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

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Issued 19 March 2020

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| **Below is the latest briefing on the activity in managing the response to COVID 19 (Coronavirus).** |

**Schools –**

The Scottish Government has announced the closure of Scottish schools and nurseries from the end of the school day on Friday 20 March. We have been working on plans to support our pupils during closure and will announce arrangements as soon as we can.

Education Director, Ruth Binks, has written to parents and carers:

*Dear Parent/carer*

*The purpose of this letter is to outline arrangements for schools and early years settings in Inverclyde during the developing events of Covid-19 (coronavirus).*

*Please remember that this is a rapidly changing situation and that all measures being taken are primarily to ensure the safety of our young people, their families, our staff and the wider community. As more families and work force are affected, we have to plan for the short, the medium and the long term effects of this outbreak.*

*Education staff have been working behind the scenes to prepare for activities for all children in the event of schools closing and have developed plans to support the most vulnerable. These plans include ensuring activities have been prepared and communicated by schools in a variety of ways and ensuring that meals are available for children entitled to free school meals and a clothing grant from the first day of closure.*

*We are fortunate in Inverclyde to have a dedicated workforce who are committed to supporting our young people and their families in Inverclyde. This workforce will also be affected by the impacts of Covid-19 (coronavirus), therefore we have to ensure that any measures put in place can be sustained and delivered by the workforce who are available.*

*It is anticipated that schools will be closed until the end of the academic year.*

*Please note the following measures that will be put in place:-*

* *After the announcement from the Scottish Government about school closures all schools and early years centres in Inverclyde will be closed to pupils from the end of the school day on Friday 20 March 2020.*
* *Lunches will be available to those entitled to free school meals from Monday 23 March 2020 and a message has been sent out about where these can be accessed. We have tried to make sure that lunches are available in a range of easily accessible venues.*
* *We are issuing a survey to ask the parents of key workers to let us know their childcare requirements and those who qualify will be contacted to explain arrangements. Please note, it will take time to establish exact childcare arrangements for key workers but the intention is to open the initial provision early next week.*
* *SQA exams – the Scottish Government has announced that SQA exams will not take place this year. Please be assured that the SQA will do all that they can to produce a credible certification model that will be based on coursework, assessment and prior attainment. We are aware that there will be many questions surrounding these circumstances and we will continue to work in partnership with the SQA to achieve the best outcomes for our young people.*

*All of our schools would like to thank the Inverclyde community for the many kind offers of support they have received over the recent weeks. This is a time when everybody needs to pull together with understanding and patience to help each other support the young people in our community in the best way possible.*

*Any updates to council services will be published in the council website at www.inverclyde.gov.uk/ coronavirus which also includes links to essential health and travel advice including NHS Inform.*

**School lunches during closure period –**

While schools are closed all pupils entitled to a free school meal and clothing grant will continue to have access to food at lunchtime.

We are making 2,994 packed lunches available for every pupil in Inverclyde entitled to a free school meal.

Before schools close on 20 March we will let parents know which of the 12 community hubs their child’s packed lunch will be available at. We are also delivering direct to pupils with additional support needs who are unable to travel to these locations. Even though school is closed, there’s no need to go hungry at lunchtime. If you are entitled to a free school meal in Inverclyde and are able to come along, make sure you pick up your free packed lunch.

Full list of pick-up hubs available here:

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| Community hub | Address |
| Kilmacolm Community Centre | Cargill Centre, Lochwinnoch Road, KIlmacolm PA13 4LE |
| I-Youth Zone Port Glasgow | 2-4 Dubbs Road, Port Glasgow PA14 5UD |
| Port Glasgow Town Hall | Shore Street, Port Glasgow PA14 5HD |
| Gibshill Community Centre | 2 Smillie Street, Greenock PA15 2NH |
| Auchmountain RC | 32 Burnhead Street, Greenock PA15 3LG |
| Broomhill Centre | 46 Mearns Street, Greenock PA15 4QD |
| Grieve Road Community Hall | 162 Grieve Road, Greenock PA16 1RQ |
| Gamble Halls | 44 Shore Street, Gourock PA19 1RQ |
| St Andrew’s Church Hall | Auchmead Road, Greenock PA16 0JU |
| Branchton Community Centre | 78 Branchton Road, Greenock PA16 0XX |
| Inverkip Community Hub | Kip Park, Main Street, Greenock PA16 0FZ |
| Crawfurdsburn Community Centre | 1E Crawford Street, Greenock PA15 2BS |

**Education maintenance allowance –**

Education Maintenance allowance (EMA) payments will continue for pupils. Our staff are working at home and will ensure this continues.

