

Connect
monthly

**February
2017**



moray
council

HeadsUp

Richard Anderson, Head of Housing & Property ⇒



Dear Colleagues

The Housing and Property Service is responsible for the management of council housing, tackling and responding to homelessness, managing the council's property assets (excluding schools), design and project management, maintenance and the development and implementation of the Local Housing Strategy.

There are two area housing teams (East and West Moray) who are responsible for housing management and dealing with tenancy issues. They are supported by our Capital Programmes team who oversee maintenance programmes, carried out predominately by our Building Services (DLO).

Disputes between neighbours inevitably occur, and in October 2015 this was transferred to the Community Safety team to deal with. Housing managers are still involved, of course, when complaints progress towards legal action.

The Homelessness Service assesses the needs of those who find themselves without a roof over their heads, and manages the supply of temporary accommodation with the level of support services for more vulnerable people.

In 2015/16, 536 households presented to the council as homeless, a significant increase on previous years.

All these housing services are the subject of annual scrutiny by the Scottish Housing Regulator. We have to complete an annual self-assessment detailing how we've performed, which is pretty well in relation to most key performance areas. However, we still use this annual health check to improve and develop what we do.

Property and Design is responsible for managing our housing and corporate buildings. This includes construction procurement, designing new projects, controlling costs on new builds, and providing a repairs, maintenance and

inspection service to make sure our estate complies with all the necessary rules and regs. Most recently it has been delivering the major refurbishment of four primary schools in Moray.

Our DLO carries out repairs mostly to our housing stock. It was restructured last year, and some of this is still bedding in. Longer term, we want to increase the amount of work that it does within corporate buildings and schools and by doing so become the council's main repairs and maintenance contractor. This move by the DLO is likely to deliver savings for the council over its current arrangements.

There is no doubt that our service achievements are a result of the great teams of professional managers and dedicated staff who often go above and beyond the call of duty. It's my privilege to be head of this service with such great people to work with.

Richard

EDITORIAL

Welcome to February's *Connect*. Jess and Angus have been out and about finding out just what our Facilities colleagues do, and nearly ran out of paper with all the notes! Wherever they work, schools, halls or office buildings, they have to be ready to tackle just about anything and solve a host of daily problems. They must have the widest skillset in the council!

Elsewhere you can read about Doreen's life-saving – and life-changing – experience, Ishbel's healing experience in Russia, and how to get loved-up on Valentine's Day. Enjoy, and keep sending your pictures in!

TEAM CONNECT

Peter Jones
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Raymond Shewan
PUBLIC RELATIONS COORDINATOR

Jess Barbier-Marsden
PROJECT OFFICER

Angus McNicholl
DESIGNER



Local elections, one of the most formative events in the council's calendar, take place on 04 May.

Moray Council will have a completely different look after this election, as more than half the 26 elected members currently representing Moray residents have indicated they will be standing down.

Before that day there is much to do to prepare, and ensure we stay on the right side of the rules.

There's a statutory pre-election period commencing March 13, when the notice of election is published.

From this point on, council and staff have to be particularly careful that it remains completely neutral in its actions, statements and public engagement. We can't say or do anything that could be construed as support for one party or candidate above another.

This includes the use of council premises for party meetings or promotional activity, such as photo opportunities. In addition, staff mustn't outwardly demonstrate support for party or candidate while at work or on council business. This includes posters in your car windows, badges, mouse mats, T-shirts, etc. Encouraging colleagues to vote one way or another is also out.

Once outside of work you are free to engage with the party or candidate as you wish, such as canvassing or other party work. The exception here is those whose posts are politically restricted, such as directors, heads of service and communications teams, and includes those who are working at the election.

A number of colleagues and volunteers will be involved in the polling and count process in the days leading up to and including the election, and we'll be featuring them and their work next month.

If you need any guidance on what's allowed and what isn't during this period, please give Moira Patrick or Alison Davidson a call. They're on 01343 563459/563016.



"Everybody comes to the janny if there's a problem!"

