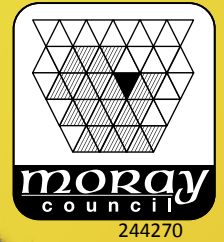


connect



Roddy Retires
Long Service Awards
Employee Survey



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Editorial

We were on a break!

We're back!!

We know some of you missed us, and took lots of opportunities to tell us over the last few months, so we're delighted to be back among you.

We're still working on a suite of changes on getting key messages across to you and have started the year with a dedicated comms hub on Interchange and the rebirth of Connect. We'll be looking for your feedback on various aspects though with a wee survey (I know, another survey - this one will be fun!) on how you'd like to see things progress now we're fully immersed in hybrid working.

We're sticking with two monthly just now for Connect publication and will continue to put more urgent notices on Interchange if it can't wait for the next edition. We're also trying to cut down the size, as it was becoming a bit unwieldy before our break. And we're testing out some new features – as always we're happy to get feedback via connectnews@moray.gov.uk.

For now, we're bringing you an update on the way the budget discussions have progressed and what's next for 2024/25 and 2025/26. We're sharing the training that is available; a round-up from the most recent Long Service Awards; the school heroes as nominated by readers of the Northern Scot and associated papers; and a farewell from our Chief Executive, who retires later this year.

We hope you enjoy the slimmed down Connect and keep an eye out for that survey to help us plan more exciting things for you!

Kirsty



Roddy Burns, Chief Executive, retiring

On a blustery but sunny February afternoon, I pop in to see Roddy for a chat ahead of his retirement at the end of May. I remark on how tidy his office is. With a smile, he says: “I’ve started having a clear out.” Understandable too. After 42 years as a public servant, Roddy has accumulated a wealth of knowledge, experience and probably paperwork!

Roddy was educated in his native Glasgow and Ayrshire before studying law at Aberdeen University then joined the former Moray District Council as a trainee solicitor. Roddy regards himself as having dual nationality as an adopted son of the north east with his roots still in Glasgow and Ayrshire.

It was while working in Aberdeen that Roddy saw an advert for a two year apprenticeship with Moray District Council. He arrived in

Moray with no intention of staying beyond his two years. Meeting his wife changed all that and they stayed to raise their two children here in Moray.

He held various legal and administrative posts and was Depute Director of Law and Administration at time of local government reorganisation in 1996.

Appointed Legal Services Manager with the new Moray Council, Roddy then became

Chief Legal Officer in 2000. After a period as Acting Chief Executive for 15 months he succeeded Alastair Keddie in the role permanently in October 2012.

So, what does someone who has worked for Moray Council, in its various guises, for over 15,330 days do when they don't have to come to HQ anymore?

Roddy says: "I'm looking forward to some downtime and taking things from there. I've got no great plans, it's just time to move on and enjoy my own time. I'm very much looking forward to being part of the community as an ordinary citizen rather than as a Chief Executive."

I'm keen to ask Roddy about the changes he's seen during four decades of Moray Council, he says the style of workplace has change significantly.

"It was very formal when I started with Moray District Council. It was male dominated and women were in what were regarded as 'traditional' roles like typist and receptionist.

"The dress code was very strict, collar and tie for men and dresses and skirts for women. A colleague was once sent home to change having worn a sports jacket to the office. Staff also smoked in their offices!

"There was only one fax for the whole of the public sector in Elgin, you had to ask permission from the regional council to use it. There were, of course, no emails so written communication was done by typewritten memos distributed and collected by hand.

"There was an old-fashioned switchboard and because it was more expensive to phone in the morning you were encouraged to make your phone calls in the afternoon. It was completely different world!"

We've recently moved to hybrid working and sometimes we forget that workplaces, and local government in particular, have always evolved their working practices. Roddy explains how a working day was structured: "There was no flexi-time, opening and closing hours were strict. The office closed completely for an hour over lunchtime. Every department had its own public reception and receptionist. With about 800 staff it was quite small and family-like. You really did know almost everyone else."

Side-hustles aren't a new thing either, a particular quirk of this small workplace came in the form of the characters employed here: "The telephonist also ran a clubby book, ask your grandparents if you don't know what that is. So outside the telephone booth, which was under the stairs to the main entrance of the council chambers, was quite often festooned with lots of bags from the clubby. She also sold eggs for one of the councillors as well. It just emphasises that family feel with one member of staff clothing most of the building."

Diversity in the workforce is a positive shift Roddy has seen during his time in local government alongside better partnership working across agencies and organisations: "When I first started every organisation was self-contained and you didn't really work the way we do now with police, fire and health colleagues, for example. There's a clear expectation now that you do work

in partnership, not just in Moray but right across the North East.”

Things haven’t always been on the up though and Roddy says one of his darkest moments working for the council was the closure of RAF Kinloss and the threat to RAF Lossiemouth.

“That was the loss of 2,000 jobs, the equivalent of 20,000 jobs in the central belt. You couldn’t buy or sell a house, businesses were really struggling. The campaign the community built up to save RAF Lossiemouth led to increased economic activity, the Growth Deal, the Levelling Up fund – they all have their origins working hard to grow the Moray economy. Without a strong economy we can’t have the level of public services we want.”

The covid pandemic was a more recent challenge Roddy led the council through, he’s previously said that he could have retired during the pandemic years but didn’t think it was the right time when there was so much uncertainty. I asked how you even begin to respond to a situation there’s no template for and no-one else has experienced either.

