



Connect

monthly

March
2019

WHAT HAS
COUNCIL
THE ~~ROMANS~~
EVER DONE
FOR US?

WELL,
QUITE A LOT
ACTUALLY!

moray
council



March 2019

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Editorial

We hope you enjoy our Life of Brian feature this month. We thought that, amongst all the budget reductions that are swirling around, we should remind ourselves of some of the sector-leading things we do and raise a smile in the process.

It's easy to get brow-beaten by those who constantly criticise 'the council' for perceived shortcomings in a few areas of service. We all get tarred by that brush, and sometimes it's good to look on the bright side of life and come back with some examples of the excellent work we do. Social media is a feeding ground for these negative judgements, and it is frustrating that we are a bit constrained by our Code of Conduct in how much we can engage with the naysayers. However, in exchange for half a denari you are free to use any of the information in the article.

We hope that the main feature this month will help you in those conversations, and maybe change a few minds about what we deliver, day in and day out.

Try as I have, I can't squeeze any other Life of Brian references into this editorial. But at least I didn't say Jehovah...



Peter Jones
Communications Officer

Sharon Dunbar
Media & Communications
Officer



Angus McNicholl
Designer



HeadsUp

Andy Donegan, ICT Project Leader
(soon-to-be ICT Business Change Officer)

Dear Colleagues

I grew up in Paisley, leaving school at 17 to join the Royal Air Force. After completing my training at RAF Cosford, I moved to Kinloss in 1985 – I've been here ever since!

I served for nine years as an Air Comms Technician, maintaining all comms systems including the acoustic systems on the now-defunct Nimrod aircraft.

Next came an opportunity with Scottish Hydro as a Comms Technician, covering the area from Banff in the east to the Isle of Lewis in the west, and as far north as Orkney and Shetland. A pretty challenging job to say the least, particularly when being flown into hilltop sites by helicopter to repair radio masts because snow had blocked every road in the vicinity!

I joined Moray Council's ICT section in 1996, working in the network team which got me out and about across the region. And, for the last four years I've been the leader on the digital services project.

Since 2015 we've been developing online services for the public to use 24/7. Not only is it a lot cheaper for us to deal with customer requests online than it is face-to-face or by phone, it's also an expectation from

our residents that they can make these requests outwith our normal working hours. Let's face it, how many of us order shopping or manage our banking online when we get home at night, or at the weekend?

Our team of ICT officers has revamped the content of the website to make it more user-friendly, and invested a lot of time in creating online forms for customers to make requests or report things. It's a varied bunch, everything from requesting a new bin, changing address for council tax billing, reporting a pothole and even registering children for school or nursery! Each service has different requests, and so do our customers, so no one-size fits all.

And it's paying off. We're seeing a marked difference in people using online services: 70% of all the garden waste applications have been made online; 70% of council house offers are accepted or rejected online and 80% of all school meals are paid for online. It's great for the customer as it's convenient, and it's saving us time and money.

I'm moving into an ICT Business Change job in April, which I'm looking forward to. It's part of the

council's improvement and modernisation plan and sees ICT as an enabler to change and improve the way we work. I'll be continuing to work with departments to come up with solutions to improve internal processes, and also public-facing ones.

I'll give you an example: school meals. There were dozens of different ways the meals which primary kids ordered was collated and sent to the kitchen! Last year we introduced a new system in primary schools which means that there's one universally-agreed process, freeing up time in the classroom and letting parents see what their kids have ordered. Everyone's a winner. If there's something you think we can help your team with, let me know and we can have a chat.

If this whistle-stop overview of ICT and digital services wasn't enough for you, check out the strategy talk in this edition for more about what our ICT teams get stuck into.

In the meantime, I've got holiday planning to do before I head off for some sun later this year. And I must find time to improve my handicap so if I'm not behind my desk, you'll find me on a golf course – a great work/life balance can't be underestimated!.

Best wishes
Andy

WHAT HAS COUNCIL THE ROMANS EVER DONE FOR US?



Given all the gloomy news about Moray Council services that are being reduced or changed to balance the budget, it would be natural to feel we're not able to deliver a good service. Relentless public criticism, errors and below par performances are often the only things people and the press comment on, and it all drives our morale and pride in the job down. We're only human after all (although frequently expected to perform super-human tasks!).

So we had a look at what the council does compared to other Scottish authorities and if that poor performance perception of Moray is borne out.

It ain't. And that's official!

The *Connect* team checked reports and data from local authority areas across Scotland, and compared to many Moray residents get a pretty good deal from this council.

