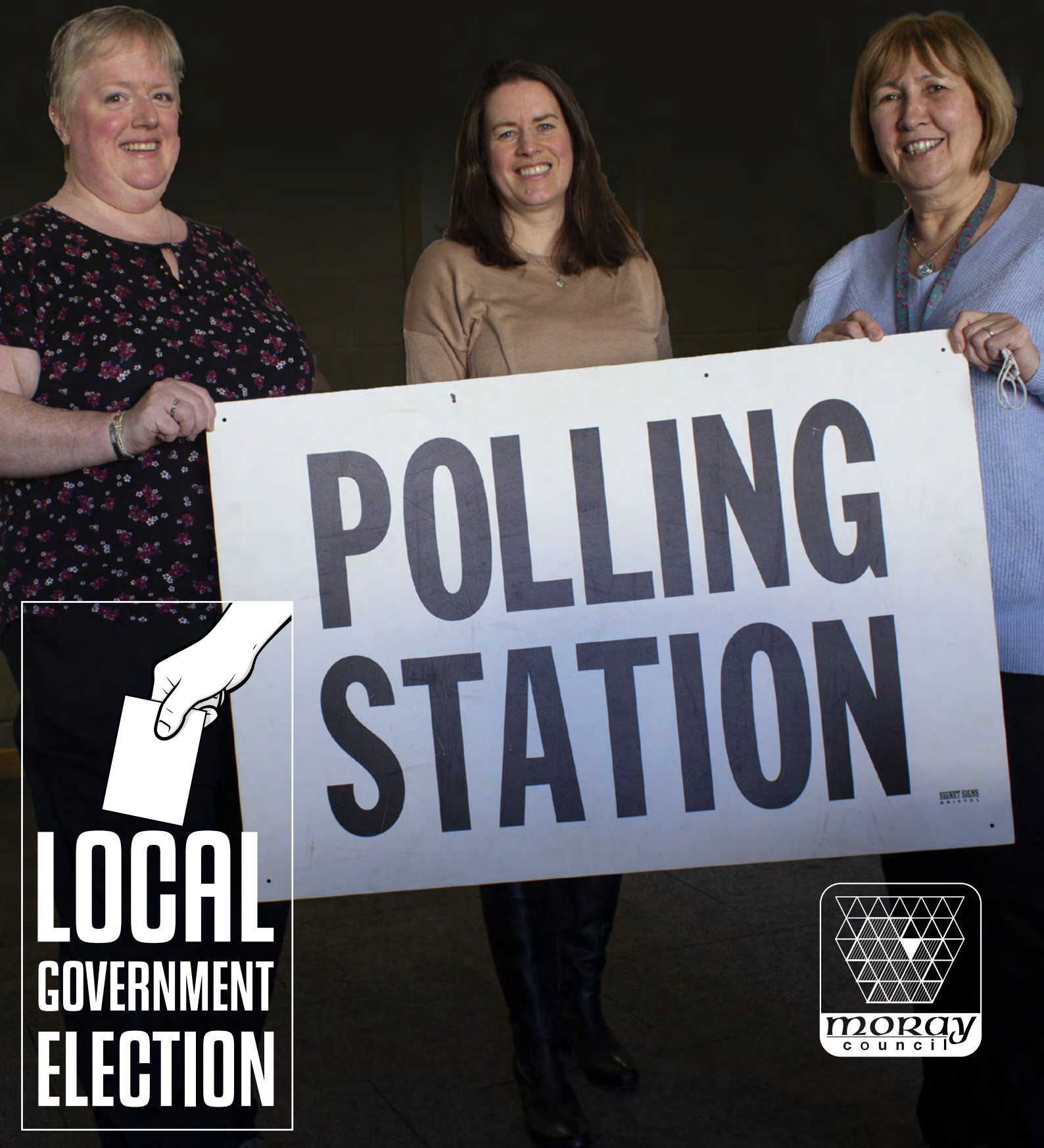




**April / May
2022**



**POLLING
STATION**

SIGNET SIGNS
ARTIST





April / May 2022

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Meet the team



■ Sharon Dunbar MCIPR
■ Senior Communications Officer



■ Kirsty Craig MCIPR
■ Communications and Media Officer



■ Ryan Bell MCIPR
■ Communications and Engagement Officer (Learning Estate)



■ Angus McNicholl
■ Designer

Editorial

It feels good to be back!

When we downed our Connect planner in April 2020, we did so knowing it wasn't the time for the somewhat lighter-hearted approach we take to communicating with colleagues via this mag. It was the time for reassurance of what was happening, when everything was changing!

So we switched things up and concentrated our efforts on issuing Covid staff updates, lockdown reviews and keeping you in the loop during a time many of our social and work bubbles had been thrown up into the air. Thanks to everyone who acknowledged these updates, your feedback and communication kept us going and we valued every one.

It's said the only constant is change and it certainly feels that way with comings and goings of colleagues, and the elections on the horizon. When faced with change it's easy to overlook what's been achieved to that point, so do check out the performance reporting spread, a remarkable effort which we should be collectively proud of achieving during arguably the most disruptive period of our working and personal lives.

It's apt that we're relaunching the mag during Stress Awareness Month; I'm certainly no medical professional but what I can vouch for is that we've all been through the wringer, so it's worth taking some time to read the results of the mental health survey which was carried out, and what support is available in managing stress and promoting positive mental health.

Our Connect mailbox is open, and we love hearing your achievements in and out of the workplace, as well as celebrations, fundraising efforts – and rejoice whenever we receive a cute pet pic. You can get in touch with us via ConnectNews@moray.gov.uk.



HeadsUp

Roddy Burns, Chief Executive

Dear Colleagues,

After a two-year break in the publishing of Connect, I'm pleased to welcome its return. There's been a huge amount of change since 2020, both in our personal and professional lives, and I want to start by thanking all colleagues for the tremendous efforts you've all put in to keep vital public services operating during what's been – and continues to be – the most challenging period in living memory.

Symptomatic, asymptomatic, lockdown, levels, keyworkers, restrictions, resilience, unprecedented: all words which entered our normal vocabulary but don't do justice to the pace of change, the speed of the council's response and the efforts of colleagues to make sure we support residents in every part of Moray. The way in which so many so quickly and so willingly accepted so much change in their home and working lives to do this will be a long-lasting memory for me.

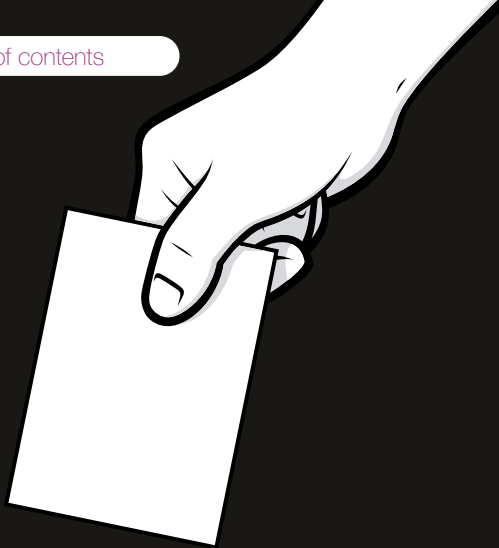
There have been significant staff changes at the council too so for those I've yet to meet, welcome, and I hope you have a rewarding and fulfilling career with us.

More change lies ahead as we look towards the imminent local government election in May, at which voters in Moray will choose the councillors they wish to see drive positive change in the region over the next

five years. It's not an easy task, by any stretch of the imagination. We've got some huge issues to tackle: transformation of the council and our workplaces, a major focus on renewal and recovery as we address the social and economic harms of the pandemic. Over this challenging two year period the Council has achieved an improved financial position however, the current financial climate will require a renewed focus on prioritisation of resources and savings.

But there are many reasons to be positive. Record investment continues to be made in Moray, not least with the progression of our £100 million Growth Deal, our £300 million learning estate strategy, and upskilling and a focus on employability through the refreshed Moray Economic Strategy to ensure our future workforce has the skills and readiness for the opportunities which lie ahead.

Connect is a great way to learn about what your colleagues in the council have been up to, to share achievements, and to 'connect' with staff in other sections you might not normally come across. I know contributions come from across the council, so encourage you to take some time out to catch up with this latest edition.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION

Local Government elections take place on 5 May the length and breadth of the UK, and here on our doorstep candidates are campaigning for one of the 26 seats across eight wards which make up Moray Council.

