**Dear (Hall Contact)
You will have seen advice from UGLE and the Provincial Office on the COVID-19 virus and steps to contain its spread.  This note is to add to that, with the information from the Grand Superintendent of Works, specifically directed to those who manage our Halls and Centres. Two areas of particular focus are referenced in the note:**

* **the new rules in respect of Statutory Sick Pay, and**
* **the potential for small business rate relief, for those working in the hospitality sector, introduced in the budget.**

**A copy of the advice issued by Dr David Staples earlier this week is also attached for information.**
**The period ahead will be a trying and one for individuals and commercially testing for our Masonic Halls. The practical advice issued on prevention should be followed to help contain this blight.**

**Sincerely and fraternally**
 **Barry Jameson                  Paul Heathcote**
**Halls Support Group**

**The note from John Pagella, Grand Superintendent of Works**

The further advice from Dr David Staples recognises the financial challenges which many Masonic Halls and Centres will face as members follow advice and stay away from meetings.

Loss of income is inevitable, and managers will need to consider urgently if the financial assistance to small businesses and companies operating in the hospitality sector announced in the budget could apply. Relief from business rates may not apply in all cases, and where doubt exists the local rating authority should be approached for guidance, or professional advice should be sought.

Those Masonic Halls and Centres which provide permanent employment or operate using people who are self-employed should familiarise themselves with the new rules which apply to entitlement to statutory sick pay.

Many Masonic Halls and Centres offer outside and private hires. These arrangements are not directly affected by the further advice from Dr David Staples, but they are subject to the rules published by the Government and Public Health England. It is inevitable that over the coming weeks ‘social distancing’ will play an increasing role in public policy to restrict the spread of Covid-19, and that in turn will result in many outside and private hires being cancelled.

Most outside hire agreements contain cancellation policies. The terms of these policies were set up in more normal times, and decisions over whether and how rigidly to enforce loss of deposits should be taken having regard to the reputational consequences in the longer term which will follow from decisions taken in these unusual and difficult times.

John Pagella

Grand Superintendent of Works

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**From David Staples, Grand Secretary and CEO**

Dear Brother,

As we are sure you are aware, the next steps in the Government's approach to the Coronavirus outbreak were announced yesterday. The Prime Minister, alongside the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Officer, disclosed that the United Kingdom was moving out of the ‘Containment’ phase and into the ‘Delay’ phase. The aim of this phase is to push the peak of the outbreak into the summer, so as to give as much time as possible for further research into the virus and to ensure that the NHS is as prepared as it can be.

As set out in recent communications on this issue, UGLE are content to give advice beyond that issued by Public Health England in relation to this virus due to the demographic of our membership and the high risk posed by it to a number of our more elderly members.

After consultation with the Rulers and Senior members of the Board, we have therefore agreed to strengthen our guidance as follows:

- The United Grand Lodge of England strongly advises that those over the age of 65 years old, and those with hypertension, heart disease, lung disease or diabetes no longer attend Lodge and Chapter meetings for the foreseeable future.

- The United Grand Lodge of England strongly advises that meetings of over 100 members should not take place. Advice on abandoning meetings has been previously circulated.

- We draw attention to the fragile state of some Masonic Halls and their financial reliance on income from meetings. We encourage Lodges to consider their Halls’ ongoing viability when cancelling meetings and advise, where possible, that arrangements are made to support their halls through the difficult times ahead in exchange for some future agreement to recoup any such support when the situation resolves.

For your information, at Freemasons’ Hall in London, in addition to hand washing on entry for all staff and visitors, the following steps will now be implemented:

- **All United Grand Lodge of England staff (who are able to) will be working from home**

**until further notice.**

 **- Freemasons' Hall will be closed to external visitors, tourists and tours will cease.**

 **- Non-masonic business meetings will be virtual where possible.**

We will review this advice as the situation worsens. Finally, we would ask that you check on the more elderly and vulnerable members of your Lodges and Chapters, especially those that live alone, remembering that telephoning is probably safest for them rather than visiting in person.

Sincerely and fraternally yours,

Dr David Staples FRCP

CEO and Grand Secretary