

**Connect**  
*monthly*

**January  
2017**



**Talking  
Cents**



**moray**  
council

# HeadsUp



## EDITORIAL

### Dear Colleagues

Our teams of 472 full time and 684 part time staff deliver 30 different services to the public, all for an annual budget of £24m. The services provided are almost entirely front-facing and are the main ones that the public see on a daily basis, and play a major role in defining the Council's reputation.

The broad range services include maintaining roads (repairs, gritting, bridges, etc), bin collection and recycling, street cleansing, parks, countryside access, school catering, burial grounds, public toilets, school transport, school crossings, harbours and flood risk management. In addition we provide a range of support services to the rest of the council such as building cleaning, janitorial services and maintenance of the council's fleet of vehicles.

It's a lot to do each and every day.

I feel we do a pretty good job overall, but it's important we understand just how well we perform and if we could do better. Customer feedback is a clear indication of how our services are performing. For example in surveys

to measure parents' satisfaction with school bus services there was an increase from 55% satisfied in 2014 to 70% satisfied in 2016. Traffic enquiries dealt with within target timescales increased from 94% in 2013/14 to 96% in 2015/16.

Clearly the council have been under – and will continue to face – financial pressures; Direct Services alone have seen a reduction in budget of over £3M in the last three years, but despite this we have still managed to deliver improvements in service delivery. For example we have reduced the cost of providing school meals while retaining the quality and increasing the uptake. We continue to perform well on recycling by having the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest recycling rate in Scotland – 57% recycled last year – and compared to the financial year 2013/14 in 2015/16 there were a third more road repairs undertaken.

We have also been recognised for our efforts with the council receiving the Campbell Christie Public Service Award for our Dial-a-Bus service, a Saltire commendation from the Society of Civil

Engineers for the Elgin Flood Alleviation scheme, and not forgetting Graham Dunlop who won the council's Colleagues' Choice award for responding to recent flooding events.

In spite of all the challenges we face I'm convinced that our continued improvement is down to a dedicated workforce who take pride in what they do, and a commitment to the communities they serve.

While much has changed in local government over the years and indeed centuries, the need for core services still remains: most notably a reliable and safe transport infrastructure, the environmental management of our waste, a dignified burial service and a pleasant and well maintained open spaces that our communities can enjoy. The impact that these services provide on everyone's daily life is huge and it is up to all of us to ensure that we play our part to ensure that our communities get the best that we can offer.

**Stephen P. Cooper**

**Head of Direct Services**

Happy New Year! And big thanks to all those that sent in Christmas jumper pictures, we've plastered them across [pages 14 & 15](#) for your enjoyment.

To ring in the changes for 2017 we're giving the council's directors some time off from writing their 'Inside Stories', making way for heads of service and department managers to give us their take on their teams, what they do and what's new.

This month we're kicking off with Direct Services and Stephen Cooper, who's headed up that arm of the council's operation since joining us from Shetland Council five years ago. Since then his team have finished two flood schemes, procured a new dredger, reduced costs and increased recycling, while all the time maintaining a high level of service.

Enjoy your *Connect!*

## TEAM CONNECT

Peter Jones  
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Raymond Shewan  
PUBLIC RELATIONS COORDINATOR

Jess Barbier-Marsden  
PROJECT OFFICER

Angus McNicholl  
DESIGNER



# Talking Cents

**The festive fun is over, and for many people the New Year gets off to a worrying start in terms of finances – but if you’ve overspent during the holidays, don’t fret! Help is at hand from our Money Advice Service.**

Connect caught up with the team to find out how they help people from across Moray take back control of their finances.

The team has noticed the impact that the decline in the oil industry has had on the area, and an increase in debt among under-25s who are trying to make it on their own. February is always a busy time for the team, when the credit card bills start coming in after Christmas.

Juliet Taylor is leader of the Financial Inclusion Team and has been with us for 12 years. *“People in debt often can’t see a way out of their problems, but nothing can be further from the truth. Our advisers have helped hundreds of clients out of debt every year,”* she said.

