

The Leader of the Moray Council,  
Cllr Stewart Cree, says:

# “Let me bring you up to speed...”

I know that most of you will have watched with interest the ongoing debate on the administration's proposals to end the council tax freeze in Moray and many of you will be wondering what on earth it was that prompted us to make such a seemingly dramatic proposal. Furthermore, during the very public debate that has ensued, I hope you heard me highlight the threat that exists to council services following the additional cuts in central funding.

I also know that any talk of cuts will raise alarm amongst those employed by the Council. The administration values the work of you all and recognises the significant sacrifices you have made in recent years to deliver services. We also acknowledge the results of the recent workforce survey which show that you want to see elected members taking a greater role in leadership and determining how the Council is run and organised. Similar messages have been given by forums such as the workforce culture group which I chair, where elected members have the opportunity

to hear your views and to gain some appreciation for workforce morale.

I'd like to make it clear that, by giving examples of Council service cuts in comments to the press, I was highlighting the full extent of the impact that the cuts could have on the community and staff. I did this to reinforce the case for an increase in Council Tax, using some money from reserves and implementing some efficiency measures as an alternative to these cuts. However, our option has effectively been removed from the council with the threat of significant penalties by the Scottish Government. We had a difficult choice to make between what we believe is the right course for Moray and our staff or face these harsh consequences.

To protect services and jobs the administration is now proposing a series of measures that will enable the council to meet the government's demand to freeze the council tax for another year.

These measures include a 12-month period of vacancy management, the deferment of spending where possible for a year and using more money than before from our reserves. We will put these proposals to a meeting of the Full Council on February 17.

Make no mistake; this is not a sustainable position for the council. We have called upon the government to bring forward their proposals to reform local government funding before next year's budget when we – and other councils – will be faced with a far worse situation.

The public have told us in the past, and many continue to do so, that they value the services which the Council provides and want to see these maintained. We in the administration group are committed to this.

The administration is confident that it understands what both you and the

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# Inside story



## It's a budget Jim, but not as we know it

The council is due to approve its budget for the year ahead on 17 February. There has been a lot of fast moving debate about Moray's Council Tax proposals over the last while, but a settled view has emerged following a meeting in Edinburgh with Cosla on January 29.

The administration group propose to freeze the council tax at the current level, but in order to balance the budget for this year other measures will be needed.

These include vacancy management, deferring spends where possible and using more monies from reserves.

Based on current estimates, if this budget proposal is approved the council will still face a shortfall in 2016/17 and an even greater financial challenge in the following year. Therefore, it is clear that further significant reductions in service provision will be required by April 2017.

Part of my job and that of other colleagues over the next 12 months will be to engage with communities about the financial situation and ensure that as many people as possible understand the issues and have the opportunity to comment. This will be part of a wider public sector action to engage with communities about the future of service provision. We are aiming to establish which services people in our communities value the most, which services they might be prepared to see a decrease, and any other ideas they may have to look at public service delivery in a different way.

The engagement plans will recognise that many of us who work for the council also live in Moray, and we will

use links with you to promote these engagement activities. This could be via your social media groups or societies/clubs you're part of. It's important that you to contribute as an individual or, as part of any community groups you are involved with.

I hope you can find the time to learn more about the financial situation faced by the council and provide us with your feedback on priorities and options for change. We will be making information available to help you and all members of the public to better understand the difficult choices currently faced by the council. This will be done mainly via social media, but we are also aiming to attend meetings organised by community groups who are keen to influence the future direction of the council.

So, if you are involved in a group that would like to engage with senior officers about the future of council services, it would be great to hear from you.

**Mark Palmer**  
**Corporate director (CS)**

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public want in providing an effective and sustainable Moray Council for all our service users, from infants to the elderly. Our decision therefore is to protect such services as far as possible and to deploy the least painful of measures to achieve this. I hope this brief explanation of where we are gives

you an understanding of our thinking behind our proposals, that this makes it clear how the administration group would wish to lead the Moray Council at this time and that it provides some reassurance to you. I am grateful for the opportunity of sharing this with you.