Organising an election is a meticulous process, and no-one knows that more than the elections team. It takes months of preparation for both polling day and then the count itself, which takes place on 6 May at the Town Hall in Elgin.

For this election we've 175 polling staff across 82 polling stations in 58 venues. Each polling station is manned by a Presiding Officer and a Polling Clerk, and a handful of Polling Place Inspectors visit locations across Moray during the opening hours of 7am and 10pm, supporting staff to tackle any issues which might have cropped up. Then, once polling is over the ballot boxes are stored in a secure location, ready for the count kicking off shortly after 9am the following day.

As Connect goes to print we received notice that voters won't go to the polls in Buckie as this is an uncontested ward.

It's a different setup to other election counts, for example the Scottish or UK Parliamentary elections, as the ballot papers are counted electronically. The core elections team including Depute Returning Officers and the Returning Officer ensure the smooth running, while other colleagues look after security, refreshments for staff, ICT and more. The comms team are on hand to support the press and media, as well as streaming the results on social media (check out the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels). There are a huge number of other colleagues all working together to make sure it all goes off without a hitch – check out the long list of thank-yous for a sense of scale of the operation.





“THE SIZE OF OUR PROJECT PLAN IS EYE-WATERING AND WE PLAN UP TO 18 MONTHS IN ADVANCE FOR SCHEDULED POLLS.



■ Alison Davidson

We asked Elections Officer, Alison, and Depute Returning Officer, Moira, if after their years of experience it gets any easier. No, is the long and short of it!

“Every election is a challenge,” admits Alison, “there’s always something new to contend with as regular legislative changes mean every poll is different.

“Sometimes polls are unscheduled – like snap elections. Some are held during the winter which makes logistics trickier; voting and counting methods are different for different elections; or the general political climate has changed, which can influence the candidates coming forward and the turnout at the polling station.

“The size of our project plan is eye-watering and we plan up to 18 months in advance for scheduled polls. As well as the staff working on polling day itself within the polling places, we’ve around 20 staff working in the fortnight before, opening and processing postal votes packs returned prior to the election; 20 working into the night on 5 May, assisting, checking and securing the ballot boxes prior to the next day count; and 50 eCount and support staff on count day.”

Depute Returning Officer (DRO), Moira, says it’s this army of colleagues who ensure the election itself goes ahead – especially in the most challenging of circumstances (like a pandemic, perhaps?!).

“Throughout my time as DRO the thing that has remained constant is this tremendous support the elections team has received from all of them.

“This support was never more needed and generously given during last year’s Scottish Parliament Elections held during the pandemic. We had thought running the last combined Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government Elections in 2007 when STV was first introduced, and the 2014 Scottish independence referendum were challenging, but running an election during a pandemic made them look like a breeze!”

Despite Moray being in the midst of a localised outbreak in May 2021, which saw us remain in tighter Covid protection measures than the rest of Scotland, the election and count was so meticulously planned for – with safety at the heart of it – that no Covid cases were attributed to the elections process in Moray, despite 220 staff working and 28,000 voters passing through the polling stations. Probably the largest volume of people in concentrated areas since the pandemic began, and a signal of just how seriously all involved took their responsibility to limit transmission. Not one anyone involved in the planning for will forget in a hurry.

“The pandemic and numerous changes to guidance meant that staffing and equipping the polling stations in May 2021 was the biggest challenge we’ve ever tackled in the current election team’s history,” recalls Alison.

The team’s been bolstered recently with the appointment of committee services officer and elections support officer, Lindsey Robinson. A welcome recruit to a small team with a huge job, and ever-changing demands, as Moira explains.

“In the ‘early days’ postal votes were only provided in exceptional circumstances, and in 2001 we had a total of 1,500 across the whole of Moray – now we’re expecting to see around 19,400! We also hadn’t entered the world of STV - the Single Transferrable Voting system used in local government elections in Scotland. It definitely was a simpler time.

“The upcoming local government elections will see our team dealing with over 40 candidates for the 26 seats up for grabs. While the restrictions may be easing in terms of the pandemic we’ll still be required to maintain certain levels of protection, and we’ll still be required to call upon the army of volunteers and the various departments across the council.

“But we’re in no doubt that, once again, we’ll deliver a well-run election that will see voters across Moray able to cast their vote in a secure and safe environment.”

■ Lindsey Robinson



We work closely with other departments

We'd particularly like to mention our colleagues from other council departments, whose support the Returning Officer and elections office in the delivery up to, on and after polling day can't be overlooked:

- **Roads and transportation:** who assist us with barriers and cones for polling places, and the transport of ballot boxes and checking planned roadworks do not disrupt voters access to the polling places.
- **Facilities management and educational resources:** who open and close venues across Moray to allow us access to deliver, set up and operate polling stations, the elections office and the count (sometimes at very unsociable hours!).
- **Education, schools and community centres:** where some of our polling stations are based, either as a shared site or for a school closure.

- **Lands and parks, and the housing DLO:** with their services we are able to distribute kit and polling booths to all our polling places.
- **Procurement and orders:** who source huge quantities of kit and odd requests for the election office as we kit out stations and temporary locations for our processes and public events.
- **HQ Print Room:** who produce huge volumes of signage, polling station paperwork and counting materials.
- **Contact centre:** who support us in answering hundreds of queries and requests from voters, candidates and agents.
- **Mail room:** who help us securely and efficiently receive thousands of postal votes.
- **ICT:** who support our remote operations and unique requests, day and night.



“THE THING THAT HAS REMAINED CONSTANT IS THIS TREMENDOUS SUPPORT THE ELECTIONS TEAM HAS RECEIVED FROM ALL [OUR HELPERS].”

- **Property, legal services, accountancy, comms & PR, member support, LDS admin, and health and safety:** who help us cross the t's and dot the i's.
- Colleagues across the council that come forward individually to work with us year after year at the poll, count and preparations, who unwaveringly go the extra mile in time pressured circumstances.

What happens after councillors are elected?

An administration will form which could see the council led by a minority group, a group with a majority, or a coalition. Councillors decide who chairs each committee, who represents the council on external bodies, and who will become 'champions' for things like the Armed Forces, or equalities. This happens at a committee meeting with oversight and advice from our colleagues in legal services.

All councillors will receive a 100-day induction, of which the first seven will focus heavily on how the council works, governance, finance and the corporate plan priorities, and an understanding of local communities and council services.

Committees will begin shortly after, so that council business isn't disrupted. You can learn more about committees and what business they cover, on the council's website.

The notice of election was published on 14 March, and we've now entered what's called the 'pre-election period'. This means there are some restrictions on what the council can and can't say/do, particularly when it comes to publicity.

Returning Officer, Denise Whitworth, has issued guidance for colleagues during the pre-election period, which you can read on [interchange](#).

Timeline of key dates

- 14 March
Notice of election published ☒ and pre-election period begins.
- 15 March
First tranche of pollcards issued to registered voters ☒
- 30 March
Nominations for prospective candidates closes ☒
- 30 March
Candidates standing for election announced ☒
- 15 April
First tranche of postal vote packs issued to registered voters
- 18 April
Deadline for registering to vote
- 19 April
Deadline for applying for postal and postal proxy votes, including changes to existing postal or proxy arrangements
- 26 April
Deadline for new applications to vote by proxy
- 5 May
Polling day! Polling places are open from 7am – 10pm.
- 6 May
Verification and counting of the votes. Results declared.



CARER POSITIVE

Employer in Scotland

Great news, we've been recognised for the supportive environment we create for unpaid carers in our workplace!

We've achieved the Carer Positive 'engaged' status in a scheme operated by Carers Scotland, which requires employees to evidence how they support and value colleagues with caring responsibilities.

Of our 5,000 colleagues, it's estimated that 1 in 8 will be juggling work and the demands of being an unpaid carer.

"As one of Moray's largest employers, we are delighted to be recognised as a Carer Positive Employer committed to embedding a culture of support for staff who have caring responsibilities," says Frances Garrow, our Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development.

"Our workforce is our greatest resource and it is vital all staff feel valued and supported. Life

for anyone who is an unpaid carer can be particularly challenging and unpredictable.

"We're focused on ensuring staff feel able to identify as an unpaid carer by establishing a comfortable and supportive environment which encourages them to have a conversation with the HR team or their line manager."

The award was presented during a virtual event by Sue McLintock, Carer Positive Awards Manager at Carers Scotland.

"It is evident that a really good foundation of support is being established within the Council and it's also very encouraging to see the planned actions to further develop this – I'm sure the support will go from strength to strength."

