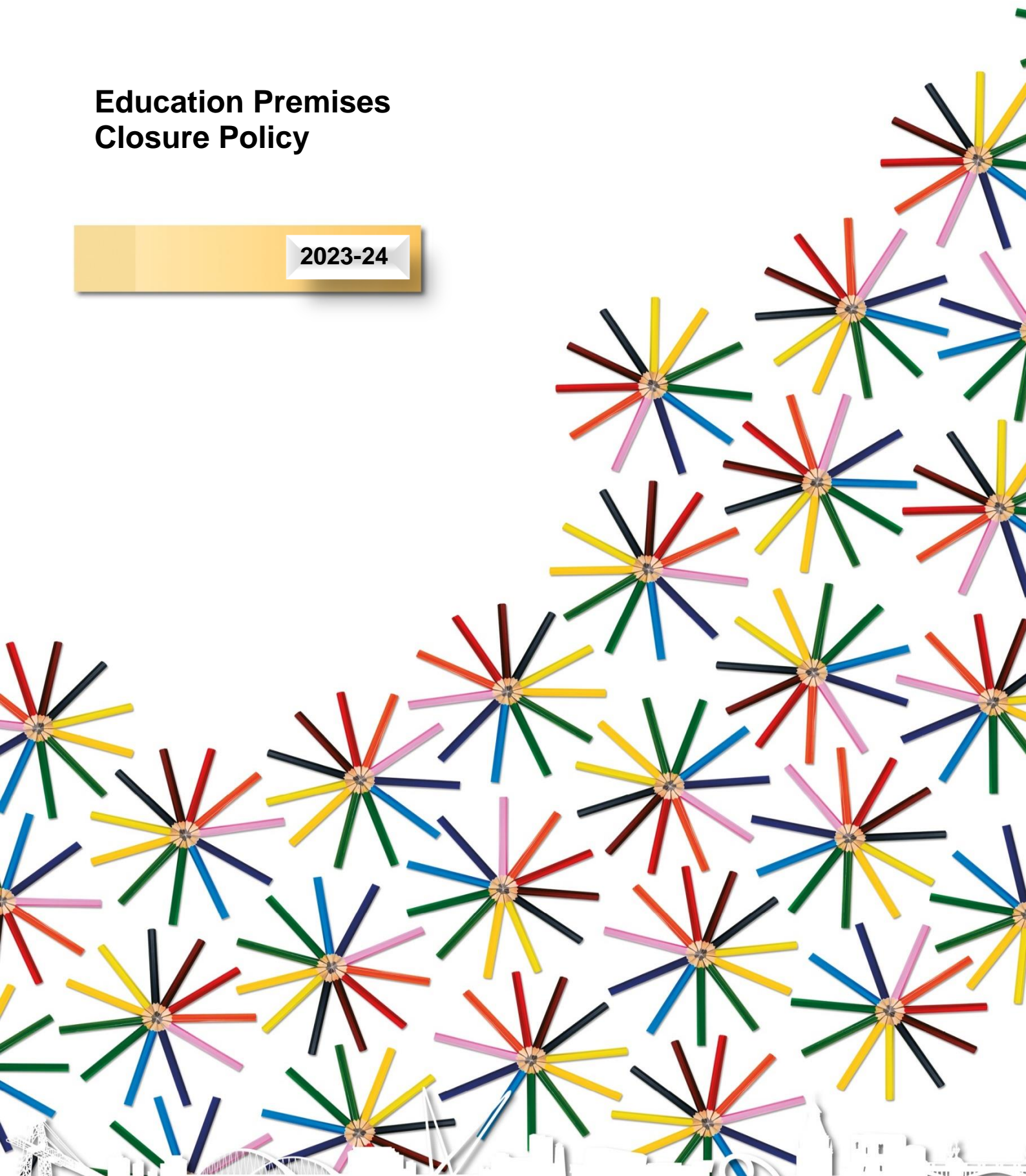


Education Premises Closure Policy

2023-24



Newport City Council - Education Service

Education Premises Closure Policy

1. Purpose

1.1 This Guidance Note provides Head Teachers, Chairs of Governing Bodies, and Premises Managers (PM) with advice regarding the closure of their premises.