Kevin Donald, Group Supervisor, Buckie High

When the sink blocks or the radiator rattles, who're you gonna call? When you need laptops set up for a meeting, or the heating goes out in a school, who're you gonna call? Not Ghostbusters but the janitors, caretakers and facilities team members across the council who, armed with their toolboxes and WD40, keep the wheels of local government turning!

Connect caught up with staff from across Moray, got them to down tools and tell us what their days are like.

Marian Ogg, Resources Officer in Environmental Protection, is the line manager for 35 full-time and 50 part-time members of staff who look after 51 schools, two education buildings, and six

community halls. She said: *"It starts with looking after the maintenance of the facility. The schools come up with requirements and our janitors will deal with it if they can."*

"You need to be a 'people person,' because you are dealing with them all of the time."

The schools are probably the first place you think of as having a janitor.

Kevin Donald, Group Supervisor at Buckie High School for almost 24 years, said: *"Everybody comes to the janny if there's a problem!"*

"A lot of friends down the town say 'Janny? That's an easy number,' but a couple of weeks with me would change their tune."

"Setting up for community lets, dealing with flooding in the toilets – you've got to be able to adapt to everything."

"It's quite manual, though there's variety. You're meeting with the public, the teachers and students as well. It's a good job to get into."

Each high school has two janitors, and the primary schools have one, though some share one between them. Kevin and his colleague, Allan Paterson, are also the school's caretakers for night and weekend rotas. They set up for community groups that use the school during the day – including a mum and tots group, bowls and a whist club – and at night for other groups. The pair use the evenings to

undertake jobs that avoid disturbing classrooms during the day.

Janitors open the school each morning, walk around the site first to ensure that there are no hazards such as broken glass, dog fouling on playfields, or cigarette ends. They get the heating and lighting going, and grit the pathways in bad weather.

Rothes Primary Head Teacher Beverley McPherson said: *"At 7:00 am, when it's cold and snowing and you're trying to decide if you should close, you walk in and there's Mr McKenzie with his buckets and a smile – he's worth his weight in gold!"* She refers to Eoin McKenzie, the head janitor at both Rothes and Mortlach primary schools in Speyside.

"Our building is 100 years old but it doesn't look it; he takes such good care of it," she said.

The janitors and facilities teams are responsible for keeping their sites clean, tidy and well-maintained – as well as for carrying out monthly Legionella checks on the water supply, testing fire alarms, carrying out fire drills, dealing with contractors, and moving equipment and furniture. Lost property and vending machines are additional roles that they take on. For bigger repairs they book requests by email through a service desk. They are responsible for monitoring CCTV in the case of the high schools, and all can be called out at any time day or night to attend if the school's alarm is going off.

Having spent 13 years in the role, Eoin also acts as playground supervisor at break time, and is responsible for looking after Rothes Primary's resident 'dragon'.

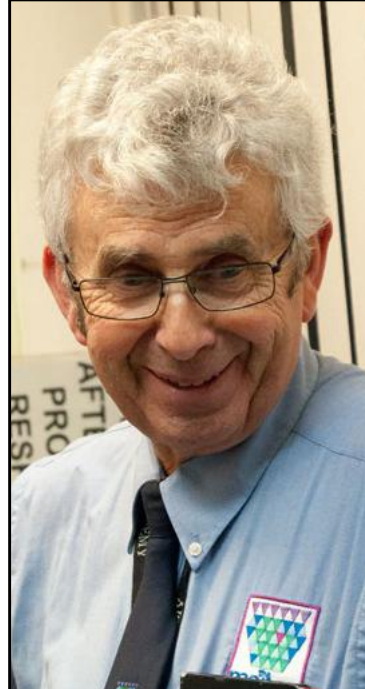
"The weans go round to the boiler house – that's where the 'dragon' stays –

to see where I feed him his hamburgers," he jokes.

