

The Vivace Chorus, from Guildford meets on May 17 2021 as restrictions - briefly - ease



Surrey singers feel 'targeted' by choir U-turn

ANGER AT DECISION TO PUT CHOIR BAN BACK IN PLACE AS OTHER RESTRICTIONS LIFT

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THOUSANDS of singers in Surrey have been banned from choirs following a rule U-turn which means no more than six people can perform together.

Some choir leaders have said they feel singled out, after more than a year of their members singing to themselves on Zoom - with their computers set to mute.

Some choirs met for the first time in more than a year as restrictions eased last Monday (May 17) but were swiftly sent back to Zoom when the government stated no more than six amateurs can meet up to sing.

Among them was the Vivace Chorus, which met at Guildford Baptist Church with strict rules in place - including mask wearing, distancing and a shorter session than normal.

Like many, Jeremy Backhouse, its musical director for the past 27 years, is angry.

"Six people is not a choir," he said. "This basically is a ban on choral singing."

Choirs feel "targeted," he added. "There is no justification for this retrograde step, no justification at all."

"In gyms you can breathe and puff

and pant over everybody with no masks or distancing and that is acceptable."

Like all Surrey choirs we spoke to, the Vivace Chorus has been meeting weekly on Zoom. The online delay makes it impossible to sing together, so all members perform at their screens, muted.

It is a "poor compromise," said Mr Backhouse.

"The last time we sang together [before last Monday] was March 2020. It has been really difficult.

"Singing is an empathetic thing anyway, being a singer requires not just going out to have a bit of a yell.

"It is doing things together, it is very much about teamwork, you build on relationships. It is part of the soul.

"When we did the rehearsal last Monday, a lady came up and said 'I have got my life back'.

"They have really felt deprived of a big part of their lives."

He said he, and others, feared limits on choral singing will continue even if the final part of the roadmap - the easing of all restrictions -- goes ahead on June 21.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said the decision to restrict choirs was made on the basis of "very clear public health guidance".