Georgina Sutherland, who works as our Young Carers Strategy Officer and gathered the supporting evidence for the application, said: "This gives us a great framework to build on as we progress towards the next award level."

"Our next steps will be to engage more widely with colleagues and encourage those with caring responsibilities to be fully involved in future planning and development through establishing a working carers group and Grampian-wide peer support network."

What did we have to do to achieve this status? We had to demonstrate:

- A good understanding of what the term 'carer' means and the systems in place to help carers identify themselves as carer.
- Recognise carers within HR policies and procedures.
- Enable carers in our workforce to access practical workplace support and information about external support and services such as Quarriers (Moray) Carer Support Service.
- Communicate with carers about advice and support, raises awareness of carers' issues for managers and staff, and offers training and support
- Help carers to engage with other carers.



■ Elaine McRae with the catering team from Hythehill Primary School

Sharing the achievements of colleagues is one of the best things about producing Connect, so we're chuffed to feature our catering colleagues who received a national award for their work in preparing and serving fresh, local and healthy food from our 45 primary school kitchens.

We recently received the bronze Food for Life Served Here award, run by the Soil Association. It means that a minimum of 75% of dishes are freshly prepared from unprocessed ingredients. Meals are free from undesirable trans fats, sweeteners, additives and all genetically modified ingredients. Catering teams use free range eggs, higher welfare meat and ingredients from sustainable and ethical sources.

Around 17,500 meals are served in primary schools each week, using locally-sourced ingredients wherever possible. This includes fresh milk from Graham's Dairy in Nairn; free-range eggs from Allaburn in Elgin; seasonal vegetables from Swansons Fruit and Veg in Elgin; and quality meat from Fraser Brothers Butchers in Forres. Meals are prepared from scratch, and all menus meet the nutritional standards for food and drink in schools, as required by law.

Catering Manager, Elaine McRae, said: "School meals in Moray remain a popular choice for families as we prioritise serving healthy and nutritious meals using responsibly-sourced and ethical ingredients.

"I'm delighted that the dedication of the catering service has been recognised through this award; we'll continue to ensure our primary pupils receive high-quality, tasty and nutritious food – and keep their favourite dishes on the menu!

"What's also important for us is being able to support our local growers and food producers, and we spend around £58k a year with local suppliers for school meal provision. We encourage local businesses to look out for opportunities for partnering with us; procurement opportunities are advertised on Public Contracts Scotland."

HR NOTICEBOARD



Platinum Jubilee

As well as our normal public holidays, this year the Council has agreed an additional holiday on 3rd June to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee!

Those staff unable to take the leave on this date because they do not work that day, or for service reasons, will be able to take the extra day of annual leave at another time as agreed with their line manager.

2022 Public holidays (a wee reminder)

Public holidays remaining for 2022 are::

Good Friday: 15th April

May Day: 2nd May

26th, 27th & 30th December

If you work in a service that operates 7 days a week, remember to check with your manager to see which dates over the festive period are being recognised as the public holiday in your particular area as these may be slightly different for you.

When we are talking about holidays it's worthwhile to start planning some leave for this year to make sure that you use your full entitlement with regular breaks being taken across the calendar year. We know there was a last minute scramble towards the end of last year to use up remaining days!

It's important to take regular breaks for your health and wellbeing and planning these in advance helps services to plan continuity for service delivery. Plus it gives you something to look forward to!



Time for Talking

From time to time, we all may need a bit of extra support, guidance or advice. We may look to family, friends or colleagues for this, but there may be times when someone independent or professional is preferred.

Time for Talking (TfT) is the council's Employee Assistance Provider and they offer psychological, emotional and practical support, which can be accessed by any employee when they need it.

Services they offer include:

- * Structured telephone counselling
- * Video conferencing / face-to-face counselling (dependent on Covid-19)
- * Telephone support (24/7, 365 days a year)
- * Live Chat
- * Information & resources including links, podcasts, templates and exercises

The benefits of speaking with TfT are:

- * It's confidential: no one at the council will know that you have called, unless you choose to disclose this.
- * It's completely free of charge: the service is paid for by the council.
- * You can have unlimited access to all of the support and resources.

In addition to the above, their website www.timefortalking.co.uk offers a wealth of information on a variety of topics including depression, managing stress, harassment & bullying, managing anger, dealing with change, financial wellbeing, work/life balance, exercise and self-harm.

You can contact Time for Talking on 0800 970 3980 or chat online to a counsellor through their live chat using the password TfTnow.



International Children's Book Day

Isn't it just lovely to see children enjoying books? April 2 is International Children's Book Day, which has been on the go since 1967.

Our libraries staff have picked some top tales for young readers – how many have your children read? Maybe you're looking for inspiration for a grandchild's birthday? Here's what they picked:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ The Butterfly Lion
– Michael Morpurgo | ■ Bone Music
– David Almond |
| ■ A Brave Bear
– Sean Taylor | ■ House of Windows
– Alexia Casale |
| ■ The Racehorse Who Learned to Dance
– Clare Balding | ■ Geronimo
– David Walliams |
| ■ Wolf Brother
– Michelle Paver | ■ This Morning I Met A Whale
– Michael Morpurgo |

There are also some Bookbug sessions coming up at Elgin Library (dates and times below) – places are limited and need to be booked by phoning **01343 562602** or emailing elgin.lending@moray.gov.uk.

Look out for special activities for babies, toddlers, parents and carers during Bookbug Week in May too – we'll share details on social media @moraycouncil and @moraylibraries.

Moray Libraries are also looking forward to welcoming children during the summer break to participate in this year's Summer Reading Challenge. Watch out for more details in the coming weeks.

Bookbug at Elgin Library – April 2022

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| ■ Tuesday 5 April | 2:00 – 2:30pm |
| ■ Thursday 14 April | 9:15 – 9:45am |
| ■ Monday 18 April | 2:00 – 2:30pm |
| ■ Wednesday 27 April | 9:15 – 9:45am |



LGBT history month at our Libraries

Our libraries team are great at making sure our facilities are inclusive and representation is there for everyone. February, LGBT History Month (LGBTHM), was no different this year.

There was an adult fiction display of *Rainbow Reads* across the whole of the Moray Libraries Service.

This year they also tied LGBTHM in to a broader library-wide theme of *Love*. In the junior section they highlighted books about different and diverse families, along with stories about love in general.

The theme for LGBTHM Scotland this year was *Blurring Borders*, so the focus for the junior information display on important dates for LGBTQ+ rights in Scotland, and then compared them to LGBTQ+ rights in several very different countries around the world.

The teen and adult fiction displays focussed on both historical titles and authors of colour, with adult non-fiction looking at LGBTQ+ people in history and more general information.

Our libraries are a great source of information and support so an information point with a variety of information leaflets for library users to take away, and materials in the teen section on both coming out and supporting LGBTQ+ children available.

Thank you to our libraries team for flying the rainbow flag but also being a source of support for many communities in Moray.





Imagine being in your job for 70 years! While most of us would be long retired, the Queen celebrates her Platinum Jubilee this year. We've all had the long weekend in our diaries for months (we're off on 3 June, in case you didn't know) but are you planning something special?

All over the UK four main events are marking the monarch's milestone, with Moray throwing in an extra one for good measure.

Kicking off the holiday weekend is the beacon lighting across the Commonwealth on the evening of Thursday 2 June. Communities, Armed Forces, Reserves and Cadets, organisations and individuals are encouraged to take part in beacon and bonfire lighting, piping the specially composed tune, bugling and singing. Military Wives Choirs across the country will sing Song for the Commonwealth.

Moray communities in particular are encouraged to take part as the Moray Firth coast lights up for the occasion, with festivities starting around 9.30pm.

Street parties are standard for a royal celebration and we're encouraged to turn ours into the Big Jubilee Lunch on Sunday 5 June. Perhaps you'll hold a street party, BBQ or picnic to bring your community together.

In Elgin, the Queen's Green Canopy will see a ceremonial tree avenue planted in Cooper Park. A number of schools, individuals and community groups have already planted their jubilee tree but you're not too late. You can still plant a sapling, whip or tree to mark the Queens' 70 years on the throne.

Finally, in Moray we have a unique opportunity with the Moray Badge Platinum Jubilee. In homage to the precursor to the DofE awards, the Moray Badge was resurrected for one year only. Currently 32 schools and 3,500 pupils in Banffshire and Moray are taking part in various challenges finishing in April, with the awards being presented in June.

