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

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Issued 9 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*** |

**Joint PPE statement**

Below is a copy of a joint statement issued by the Scottish Government, COSLA and trade unions on PPE:

*The Scottish Government with COSLA and the SJC Unions have agreed today that the guidance jointly published by the Department of Health and Social Care, Health Protection Scotland (HPS), Public Health Wales, Public Health Agency Northern Ireland, Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England on 2 April 2020 is the official and fully comprehensive guidance on the matter of the use of PPE in the context of COVID19.*

*That guidance makes clear that social and home care workers can wear a fluid resistant face mask along with other appropriate PPE where the person they are visiting or otherwise attending to is neither confirmed nor suspected of having COVID19, if they consider doing so necessary to their own and the individual's safety - they are professionals and we trust their professional judgement.*

*The guidance had input from Royal Colleges and is endorsed by expert scientific groups, as well as the Chief Medical Officers and Chief Nursing Officers in the UK.*

*COSLA and the SJC Trade Unions are clear that this joint statement is necessary to ensure our social and home care workforce has the confidence to carry out its role. The Scottish Government has given assurances that it will take all possible steps to ensure all appropriate supplies will be made available to the workforce. We recognise that this will also assure those who are receiving vital services and who are already shielding.*

*We wish to emphasise that all social and home care staff have our utmost thanks and support for the essential work they are carrying out during this pandemic.*

Below is a copy of a statement from the council welcoming the clarity which will be issued this afternoon:

*NEW guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) during the coronavirus outbreak has been welcomed by the leader of Inverclyde Council.*

*Councillor Stephen McCabe says today’s joint statement from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla), the Scottish Government and trade unions is important in providing clarity on what type of PPE should be used and when.*

*The guidance makes clear that social and home care workers can wear a fluid-resistant face mask along with appropriate PPE where the person they are visiting is neither confirmed nor suspected of having Covid-19.*

*Cllr McCabe said: “The council fully supports the new guidance issued today by the Scottish Government, Cosla and trade unions regarding the use of PPE.*

*“In times of great uncertainty, the guidelines provide greater clarity for out vital frontline staff working in the health and social care sectors.*

*“It’s important that our key workers get all the protection they need and that there’s no confusion around the matter.”*

*The new guidance says that social and home care workers are ‘professionals and we trust their professional judgement’ on deciding the level of PPE protection they require and when.*

*It has been endorsed by the public health offices of the UK Government and all devolved administrations, respective chief medical and nursing officers, as well support from the Royal Colleges and expert scientific groups.*

*Councillor Robert Moran, Convener of Health & Social Care, said: “There have been a lot of concerns raised about the use of PPE and I hope this new comprehensive guidance goes a long way to allaying those concerns at a time when our key health and social care staff have enough of their plates.*

*“We cannot thank them enough for the incredible work they are doing.”*

*The full guidance is available from the Health Protection Scotland website at* [*www.hps.scot.nhs.uk*](http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk)

**Crematorium changes**

To manage the potential for increased demand, cremation service times at Greenock crematorium will be reduced to 30 minutes instead of the current one hour time provided previously.

These changes will come into effect from Monday 27 April 2020.

**GPs and pharmacies open over Easter break**

General practices and community pharmacies will remain open on Good Friday and Easter Monday to help relieve pressure on out-of-hours services this weekend.

GPs will be open to offer treatment for non-coronavirus (COVID-19) related health issues, where it is safe to do so. Community pharmacies have also been requested to remain open where possible to support the wider efforts of the NHS.

Patients with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms are asked to check nhsinform.scot/coronavirus first for advice or dial NHS 24 on 111, day or night, if their symptoms worsen or do not improve after seven days.

**Annual leave guidance for council employees**

Following discussion about staff annual leave with trade union representatives the information below has been agreed:

**Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the application on annual leave during the Covid-19 pandemic. The guidance is correct as at 9 April 2020, however will be reviewed as the situation and Government advice changes.