“It was quite frightening and lonely at first. Right at the beginning there was no vaccine, no-one knew how long it was going to last and we just had to take it a stage at a time. As officers, we were well rehearsed and experienced in responding to previous major events, like the floods in the 90s and extreme weather in 2009 and 2010, the community stood up. I felt that as we went through each of the covid levels the underpinning factor was the community response and the council becoming a trusted source of information.

The response and the trust gave us the comfort that we were doing the right thing at each stage of the pandemic. Staff also rolled up their sleeves and got on with it.”

Roddy knows there’s still a lot to do and he sees the change in Chief Executive as an opportunity for someone to put their stamp on this work. He has a message for his successor: “I think local government is a force for good and it’s a great opportunity to make things better. You can make a difference. Moray’s a great place to work, it’s often underestimated in terms of what it does and what it can do.”

Roddy’s parting message to staff is one of gratitude: “I want to thank all the staff past and present and I wish current staff all the best for the future. I hope they will be as fortunate as I’ve been in terms of the support I’ve received at every stage in my career. Local government has been good to me, Moray has been good to me, and I leave with extremely fond memories of what’s been achieved. That’s not to say it’s not been hard work, but anything worthy of achieving involves hard work.”

While I’m sure it’s tempting to start winding down once your retirement date is set, as I finished chatting to Roddy he was straight into another meeting and on with his paperwork. Something tells me his hard work ethic won’t stop until he’s out the door.

We all wish Roddy the best for a long, healthy and happy retirement. And hope he can take some of his new found free time to reflect on a distinguished career to be proud of.

Staff-led bike rides – Get on yer bike!

Spring is in the air and now is as good a time as any to start getting out and about!

Cycling instead of driving reduces harmful emissions and congestion and we know getting exercise is good for mental and physical health.

Staff are encouraged to cycle to meetings and site visits, wherever possible, and to commute to work sustainably instead of (individually) using (the pool) vehicles.

Did you know?! We've got eight pool bikes: two e-bikes and six 'standard' push bikes for staff use. The bikes come with paniers, locks, instructions where needed, and helmets.

Pool bikes:

interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_108419.html

If you don't feel confident cycling or need a refresher, why not join us on one of the organised skills sessions and led bike rides?

Skills sessions are for anyone who hasn't cycled in a while or can't cycle and wants to improve their skills. We'll focus on start/stop, signalling, changing gear, cycling in a group and will be cycling in Cooper Park only.

The led-rides are for those of us who feel fairly confident in the 'technical skill' of cycling, but maybe lacks confidence cycling in busier places and traffic. The led rides will take us to vehicle-free paths – although you might meet pedestrians, dogs or other cyclists - but we can also organise a traffic-low led-ride on demand.

You can come along to more than one session. All council staff, regardless of where you work, are invited to take part in these sessions.

Skill sessions and led rides are on Tuesdays:

- 19 March
- 23 April
- 21 May
- 18 June

Starting 12.30pm at the bike shelter at the Councillor's car park at HQ in Elgin.

You can use a pool bike, which are pre-booked already.

Register your interest or ask for more information: activetravel@moray.gov.uk

Certified cycling instructors: Will Burnish and Tilia Maas Geesteranus.





Budget update

Between the public communications, Team Briefs (14 Sept, 26 Oct, 2 Nov, 15 Dec, 28 Feb) and the discussions managers have been having with their teams it's likely you're well versed in the budget situation the council faces.

Team Briefs:

interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_107569.html

First round of decisions:

<https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/moray-council-budget-decisions-being-made-for-202425>

Service specific proposals:

<https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/moray-council-announces-further-202425-budget-proposals>

Published results:

<https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/moray-council-publishes-summary-of-latest-budget-consultation-feedback>

To set the 2024/25 budget we started with the need to make £20m of savings over the next two years. This followed the £58m of savings we've already implemented since 2010.

In September 2023, we launched a series on engagement activities designed to help shape the budget and the future of council services. We asked you, our workforce, and the public what would be an acceptable level of change in how we deliver services.

The first survey we published got over 2,300 responses with over 1,500 people completing the survey in full. The result was 60% of participants willing to see increased charges to avoid service reduction. And 43% of them agreed a moderate to significant increase was acceptable.

This allowed elected members to make the first round of decisions that included an increase to the garden waste permit charge; a reduction in street lighting maintenance; an uplift to full cost recovery of burial charges; withdrawing from the Food for Life school catering scheme; and the introduction of dynamic pricing for school meals.

The next survey gave us the chance to look at service specific proposals and ask staff and residents your thoughts on reducing recycling centre opening; reducing animal health services; commercialising industrial rent; reducing the community training budget

and the capacity for supporting participatory budgeting; decreasing the customer services team size; reducing outdoor learning and DofE support; and rethinking out mobile library offering.

We published the results of this in December and all of these proposals, some with amendments, have now been agreed by full council and will progress through the formal channels to become operational.

In November we launched a specific engagement exercise on the future delivery of sport and culture services. Our libraries, swimming pools, community facilities and programmes have all been considered for alternative models of delivery and we opened our inboxes to suggestions from the public and staff. The six drop-in events at libraries and community centres across Moray were well attended with constructive conversations taking place. We were then able to invite those who had signalled an interest in attending workshops to look at how we might run these services. This will be the subject of the next meeting of the Education, Children's and Leisure Services Committee on 27 March.