Whatever you're doing to mark the Queen's platinum jubilee, enjoy your long weekend!

Public performance report

Performance management and reporting isn't always the most engaging of topics, but every year we're required to pull together a Public Performance Report. It's an easier-to-understand, jargon-removed performance round-up with imagery, examples of how we're showcasing our progress, and sets out how we're achieving our corporate plan priorities in an outcome-focussed way.

And it's also an excellent way to reflect on what we've collectively achieved as a workforce, and the investment in our local communities.

We'll let the figures for 2020/21 do the talking...

£39.2m

Invested in Moray during the year



• £20m

New schools, improvements to existing schools and facilities for early learning and childcare



• £10m

Waste management facilities, including a joint project with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire councils to build an energy from waste plant



• £2.7m

Vehicles and electric car chargers



• £2.2m

Road improvements, road safety measures and sustainable travel



• £1.9m

ICT and other equipment



• £0.9m

Various works at harbours



• £0.6m

Bridge renovations



• £0.6m

Other land and buildings



• £0.3m

Street lighting

The full report is available to [read online](#), and we've pulled out some highlights from the year overleaf.

Showcasing our progress

Despite the challenges the year brought, we were able to demonstrate the achievements of our colleagues, partners and communities against our corporate plan priorities.

1 May 2020

Our people



School catering staff volunteer with Moray Food Plus to help feed local families

15 May 2020

Our future



Multi-million pound Growth Deal for Moray gets thumbs-up from UK and Scottish parliaments

6 July 2020

Our place



Buckie community groups praised in Education Scotland report

17 July 2020

Our people



New £2 million Pilmuir Nursery handed over to Council for August return for children

22 July 2020

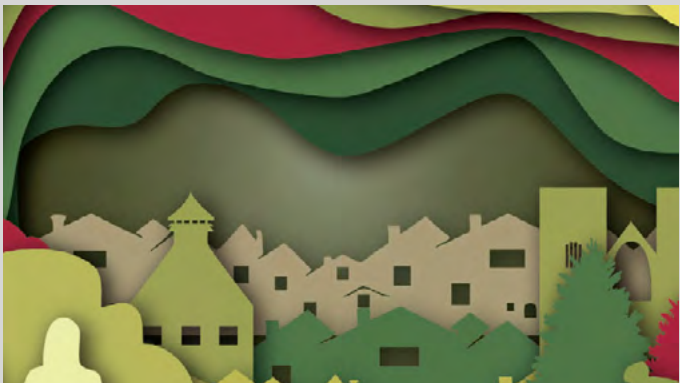
Our place



Work begins on new £43k play park in Buckie

3 August 2020

Our future



Moray's 10-year local development plan signed off

17 September 2020

Our people



Devices delivered to digitally-disconnected 'shielders' in Moray

6 October 2020

Our place



Community Asset Transfers in Aberlour, Lossiemouth and Findochty given go-ahead

28 October 2020

Our people



Dedicated employability support for young people, and low-income parents, in development

14 January 2021

Our people



£12.8 million Linkwood Primary School opens

4 February 2021

Our people



Moray Council offers free on-site Coronavirus testing to businesses

10 March 2021

Our future



Action plan to secure carbon neutral status for Moray Council approved

Greenfingers



Great news from our friends at Greenfingers as they received £375 funding from Police Scotland to support mental health activities.

Police Scotland worked with our colleagues in Environmental Health to identify recipients in Moray who could benefit. Alongside Greenfingers, funding was given to Outfit Moray and Men's Sheds.

We visited Greenfingers, who told us they're spending the funding to provide mental health first aid training to staff.

"Having access to this training and knowledge sharing from experienced wellbeing training facilitators will be a great benefit to the wellbeing and development of

our staffing team, who support and enable the Greenfingers trainees. It's been a testing time for everyone, so this was an unexpected but very welcome gift."

Inspector Darren Bruce of North East Police Division said: "Community Safety Partnership lies at the heart of supporting the people of Moray. This was an opportunity for the partnership to work with groups who support wellbeing during this challenging time."

Our Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager added: "It's been a real pleasure to engage with and forge links to these organisations that do so much to promote and improve mental health and wellbeing in our community."

More from Greenfingers in the next edition of Connect – we're looking forward to it already! Meantime, why not head along to their plant sale and snap up a bargain for the garden?

What: Greenfingers veggie plant sale

Where: Moray Resource Centre garden, Elgin

When: 21 April from 11.30am – 2pm

Why: They'll be selling veg plants including: tomato, courgette, cucumber, baby sweetcorn, pepper, celery, Chinese cabbage, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, dwarf kale and green beans.

See you there!



VALHALLA AWAITS

When Stephen Cooper, former Head of Environmental and Commercial Services, was asked if he was up for a feature in Connect about his retirement, he took matters into his own hands and wrote it for us.

We don't know if he got the wrong end of the stick, or was just doing things in typical Stephen fashion and getting stuck right in! Anyway, after decades of public service, here's what he had to say about sailing off into the sunset...

"Having had 35 years in local government (before that I worked in IT and Inland Revenue) it's now time to retire.

"I've worked with five local authorities: Cumbernauld and Kilsyth District Council, Kirkcaldy District Council, Stirling Council, Shetland Islands Council and the last 10 years with Moray Council. Starting off as an administrative assistant in the cleansing department and climbing the greasy pole of management ever since.

"I'll look back fondly during my time with every council that I have worked with. Some of the more interesting highlights include towing a dead 40 foot sperm whale onto a beach to be buried; spending a summer going round old landfill sites testing for landfill gas; hiding behind a tree taking photographs of a gang illegally dumping tyres; and taking a delegation from the Mongolian government to see Shetland ponies after they had been to visit an energy from waste plant.

"While there are differences with every council the one thing that doesn't change, is central to what makes a council, and that is the services delivered by a dedicated frontline staff. I've been privileged to work with good staff throughout my career and Moray Council is no exception.

"As a place, Moray is my favourite place to live and therefore I intend to spend my retirement here enjoying the amazing scenery, walks and cycling and, of course, our good weather.

"I wish everyone well and I'm sure that I'll continue to bump into old colleagues. However when I do, let's not talk about work; it's not that interesting."



Memorable pandemic moments

We don't want to dwell on pandemic lockdowns and isolation here – we're much more interested in things that brought us joy during the lost coronavirus years.

Kirsti Breen from OD got her dream wedding day in July 2021 after postponing her original August 2020 date. Despite restrictions still being in place and torrential rain the morning of the wedding, Kirsti and her husband had a ball, and even managed a little honeymoon to the beautiful Isle of Harris.

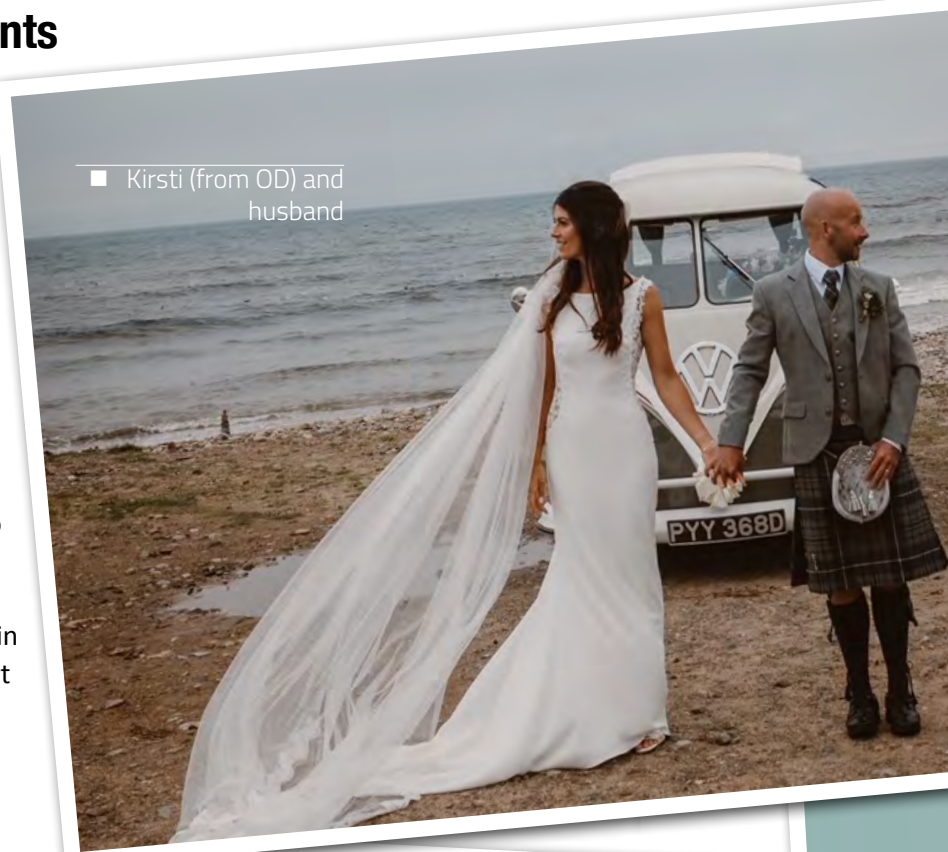
Emma Connor, business support team leader in customer services, lost dog, Raven, at the start of lockdown. Harley and sister Harper have, however, since joined the family and settled in well. Emma says they definitely made the pandemic a bit easier to deal with.