ROMANES
EUNT
DOMUS

ROMANES
EUNT
DOMUS

Bins

The hot topic at the moment is bin collections and garden waste permits. Given the data, we think our waste collection is the best in the country, and here are the facts to back that up:

Sixty per cent of all household waste in Moray is recycled, meaning we've already hit the 2020 government target and have one of the highest recycling rates in the country. But did you know we also provide among the most comprehensive kerbside collections?

There's no kerbside collection of glass in Dundee, Fife, Perth & Kinross, Inverclyde, Shetland, West Dunbartonshire or Highland.

Garden waste isn't collected in Argyll & Bute or Dumfries & Galloway. Of the councils which do collect it, more and more are introducing a charge: Highland, Perth & Kinross, Midlothian, Angus and the City of Edinburgh councils all have a paid-for permit system in place.

Meanwhile in the Scottish Borders and Aberdeenshire, residents receive no glass or garden waste collections from the kerbside.

The Code of Practice for household recycling in Scotland says that containers for recycling glass can be given to each property or, alternatively, within the community for communal use. Here we offer both, as many of our recycling points have glass recycling facilities within.

The Code of Practice doesn't cover garden waste, simply saying 'councils may make their own plans for the collection of garden waste'. As it's not a statutory service but a valuable one to householders, the only way we can continue to provide this is through charging for the use of it. So far we've sold more than 13,500 permits, generating much-needed income.

Housing

Housing is another high-performing service. Our tenants stay in their houses longer than anywhere else in Scotland – so they must like them. We collect 101.8% of all rents, including former tenant arrears, again the best in Scotland, and we are in the top ten – 8th – for having a low level of arrears in the first place (2.4%). This efficient collection of rents means that we can afford to maintain our housing stock to a high level.

Bringing money in efficiently to help pay for services is clearly one of our strengths, and our revenues team are consistently in the top ten for prompt collection of Council Tax. For 2017/18 tax year we collected 96.7% of all outstanding tax and have significantly cut the cost of collection.

Leisure Services

Leisure services and pools are very much in the news locally, but how do we compare with other councils?

Membership costs for other Scottish local authority leisure services vary hugely; if you lived in Argyll & Bute you'd be stung for £83 per month, per family. In Midlothian it is £85.60 per month for just a couple, and in North Lanarkshire £70 per month, per couple. In neighbouring Highland and Aberdeenshire it costs families £30 per month and £58 per month respectively.

Compared to our 'all-inclusive' family membership costing a maximum of £30 per month, including swimming lessons, fitness classes, swimming pool and gym access, our residents get a lot more bang for their buck. Even better, the FitLife? card gives access to all Moray Council-run leisure services and Moray Leisure Centre.

Bonus!

Street lights

Our programme to replace all street lights with energy-efficient LEDs is ahead of schedule. Despite some of the nay-sayers criticising the programme as an unnecessary use of money, it's already slashing the council's – and therefore taxpayer's – energy bills and has made a huge difference to the light pollution from old sodium fittings that communities have experienced for years. Most other councils are still struggling on with energy-hungry lights, and those that plan to start a replacement programme are struggling to finance it. On top of that all emergency repairs to streetlights were completed within two hours.

Much better!

