

Proactive steps taken during the Covid-19 outbreak

Knysna Municipality has implemented a number of practical measures to support its residents during the Covid-19 related, nationally enforced lock-down - and the uncertain future once the lock-down has been lifted.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has already wreaked havoc in countries like China, is still doing so in countries like Italy and will undoubtedly still do so in many others,” said Knysna Executive Deputy Mayor Aubrey Tsengwa. “President Ramaphosa has taken the difficult – yet necessary - decision to place South Africa under lock-down in an effort to stop the outbreak in our country from reaching pandemic stage.”

“A nationwide lock-down creates many challenges for many people, including the local authority,” he said. “We are however doing what we can to overcome these, and to support our residents during this time.”

The municipality had already implemented stringent measures to promote social distancing prior to the lock-down, including the closure of public facilities from beaches to libraries, the cancelation of public meetings and promoting the use of its electronic communication platforms. “Our mobile application is available from your app store, free of charge, and offers many functions to manage your account, report faults or even ‘chat’ with us directly. It also works on non-smart phones, making it accessible to most users.”

While the municipal offices closed on 26 March as per the lock-down regulations, it implemented its business continuity plan to ensure that all essential and emergency services are rendered during this time. “This includes refuse removal,” he said. “With the Easter long weekend coming up, please note that collections scheduled for Friday 10 April will take place on Thursday 9 April. Collections will take place as usual on Monday 13 April.”

Other municipal sections are also carrying on with certain aspects of their duties. It is however important to note that Knysna Municipality will only be sending registered mail and posting press notifications of land use applications after the national lock-down has been lifted. This is in line with recommendations made by the Western Cape Provincial Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning.

“Many people are understandably concerned about their businesses and financial stability,” Tsengwa continued. “There are various government entities that have implemented financial support- and debt relief schemes to assist qualifying businesses. I urge you to visit the websites listed below to find out how you may qualify and what assistance is available to you. You may also visit our website at www.knysna.gov.za for more information on business support and the Covid-19 coronavirus.”

A support package for the informal business sector is also under development. “We have collated information on our spaza shops,” he said. “We are checking if shops are licensed and

have the relevant Certificate of Acceptability and that social distancing is implemented at these premises.”

“We also know that not all of our residents are fortunate enough to ride out the lock-down from the comfort of their own homes,” said Tsengwa. “The homeless of Knysna and Sedgefield are being housed at Loerie Park, where they have access to ablution facilities, medication and meals. Thank you to all our partners for assisting us in this regard.”

Water meters of residents in arrears with their payments have been unblocked and the municipality has confirmed that no further blocking will be implemented until the end of April 2020. “Residents are still responsible for settling their accounts and to honour arrangements made to avoid being blocked again.”

The municipality have also taken steps to make sanitation and personal hygiene more accessible to the area’s vulnerable communities. “We will provide – and fix where necessary – communal taps to specific informal settlements,” Tsengwa said. “We have also secured a contract for the delivery of 200 chemical toilets to specifically identified informal settlements. These areas have been targeted based on the need within the community. When making use of these facilities, we urge residents to keep at least 1,5m apart from one another, to not touch surfaces unnecessarily, and to not touch your face without washing your hands.”

The Western Cape Provincial Department of Human Settlements has announced their planned provision of 78 water tanks to the Garden Route District. Knysna Municipality will receive 20 of these and distribute them throughout our severely vulnerable communities that have no access to sanitation or water services. The Western Cape Provincial Department of Social Development has also indicated that they would donate food parcels to those in need. Qualifying criteria is a combined household income of less than R3 000 per month. Ward Councillors are assisting the municipality in identifying the most vulnerable households who will have to apply in order to benefit from this donation.

Tsengwa also indicated that the large scale disinfecting of specific areas will begin within the week, with municipal staff having received the relevant training on Saturday 4 April. “Thank you to the Knysna Rotary Club for procuring the necessary personal protection equipment, F10 disinfectant and soaps. We are working closely with the taxi associations to ensure that taxis are disinfected after each load, and 5 000 500g disinfectant soap bars will be distributed to those homes that need them the most.”

“Our Public Participation Section are doing their utmost best to educate the community,” he continued. “We continue to loud hail necessary information throughout our informal settlements and will distribute informative flyers to taxis. For now, we ask our residents to adhere to the lock-down regulations. I know that it is difficult, but please stay at home. This is the only way in which we can overcome this challenge. If you do need to go outside, please adhere to the social distancing protocols. Keep your hands clean and don’t touch your face. And, should you encounter any of our law enforcement officers or members of the police force, comply with their instructions. Keep in mind that they are also under immense pressure.”

“Thank you to the essential workers of Knysna,” he concluded. “Our municipal workers, health professionals, our security personnel, our shop assistants, stockers and tellers, and everyone else who are putting themselves at risk to serve us. We appreciate your service. Let us stand together by keeping apart – that is how we can beat Covid-19.”

To donate toiletries, bedding or non-perishable food to the homeless sheltered at Loerie Park, please contact Lizel Baatjies on 060 998 7106 to arrange for collection.

Employers who have had to enforce lock-down as regulated and who might require financial assistance from the UIF may access relevant information by contacting covid19ters@labour.gov.za.

Websites that offer business support and important Covid-19 related information include:

www.knysna.gov.za

www.smmesa.gov.za

www.tourismrelief.gov.za

www.idc.co.za

www.supportbusiness.co.za

Municipal contact numbers:

- Main Switchboard 044 302 6300
- Emergency Services 044 302 8911

Important COVID-19 contact details:

For any questions or if you have symptoms that match those of the coronavirus:

- Hotline – 0800 029 999
- Provincial Hotline – 021 928 4102
- WhatsApp: Say “Hi” to 060 012 3456
- COVID-19 website: www.westerncape.gov.za/coronavirus

ENDS

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