

**Connect**  
monthly

**November  
2018**



# Sea Change

**moray**  
council

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## Editorial

- 3 Welcome to your November *Connect*!
- 4 As I write this we've just had a taste of things to come with an icy blast from the Baltic. Our colleagues in roads will already be geared up for the long haul through winter to keep our 1,000 miles of tarmac gritted. In support, we in the communications office will be ready for the calls and comments from those that think every back lane and single track should be completely clear and ice-free. Educating people to drive to the conditions is an annual task for all councils and police forces; most drivers appear receptive but it's the obstinate hard core that keep us busy!
- 12 Good to meet our new harbours team and hear their enthusiasm for their new jobs. If Moray's future prosperity is as rosy as the recent investment announcements in RAF Lossiemouth, distilling, housing and tourism initiatives indicate, these harbours will be honeypots of activity. It feels good to see we've got such experienced colleagues on the ground there.
- 18 Speaking of future prosperity, the Moray Growth Deal was given the thumbs-up by Chancellor Phil Hammond as part of his budget speech. This signals the start of a negotiating period with both governments where the fine details are thrashed out, and who-pays-for-what is agreed. At the end of it a multi-million pound investment programme will be started in Moray, so a big pat on the back for the team in Moray Council for driving this forward.

■ Cover Image: Simon, Darren and Mike, the harbours team at Moray Council

## Team Connect



Peter Jones  
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OFFICER



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OFFICER



Angus McNicholl  
DESIGNER



# HeadsUp

Duncan Brown, Operations Manager - Harbours

## Dear Colleagues

Following a BA (Hons) from Durham University, the first half of my adult career began in the private sector, including eight years with BP Oil International in the City of London. I then ran my own business on a Scottish island after escaping the rat race, before working for the largest trust port in Wales in a joint post with the Milford Haven Port Authority and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

After completing an MSc as a mature student at Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh, the second half of my career began with an introduction to the public sector in North Wales. I worked for Conwy County Borough Council as Assistant Harbourmaster and then as Senior Maritime Officer with Anglesey County Council.

Taking up an opportunity to move north to Scotland, I then went to work for Highland Council Harbours as Marine Superintendent. Four years ago I logged my fourth local authority when I came to work for Moray Council. Thus I have gained many years of experience working in both the private and public sectors in a series of stunning locations, including the beautiful area where we all work now.

My official job title here is Development and Operations Manager, Harbours, but I tend to use the term Harbours Manager. I'm responsible for the overall management of the six harbours owned by Moray Council. From west to east these are Burghead, Hopeman, Buckie, Findochty, Portknockie and Cullen. Buckie and Burghead are classed as commercial, and the four smaller harbours are predominantly used by leisure craft. Moray Council is the statutory harbour authority for all six, which gives us statutory powers, as well as duties and responsibilities.

The harbours team is based at Buckie harbour office and comprises nine highly experienced and skilled individuals, who collectively take care of all operational aspects of the harbours work, ranging from cargo operations and pilotage duties to dealing with the public and general repairs and maintenance. Our aim is to develop all the harbours to maximise their potential in the years to come, to create more activity and jobs, and add growth into the local economy. These harbours are indeed among the jewels of the Moray coastline and I urge you all to pay them a visit.

## Old Navy slang quiz

1. What would you use a 'pusser's dip' for?
2. What would you find in a 'dead marine'?
3. What would you do with a 'donkey's breakfast'?

Answers below, no cheating!

Best wishes  
Duncan

1: For lighting your way (a pusser's dip is a candle)  
2: Nothing (a dead marine is an empty bottle)  
3: Sleep (a donkey's breakfast is a sailor's mattress, often a sack filled with straw)



# Sea Change

Moray's harbours are on course for a bright future thanks to a new team at the helm.

We have six harbours under council control: Buckie, Cullen, Portknockie, Findochty, Hopeman and Burghead. Lossiemouth and Portgordon are privately owned.

