

# Children's Services

## SEVERE WEATHER & PUBLIC EMERGENCY PLAN FOR SCHOOLS

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**AUTHORISING OFFICER:** SIMON NEWLAND  
Operations Director, Education

**AUTHORISING OFFICER'S SIGNATURE:**

*Simon Newland*

**AUTHOR OF PUBLICATION:** SANDRA BARLEY  
Business Delivery Manager

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## PROCEDURES TO DEAL WITH THE CONSEQUENTIAL ISSUES ARISING FROM SEVERE WEATHER OR A PUBLIC EMERGENCY

This guidance sets out the actions that schools need to take in the event of severe weather or if a public emergency is declared by the Local Authority.

### 1. Closure Decisions

- 1.1 The decision to close a school due to severe weather, or when responding to a public emergency, should be taken by the Headteacher based on the following:
  - local conditions
  - this guidance
  - an assessment of risk
  - information from the Local Authority
- 1.2 Schools with reduced teaching staff should consider staying open and providing group activities to limit the impact on working parents.
- 1.3 If the Council advises a school or a group of schools of a public emergency that may require their school(s) to close, the **HCC Warn and Inform procedure should be followed – see Appendix A, page 6.**
- 1.4 Where possible, advanced warning will be given. Where this has been issued, schools should consider how this might impact on their establishment, for example:
  - staffing issues
  - fuel supplies
  - catering supplies
  - transport issues, e.g., Passenger Transport Unit, taxis etc.
- 1.5 Where it is likely that there will be prolonged severe weather or closures related to a public emergency, a Local Authority team will be set up to co-ordinate and support services. Regular emails will be sent to Heads, giving the County picture and any new information as it becomes available.
- 1.6 In the event of an emergency or closure due to bad weather, schools should email [schoolscns@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:schoolscns@hertfordshire.gov.uk) outlining the issue in the first instance. They can also call **07919 391934** for support over a weekend if business critical.
- 1.7 Should the school require any additional assistance, for example if the premises has sustained serious damage, please follow the guidance in your local emergency response plan – there is an updated [Schools' Emergency Response Plan](#) template on the Schools' Grid.

In the event of a property related emergency, schools should:

- contact their relevant emergency service
- contact their retained property/contractor
- notify their relevant insurer(s)

For schools with HCC insurance, further advice can be sought from the insurance Team by emailing [schoolsbmt@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:schoolsbmt@hertfordshire.gov.uk).

Further information and support can be found on the on the Schools' Grid by visiting [Property Related Emergencies](#).

If the incident is critical, please notify the Local Authority using the contact below:

Phone: 01992 555703 / 01992 556438 during business hours  
07919 391934 out of hours

Email: [resilience.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:resilience.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk) / [schoolscns@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:schoolscns@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

## **2. HCC Information Telephone Helpline**

- 2.1 Information and updates about any interruptions to the normal business of HCC services can be obtained by telephoning the HCC helpline on **01992 556616**. It is only updated when an incident affecting business continuity has occurred.
- 2.2 The helpline is also used to provide information during any other emergencies, which may require us to close any HCC buildings.

## **3. Staffing**

- 3.1 Unless specifically told otherwise, staff will be expected to use their best endeavours to attend work without putting themselves or others at risk. When the Police recommend that motorists undertake only essential journeys, this is considered to include travel to work and school.
- 3.2 Headteachers should ensure there is an up-to-date list of home contact/mobile phone details for all staff and parents.
- 3.3 Where it is deemed too unsafe or difficult for staff to attend their workplace, other options should be considered.

## **4. Preparation for severe weather**

- 4.1 In the event of a prolonged period of severe cold weather make sure that the heating is left on and set to 5-10 degrees, during 'out of hours' periods for frost protection purposes. Where appropriate, ensure there is adequate fuel for prolonged closures.
- 4.2 Brief staff in advance to ensure they know what is expected of them.
- 4.3 Brief parents, children etc. in advance to ensure they understand where they can get up to date information from, e.g., Parent mail, School Website, school text or message on the school gate.
- 4.4 Ensure regular suppliers/contractors are informed of procedures and confirm arrangements are in place for essential services/deliveries.

- 4.5 Where schools are open, risk assessments must be undertaken to ensure the health and safety of staff, pupils and all site users. Inspections of paths and walkways should be carried out regularly and documented. This should include local arrangements for clearing and salting when ice or snow appears, as well as any failures to the surfaces.

If the school is insured with HCC, the Council's insurance section will deal with any liability issues that arise. Any claim that is made to the school should be passed to the insurance section immediately – email [schoolsbmt@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:schoolsbmt@hertfordshire.gov.uk).

The team will then process the claim and deal directly with the claimant, or their appointed representatives.

- 4.6 Where gales or high wind warnings have been issued, the site should be checked for dead or damaged branches/trees and other potential hazards to people or property.
- 4.7 Where it is not possible for some staff and/or children to return home, schools should ensure there are plans in place to provide warmth and hot refreshments.
- 4.8 In extreme circumstances, HCC may request that schools or other establishments be used as rest centres for members of the public.
- 4.9 All schools should have the retained services of a property consultant to provide emergency cover and support. Further information and guidance can be found on the Schools' Grid by visiting the [Property Related Emergencies](#) and [Premises and Sites](#) pages.

## **5. Reopening of schools following closure**

- 5.1 When the severe weather has passed, establishments should check their premises before announcing that it will reopen. The manager or key-holder should inspect the premises for signs of damage, e.g., heating failure, flooding, burst pipes or damaged trees.
- 5.2 School sites that have experienced damage serious enough to warrant declaring a Critical Incident should follow their School Emergency Response Plan.
- 5.3 Head teachers should use their school contact systems to advise staff and parents / carers of the situation and send an updated email to message to the Local Authority via [SchoolsCNS@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:SchoolsCNS@hertfordshire.gov.uk).

## **6. Responding to severe weather**

- 6.1 Should a school need to close due to severe weather it should email [SchoolsCNS@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:SchoolsCNS@hertfordshire.gov.uk) to make the Local Authority aware.

6.2 The school should then use all possible means available to inform parents and staff that the school will be closed, for example:

- Send a message using Parent Mail
- Send a text message
- Publish information on your own website
- Leave a message on the school answer machine
- Have contact numbers for staff and parents and others to hand and use a cascade system
- Leave a message on the main entrance or gate and in the case of schools, ensure someone is there to meet any children/parents etc who may turn up
- Let parents and others know that you will use the above methods

6.3 Try to make the decision as soon as possible but if a decision cannot be made until the morning, please send your notifications out as early as possible to reach staff, parents and children before they set off for school.

6.4 Schools should keep a copy of these procedures with their copy of the

[Schools' Emergency Response Plan](#)

## APPENDIX A

### WARN AND INFORM

If the Local Authority needs to contact a school or a group of schools to notify them of any public emergency that may affect their school or locality, the following procedure will be followed:

- An email will be sent via [SchoolsCNS@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:SchoolsCNS@hertfordshire.gov.uk) or [resilience.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:resilience.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk)
- The emergency contact(s) listed on Solero will also be contacted by telephone. **Please ensure you keep your contact details current by updating Solero, or if you have not added any details, please remember to do so, so that we have your details to hand should we need to contact you in the event of an emergency situation.**
- Out of hours, you may be contacted by the Local Authority's Resilience Team either by email from [resilience.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:resilience.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk) or by telephone from 07919 391934