

Supporting Congregations who wish to access Zoom for church meetings with adults (see separate document in relation to the use of Zoom with children and young people)

This note carries advice or recommendations. The document is subject to change as our response to COVID-19 develops.

Context

- The Free Church has clear guidance on Safeguarding - the Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Adults.

<https://freechurch.org/resources/safeguarding>

- All Church leaders/elders/deacons should be familiar with and adhere to the Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines.
- The following paper sets out some guidance for congregations to consider for sharing with church and congregational leaders.
- This paper focuses on Zoom. It appears to be the most commonly used platform for meetings in the Free Church at the moment. There are other platforms available, but the same principles would apply.

Overview of Zoom

- Zoom is a web-based video conferencing tool that can be used on desktops, laptops or on a mobile app that allows users to meet online, with or without video. Zoom sessions can be recorded. Zoom offers quality video and audio interaction.
- Zoom has a very good guide for those who are setting up a meeting for their congregation. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/209743263-Meeting-and-Webinar-Best-Practices-and-Resources>
- Zoom is not social media if used with the recommended settings.
- With the recommended settings people cannot contact leaders or message them on Zoom. There are other ways of doing that. However, with different settings, Zoom can be used for that type of communication. This would be a congregational decision.
- There is a private chat function on Zoom. This could be used by leaders for counselling and mentoring. The usual Free Church Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines, along with the GDPR guidance would apply for this kind of interaction. All Zoom events can be recorded and this may be advisable in some situations.
- Church members do not require a Zoom account to access services.
- There is a Zoom waiting room where participants can be 'held' and then admitted at the same time. This facility is useful if you wish to limit discussion between those in attendance. However, it may be that this would be a good thing to allow isolated people to have some chat before the meeting begins.

*Covid-19 – Overview of Zoom
(General Use)
Version 1*

- There is a 'chat room' facility. This is where the meeting leader can allocate participants into smaller groups for fellowship, discussion or prayer. It would be suggested that each room would have at least one leader in each chat room until the meeting ends.
- Zoom meetings can only be used if one of the leaders has set it up; it cannot be used by church members on their own. They would have to have an account and each other's email addresses.
- If church members prefer not to be seen on screen they can call into the meeting and join it in audio only.
- When using Zoom for church meetings, the screenshare facility should be set so that only the host can share their screen.

A template letter for use to explain Zoom to those who may wish to participate is available as a separate word document.

FAQ's

1. How many people can attend a Zoom meeting?

Depending on the subscription the church takes out, it is possible to have a large number of people attending Zoom meetings.

2. What number of people can be in Zoom chat rooms?

The chat rooms can accommodate a large number of people. A minimum of two leaders with two or more participants would be advised.

3. Can Zoom be used for one to one meetings?

Yes. The same protocols and practice as the current Free Church Guidelines would apply to all interactions.

4. Will participants be able to see the leaders contact details on Zoom?

No.

5. Would we encourage church members to have their own Zoom calls together during the week, to chat and pray?

All over 18s are free to connect and communicate as they wish to. The church could help those who are not used to accessing these facilities in setting them up.

6. How would we remind participants of their responsibilities online?

There are a number of very good sources for advice on appropriate online behaviour.

Follow these links for advice on best practice;

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/internet-security/>

7. Can participants call into the meeting if bandwidth is an issue?

Yes. Zoom has a dial in facility. Zoom will always prioritise sound over picture. This means that in areas with poor bandwidth not using cameras could be a helpful option.