



Victoria Centre

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15th October 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Room Booking and Hiring Position at Victoria Centre

It has been quite some time since you heard from us at Victoria Centre, for which I can only apologise. The impacts of the COVID 19 lockdown on the Centre have been considerable, and since June 2020 we have been working hard to open up what functions we could in the Centre as lockdown started to lift.

We managed to open parts of our Childcare service in late June and to operate the only Summer Holiday club in the town in August. However, opening up to room hirers has proved much more difficult. We were hopeful in August of re-starting but were then hit by a local 'semi-lockdown' as levels of COVID 19 in Victoria area rose to the 2nd highest in the County. In September we hoped to start again as the Schools and our Preschool returned, but unfortunately our staff numbers were not at the right level to make sure we could do this safely.

Suspending Hiring

The recent announcements by Government about the 'rule of 6' and the tightening of rules about wearing face masks indoors in response to considerable increases of COVID across the Country, have left us in little doubt that it is presently not viable for us to re-open for room hires for many groups at present. And it is with a heavy heart that our Management Committee has decided to suspend large group hires until Spring 2021. We plan to review this situation again in early March 2021, but it will be constantly in the minds of the Management Committee particularly if government and safety restrictions change for the better.

Keeping Everyone Safe

We can only apologise that we have had to make this decision but our need to keep everyone who uses the Centre safe is paramount. The new restrictions mean we have to apply the 2 metre social distancing rule throughout and as such this lowers the capacity of each room considerably. Added to this, the space our Preschool needs to operate has expanded so we can comply with cleaning and bubble rules, with the result that some rooms previously used for hiring are no longer available.

Moreover, the narrow corridors and limited toilet facilities in our building make allowing more than a small number of people in the Centre at any one time prohibitive. We have attempted to work round these challenges for many months but with the recent rule changes these options are now just not viable for us.

The capacity of each available hiring room is now as follows, (with mandatory 2 metre distancing and face coverings applied at all times).....

- (1) Lounge / Kitchen (together) = 6 people max
- (2) Sanctuary – evenings only = 10 people max
- (3) Main Hall – upstairs = 10 people only
- (4) IT / Meeting Room = 3 people only (limited access)



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Providing Urgent Support

We are aware that this decision could cause great distress for some people / groups who by now are really struggling as a result of these long periods of isolation. Given this, we would consider having discussions with those of you who run groups which are providing vital support to vulnerable people where the opportunity to periodically meet in person, could provide some relief and solace. We are aware some of you have been meeting in parks and open spaces throughout the summer but now, with the weather changing, this is proving more difficult.

Any such arrangements would have to comply with the Centre's COVID 19 risk mitigations but we could support small groups of up to 6 people socially distancing for agreed periods, and wearing face coverings at all times. There would be a charge for these sessions but this would be adjusted to recognise the challenges you are facing in covering the costs with such small numbers. We may be able to 'subsidise' these sessions by drawing on some funds we have managed to access from the National Lottery. Please get in touch if you think we might be able to help. Can I point out that some activities may still not be possible given the increased risk of contagion. And unfortunately, I believe singing and some other physical activities are not yet permitted.

Thus unfortunately, for larger groups, the suspension of hiring till March next year is will apply. Furthermore, we are not able to accept any party bookings till after spring 2021 either. I am sorry to be the bearer of such news but I hope you understand this is not a decision we would ordinarily ever want to take.

Your Equipment and Any Charges

We are aware some of you are still storing things at Victoria Centre and you may wish to retrieve these; please get in touch with us asap and we can arrange a safe time for you to collect items. For those of you who still wish us to store items, charges for this storage still apply. I would also appreciate it if you could produce a list of all the items you are storing here and share that with us. As a result of being short staffed since March 2020 we haven't be able to collect funds owed for storage, but we will begin this process of collection in the coming weeks as we once again make contact. If this will cause you financial difficulties please let us know.

Finally, all at the Victoria Centre wish you well as we regard you as being part of our family. It is really sad we cannot have you all back at this time as your custom and our connection means so much to us.

Wishing you all the very best in the meantime.

Yours sincerely

Marion Turner-Hawes
Victoria Centre Manager