To start the process, one of the money advisers meets with a new client, one of over 300 new clients per year. Many referrals come in from word-of-mouth and from other council departments.

Juliet said: *“The first meeting is where we find out what the problem is, and provide an overview of options.”*

Individuals can consider various options including the Debt Arrangement Scheme (DAS). DAS was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2004 to help people pay back what they owe. Once a DAS has been approved legally the creditors must freeze all interest and charges and cannot take any further action to recover the debts.



*“We don’t judge and we’ll help anyone”*

Juliet Taylor  
Leader of the Financial Inclusion Team



*“There is a stigma around debt... And people feel so relieved once they’ve come in to see us”*

Julie McNamee  
Money Adviser & Money Advice Assistant

Money adviser Fiona Spendlow has been with us for 15 years. Her colleague Julie McNamee, who has been with us for 10 years, wears two hats within the Money Advice team: in the mornings she is a money adviser, and in the afternoons she handles the administration for the team as Money Advice Assistant. Kathryn Munro is the third money adviser. Although new to the Money Advice team, she has been part of the Financial Inclusion Service for four years.

*“We can even assist with debts that are potentially leading to homelessness,”* said Fiona. *“We can negotiate with private landlords for rentals, the council, and mortgage lenders to help keep people in their homes,”* she says.

The Money Advice team know that for some people debt remains a taboo subject, and that the fear of facing debt can make taking the first step difficult.

*“When people decide to do something about their debt you can almost see the weight lifting from their shoulders,”* says Fiona. *“Clients feel relieved they’ve been able to talk and they go away feeling like there’s light at the end of the tunnel.”*

It takes approximately a year to become an approved money adviser, and to make a good money advisor life experience and the ability to empathise is vital.

*“People have to be able to talk to you, and you build up trust,”* says Juliet. *“As part of that you also have to be able to be honest, but we enjoy our job because we know we are helping people.”*

The process takes an average of three to four months to set up payment plan. Payment plans can sometimes last years for larger debts, but the situation is under control and interest is usually frozen.

Feedback that the service receives is overwhelmingly positive. *“We get ‘thank you’ cards and we’ve even received flowers,”* said Fiona.

The Money Advice Service stress that their confidential services are also available to fellow council employees. Based in the Elgin Annexe, they can also arrange to meet with you in a meeting room in a different location if that’s preferable – just send them an email or give them a call.

All other appointments should be made via the Contact Centre on **0300 123 4561**. There is also a budgeting service available through Revenues – call **01343 563456** or email on [benefitadvice@moray.gov.uk](mailto:benefitadvice@moray.gov.uk) for details. The team has also developed an easy-to-follow module on the CLIVE system to help Council staff who deal with clients that have debts – search for ‘Moray: Money Advice.’ The module provides information

## Employee Benefits

If you’re looking to save money or manage your finances, as an employee of Moray Council you’re entitled to a range of benefits, some of which are detailed below. Please remember that Moray Council is not financially responsible for any arrangement you make.

### Childcare Vouchers

Our childcare voucher scheme with Edenred allows you to take a portion of your salary, tax and NI free, and convert it into childcare vouchers. These can be used as full or part-payment to registered childcare providers.

To join the scheme, visit Edenred’s childcare voucher website, then click the ‘Parent’ tab from the top of the homepage. Select ‘Join now’ and enter our unique

scheme ID: MORA8512. You’ll then have to supply your payroll number (you can find this on your pay slip) and choose a four digit PIN. Follow the steps then click submit. Important: Bear in mind this is a salary sacrifice agreement, so be sure you want to join before you click submit.

Childcare voucher amounts can also be amended and cancelled through the Edenred childcare website: [www.edenred.co.uk](http://www.edenred.co.uk)

on how to spot when someone is struggling with debt and what help is available. There are also useful online self-help tools at National Debtline (Freephone 0808 808 4000) and the Scottish Financial Health Service (Freephone 0800 707 6696)

How do you know you're getting into debt? If you start noticing yourself making late payments, missing payments or direct debits, or if it gets to the point that you are considering a payday loan, get in touch with the team.