Following the retirement of some staff recently, the opportunity was taken to re-structure the harbourmaster service and meet the growing demand across harbours. The council has a single harbourmaster overseeing all harbours, with two assistant harbourmasters. Added to that are five watch-keepers, who operate a shift system to maintain a vigil across the marine estate, and an administrator to do the invoicing and other admin work.

Our Harbourmaster is Darren Bremner, based at Buckie, who is responsible for the 24-hour operation of all six of our harbours.

*"This new structure is working really well," he said.*

*"There's lots of autonomy for the team to solve issues for particular harbours, and we're all about finding new ways of tackling jobs that are more efficient. We place a lot of emphasis on teamwork both amongst ourselves and with our customers as this is the best way to ensure efficiency in all aspects of our job.*

*"I know that we all feel we're helping the communities that live around the harbours, those that use them, and the wider public. The harbours are great assets that we're determined*

*will play an increasingly important role."*

Buckie and Burghead are our commercial harbours, and both have seen an upturn in fish landings and cargo volume in the last few years. In addition, Buckie is starting to see more energy industry traffic using the harbour, as well as vessels associated with the shipyard. The upturn in the whisky industry has meant bigger grain shipments than ever being offloaded at the harbour – the new distillery at Macallan alone will need 60,000 tonnes of grain a year. Last year the total grain imported for all distilleries was just over 36,500 tonnes – huge increase!

Fishing activity at Burghead is also on the increase, with plentiful stocks in the Moray Firth proving an attraction to vessels as far south as Newcastle as well as keeping indigenous trawlers busy.

Assistant harbourmaster for commercial activity is Simon Forest.

He's ex-Royal Navy, had many years working on scallop trawlers out of Kirkcudbright and – prior to the energy sector downturn – offshore in the oil and gas industry.

Although he has seen a significant drop in his earnings from his time offshore, he says there are many compensations.

*"For one, I absolutely love the job,"* he said.

*"Every day is different and I feel lucky to have started here at a time when the harbours are getting busier."*

*"This job means I get to spend lots more time with my teenage children, and as my wife works too we can share much more than when I was offshore."*

Simon predicts a rosy future for Moray's harbours under the new structure.

*"The harbours need to change with the times,"* he said.

*"Burghead is more commercial now than it has been for many years, so we need more space for the fishing boats to manoeuvre and berth, which puts a strain on the room taken by leisure craft. I'm hopeful that Burghead will become commercial-only in the near future, but we'll see how that can be achieved."*

Assistant Harbourmaster for leisure harbours is another ex-military man, Mike Soper. Mike's from Cornwall, where his family were involved in boatbuilding, and his earliest memories comprise frequent days at sea on sea trials in new yachts.

After 14 years fixing aircraft in the RAF he spent time offshore as a hydraulics engineer, but found the work quite isolating. Eventually an incident offshore inflamed his PTSD, a condition he developed after being in the midst of horrors in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To help cope with the debilitating condition, Mike and his wife developed a small croft near Turriff,

and she persuaded him they should join their local sailing club.

*"It was then I realised that being near and on the water is the best, most calming place for me to be,"* he said.

*"It took quite a while to get myself back on track, the PTSD took me to a very low place, to the point where I wanted to take my own life. I was lucky, my wife encouraged me to ask for help and with her help I found a way back."*

He says he's over the moon to have landed the assistant harbourmaster job; it's put him into a like-minded team that work together to get the job done. A hands-on practical person, his huge experience in hydraulics and engineering has been put to good use keeping the council's ageing pilot boat going in Buckie harbour.

*"I just love it. I have a lovely drive to work along the coast, and whatever the weather I feel we're doing something worthwhile. Simon and I*



*will often work together in harbours, and both being ex-military helps."*

Over the winter the pair will be refurbishing some pontoons using their own design, and working with boat owners to improve harbour operations.

