**Coronavirus – thoughts on the latest lifting of resrictions**

On March 8th the country began its journey out of Coronavirus lockdown restrictions towards a ‘new normal’ where society is back to something approaching the life we remember from 2019. Tentatively, restrictions are being lifted, and March 8th saw the first of these, with the resumption of education – with some continuing limitations such as use of face-masks, social distancing etc.

29th March sees a further lifting of restrictions. People can now meet in slightly larger groups outdoors – the return of the ‘rule of six’ - and formally organised outdoor sports can resume. Outdoor sports facilities can also open again. Although the requirement to ‘stay at home’ has been lifted, the general recommendation is still to minimise the number of journeys made, and to work from home where possible.

So, it’s baby steps towards the lifting of restrictions. The Roadmap revealed by the government sets out the various stages until the final, Step 4 is reached, but what are the implications for organisations such as charities or community groups looking to deliver services for their beneficiaries or service users? What’s changed?

Well, so far, not much. Government guidance published today (29th March) gives us the following additional permissions:

* you can meet outdoors either in a group of 6 (from any number of households), or in a group of any size from up to 2 households (a household can include an existing support bubble, if eligible)
* you can take part in formally organised outdoor sports with any number of people (outdoor sports venues and facilities will be able to reopen)
* childcare and supervised activities are allowed outdoors for all children
* formally organised parent and child groups can take place outdoors for up to 15 attendees. Children under 5 will not be counted in this number

Even where the above opens up possibilities for your group to resume, you still need to take all the earlier precautions for the safe operation of your group – face masks, sanitiser, social distancing etc.

Step 2 is the milestone which starts to offer greater opportunities for groups and charitable activities. No earlier than 12th April, non-essential retail can re-open. Within this category, libraries and community centres can re-open, as can indoor leisure centres and gyms. At this stage too restrictions on out of school settings opening their doors should also be lifted – so your Scouts and Guides units may be able to return when we enter Step 2.

It’s not until Step 3 that indoor entertainment venues can open. These include cinemas and children’s play areas. Some larger performances and sporting events can start allowing spectators back in, but with restrictions on numbers attending. During Step 3 the government has promised to review the rules on social distancing – but until this review is complete, these rules are still applicable, so we’re not seeing any radical relaxation any time soon.

The speed at which we reach the sunlit uplands of a restriction free life will depend on various factors, not least the extent to which people comply with the rules and therefore help to limit the spread and any further increase in infections; the take-up and continued roll-out of the vaccination programme, and the extent and consequences of any changes to the virus itself.

We’re not yet out of the woods, but we can perhaps glimpse the future, and as trustees and custodians of public assets, now might be the time to start planning for the time when you consider it is safe for people to resume activities for which you have responsibility – either within your premises or for your beneficiaries.

**See below for some of the latest government guidance**

Roadmap and latest restrictions

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_source=8aaff927-9635-4a00-b675-b3e3a94b7d86&utm_content=daily>

Grassroots sport

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-grassroots-sports-guidance-for-the-public-and-sport-providers>

Out of school settings

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>