

**2 November 2020**

**Nicola Sturgeon  
First Minister  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP**

Dear Ms Sturgeon,

**Joint Statement in response to Scottish Government's Tier Framework**

We have all been working together as partners in response to Covid-19, trying to minimise the extent of economic harm to Inverclyde as a result of the virus. We understand the need for health protection levels to be identified as part of the on-going response to the pandemic and welcome the corresponding public health interventions provided by the Scottish Government's Strategic Framework for each health protection level.

However, we feel that the approach adopted by government does not in practice give equal consideration to the four harms outlined in the framework. Inverclyde's historic position tends to lead to a longer and deeper economic impact and recently published and historic data outlines the concerning trends in terms of our local economy that we are already facing. Economic harm should be seen as a significant factor in decision making around the levels.

For those reasons, we believe that Inverclyde should be placed on Level 2 of the restrictions rather than Level 3 to try and mitigate the economic harm now while still protecting the public.

Inverclyde and its businesses have shown that they have complied with the regulations as they have been introduced. We have implemented a number of measures to ensure that the area's economy could operate while maintaining appropriate physical distancing, including Spaces for People and the Council's recovery plan as the area emerged from national lockdown in July.

Footfall levels across our town centres were beginning to rise and our businesses were reporting positive signs of some recovery. Businesses were also going beyond Government guidance in terms of implementing processes and procedures for physical distancing.

The hotel and self-catering sector are struggling to get revenues back to levels even prior to local lockdown, and that initial pipeline demand has not returned. Accommodation bookings and wider spend depend on travel from different regions of Scotland, the UK and internationally.

Unemployment in this area has historically been above the Scottish and UK averages, and this has jumped a further 44 per cent between March and September, with the number of people receiving universal credit assistance rising to more than 3,190 people.

At the same time, we have seen a significant decrease in the total number of job vacancies in the area. The impact is apparent across sectors, and we are seeing a significant proportion of this in the hospitality sector.

All of this has an impact on confidence, and we are concerned about the legacy effects on the area and the economic harm beyond the immediate challenges we face, and particularly the impact on lower income households.

As a matter of urgency, we need to send a signal of confidence in Inverclyde to businesses – within the area and to Scottish and UK businesses and investors.

Collectively we are calling on government to:

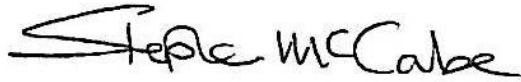
- 1 Place Inverclyde into Level 2 at the nearest possible review point. If the Scottish Government believes this is not possible, given the urgency of the challenging economic situation and declining prevalence of the virus in the area, it should set out an indicative date for when Inverclyde will be able to move into Level 2 immediately.
- 2 In the short term, businesses in areas moving between levels need to be alerted as soon as possible to allow them to prepare for any further scheduling. We encourage Government to continue to engage with us through the dedicated Task Force formed from within the local Business Resilience Group that was set in response to Covid-19. We need clarity around the any weekly reviews and how changes are notified to those affected.
- 3 The Scottish Government must work alongside local authorities and business to develop a more ambitious forward-looking pathway to sustainably reopen all sectors of the economy in the months ahead and allow us to build towards recovery.
- 4 A refreshed route map should be created which focuses on resolving some of the key challenges which are creating serious economic harm. In particular this should address the safe re-opening of offices, put forward practical solutions and timescales to allow leisure and

corporate travel to resume, and set out steps to work with the hospitality sector to ease restrictions which are putting businesses at severe risk.

Signed,



Gavin McDonagh  
President  
Inverclyde Chamber of Commerce



Stephen McCabe  
Leader  
Inverclyde Council