Simon adds: *"It's all about relationships; we can't change*

*everything overnight, but the harbour users are getting to know us, we think they like the fact we've been in their shoes and understand their issues."*

Development and operations manager for harbours, Duncan Brown, said: *"We've really landed a catch with Darren, Mike and Simon.*

*"Along with our new watch-keepers we have in place a great team, with huge experience in many fields and with a real can-do attitude. I really feel the section is in the best ship-shape it's been for many years, is ready to navigate the future and help everyone make the most of our harbours."*



# Moray Skills Pathway

**In the Year of Young People our Education Support Officer (Skills), Maxine Scott, tells us about the Moray Skills Pathway, and how we can help prepare young people for their future world of work.**

We all experienced 'work experience' at school – that traditional one week where we went into the workplace and loved it or hated it! But did it prepare you for the world of work?

The Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) report in 2014 looked at the traditional model and found that we need to do better, very much putting the focus on the employers to ensure that they support children and young people through learning to develop the skills our workplaces need now and in the future.

Through community planning with the Moray Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, we have committed to 'building a better future for our children and young people' by making them 'ambitious and confident children', with relevant actions set out in the Children's Services Plan.

We've a commitment to develop skills for work in all our children and young people aged 3-18, wherever they access their learning. The Moray Skills Pathway is the collaborative response to DYW to ensure that all our children and young people have the opportunity

to develop skills and understand Moray's unique economy – and the opportunities it can offer them.

As one of Moray's largest employers it's important that we showcase the broad range of career paths we have as an organisation – much of this can be done through a range of interactions with schools and young people.

To do this we no longer ask only for work experience but for you to showcase your role. Many have done this through STEM ambassadors, Career Ready mentoring, classroom talks etc.

Work-related learning can take many guises:

- learning in simulated work environments
- enterprise activities
- mock interviews
- career events
- research tasks
- employer presentations
- site visits
- personal skills analysis activities
- work placement activities

Through the Moray Skills Pathway we've guaranteed that all children and young people will have the opportunity at least four times during their schooling to explore the key growth sectors in Moray, and meet people who work in these through some of the opportunities above.

By supporting young people who have barriers to employment through Family Firm, we can afford them the same opportunities that we would wish our own children to have. To support further work in employability we're currently developing the 'Moray Pathways' website.

So what am I asking?

- Are you keen to be involved in developing our future workforce?
- Can you offer some time to support a young person, perhaps through mentoring?
- Are you keen to enthuse children and young people about the exciting job you do?
- Have you had an interesting and diverse career path?
- Can you support our young people to develop their skills for work?

Drop me an email ([maxine.scott@moray.gov.uk](mailto:maxine.scott@moray.gov.uk)) and we can discuss how we can support each other.

And lastly, if you can offer nothing else please speak positively about the world of work and the opportunities that Moray has to offer to our young people – now and in the future – so they enter the workplace confidently and ready to take their place in the community.



year of young people  
moray • 2018

# HR Noticeboard

## Holiday Buy Back

Remember that holiday buy back applications need to be in by the end of this month.

Holiday buy back it allows eligible staff to buy up to two extra weeks' annual leave. It's a salary sacrifice agreement, so equal instalments are deducted from your pay packet each month over the year. For every extra week you take, you'll sacrifice a week's pay.

Applications for 2019 requests will close on 30 November to allow Payroll to process all applications in time for the January pay run.

Just so you know, holiday buy back won't have any impact on your pension contributions or entitlements.

You can look at the guidance and application form – on interchange – to see if it's right for you.

## STAR Awards

Voting for the Colleague's Choice award has begun and we need YOUR vote!

This is your opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of your colleagues and vote for who you would like to see win the award.

Read more about who's shortlisted, and place your vote on the interchange.

For further help or information or if you/a colleague would like to vote but do not have the facility to do so, please contact HR on [hr@moray.gov.uk](mailto:hr@moray.gov.uk) or telephone 01343 563261 to lodge a vote on your behalf.