Generations of Rothes schoolchildren have grown up believing that a dragon lives in the school's boiler house – reached by an external door with a metal grille and a large padlock from behind which noise and steam regularly escape. However, the children have confidence in Eoin's dragon-taming ability: *"They're not scared of it, to them it's just there,"* he says. *"You get a good laugh with the bairns; they can really cheer you up. They know you, they'll come and speak to you if something's wrong or they're upset. It takes two minutes to sort out, but it means a lot to them."*

Eoin is also a caretaker at Elgin High School, and has been so for 37 years, opening up at nights and weekends for groups and classes. *"There's people have been going there for many years and you get to know them. It's very sociable. You've got to be able to go and speak to people; it's all part of the job and it's what I like about it."*

Some of our longest-serving janitors work in Forres. Alexander 'Sandy' Burgess, Group Supervisor at Forres Academy, is retiring this month after nearly 30 years. Duncan Simpson, currently Senior Janitor at Applegrove Primary in Forres will be moving up to take over his post. He has been at



"I enjoy it a lot. You get a mixed bag every day."

Sandy Burgess, Group Supervisor, Forres Academy

Applegrove almost as long – since 1986 – though neither can quite match the service of colleague Ivor Brown, who has been part of the team at Andersons and Pilmuir primaries since 1985!

Sandy said the teams are very aware of costs. *"We prioritise our duties from a job sheet every day,"* he said.

"The more we can do, the more money it saves the school. We're never stuck for things to do. We set up 100-200 chairs for assemblies, arrange the back end of hall with chairs and tables as a sixth year study area, and clear it at night for bowlers."





"Your day is never set out. It's busy, hectic sometimes."

Lorraine Jones, Facilities Assistant, HQ Annexe

"I enjoy it a lot. You get a mixed bag every day – you never know what you're going to come in to. Students will stop in the street and speak to you years after they've left."

Duncan agrees that it's the children that really put the heart into what they do: *"Sometimes you're dealing with parents, but it's a totally different approach for the children. They all come to you just to say hi; you're halfway through Tesco and hear 'Mr. Simpson!' That's always nice. It's a worthwhile job."*

At the Elgin Town Hall and HQ campus, it's a different – though equally varied – story.

Bill Beaton, Senior Hall-keeper, has been there for two years and lists just a few of the events that have taken place in the last six months: *"Scottish Opera, pantos and school concerts, a Happy Mums market, beer festival, the Elgin Model train club,*

blood donors – and there's an over 60s tea dance every Monday which has been going on for decades. And elections, of course."

With three function rooms that can be in use by separate groups at the same time, it still only takes an hour or two to turn the rooms around between events, a speed that Bill attributes to his colleagues Dougie Duncan and Dave Newman.

He said: *"Each event has its own unique set up. It's teamwork. I'd be totally stuck without them."*

The hall can be laid out theatre-style with rows of seats, or cabaret-style with tables dotted about, or for formal dinners. It can hold over 550 people, and is in use almost daily. In the rare times that the venue is quiet, the team takes care of cleaning and maintenance. Bill has revamped the booking system and developed a digital version to keep

track of both bookings and the staff rota.

"It's not easy sometimes," he says. *"We try to be fair about the balance of nights and weekend work."*

"One of us must be on hand at each event to assist with the PA system, emergency procedures, and the take down."

"It's our town hall, the only place in Moray of this size and anyone can hire it. It's amazing what actually happens here."



"[The bairns] come and speak to you if something's wrong or they're upset."

Eoin McKenzie, Janitor (& Dragon Keeper), Rothes Primary

Kevin and Allan share a laugh after restocking the vending machine with healthy options at Buckie High



Across town, the largest facilities team is based in the new HQ Annexe. They are Gary Munro, Facilities Supervisor, Facilities Assistants Dennis Collins, Lorraine Jones – who also does catering – Steven Allan and cleaner Kate Chambers. The team's duties include overseeing pool car bookings, pool bikes, setting up IT for meetings, daily catering, restocking and repairing vending machines, repairs and general maintenance, even hoisting the rooftop flags and removing dead pigeons from the roof!

Gary notes demand is constant. *"Everyone wants something at every moment in the day. You come through the door and you don't know what you're going to do first."*

Starting at 6:30 am, the facilities team check the alarms and open up the HQ campus buildings ready for the first members of staff, who begin to arrive at 6:45 am. Like the janitors, they perform a site check, reporting any maintenance hazards or faults such as leaks.