Roads

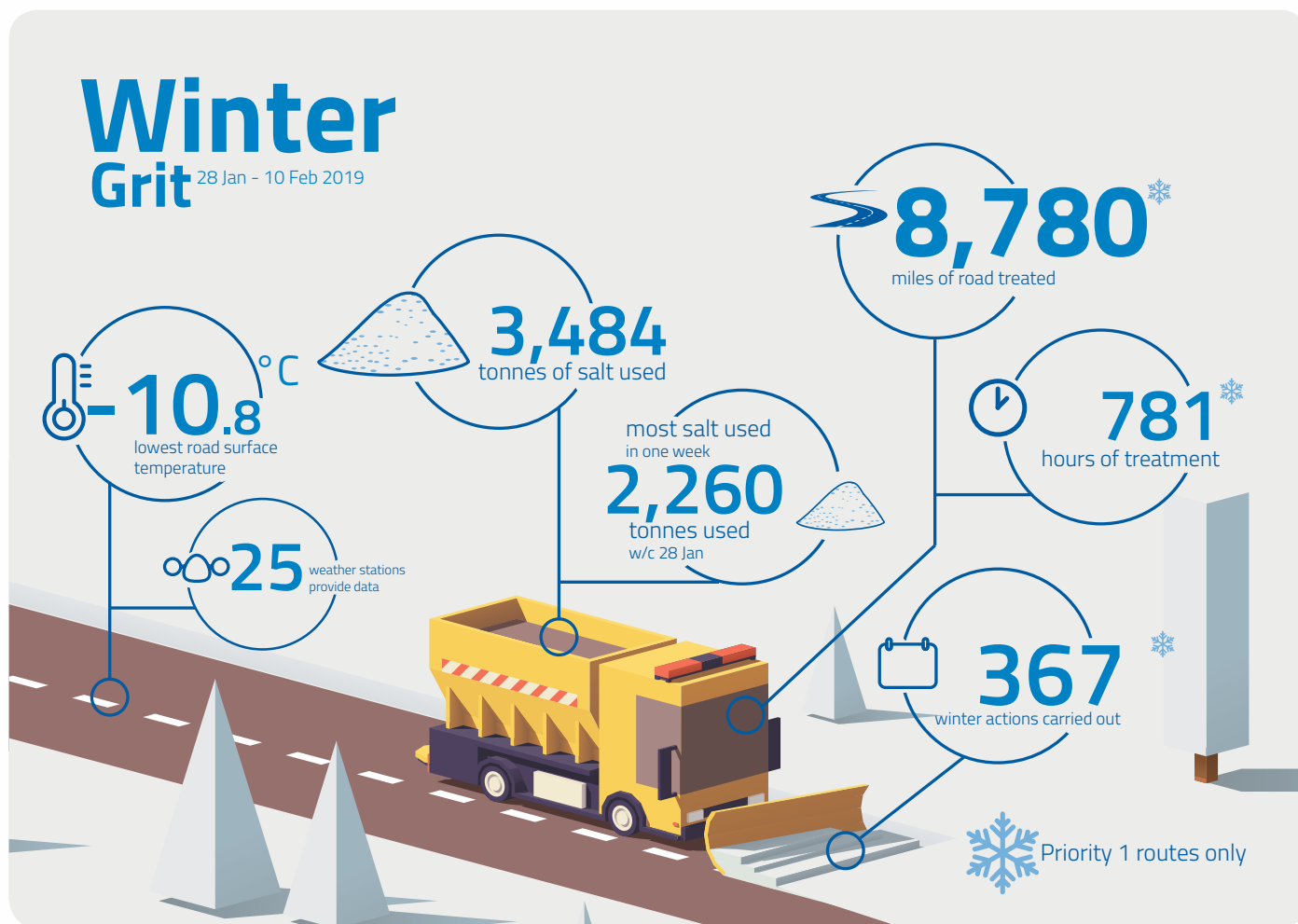
At this time of year we get an increase in complaints about the roads. There are more potholes; not gritted to the point where drivers can do 60mph+ in sub-zero conditions; gritters putting too much salt on the road; gritters not out early enough – you name it, it gets complained about.

The facts tell a different story.

Our repair of roads that are damaged is pretty efficient; in the last quarter our teams made safe every emergency road damage and pothole within two hours, and on average completed repairs to over 93% of them within three days. We complete 80% of priority 2 repairs, which includes less dangerous potholes, within 28 days, and last quarter alone there were 940 of them!

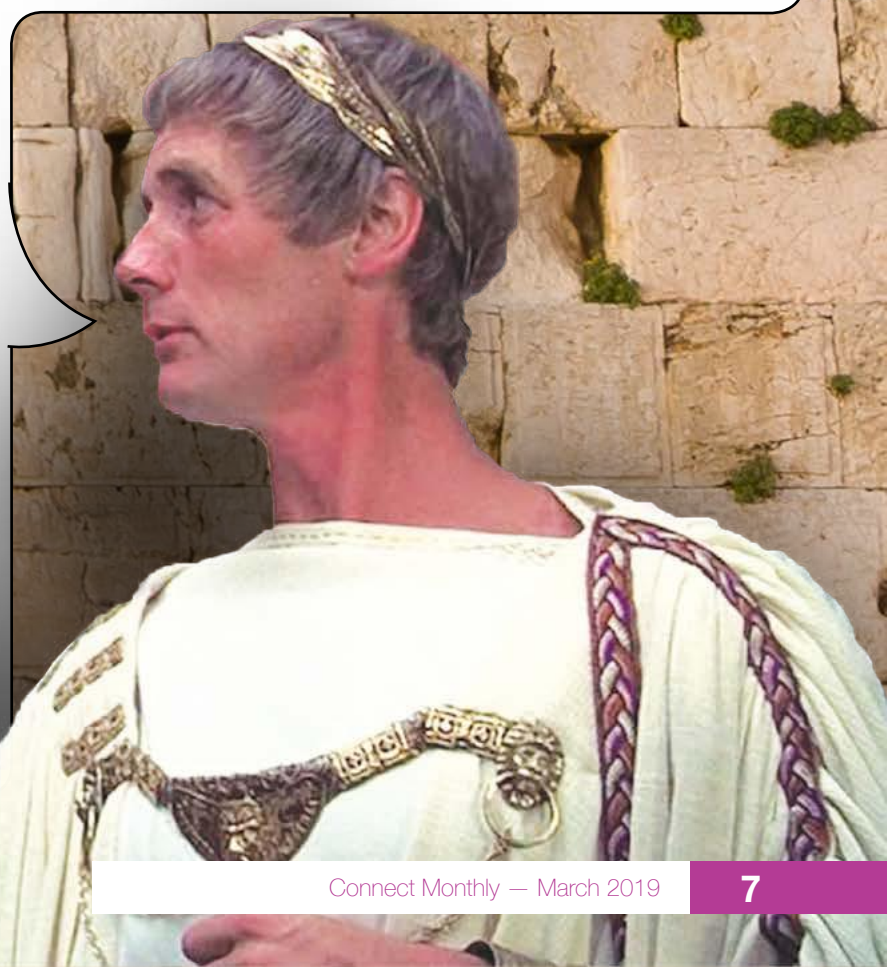
Good work team!

