anti-Hindu hate underlines how the social media companies continue to fall short.

We cannot continue to rely on their piecemeal approach to online abuse.

Today, we are calling on the UK Government to bring forward the Online Harms legislation as a matter of urgency. The UK Government promised to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online but their flagship Online Harm legislation continues to be delayed. This legislation must take us away from a reliance on a reactive approach where the rules are set by the companies.

The social media companies must be held to account when they design their services in a way that encourages and facilitates hate.”

- Very Rev Dr Susan Brown, Convener, Faith Impact Forum, The Church of Scotland
- Akeela Ahmed MBE, Chair of the Independent Members, the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group
- Qari Muhammad Asim MBE, Chair, Mosques Imams National Advisory Board. Senior Imam, Makkah Mosque
- Iman Atta, Director Tell MAMA and Faith Matters
- Mark Gardner, Incoming Chief Executive, Community Security Trust
- Rajnish Kashyap, General Secretary, Hindu Council UK
- Laura Marks OBE, Co-Founder, Nisa-Nashim
- Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, Quakers in Britain
- Sally Patterson, Executive Committee, Alliance of Jewish Women and their Organisations

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/faith-leaders-call-for-action-to-tackle-hate-speech-on-social-media>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/assisteddying.html>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/educationassemblies.html>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/genocidedeterminationbill.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageandcivilpartnershipminimumage.html>

Scottish Parliament

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438