Checking the diary, the team begin setting up meeting rooms with computers and video-conferencing: as many as 15 meeting rooms may need to be ready to start the day, and by the end of the day they will have completed 19-20 room set-ups. The team has to get the

equipment to the meeting room, set it up, take it down after the meeting, and put it back to the store. They are strict on timing, allowing only 10 minutes to clear ICT equipment for the next room user.

It's a similar story with the fleet of pool cars. The facilities team ensures that only the named person from the steady stream of users throughout the day gets the keys. They also administer pool bikes, which have proven popular since their introduction last year.

"Every day is a different challenge," Gary says. "We're the frontline to monitor the Annexe Access Point. The panic buttons come through to us, and we can step in to ask people to leave if their behaviour gets out of hand. We escort the public to the chamber for meetings, replenish loo roll and hand towels. We're mechanics, plumbers, tour guides – we're a living, breathing info centre."

On top of this, the facilities teams carry out daily heating and lighting checks, monthly Legionella testing, test fire alarms, and escort contractors to ensure they adhere to health and safety regs.

"We get about 80 calls a day, and 60 questions in person."

"We've got a really good team, we go the extra mile and people appreciate

that. There's a good rapport and banter with everyone which brightens the days.

"We rely on the ICT and maintenance teams; they're very helpful. Between the three of us we can fix it."

Although the facilities team does maintenance for the outside of the building, including cleaning the gutters and gritting the entrances, in the winter they rely on Lands & Parks to do the car parks, and would like to pass on their thanks for their input.

One person must be in their annexe room at all times to monitor CCTV systems, let in vehicles, distribute pool car and pool bike keys, and accept deliveries – up to 70 parcels a day! They also take on some cleaning during the day and car parking issues.

Lorraine, who has been with us in different departments for 16 years, said: *"Your day is never set out. It's busy, hectic sometimes."*

Dennis, who has been with the team for seven years, said: *"There's no two days the same here."*

"You get on with it; you have to be flexible."

"For example, last year we had to close off the road next to the building when



"One of us must be on hand at each event to assist."

Bill Beaton, Senior Hall-keeper, Elgin Town Hall

a tree fell down. After phoning the police we put on our hi-vis vests, checked to make sure that no one was trapped under the tree – ready to use our first aid training if necessary – put cones around it and redirected traffic until the police could arrive."

"The best part of the job for me is taking on the challenges of every day," says Gary. "You never know what's going to happen next, it's rare we get a quiet day."

He compares the team to a popular 1980s film. *"You've heard of 'who you gonna call? Ghostbusters!'" he said. "Well that's wrong; it's 'Facilities!'"*

HR Noticeboard

Social Area Standards

- Suitable for eating meals
- Hygienic
- Equipped with an adequate number of seats and tables or suitable surfaces
- Adhered to no smoking policy
- Separated from any

- The furniture, furnishings and equipment will be kept sufficiently clean. Employees are equally responsible for maintaining a clean and suitable hygiene standard.

- Seats will be kept sufficiently clean and fit for purpose. The seating itself will have backs to them, with adequate and suitable seating available for disabled persons within their base local

SOCIAL AREAS

We can all get engrossed in our work and before we know it lunch time is upon us. Within the council our social areas provide a place to sit down and eat a meal during these times – however there are varying degrees of standards across the council in terms of cleanliness, furniture, space, etc.

In order to support equity, a set of minimum standards for staff rooms, bothies and other staff areas have been agreed. They detail what you can expect from the council in terms of providing suitable facilities. In turn, they also set out what the council expects from you as an employee, and what your responsibilities are in maintaining these areas. The standards are not extravagant, but are reasonable in ensuring you have a suitable place to take time out to refuel and rejuvenate with your colleagues. The next time you are in your staff area, look out for the poster detailing our standards and make sure you are compliant. If you feel that the standards are not being met please raise your concerns with your line manager.

INDUCTION CHECKLIST

The first day at a new job may be amongst the most memorable with a mix of nerves and excitement. We all want to settle quickly and become familiar with the surroundings and the ways of working. To support new employees, a standardised induction checklist was implemented across the council in August 2016. The checklist includes the mandatory processes as well as the softer cultural elements, all of which are important factors in enabling new employees to feel settled.