As for winter treatment, we'll just let our graphic of 28 Jan – 10 Feb do the talking:



Of course we can always do better in lots of ways, and that's what we aim for. But these examples are just a few of the areas where we are among the best performing councils in Scotland.

So next time someone in the pub starts to moan about your council, you now have something to answer them with.





ICT AND DIGITAL STRATEGY

We must make better use of flexible and mobile working, put more services online and make the best use possible of ICT within schools if we are to transform the council.

Technology has only been used within local government since the early 80s. It's changed beyond recognition since then and is now critical to the everyday work that we do. Technology changes faster than ever now and it's important that we set out a plan for the future to make best use of what's available. It's even more important when we are facing extreme financial pressures.

The ICT and Digital Strategy contains four main priorities: transformation, decision support, compliance and future planning.

TRANSFORMATION

We must make better use of flexible and mobile working, put more services online and make the best use possible of ICT within schools if we are to transform the council and operate more efficiently. However, we tend to like to do things in the way we always have, which means that we really need to change the way we think.

Developments at home like Alexa and remote doorbell apps show us what might be possible, and we need to think differently about how we do our jobs too. So when looking to provide information to the public, do we really need to put this on a poster or other document? It might be possible to deal with something by phone, but could the web site or a digital form help?

Typically the average cost of providing a service face to face is 20 times more expensive than telephone and 50 times more expensive than online. That's the importance of this transformation element and why we're looking at this to deliver further efficiencies.

DECISION SUPPORT

At a personal level we make use of data all the time, whether it's reading reviews on Amazon, using price comparison sites before making a purchase or looking at mortgage rates before buying a house. It can often be frustrating when you can't find information to help you decide what to buy. We hold vast amounts of data but it's primarily held in departmental silos and often provided in paper-based reports. To unlock the value of this data, an open and transparent approach is being developed to provide employees, managers and elected members with timely access to information to perform in their role, manage their service and support decision-making. Providing information to the public in a transparent manner will also help them to understand the reasons for the decisions we make.

Why not take a look at www.moray.gov.uk/opendata to give you an idea of the type of thing that's available?

COMPLIANCE

While the use of ICT is increasing this brings with it additional audit and compliance requirements covering cyber security, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and online payments. Much of the work in this area is unseen and for the things that are visible, such as enforcing regular password change, we can be inclined to see them as a nuisance. However, compliance is a serious issue and to reduce the risk of a security breach or similar issue everyone needs to understand the need for security when working out of the office or perhaps when clicking on links in emails. The latest revision of the strategy identifies the need to develop policies and procedures to ensure an ongoing approach to compliance within the council supported by a staff awareness programme.

Staff are the first line of protection within a cyber security context and although ICT can do as much as possible to safeguard the integrity of systems and data we still rely on everyone to help.

FUTURE PLANNING

The first mass-produced smartphone was introduced by Apple in 2007 but not many of us could contemplate life now without the smartphone. You just have to look at your own life and the technology changes that may have come in over the last few years with heating systems that can be turned on/off remotely, smart gas and electricity meters that automate meter readings and provide at a glance energy usage, smart televisions, Wi-Fi enabled music streaming solutions and personal activity trackers. A lot is going to change over the course of a five-year strategy so we need to continue to consider opportunities that are presented from the use of new technologies.

We already have some smart technology within the council such as centrally-controlled heating systems, smart lighting within some buildings but is there a role for Amazon Alexa, Skype, drones or possibly even driverless vehicles in the services we provide?

Our revised strategy aims to deliver more efficient processes and procedures that will help address some of the financial pressures faced by the Council. However, everyone has a role to play and we would like you to consider the following:

We already have some smart technology within the council.

