

Emergency Situations and Adverse Weather – HR Guidance

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INTRODUCTION

In a major emergency Scottish Borders Council has a responsibility to respond both in support of the Emergency Services and in co-ordinating the longer term measures to alleviate hardship and repair damage. The Council also has a duty to maintain normal services

A major emergency is defined as:

Circumstances involving a serious disruption of life arising with little or no warning, causing or threatening death or injury to numbers of people, or extensive damage to property, or contamination of the environment, on a scale which is in excess of the capacity of the public services operating under normal conditions and requiring the special mobilisation, organisation and co-ordination of those services.

In a major emergency staff are likely to be involved in manning the Emergency Centre (based at Council Headquarters) manning Emergency Rest Centres (ERC's) based around the Borders or in the location of the actual emergency or on other emergency duties. This may include duties outwith normal working hours, including night and weekend working.

During these situations, we need to ensure that we can **keep essential services running, while at the same time treating staff fairly and equally.**

During an emergency the Chief Executive or nominated representative can declare an exemption from the Drivers' Hours Regulations. In this situation relevant staff will be notified as soon as possible.

The decision to close workplaces /schools or allow an early finish for employees will be decided by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Emergency Response Team. In the absence of the Chief Executive the decision will be taken by an appropriate Director as necessary. The decision will be communicated through all appropriate communication systems.

There is a staff web page:

https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20027/working_for_us/855/employees/1

available to anyone who has access to the internet from any device. We will post updates and relevant briefings/guidance for staff on the page during a period of adverse weather so please regularly check this page. Email, Yammer and the intranet will also be used to provide this information to staff with access to these.

The Council, in conjunction with multi-agency partners, are generally able to give advance warning of adverse weather. The SB Alert free emergency messaging service is used to alert the public to these warnings and staff are encouraged to sign up to the service. Where advance warning has been received employees should make arrangements to take work and suitable IT devices home. (If not already working from home).

SCOPE

This guidance applies to all employees of Scottish Borders Council.

KEY POINTS

- On the first day of an emergency or adverse weather SBC are flexible in terms of allowing staff who are in the workplace to go home early etc, and we authorise managers to credit time to a normal day.

- Thereafter we ask staff to report as normal for **essential services** such as:
 - Emergency Response Team
 - Neighbourhood staff
 - Waste Services staff
 - Homecare staff
 - Care home staff
 - EDT staff
 - Customer Services staff
 - Social Work staff
 - Business Support staff

This is to ensure we can protect our vulnerable people and respond to the emergency effectively.

During a prolonged period of adverse weather we have access to vehicles and services which can assist with bringing staff to and from work and taking them to remote areas to help vulnerable people or those needing home care or medical attention. This is co-ordinated through the Emergency Centre . Guidance on how to access this support will be communicated through the staff website and other communication channels (detailed above) as required.

- Staff not considered essential to maintaining vital frontline and emergency response services should work from home where possible. Where that is not possible they should report to their nearest work place. Teachers should report to their nearest open primary/secondary school respectively, but if unable to travel are expected to be able to work from home on things like lesson plans and exam support etc. SBC mandatory training on [SBLearn](#) can also be accessed via SBC devices and staff's own devices via web access.
- Staff not in essential roles that are unable to travel to work can also contribute by helping in their local communities. Staff can either support their local Resilient Community group, where there is one, or volunteer to assist in the emergency response within their community. All this will be considered as working time, providing staff register their attendance. Details of this process will be published on the staff website as required.
https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20027/working_for_us/855/employees/1
- Only if all these options fail, then we ask staff to use toil or leave to cover absences following the first day. We also ensure that we are flexible in allowing staff to make up the time over a reasonable period.

This approach ensures that we comply with employment law and also treats staff fairly and equally. It would be impossible to maintain essential services and respond to emergencies if we did not differentiate between those who are working and those who are not.

SCHEME OF PAYMENT

The Chief Executive will determine the start and end of any designated major emergency period for payment purposes. During any such designated period the arrangements detailed below will apply. Any variation of these arrangements may be made at the discretion of the Chief Executive during unforeseen or extreme circumstances.

All employees will be paid at their normal rate of pay regardless of the emergency duties undertaken.

During an emergency situation if an employee refuses alternative working accommodation or homeworking they will only be paid for the hours worked.

Where individuals are required to undertake very exceptional responsibilities, greatly in excess of their routine duties, payment of an honorarium may be approved by the Chief Executive after the major emergency period has ended.

STAFF WELLBEING AND SUPPORT DURING AN EMERGENCY

Scottish Borders Council values the wellbeing of all staff and recognises that additional support may be needed during an emergency and for some time after the event.

All staff have access to the Employee Helpline which operates 24 hours a day 7 days a week tel 0800 882 4102 or by visiting the P.A.M. Assist Website www.pamassist.co.uk. The log in details are:

Username: Borders
Password: Council

The helpline offers free confidential advice and support on issues such as stress, wellbeing, relationships and financial concerns.. Pam Assist have qualified counsellors who are available to assist staff in coping with an emergency situation.

In addition the Council has access to an Occupational Health (OH) service which can provide confidential health advice and support to managers and employees over the telephone.

