

Faith Communities Forum meeting

26 June 2020 – Microsoft Teams

Attending

Aled Edwards	Cytun: Churches Together in Wales
Gethin Rhys	Cytun: Churches Together in Wales
Rheinallt Thomas	Free Church Council of Wales
Sakti Guha	Hindu Council of Wales
Radhika Kadaba	Hindu Council of Wales
Christine Abbas	Baha'i Faith
Joga Singh	Sikh Council of Wales
Gurmit Singh Randhawa	Sikh Council of Wales
Laurence Kahn	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Melody Odey	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Nor'dzin Pamo	Buddhist representative
John Davies	Archbishop of Wales, Church in Wales

Apologies

Vivian Bartlett	Baha'i Faith
Meraj Hasan	Muslim Council of Wales
Abdul-Azim Ahmed	Muslim Council of Wales
Kate McColgan	Chair of the Interfaith Council for Wales
Sian Rees	Evangelical Alliance

Attendance

The Deputy Minister and Chief Whip (DM&CW) noted that the Forum has met regularly during lockdown and expressed her gratitude for the ongoing, close dialogue between the Welsh Government and faith communities in Wales.

The DM&CW said she hoped the Forum had received her letter of thanks for their hard work throughout the pandemic and in the lead up to the recent announcement that places of worship (PoW) are open for individual and household prayer.

The DM&CW introduced the meeting.

Item 1: New Places of Worship guidance and update on change to regulations

The DM&CW thanked forum members, especially those involved in the Task & Finish group for their input into the guidance document on re-opening Places of Worship which was published on 23 June.

The DM&CW noted the online Q&A session on 24 June, where over 65 people joined to discuss a range of issues.

The DM&CW invited forum members to reflect on the Q&A.

Feedback included:

The Q&A session was modelled on a similar BAME meeting which had worked well. Another Q&A will be held soon.

There was a call to involve black-led churches in future work.

The Q&A was very useful. Outputs from the session will include; a brief on cleaning Places of Worship and a FAQ document.

ACTION: Officials to produce a short FAQ on guidance for opening PoW and a cleaning brief.

The DM&CW noted that permitting private prayer is not as meaningful for some faiths as others and work will continue to consider how and when broader re-opening could take place in a way that was safe.

Solemnisation of Marriages

The DM&CW noted recent, additional changes to the Coronavirus regulations to allow the solemnisation of a marriage / civil partnership and some related permissions.

Paul Webb (PW) outlined the following:

PoW must apply all social distancing rules, solemnisation of marriage and civil ceremonies must be invite only and attendee numbers will be dependent on the capacity of specific venues.

A working draft of the guidance will go to the Task and Finish groups today.

There are challenges around the role of singing/chanting, a balance must be found so that people's experience is meaningful but also safe.

A further meeting of the task and finish group will be held on 2 July, the guidance will be published shortly after and reviewed each 21 days as part of the general review.

Emma Bennett (EB) said the Funerals and Burials group will meet on 6 July, the group may now focus on all ceremonies. This group includes organisations of no-faith, those concerned with community cohesion and the WLGAs.

The DM&CW asked for comments on the marriage guidance.

One member of the forum asked how we help people stay married as the basis of a stable society?

PW said we won't be looking at this issue. Marriage is a protected characteristic, we would have to approach this carefully.

EB invited members to contact her directly to discuss the issue.

Item 2: Test, Trace, Protect (TTP)

The DM&CW explained that TTP is crucial to help people in Wales stay safe and is not about surveillance. Testing is available for anyone in Wales showing symptoms, following a positive test result, the process of tracing will begin.

The DM&CW invited Lowri Jones and Claire Chappell from WG to speak:

The Welsh Government (WG) is working with communities to tailor clear, visual communications so people understand testing and contact tracing.

We need those in charge of PoW to engage with communities to explain TTP. There are materials and toolkits available to share with networks.

A swab test will confirm infection by the virus, antibody tests tell if someone has had the virus in the past.

Antibody tests are available on a trial basis in some education and healthcare settings now

Information is available on [the Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect webpage](#) on testing and contact tracing, or positive test result.

