DCMS publishes updated guidance for event organisers and Local Authorities

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The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has updated its events guidance for both organisers and Local Authorities ahead of the commencement of the Events Research Programme (ERP).

The Business Visits and Events Partnership have said it will be clarifying further details with Government on 7 April.

The updated guidance is a lengthy document and can be viewed in full here. All event organisers, venues, suppliers and Local Authorities must read this guidance.

Conference News can reveal the following key points.

Step 2 – Events from 12 April

Some public events can take place from 12 April, such as village fetes, agricultural shows, gardening shows, funfairs and food and drink festivals.

Events that are able to commence from Step 2 are not subject to a capacity cap on attendees. However, DCMS expects these events to have fewer than 4,000 attendees per day. Organisers of events that are likely to have more than 4,000 attendees should notify the Local Authority and should only take place if the event organisers can assure them attendees will be dispersed across a sufficiently large geographic area or will be sufficiently distributed throughout the day, so as to mitigate the risk of crowding at the venue and on public transport. Event organisers should follow Covid-secure guidance and must adhere to legal requirements.

The Rule of Six still applies, so any household or group attending an event may not exceed that number.

Hospitality is permitted at these outdoor events, such as takeaway stands.

Step 3 – Events from 17 May

From 17 May, indoor events and all remaining outdoor events can recommence subject to meeting Covid-secure requirements including social distancing.

Business events such as conferences, exhibitions and tradeshows, charity auctions, and private dining events such as charity or gala dinners and awards ceremonies, and corporate hospitality will be permitted from this date.

Organisers must take reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission, completing a related risk assessment, and adhering to all legal requirements, including ensuring that those attending an event do not mix beyond what is permitted by social contact limits.

These limits for permitted organised gatherings will be: Indoors – rule of 6 or two households and 30-person groups outdoors.

All capacity restrictions must be adhered to at any point throughout the event. For example, a venue can admit over 1,000 people in a single day, but no more than 1,000 people at one time. If an event runs over the course of multiple days, no more than 1,000 people should be admitted at any one time over that period. If a single venue hosts multiple different events at one time, and the attendees of each event are separated for the duration of the event (for example, a cinema with multiple screens, or an exhibition centre hosting multiple business events), the 50% capacity cap will apply to each individual event, rather than the venue.

Staff required to run the event are not included in this total.

Catering and hospitality is permitted in groups and with table service.

Step 4 – from 21 June

With appropriate mitigations in place, by Step 4, the Government aims to remove all legal limits on social contact and enable all events above the Step 3 capacity restrictions to go ahead. This will be strictly subject to the Government review of the latest available data on the impact of the previous step against four tests and the outcome of the scientific Events Research Programme, potentially using testing to reduce the risk of infection, subject to further evaluation.

Local Authorities must not put blanket bans on events

Local authorities can allow or prohibit organised events from taking place in their local area but have told by the Government that they must act reasonably and may not put blanket bans on events taking place in their areas.

Decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, with consideration given to both the risks and the mitigations in place as well as the economic and social benefits that events offer to local communities. Local authorities should not issue blanket bans on permitted events, and should assess each event in discussion with the organiser based on the Covid-secure guidance and relevant government restrictions in place at the time. Any objections to a particular event by a local authority should be based on clear evidence that points to inadequate alignment with guidance or government restrictions, or to the absence of a comprehensive risk assessment.

Event organisers should make it clear to local authorities whether their particular event contains any elements of a business event, sporting event, or live performance or show that would make it subject to a capacity cap. Event organisers may be able to remove a particular element of the event to allow it to proceed without a cap on numbers.

What guidance should Local Authorities follow?

In deciding whether an event is permitted, local authorities should also consider factors such as:

Is there a risk to local population health, taking into account local trends in the prevalence of coronavirus?

Is the event permitted at the relevant Step of the Roadmap?

Is it an event that is subject to restrictions: a business event, elite sporting event, fundraising event or live performance?

Has the event organiser carried out a comprehensive risk assessment?

Has the event organiser taken into account the relevant Covid-secure guidance?

Can/will all mitigations be operated effectively?

What will be the impact on the local area and other adjacent areas?

Has the event organiser engaged appropriately with neighbouring businesses, transport operators and local police to assess and mitigate risks arising from pressure on local and public transport?

Has the event organiser engaged appropriately with with local accommodation providers in the area in the event of overnight stays, including for event staff, workers and contractors

Has the event organiser considered the impact of increased footfall on the surrounding area and infrastructure (for example, queue management and crowding outside of a venue)?

Will attendees be primarily local, or will there be additional risk factors created by attracting a national or international audience for the event?

Has the event organiser successfully run their event in line with COVID-secure guidance previously? This could be within the local authority area or successful events in other local authority areas.

Legal powers to stop events

Where an event poses a risk to public health or in the event of a local spike in coronavirus cases, local authorities can consider prohibiting, restricting or imposing conditions in respect of venues, events or outdoor public places using the powers available in The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020. These powers should only be used if the event, venue or gathering in an outdoor public place poses a serious and imminent threat to public health that cannot be mitigated in conversation with the event organiser.

Any such decision must be both necessary and proportionate.