Voting closes on Friday 9 November. The winner will be announced and presented at the STAR Awards ceremony on 28 November and publicised soon after.



email [connectnews@moray.gov.uk](mailto:connectnews@moray.gov.uk)  
to get Connect emailed to your  
personal email address, every  
month.

# Share your... Bright Ideas!



Thanks to all who took part in this year's Bright Ideas staff suggestion scheme, to come up with ways we can make savings or operate more efficiently. We know that the people who know our work best are our staff, and this year we received lots of suggestions on how we can do this.

Given the financial challenges we're facing, the high level of participation is encouraging – demonstrating that we can all work together to achieve financial savings.

All suggestions have been explored further, shared with CMT, and response letters have been sent to each individual. A list of all the suggestions received is now available to view on the interchange but for now, here's a small selection we can share with you:

- Make the holiday buy back scheme mandatory for all employees, to generate savings on staffing costs.
- Stop the purchase of clothing which is not required as PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for example clothing worn in Leisure/Active Schools.
- Restrict the use of the staff car park, make it free for staff who need to use their own car for work purposes and charge everyone else £1 a day.
- Introduce a timetable system to our fleet of buses to save on fuel costs and maximise passenger numbers.
- Reduce the number of weeks our festive lights are switched on for, to save on energy costs.
- Condense working patterns so that the council closes at Friday lunch time generating savings on energy and improving morale.

Bright Ideas will be back in 2019 but, in the meantime, if you have any suggestions for service efficiencies or financial savings please make sure that you share them with your manager – Bright Ideas is supplementary to what should already be happening at service level.



Join the 50 alarm responders across Moray, helping less able residents stay in their own homes.

Several of our colleagues are already responders but there are many clients waiting in Forres, Elgin and Buckie. If anyone would like to know more about what this role entails or would like to become a responder please contact the Volunteer Department on **01343 563515** or email [Margaret.Cowie@moray.gov.uk](mailto:Margaret.Cowie@moray.gov.uk).



## Employee Conference 2018

The final conference for this year came to a close in Elgin in September, following conferences in Buckie and Forres.

The theme for all three events was 'The Power of You', focusing on us as employees. This theme helped to consider how we continue to transform services that deliver our priorities, the Corporate Plan, and to determine what role we play in addressing the challenges ahead.

Chief Executive, Roddy Burns, thanked everyone for their hard work and commitment over what has been a very challenging year. He said he was aware that we all know that the Council has to continue to change how it delivers services to achieve our priorities within a balanced budget. He was confident we can work together to achieve our corporate and service ambitions, and that the council was moving into a period of transformation and modernisation.

Delegates were involved in discussion groups, with the first session using 'Morayopoly' as a tool to develop ideas. This involved consideration of the impact a reducing budget has on council services and the workforce, what services should be protected, what needed to change and what the council needed to stop doing.

Delegates then used a 'spidergram' to consider the employee perspective on how we engage 'the power of you'. The focus was to consider what support employees needed to be the best they can be during this period of transformational change. This involved discussion around health and wellbeing, resilience, the working environment and communications. Stands providing information were available during the breaks, and many attendees sought advice from our Occupational Health provider on stress management, and had the opportunity to have a blood pressure check. The NHS



health point had advice and literature on health-related matters, and there were information points on health eating, exercise and signposting mental health services.

At the end of the events short films of three of our colleagues were shown about their work. They were Angela Keegan (Day Services Manager) Mark Bruce (Sport & Leisure Supervisor) and Mary Ross (Administrative Assistant), last year's winner of the Chief Executive's Award for Excellence at the STAR Awards.

Council Convener, Shona Morrison and Leader of Moray Council, Graham Leadbitter, opened and closed the conferences between them. Thanks to all those who attended and took part in the event. Feedback from the conferences will be published on the interchange as soon as it's ready.