In January, council set service charges for the year ahead also approved £50m of capital spend. This includes spending on our learning estate, climate change action, open spaces, harbours and vehicles.



Engagement exercise:
<https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/the-future-of-leisure-and-libraries-examined-in-moray>

Set service charges:
<https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/moray-council-sets-202425-charges-for-services>

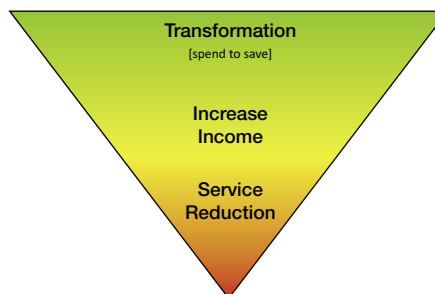
Latest budget setting:
<https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/moray-council-sets-budget-for-202425>

That brings us bang up-to-date with the latest budget setting meeting taking place on 28 February 2024. Here, elected members set our £278.8m budget for 2024/25, using reserves for most of the £19.2m shortfall.

This year we're getting £213m from the Scottish Government grant, which makes up around 80% of our budget. Council tax, charges for services and other grants makes up the rest.

You may also be aware that the Scottish Government asked us to freeze council tax this year too, so rates will stay the same as last year. Although, any change to water charges may mean your council tax bills won't stay the same. In our first budget survey back in September 2023, before the Scottish Government made this announcement, we asked participants if they would be willing to see council tax rise. The response showed, on average, people were willing to see it rise by 5.9%. The breakdown was 60% willing to see a 3% rise, 40% were okay with a 6% rise and 20% would have accepted a 10% rise.

Sustainable financial planning has been the focus for senior management over the last year and taking a hierarchical approach is now embedded in our thinking council-wide.



It's not easy to continue to deliver high quality services when this is the backdrop to your working day. Colleagues who have questions or are struggling should speak to their line manager in the first instance. There will be more chances in the coming months to share thoughts and have team-led conversations as we continue to plan ahead for next year.

Budget 2024/25 timeline

23 August 2023:

Full Council approved new Corporate Plan vision and values, draft for engagement

14 September 2023:

Budget planning for 2024/25 introduced to public and workforce through survey

25 October 2023:

Full Council decision on consulting staff and service specific proposals public consultation

November 2023:

Management consideration of consultation responses

December 2023/January 2024:

Charges updates agreed and council considers consultation feedback

28 February 2024:

Full Council further consideration, review of financial planning and set 2024/25 budget, including council tax

March/April 2024:

The future of sport and culture services discussed at committee

24 April 2024:

Full Council meets to consider further proposals and plan for 2025/26

Sport and Culture services timeline

14 September 2023:

Budget planning for 2024/25 introduced to public and workforce through survey – sport and culture services asked about

20 November 2023:

Service specific survey launched – supported by six drop-in events for customers

December 2023:

Survey closed 8 Dec – responses analysed

January 2023:

Stakeholder workshops on the future of sport and culture services

28 February 2023:

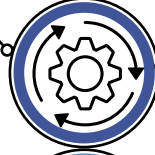
Full council sets 2024/25 budget without sport and culture elements included

March/April 2023:

Sport and culture future service delivery discussed at committee

24 April 2023:

Full Council meets to consider further proposals and plan for 2025/26



Employee Survey 2023 Results

From 21 August until 15 September 2023 we asked you to use 'Your Voice' and tell us how things are for you at work. We had a positive response rate of 23%.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the survey, sharing your views and allowing us to get an accurate understanding of how employees feel.

The Employee Survey asks questions on a range of themes to hear directly from you about your experience of working for Moray Council. This shows us where you've said things are working well and where there may be room to make some improvements. We compare with previous survey results to track trends and see where previous improvements have made a positive difference.

The results have now been analysed and are fundamental in pin-pointing what we do well, and where improvements need to be made to make the Council a great place to work and provide the best services we can for the people of Moray.

Here are the headline results – the full analysis booklet is available on the Interchange:
interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_150299.html

Response Rate: 23%

Highest Scoring Questions:

- 96%** It is clear to me what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace
- 89%** I enjoy the work I do
- 87%** I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are
- 85%** I feel respected by my colleagues
- 83%** My line manager/ supervisor treats me fairly and with respect
- 83%** I believe my line manager/supervisor cares about my well-being

Lowest Scoring Questions:

- 22%** I believe Elected Members provide leadership for the Council
- 28%** I believe that the Council will take action to address issues arising from the survey
- 36%** I know what Elected Members do
- 44%** I believe senior management have a clear vision of where the organisation is going
- 45%** Communications from the Council are open and honest
- 45%** Overall, I am satisfied with communication in the Council

Key Findings:

Key Improvements	2023 % agreeing with statement	2019 % agreeing with statement	% change since 2019
I feel I am coping well	74%	54% (2022 MH survey)	+20%
I am given the proper equipment to keep me safe and protect my health	82%	76%	+6%
Do you feel your mental health is sufficiently supported at work	59%	53%	+6%
Relationships at work are strained*	27%	33%	-6%
Areas of Sustained Performance	2023 % agreeing with statement	2019 % agreeing with statement	% change since 2019
I know what Elected Members do	36%	36%	No change
I am kept well informed about what is happening in my team	70%	70%	No change
I have the opportunity to participate in regular team interactions (or meetings)	74%	74%	No change
The information I receive is easy to understand	74%	74%	No change
I am able to access the training and development opportunities that I need	58%	58%	No change
My line manager/supervisor manages staff in our team fairly and consistently	72%	72%	No change
I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	87%	87%	No change

