LJ shul buildings - Preparing for Phased Reopening

**Categories of re-opening**

**Full lockdown** Closure to members of the public

**Individual Only Lockdown** Open for individual or private prayer only, with physical measures in place - note that this will generally not apply to synagogues and most synagogues will decide to wait for full reopening before they open their doors.

**Limited Groups Lockdown** Open to groups of a limited size and for a limited range of services linked to

ensuring physical distancing measures in place

**“New Normal”** Open for wide range of services with physical distancing measures in place.

**General:**

• No indicative date for re-opening of places of worship apart from 4th July 2020 (TBC, pending government announcement)

• Decision of what is to be opened is dependent on how well physical distancing measures can be ensured.

• Continue services where possible online

**Reopening:**

• Trustees to make decision of how and when to open the shul

• Trustees are legally liable and must be able to demonstrate that they:

* have thought through the full range of considerations for reopening,
* are complying with the relevant regulations in force at the time, and
* are discharging their legal duties to the best of their abilities.

**At a minimum, Trustees must demonstrate that they have considered the following:**

• **Safety** -The safety of our members, staff, and volunteers should be of paramount importance and all available protection measure should be considered

• I**nsurance** -Consult our insurers on the re-opening options we are considering as they may have certain requirements of us that we need to take into consideration and the validity of our public liability or other insurance may be dependent on this

• **Risk Assessments & Procedures** –Reviewing and updating our building risk assessment and operating plans is essential and documenting this as this may be required by our insurers should claims arise at a later date.

• **Charitable objects** -If we are significantly changing what we deliver, we will need to check whether we are still operating within our charitable objects or whether we need to make special arrangements to enable us to do so.

• **Record keeping** -Any key decisions taken at a virtual meeting of the relevant trustees/directors should be minuted or recorded to demonstrate that all material considerations were taken into account in arriving at the decisions.

**Planning Steps**

**1. Allocate - COVID Safety Officer**

• Who should be allocated to lead?

• Allocate at least one COVID Safety Officer on the management team or amongst the trustees.

• This person must have the ability to engage with a wide range of community members and stakeholders, keep updated with the latest public health regulations and be a focal point for your reopening preparations.

**2. With whom to engage:**

• **Community Members**–their safety is of paramount importance. We will need to communicate the changes to our community members when we decide to reopen, therefore engaging them early will help the process.

• **Rabbis** –there will be some difficult decisions to be made regarding which services can and cannot run under a particular limited lockdown phase, or how they will be run differently (e.g. limiting numbers, physical distancing, etc). Consult our rabbi/rabbinic team early to ensure their views are considered.

• **Neighbours**–We should let them know of our decision to reopen as they will see community members entering our building again. They may be worried about the impact of reopening, so we need to keep them informed of our plans.

• **Volunteers & Staff**– we will need to train our volunteers and staff in managing the building as it reopens. Also, no volunteer or staff member should feel uncomfortable or be asked to perform a role or duty that they feel is unsafe. Engaging our volunteers and staff early will help them feel their views are being listened to.

• **Other local shuls**–Community members might be confused if some shuls reopen in a certain way, while others do not. It could be a good idea to coordinate or at least discuss our reopening plans with other local shuls.

• **Local Authority/Police/CST**–engage our contact person at our local police force and/or Local Authority as well as the CST to seek their advice and keep them informed of our plans.

**3. Conduct – A Risk Assessment of the shul:**

Physical distancing measures -such as maintaining a 2m distance and avoiding unnecessary physical contact - will introduce significant changes to the way our building will be used. Key questions to consider when conducting a new risk assessment and reviewing procedures for our building:

• **Security/Security Officer** -Our building has been empty/unoccupied for several weeks since the lockdown began, so we need to perform a thorough security check. Employ and identify a security/other officers to monitor entry of attendees to the shul.

• **Online entry registration**-Consider an online system of attendees booking to attend services. No one should be allowed into the shul without having booked or registered their attendance. Name, address and contact numbers must be obtained from anyone booking. (Note, this could also be very helpful if something goes wrong, as we will be able to contact and alert everyone quickly if needed).

• **Entrance/Exit Procedures**-Which entrance and exit routes will we reopen? Have we considered a one-way system? How will we ensure a crowd does not develop at our building’s entrance or exit points?

• **Fire hazards**-Is there unnecessary clutter which might prove an obstacle during an emergency evacuation or present a fire hazard?

• **Mark spaces**-Consider marking 2m gaps between chairs (measured from centre of chair) with signs provided at entrances and exits and in main rooms/sanctuary. All other areas to the building must be secured with barriers.