There were some big changes in the comms team mid-covid times – Peter retired (lucky thing!), Sharon is now leading the team and we finally let Kirsty join us permanently after fixed term and seconded posts. We were also joined last year by Ryan, who fits in perfectly with the team with his love of cute dogs and chocolate. Angus is still keeping us entertained too.

Kirsty managed to fit in her wedding and honeymoon just days before lockdown number one – in fact, the first coronavirus cases were announced on her Hogmanay wedding day, making it a memorable one for many reasons.

There have been some sadder family moments too as Angus and Sharon both lost beloved family dogs. Sharon chose to commemorate Trafford with a beautiful drawing and, while our pets can never be replaced, Angus has been kept on his toes by new puppy Harris.

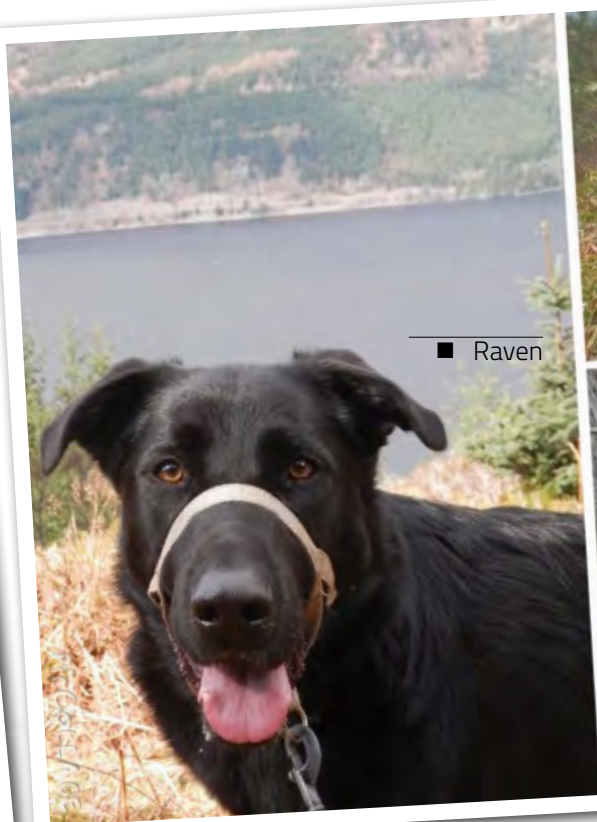
We love seeing your pets and hearing your good news stories – keep them coming in to connectnews@moray.gov.uk.



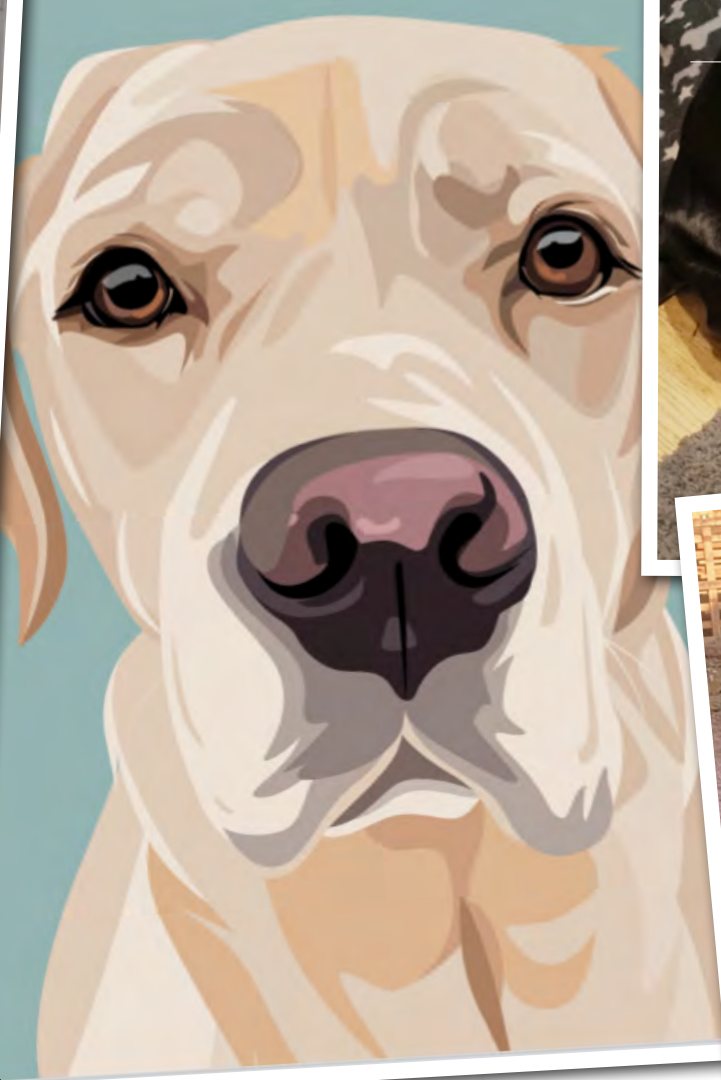
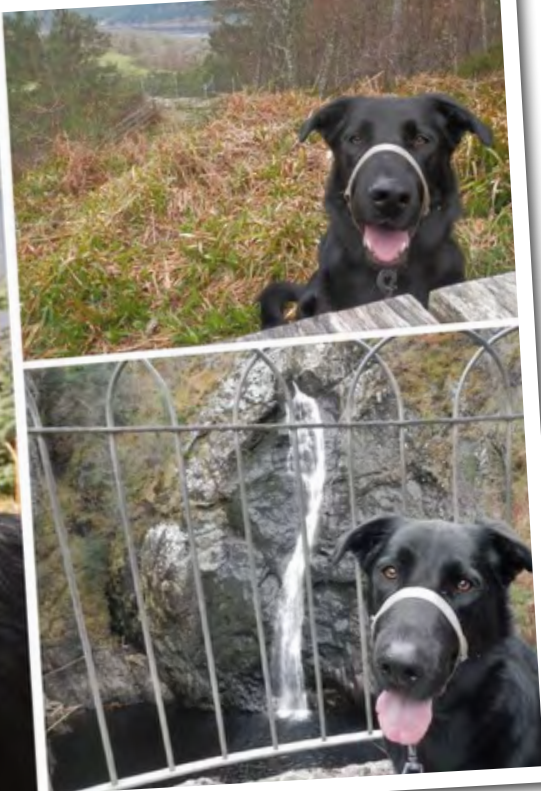
■ Kirsti (from OD) and husband



■ Kirsty (from Comms) and husband Kevin tie the knot



■ Raven



■ Trafford



■ Harley and Harper



■ Harris

Moray Learning Estate Strategy



Background

Approved by Council in December 2020, the Moray Learning Estate Strategy sets out our vision of providing a sustainable education service aiming for excellence.