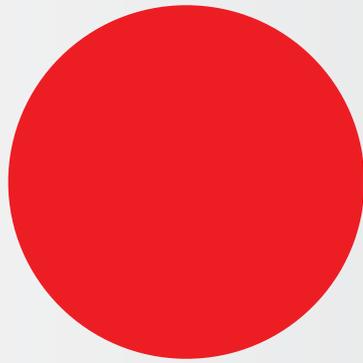
■ Anne from HR records the feedback during one of the sessions



■ Anne and Kara from HR enjoy a well deserved OJ (no vodka, honest)



**CHINA**



**VISIT**

**LEARNING TRIP OF A LIFETIME**

Meeting with S5 pupils  
@ High School No. 55



**Q**uality Improvement Officer, Willem Smit, made the trip to China last month with 18 other local authority head teachers and QIOs. The trip was funded by the Confucius Institute a non-profit, educational organisation which promotes educational, economic and cultural ties between Scotland and China.

In his diary of the trip he explains why he was there, what he got up to and shares some pictures.

**Day 1 & 2**  
**Friday 12 & Saturday 13 October**

I met up with the other 18 Scottish local authority participants in Glasgow and then flew to Beijing via Dubai on Friday 12 October. We were taken by coach to the Heping Hotel in Tianjin, a city with a population of 15.6 million and with which Scotland has a Mandarin language link.

**Day 3**  
**Sunday 14 October**

We visited the Tianjin Cultural Centre where we were fortunate to observe a Chinese dance competition for over 50s ladies and first came across the Chinese practice of having their selfie taken with westerners. I was surprised at how few non-Chinese people we met, especially as there were lots of European and North American products in shops along with KFC and McDonalds. After this we visited the Woodblock New Year Painting Museum where we made our own print on a wood block of a Chinese god of prosperity.

**Day 4**  
**Monday 15 October**

We attended a seminar on China-UK Education Status and Development at Nankai Middle School which is attached to Tianjin Normal University Old Campus. 'Normal' in this context means an academic university rather than a vocational one. Later on in the afternoon we visited the Tianjin University New Campus and its new library which can house 5,000 students. In this library there was an amazing collection of Chinese relics and a Department of Chinese Art which showed Chinese art and scholarship at its best. Here we also met

20 Mandarin gap year students who have just left Scottish high schools. They were enjoying themselves in Tianjin.

The day was rounded off with a boat trip along the Haihe River where we viewed the city lights which were striking in their beauty.

### Day 5 Tuesday 16 October

This was the day on which we met our partner schools. The Moray Confucius Hub at Elgin Academy is twinned with High School No. 55 in Tianjin which has 1,800 pupils. In S1 to S3 their pupils study a common course and then sit exams to get into S4 to S6 in this academic school. If they don't get into this school they can go to a vocational school or leave to be given a guaranteed job. I observed an S5 English lesson with 42 pupils which was fast-paced and engaging with a good teacher. I gave a presentation to the Senior Leadership Team and some other teachers as well as to a group of six S5 pupils later on. I showed them a map of Scotland with Moray highlighted and some information about our part of this beautiful country. I mentioned that Eric Liddell, the famous Scottish sprinter of 'Chariots of Fire' fame, was born to Scottish parents in Tianjin, making him the first Chinese born athlete to win an Olympic gold medal.

### Day 6 Wednesday 17 October

We transferred to Beijing and visited the Confucius Institute Headquarters, which was really impressive with a remarkable display of Chinese artefacts and history. We discussed how to improve the Confucius Hanban (teacher) programme and upskill our Chinese teachers. This was profitable and bodes well for the future. After this we watched a Kungfu show at The Red Theatre, the outside of which was, well, red.

### Day 7 Thursday 17 October

We took a bus journey to the Water Town which was beautiful and lies beside a section of the Great Wall of China which we visited later. Nothing could prepare me for the scale of the Great Wall, and the steepness of it on a hot sunny day. A memorable and breath-taking experience with my Scottish colleagues.