• **Siddurim**- These should be either removed or signs should be put up to ask people not to use communal books. They should bring their own siddur from home.

• **Tallitot** – Communal tallitot will be removed.

• **Posters and Notices**- Make sure posters/noticeboards are up to date and display new information with up-to-date guidelines.

• **Door stops**–For non-fire doors only, consider using door stops to keep doors open for users to pass through without them touching door handles

• **Cleaning procedures**– Consider what frequency of cleaning will be put in place, by whom, where and using what equipment?

• **Face Masks/PPE**–It is likely that building users may be required to or highly encouraged to wear face masks, gloves or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We must encourage and remind attendees to wear masks and gloves. If they forget theirs, they will have to buy one from the shul; if not they could be asked to leave the building.

• **Timing of services**–depending on the phase of reopening, we will have to limit the amount of time users will stay in the building. Initially the shul will only be open for Shabbat services and a decision will be made regarding the numbers who will be able to attend (depending on capacity, which must be assessed ASAP). A decision will need to be made about when users are allowed to come in (e.g. 10 mins before service starts?) and when they must leave the building.

**Kiddush**- No kiddush in any form should be allowed.

• **Vulnerable users** –It is likely that vulnerable community members should be discouraged from attending [i.e. elderly, sick, high risk, frontline healthcare worker]. Every effort is to be made to communicate to the elderly or vulnerable that they should stay at home (consider providing help with accessing online services?). Subject to Public Health guidance, children might not be allowed at services.

• **Trauma** –Community members might have had family members or people they know die from the virus. Consider how we support them.

**4. Calculate –Estimate our ‘new capacity’**

Physical distancing measures such as maintaining a 2m distance between individuals from different households, will markedly reduce our capacity. Calculating what our building’s ‘new capacity’ is is essential to plan ahead, consider:

• **Mark-out**–Trial run our main rooms, halls or classrooms [when open] with physical distancing.

• **Calculate**–Estimate our ‘new capacity’ for each room. For example, based on latest physical distancing measures of a 2m gap.

• **In/out flow –** Consider how we will communicate and enforce the capacity limits and physical distancing requirements? How will we train volunteers/staff?

**5. Identify –New equipment we will need**

• **Signage/Barriers**–What new tape, signage or barriers will we need?

• **Sanitization**–We will be providing hand sanitizer and tissues at entrances/exits.

• **Cleaning routines** –what additional types and quantities of cleaning products, disinfectants and tools will we require? What will be the estimated weekly cost of this?

• **Bring Your Own**–what equipment or items will we be asking our community members to bring? e.g. their own siddur, tallit, face masks/PPE, etc.

**6. Training –for volunteers and staff**

• **Advance Planning**–Arrange training in new measures and procedures for volunteers and staff prior to re-opening of the shul. Make sure that volunteers/staff are aware of who the COVID Safety Officer is. All volunteers and staff will have to wear face mask/PPE as standard.

• **Escalation**–What will our volunteers and staff do to ensure crowds do not form at entrances and exits? How will we deal with an unhappy attendee at the door? What is the process of escalating if a situation gets out of hand?

• **Safeguarding Officer**–who will this be? Are they aware of their new duties in-line with our new measures and procedures? Do we need one?

**7. Communicate –expectations of the wider community**

• **Educating**–Whatever additional measures are put in place at our shul will be useless unless our community members are educated about them. Ensure the changes are communicated clearly and placed on our website, social media, included in community email updates etc.

• **Regular attendees**-Be aware that some of our older members may be more resistant to the idea of staying away from our shul any longer. How will we communicate new measures and procedures to them?

• **Children**–Depending on public health advice that will be issued, it is likely that very young children will not be able to attend, due to their not being able to maintain physical distancing and risk of being carriers for the virus to others. We will need to let our community members know not to bring their young children with them if this is the case. This should be included on the booking registration screen and posters displayed by the entrance of the shul.

• **Vulnerable/Shielding**-Consider how many of our community members may still be shielding or vulnerable, and thus should not be entering our building. How can we still keep in touch with them and ensure they don’t feel left out? Can we continue delivering some services online, or reach out to them through volunteers phoning or knocking on their door to check they are ok?

**8. Conclusion**

The “new normal” for the foreseeable future for our shul will be markedly different to what we were used to before.

We need to plan early, consult widely, and take a holistic approach to reopening to members of the public when it is safe to do so, in-line with public health regulations.

It is important that the decisions to reopen are not rushed and that all necessary preparations, training and measures are in place well in advance.

Trustees have significant legal responsibilities to keep their community members safe and community members will rightfully have an expectation that trustees do not neglect their duties.

Community leaders and rabbis will have some very challenging decisions to make in the coming weeks.