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| **Coronavirus (Covid-19) – briefing** |

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Issued 8 April 2020

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| **Below is the latest briefing on the activity in managing the response to coronavirus (Covid-19).**  **Local updates, council service changes and links to trusted sources of health guidance are published at *www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus*** |

**School lunches set for a change**

The following messages are being sent today to parents and carers informing them of changes to free school lunches while schools are closed.

The message below is being sent to parents and carers of children entitled to free school meals and clothing grants:

*We are committed to supporting families in receipt of free school meals/clothing grants by making lunch provision for your child or children while the schools are closed.*

*Our response so far has included a daily packed lunch and then fortnightly food bag. We cannot continue to guarantee the level of food supply to deliver this service but we still want to support families.*

*That’s why we will be changing the way we do that by providing you with money to support providing lunches to your child or children.*

*On the 14 April 2020 and every two weeks, until you are notified otherwise, we will provide you with a free school meal grant payment of £25 for each school/nursery aged child in your household. This payment will be made directly to the bank account that your clothing grant for 2019/2020 was paid in to. You DO NOT need to re-apply for this free meal grant. This payment will be made to you automatically and you do not need to do anything further.*

*If your bank account details have changed since you received the clothing grant, you must let us know as soon as possible by emailing us using the contact details above. Please note any change to bank account details will delay the first payment to you as we carry out the necessary security checks to make sure we are getting the money to the right people.*

*For security reasons, we will be unable to confirm or check the current details held on file. Please only contact us if you no longer have access to the original bank account.*

*This payment will only be in place while the schools remain closed as a result of coronavirus (covid-19) restrictions.*

*In the meantime, I hope this grant payment helps you to support your family at this difficult time.*

The following message has been sent to parents and carers of children in p1-4 who do not receive a clothing grant:

*We are committed to supporting families in receipt of free school meals and clothing grants by making lunch available when the schools are closed.*

*However, we are aware of the universal offer of free school lunches for all children from P1-P4, regardless of household circumstances.*

*If your child received a free school meal and you are not in receipt of a clothing grant and you wish to continue to receive a meal, we will make a packed lunch available each day for them between 12 noon and 2 pm at the childcare hub nearest you.*

*This will be available from Tuesday 14 April 2020. You must inform us each week if you wish to take up this offer and collect a packed lunch. You can do this by emailing us at admin.educationhq@inverclyde.gov.uk or phoning 01475 712850. Please contact us each Friday to let us know if you wish to take this up the following week.*

*If your child currently attends the childcare hub, there is no change to their lunch provision and you can disregard this letter.*

*If you or your family require to access any information about local services affected by coronavirus (covid-19) please visit www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coroanvirus which includes links to public health guidance.*

The following message has been sent to parents and carers of children in early years entitled to a free lunch:

*As part of our approach to supporting children who are entitled to a free lunch while their early years setting is closed, we are providing a fortnightly grant payment of £25 per child to families instead of providing a food parcel. This option is available to those who would normally be entitled to receive a clothing grant.*

*However, the only way we can pay this grant is directly into your bank account.*

*As we do not have your bank account details, please complete the enclosed form and send it back to us no later than Wednesday 15 April 2020 using the pre-paid envelope provided. We will then endeavour to pay the grant directly into your account from the next payment date on 28 April 2020 and every two weeks until you are notified otherwise.*

*If you already have school-aged children in receipt of free school meals and a clothing grant, you do not need to take any further action as we already have your bank details. You will also have already received an email from me earlier.*

*If you have any questions, please contact us on 01475 712850 or email us at the e-mail address above.*

**Registrars service operating seven days**

Inverclyde Council’s registrar’s service will now be operating over seven days-a-week. The service, run through the council’s customer service centre, will continue to be by telephone to support the national stay at home and social distancing guidance.

The service will be available on Good Friday and Easter Monday by phone at 01475 714250 between 10am and 3pm.

On Saturday and Sunday phone line, 01475 714250, will be open 10am to 1pm. For opening times beyond the bank holiday please refer the ‘contacting the council’ section at www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coroanvirus

**Testing centre opens on Thursday**

The planned health and care staff testing centre at Port Glasgow Health Centre opens tomorrow (Thursday).

**Policy and resources executive sub-committee**

With all committee meetings of the council cancelled, the council’s policy and resources executive sub-committee, which met yesterday (8 April 2020) will now meet fortnightly to examine urgent matters.

The meeting yesterday considered a detailed action log of decisions taken since the start of the pandemic to manage the council’s response to coronavirus (covid-19).

