

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Keeping Schools open and operating normally is important in terms of both the economy and business continuity for organisations in Dumfries and Galloway. This is because of the impact on working parents if schools have to be closed in emergency circumstances.

Aim

- 1.2 The aim of **Part III** of the Winter Service Operations Plan is to set out general operational arrangements and guidelines for operating schools normally to minimise the impact of school closures on Community Planning Partners and the region's economy.

2 STATEMENT OF POLICIES AND ROLES

Policy

- 2.1 Education Services will, as far as possible, and with due regard to the health, safety and welfare of both staff and pupils, continue to operate schools normally in order to minimise the impact of school closures on Community Planning Partners and the region's economy.
- 2.2 In allocating available resources, keeping schools open/operating normally is a formal priority for Dumfries and Galloway Council in periods of significantly adverse weather.
- 2.3 Dumfries and Galloway Council will not normally instruct the blanket closure of Schools in as extensive a geographical area as that covered by our Council. The authority to close (or not to open) a school lies with the Headteacher as the person best placed to assess the circumstances for the individual school, not on the basis of comparison with other schools. In a largely rural area, the next nearest school may be at a significant distance and have very different prevailing weather conditions and associated consequences.

Roles and Responsibilities

- 2.4 It is for the Council's Chief Executive to allocate the Council's resources in the most appropriate manner and thus the Chief Executive, or his nominee, will determine when, in periods of significantly adverse weather, to set in motion the arrangements and procedures in this part of the Winter Service Operations Plan.
- 2.5 Concept of Operations. The concept of operations is that, in periods of significantly adverse weather, and when instructed by the Chief Executive:
- a. DG First Roads Services facilitate travel to school by treating main roads and footways shown in Tables I-1 and I-2, in **Part I**.
 - b. DG First Neighbourhood Services enable an access to schools.
 - c. Education Services are responsible for other mobility/access within school grounds.
- 2.6 Safety on School Grounds.
- a. General. As lead tenants, access to the school buildings and playgrounds are the school's responsibility in normal winter conditions. In normal winter conditions, schools purchase salt from their Devolved School Budget.
 - b. School Lets. The school has responsibility to advise those using the building outwith school hours regarding the status of access/egress to buildings, car parks and grounds.
 - c. PPP Schools. The responsibility for access within school grounds in the PPP schools lies with the contractor hence the partnership arrangements with DG First do not apply for these establishments.
- 2.7 Neighbourhood Services role within the Winter Services Operations Plan is to support Roads Services staff during normal and adverse winter weather conditions. In the interests of efficiency, designated operational Roads Services staff will contact designated Neighbourhood Services staff to co-ordinate a pro-active response during winter weather conditions. The level of response will be dependent on the severity of the weather conditions and on the provision of other essential services that Neighbourhood Services provide, such as the Burial Service and Refuse Collection. These services will be maintained, as appropriate, during adverse weather conditions.

Prioritisation

- 2.8 Operational and financial resources are finite, and operations to facilitate access to schools will be prioritised on the basis of school rolls, with larger schools being treated before smaller.
- 2.9 Deployment of resources and detailed prioritisation are dealt with by the Director Education Services directly liaising with the Head of Roads, Neighbourhood and Contracting Services.
- 2.10 Schools have identified one priority access and one internal school access route to be treated by DG First Neighbourhood Services.
- 2.11 School treatment plans have been created to identify carriageway and footway treatment routes (where applicable), and priority school treatment routes from the primary access gate to the main school door that may require treatment by Neighbourhood Services in extreme weather conditions.

3 OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Business Continuity

- 3.1 Access arrangements to weather information for Headteachers and centrally based Education Services staff is well-established and allows appropriate access from both a work base and from home. Appropriate people are notified directly in the event of weather warnings being issued. Headteachers are therefore in a position to make informed decisions without necessarily having to physically arrive at the school first. Cascades are in place to inform the relevant parents, teachers and other staff if a decision is taken to close a school.
- 3.2 The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all teachers and support staff to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school. Detailed guidance for this is available from <http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=7431> (Search for 'Emergency closure of schools'.)

School Closure Decision Making

- 3.3 Headteachers are authorised to make an emergency closure when the state of the weather or any other exceptional circumstance make it absolutely necessary in the best interests of the pupils. These decisions must be supported by the latest and most accurate information available. The presumption should be in favour of keeping the school open unless, in the Headteacher's view, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of pupils and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, Headteachers should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:
- Arrangements for Pupil Safety. The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child. Where children cannot be collected or delivered home, they should be kept at school and supervised.
 - Short and Longer Term Weather Information. It would be inadvisable to react to the first flurry of snow without seeking further information on the weather conditions ahead. Equally, it would be unwise to send people (pupils or staff) home when a blizzard is at its height.
 - Advice from Transport Operators. Transport operators are key players in such circumstances as they will be the ones who decide whether vehicles should/can continue to operate.
- 3.4 Where Headteachers are in any doubt about sources of information about roads/weather/school transport they should contact Education Services Headquarters (Woodbank) on 01387 260427/260432 or email Gillian.Brydson@dumgal.gov.uk. It is often specific access or other localised issues that require schools to close. The closure or opening of other schools nearby should not be the key factor in taking decisions.