ARE YOU UP FOR THE CHANGE?

Do you have the digital skills to allow you to do your work?

Do you have a good idea for changing the way you work?

If you have any questions or would like to provide some feedback then drop us an email at connected@moray.gov.uk.

HR Noticeboard

Employee Conference

We're also starting to plan for this year's employee conference, where there'll be opportunities to hear about a range of improvement activity going on across the council, speak with colleagues and hear about the work they are doing and to have discussions with senior managers.

Invites will be sent out later in the year – so we hope to see you there.

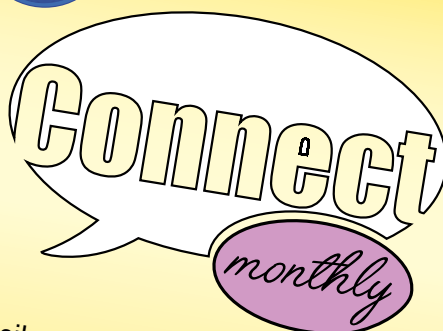
Don't be too disappointed if you don't receive an invite though as there will be other opportunities and ways to contribute.

Employee Opinion Survey

Our employee opinion survey happens every two years. While it hardly seems any time since the last one in 2017, we're already planning this year's survey. This is be a chance for you to voice your opinions, so please use the opportunity to submit your views.

The last survey in 2017 had a response rate of 42%, which was great but let's try and beat it!!

The survey will go live in June but we will tell you more about it in future editions of *Connect*.



email connectnews@moray.gov.uk to get *Connect* emailed to your personal email address, every month.

Triple Challenge

Elgin Rotary



2019

**FEB
23rd**

Swim 800m

Moray Leisure and Lossiemouth Swimming Pool

Cycle 50 KM

Moray

**APRIL
7th**

**JUNE
2nd**

Run 5 miles

Elgin Cooper Park

Enter One or more events **OR** as a team!
www.resultsbase.net

1, 2 or 3

**June
1st and
2nd**

ROTAFUN Weekend

Saturday Marquee and Sunday Family Fun
in Elgin Cooper Park, details to follow



Visit our website for more information
www.elgin.rotary1010.org

ELC IN MORAY

Comms and Engagement Officer for our Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) programme, Kirsty Boyle, gave *Connect* the low-down following a busy registration period in January – and everything else that's been happening in the land of ELC...

Registration for the next phase of our ELC expansion took place in January with around 1,000 children able to access their increased number of hours in a flexible way from

this August. It was great to see so many parents already aware of the expansion and knowing what hours they were looking for when registering – a big thanks to all our staff who've helped get our messages and news out there!

We saw online registration for the first time in four of our settings; it's hoped this will be rolled out across all nurseries next year. Parents will receive their allocation confirmation before the Easter holidays.

Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Children and Young People, visited Seafeld Nursery





Early Years Modern Apprentices – Emma, Beth, Lori, Mhairi and Samantha

Nursery manager posts will be filled for our phase two nurseries in the coming months and any staffing gaps will be recruited for afterwards. Existing staff will have the opportunity to speak with HR regarding increasing their hours prior to any new staff being recruited.

Our five Early Years Modern Apprentices – Emma, Beth, Lori, Mhairi and Samantha – started in February giving us the opportunity to train staff who can go on to enjoy a successful and progressive ELC career here in Moray. Offering these posts as part of the wider ELC expansion investment is great both for us and our young people taking up these opportunities to train and work in this growing sector.

Building work is starting on the phase two new builds at Cullen and Pilmuir in the next few weeks – the extended

hours will be delivered in the existing buildings until work is complete later this year.

We've produced a 'positive lunchtime experiences' video to aid our colleagues in the Northern Alliance with the introduction of funded lunches through the expansion. Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd MSP, visited Seafield Nursery to learn about how we deliver the funded lunch. All children receiving their 1,140 hours with a funded provider over lunchtime are entitled to a free nursery lunch. We're lucky to have a dedicated project officer working on this – but not everyone is fortunate enough to have a Pearl Gray in their team! The video will also be available for parents to find out a bit more about what lunchtime looks like in a nursery...

All children receiving their 1,140 hours with a funded provider over lunchtime are entitled to a free nursery lunch.