### Day 8 Friday 19 October

In Beijing we visited the Forbidden City which was huge for an ancient Emperor's residence. Tain'anmen Square was impressive although the memory of seeing pro-democracy protests being crushed on the media caused me to appreciate the freedoms we have in the UK.

We then visited the temple of Heaven where ancient Emperors carried out their religious duties and the Pearl Market where we haggled for souvenirs, jewellery, silk scarfs, etc.

### Day 9 Saturday 20 October

We started off the day with a rickshaw ride through the Hutong district, an older district for Beijing citizens to live. Because of its age it's not 'high rise', so has seen property rental prices rise significantly in the recent past. The last visit was to the Summer Palace which had a man-made loch and ended off a good day. We were then taken to Beijing airport to fly home.

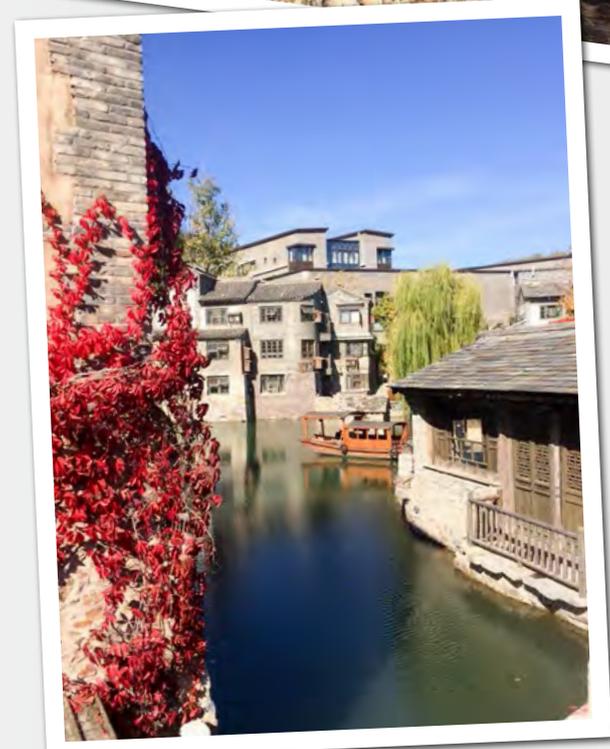
## My thoughts on the trip

There were a lot of police and security guards about which gave the cities and motorway service areas a certain feeling. All of the tourist attractions had security scanners for our bags. There were cameras everywhere and so I had the impression that I was always being watched, but I suppose that's just the Chinese Government's way.

The biggest surprise for me was the lack of westerners. I spoke to a German tourist over a coffee in Tianjin who told me that the authorities in China have people 'under tight control', which means that people have to conform and not speak out. However, in a school focus group an S5 pupil told me that she was not challenged by her English lessons with her English teacher present, so she felt free to speak up for herself in that context.

I really enjoyed visiting the high school but thought that the young people were being held back in large classes. The pupils were very focused on their goal – which was to get into a tier 1 Chinese university. This motivation was impressive and pupils were keen to show off their learning in class during discussions. Pupils were very keen to speak to me in a focus group and their English was impressive as they saw it as a way to engage with the outside world which was restricted to them.

The main thing I took from the visit is the desire for our two countries to work together despite our differences so that we can mutually benefit, although I am very pleased that I live in Scotland with our freedom and democracy.