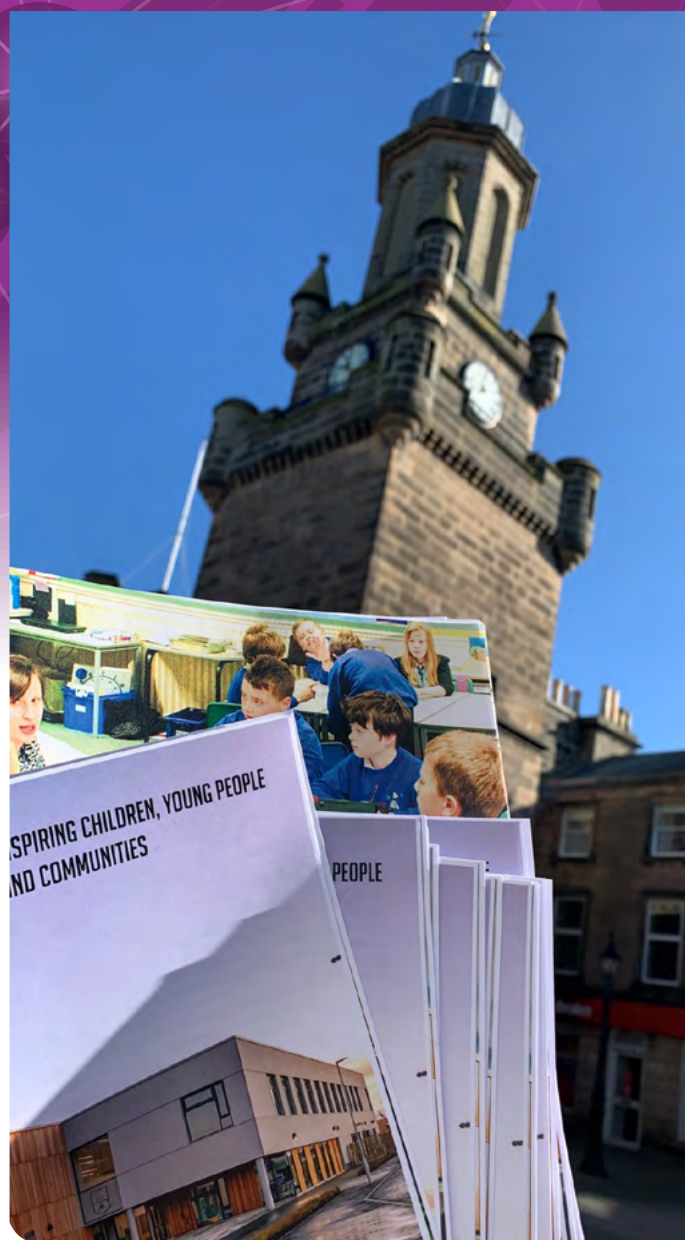
To do this, we're committed to the development of state-of-the-art buildings which fully meet the needs of our young people whilst responding to the needs of the communities in which they serve.

We continue to face a number of challenges with the condition of our school buildings and recognise that significant investment is required to meet our vision. We currently have 54 schools across Moray – 46 of these are primary schools and 8 are secondary schools.

Of this number, 25 primary and 6 secondary schools fall below the minimum B/B standard for both condition and suitability – meaning

that over 50% of our pupils are currently learning in below-standard schools.

The basis of the strategy is the occupancy, suitability and condition of our schools. As well as supporting learning, teaching and assessment across Moray, our aim is to provide schools with top-class facilities that are available to and used by our communities every day of the week.



The quality of the learning environment has a direct impact on learning and attainment, therefore we're aspiring for any new build and/or major refurbishment to deliver an A/A standard for both condition and suitability.

Lifetime maintenance plans will also be developed for all of our schools to ensure they are maintained at a minimum B/B standard for both condition and suitability for years to come.

We're committed to working together with our local communities and in partnership with parents and/or carers to ensure we deliver the very best for young people across Moray.

On the road

Throughout the months of February and March, our dedicated learning estate team were on the road to meet with communities and provide them with more information on our plans for the future of our learning estate. The team were joined by members of the communities team who assisted with the sessions in their areas.

Recognising that individual solutions are required to meet the differing needs of areas across Moray, a series of drop-in information sessions were held at Aberlour; Buckie; Burghead; Cullen; Dufftown; Elgin; Fochabers; Forres; Keith; Lhanbryde; Lossiemouth and Rothes.

The sessions provided attendees with an overview of the current learning estate, our plans for the future, as well as information on funding, community use and how to get involved in future sessions.

A range of different stakeholders attended the sessions, including parents, prospective parents, parent council members, community council members, community groups and local businesses alike. The feedback received was positive and attendees really appreciated the team coming out to talk about the plans.

Next steps

As much as we'd love to wave a magic wand and make these improvements overnight, that sadly isn't possible. We're currently in the process of 'estate rationalisation' whereby we're assessing the ownership, occupation, management and use of our schools.

Part of this includes carrying out full condition surveys of all our school buildings – which is expected to be complete by the end of 2023. The findings from these surveys will be used to identify major upgrade works and prioritise projects to address these.

Whilst there aren't any specific proposals at this stage, increasing school rolls means that the initial focus is likely to be on Buckie, Elgin and Forres where there's an identified need to create more capacity.

Other priority areas will be those with schools suffering significant maintenance issues, with decisions being based upon:

- Full consideration of the existing school estate in the area;
- School roll;
- Growth rates;
- School condition; and
- School suitability

An information paper was submitted for discussion at the Education, Children's and Leisure Services Committee on 9 March 2022. The information paper sought approval for the consideration of the various options for Buckie and Forres,

allowing the Learning Estate Team to prepare these bids.

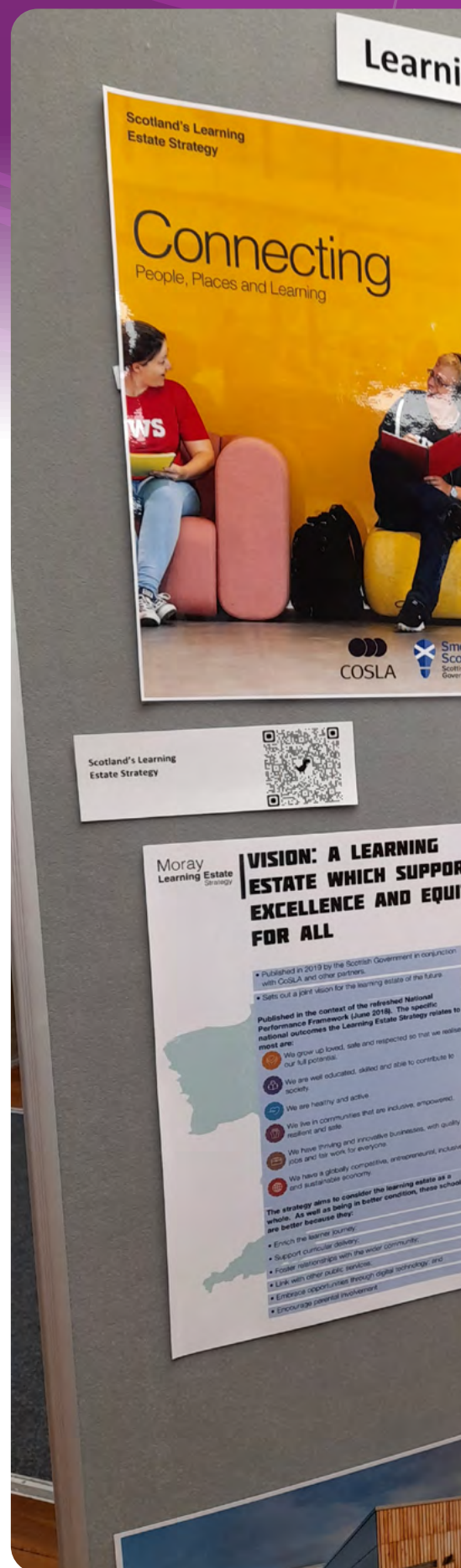
For those of you wondering how we're going to fund such an ambitious strategy and the programmes of work that come with it, the successful delivery of the strategy is dependent on Scottish Government Learning Estate Improvement Programme (LEIP) funding over a number of phases.

We already have a project accepted into the Learning Estate Improvement Programme, with the new Findrassie Primary School in Elgin being accepted into Phase 2 of the Programme in December 2020.

A request to all local authorities for Phase 3 funding submissions is expected in autumn this year, with an anticipated deadline of four weeks for us to make formal submissions. To be prepared for submitting a bid for the next phase of funding, capital project bids have to be ready for autumn.

Dependent on the outcome of the bid, we'll work closely with both the Buckie and Forres ASG communities on the development of future school designs. The various options for Buckie High School and Forres Academy can be seen within the information paper.

The options include: doing nothing; major refurbishment; new build secondary school; and new build secondary school with 3-18 community campus. No decisions have been made as yet and we look forward to working closely with our local communities in the months and years to come.





Want to find out more?

You can find out more about the learning estate strategy by visiting our website: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_138258.html.

Alternatively, please contact the team by emailing learningestate@moray.gov.uk.

We need you!

A new feature for Connect is our 'what's new with you?' section.

