

Message from District Governor Ken

This weekend should have been our District Conference at Lion Quays our first in-district conference. This should have been a time when Rotarians and guests get together for fun and fellowship and celebrate the good things that Rotary does in the world. It should have been a time when we could all renew our enthusiasm for our great projects. How times have changed in recent months.

Let's remember RI President Holger's theme for the year that "Rotary Opens Opportunities" and take stock of where we are and what we must do to secure a bright future for Rotary.

Earlier this week the Rotary Great Britain and Ireland Governing Council (of which I am a member) agreed to issue a statement on Rotary's position on face to face meetings and this has been emailed to every member who has a registered email address.

Not every member has an email address and consequently I am attaching the statement to this newsletter in the hope that Presidents and Secretaries will ensure that every member gets to see it and more importantly understands the significance of the position. It is particularly important now that we have seen a significant part of our District placed under local lockdown from next Tuesday.

There can be no ambiguity. The law is now specific that we cannot hold face to face meetings with more than 6 people present for the foreseeable future. Any breach of this will invalidate a club's insurance and the costs of any consequent legal action and possible compensation claim will become the responsibility of the club breaking the rules. Rotary club members are jointly and severally liable which means that all club members including those who were unaware that the rules were being broken will be potentially liable.

The reputation of Rotary International is at stake and the consequences are potentially far reaching so it is essential that clubs abide by this ruling in full, both in the letter and the spirit of the law.

I'm sure we are all disappointed that we are unable to meet in the normal way and carry out our Rotary service in our communities as we had hoped and planned. These are challenging times and we all must play our part to keep our members and our communities safe.

When this pandemic is over a new normal will develop and the need for Rotary will still be there perhaps in a somewhat different form than we are used to but that is where the opportunity presents itself.

I have now completed more than 50% of my official club visits. Whilst for me it is a great disappointment that I cannot visit in person, I have been made very welcome at the virtual meetings and I am impressed with the resilience of clubs and the good work that you are continuing to do.

There are a number of initiatives being developed by the District team and by Rotary Great Britain and Ireland and these will be circulated in future newsletters.

Members' Newsletter



COVID-19 Face-to-Face meetings update

With the increasing changes to Government guidance and legislation, some of the information is proving difficult to interpret, particularly in respect of when clubs and districts should start to resume face-to-face meetings.

The instruction below from the Governing Council to clubs, districts and members applies across Great Britain and Ireland, irrespective of whether you live in England,

Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

The announcement made by the Prime Minister, and now contained in the official [Government Guidance](#), is that the “Rule of Six” is now law and not guidance which is a change to previous Government guidance. The Rule of Six is effective from Monday 14th September 2020.

At its meeting on 15th September 2020, the Governing Council discussed the subject of clubs (and districts alike) returning to holding meetings face-to-face. The message from the Governing Council is that **until further notice, face-to-face Rotary meetings are not permitted (note: this also applies to district meetings).**

For reference the current UK Government directive that has been causing confusion is given below:

(the extract is taken from 2.10 of the [FAQs](#) associated with the [Government Guidance](#), as of 14/09/20)

“When can I gather in groups of more than 6?

If you live in a household with more than 6 people, you can continue to gather in and attend all settings together. This same applies for your support bubbles. All venues should continue to accommodate groups larger than 6 who live together or are in the same support bubble to gather in and use their services and venues.

There are exceptions where groups can be larger than 6 people, including:

- *for work, or the provision of **voluntary or charitable services***
- *registered childcare, education or training*
- *... “*

As can be seen, the reference is for voluntary or charitable ‘services’ not social/planning meetings. Rotary club/district meetings are more usually social or planning meetings which can be undertaken using electronic means (see Rotary website for more information about [meeting online](#)). Where a Rotary service activity is being carried out, the appropriate risk assessment and project

plans are required, and must include specific consideration to risk management for COVID-19.

We have had many enquiries and points of view as to whether clubs should meet face-to-face and below are some points which might explain why the Governing Council feel that it is not yet appropriate to meet face-to-face.

1. It is possible to argue that a club could lawfully meet in a COVID-19 Secure Premises on the proviso that:

a) people kept very separate in their pre-defined (booked) group of six people. As a club of 20 you would have to have 4 groups of 5 people, however, you would not be able to have interaction with other members on the additional tables.

b) individuals avoid social interaction with anyone outside the group you are with, even if you see other people you know – see 1 (a) above.

c) the club provides the contact details of all those present to the organiser so that members can be contacted if needed by the NHS Test and Trace programme

In practice this would be very difficult to achieve. It would be almost impossible for a club to be confident that people from different groups would not socially interact for example in the carpark, at the bar or even inside the premises. The club would not be able to undertake any interactive activity such as a raffle. It is even debatable if a club could have any sort of meeting/announcements which might require raising one's voice across the tables. It would be a long way from what you might call a normal "Rotary Meeting". **Any breach of the social interaction guidance would probably make the meeting unlawful.**

2. The health and safety of members is paramount. Some members will still not be comfortable meeting face-to-face at the moment because of their own personal circumstances. Those in the high-risk health categories or over 70 yrs are still advised to minimise contact with people outside of their household and stay at home as much as possible. There is, therefore, an issue around discrimination and equality by these members being excluded from face-to-face meetings should they take place.

3. The reputation of Rotary and the club is at stake. Although it might be argued that a meeting was lawful (and we are not lawyers) it would probably be

seen as not following the spirit of the law in trying to contain the virus. If there was a spike in COVID-19 cases associated with the venue, or even worse in the club/district, then the decision to have held the meeting would bring Rotary into disrepute.

4. Whilst a club can be mindful to ensure that the Risk Assessment might include all the necessary COVID-19 mitigation controls, it cannot guarantee that members will adhere to the control measures at all times.

The Governing Council are, therefore, issuing this statement that no face-to-face meetings are to be held until the social interactions' restrictions are lifted and Rotary feel comfortable that all our members can return to face-to-face meetings safely.