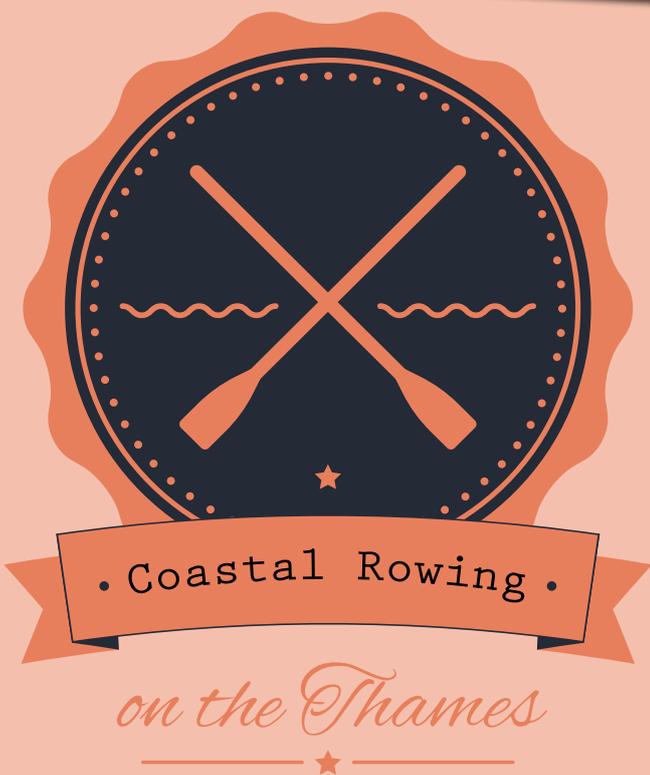


**T**wo colleagues switched the coastal waters of the Moray Firth for the River Thames for The Great River Race in September.

Helen Innes, a clerical assistant in Elgin Community Centre, and Jax Wright, a principal teacher for our SEBN service at Beechbrae, both took part with four fellow rowers from Findhorn Coastal Rowing Club.

*“Last year we all took part in the ‘Castle to Crane’ race, 13 miles up the River Clyde from Dumbarton Castle to the Finnieston Crane in the heart of Glasgow,” said Helen, “and that race inspired us to try the Thames race.”*

The event, which started in 1988, this year saw 329 boats and 2,400 competitors from all over the world competing for 35 trophies over a 21.6 mile course from London Docklands to Ham House in Richmond. Many different sizes and classes of fixed seat, paddle or oar powered boats took part, from Cornish gigs to Dragon Boats and Hawaiian out riggers, including the St Ayles skiff - which is the type of boat Helen and Jax are used to from their time at Findhorn Coastal Rowing Club.





*“Our skiff ‘Joppa’ was built in Findhorn as a community project. It launched in 2015 and is now part of a growing skiff club community around the Moray Firth of over 15 clubs and growing!” said Helen.*

*“Two of our crew left by road on Thursday morning before the race, towing the boat and the rest of us flew down on Friday morning. We all met up at Ham House, Richmond, on Friday afternoon, prepared the boat and launched her ready to be towed to the start early on Saturday morning.*

*“On race day we were up at 5am to catch the buses laid on to get us into London in time for the 10am start. The slowest boats went off first and the fastest last.*

*“It was a fantastic carnival atmosphere, lots of crews in fancy dress and all boats display a flag of their choice, adding to the colourful spectacle. Crowds on the banks and bridges wave, clap, ring bells and shout encouragement as the boats go past.*

*“There were 28 bridges in total to navigate and the first bridge we went under was Tower Bridge – it was amazing to have the opportunity to see the bridges and sights from the water such as the Tower of London, The Shard, St Paul’s Cathedral and many more iconic landmarks.”*

*Jax said: “All the crew were thrilled to have taken part and thank our club for the support and encouragement they have given us. Thanks also for the donations we’ve received for Lymphoma Action and Pancreatic Cancer Scotland – I lost my mum a year ago to pancreatic cancer and so far have raised £500 for this charity, with pledges still coming in.*

*“We are always looking for new members at the rowing club, so if we’ve inspired you to give rowing a go – get in touch!”*



Legal eagle Morag Smith scaled new heights on her fundraising trip to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. She's raised £2,015 so far for Alzheimer Scotland, in memory of her father. She reached the Uhuru Peak on 6 September after a "gruelling" 7.5 hour climb to the summit, where she said it was so cold she had to wear five layers of clothing.