We'd love you to get involved and submit a favourite recipe, a book recommendation, a new walking route you've discovered in Moray. Perhaps you've discovered a new café or restaurant you want to shout about – anything you think others would be interested in finding out about Moray and your recommendations.

The staff discussion board on Interchange is due a revamp and we'd like to see Connect as a starting point for new threads on there to can carry on the conversation. Maybe you'd like to get a quiz team together or meeting like-minded gaming fans. Online it can be used as a social space and we'll highlight news in future editions of Connect.

Are there any issues you'd like to see us shine a spotlight on here? We'll aim to bring experts from services in on topics you want to know more about. That might be in-house professionals or external contributors – we'll focus on what you want.

We look forward to seeing your recommendations throughout the year come in to connectnews@moray.gov.uk.

Mental health and wellbeing survey

You will remember that the council undertook a Mental Health & Wellbeing survey last year to gather some feedback on how staff were coping with rapid changes brought about by the pandemic. The purpose of the survey was to help shape and inform future working practices and to do that it was important to understand how you were managing at work while balancing life demands and the impact on you both personally and professionally. Thank you to all who took the time to participate and share how you were feeling.

What did we learn?

This was the first mental health and wellbeing survey and it was undertaken from June to July 2021. The survey received 1,251 returns providing an overall response rate of 25%, whilst this looks a fairly limited response, in survey terms provides a good level of representation from the workforce to enable a view to be formed.

Overall the survey displayed a positive high level view on how well Moray Council has supported the workforce and how well the workforce have managed their mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic. It is important to note however that whilst the whole workforce survey's overall results provide an indication of the current position and main themes arising, there is an acknowledgement that more service specific work is required to address themes arising in various services due to different ways of working.

These are the highest scoring questions throughout the survey which demonstrated some positives arising during the height of the pandemic.

- **82.44%** Respondents said no to having suffered with a mental health issue in the last year that has led them to seek support from their GP or other health professional.
- **80.66%** Respondents had been able to access communications during the pandemic from their Line Manager.
- **79.25%** Respondents were able to use all of their annual leave during 2020.

- **71.43%** Respondents said yes, they feel they had been able to maintain their mental health and wellbeing during the last year.
- **77.20%** Respondents had been able to access communications during the pandemic from all user e-mails.

In contrast, you told us about your areas of concern and these will help inform some of the improvements and action arising from the survey and included the following areas:

- **70.25%** Respondents said yes, they feel there could be more awareness or support for specific mental health concerns including suicide and the associated impacts.
- **66.69%** Respondents have noticed an increase in mental health concerns within their service either themselves, colleagues or service users.
- **64.10%** Respondents have feelings of missing contact with family / friends.
- **61.61%** Respondents think training to help understand mental health issues would support a more positive workplace for them and their colleagues' mental health.

The survey was broken down into 7 areas which cover questions on: you and your role; interaction and working environment; working environment; health and safety; you, your life and feelings; support and training and communication.

Respondents confirmed that for some, how they worked had changed with 43.73% of respondents continuing to work as normal in their usual location, 35.97% were working from home instead of the workplace. 13.67% of people were also working from other locations combined with homeworking rather than in their normal locations, along with nurseries and day services.

With regard to how the Council interacted with service users, the public and colleagues it was found that this changed significantly with respondents noting increased use of email, telephone use and virtual meetings and a

decrease in face to face meetings, which was reflective of the health and safety measures in place including social distancing requirements. Staff indicated that overall they had felt safe with the Covid safety measures in place.

Looking to the future there remains an interest to continue to work from home or have a combination of home and workplace working, however it was noted that for frontline services, this would not be an option which would sustain effective service delivery. Health and safety proved to be a positive feature within the survey with a strong indication that employees felt their health and safety had been well looked after and they had been given the proper equipment to protect their health.

Anxiety about workload and missing contact with family and colleagues was prevalent across respondents. Less than a third of respondents had a social network and only 39% had a family network. 18% of respondents felt the need to seek support for a mental health concern from a GP or health professional. 67% noticed an increase in mental health concerns within their service. When asked where most likely to access support 62% of respondents prefer to access support from colleagues and 52% would access support from their manager with more formalised support provisions not scoring so highly. When asked what additional support was required for health and wellbeing the highest scoring area was more interaction with colleagues.

Providing a more positive workplace from the respondents' perspective would be achieved with further training to help understand mental health issues, along with signposting to information and more team meetings. There were a variety of communications channels accessed during the pandemic which was reflective of where and how employees were working. Encouragingly 51% of respondents felt a year on since the pandemic started employees had coped well with the rapid pace of change.

These results show that while in general the workforce has managed the impact of Covid-19 well, there are areas of concern arising from the departmental analysis that identify specific service themes which require support and intervention in order to make improvements. These are currently being discussed with service management teams for consideration of inclusion in departmental plans and bespoke action plans.

The main priorities which have been identified are specifically in relation to improving awareness of mental health generally, training staff to have a better understanding of how to support staff and their mental health, reviewing communications particularly across frontline services, finding ways to improve workload management and providing clarity on future work practices. Work is now ongoing to put in place actions to address these priorities and make improvements. Further information and full details of the survey results are now available on the Interchange on the Improving Workforce Culture page.

As always we are keen to learn more. We are planning to launch a short follow up survey shortly to see how you are feeling and coping now. Please look out for further information on the interchange and from your manager about how you can participate. The more people who respond the stronger the message we receive, so please get involved. Time will be given within work to let you share your views.

April is also Stress Awareness month, so whilst sharing these results from the Mental Health and Wellbeing survey, there is no better time than to raise awareness and provide advice on how to manage stress.



STRESS AWARENESS MONTH



Recognising the signs of stress will help us all to take steps to prevent, reduce and manage stress in the workplace.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where your to-do list seems endless, deadlines are fast approaching and you find yourself saying ‘Eek! I feel stressed!’?

But what is stress really, and how does it affect us?

People feel stressed when they can’t cope with pressures and demands placed upon them, along with other issues. This can lead to chronic physical and mental health conditions. Understanding the importance of managing and reducing workplace stress has arguably never been more important than now, in the shadow of the Covid-19 epidemic, as organisations and businesses begin to focus on returning to work and supporting their teams as they adjust to their new ways of working.

Evidence shows that there are six key factors which, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates.

The six key factors are:

- **Demands:** workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control:** how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support:** encouragement, sponsorship and resources available to workers.
- **Relationships:** promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- **Role:** whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change:** how change (large or small) is managed and communicated.

Employers are recognising that providing a mentally healthy workplace is a necessity and not a luxury for the way we work today, because there is no health without mental health.

Where to begin and how can you help?

Reach out: make time to reach out to the people you work with and check in on how they’re feeling and coping. Starting the conversation isn’t always easy, but it’s always worth it and is an important first step.

Recognise: if you recognise someone is struggling, encourage them to talk about it. Keep an eye out for signs of stress such as someone seeming more withdrawn, sensitive or aggressive.

Respond: having positive relationships and good support is key to helping people to cope when demands and pressures start to feel too much. Other things to consider include how much control someone has over their work and if any recent changes could be impacting them.

Reflect: take a moment to reflect on this last year; the ups and the downs, what worked and what didn’t. Did we recognise and respond to the signs of stress in ourselves and our colleagues as best we could? What could we do differently this year to better support our colleagues and make mental health a priority? Let’s speak to one another and get ideas on what can be done to prevent, reduce or tackle any problems identified.

Make it Routine: the important thing is to make talking about stress and how people are feeling and coping a normal part of everyday working life. Take regular opportunities to check-in on mental health and stress, assessing the risks from any hazard is not a one-off process – things change.

If you need support you can speak to a member of the timefortalking team at any time via the 24 hour confidential helpline on 0800 970 3980 or visit timefortalking.co.uk.

Further help can be found here:

- [Mental Health Awareness Interchange](#)
- [Mental Health Support Interchange](#)
- [Wellbeing Guidance Interchange](#)

Further help and information can be found on the [Interchange](#) or [HSE’s Working Minds](#).



Climate Change Strategy

It seems a long time since the world came to Glasgow at the COP26 summit to tackle global climate emissions. While Omicron and the war in Ukraine has taken climate change off the news, it is still one of the most important issues facing us today.

Our climate is changing and recent reports from the international scientific community reaffirmed that climate change is happening now, caused by human actions, and is impacting communities all around the world. More frequent extreme weather events like storms and flash flooding are already hitting us in Moray.