## Energy Myths

### Turning a thermostat up higher will heat a room quicker

No it won't. The room will heat up at just the same rate but will then continue to heat the room, wasting energy and money.

Your air-conditioning might even kick in to cool the room back down... wasting even more energy and money.

Well done to everyone working at Ashgrove Depot, their gas bill for December 2015 was 42% lower than it was during the same period in 2014.

An honorable mention also goes out to Beachbrae Education Centre who managed to lower their consumption by 25% over the same period.

That's a saving of £1,301.62 for just these two sites alone!

# Carbon Connect

Think about how you could save energy at your place of work. It will make a difference!

A recent report to the council's Policy and Resources committee said that, thanks to promotions by our energy team helping us change behaviours, power consumption dropped by the equivalent of £108,000 last year.

Energy officer Bill Anderson said: "The report presented an energy reduction strategy that highlights areas across

the council's estate where energy and carbon emissions can be reduced.

"The council will be liable for a £16.50 charge for each tonne of carbon it produces. In 2014/15 this led to a £239,133 surcharge, which underpins the need to cut energy use where possible."

## The Energy Team

A little  makes a big difference



## Fit Winners

The winners of our 'grab a director' selfie competition received their prizes last week.

Lissa Rowan and Caroline Howie, who work in the Committee Services section, submitted a picture of themselves having pounced on corporate director

Mark Palmer when he walked into their office. Both received Fit Life vouchers for a month of free sessions at any of Moray Council's leisure facilities, and they say they're keen to get started. If they like the sessions Lissa and Caroline will be able to sign up for a 6 or 12-month package membership.

We've already had a load of Christmas party selfies for the latest competition, winners will be announced next month. Keep 'em coming!



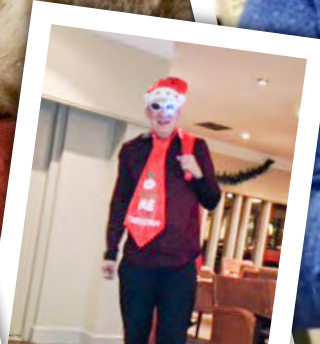
# Festive Recap

Very many thanks to all of who joined in the spirit of the festive season by sending us snapshots of your office parties and nights out.

If nothing else, they are evidence that council staff know how to enjoy themselves!

Some of the snaps show colleagues as you have never seen them before – and are unlikely ever to see them again.

Those of a squeamish disposition might want to look away now...

















# Moray Management Methods

## Hot Topic 1 – Customer Care

Welcome to the first in a series of 11 'hot topics', each focusing on an aspect of the recently introduced Moray Management Methods.

This first article is about customer care and how the council aims to improve our focus on customer satisfaction levels.

In seeking to improve how the council provides services to, deals with and communicates with our customers, recent and future activity has been reviewed and is now outlined in two main documents:

**Customer Focus Strategy** – sets out the steps the council needs to take to get better at listening to our customers and engaging with them. It aims to distil existing good practice, identify areas for further improvement and provide a set of actions which will raise standards of customer satisfaction across all council services. That aim, or mission, is reflected in the statement 'Moray Council Cares' and puts in place measures that will ensure our workforce demonstrate their commitment to this ideal in every aspect of their interaction with customers, thereby improving the customer experience for people living in Moray who access our services

**Customer Charter** – sets out how we aim to deal with our customers with a pledge to provide high quality customer services, offer choices in how people contact us, provide a

responsive service, be polite, helpful, sensitive and discreet, treat customers fairly and equally, keep information safe and respond to routine inquiries promptly. The pledge also promises to use customer views to improve and shape future service delivery and that we will check regularly that the terms of the charter are being delivered.

As before, managers need to ensure all employees implement high quality customer care by being courteous and responsive to service users and need to undertake customer engagement that has an impact on service design.