There are also Mental Health First Aiders, who are members of staff trained to listen non-judgmentally, give reassurance and information and encourage the person to get professional help and encourage self-help strategies.

Contact can be made by telephone: 01835 825036 (Lync: Mental Health First Aiders) or by e-mail: MHFirstAiders@scotborders.gov.uk.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ALL STAFF FAQs

Q: I can't get to work or I'm worried about travelling due to the weather conditions, what should I do?

A: Where the workplace is open employees should make every effort to report for work at the recognised start time. In poor weather conditions where offices/schools are open, it is the employee's responsibility to make the decision as to whether or not it is safe for them to make the journey to work. Where routes to work are open but an employee decides not to make the journey, for example because they are worried about the driving conditions staff should make the effort to find alternative transport.

When adverse weather is anticipated, staff are expected to make provision to get to work the following day, eg.park vehicles in an accessible place if they need to access them. If a school or office is closed for pupils/clients, staff should also check with their line manager to establish if the setting is open for staff to work from.

If staff genuinely cannot make travel arrangements to get to their workplace, they should contact their Line Manager. In these circumstances staff may be asked to take, Toil or Annual Leave. See “Key Points” above for further guidance.

Q: My workplace is closed, what should I do?

A: Where specific workplaces are closed due to an emergency event or adverse weather, staff should contact their line manager for guidance on an alternative workplace, alternative working arrangements, community or emergency support roles as per key points above. Advice will also be provided on the staff webpage – https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20027/working_for_us/855/employees/1

Q: When is home-working agreed?

A: If the weather warning indicates that it is not safe to travel then employees will be expected to work, as far as possible, on tasks at home. This will be agreed with your line-manager.

For some groups of staff this may be difficult and line-managers may deploy people to support local communities or wider Council tasks. Staff should regularly check the staff webpage and Communications.

https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20027/working_for_us/855/employees/1 for information.

Q: What happens if my child's school is closed and I have childcare issues?

A: Employees are asked to plan for such events to ensure they can attend their place of work. If you are not already working from home and are required to attend a work location, but you need to remain at home because of childcare issues – you should contact your Line Manager to discuss the situation. In these circumstances staff would be expected to use toil or leave.

Q: I am unable to travel to my normal place of work, what should I do?

A: Speak to your line Manager as you may be required to work at a different location nearer to your home dependent on the needs of the service.

Q: I've been told to work at an alternative workplace to normal due to the emergency. This means I have to travel further than normal, will I be compensated?

A: Wherever possible staff should make use of the pool car scheme for such travel. However, if this is not possible and staff have to use their own vehicle, a disturbance allowance will be paid to employees where their place of employment is changed by the Council and the distance travelled is greater than normal travel. Claims should be made through Business World where available or HR Shared Services.

TEACHING STAFF FAQs

Q: Who makes the decision to close all schools?

A: The decision to close all schools in the Borders will be taken by the Chief Executive, or in their absence the appropriate Director, in consultation with Emergency Response Team and only where absolutely necessary and where conditions are widespread. The decision will be communicated to parents via Groupcall, Radio Borders and the Council's website and social media channels.

Q: Who makes the decision to close a school before the school day has started?

A: This is a joint decision taken by the Emergency Response Team in conjunction with the Headteacher. The decision will be based on the weather forecast, availability of school transport, the dynamic risk assessment, and school specific information such as pupil/teacher ratios.

Q: Who makes the decision to close a school early?

A: This decision is made based on local conditions, weather forecast and staffing ratios. If a Headteacher is concerned about the weather in their area they should contact the Emergency Response Team to gain more information about weather predictions. Teachers, once home safely, are expected to work as usefully as possible for the rest of the normal working day. For example this can be an opportunity for preparatory work or to complete outstanding mandatory training which can be accessed through [.SBLearn.](#)

Q: I'm a school teacher and my school is closed, what do I do?

A: Where a school is closed to pupils, teachers are required to contact their Headteacher/school management team and a decision will be made as to whether the teacher will do collegiate work, personal work, or work from home. Teachers who are unable to reach their normal place of work should try to contact or report to the nearest primary school if they are primary teachers, and the nearest secondary if they are secondary teachers. This is required to provide cover in local schools where teachers who are based in the school may not be able to attend because of the conditions. www.scotborders.gov.uk/staff

Q: I'm a member of educational support staff and my school is closed. What should I do?

A: Educational support staff are expected to report to the nearest Primary School in the case of Primary staff and the nearest Secondary School for Secondary staff. This isn't limited to safe walking distance, as long as it is safe to travel. This is required to provide cover in local schools where staff who are based in the school may not be able to attend because of weather conditions. Other school staff, eg Catering, Cleaning and Janitorial, will be advised by their Line Manager on what they should do. The school may be closed to pupils but it may be available for support and teaching staff to work from and guidance should be sought from Line Managers. Staff guidance will be published on the staff section of the SBC website https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20027/working_for_us/855/employees/1

Q: As a senior leader, if my school is closed but my local school is open with no SMT, do I assume HT responsibility if I am able to attend?

A: Yes.