Safety is paramount, there is information available in case of an outbreak – steps taken by PoW may determine if cases are defined as outbreaks.

The role of Contact Tracing is to keep communities safe, not surveillance

Success in communities depends on participation. Barriers to vulnerable groups include language, internet access, disability, concerns on surveillance, lack of understanding, lack of employer/workforce engagement

WG has a suite of assets (language and accessibility), that can be downloaded from the WG website and printed and shared for local groups. There is a community outreach plan.

6 core assets are available in 28 different languages with simple visual guidance. Easy read versions are also available on the [Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect downloads webpage](#).

Questions were asked about test results:

CC said that when tests are done you should be told how you will receive results. The TTP webpage lists contacts at local health boards to chase for results. Public Health Wales (PHW) also give advice on results.

If a child has a test there are different methods e.g. at drive-through tests.

Lots of information is available on how to take the test at home.

We want to engage to reach those who may struggle with the process, we need contacts within networks, for community leaders to explain how to get a test.

Questions were asked about the need for PoW to keep records of attendees:

There is no obligation to keep records.

Signs of an outbreak at a PoW would prompt a rapid response team from PHW to visit and support you. Records would help with Contact Tracing, as the service calls contacts following a positive test result. Guidance is available on the [Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect webpage on keeping records](#)

Social distancing measures exempts PoW from Contact Tracing.

Aled Edwards (AE) said faith communities have engaged with an awareness that we need to protect our own and others.

Faith leaders have consistently conveyed that it's not practical to keep records. Some communities have issues around prevent, immigration etc.

Many communities want assurance of boundaries on TTP, with third parties etc.

CC stated that any information is dealt with in complete confidence, data provided is voluntary and totally secure, not used for any other purposes.

The DM&CW confirmed, as a WG Minister, that data given to a tracer will never be given to the police, immigration etc. Other data (bank details etc.) will not be requested.

Tracers are public officials, not private sector, often local people.

TTP has to move alongside other developments and will be reviewed similarly.

TTP colleagues will also attend the Wales Race Forum to engage.

Item 3: Remembering Srebrenica input from Abi Carter

The DM&CW said Wales plays a prominent role in supporting Remembering Srebrenica (RS), and will mark this 25th anniversary year.

The DM&CW invited Abi Carter to speak:

RS' aims are education on the consequences of hatred and commemorating this genocide on 11 July. They are committed to creating a more cohesive society.

The next generation do not remember the genocide, it must not be forgotten.

The event planned for the Senedd is now a series of virtual events on 5-12 July

RS has two requests:

1. Spreading the word on days of religious observance, materials for prayers etc. are available.
2. People to flood social media on 8 July, with photos of themselves holding up a poster: 'I am remembering Srebrenica'. RS can provide a bilingual banner.

Please follow, like and share social media posts from RS, and tell Abi if Lessons from Srebrenica can help with projects.

2020's theme is 'Every Action matters'.

The DM&CW thanked AC for her powerful statement, the forum embraces those messages and is committed to taking photos and sharing resources.

Item 4: Research on strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales.

The DM&CW introduced the research in safeguarding equality and human rights in Wales, the possibility of incorporating UN conventions or a Human Rights Bill for Wales, and Simon Hoffman's work at Swansea University with Diverse Cymru. Sarah Nason (SN) said she supports this research at Bangor University alongside an expert advisory group. This builds on work by the EHRC and the Gender Review.

Methods are changing due to the pandemic, some interviews with the 4 Commissioners in Wales and online workshops have taken place. An online survey will run in the next few months.

SN requested a 30min slot at a future meeting of this Forum to discuss views on on how duties are being implemented, accountability, effectiveness of monitoring, Impact Assessments, links between wellbeing, Equality and Human Rights.

The DM&CW confirmed that the group will engage and will meet again before August.

All communities and leaders were asked to look at recovery plans, and feedback to ourfuturewales@gov.wales. We want a fair, just and green Wales.

AE suggested a webinar model for a separate meeting rather than the Forum.

ACTION: Officials to facilitate a meeting on Equality and Human Rights, and to place Forum members on the Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights group.

The DM&CW noted that the Task and Finish group is meeting again shortly.

Meeting ends.