**Cremation and Burials–**

**Crematorium office –** The Greenock crematorium office will be closed to visitors, contact can be made by the general public by telephone entry will be restricted to funeral directors.  Viewing of the book of remembrance will no longer be available but can be done online through Inverclyde Council web page.

Our staff will prioritise burial and cremation administration but will reduce priority for other areas of service including memorial permits and family tree searches.

Family funeral arrangements will change.  Only close family members should attend services In line with churches and chapels.  Funeral directors will carry coffins to graveside/crematorium to reduce the involvement in front line staff to control the spread of the virus.

**Whinhill Golf Course –**

The golf course will be closed with immediate effect.

**Staffing issues -**

**Vulnerable employees -** We are asking everyone who is over 70, who has a specific underlying health condition or is pregnant to self-isolate. The list of underlying health conditions include:

* chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive
* pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
* chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
* chronic kidney disease
* chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
* chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone
* disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
* diabetes
* problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have
* had your spleen removed
* a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and
* AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
* being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)

Higher risk of severe illness - There are some clinical conditions which put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

People falling into this higher risk group are those who may be at particular risk due to complex health problems such as:

* People who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication
* People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
* People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment
* People with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
* People with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)

Any members of staff that fall within the above categories should discuss immediately making provision for home working with their line manager.

Where the employee’s role is such that they are unable to work from home, the manager should discuss with the employee possible tasks or activities that are paper based and can be done at home, e.g. undertake training, reviewing coursework, policy and procedures review etc. as an alternative.  The employee will receive their normal pay.

Where it is not possible for an employee to undertake any work activity, tasks or training from home, a period of paid special leave can be granted.  However, communication between manager and employee should be maintained as they may be required to undertake other specific tasks to support the Council deliver essential services.

**Other concerns -** Where an employee has other concerns about their specific circumstances, such as living with someone with a specific underlying health condition, they should have a discussion with their manager at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the appropriate safeguards can be put in place to reduce the risk of potential exposure.

Solutions may include adjusting duties, working from a different location that minimises risks or working from home. This list is not exhaustive and solutions should consider the needs of the employee and the service in which they work.

**Looking after yourself -** We appreciate that as well as being a valued member of Inverclyde Council you all have family and friends that you will be anxious about, we give a commitment to support you as best we can throughout this difficult and challenging time.

We know over the next period of time there will be competing priorities within your life, please make sure you keep in contact with your line manager to discuss the flexibilities that can be put in place to help you to look after your own family as well as continuing help us deliver essential services.

Employees should ensure that they are taking steps to look after their wellbeing during their period of working from home. This includes:

* maintaining regular contact with their manager and colleagues
* taking regular breaks
* contacting the employee assistance programme if they need support, for example, in  relation to heightened feelings of anxiety
* being aware of the things that can cause them poor wellbeing and the activities and resources that can help to address this

**School closure due to coronavirus, what will happen -**

Schools will be closed for pupils only. All school-based employees should continue to report for work as normal.

This is a developing situation but our priority is, while schools are closed to support our young people to be able to continue their learning as much as possible.

Employees may be asked to work at an alternative location or in a different role if appropriate, taking into account their knowledge, skills, experience and ability to travel.

Alternatively, where the employee’s job role allows them to work effectively from home, this may be agreed and communication between manager and employee should be maintained.  Employees will receive their normal pay.

Where the employee’s role is such that it is not possible to work from home, a discussion can take place with the employee to explore possible tasks or activities that are paper based and can be done at home, e.g. undertake training, reviewing coursework, policy and procedures review etc. as an alternative.  Employees will receive their normal pay.

Where it is not possible for an employee to undertake any work activity, tasks or training at their workplace, from home or an alternative location, a period of paid special leave may be granted, however, communication between manager and employee should be maintained as they may be required to undertake other specific tasks to support the Council deliver essential services.

**Care leave - employees unable to attend work due to their child’s school closing –**

Where possible all reasonable alternative arrangements should be explored for childcare. Where alternative arrangements cannot be made, the following should apply:

* Where the employee’s job role allows them to work from home, this can be agreed and communication between manager and employee should be maintained.  The employee will receive their normal pay.
* Where the employee’s role is such that they are unable to work from home, the manager should discuss with the employee possible tasks or activities that are paper based and can be done at home, e.g. undertake training, reviewing coursework, policy and procedures review etc. as an alternative.  The employee will receive their normal pay.
* Where it is not possible for an employee to undertake any work activity, tasks or training from home, a period of paid special leave could be agreed during term time.  However, communication between manager and employee should be maintained as they may be required to undertake other specific tasks to support the Council deliver essential services.  This arrangement would need to be reviewed at the end of March.