As well as raising money for a well-deserved cause, Morag was rewarded for her efforts with stunning views, and she shared her pic from the summit with us.

# Christmas CRAFT FAIR



A Christmas craft fayre is being held at Ashgrove depot from 5-9 November, with part of the proceeds raised donated to Scottish Huntington's Association.

A table of goodies including chutneys and jams, crochet items and bags, pictures, cushions, hats and Christmas decorations will all be up for sale – some of which have been by the team there!

Head along between 12-2pm to pick up some Christmas gifts or a treat for yourself.



# GEARING UP FOR WINTER

**W**inter has landed and our colleagues in fleet services and roads maintenance at Ashgrove have been doing their usual preparations for the season which lies ahead. Given this summer's fantastic weather, the more sceptical among us may believe that this means a harsh, cold winter lies ahead.

To help you prepare for winter, we've pulled together some useful links which will come in handy over the coming months.

**Interactive gritting maps:** see which routes are gritters are treating, updated daily.

[www.moray.gov.uk/moray\\_standard/page\\_108484.html](http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_108484.html)

**Gritting priorities:** we can't be everywhere, so find out the different priority categories and when these are gritted...

[www.moray.gov.uk/moray\\_standard/page\\_103160.html](http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_103160.html)

**Find your nearest grit bin:** enter your postcode to locate your nearest grit bin

[www.moray.gov.uk/moray\\_standard/page\\_104806.html](http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_104806.html)

**Winter driving advice:** how to stay safe and avoid a breakdown this winter

[www.theaa.com/driving-advice/seasonal/winter](http://www.theaa.com/driving-advice/seasonal/winter)

**Trunk road gritters and winter salt treatment:** see what treatment Moray's trunk roads are receiving, updated daily [trafficscotland.org/wintertreatment](http://trafficscotland.org/wintertreatment)

**Road conditions and closures:** we'll detail any roads which are affected by adverse weather [roadclosures.moray.gov.uk](http://roadclosures.moray.gov.uk)

**School closures:** see below

A new alert system which will notify parents when schools are closed for bad weather, heating failures or other reasons is being developed by our colleagues in ICT.

You can sign up to receive school closure alerts by email for multiple schools – ideal if you have kids at primary and secondary school.

We'll still publish any closures in all the usual places, including social media, on Moray Firth Radio and the school closures page on our website. This is just a handy addition which means you get emails directly to your computer or phone alerting you of any closures, or changes to school closures.

We'll share more info once it's ready to go, including how you can sign up for alerts.



**M**ost of us will have our Christmas heads firmly screwed on by now and be prepping for the festivities.

While out and about picking up gifts for our friends and family, we're being encouraged to pick up an extra present to donate to Mission Christmas, to make sure every child in the local area wakes up on Christmas morning with a gift.

Last year MFR's Mission Christmas appeal gave gifts to 6,324 kids across the North East, that wouldn't otherwise have received a Christmas present.

This year our colleague, Dionne McLennan, a Clerical Assistant based at HQ has set up a drop-off point for donated gifts at the breakout area of HQ. It will be in place for six weeks, from Monday 12 November, and we'll be collecting new and unwrapped presents for children aged 0-18.

Dionne spoke to *Connect* about why she's gone to the effort to arrange a Mission Christmas present drop off.

*"Since I got my first full time 'adult' job here in the council last April – and I've started paying my way and not relying on my mum and dad – I've realised how expensive life is and Christmas is!"*

*"I want to make sure all kids have a reason to smile on Christmas day and that their parents aren't stressed about money and have the chance to feel good about themselves at Christmas, too."*

Are you organising a present drop-off elsewhere in the council? Let us know by emailing [webmaster@moray.gov.uk](mailto:webmaster@moray.gov.uk) and we'll publish all drop-off points on the interchange.