Areas of Development	2023 % agreeing with statement	2019 % agreeing with statement	% change since 2019
I am aware of the challenges that face the Council over the next few years	73%	86%	-13%
I expect the Council will have to change the way it delivers services because of these changes	73%	82%	-9%
I am kept well informed of what is happening in the council by my line manager/ supervisor	68%	77%	-9%
I have been able to maintain and/or improve my mental health and wellbeing during the last year	59%	65% (2022 MH survey)	-6%
I am kept well informed about what is happening within the Council	48%	54%	-6%

These results have been reported to Committee and discussed with managers at all levels to see if any future actions are needed to build on our successes and deliver improvements.

Elected Members are keen to show their support in improving the workplace for all. Having reviewed the analysis a decision has been taken to create a short life working group with the aim of supporting improvements in workplace culture across the council. Watch out for more information on this coming soon!



Gold! Gold! Always believe in your soul...

Congratulations to Elgin Academy, currently celebrating huge success in achieving the gold award in the Scottish Book Trust's Reading Schools programme.

Since reaching the heights of the silver award in early 2023, the school and pupils worked extremely hard to earn that gold status. Including participating in a variety of events and activities to promote the joys of reading.

On top of earning the Gold Award, Elgin Academy has the unique achievement of being the first ever secondary school in Moray to reach gold status.

Elgin Academy's librarian, Shelagh Toonen, and her school improvement

group supported by the pupils, have been instrumental in this achievement. They created an environment that not only celebrates the fun and importance of reading but have become proud champions of reading across the whole community.

The group implemented partnership reading projects with primary schools and Anderson's care home, worked with local businesses and held a fundraiser for a book basket to give away to parents in a free raffle.



One S4 Reading Leader, Evie Collins, said: "Working towards our Gold Award gave us the opportunity to build connections with our community in and outside of school. It helped us to share our love of reading and to spread the importance and fun of reading with others in lots of different ways."

This experience has had lasting impacts on the students involved with Bethan Dodd, another S4 reading leader, adding: "Achieving Gold has taught us that, even though we have now achieved gold accreditation, we still have lots of creative opportunities to share reading in our community."

If you'd like to take a page out of Elgin Academy's book you can learn more about all the amazing projects the school have been involved with on their library webpage.





Carbon Literacy Training

Ask anyone who has previously undergone the council provided Carbon Literacy Training and they'll probably tell you the trickiest part was picking a pledge on how you're going to take action to tackle climate change.

Our colleague, swimming pool lifeguard, Lee Philip, shows us how it's done.

Lee, an assistant at Speyside Sports and Community Centre, approached Cycling Scotland to fund a 14 bike cycle shelter

for Speyside High School pupils and sports centre users to encourage higher take-up of cycling in the area.

Describing Lee as an "all round champion", Carbon Literacy Trainer Sophie Ward said

she was delighted to see a pledge promising such significant impact being fulfilled: “Lee noticed that many of the school pupils were getting dropped off by their parents or carers in cars. He could see that lack of cycle parking spaces was really hindering the young people – and also sports and community centre users - so he decided to do something about it. How brilliant to see this facility in place, I’m delighted that Lee has achieved this.”

Lee said he couldn’t have done it without the advice and support of council colleagues: “Hopefully more of the school pupils will start cycling to school now, and this will help the sports and community centre staff too. It’s great to see it in place and this is absolutely brilliant for me too - I cycle to work and I had nowhere to put my bike.”

The Carbon Literacy course gave staff an awareness of the impacts of carbon dioxide from everyday activities. It also gave attendees the skills and knowledge to reduce emissions on an individual, community, and organisational basis.

To date, 50 staff and elected members have taken the course, including procurement officers, the Moray Growth Deal project team and the comms team.

The council is committed to promoting a culture of low carbon and sustainable behaviour across the organisation. The Carbon Literacy training, which was adapted and delivered in-house by climate change officers, is currently being re-modelled.

Sophie added: “I’ve loved delivering Carbon Literacy over the last two years. It’s been

amazing to see people as engaged, surprised and empowered by the training as I was when I undertook it.

“Climate change presents us with the most incredible challenge, but it also gives us the opportunity to make things better for everyone. Working together is the only way this is going to happen, and there really is something that every single person can do.”

Adding: “A short climate change e-module is currently available on LearnPro. But if you feel that more in depth training would help you in your role, please get in touch as we’ll be looking at taking the best bits of Carbon Literacy through to a new model more tailored to the needs of your individual team or way of working.”

Email Rod, Sophie and George at: climatechange@moray.gov.uk to find out more.

Staff climate pages: interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_143298.html

Public climate pages: www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_136444.html

Long Service Awards 2023

Our break means we didn't get a chance to share with you all our wonderful long serving staff as of 2023, who were recognised at a ceremony on 23 November.

But we're here now to celebrate the public sector service milestones reached by our colleagues.

A huge congratulations to everyone and thank you for your dedicated service.

Our Chief Executive, Roddy Burns, said: "I am always thankful to have the opportunity to acknowledge staff for their tremendous hard work. Thank you to all recipients for their years of service and dedication, all your efforts are truly appreciated."



