

*"Working together to help South West Mull and Iona to grow socially and economically in a way which is sustainable and fitting for our communities."*



## South West Mull and Iona Development Response to "Covid-19 – A Framework for Decision Making"

South West Mull and Iona Development (SWMID) is a development trust which aims to facilitate social and economic regeneration in the area which covers the south west of the Isle of Mull and the Isle of Iona.

SWMID are supportive of the Scottish Government document "COVID-19 – A Framework for Decision Making" and are in agreement with the careful and balanced approach which is being proposed. While it is necessary that we remain in lockdown for some time to come, we are clear that our communities should transition through lockdown and onto the next stages alongside the rest of Scotland when the time is right.

SWMID's comments on the framework in relation to our locality:

### **Health**

The health of people in our communities is a priority and ensuring that the transition through lockdown is considered and measured is vital. We appreciate the Scottish Government approach which focuses on "safeguarding human rights and upholding human dignity". Our area has an older demographic and the aim of introducing measures to protect those who are vulnerable whilst moving to a new normal is welcomed. The framework also recognises the impact of lockdown and the harms associated with it on mental health. SWMID appreciate the Scottish Government approach which identifies the interrelation between the societal, economic and health effects and seeks to balance them to minimize overall harm, this will be vital in efforts to preserve mental health over this difficult time.

### **Tourism**

Our economy is heavily dependent on tourism. The impacts of the lockdown felt by providers and businesses will remain for years to come, with some businesses, potentially, being unable to recover. While the physical health of people is of the utmost importance, the balance proposed in the document allows for a gradual move to lessening restrictions, allowing for a managed transitioning from lockdown, when the time is right. Visitors returning in the numbers that we are used to will not happen soon. SWMID support a gradual move to welcoming visitors, after lockdown, in line with the strategies put in place by the government for the rest of the country. This will give the many people who rely on tourism for their income an opportunity to gradually rebuild after the impact of COVID-19 on this season.

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A high proportion of businesses rely on income from each Summer season to see them through the winter, and may lose the entire Summer 2020 season; this must be considered in support offered by the government to ensure that financial help is available for an extended period. Due to the seasonal nature of work in our area, many people rely on having more than one way of earning a living, the result is that some individuals and businesses are falling through the cracks in their eligibility for funding.

Clarity will be of the utmost importance when implementing the easing of travel restrictions. The Scottish Government must give clear messages to guide accommodation providers and potential visitors regarding the ability to travel and the necessary physical distancing measures which accommodation providers should implement. It is essential that systems are in place to ensure that during the "new normal" phase, where there will potentially be more people on the islands, food supplies and medical care will be safeguarded, while shielding and vulnerable people continue to receive the support they need.

## **Education**

The First Minister has stated that it is unlikely that children and young people will return to school in the near future. It is imperative that pupils only return to school when it is safe to do so and measures such as a gradual and more staggered return are being considered. In the SWMID operating area, 40 pupils travel by ferry to Oban for high school every week and stay in an Argyll and Bute Council owned hostel between Monday and Friday. It is crucial that our children return to school alongside their peers with methods and support in place to ensure that any requirements, such as physical distancing, are achievable and do not disadvantage them because of their unique situation. Consideration should also be given to further and higher education and how young people can begin and continue their studies after school.

## **Connectivity**

The framework is based on a balanced and gradual transition out of lockdown and it is expected that many people will remain working at home for the foreseeable future and that the first stages of children returning to school could see a blend of in school and at home periods. SWMID appreciate this rational approach, however the digital connectivity of the area in which we live is not fit for purpose and since lockdown began we have heard from adults who are working from home, parents of children who are learning at home and people who are shielding to tell us that the poor broadband and lack of 4G has resulted in extra stress and decreased their ability to carry out necessary tasks and communication. The pandemic has further highlighted the need for fit for purpose connectivity. Moving forward, and in the interest of equality, SWMID would like to see connectivity for areas such as ours to be moved forward as a high priority.

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## **Conclusion**

Overall SWMID see the Framework for Decision Making as a welcome beginning to the conversation about the transition from lockdown. We feel that the document is based on strong principles and are fully supportive of the gradual and managed move away from current restrictions, with the whole of Scotland moving together, when it is safe to do so.