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| **Covid 19 (coronavirus) – briefing**  |

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Issued 17 March 2020

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| **Below is the latest briefing on the activity in managing the response to COVID 19 (Coronavirus). The position is changing continuously across the country but at this time, there are no positive cases in Inverclyde.** |

**Management and planning -**

Since the outbreak of Covid 19 (Coronavirus) the council has escalated its Council Resilience Management Team (CRMT) has been meeting weekly, this has now been escalated to daily.

A local resilience partnership (LRP) meeting is programmed for this week with multi-agency partners from across Renfrewshire.

A teleconference of the public communications group will take place this week with communications leads from all category one responders connecting in to that to forward plan public communications activity particularly around warning and informing arrangements.

The CRMT meetings have representatives from all council services and the HSCP, is chaired by Martin McNab and supported by Mark Harris of the Civil Contingencies Service.

Separately Greater Glasgow and Clyde side has stood up its pandemic flu plan and activated their strategic and tactical teams across GG&C. Locally the Local Resilience Management Team (LRMT) is acting as the incident management group. This is a multi-agency health and social care and is chaired by Louise Long to co-ordinate the local health and care response to Covid 19 (Coronavirus). This builds on planning which has been taking place over the last month.

This group has representatives from across the health and social care side, trade unions, third sector and council representatives from the council’s public protection, human resources, communications and health & safety.

**Health advice -**

**Self isolation -** It has been announced by the UK/Scottish Government that as of 16 March anyone developing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, however mild, should stay at home for seven days from the onset of symptoms as per existing advice.

In addition, it is now recommended that anyone living in the same household as a symptomatic person should self-isolate for 14 days (this is longer because of the expected incubation period).

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of:

* new continuous cough and/or
* high temperature

Information for the public on COVID-19, including stay at home advice for people who are self-isolating, can be found on NHS Inform.

**Social distancing -** People are advised to take social distancing measures to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. In particular, this is strongly advised for people aged 70 or over, people with underlying medical conditions and pregnant women.

In addition, the Government is advising the following:

* minimise social contact by avoiding crowded areas and large gatherings, including religious congregations and smaller gatherings such as restaurants, pubs, bars, clubs, cinemas and gyms
* avoid using public transport as much as possible
* work from home when possible
* follow the latest health and travel advice, and follow basic hygiene precautions, such as washing hands frequently, not touching their face and covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

**Staffing –**

**Homeworking -** The current UK advice is that workers, where possible, should work from home. The council’s ICT service has been working, as part of the CRMT, to assess availability of laptops and other mobile devices.

Aventail, the council’s access into the network remotely, is being upgraded today (17 March 2020) to ensure it is ready for a larger than normal usage by council employees. This means that it will be unavailable today.

Directorates have also been examining updated business continuity plans to identify priority areas of work and further guidance will come out to managers.

**Underlying medical conditions–**  It is understood that, for employees with underlying medical conditions or immunosuppressed, this is a particularly concerning time. We would ask you to discuss your situation with your line manager at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the appropriate safeguards can be put in place to reduce the risk of potential exposure, e.g. working from home, self-isolating or working from a different location that minimises risk. This list is not exhaustive and solutions should consider the needs of the employee and the service in which they work.

**Pregnant employees -** Pregnant women do not appear to be more severely unwell if they develop Civid-19 (coronavirus) than the general population. As this is a new virus, how it may affect you is not yet clear. It is expected the large majority of pregnant women will experience only mild or moderate cold/flu like symptoms. However, at this time we are encouraging pregnant women to discuss steps to reduce the risks of potential exposure with their line managers, e.g. working from home, self-isolating, or working from a different location that minimises risk. This list is not exhaustive and solutions should consider the needs of the employee and the service in which they work.

**Attendance at meetings –** External meetings should be avoided where possible.

**Home visiting –** Council services will require to examine their requirement to carry out home visits that are not part of essential health and social care home activity as part of prioritising work taking account of the social distancing and health advice and the longer term capacity of individual teams.

**Support for services –** Across education services and HSCP services staff have been asked about their availability to volunteer to support other services, particularly health and care services, using existing skills and training. This information will allow managers and heads of service to identify potential support at peak periods.

**Social distancing –** Where council offices or work places allow it, a degree of distancing should be arranged as a precautionary measure.

**Cleaning -** Specific arrangements have been made in some services for deep cleaning, particularly to protect vulnerable people. Cleaning staff across the council are being offered additional hours to provide more frequent cleaning during the day to help maintain good hand hygiene and enhanced cleaning regime, where practical, as part of infection control.

**Schools –**

Schools have been encouraged to promote good hand hygiene and cleaning to help limit the spread of infection in the wider community.

No decision has been taken on the widespread closure of schools across the UK or Scotland and officers continue to liaise with COSLA and the Scottish Government.

A letter will be sent to parents today (17 March 2020) outlining these arrangements:

**School trips -** Guidance has been issued that all overseas education trips for children under the age of 18 should be cancelled. Therefore all overseas trips taking place before 1 May 2020 will be cancelled until further notice. Further advice will be issued as national guidance is received.

Planned UK based trips will be individually risk assessed and your school will be in contact with any families affected by any cancellations. Please note that any trips before the Easter holiday are likely to be cancelled.

**School/establishment and education events -** There are a number of school / establishment events taking place in the coming weeks, leading to the Easter holidays. Our advice to schools is that these are now postponed or cancelled. This will include parents’ evenings.