At a more detailed level this means:

- All staff knowing the customer care standards – now the Customer Charter
- Services gathering and monitoring regular customer feedback to identify key improvement actions – at least once a year
- Services reporting at least once every three years to committee on customer satisfaction

- Welcoming, responding to and learning from complaints to ensure continuous improvement
- To do this effectively means you have to:
- Talk to the customers of your services to find out what they need
- Design and develop improvements so that people are confident about approaching the council for help and that services are efficient and accessible
- Consult regularly with your service users using national or industry relevant standards of engagement

One of the steps taken to improve customer satisfaction is a pledge that all front facing employees will be trained in customer service and an e-learning package is being developed to help achieve this.







# Uniformly smart

A service learning visit by members of the council's corporate management team has led to a smart new look for our registrars

The team now wear matching navy blue clothes – a jacket and neckerchief for the women, jacket and tie for the men – which was approved following the visit by CMT when the registrars talked about issues around their work.

One of these issues was that although staff turned up for work smart but casual, they reserved their own Sunday

best for officiating at weddings and civil marriages. Although appropriate for the occasions, the team felt they would be better suited if they presented a uniformed front, with which the directors agreed.

Senior registrar Heather Greig said the new uniform had been well received by customers.

*"It creates a good impression and helps give the team a much more professional appearance," said Heather. "It also gives us a great sense of pride in the service we are providing."*

# Apprenticeships

One of the council's engineering team has urged school leavers to think about apprenticeships as a gateway to a fulfilling career.

Engineering technician Bethany Holroyd has been involved in the maintenance of council-owned bridges and harbours since joining us 18 months ago. She had previously been an apprentice with civil engineering giants Halcrow.

*"Being a technician wasn't what I had always wanted to do," she said.*

*"Not because I didn't want to do it, more because it wasn't an option given to me at high school. I attended an all-girls school and the options on Careers Day didn't include anything from the construction sector.*

*"But once I looked at what engineers do and the training that apprenticeships include, I knew this was the career for me."*

She spent four years at a construction college in her native Leeds during which time she secured the apprenticeship.

As well as working on a range of construction projects, Bethany also became the first person in Britain to complete the Level 3 Advanced Level Apprenticeship in civil engineering for technicians.

Moray Council runs apprenticeships in many departments developing a variety of skills, from mechanics and building trades to administration. Many of our apprentices go on to become qualified permanent members of staff. All apprentice opportunities are posted on the Moray Council section of MyjobScotland website.

Bethany's career path is the subject of a feature on the Institution of Civil Engineers' magazine, and the full article can be accessed at [www.ice.org.uk/news/knowledge/january-2016](http://www.ice.org.uk/news/knowledge/january-2016)





# RUN DUNCAN RUN



A long-held ambition is about to be realised by one of our colleagues, Allan Duncan as he gets into training for one of the world's leading mass participation events.

Allan beat the odds by becoming one of more than 250,000 runners to have their application accepted for 20,000 places on the starting line for this year's London Marathon.

It will be Allan's first marathon and promises to be a baptism of fire as he pounds the streets of the capital in the company of some of the world's great endurance runners – and he concedes he will be lagging some distance behind them.

"For as long as I can remember I have wanted to run the London Marathon," said Allan, a taxation support assistant in the council's revenues section. "Just hearing the intro music on the television is enough to raise the hairs on the back of my neck.

*"I had never quite plucked up the courage to enter but thanks to the support of my family I decided to apply last May when I was told there were 250,000 applications for 20,000 places so I did not think I had much of a chance of being accepted."*

However, confirmation came through in October that his application had been accepted, which filled him with surprise and excitement and not a little trepidation given that it left him only six months in which to train.

*"I hadn't done any running since the Marafun in 2009 and it was only when I found out I had been accepted that I looked out my running shows again,"* said Allan.