Juliet said: "We are confidential and approachable, and are available even just to have a quick chat to put your mind at ease. Remember, there are lots of options to get out of debt; there is normally a way out, no matter how bad it seems."



"We get 'thank you' cards and we've even received flowers"

Fiona Spendlow  
Money Advisor

## TOP TIPS FOR DEALING WITH DEBT:

### Face your fears

Unfortunately, debt doesn't just go away on its own, so facing up to the issue is the first step to tackling it.

### Now is the time

Debt is generally easier to tackle early on, but you can come in for help at any time.

### Credit Unions

If you need a loan for a small amount of money (for example, to cover the cost of a school uniform) a credit union may be a good option. Their interest rates can be lower than banks and you can borrow a smaller amount to cover only what you need.

### Steer clear of payday loans

They charge very high interest rates! The Money Advice team can help with options that don't charge interest.

If you would like to contact the Money Advice Service, their advice is FREE and confidential. Get in touch with the team by telephone on 0300 123 4561 or by email at [money.advice@moray.gov.uk](mailto:money.advice@moray.gov.uk).

Other reputable agencies that can help with debt are:

🗨 National Debtline – Freephone: 0808 808 4000 or <https://www.nationaldebtline.org/S/Pages/default.aspx>

🗨 StepChange Debt Charity – Freephone: 0800 138 1111 or <https://www.stepchange.org/>

Or for Money Management Advice try:

🗨 The Money Advice Service: 0300 500 5000 or <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en>

🗨 Scotland's Financial Health Service: 0800 707 6696 or <https://www.scotlandsfinancialhealthservice.gov.uk/>

🗨 Citizens Advice: 01343 550088 or <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/debt-and-money/>

### Credit Unions

Credit unions are a profit-sharing, democratically run, financial co-operative which offer convenient savings and low interest to their members. There are three in the local area to which you can sign up:

Grampian Credit Union: 223 Holburn Street, Aberdeen.  
w: [www.grampiancreditunion.co.uk](http://www.grampiancreditunion.co.uk) t: 01224 576900

Forres Area Credit Union: 138 High Street, Forres.  
w: [www.forresareacreditunion.co.uk](http://www.forresareacreditunion.co.uk) t: 01309 676735

North East Credit Union: 7 Finnan Place, Aberdeen.  
w: [www.nescu.co.uk](http://www.nescu.co.uk) t: 01224 899688

# HR Noticeboard

## POSITIVE STEPS TO TACKLING WORKPLACE PROBLEMS

As employees we are all responsible for our own behaviour and acting appropriately whilst carrying out our jobs. However we know that problems arise from time to time and it is important to be clear about the sort of behaviour that is not acceptable and what options are available should problems arise.

A 'Positive Steps to Tackling Workplace Problems' leaflet has been created outlining the various options available to address workplace problems. For each of the options, it defines how the particular action can be instigated and what the next steps would be. This leaflet is available for all employees, providing support and direction. In addition to this leaflet, our 'Working Together for a Positive Workplace' guide will provide more information on the positive workforce culture the council is building.

These tools are just some of a range of resources available to work together with you, and support the development of our positive workforce culture.

## INVESTIGATION GUIDE

Workplace investigations can be daunting for both employees and managers. An investigation best practice guide has been developed to support managers in carrying out a thorough and balanced investigation. The comprehensive guide is available to everyone, although it will be most effective for managers involved in the process.