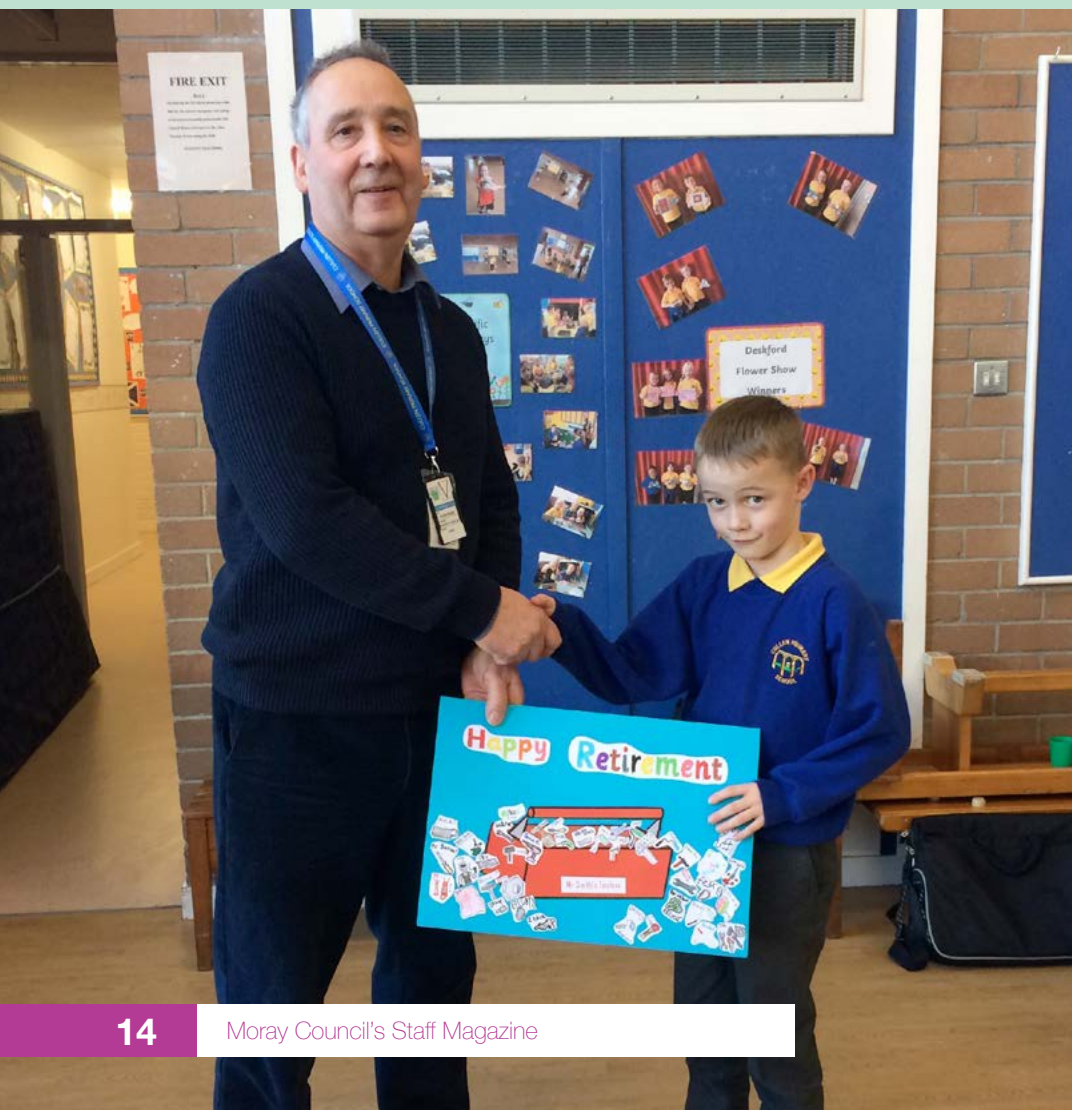


A retirement celebration was held for Principal Planning Officer, Angus Burnie, in late January. Angus joined the council in 1991 as a Senior Planning Assistant, and in 1996 became Principal Planning Officer. During his career, he's spent six years working on the multi-million pound flood alleviation schemes.

He said over the years he'd faced *"many challenges and complex applications"* and thanked colleagues for the support he'd received. Angus plans to take a break and travel to Canada to visit his son but will miss his colleagues, many of whom he said have become friends.



Fond Farewells



Richard Smith retired at the end of the year having worked at Cullen, Findochty and Portknockie schools for the past six and a half years. Here is receiving a retirementcard made by pupils at Cullen School, from Calum McKay P4/5 at their Robert Burns Assembly.

Richard said: *"I really miss getting up in the morning to come and work at my schools but I will have plenty to do, especially when the Spring comes."*

The Budget & You

Among the many other measures to reduce the council's annual spend at the budget setting meeting on February 27, councillors approved the deletion of 84 posts, along with reduced hours for many others. It's one of the toughest budgets the council has ever had to deliver, and the impact of the many measures agreed will continue to be keenly felt by colleagues and residents as the year progresses.