1.2 The default position stands that all schools are open. Therefore, notification that a school is open is not required.

1.3 A notification of education premises closure is in respect of one full school day. Therefore, a notification should be issued / received each day of closure for example, in the event of inclement weather.

1.4 Governing bodies are responsible for ensuring that schools have an Emergency Plan in place. School emergency planning includes the notification of closure for any longer period and for any other situation e.g. the management of the heating or water supply, electricity supply failure. Such a notification is often as a result of an emergency or urgent critical but planned works on sites.

2. Background

2.1 This guidance note has been updated to incorporate the recommendations in previous years from the Overview & Scrutiny Forum for Young People's Services (OSF for YPS), following a review of the closure of schools resulting from snowfall. The five recommendations directly emerging from that review are detailed in Section 3 below.

2.2 Historically responsible officers for sites have contacted the authority and have taken the opportunity of contacting ad hoc media groups to notify of a closure. Even though this seems a good way of informing parents, service users and the public it does not always reach the officers who need to act upon the information. Therefore, a reporting procedure is required for all closures to ensure sound communication channels are in place for the safety and wellbeing of pupils.

2.3 The **responsible officers of all school sites are asked not to individually notify media groups** as this service can be abused, as well as in-accurate information given.

3. OSF for YPS Recommendations

3.1 That the decision to close a school remains the responsibility of the Head Teacher, in consultation with the Chair of the Governing Body.

3.2 That, in future, the decision to close a school to pupils is made and reported separately to the decision to close that school to staff.

3.3 That the costs incurred by Grounds Maintenance in clearing schools sites of snow are recharged to the schools in future, and that this and other budget pressures continue to be monitored by the Newport Schools Forum.



3.4 That schools should be encouraged to take part in the review of the *Winter Maintenance Plan* so that their sites can be included in the Authority-wide response to extreme winter weather.

3.5 That the Council continues to work with schools to ensure that emergency plans are in place for every school, which include procedures to be followed in the event of heavy or prolonged snowfall occurring in the future. This work will be taken forward by the Education Business Manager.

4. Procedure

4.1 This procedure has regard for the OSF for YPS five recommendations in Section 3 above and is to be used in all cases of a closure from heating failure to inclement weather conditions. The service has now been simplified to avoid confusion and inaccurate information being distributed.

4.2 It is also the aim of the current procedure to have all notifications on the Council website by 08.00 each morning. It is recommended that you notify the e-mail address as early as possible, to enable the information to be acted upon.

The following steps are to guide you through reporting a closure:

1. In the event that there is a risk of potential closure, the Premises Manager or nominated competent person is to assess the situation on site and make an accurate decision following agreement by the Head Teacher in consultation with the Chair of the Governing Body on whether:
 - a) It is safe to open the premises to pupils, or
 - b) It is safe to open the premises to staff, or
 - c) To implement a closure, and if so, what is the basis / rationale for closure.
2. The notification and basis for closure must have regard for the OSF for YPS recommendation 3.2 above and be clear in interpretation by notifying one or both of the following:
 - a) A decision has been taken to close a school to pupils, or
 - b) A decision has been taken to also close that school to staff.
3. The Premises Manager or nominated person is to e-mail education.closures@newport.gov.uk to notify the local authority of one or both decisions and the basis or rationale for closure (please have regard for section 5 of this policy).



4. The e-mail will automatically be forwarded to:
- Education Senior Management Team
 - Planning & Development Manager
 - Education Business Manager
 - Education Policy Officer
 - Education Business Support Officer
 - Passenger Transport Unit – Passenger.Transport@newport.gov.uk
 - Contracts & Commissioning Team - ComTea@newport.gov.uk
 - Newport Norse Helpdesk – property.services@newportnorse.co.uk
 - Public Relations – public.relations@newport.gov.uk
 - City Contact Centre – ccadmin@newport.gov.uk

There is no need to contact any other group or team, as colleagues in the Education Service will ensure that the information received is acted upon and dealt with appropriately.