## TIME FOR TALKING

Our Employee Assistance Programme is provided by timefortalking. Timefortalking is a 24/7 support service, offering:

- ☞ structured telephone counselling
- ☞ face-to-face counselling
- ☞ telephone support

You can speak to a member of the timefortalking team at any time via the 24-hour confidential helpline. If you would like to access the face-to-face counselling, you or your manager can make a request for this.

tel: 0800 970 3980 (24/7, 365 days a year)

web: [www.timefortalking.co.uk](http://www.timefortalking.co.uk)

Click on 'members area' tab (top, far right); select the Moray Council logo and enter username: Moray, password: elgin2016

NB: Specialist advice on matters such as debt, legal and finance are available through our Trading Standards service and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

# MORAY MANAGEMENT METHODS - FOR REAL

The Moray Management Methods were introduced to provide a common base for management practice within the council so that everyone understands the responsibilities and expectations of Moray Council managers. There are 11 major management tasks and simple checklists that set out what must be done. These are all backed up by extensive policy statements and guidance that provide the full detail on all the requirements.

This sounds pretty straightforward. It should be easy then for all managers to be managing everything from finances to people and risks to equalities consistently and for employees to know just what to expect from their boss.

It's not that simple though, is it? In practice there are so many variable situations and individual circumstances to take account of that management can appear to be a twilight world of its own, both to those who manage and those who experience the management decisions and actions – staff and service users.

There really isn't one answer for every situation and that makes it difficult for everyone. To manage effectively, there needs to be room for discretion and judgement in how the MMM procedures are applied. To help to tease this out we will be running a series of articles highlighting some of the 'wicked' MMM issues and providing case studies to help illustrate their application.

## Case Study

Bill manages a team of employees in a council service. He understands that people like to know how they are doing. He knows it's important to his team that he gives each of them feedback and that he provides a chance for them to say how they feel things have been going.

But Bill's team tend to be under a fair bit of pressure and he often finds that he has to help them re-prioritise just to manage the workload. Every couple of weeks the team meet to talk about what work they have on and the difficult cases they are managing. Bill also meets each employee once a month to go over their individual case load and provide support and advice.

Because he knows his staff well and speaks to them regularly in one to ones and team meetings, he finds the annual ERDP a bit of a non-event. There's usually nothing new but he records the overview of the year. On the positive side, Bill and his team say that they are often surprised when they look back at just how much they have done.

Up first is People Management where one of the seven tasks on the checklist is regular annual appraisals with employees (ERDP or PR&D). Sitting down once a year to talk about work doesn't seem too hard but our survey in 2015 showed that with the exception of teachers, only 57% of employees had an ERDP in the preceding 12 months. No doubt time is one of the barriers to ERDPs happening but there are also views that annual performance reviews are not effective, don't add anything and so there is no point in them.

There could be some merit in that – talking about performance and work tasks once a year is not really enough to make sure employees are working effectively and have a chance to address individual development needs.

The ERDP process has been designed to be flexible so that it can be made relevant to the wide range of jobs and people who work for the council. Essentially, appraisal is about speaking to employees to review individual performance, plan tasks, plan development and address any issues. We should all have regular catch ups but a once a year planned session to complete ERDP is a must in applying MMM for real.

## Case Study

The Land and Parks service have a large number of employees and a relatively small number of managers to carry out appraisals. They also find the ERDP process and form filling doesn't really suit the work they do. They've tended to do appraisals in group meetings but this hasn't been good for raising individual issues.

Working with the Organisational Development team, the ERDP has been tailored so that it suits the service better. It is now shorter, more relevant to manual work and more focussed on the work of the service. There is a single page record to complete and a single page of guidance on how to use it. Supervisors are being given bespoke training on how to do ERDPs and will be supported to carry out one to one appraisals with every employee.

# WELCOME ABOARD

It's been a busy few weeks with lots of comings and goings and celebrating!

Iain MacDonald, Children's Wellbeing Manager, celebrated his half-century with his colleagues from Education. Happy 50<sup>th</sup> Iain!



Kirsty Main-Ellen has joined us as a Project Officer from a role as a Volunteer Coordinator at Trees for Life in Findhorn.



Sheena Duffus, QIO, retired at the end of December after receiving her long service award for 40 years with the council and its predecessor. All the best Sheena!