Few of us will escape being affected, from increased pressure on those remaining to do more with less time and resource, to bearing the brunt of complaints from reduced services. There's plenty of support available to all staff if things get too much, or if specific issues need dealing with – formally or otherwise.

Your immediate line manager or supervisor is your first port of call, but there's also the council's employee support line. We have excellent union representation within the council too, and if you need to discuss with them here are their details:



Moray Unison represents members employed within public, voluntary and community services throughout Moray. It is run by a branch committee and supported by skilled staff, locally, regionally and nationally. If you have a problem, talk to your local steward or a Branch Secretary:

Suzanne Wright
01343 563170
unison@moray.gov.uk

If your local reps can't handle the problem on their own, they can talk to full-time union experts on your behalf.

A list of branch officers can be found at: www.morayunison.com/about/whos-who/



The **GMB's** membership comprises many front-line staff, and it is our members that frequently face the public's frustration at budget cuts and service reductions. This can be distressing and make for a stressful working environment. Like our colleagues in Unison and Unite, we are here to support you. Call or email me:

Keith Ewen
07837 149993
keith.ewen@googlemail.com

Unfortunately we don't have contact details for a local representative for the **Unite** union, but their regional officer, Vic Fraser, can be contacted on 01224 645271, mobile 07810 157920, or on email vic.
fraser@unitetheunion.org

There's plenty of support available to all staff if things get too much, or if specific issues need dealing with.



Strictly Inverness

I thought it was time to set my biggest challenge yet – Strictly Inverness 2019

Janet MacDonald, our Sustainable Travel Officer, will be swapping her high heels for dancing shoes as she takes on the challenge of Strictly Inverness this year.

She's been fundraising for various charities for around 10 years and sees the challenge as something which helps her local community.

"This time I thought it was time to set my biggest challenge yet – Strictly Inverness 2019 – in aid of Highland Hospice."

Highland Hospice is a charity that provides specialist palliative care to improve the quality of life for people throughout the Highlands, and parts of Moray, who have life limiting illness and require specific treatment for difficult

problems such as pain and symptom control or require rehabilitation.

"This year I am taking part in the 10th anniversary of 'Strictly Inverness 2019', I'm committing to learn three new dances and competing in front of a 600-strong audience each night from the 9 - 11 May at Inverness Ice Centre. I don't have a personal story as to why I'm choosing this charity, all I know is that sometimes its best for us to support and care for a service before we, or anyone we love, might actually need to use it."

"I'm organising lots of events over the course of the next few months, so keep your eyes peeled for posters with upcoming details. I really hoping you can all support me on this journey to finding a left and

right foot, and most importantly raising these much needed vital funds. It's going to be a tough slog so any and all support will be gratefully received.

"Below is the link to my 'Everyday Hero' fundraising page!"

<https://strictlyinverness2019.everydayhero.com/uk/janets-strictly-inverness-2019>

Flippin' marvellous, pancake day is just around the corner.

We've hunted high and low on the internet (not really - thanks, Google) and share with you some fool-proof recipes that will see you crowned the culinary King or Queen of your household.

You're welcome!



Easy pancakes

Ingredients:

- 1 egg
- 3/4 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons margarine, melted
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Method

Beat egg until fluffy.

Add milk and melted margarine.

Add dry ingredients and mix well.

Heat a greased pan. Tip: the pan is hot enough when a drop of water breaks into several smaller balls which 'dance' around the pan.

Pour a small amount of batter (approx 1/4 cup) into pan and tip to spread out or spread with spoon.

When bubbles appear on surface and begin to break, turn over and cook the other side.

Dairy-free pancakes

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup plain flour
- 1/2 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp ground flaxseed
- 1 cup almond milk
- 2 tbsp cooking oil

Method

In a small bowl, mix together ground flaxseed with 3 tbsp water. Let stand for 2-3 minutes before using.

In another bowl, mix together flours, sugar, baking powder and salt. Add almond milk and cooking oil to flaxseed, then pour into the flour. Mix well until smooth.

Heat a pan over medium heat. Add 1/4 cup of batter to the pan. Cook for 2-3 minutes until bubbles form on top. Flip and cook for 2 minutes on the other side. Remove from pan and repeat until batter has been used up.

Serve with maple syrup or your favourite topping.

Gluten-free lemon ricotta pancakes

Ingredients

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 tbsp granulated sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1/2 tbsp poppy seeds

Method

Whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in a large bowl.

In a separate bowl, whisk together cottage cheese, eggs, lemon juice, and oil.

Fold the wet batter into the dry mix until smooth, and then stir in the poppy seeds.