40 years of service

- Jennifer Brown
- Linda Cameron
- Lorna Carmichael
- Vivienne Cross
- Doreen Cruickshank
- Elaine Henderson
- Heather Kellas
- Deborah McDonald
- Sheena Tulloch



30 years of service

- Michael Atnderson
- Alison Beacham
- Shona Brown
- Gail Buckley
- Angela Cant
- Kevin Donald
- Eunice Farren
- Marie Fraser
- Emma Gillings
- Glen Hopkins
- Elizabeth Hughes
- David Kew
- Julie Lloyd
- Michael Maclean
- Linda Magill
- Catherine MCGowan
- Avril Mcken
- Pauline Mckenzie
- Julie Millar
- Jennifer Milne
- Louise Milne
- Ann Munro
- Graham Norrie
- Caroline O'Connor
- Catherine Reilly
- Jo-Anne Robertson
- Aileen Scott
- Arlene Taylor
- Gary Youngson



20 years of service

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| • Audrey Ballantyne | • Louise Hamilton | • Anne Mccaskell | • Diane Russell |
| • Anne Bowie | • Sheryl Hay | • Brenda Mcdonald | • Claire Staunton |
| • Leanne Bruce | • Emma Hendry | • Morag Mcdonald | • Yvonne Stuart |
| • Stella Brumfitt | • John Hogarth | • Gillian Mckay | • Maureen Tang |
| • Jacqueline Clark | • Duncan Jagger | • Janice Mclean | • Claire Tarling |
| • Amanda Craib | • Alan Johnstone | • Elaine Mcrae | • Pamela Thomas |
| • Paul Dale | • Hilary Joyner | • Sonia Morrison | • Helen Thorley |
| • Irene Davidson | • Sara Kane | • Natalie Munro | • Kerry Turkington-Glass |
| • Andrew Drinkwater | • Stuart Kennedy | • Helen Murphy | • Keith Turner |
| • Diane Elliott | • Claire Leggat | • Joyce Murray | • Deborah Ure |
| • Michelle Fyfe | • Stephen Leitch | • Andrew Newcome | • Nichola Urquhart |
| • Tamara Gault | • Alison Mackie | • Celia Nicholson | • Susan Urquhart |
| • Alison Goodfellow | • Lesley Maclellan | • Jenifer O'Hagan | • Marlene Walker |
| • Ian Gordon | • Sharon Mair | • Dawn Phillips | • Amanda Williams |
| • Catherine Hall | • Paula Matheson | • Jo-Anne Pike | • Louise Wojcik |
| • Laylia Hamilton | • Susan Matthews | • Tim Pott | • Yvonne Worthington |



Don't get phished – get trained!

We all know we face cyber threats and attacks, that phishing is a major threat to Moray Council as well as to us personally. Fraudsters are constantly trying to attack individuals and businesses to get sensitive and valuable information that they use to expand their criminal enterprise.

Recent successful cyber-attacks on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), as well as on public bodies (NHS, UHI, SEPA) and businesses (Arnold Clark, Royal Mail) show how real the threat is.

Moray Council is also subjected to attempted phishing attacks on a regular basis, which, if successful, could massively impact our ICT systems, our day to day working and the services we provide.

Late last year, ICT simulated a phishing attack on our systems and were concerned at the results. 737 employees clicked on the link and 452 entered details. Although, around 275 employees reported this as a suspected phishing/scam email to our IT Service Desk.

To help make sure we all understand the dangers and what we can do to help protect Moray Council, as well as

ourselves personally, we've partnered with MetaCompliance to provide a short training session.

If you haven't already, you'll be getting an email soon inviting you to log on to watch some short videos and answer a few questions to help keep us all safe from cyber attacks.

It's important all employees take the time to do this training – it only takes around 20 mins – and could save us all a big headache in future!

More information on Interchange:
[interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/
Page_153128.html](https://interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_153128.html)

Councillor's Corner

Council leader

Cllr Kathleen Robertson (Ward 8 (Forres)) is Leader of the Council and represents and Chair of the Education, Children's and Leisure Services Committee.

"Those of us born in Paisley are known as 'buddies' – it's a term that's believed to be a corruption of the old Scottish term for bodies. My family's history of serving the community as medics dates back three generations - so there was a high expectation that I would follow tradition, which I did, only I chose animals instead of people.

My career as a vet has been varied. I focussed mainly on farm animals before specialising in anaesthetics. This specialist pathway led me into teaching at the Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh, and it steered me into the Forres practice

as locum, where I met my husband, who owned the Veterinary practice.

We have two children, our eldest son is carrying on the family tradition and is studying medicine at Edinburgh University. Our younger son is still in secondary school so still has time to decide.

Thinking back, I'll never forget how grateful I was to my grandfather when I was due to give birth, because it was him who was responsible, together with an anaesthetist, for the clinical invention of gas and air to assist obstetric delivery!



Although being a Councillor and a Council Leader is a full-time job, I still undertake veterinary work during the week. I strangely find the roles are similar. Each present problems that you can either fix or signpost. The only difference is the constituents don't bite."

Depute leader

Cllr Donald Gatt (Ward 2 Keith and Cullen) is the Council's Depute Leader and is Chair of the Housing & Community Safety Committee and Depute Chair of the full Moray Council committee.