Evelyn Flett celebrated her retirement at a party with her colleagues from Greenfingers.



Colleagues in the Building Standards service bid a festive season farewell to Alex Mair, who has retired after 39 years. Alex was presented with parting gifts by Building Standards Manager Kevan Sturgeon and by council leader Stewart Cree on behalf of the council. Alex worked with Seafield Estates in Cullen, where he still lives, before joining the former Moray District Council in 1977.



# Dining 'al desko'

Experts are warning that desk-bound workers should take a proper lunch break to stay healthy. The habit of eating 'al desko' has grown to such an extent that two-thirds of people now eat lunch at their desks most days of the week. But pungent packed lunches including oily fish, cheese and egg sandwiches are having an adverse effect on working conditions and office culture.

In a survey of 1,000 UK office workers, two out of five said they were too busy to take a proper lunch break, while over half branded colleagues who eat strong-smelling food as 'anti-social'. The worst smell was said to be mackerel or sardines, followed by cheese and eggs – yet fewer than one in five workers ask a colleague to eat somewhere else. But desktop dining may not only be bad workplace etiquette – it could also have a detrimental effect on waistlines.

Experts have warned that the growing culture of eating in the office could lead to weight gain, with health psychologists saying it distracts people into 'forgetting' they've eaten.

Researchers at Surrey University warned last year that not taking time out to eat a proper meal, and being distracted sitting in front of a computer, could mean people remain hungry and want to eat again later.

Lead author Professor Jane Ogden said, "Al desko diners run the risk of increasing their food intake later in the day which can lead to weight gain and obesity."

*"Making time for lunch and sitting down at the table is actually good for our waistline."*

*"When you're at a table, away from your desk and distractions, you actually think, 'this is food, this is a meal', and you remember it and you count it."*

*"Importantly, this also means you're much less likely to snack later on. Your brain calls it food, calls it a meal and, therefore, you feel fuller."*

She added, "Fullness is not only the result of brain and chemical reactions, but a perception that is influenced by learning, emotion and distraction."

Prof Ogden advised office workers to build a proper lunch break into their schedules and said "Any form of distraction, including eating at our desks can lead to weight gain."

Eating at one's desk is also highly unhygienic – with computer keyboards and worktop surfaces being riddled with millions of bacteria.

In 2014 Dr Lisa Ackerley, Professorial Fellow at the Royal Society of Public Health, warned that the average office worker comes into contact with 10 million bacteria a day.

*"We know from studies 3,000 organisms per square inch can be found on a keyboard or over 1,600 a computer mouse," she said.*



# Winter Blues & New Year Resolutions

Lots of people feel down and get depressed in winter, particularly just after Christmas and New Year which for many people can be a difficult time of the year.

Despite the fact that many of us report feeling winter-related low mood, it can sometimes seem as if the 'winter blues' is just a myth. In fact there is sound scientific evidence that supports the idea that the seasons and in particular light can affect our moods and behaviours. For example it is extremely rare in people living within 30 degrees of the Equator, where daylight hours are long, constant and bright.

If the short, dark days are getting you down, what can you do to feel like yourself again? What about all these New Year resolutions? Every year millions of us make resolutions but almost 80% of us fail to carry them through. Here are some tips to beat the winter blues and to help see these New Year resolutions through. Things like eating healthy, exercising, cutting down on alcohol and giving up smoking can have a real positive impact on our mental and physical health and are often central to many people's New Year resolutions.

The Mental Health Foundation has produced a number of useful tips for achieving your goals this year and also has a range of free podcasts on topics such as diet and exercise to help you stick to your resolutions.

## How to stick to your New Year resolutions

### Be realistic

Unattainable goals are often the enemy of achievable resolutions. Change one small thing at a time.

### Planning helps

Don't wait until the last minute – plan ahead of New Year's Day.

### Develop a support network

Friends, family and colleagues can all help you – talk to them about what you're planning to do and tell them how they can help.