**Booked annual leave**

If you have already booked annual leave then you should still take this as planned. If you ask to cancel this, it will be at the discretion of your manager as to whether it can be cancelled. This will depend on the availability of work during the period of planned leave and the ability to accommodate it at a future date.

With many colleagues unwell or in self-isolation you may be asked to consider re-arranging or deferring annual leave to provide cover for essential work.

**Working from home**

If you are working from home you are expected to schedule a proportionate period of time as annual leave to ensure that you have a break from work, just as you would do if you were at your normal place of work. As a guide this would equate to 7 or 8 days per 13 week period. This should be requested and recorded in the normal way.

If you are required to move into an essential role we would still ask you to consider managing your leave to ensure you get a break from work.

It is important that annual leave is managed over the year to ensure large balances are not built up which may case service delivery issued later in the year.

**Employees on paid special leave**

If you are on paid special leave because you can’t work from home, you have childcare/caring responsibilities or are in a higher risk category, you will also be expected to schedule a proportionate period of annual leave (i.e. seven or eight days per 13 week period) and your manager will agree this with you. It is important that all staff on special paid leave observe this guidance for their own health and wellbeing and avoid accruing too much leave for the second half of the leave year.

While you are on paid special leave, you should be available to be contacted and your manager will continue to explore options about work which could be done from home. This may include for example project work, planning duties or online training opportunities. During periods of annual leave employees will not require to be contactable.

**Term time workers**

If you are a term time worker (including Teachers) and working from home, you should continue to observe your usual leave arrangements for now.

**Essential/critical workers**

It is appreciated that in critical services it may be more challenging for requests for annual leave to be approved. In these services managers should be trying where operationally feasible to allow employees time off. Where this is not possible, arrangements will be made for them to carry over unused leave into future annual leave years in accordance with the latest UK Government advice.

Please note this provision should be limited to our critical services only and in all other service areas every effort should be made for annual leave to be taken with only standard carry-over arrangements in place at the end of the leave year.

**Monitoring and review**

This arrangement will be reviewed at the end of June to ensure employees are taking an appropriate number of annual leave days to support their wellbeing and avoid them accruing too much leave which may lead to service delivery issues later in the year.
 **HMRC message on child benefit**

HMRC has issued messages to new parents that they do not need to miss out on child benefit even if unable to register the birth of a newborn.

The message reads:

*Parents of new-borns will still be able to claim Child Benefit despite the outbreak of coronavirus, HMRC announces today.*

*Even though General Register Offices remain closed for now, parents can still claim Child Benefit without having to register their child’s birth first to ensure that they do not miss out.*

*First time parents will need to fill in Child Benefit Claim form CH2 found online and send it to the Child Benefit Office. If they haven’t registered the birth because of COVID-19, they should add a note with their claim to let us know.*

*If they already claim Child Benefit, they can complete the form or add their new-born’s details over the telephone on 0300 200 3100. You will need your National Insurance number or Child Benefit number.*

*Child Benefit claims can be backdated by up to three months.*

*This announcement is timely as child benefit payments increase from 6 April to a weekly rate of £21.05 for the first child and £13.95 for each additional child. Child Benefit is paid into your bank account, usually every 4 weeks.*

*Only one person can claim Child Benefit for a child. For couples with one partner not working or paying National Insurance contributions, making the claim in their name will help protect their State Pension.*

*HMRC is reminding High Income Child Benefit Charge customers of the importance of claiming child benefit, even if they choose to opt out of receiving monetary benefits.*

*The tax charge applies to anyone with an income over £50,000, who claims Child Benefit or whose partner claims it. Even if you do have to pay the tax charge, you could still be better off by claiming Child Benefit - the tax is 1% of Child Benefit for each £100 of income over £50,000.*

*You can use the Child Benefit tax calculator to work out how much you may have to pay, or you can opt out of receiving Child Benefit payments altogether when you complete the form, so you won't have to pay the charge but will still protect your State Pension.*