Spray a non-stick pan with cooking oil and heat over a medium heat. Pour a cup of the batter onto the well-heated pan and cook until set on one side (about 3-4 minutes) and then flip to cook on the other side (about 2-3 more minutes).

Recipes
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under Creative
Commons
Attribution.

FLIPPIN' MARVELLOUS

Driving for Work



Do you drive for work? Whether you occasionally hop into a pool car for a meeting across town, drive regularly to carry out site visits, or spend all day behind the wheel of a light commercial vehicle or HGV – there are important rules in place to protect your safety, and the safety of others.

Anyone who drives on council business must comply with our Goods Vehicle Operator Licence Undertaking and Declaration – and other council policies – which are in place to ensure that use of vehicles is legal, safe and appropriate, and staff drive responsibly.

Here's a summary of the main measures included in the regulations:

- Seatbelts must be worn in all vehicles.
- Zero tolerance of the use of handheld mobile phones, texting, the use of hands free or Bluetooth.
- Don't phone a colleague if you know they're driving. If a supervisor or manager is found to have had a conversation with a driver knowing they were driving then the council will be called to Public Inquiry along with the driver, Transport Manager and Senior Management.
- If the vehicle is fitted with a two-way radio, use appropriately with caution.
- Make sure you're fit to drive. This is the responsibility of you as a driver, and your line manager. You must not be under the influence of any alcohol, drugs or have any ill-health issues that could impair driving ability.
- Make sure you've got an appropriate driving licence. Managers and drivers must ensure that drivers hold a valid category of licence for the vehicle they are being asked to drive for work.
- Observing and driving to the speed limits appropriate to the vehicle they're driving.
- All vehicles and trailers must be kept in a fit and serviceable condition. Drivers must carry out a walk-round inspection of the vehicle before each use. If you're driving any vehicle which develops a fault, or symptoms of a fault, you should report this.

- Vehicles and trailers should not be overloaded – all of our vehicles have stickers on and appropriate legal plates displaying the maximum load and this should not be exceeded.
- You must inform your line manager if you receive any motoring conviction, or if you have a motoring conviction pending, regardless what vehicle was being driven at the time of the offence.
- If you're driving a vehicle over 3,500kg, you must use a tachograph and comply with drivers hours regulations (unless exempt). If you're driving a light vehicle, you should take a 15 minute break every two hours of driving, or more regularly if you're tired, making sure you stop in a safe place.

These are an excerpt of the main points – a full list is available from Fleet Services on request.

There's often a misconception that these rules only apply to HGV drivers and vehicles. This is incorrect. All vehicles operated by the council must comply, and all Council drivers must be fully aware of the safe driving policy and reversing guidance documents before driving.

The DVSA now receive reports directly from the police if a driver is charged using a handheld mobile whilst driving.

The Traffic Commissioner will call any convicted HGV driver to a Driver Hearing and may remove their vocational licence for a period of time, dependant on the circumstances. We received a severe warning for such an event in 2008, when a driver was called by his line manager and was apprehended by the police during the phone call. We were deemed to have caused and permitted the offence and were very lucky not to lose or at least have its Goods Vehicles Operators Licence curtailed. Without this licence we could not operate vehicle and therefore provide front-line services such as bin collections, roads and grounds maintenance, and building services.



DARK SKY

With Dark Sky Week taking place at the end of the month, will you and your telescope be heading to Scotland's newest Dark Sky Area? You should, it's right on our doorstep!

Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership applied for Dark Sky Park status in April of last year, with a bid to become one of the darkest park in the UK and also the most northerly one in the world. Being a Dark Sky Park is a coveted designation to secure; the council supported their application and it was granted last year, becoming only the second in Scotland (in 2009 Galloway Forest Park, in Dumfries and Galloway, was the first).

Our letter in support of their application to the International Dark Sky Association, written by Jim Grant, Head of Development Services, said: *"The area surrounding Tomintoul and Glenlivet has some of the darkest and least polluted night skies in Moray, and as a result the underlying quality of its night skies is excellent."*

"Moray Council recognises the need to protect these special characteristics and promote the Tomintoul and Glenlivet area as both a visitor attraction and as an educational resource for the future."

So while Dark Sky Week lasts from 31 March to 7 April, the benefits from Dark Sky status are more wide-reaching. This

is because Dark Sky Park status helps protect the characteristics of the area and enhance tourism. The Dark Sky boundary covers around 265km², most of which lies within the Cairngorms National Park. The area is surrounded by hills which help protect it from much of the light pollution – making the quality of the night skies there hard to beat.

See you there?

Bring a torch!

Dark Sky Week 2019 is Sunday, 31 March – Sunday, 7 April