Advice to Parents

- 3.5 Headteachers should also recognise that parents have a key role to play in the event of severe weather. Parents should be made aware that there is a responsibility upon them to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children when weather conditions are severe. If they have concerns about their children travelling between home and school, they should "play safe" and keep them at home, informing the school that they are doing so. The fact that several parents take this view does not, however, mean that the school should be closed unless the considerations listed above indicate that this is the only sensible decision.

Communication Arrangements

- 3.6 It is essential that, when there is potential for school closures due to severe weather conditions, the Council can communicate quickly and clearly with parents. This is just as important in relation to schools which are to remain open as it is to those which are closed. The Council website, Call Centre and local media are now seen by many parents as the information channel in these situations. To make best use of the communication channels they offer, any decision to close should be taken as early in the day as possible and the Emergency School Closure Application used to communicate the decision. The main aim of the application is to alert the media and the Council communications team. It is still necessary for schools to follow the usual procedures (i.e. text messaging) to inform parents and carers. Staff and/or a notice posted at the school gates could prevent pupils from being left by parents at the start of the school day.
- 3.7 A step by step guide on the operation of the Emergency School Closure website is provided within the Application on each screen. Should any school have difficulty in accessing the Application they should contact the Technology Solutions Service Desk on: 01387 260346 or servicedesk@dumgal.gov.uk.
- 3.8 Schools should normally inform the Education Services Management Team at Headquarters (Woodbank) if they intend to close. In an emergency, the Headteacher may require to act independently. However, Education Services Headquarters (Woodbank) must be informed of any action taken as soon as possible.

Closure during the School Day

- 3.9 The safety and well-being of pupils are paramount. If in doubt, a child should not be released. Safe and speedy dismissal of pupils in the event of an emergency closure depends on the school and parents working in partnership.
- 3.10 Parents should:
- be fully aware of the procedures which will operate in any particular school should there be an emergency closure. This information appears in the school prospectus and on the school website.
 - give schools an emergency contact and should have told the children what to do in the event of an emergency closure.
 - provide the school with any specific instructions in respect of their child should the school close and should make it clear to their older children whether or not they may escort younger brothers/sisters to their destination.
 - give strict instructions to the children as to what they should do in the event of transport not turning up to take them to school.
- 3.11 Precautions to be taken:
- Reasonable attempts should be made to ensure that children and young people will go home to a safe environment should school be closed. Clearly, the relevance of the following precautions will be dependant upon the age of the child or young person.
 - It may be that a parent who collects his/her children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children should be sought before releasing pupils in this way.
 - If it is customary for pupils to walk home at the end of the school day, it would be reasonable for the school to release these pupils to walk home in an emergency but only if there were a parent or an identified adult expecting their arrival. Account should be taken also of the age of the pupil, the severity of weather conditions and the distance to be walked. It would not be

reasonable to release pupils with the instruction to return to school if they find no one at home.

- d. On occasion, teaching staff escort pupils home and return with them to school if there is no one at home to supervise them. Before this course of action is undertaken, due attention should be paid to the severity of the weather and to the pupil to teacher ratio in the escorted group.

3.12 For Children Remaining in School:

- a. Adequate supervision must be provided by members of teaching staff for those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school.
- b. In widespread, severe adverse weather where significant numbers of children cannot travel home, Education Services should be advised (so that consideration can be given to the either rest centre facilities or specialist transport).

Services

3.13 All those who provide services who will be affected by the closure should be informed as soon as possible after the decision to close or open a school. This includes:

- a. School Transport Providers. (The Sustainable Travel team within the Integrated Transport Service can assist with this process where pupils are transported by bus.) Note: Schools which share transport should make absolutely certain that each is aware of what the other is doing.
- b. School Crossing Patrols, Playground Supervisors, Catering, Cleaning and Janitorial Staff. Contact should be made with DG First Care and Facilities Management.

Weather and Traffic Conditions

3.14 The Headteacher, in conjunction with the driver/bus operator should make reasonable effort to establish the safety of the route due to weather and traffic conditions. Guidance is available from:

- a. <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>
- b. <http://trafficscotland.org/>

3.15 Routine Weather Forecasts. Daily meteorological forecasts are relayed direct to Infrastructure and Commissioning and DG First during the winter period.

3.16 Severe Weather.

- a. National Severe Weather Warnings issued to the Council are forwarded by e-mail to Winter Service staff and Education Services.
- b. Where additional advice is received from the Met Office Public Weather Service Advisor, this will be forwarded by the most appropriate means to Education Services.

3.17 The Head of Infrastructure and Commissioning will provide forecast information direct to the Director Education Services in periods when severe weather is expected.

Liaison

3.18 Immediately before each winter, DG First Neighbourhood Services will liaise with Education Services to confirm arrangements and contact points. Liaison continues through the winter period to ensure that communication links are in place.

3.19 During operations DG First Neighbourhood Services will maintain communications with Education Services Management Team using the schools closure list as a means for exception reporting.