*"I'm currently training three times a week, twice by myself and once with a JogScotland group which meets at Elgin library on a Thursday. I ran 11 miles the other night which is the farthest I have run in my life."*

*"I'm no athlete, just a middle aged dad who hasn't kept up the active lifestyle I had when I was younger, so it has been a challenge and a big commitment. But I'm enjoying the training so far and feeling fitter as a result."*

Allan will be raising funds through sponsorship for the Moray Cricket Association, a local charity of which he is treasurer and which oversees cricket development for youngsters in Moray.

For anyone who would like to contribute, Allan has a Just Giving page at <https://crowdfunding.justgiving.com/allan-duncan>

Are you planning to run a marathon this year? Drop us an email and tell us about it. [raymond.shewan@moray.gov.uk](mailto:raymond.shewan@moray.gov.uk)



# Festive mega-raffle

DLO staff based at Mosstodloch held a mega-raffle in the run-up to Christmas, with a vast array of prizes – only a fraction of which can be seen in the photograph.

The raffle was organised by building services scheduler Gillian McKay who is seen beginning to make the draw as colleagues gather round.

The total raised amounted to a whopping £847 which will be divided between cancer support and Alzheimer's research.



## Walk Challenge winners

The Health Working Lives team's latest Walk Challenge attracted 36 entries – 10 more than the previous year.

The aim of the challenge was to encourage participants to walk 10,000 steps every day along a 'virtual' Route 66 across the United States from Illinois to California.

No one quite made it that far, but first prize went to Traffic's Best Foot Forward – alias Pat Douglass, Linda Guild, James Smith and his wife Fiona – who clocked up a total of 1,876,653 steps to reach Arizona.

One team member went above and beyond the call of duty as part of the

challenge – Tracey Bavidge, of the Harry Potter Room team, actually visited Route 66 while on holiday in the States.

The photo shows Lois Dunlop from the HWL team presenting the prize to Pat with James, Linda and Jane Fordyce, also of the HWL team, looking on.



# Tea Break Charter

**You'd have to be as mad as a hatter not to take a regular break from work.**

It's no doubt that holidays, weekends and tea breaks are what keep us going. No-one can perform at their best without even the briefest respite from the daily grind, but it's a concern to many organisations that the importance of even a quick tea break is being diminished. This has been reflected in recent staff surveys, where some responses say they feel under pressure not to stop for a tea break.

Even the tea giants Tetley have realised this. A survey of 2,000 of their workers found almost half were too busy to stop for a cuppa at work and one in four believed they were not allowed to have a break. In a tea producer!

In a report on this Tetley survey psychologist Honey Lancaster-James states: 'Fewer tea breaks reflect the

increasing pressure people feel they are under at work. Whereas in the past taking a tea break was seen as a valuable social activity at work, it is now beginning to be seen as an unnecessary indulgence and waste of productive work time. Yet research has indicated time and time again that striking a balance by taking short breaks during the working day increases people's productivity and creativity.'

At present, your feedback from surveys suggests that there is a lack of consistency in tea breaks across the council. Some of you feel that tea breaks away from work are frowned upon while others are actively encouraged to take a tea break as and when required.

**"taking short breaks during the working day increases people's productivity and creativity"**

The council's workforce culture group are keen to make sure that we all take breaks and feel comfortable doing so.

However engrossed we become or however in demand we are, it's important that we take proper breaks to refresh, recharge and refocus. Nobody can be expected to keep a high level of concentration indefinitely. Without taking proper breaks it's only a matter of time before things start to slip, health is affected, errors are made and performance is compromised. In addition, it's good to take time to talk non-work stuff with colleagues in your team or to network with others from different sections.

So keep that flask at the ready, stop for a breather, take a sip from that reviving cup and you'll be better for it.

And while you're at it, take a picture and send it in to [raymond.shewan@moray.gov.uk](mailto:raymond.shewan@moray.gov.uk). You could win a Mars Bar to have with your next cuppa!