### Measure your successes

Stay motivated by measuring how far you've come each week. This will help you realise how small changes can make a big difference.

### Reward yourself

Celebrate when you succeed with a treat, which doesn't necessarily have to be the thing you're trying to avoid. You might reward the first month of your successful diet with a night at the cinema, for example – or even a short holiday!

### Treat failure as a small setback

If you slip and break your diet, forget to exercise or have a secret cigarette, don't despair! Learn from the setback: what situations made you slip? Can you avoid them next time? Don't obsess over small setbacks – it won't help you achieve your goal. Start fresh the next day. Don't give up!

### Make your resolution stick

After a couple of weeks, the changes you've made will become a habit and part of your routine, so don't be discouraged if you're still finding it hard after the first week. Stick to it and it will only get easier!

Further advice from the Mental Health Foundation and free podcasts can be found at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/n/new-years-resolutions>

## Where to get support

When feeling low or that things are starting to overwhelm us it's important that we have someone to turn to, someone we can trust and confide in. If for any reason you feel that you can't talk to a family member or a friend you can call Breathing Space or Samaritans who are there in times of difficulty to provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and providing information.

### Breathing Space

Feeling down or depressed? Breathing Space can help if you need someone to talk to. Experienced advisors will listen and provide confidential information and advice.

tel: **0800 83 85 87**  
(freephone)

web: [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

### Samaritans

Available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts. Also if you need support with helping someone you are worried about.

tel: **116 123** (freephone)

email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

web: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### Cruse Bereavement Care (Moray)

If you live in Moray and have been affected or bereaved by suicide we can provide free and confidential group and/or individual support. For bereavement support contact:

tel: **0845 600 2227**

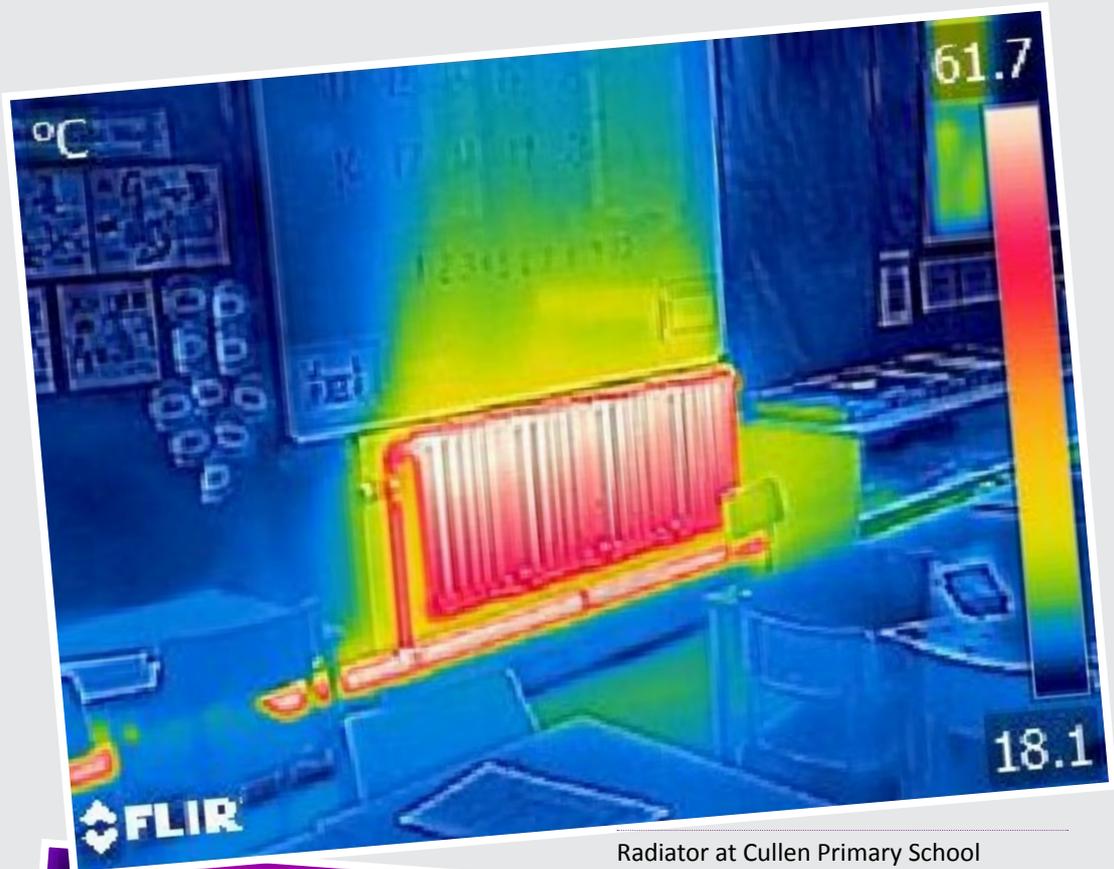
email: [moray@crusescotland.org.uk](mailto:moray@crusescotland.org.uk)