**After school clubs -** We have advised schools that all after school clubs should now be cancelled for the foreseeable future. Breakfast clubs and afterschool childcare will run as normal. There may also be study sessions for pupils in the senior phase of secondary school - your school will issue adviceor guidance on this.

**Food provision in schools/establishments -** There have been some recommendations in relation to the provision of food and food handling, particularly in relation to unwrapped food. As a further precautionary measure in the dinner hall environment, we are removing the self-service element of school meals and food will be served to pupils, minimising the numbers of people who handle food and again, reducing risk. Within early years’ establishments lunches, snacks and drinks will be served directly to children. Please note that there may be changes to the menu options for your child.

**SQA Examination diet 2020 -** As of 16 March 2020, the SQA still plans to proceed with this year’s exam diet. If this should change schools will communicate with parents of pupils in the Senior Phase with the plans that will need to be put in place.

**Preparing for school closure -** Schools have been asked to make preparations in the case of school closure. Your child’s school will be in contact with you directly about the arrangements that they are putting in place.

**Health and social care services -**

**Older people’s day care service –** From 18 March 2020 all older people’s day care services will stop at Hillend Older People’s Day Centre and two commissioned day services run by the third sector, Muirshiel and Crown Day services. Alternative arrangements are being made to ensure that service users continue to receive the assessed support needed to remain at home safely and they will be contacted to confirm what these arrangements are.

This decision has been taken to protect vulnerable older people, many with underlying health conditions.

**Events -**

**Gourock Highland Games -** The Gourock Highland Games is planned for Sunday 10 May and regularly has attendance of over 10,000. The current guidance of limiting events of over 500 people will mean that this not take place. The council’s corporate communications service is working with its partners at the Scottish Highland Games Association and the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA) to examine options for hosting the event later in the year and will make an announcement through social media after Wednesday when those discussions are complete.

**Library events -** All of our libraries remain open at this time though library events are being postponed to protect older vulnerable people or because they bring large numbers of people together.

This applies to all of our library bookbug sessions, chatty cafes, IT classes, and library club. This also applies to the ‘making waves’ exhibition and recital planned for Wednesday 18 March 2020.

**Duke of Edinburgh Awards -** We are postponing a planned expedition for the Duke of Edinburgh Awards which was due to take place and this also means the training event on 17 and 18 March 2020 will also be postponed.

**Discover Inverclyde industry event –** The planned tourism event will be postponed following the closure of the Beacon Arts Centre. Council communications and tourism service staff are speaking with partners to assess whether, given the impact Covid-19 (coronavirus) is having on the tourism sector, if there is an online version of the event which can be facilitated to identify guidance and support for the sector now and through to the recovery phase.

**Other organisations -**

**Beacon Arts Centre -** The following statement will be issued by the Beacon Arts Centre today (17 March 2020):

*“In line with the UK and Scottish Government’s advice to avoid social contact, including in theatres, the Beacon Arts Centre is suspending all activities with immediate effect, until further notice, to support measures to combat the spread of COVID-19.*

*As always, our priority remains the health and wellbeing of our audiences, participants and staff.*

*We hope to reschedule affected performances and will be in touch with ticket holders as quickly as possible.*

*As an arts charity operating in the local community, we are reliant on the support of customers, funders and stakeholders. To ensure that we can re-open with the fantastic programme of performances and activities planned for later in the year, please consider supporting us in one of the following ways:*

* *Exchange your ticket for a rescheduled performance*
* *Turn the value of your ticket into a donation*
* *Transfer the value of your ticket into a credit to be used for future performances*

*We thank our customers for their support and patience during this uncertain time and are grateful to our funders for their continued support. We are also grateful to the many producers, artists and organisations we work with for their understanding.*

*We can be contacted at info@beaconartscentre.co.uk. Please bear with us while we respond to a large number of enquiries.*

*It is with great sadness that we temporarily close our doors and we look forward to welcoming you back when re-open.”*

**West College Scotland –** The college will be suspending all face to face teaching with effect from 4pm on Friday 20 March 2020.   They are asking that pupils come into college this week, timetabled, to discuss and implement alternative arrangements.

**Business -**

**National support -** The following support will be available to businesses from 1 April 2020, during the 2020/21 financial year and includes:

• 75 per cent rates relief for retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with a rateable value of less than £69,000 from 1 April 2020

• £80m fund to provide grants of at least £3,000 to small businesses in sectors facing the worst economic impact of Covid-19

• 1.6% rates relief for all properties across Scotland, effectively reversing the planned below inflation uplift in the poundage from 1 April 2020

• Fixed rates relief of up to £5,000 for all pubs with a rateable value of less than £100,000 from 1 April 2020

**Business Gateway Inverclyde -** Business Gateway is being responsive and reactive to the needs and challenges Scottish businesses face due to the Covid-19 (coronavirus). Plans are being put in place to deliver a virtual advisory and workshop service where possible.

Advisers can offer free support with a wide range of business matters including continuity planning, managing cashflow, HR and dealing with suppliers.

The local number for Inverclyde is 01475 779327.

**Communications-**

As the advice is changing on a daily and, potentially, hourly basis, the communications is focussed on encouraging residents and staff to access the most up to date health and travel advice.

A dedicated page has been created at [www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus) which will include any local updates or service changes and includes links to national health and travel advice include NHS Inform, Public Health Scotland and the World Health Organisation.

Social media updates from the council will promote any emerging health advice.

To combat the spread of malicious misinformation, residents are encouraged to use trusted sources of health and travel advice including the links listed on the council’s [www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus) page

All communications should be channelled through corporate communications which will then update this page to encourage people to use this as a single trusted source of information and advice.