If you have line management responsibility, remember to refer to the 'Induction Checklist' the next time you have a new employee to support them in becoming settled and productive in their role. It can be located under the 'Corporate Induction' section within Interchange.

Are you a carer?

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or
age affected by physical or
irailty or substance misuse,
without the support

BRIGHT IDEAS INTERNAL MAIL

The pressures we face as a council can be challenging, especially during times of unprecedented cuts in spending, but we know that we can achieve more together. Our staff suggestion scheme – Bright Ideas! – encouraged employees to put forward their ideas which would contribute towards financial savings or service efficiency.

One of the suggestions received related to making better use of the council's internal mail system. Currently, some communications from the council are being sent to employee's home addresses via external mail, when they could have been sent via the internal mail system. By making better use of the internal mail system, financial savings can be achieved.

Managers within each service have now been asked to review their processes with a view to determining whether communications can be sent by internal mail instead of external mail, whilst considering information security and management.

So the next time you need to send out a document, stop and think about whether you can send it by internal mail and help make financial savings.



SOCIAL EVENTS

As an employee, you are one of the most important assets to Moray Council, enabling services to be delivered effectively and making Moray an even better place to work. The Workforce Culture team have been working hard to create a more positive culture for you by undertaking a range of actions; we want you to feel recognised and valued whilst developing positive relationships with colleagues. Social activities can play a part in this, with social interaction in the workplace contributing towards improving working relationships, motivation and engagement.

Throughout the year, services across the council will be encouraged to participate in social activities of their choosing. Managers can encourage social engagement and ensure there is scope for sections to decide what they would like to do and make appropriate arrangements.

We will highlight upcoming events in *Connect* providing you with some options to choose from. However, we would really like employees to identify which social events they want to participate in and take responsibility to actually make it happen. It may be that you have a charity close to your heart and would like to raise money to support them, or it may be that you would like to improve your health and wellbeing and have set a goal of running a 5k as a team. It is up to you to! So get thinking about how your service can get involved, ask your manager for support and start planning your event!

THE FAMILY FIRM

What is it?

- As a 'Corporate Parent,' Moray Council has a responsibility to ensure that all Looked After Children receive the same quality of support from the Council as they would from a supportive parent
- In 2011 the Scottish Government published 'family firm'. This concept aims to encourage and enable local authorities and their partners to offer Looked After young people and care leavers a broad range of support to help them progress to a positive economic destination
- Adopting a 'family firm' approach, places an obligation on the Moray Council to support young people into positive and sustained destinations
- The Moray Council as a corporate parent has the resources of to be able to offer, all young people in its care, opportunities to develop their employability skills and improve their potential for gaining apprenticeships or long term employment.
- The 'family firm' approach will allow young people to be supported into, during and after placement opportunities.

Actions

The family firm policy can bring about the following outcomes:

- Create tailored opportunities for to allow for employability skills to be developed
- Increase the availability and range of opportunities provided by services by supporting them to feel equipped to offer opportunities for young people
- More ambitious and confident children and young people able to fulfil their potential
- Our children will be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included
- Increase the number of young people achieving and sustaining positive destinations.

Why?

- The post-school outcomes for currently and previously Looked After young people in Moray are not always positive. These young people are less likely than their peers who have not been looked after to go on to a positive destination post-school
- In 2015 80% of LAC young people who left school progressed to positive destinations; in 2016 71.3% of LAC young people progressed to positive destinations
- The 'family firm' approach will harness the existing employability provision in Moray, by identifying a positive pathway for young people to ensure they are in a positive post school destination
- The family firm approach will also seek to provide sustained positive destinations to young people
- The Moray 2026 Plan priorities – Ambitious and Confident Children and Young People, Achieving and Attaining, Achieving our potential – relate to this.

Next steps include:

- Finalise 'family firm' policy and seek agreement from committee
- Identify requirements of young people
- Identify opportunities across the council with Heads of Service
- Build programme of support and identify training needs
- Create a system to administer and support matching young people to opportunities.

