



Scottish Police Federation

5 Woodside Place Glasgow G3 7QF

JCC Circular 16 of 2020

Ref: CS/LS

18 March 2020

Dear Colleague

COVID-19 – SPF Update - 18 March 2020

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak continues to be the single most important issue facing us as a nation. Both the Prime Minister and First Minister used language yesterday (17 March) describing the challenge as the biggest peace time mission our nations have faced in our lifetimes. Outside Scotland and the wider UK, we see Governments across the world taking actions that lend support to this description. This ought to leave no one in any doubt as to the sheer scale of what is before us.

Separate to our entirely legitimate concerns in respect of our own health and wellbeing, and indeed that of our wider families, we have seen a dramatic decline in social and commercial activity, and thousands of our fellow citizens face perilous economic realities as their jobs and businesses are quite literally disappearing before their eyes.

This does not diminish the concerns we have as individuals. The Government issued advice rarely fits neatly into the realities of the conflicting priorities we face, and we are often left to balance one piece of advice against another.

As police officers we have always occupied a unique position in our society and whilst there is an understandable focus on the health and care providers at this time, the reality is that we continue to represent what is arguably one of the most important pillars of our society.

The public understandably, and increasingly look to police officers and the police service as a source of comfort, stability, and reassurance at what are otherwise uncertain times. Each and every one of us has a role in delivering on that public expectation and I am confident we will more than meet that challenge.

There can be little doubt that as police officers we face uncertainty and considerable disruption in the weeks and months ahead. The nature of the beast with which we are dealing means that our responses are often overtaken by events and we will appear more reactive than proactive. Indeed we have had real experience of this in the past few days where significant policy decisions were effectively consigned to the bin as Government advice changed dramatically but mercifully before (what would have been redundant internal) guidance had been issued.

Police officers are the single most flexible resource in the public sector and emergency services. We can be asked to work anywhere, and at any time. In times of exceptional public crisis, we need to prepare for the reality that our shifts will change, that our rest days and leave periods may be cancelled, and that our working days will be long. It will not always be possible to provide as much notice of these changes as we would like, and the ask from your families supporting you in delivering your duty will be considerable.

It is with that in mind that it may be prudent to consider how those of you who have children of school age will be able to manage in the event the Government, or your local authority decides to close its schools.

Just last night (17 March) the First Minister indicated that it was highly possible that schools could shut within days. Clearly the First Minister did not make that statement lightly. The SPF has already been in discussion with the Service in respect of the obvious challenges this will present for many of our colleagues. The Service is working at exceptional pace to ensure it is able to respond practically to the organisational challenges this would present.

At this precise time however we simply do not know what (if any) Governmental advice might accompany a policy decision on school closures. Any accompanying advice will need to be considered as part of the police service organisational response, and we will work quickly with the Service to ensure this is communicated promptly. You should however prepare for a lag between the Government advice and what that means in terms of practical guidance from the Service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Calum Steele', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Calum Steele
General Secretary

Note – As this circular was being finalised the First Minister announced that her planning assumption was that schools would close in Scotland from the end of the week and that people should not assume they will reopen after the Easter Break