The latest news on the Black Isle's response to Covid-19

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Welcome to the second edition of

# Black Isle Bulletin

the official newsletter of the Black Isle Partnership

We've gone a bit more digital for this issue, to make it easier for sharing - but kept the layout simple so its easy to print off and give to those without access to the internet.

## Venture Safely

On Wednesday 8th July the Black Isle Partnership will officially launch its **#venturesafely** campaign. As people start to move around more freely with the easing of lockdown the campaign aims to promote four key messages to help us all get through this unprecedented time as best we can. Roadside banners will be erected across the Black Isle. Residents, too, are being asked to get involved by printing off posters at home and displaying them in windows. A special edition of the free Black Isle Visitor Map will be readily available and this also carries the same key messages.

With a campaign of this kind it is impossible to cover every angle, or to include everybody's ideas and opinions.

But we trust everyone agrees that something is better than nothing. There are many concerns about how we progress safely into more routine day-to-day activities. The Black Isle has, with great good fortune and not a small amount of community spirit, got off very lightly compared to other parts of the UK. And of course we would all like to keep it that way. We hope you'll want to support this campaign and help demonstrate to the wider world that the Black isle is a community that continues to care.

For further information go to www.black-isle.info/coronavirus. When using social media please use **#venturesafely** and **#blackisle**



The design for the road-side banners which will be going up on 8th July.



An example of one of the A4 print-off-at-home posters - available on the website from Wednesday.

## Covid Induced Fear

A personal view from Councillor Gordon Adam:

'It is generally a lot easier to create fear than dispel it. This is particularly true of pandemics: with HIV/AIDS, governments of the time tried to frighten people to control the spread of the disease.

The problem was that many people assumed the disease was far more infectious than it really was, and those suspected of being HIV positive were often stigmatised for no good reason.

There are parallels with Covid-19, not exact of course but worth noting. The government advises remaining isolated

and at home as the best protection from the virus, but the consequence that incomers such as tourists can be stigmatised. The government has not helped by sticking to a nationwide approach to Coronavirus control. This was fair enough initially to keep the lockdown message simple, but a one-size-fits-all approach to easing lockdown is not helpful in the Highlands where infections have been low, but the economy – heavily reliant on tourism and hospitality - will be particularly hard hit.

So many people on the Black Isle are worried – those reliant on tourism on one hand, and those afraid of tourists infecting them on the other. But what is the risk of catching Covid-19? Just seven people under 65 in the Highlands have died in the last three months, and 42 people over 65, out of a total population of 235,000. Sadly just under half of them were in care homes. Overall, this suggests the risks of being infected in the community are low.

There are other questions, including: Are locals at increased risk of infection from tourists? Is there additional risk if tourists do their shopping locally? What about tourists passing on the disease in the street?

The government has not given specific guidance on these, but common sense can provide some answers:

* Self-catering accommodation is safer than B&Bs where hosts are sharing their homes with tourists. But a lot of risk can be eliminated through deep cleaning protocols that are being developed.

* Shopping: providing social distancing is observed, tourists do not pose a greater risk than locals.

* It is widely accepted that there is minimal risk in Covid-19 being transmitted out of doors unless there is close contact.

Ultimately it is a balance of risk: trying to eliminate the risk of catching Covid-19 on one hand, with the increased damage that this will inflict on the economy, and mental and physical health; or opening up tourism sooner rather than later so that the rest of the season is saved, businesses survive and people can return to work – but with the caveat there may be a small risk of new Covid infection.

Not an easy choice, but it is important to examine the facts as best we can and then assess the risks accordingly.'

## The Coronavirus And Our Children

Anne Mackay, chair of Killearnan CC, writes:

*"Each child belongs to all of us and they will bring us a tomorrow in direct relation to the responsibility we have shown to them."* Maya Angelou.

The Media is celebrating the easing of lock-down. Wow! You can drink in your local; football is back; High Street shops are returning to business; there's even a task force to look into the possibility of reopening English bowling alleys.

So what about the children?

Government response: Well you see we're kind of looking into that – schools and things – the workers will need to get back into the workplace – the economy will need kick-starting ... Maybe the kids can all just go back sometime - they don't suffer much from the virus – hardly at all – not many have died. They'll be able to catch up...simple!!

Talk, Talk, Talk!

Eventually the authorities almost got their act together where the NHS and Economy were concerned. Eventually billions were found to set up pop-up hospitals, get PPE for front line workers, furlough workers and pay their wages and prop up companies. (Pity about the tracing App.) Local Councils set up food hubs and such and sent out 'Advice'. Volunteer groups swung into action.

But what about the children? Where are their emergency billions ? What about the teen-agers - robbed of their rites of passage through S4.S5.S6 exams towards a career and the rest of their lives? Fortunately, they seem to be suffering less mental stress than the 8- 12 year olds. It seems the teenagers' natural rebelliousness, their native intelligence and their skills with social media have led them to develop amazing coping strategies but what of their future? Perhaps, the enforced freedom from the constraints of formalised learning will result in an entrepreneurial, self-motivated generation. After all, it was the drop outs who developed Microsoft, Face Book and the like.

The worst affected are surely the pre-secondary pupils. Most are spending their time on their phones and notebooks (if they have them). They have shut down. The structure in their lives, so important in giving them the sense of security that they need to develop and flourish, has suddenly disappeared. The bedroom has become their haven; day has been turned into night. Outside the big, bad virus looms. They have not yet developed language and reasoning skills to a level which can help them understand the situation in which they find themselves or even to express their confusion.