The full sub-committee papers are available to download online at: <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2256>

Following the new emergency coronavirus legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament, the notice below has been published by the council about committee meetings:

*In terms of Section 50A(3A) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as introduced by Schedule 6, Paragraph 13 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, it is necessary to exclude the public from the meetings of the Executive Sub-Committee on public health grounds.*

*The Council considers that, if members of the public were to be present, this would create a real or substantial risk to public health, specifically relating to infection or contamination by Coronavirus.*

**The whole wide world went ZOOM**

The digital office for local government has updated its guidance on the use of zoom, the video conferencing platform which has seen a boom since the start of the conronavirus (covid-19) pandemic.

The digital office statement calls for a ban of zoom and reads: Two weeks ago, the Digital Office released a brochure describing tools that could be used to assist remote working. One of these recommendations was the video conferencing application Zoom. Since then a number of news stories have circulated describing privacy and security flaws in Zoom, and now detailed technical analysis of the tool has shown serious vulnerabilities and poor programming practices (that will enable future vulnerabilities) in the Zoom installation. These include, but are not limited to: remote camera hijacking; privilege escalation; local web server installation that persists after uninstalling; and the redirecting of calls via servers located in China for no identifiable reason.

Many NHS Scotland Boards and the Scottish Government have taken the decision to block Zoom at their firewalls and to ban the use of Zoom across their organisations. We recommend that councils take the same action. Understanding that Zoom may already form a substantial part of your remote working practices, the following guidelines may be useful until another solution is able to take its place:

* Do not use the standalone zoom client on corporate devices;
* Where possible, use the zoom web application rather than installed service;
* Do not use zoom for Commercially Sensitive, Official Sensitive or discussions involving personal data;
* If you are not confident that colleagues can self-regulate the above point then ban completely.

If you have any concerns or queries relating to this statement, please email info@digitaloffice.scot.

**Community pharmacies funding**

Funding of £5.5m has been announced by the Scottish Government to ease coronavirus pressures on community pharmacies.

Additional funding of £5.5 million will be provided to community pharmacies to help them cope with increased pressures from coronavirus (COVID-19).

Pharmacy workloads almost doubled during March - with increased prescriptions, staff overtime and a higher level of consultations all resulting in additional costs for the service.

The additional funding will be added to the network’s March payments and is intended to help with costs including:

* additional staff hours and locum costs
* the increased amount of medicine prescriptions
* modifications to premises such as installation of protective screens
* additional cleaning costs
* increased phone consultations

**Guidance for construction industry**

Guidance has been issued to the construction industry that non-essential works should cease.

The statement issued by the Scottish Government said:

Work on construction sites, unless it is for essential projects, should stop immediately, as confirmed in new guidance for the construction industry.

The guidance makes clear that work on construction projects should cease unless it is supporting crucial work during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Any project deemed essential can only continue operating if it can comply with guidance on social distancing, safety and welfare during the COVID-19 outbreak. Any site unable to meet these requirements should close.

Essential projects include:

* those to create or repurpose facilities which will be used directly in COVID-19 related activities
* projects to create or repurpose facilities which will be used to accommodate key workers, or free up space in facilities to be used directly in COVID-19 related activities
* projects which are considered essential public services
* the repair and maintenance of critical infrastructure

NHS boards will make decisions on their own individual sites and projects, in conjunction with contractors.

The full guidance is available on the Scottish Government website and a link is included in the **‘**Business support and advice’ section of www.inverclyde.gov.uk/coronavirus

**Supporting people affected by alcohol & drugs**

The Scottish Government has announcedextra support for people affected by alcohol and drug use during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Funding of £166,000 from the Scottish Government will support:

* a programme to increase access to naloxone in new settings, including investment in kits to add to the existing outlets for naloxone supply
* increased capacity within the Know the Score helpline and webchat service
* a COVID-19 publicity campaign signposting support for alcohol and drug users during the pandemic
* funding to link people with others in recovery through the Scottish Recovery Consortium

Help will also be available for those affected by another’s alcohol and drug use through the Supporting Families Fund. This includes a discretionary emergency fund for families, online wellbeing activities, family meals, wellbeing packs and counselling support.

# Key support services get £8 million boost People most at risk from the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak are to receive further support following emergency investment in crucial services. Charities Scottish Women’s Aid, Social Bite and other key partners will share up to £8 million to provide an emergency response and ensure services can react to coronavirus (COVID-19). Disadvantaged groups facing hardships such as homelessness, food insecurity or social isolation and loneliness are among those to benefit from services such as:

* emergency accommodation in Glasgow and Edinburgh
* the provision of food and essential supplies to vulnerable groups in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen
* public health information translated into British Sign Language (BSL) and the creation of an easy, one-stop shop approach for BSL users
* online and telephone support for both older people and young people, and more isolated members of the LGBT community, to improve mental resilience and wellbeing

This investment is part of the Scottish Government’s wider £350 million Communities Funding to help those most affected by the pandemic.

A full list of the projects to be awarded a share of the funding can be found at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/emergency-help-for-those-worse-affected-by-coronavirus/>