# HOT PIXS

Housing and Property have taken receipt of a Thermal Imaging Camera as part of its ongoing commitment to Energy Efficiency. While normal cameras capture visible light, a thermal camera picks up invisible heat emissions which can be an indication of heat loss through walls and pipes.

They have already been put to good use as part of recent energy audits as shown in these pictures.



Radiator at Cullen Primary School



Cullen Primary School ECO-Committee (working hard!)

**ENERGY** team

A little

makes a big difference

# MAKE ENERGY SAVING YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

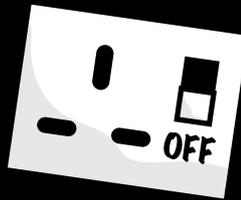
At this time of the year we are all trying hard to drink a little less, eat a little less and take more exercise. How about adding saving energy to your list of New Year resolutions for 2017?

The Energy Team are on hand to visit Team Meetings throughout 2017 to share advice about how easy it can be to make savings at work by

# This new Year



# Relax and switch off



A little  makes a big difference

ENERGI Team

recognising where energy is being wasted and taking action to reduce this waste. Did you know, for instance, that our electricity bill for 2016 for the HQ and HQ Annexe buildings combined was £126,000? Wherever you work and whatever you do within Moray Council, you can take small steps to make a big difference.

If you would like a short presentation at one of your Team Meetings this year please contact us on [energy@moray.gov.uk](mailto:energy@moray.gov.uk) to arrange a suitable time.

This is one New Year resolution we can all keep!



# Festive Selfies

A great many people across the council got in to the festive spirit during the last working days of 2016.

See if you can find yourself or someone you know amongst the many pictures we were sent.

We at *Connect* hope that you all had a great time over Christmas and New Year.



# Strictly Ballroom



Iain Sneddon, one of our Research & Information Officers, and his wife Fiona ‘waltzed’ their way to an amazing top four finish in the senior category of the Scottish Closed Championships for ballroom dancing in December.

The success follows hot on the heels of their placement in the top 36 couples across the whole of the UK in the senior category of the British National Dance Championships, held in Blackpool in November.

Iain, who has been dancing for seven years, never considered ballroom dancing as a hobby until he was persuaded to have a go.

*“I was a classic ‘dad dancer’ with two left feet and had no intention of dancing, but after two weeks I was hooked,”* he said.

*“It’s good exercise for the body and it’s good for the mind – and we’ve met some lovely people as well.”*

The couple began competing a year after taking it up and now compete in the highest category possible without going professional.

They play a major part in organising the ‘Strictly’-style fundraising events that have taken place in Lossiemouth for the past two years. Spending their evenings coaching the 10 novice couples for weeks ahead of time, the evenings mimic the popular TV series with a panel of judges giving marks and comments on each performance. The events have raised over £22,000 to date for local charities.

*“Give it a try – if you think you’re hard enough!”* says Iain. *“Take it from someone who didn’t want to dance!”*