"I came to Moray in 1981 serving with the Royal Air Force. Another three postings here later I decided, in 2005, to make it our home. I'm enjoying my second term as a Councillor and hoping I'm imparting my experience on newer members. It's the variety of subjects one gets

involved in that makes the role so interesting. Every day has different twists and turns and you never know the subject you'll be turning to next for a constituent needing help.

My role as Depute Leader means I need to be ready to stand in as



required, and some days, with my own workload alone, I'm non-stop with back-to-back meetings, I nip home for a quick tea and go back out again for attend a meeting of a Community Council.

I'd say the plethora of meetings and the vast number of committee and

other Council-related papers one has to read are the biggest challenges of the role. It's a good job I like reading – you can find yourself getting really stuck into a subject like roads infrastructure.

In my spare time, I enjoy walking with my wife Shona the fantastic

paths round Moray or venturing to places like Aberdeenshire's Bennachie or Tap o Noth. I'm a bit of a history-buff, and having recently read a biography of British naval historian Sir Julian Corbett, I've moved onto his notable book, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*."

Civic Leader

Cllr John Cowe (Ward 5 Heldon and Laich) is an Independent Councillor who was elected in 2013 and then elected by his colleagues into his current role as the Council's Civic Leader. He formerly chaired the Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee.

"I am a Lossie man, born, raised, and educated in Heldon and Laich, and I have lived and worked in Moray all my life. I am incredibly passionate about the area we live in and have taken every opportunity through my business and the Moray Council to promote the outstanding food and drink larder we are renowned for, as well as the incredible beauty of Moray and Scotland.

I followed in the footsteps of my father into the seafood industry and diversified into exports worldwide. One of my proudest moments was being recognised as business of the year by the Moray Chamber of Commerce for my contribution to the local economy as Scottish Exporter of the Year, UK exporter of the year in Seafood and Winner of Food Manufacturer Award, among many others. I understand business and have mentored fledgling companies, sharing

knowledge, experience and advice, and supporting them through from conception to success. Now, more than ever, it is important to assist our businesses after such a difficult and challenging time, and to promote tourism to create employment and retain our young workforce. We need to encourage businesses to locate and embrace what Moray has to offer.

Following my election in 2013, it was a great honour and privilege to serve Moray in the past as Chair of Economic Development and the Moray Economic Partnership, and now as Civic Leader of Moray. There have been challenges we have overcome, and there will be more to tackle. We are not alone as each local authority battles to present a balanced budget. We are a resilient race, proud of our heritage, and proud of our little corner of Scotland."



Voting is open online until Sunday, March 24 – be sure to place your vote for your Moray and Banffshire heroes by then.

<https://www.hnmedia.co.uk/morayheroes/>

Moray and Banffshire Hero nominations

The nominees for this year's Highland News Media Moray and Banffshire heroes' awards have been announced.

After months of readers of the Northern Scott, Forres Gazette, Banffshire Advertiser and their sister papers, submitting nominations to shine a spotlight on unsung community heroes, the shortlist is finally here.

These finalists include some of our amazing teachers and schools in their respective categories and we congratulate them on their nominations by showcasing their individual stories.

Primary Teacher of the Year

Kirstin Player

Primary six and seven teacher at St Sylvester's, Elgin, Kirstin Player, has been nominated for primary teacher of the year.

Kirstin's nomination said: "She has gone above and beyond to provide additional activities for the class to ensure their last year of primary school is special and memorable. She also set up and runs sports clubs for the class to encourage them to not only try out, but also compete in tournaments, working closely with them to build their confidence. She ensures that all of her children are given a voice, are encouraged to speak up and be heard. Mrs Player got through to them in a way no-one else had managed to. She goes above and beyond for all of her children."

Kirstin who has been teaching for a total of 16 years, seven of those at St Sylvesters said: "Seeing children thrive, how they develop and that they're happy and engaged when they're learning is amazing."



Asked what she thinks about the nomination, she says she was surprised: "It's slightly shocking! It's not something you expect."

Sarah Will

New Elgin Primary School teacher, Sarah Will has been teaching for 19 years. This past year she has pivoted slightly and has been working as an ASN (additional support needs) teacher and as the school's mentor to two probationer teachers.

Sarah's nomination said: "Mrs Will has consistently gone above and beyond. She communicates brilliantly with parents, and keeps researching and trying new strategies to help. She is an incredible professional and an extremely special teacher. Empathetic, kind, committed and effective. We are extremely lucky to have her."

Sarah said of her nomination: "It's been the most fantastic year. I feel I have found my

calling working with a group of ASN children, it's so rewarding. And in my mentoring role, helping newly qualified teachers become fully qualified, has also been hugely rewarding.

"I feel humbled. I can't believe someone has taken the time to think about me like that. This job is a team effort. It shouldn't just be me, it should be everybody who works alongside me."



Secondary Teacher of the Year

Jasmine Taylor

Elgin High School PE teacher, Jasmin Taylor, has been teaching for seven years and has been a PE teacher at Elgin High School for five years.

Jasmine's nomination said: "She is a hard-working, dedicated, caring and compassionate teacher who I believe is the best by far in her school, she cares very much for the students and only wants the best for them. She goes out of her way to help them, she is brilliant with ASN students and even takes them for tennis or badminton lessons during her lunch breaks."