In 2019, the council recognised the importance of climate change by declaring a climate emergency and committing to act to protect our planet, our region and Moray's residents. In 2021, this pledge was turned into a Climate Change Strategy for 2020-2030 which committed the council to reducing its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. This means that the council will reduce its emissions to as near to zero as possible. Any remaining emissions will be balanced by actions to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

To reach this goal, a number of actions were taken including the creation of a Climate Change team to advance the journey to net zero, research into cutting fossil fuel use in fleet vehicles and council buildings, and research into how Moray can utilise hydrogen in vehicles and buildings. Each key service area has the responsibility to cut carbon

emissions and ensure that climate change understanding and action is embedded in all planning processes across the council.

A route map is being developed to cost and highlight the actions that are needed for the council to be carbon neutral. These actions include installing renewables and low carbon heating in council buildings, moving away from petrol and diesel vehicles, ending landfill and opening an energy from waste plant to create energy by burning Moray's waste, and creating a network of climate change champions through the council. Many changes are already underway, but there is a lot of work still to do.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that, when we have to, we can radically change how we deliver services while maintaining a standard of delivery. Climate change presents an even more crucial challenge than we have faced over the last two years, but the opportunities that can arise from meeting it are great – from warmer homes to

a skilled young workforce that can deliver the economic and technical transformation required.

For the council to become carbon neutral, significant changes are required in how we operate, how services are delivered, and what works are prioritised. Departments must consider what they do and how they do it. However, the Climate Change team is available to help.

Further information on climate change and the help that can be obtained, please e-mail: climatechange@moray.gov.uk.





Introducing our Digital Champions Network

We know digital technology has had an impact on every area of our lives. Many of us manage almost our entire lives through our smartphones, from arranging appointments to paying bills and technology is playing an ever increasing role in how we work. In this increasingly connected digital world, we need to support our colleagues to embrace new technologies and new ways of working.

This was never more evident following the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, where many of you needed to embrace new technologies to work remotely. This has accelerated the introduction of some technologies, requiring you to quickly upskill.

Whilst the growing use of technology offers numerous benefits including better collaboration between colleagues, an improved customer experience and the potential for efficiencies, these can only be realised when the workforce feels confident and competent in their digital skills. To assist with this increased and growing use of technology, we have created a Digital Champions network to support colleagues in the workplace to develop their digital skills.

Meet Moray's Digital Champions

Our Digital Champions are an engaged group of passionate employees, who recognise the value of technology, and are committed to helping colleagues across our organisation improve their confidence, motivation and digital skills for work. Through peer to peer learning, Digital Champions are supporting colleagues with a range of digital tasks from helping someone get to grips with making a video call on Microsoft Teams, accessing eLearning or getting the most from Excel.

Here's what one of our champions shared about becoming a Digital Champion:



Hi, I am Martin currently working on a Digital Literacy project for Moray Pathways employability and training hub based at the Inkwell in Elgin. My work mainly involves building digital skills, confidence and resilience in individuals of all ages with the aim of getting them closer to the job market, while helping them see themselves and things differently.

I signed up to be a Digital Champion as I found that I was also helping my colleagues develop their confidence and skills in using the essential everyday software we use for work. It has been presumed we have the skills to use software such as Teams, Outlook and Excel among others, however I have found that many individuals need varying levels of help and support with such software that is now accepted to be part of everyday working life. This highlighted to me a need for wider support and I thought the Digital Champions programme would allow me an excellent opportunity to use my skills and knowledge to help to make a difference.

Martin

Even in our own general everyday living, having a core set of essential digital skills and the hardware to be able to get connected are critical as we see more and more services and sites transitioning to online platforms.

Having a Digital Champions network also enables us to support the roll out of future technologies such as the replacement for Microsoft Office 2016. Whether that be to help broadcast updates across our services so everyone is in the loop or to offer user insight when developing new learning resources.

It is very easy to get help, just send your request to DigitalChampions@moray.gov.uk and a member of the network will be in touch.

Interested in becoming a champion and joining the team?

In fact, you may already be an informal digital champion, helping your family, friends, service users or team mates with getting to grips with digital devices and tools. If that is the case, this is an opportunity to formally recognise your skills and supportive role.

As a Champion you will have access to a network of Moray Digital Champions to share knowledge. You will also be offered virtual support meetings with the Organisational Development team where we share training and useful resources.

If you would like to volunteer to become a Digital Champion please have a discussion with your line manager before registering your interest via an email to DigitalChampions@moray.gov.uk.



Meet our other colleagues who are also Digital Champions:

Jamie

I work as an Organisation Development Adviser in the Organisational Development team. Areas of interest include PowerPoint, eLearning, and Word. I wanted to become a digital champion because I wanted to help people that are maybe just need a little bit of guidance on how to deal with an IT issue. Sometimes we spend ages looking a problem, and think it's bigger than it is. I think that's where the digital champions can help by giving you that nudge in the right direction.

David

I'm a Business Support Officer (Customer Services) and I am happy to help with all SharePoint and Excel queries.

Mhairi

I'm a Business Support Officer and I'm here to help with queries regarding Teams and utilising tech to encourage team engagement and collaboration.

Doug

I work as a Contracts Manager in Building Services. I have a general all round knowledge of various Microsoft packages such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Teams happy to help with any queries that I can.

Dawn

I am a Training Facilitator within the Social Work Training team, I can offer support with Word, Excel (basic), PowerPoint, Outlook and the internet in general.

More over page

Angela

I am a Primary Teacher and I am here to help with queries relating to Digital Literacy, use of Word/Excel and the use of programming and coding packages.

Nena

Area Housing Officer within the Housing department and I am here to help with any general queries you might have.

Andrew

I'm an Asset Co-ordinator within Roads Maintenance. Happy to support with Excel, web browsing and Interchange.

Anne

Hi I'm a Systems Co-Ordinator within Environmental Protection and I am here to help with queries relating to Office packages (Word, Excel etc)

Chris

I'm a Clerical Assistant in the Health & Social Care Info Systems Team. My expertise is Excel. Lots of experience managing and matching large blocks of data from different sources, designing and coding (Visual Basic) tools if the 'off-the-shelf' ones provided by Excel don't quite fit the job you want done.

Dimitris

I work as a Community Sports Hub Officer and I am here to support you to use Microsoft Office including Word, Excel and Outlook.

Andy

Customer Development Manager within the Customer Services team. Here to help with queries relating to Outlook, navigating the web and Interchange.

Natalie

I am a Clerical Assistant within Roads Maintenance. Here to support Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook.

Paul

Principal Technician within Roads Maintenance. Here to support Microsoft Office including Word, Excel and Outlook. As well as safe web browsing, Interchange and LearnPro.

Elaine

Procurement Officer (Systems) within the Payments section. Happy to help with queries on Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook and Teams.

Alison

I work as a Learning Technologist in Education. I am here to help with queries relating to Microsoft Word, Outlook and Teams. As well as navigating Interchange and safe web browsing.

HONESTLY, WE'RE
JUST LIKE YOU ;)





As part of our ongoing review of our employment policy framework, we've updated three policies to take into account changes in legislation, benchmarking and best practice recommendations. These policy changes were approved at the Corporate Committee on 15 March.

The latest policies to be reviewed were:

- Flexible and Early Retirement Policy
- Secondment Guidance
- Lone Working Policy

The format of the policies has been updated and hyperlinks to other supporting documents added to help make these more user friendly and easier to navigate.

There was limited changes made to the policies, however the main ones are highlighted below:

The Flexible Retirement policy and Early Retirement Policies were combined into one document. A flowchart outlining the process along with links to supporting

information have been included to make the policy easier for managers and employees to understand and apply. There is a separate policy each for Teaching and SJC staff.

The Secondment Guidance has been improved by providing more detail in relation to the different types of secondment available. Clearer guidance has been provided and templates created of secondment agreements. These changes have improved the clarity and principles surrounding secondments.

The Lone Working Policy was refreshed and includes reference to appropriate protocols and safe systems of work and the requirement to ensure they are applied and implemented across services to ensure the health and safety of lone workers.

If you would like to see more details on the council's policies, they are on Interchange or you can contact HR.

Distance Aware badges or lanyards are available in libraries, most Asda stores, or available to [purchase online](#). Wearing one lets people know – colleagues, customers, friends or family – that you feel more comfortable when you have more room, and it’s a non-confrontational way of asking others to respect your individual space.

To the right is a poster which can be printed off and displayed in your workplace. Just cut round the dashed line.

Be Distance Aware