BON VOYAGE AND
WELCOME ABOARD

It's all change in Forres! Alexander 'Sandy' Burgess, Group Supervisor at Forres Academy, is retiring after nearly 30 years in post. Sandy has been keeping Forres schools in top form since August 1987 but will soon be relaxing in his garden and maintaining the green at his bowling club. Duncan Simpson will be moving into Sandy's role from Applegrove Primary, and to fill Duncan's shoes we are pleased to welcome Stuart Dickson to the team, who is joining us from a relief facilities role.

Alexander 'Sandy' Burgess, top
Stuart Dickson, bottom left
Duncan Simpson, bottom right



CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations go to Diane McIntosh from the canteen at Milne's High School, who came a highly impressive second in the 'Big Schools Bake Off' competition for 2016.

Diane travelled to the City of Glasgow College at the close of last year to bake a range of delicacies for the panel of judges. She received a gift voucher and a signed cookbook as part of her prize.

A great effort and very well done to her!



Moir Gordon, a social worker who has been with us for nine years, recently celebrated a big (we won't say how big) birthday. Her Access Care co-workers decorated her work station with glittery banners, balloons, flowers and a cake for her big day. *"I kept it very quiet, but not quiet enough!"* she laughed.

Many happy returns Moira!





Bird Feeding

You may think that the worst of the winter is over – and let's hope it is – but February has been known to throw some pretty grim weather at us.

Which is why those of us who feed our feathered friends should not drop our guard. February is Bird Feeding Month and it is an important time of year in ensuring that wild birds are in tip-top condition ahead of the breeding season.

Some of our resident garden birds, including blackbirds, collared doves, house sparrows and dunnocks, will begin nesting this month as the daylight hours begin to stretch.

That is all well and good as long as the weather remains favourable, but a sudden cold snap can result in a high mortality rate among chicks. So keep putting out food and water for the birds to help them through what remains of the winter.

Though please note – this doesn't include the gulls!

MONTH





This year's Walk Challenge saw 16 teams compete to finish the equivalent of the famous scenic North Coast 500 route. The aim was to encourage participants to get out and walk the recommended 10,000 steps per day. Most teams managed to walk the 500 miles within the four-week period, with the winning team plus one other completing in excess of 1,000 miles throughout the challenge.

The winning team, 'The Proclaimers' – Neil Stables, Paul Nevin, Craig Wilson & Harry Gordon – not only completed the route first but also overall clocked up the highest amount of steps – an impressive 2,586,585 – the equivalent of 1,293 miles. Here they are displaying their certificate and prizes!

HATS OFF TO FUN

The Elgin Registrars recently had fun, organising a team outing at a fancy dress Mad Hatters party. Senior Registrar Heather Greig, Registrars Charlie Simpson, Heather Kellas and Liz Lambie, retired Registrar Elizabeth Ogilvie and Burial Grounds Foreman Steve Davies – or should we say the Queens of Hearts, the Mad Hatters, and the White Rabbit – had a blast in their outfits, taking turns wearing the large top hat that Heather had made specially for their night out. The registrar-themed hat was decorated with a bride and groom, baby, fountain pen and even mini birth, death and marriage registers. Top that!



TO RUSSIA UPDATE WITH LOVE

Back in August last year we highlighted the efforts of Ishbel Ewen, the council's Design Coordinator, who was trying to raise money to treat husband Mark's Secondary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis (SPMS).

A radical treatment that has been found to arrest the progression of this debilitating condition is not available on the NHS, and sending Mark to Russia where it was became the only option. But it cost £41,750.

Scores of you responded – the design office was frequently very emotional when donations came in – and thanks in large part to your generosity Ishbel and Mark flew to Moscow in November.