Jasmin, who also plays tennis competitively, loves her job and finds the opportunity to be a key role model for her students hugely rewarding: "Everyday is different! There's ups, downs, laughs, tears but I always learn

something new. I enjoy building relationships with our young people and supporting them to be the best version of themselves. It's rewarding to know I make a positive difference to their lives and to be a key role model in their growth into adulthood.

"I'm really flattered to have been nominated for this, never mind being shortlisted! Honestly, I just love what I do and to be recognised for that is a wonderful feeling."



June Buchanan and Emma McLaughlan

Deputy head teachers at Elgin High School, June Buchan and Emma McLaughlan, have been teaching for 23 years and 20 years, respectively, with June at Elgin High for five years, and Emma, six years.

Their nomination said: “They offer the school community lots and demonstrate the key qualities of resilience, respect, care and nurture. These qualities go a long way to instil positive values within the school community and beyond. June and Emma work tirelessly to support the young people of Elgin High School to reach their full potential as well as ensuring that they have a positive academic and social experience.”

Both were surprised but delighted to have been shortlisted: “I’m quite shocked!,” said June. “I was taken aback because what we do here is just what we do, we come to work to help young people. We don’t see what we do is different to anyone else. Being nominated came out of the blue.”

“We don’t think we do anything that a depute wouldn’t do to get the best out of the children.” added Emma.

Both remain passionate about teaching, supporting pupils through intervention and



group work with youngsters that require extra support or nurture.

“It’s the interaction with the young people,” explained June.

“It’s the impact you can make for so many young people in so many different ways regardless of their pathway.” Added Emma: “I like the creative side of being a depute. Finding the right intervention, and if it doesn’t exist, making it exist for young people.”

School of the year

Mortlach Primary School

Mortlach Primary School, has been shortlisted for a Moray Heroes School of the Year award and described as going above and beyond the call of duty.

The nomination for the primary school said: "It's growing in strength all the time. Every single teacher, support staff and pupil make the school exceptional. The joint working between the parent council and school is fantastic and ensures that all pupils are included for events free of charge. The school deserves to be recognised for its hard work and commitment to its pupils, staff and the wider community."

Head teacher Tracy Gordon said: "We're incredibly proud of our wonderful pupils who make every day enjoyable and approach learning with enthusiasm. Every member of staff is highly motivated and works extremely hard to ensure that our pupils feel valued, supported and encouraged. It's a pleasure to work alongside our parents, families and wider community, who go above and beyond to support school developments and provide experiences for our learners to apply their skills and talents."

"Our pupils will be delighted to hear that their school has been shortlisted. Our refreshed vision, developed in consultation with pupils, families and staff, is 'At Mortlach anything is possible', we believe that everyone at Mortlach can achieve anything they set their mind to. It is a privilege to be Head Teacher and as an ex-pupil I have a deep connection with the school and community."



Findochty Primary School

Having a big vision and set of values that encourage acts of kindness has supported Findochty Primary School to be shortlisted for a Moray Heroes Award.

Headteacher Dawn Thomson, who has been leading Findochty Primary School for 12 years, said: "It's so lovely to be nominated and recognised for the hard work that we do. We do our best to put the local community at the heart of what we do and I do believe that we're at the heart of the community. Our pupils enjoy making Christmas cards or



leaving flowers on the doorstep of the older members of our community so that they feel cared for and know that even if their families live far away, they are in our thoughts.

“Before the pandemic, we used to have lots of village elders come in to read, craft or play games with the children and we’re beginning to rebuild those connections now. All our pupils will be excited to hear about this nomination.”

Keith Primary School

The kindness of its staff team and their willingness to find ways to make lessons as inclusive as possible for pupils with additional needs are some of the many reasons Keith Primary School has been shortlisted for the school of the year award.

The nomination said: “When one of my children was diagnosed with additional support needs, her teacher made sure she got the right help at the right time. Both my children were treated with the utmost respect.”

Head teacher Susan Buchan said: “It’s lovely for the school and our staff to receive recognition like this. We pride ourselves in the ethos of being inclusive and nurturing and it’s wonderful to hear that being affirmed by this kind nomination.

“Being a teacher creates so many opportunities for joy. Our pupils always say or do something that make us smile or feel proud. As a community, Keith is a wonderful place to teach because the parents and wider community go above and beyond to support us in so many ways; any time that we are

fundraising there is an exceptional response from the local area. It’s heartwarming to be a part of the Keith community.”

Once again, huge congratulations to all the finalists. It’s fantastic to share the recognition teachers and schools are getting publicly for all their hard work.



Policy Review

Two of the council's employment policies have recently been updated to take into account changes in legislation, benchmarking and best practice recommendations. These policy changes were approved at the Corporate Committee in January 2024.

The latest policies to be reviewed were:

- **Pregnancy Loss Special Leave policy addendum:** This addendum to the Special Leave policy outlines the provisions for employees who experience a loss of the pregnancy before 24 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Policy to Combat Fraud, Theft, Bribery and Corruption:** updates to reflect good practice and promote the importance of creating a culture of prevention.

Pregnancy Loss – addendum to Special Leave Policy

The Pregnancy Loss addendum is a new provision for inclusion within the Special Leave policy which outlines the provision for employees experiencing the impact of pregnancy loss before 24 weeks gestation. The policy aims to provide provision in advance of the Miscarriage Leave Bill becoming law.

