



# THE GRAND LODGE OF MARK MASTER MASONS

of England and Wales and its Districts and Lodges Overseas

## GRAND SECRETARY'S OFFICE

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**To: Provincial/Divisional/District & Inspectorate Heads of Orders  
Provincial/Divisional/District/Inspectorate Secretaries and Unit Secretaries**

Dear Sir and Brother

### **Updated Guidance following the relaxation of the General Suspension of Masonic Activity**

On 23 March 2020, all Unit Secretaries were instructed to place a copy of the Notice of the General Suspension of Masonic Activity in the Minute Book to record the fact that meetings were suspended until further notice.

Now that the suspension has come to an end, the Secretaries of Units that were unable to meet between 17 March 2020 and 17 July 2020 are required to annotate the Minute Book as follows: *'As a result of the suspension imposed by the Rulers of the Orders administered from Mark Masons' Hall between 17 March 2020 and 17 July 2020, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, the [insert Lodge/Council etc., as appropriate] was unable to meet during that period.'*

The Secretaries of Units that did not have meetings scheduled during the suspension need take no action.

### **Virtual Business Meetings**

A virtual business meeting should only be held in lieu of a regular, physical meeting which cannot take place either because the chosen venue is closed, or the members are unwilling to attend. The scheme is not intended for the holding of additional meetings unless just cause can be shown.

The Seven Steps Aide Memoire and Paper of Business templates for Unit and Provincial/Divisional/District virtual business meetings have been updated and copies accompany this guidance note.

In addition to being able to *propose* Candidates, Joining and Re-Joining members, Units may now also *ballot* for them subject to the provisions set out in Step 6 of the process being observed.

Ballots that would normally be conducted in secret, may, for the time being, be dealt with by a show of hands so long as all members of the Unit have prior notice of the intention to deal with ballots in this way and no objection is raised. If any member does object to this approach (beforehand or during the meeting), the matter must be deferred until the next physical meeting when the ballot should be conducted in accordance with the Covid adaptation notes applicable at that time.

### **Election and Installation meetings**

The Constitutions & Regulations of our Orders provide ample direction regarding the election and installation of the Master (or equivalent) and the process to be followed if it should become impracticable to hold either meeting.

The extension of the virtual business meeting scheme announced recently, will enable Units to elect a Master (or equivalent) for the ensuing year. However, it seems increasingly likely that the delayed opening of many Masonic Centres will prevent Units from holding their Installation meeting within the permitted timescale set out in the Constitutions & Regulations.

Where this is the case, the Master (or equivalent) continues in office, without the need for a proclamation, until the next regular installation meeting with the power to appoint and invest Officers. If this means that the Master will enter his third consecutive year in office, a Dispensation will be required and should be applied for in the usual way.

### **Abandoned and Postponed Meetings**

No meeting of any Unit may be cancelled.

*Postponed meetings* - if the next regular meeting of a Unit cannot be held on the due date, it may be postponed to an alternative date subject to the provisions of the Constitutions & Regulations as well as the Unit By-Laws. If the new date is outside the timeframe permitted by the Constitutions & Regulations, a Dispensation will be required.

*Abandoned meetings* – despite the prevailing circumstances affecting Freemasonry now, Unit Secretaries are required to issue a Summons for each regular meeting. If that meeting cannot subsequently take place because the venue is closed or the members have indicated their unwillingness to attend, the meeting shall be declared abandoned on the day it is scheduled to take place.

The Unit Secretary must ensure that the Minute Book is annotated to state that *‘the Regular Meeting of the [insert Lodge/ Council/ Conclave etc., as appropriate] on [insert date] was duly called but abandoned due to [insert either ‘venue closed’ or ‘insufficient members attending]’*.

### **Exclusions and Ceased Memberships**

There have been many instances recently of members recorded as having been excluded by Units when, in fact, their membership has ceased.

If a member does not pay his subscription to a Unit for two years, his membership of that Unit is automatically ceased. It does not require a vote by the members to give effect to the cessation of membership and the Unit Secretary must ensure that Keystone Online is updated in the usual way.

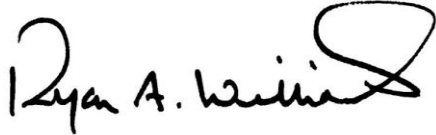
The By-Laws of many Units provide that a member may be liable to exclusion if he has not paid his subscription for a period shorter than the two years mentioned above. Where this is the case, *it is necessary* for the members of the Unit to vote on such a course of action. If the vote is in favour of exclusion, the Unit Secretary must ensure that Keystone Online is updated in the usual way.

## **Festive Boards**

It has been suggested that changes to the lockdown restrictions in England from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 may enable festive boards to resume. We have sought legal opinion on this and are advised that the changes will not permit any alteration in our stated position.

Further guidance will be issued, when necessary, and in response to any change in government guidance.

With fraternal regards and best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan A. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'R' and 'W'.

R.W.Bro. Ryan A Williams, P.G.J.W.  
Grand Secretary