The staggering amount raised covered Mark's month-long hospital stay to stop his condition in its tracks. *"It was amazing to get the full amount,"* says Ishbel. *"There was so much support it was overwhelming."*

The money raised came in as donations on social media, collections, raffles, bake sales and events such as coffee mornings and sponsored walks. *"Several council departments were involved in fundraising, as well as family and friends,"* says Ishbel. *"It's unbelievable what colleagues and community have done for us."*

The aim of the treatment was to stop the symptoms of Mark's SPMS, a condition for which there is no known cure, from getting any worse. Following his diagnosis in 2015, it had progressed rapidly to the point where Mark had had to give up work. Before treatment began he went through two days of medical tests, which was an anxious time: if the doctors had felt Mark wasn't strong enough, they would have cancelled it then and there. Then the green light came and the life-changing stem cell treatment started.



To start the process Mark was given steroid injections for four days to stimulate his production of stem cells. These were then removed and frozen in liquid nitrogen for later use. Four days of intensive chemotherapy followed to knock Mark's immune system back to square one, then the stem cells that had been removed were quickly pumped back into his body to kick-start his immune system from scratch. Mark was kept in isolation during this stage, and was given a cocktail of antiviral, antibacterial and antifungal medication to prevent infection – as well as antacids to protect his stomach from effects of the chemo. Throughout, Ishbel and the family were able to keep in touch with Mark daily by text, email and Skype.

Ishbel returned to Moscow to pick Mark up at the end of December and the couple got home to Rothes just in time to celebrate a quiet family Christmas with their boys. The best present of all was the improvement that Mark was already feeling as a result.

It may take up to a year to see the full effects of Mark's treatment, but the family say they are so grateful to everyone that donated and gave them the chance of a normal life.

"We're still amazed at just how far people have put themselves out for us," says Ishbel. *"A massive thank you to everybody doesn't seem enough, but it is heartfelt."*



Heart's Desire



A mum-of-two who came close to death following a cardiac arrest is campaigning for more people to be trained in potentially life-saving CPR.

Doreen McClelland-Jones would also like to see heart defibrillators made more commonly available in public places – and more people trained to use them.

A fit 42-year-old with no previous health problems, Doreen went into cardiac arrest as she dropped off her car at an Elgin garage last May.

Staff rushed to her aid as she collapsed unconscious and called for an ambulance as one of the mechanics – a retired firefighter who had been trained in CPR – began chest compressions.

Doreen was rushed to Dr Gray's Hospital before being transferred to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary where doctors discovered a clot in an artery. In the intervening months she has made a good recovery although it will be some time before she is back to full fitness.

Doreen, a teacher with the council's early years education service who has two daughters, considers herself very fortunate that immediate help was on hand when she became ill. Had that not been the case, her chances of survival would have been slim.

"Every minute you are not breathing, you have a 10% less chance of surviving," she said. "Quick action in situations like these is so, so vital."

"I was lucky that there was someone on hand who could administer CPR and that an ambulance crew with a defibrillator arrived within minutes. Without either of those, I would not be here now."

Doreen is now campaigning to raise awareness of the need for more people to learn basic CPR and for a network of defibrillators to be placed at strategic locations where they are readily accessible in the event of an emergency.

As well as having the defibrillators available, she said it was equally important that their whereabouts were promoted and well signposted because any delay in getting them into action could mean the difference between life and death.

"I am happy to lend my story to the cause because I am one of the lucky ones who lived to tell the story," said Doreen. "I now realise that what happened to me can happen to anyone."



be my Valentine

Flowers, chocolates, cards - February has been the month of romance for centuries. As far back as Roman times, a fertility festival was celebrated on February 15, and to get early Christians to come on board with this previously pagan holiday the Pope declared February 14 to be St. Valentine's Day in the late fifth century AD.

But it doesn't always have to be about new love.

February can be a gloomy month for council staff; the budget is set, it's dark going to and from work and there's ages to go 'til summer holidays. Things can really get you down so here's a tip to break the winter blues and prepare yourself for Spring.

How about using Valentine's Day to appreciate those close to you? Your partner, family, close friends and colleagues are probably the people you let off steam to when work gets on top of you, so a token of appreciation on this most loved-up of days in the year would be a great opportunity to say 'thanks for being there.' Letting those supportive people around you know you appreciate them will give everyone in your circle a boost, so spread the love this Valentine's Day and make it a bigger celebration!