Home Learning? Most teachers, both Primary and Secondary, have pulled out all the stops. They have enhanced their own IT skills and turned themselves into

Media programme producers. Many contact each of their pupils regularly to see how they're getting on. But, as with secondary education, assessment has all but vanished.

And there are such wide disparities. So much unfairness. Just take the fact that some primary schools have had to ration the issue of Chromebooks, handing them out only to P7. Not all parents are wealthy enough to provide notebooks or quiet places to work or active help with assignments.

Parents are asking: How safe will our children be if they return to school? What method of virus testing will be used? How will schools make sure younger children are keeping a safe distance from one another? Will kids/staff have to wear masks? How often will hands be washed; how will hygiene standards be enhanced – school toilets are notoriously 'smelly'?How will intervals be organised? How will senior pupils be helped to progress towards their planned careers? How will schools decide which pupils will be in school and which at home – will it be by age or potential – what social inequalities will 'grouping' children set in train? How will the safe distance requirements be met with on the school bus?

Conclusion: get practical you lot in Westminster and Holyrood! Appoint a UK emergency force trained in logistics – from the military? – the sort of people who can organise and carry out manoeuvres like the D Day landings. Liaise with each local education authority; weigh up the capacity of each school –staff and accommodation; increase staffing levels; provide testing for all pupils and staff; issue masks; commandeer nearby public buildings or acquire and set up temporary porta-cabins; hire more cleaning squads and supply disinfectants; increase the fleet of buses. And find the funds. Our children need and deserve a grown-up, nationwide strategy.

I agree with Professor Calum Semple of the University of Liverpool – an advisor on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies:

"It does seem a bit of a paradox I can go to the pub ... but my teenage daughter can't go to school."

School playgrounds have been deserted for months. Come August, might they be echoing to the sounds of children once more?

## Further Education? Who Pays For Travel?

Information from Nige Shapcott of Cromarty:

'One thing that is clear is that it's a time of change and uncertainty. One of the issues that has arisen is that of young people who are having to change plans for their future as a result of the pandemic. Businesses they were planning to work in, or take part in apprenticeship training with, have themselves had to change their plans. One of the clear choices is to look at Further and Higher Education to gain qualifications and training for future careers.

Unfortunately, people can easily be put off examining this option by their knowledge of local bus fares and by the reality of the cost of getting to college using public transport. But there are ways in which people attending courses can have their travel costs subsidised:

The Educational Maintenance Allowance and the FE Bursary from Inverness College, UHI can provide travel funding to help with travel costs. At the moment, those attending could apply travel funding of £22.50 or £30 a week depending on whether the course was 3/4 days a week. This covers the cost of the Mega Rider ticket.

Full time: see here

Part time: see here

You can approach the Student Funding Team by emailing: funding.ic@uhi.ac.uk.

For Higher Education students they fund their own travel out of their SAAS payments, more information here.

There are lots of really good opportunities, start by looking at the website

## Community Focus

With each issue of the Bulletin we want to end by focusing on one of the communities in the Black Isle and find out a bit more of what's been going on locally. First off is North Kessock and Helena Macleod has sent us this update:

Kessock Kindness is the Covid community response established by the Residents Association of North Kessock (RANK) to meet the needs of people in the Knockbain area during the pandemic. Initiated by a community survey at the start of lockdown, dozens of residents have volunteered their time to support vulnerable groups, offering to deliver groceries and prescriptions, answer the helpline or walk dogs for people in their neighbourhood. Twice weekly virtual cafés take place on Mondays and Thursdays, helping to keep the community connected by sharing up-to-date news and stories.

The community-led café on Monday has evolved into a themed event with local people sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise across a broad range of topics. Residents have discovered new-found talents, inspiring a unique bonding experience as a community in lockdown. The variety of presentations, workshops and demos include: community wellbeing, soda bread making, cross-stitch and brooch making by the 3R group, social media and online safety training by AbilityNet, a composting & wormery demo, and a presentation on the impact of social isolation and loneliness on mental health & wellbeing. The Kessock Regatta was re-enacted with presentations, images and videos from outstanding speakers, creating fond memories of previous Regattas and a good time was had by all at the Kessock Pub quiz night.

With the easing of lockdown, Kessock Kindness is collaborating with The Old Ticket Office to host outdoor workshops and cafés in the coastal garden. The glass painting demo and workshop has boosted confidence for budding arts and crafting enthusiasts as they decorate bottle lights with dolphins and dragonflies. The novel blend of virtual cafés and outdoor events is creating a unique and exciting experience in the community as more ideas come forward to create Kessock Kindness baby blankets.

The next steps will see the formal launch of the Telephone Befriending service in July with 12 fully trained Kessock Befrienders providing an invaluable service for people in the community. Referrals are welcome from across the Black Isle to support family members, friends or neighbours with a helpful service aimed at tackling isolation and loneliness. The volunteers are supported by the Befriending Coordinator, with ongoing training, support and supervision provided by the Highland Hospice Befriending Team. Please contact Helena at Board@residentsnorthkessock.com or phone the Kessock Kindness helpline on 01463 898128 for more information.

Helena is just one of many community representatives in the Black Isle who have been meeting every week since March (via Zoom). If you have any suggestions or ideas you'd like discussed by this partnership, please contact your local representative, (via your Community Council), or e-mail community@black-isle.info

We trust you have found this issue useful. Please share widely. To be sure of receiving further editions ask to be put on the mailing list via subscribe .

This edition of Black Isle Bulletin was edited by Jon Palmer

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