Policy to combat Fraud, Theft, Bribery and Corruption

The policy has undergone a minimal review which ensures good practice is maintained. The main changes are:

- Updated to reflect current job titles and arrangements.
- Accommodation of provision to cover all staff and Elected Members
- Emphasis and encouragement of good conduct and proper use of public resources
- Definitions added to ensure clarity of understanding.
- Added hyperlinks and contents page for ease of navigation.
- Added hyperlinks to associated policies.

These policies are available on interchange now and you can contact HR with any questions.

Equalities data

Have you given us your data? We're often wary about giving our data across – but do you know why we need it? Below is an explanation on what data the council collects, why and checks if yours is up-to-date.

What is Equality Data?

The council collects data on ethnicity, race, religion, marital status, disability, sex, sexuality and gender reassignment status - these are all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The data is collected during the recruitment process.

Why we collect it?

The council has a duty as a service provider to ensure that everyone, regardless of their protected characteristics, has access to the same services. As an employer, the council also has to make sure that its recruitment processes and employment practices are fair, nobody is put at a disadvantage because of any protected characteristic, and that it considers how its employees can do their jobs effectively.

Examples of these duties

The council has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for its service users and employees. We have to think ahead of what can be done to ensure that everyone can access services and that employees can do their work effectively.

We also have a duty to ensure that everyone is paid the same for the same job regardless of sex, race or disability. If there's a difference between what women and men are paid, for example, that's a gender pay gap. Differences between people of different race is the ethnicity pay gap and differences

as a result of long-term health issues is the disability pay gap.

To show to what extent the council is successful in meeting these duties, we have to publish data regularly. When it comes to service delivery these are published in the council's Equality Outcomes. Information about our recruitment practices and pay gaps are published in the annual Mainstreaming Report.

Do we have to answer them?

Strictly speaking, no. There's no law that says we have to answer these questions. You may be asking what has my race, religion, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity to do with Moray Council?

Keeping your equalities information up to date will help the council to ensure there's no direct or indirect discrimination in its policies and practices.

The Challenge

One of the difficulties in meeting these duties is that a large number of people do not fill in the equality data. This problem is not unique to Moray Council. It's a recognised issue across all local authorities. As we said, people don't have to share information about their protected characteristics, but doing so gives us an opportunity to deal with inequality more effectively, so we really encourage you to make sure your data is up to date.

Confidentiality

There are strict laws about what information authorities can collect and how to use them. Authorities can only collect data for specific lawful purposes not, for example, because it would be nice to know. It can store data only for a limited time.

Only people involved in data processing can see the full data

Data can only be published if employees are completely anonymous. This means that if there is only a limited number of employees who share a particular characteristic the council can't publish this information, even if it's done anonymously. This is due to an increased risk of an individual being identified from small data sets.

What can you do?

All employees are asked to complete their equality data when they join the council and to update your records should your personal circumstances change. This is completed by you via the Employee Self-Serve Portal. You use this portal to add your bank details too, so all the information is in the same place.

Employee Self-Serve Portal:
interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_108763.html

Updating your information is straight forward. All Moray Council employees have 24/7 access to the fully secure easy-to-use Employee Self Service portal (ESS). Your username and password will have been emailed out to you by the Payroll department when you started, but if you need help resetting it please get in touch with Payroll.

email Payroll:
payroll@moray.gov.uk

Information on how to launch the ESS portal is available on Interchange including how to access the portal and find your way round it. Your profile area of the portal holds all the personal data you've shared. You should review this regularly to ensure it remains up to date.

ESS on interchange:
interchange.moray.gov.uk/int_standard/Page_108763.html

We encourage you to have a look at your data now to make sure it's accurate and by doing so, you'll help the Council understand the make-up of our workforce and assess more accurately that we're meeting our equality obligations.

Corporate training calendar – now available!

The calendar covers a range of topics, from technical skills to soft skills, ensuring that there's something valuable for everyone.

Sessions provide practical insights and real-world applications while supporting you to make the most from these opportunities. We offer a mix of in-person, virtual and eLearning training.

The training promoted within the calendar is just a small selection of the learning opportunities that are available to you. CLIVE, our learning platform has a wider selection of eLearning modules as well as other training opportunities that are available.

How do I register for training?

Firstly, you should review the training calendar and pick out any training of interest before discussing this with your manager. This is an important stage of the process and is an opportunity for both parties to consider if the training is a useful investment of your time.

- Once you're happy the training is right for you, simply log into our learning platform CLIVE to begin. Remember, if you are accessing it from home or whilst on the move, just google 'LearnPro Council' before entering your login details.
- If you'd like to complete an eLearning module, just click on the Show All Elearning button to access the full list of modules that are available. You can either search by category or enter your search criteria in the search field. Once you selected the module just click on the Launch button to begin.

- If you're looking to attend a workshop, click on the Apply for Events button located within the Training Events/ Course Booking section of the main page. Enter the name of the workshop you wish to attend into the search box and hit enter on your keyboard to see a list of the available sessions. Once the right session has been identified, click on the Info button to read about the workshop before choosing the Select button. To confirm your request, click Book on Event.
- If the workshop needs management approval, a message will be sent to your manager to approve the request then, assuming there is availability, you'll be added to the workshop and an invitation will be sent with joining instructions. If no management approval is required, assuming availability, you'll be added to the workshop and will receive joining instructions.

We encourage everyone to take advantage of these opportunities.

If you've got any questions regarding the calendar or the process to register for training, please don't hesitate to contact: organisational.development@moray.gov.uk who will do their best to assist you.