When sending any emails to confirm full or partial school closure, the Premises Manager or nominated person should provide a contact telephone number on which they will be available throughout the closure day. A member of the Education Senior Management Team will use this number to contact this nominated individual by 12 noon to confirm likely arrangements for the following day.

5. What does the Council expect of schools during periods of inclement weather?

5.1 Headteachers should consider the implications of potential implications in advance of any situations arising as schools are themselves responsible for making arrangements to ensure that the site is accessible to staff and pupils.

5.2 The key feature is to ensure that the weather situation is monitored. All schools are encouraged to sign-up to the Met Office weather warning alert system (either SMS or App based) which provides specific information on a postcode by postcode basis. This free service shares current forecasts and is accessible at all times.

5.3 As a low lying coastal authority, Newport is often more fortunate than its northern neighbours, generally avoiding the worst of snow and icy conditions. For some staff members however who live in the wider area, it is acknowledged that travel to work conditions can be more challenging and that Headteachers will need to take safe staffing levels into consideration when risk assessing whether or not the school can be opened.

5.4 In order to assist in the risk assessment, the school will need to consider appropriate staffing levels and assess which staff members are likely to attend for work and identify ways in which the school is able to operate during periods of staff absence. To assist in this, the Council will share information on specific staff travel to work areas for each school. If there is any ambiguity as to what constitutes a safe staffing level, the Council will need to support schools in undertaking this assessment in advance of any potential issues.



5.5 Many schools in Newport hold Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the Council. This SLA includes the option for a fixed fee winter maintenance package that provides a “self-help” kit and supplies for severe weather. This includes a minimum of two grit bins and shovels, with bins being monitored and topped up prior to adverse weather conditions.

5.6 Schools within this SLA will receive prioritisation for snow and ice clearance to achieve access to and across the site when conditions are severe. Initially, this service is likely to be limited to direct essential pathways into schools and would not encompass car parks and playgrounds; however, it would enable safe access routes from the site entrance to the school building.

5.7 Whilst this is a “pay as you go service”, the costs are low compared with those involved for all parties in the loss of a school day. When resources permit, Grounds Maintenance could extend this provision to cover additional areas of the school. The service can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days per week by telephoning 01633 656656 with a request to the Grounds Maintenance duty officer. The service utilises staff normally deployed on grounds maintenance works and therefore does not conflict with highway safety priorities. These staff would also undertake the necessary risk assessments including the most appropriate timing of any clearance works.

5.8 Any school that has elected to purchase a grounds maintenance agreement via an alternative provider should contact that provider to enquire about the services available to them. All school sites are encouraged to consider holding a small stock of initial resources including grit bins, salt bags and hand tools. Any such services provided by the Council are chargeable to individual schools, however the initial costs are low and ongoing grit supplies can be purchased from multiple sources if required.

5.9 Schools can of course utilise other potentially available resources to assist in the main objective that is to clear a safe access route through the school grounds and into the school building. This may involve staff or parents using shovels to clear the pathways and to spread grit / salt. Providing a generic risk assessment for such actions is in place, any liabilities arising are covered from an insurance perspective. The risk assessment would however need to encompass issues such as protective clothing (including footwear), the fitness of the individual to undertake the task and the timing of any such works to ensure that they are effective and render pathways safe.

5.10 The Council’s Winter Service Plan includes a primary gritting service, which ensures that major arterial routes to the local bus network are treated before minor roads can be considered. If the Council identifies wider travel issues, these will be communicated with schools. Most notably if officers identify that the road network around Newport is going to be impacted to such an extent that it cannot function safely, the Council will issue information via a variety of media platforms advising the public to take appropriate actions. Whilst Gwent Police may issue more generic travel advice, it is important to also consider the specific advice for the road network in Newport as this will provide a more accurate reflection of local travel conditions within the city.



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