



**March
2020**

EN GARDE!

A black silhouette of a fencer in a ready stance is positioned over the word 'GARDE!' in the main title.

Robin Paterson brings his
passion to work

Heads Up
with Elaine McRae

Angelic Upstarts
new ELC apprentices

**International School
Meals Day**

moray
council



MARCH 2020

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Editorial

The Covid:19 threat is dominating news agendas and government plans. Clearly the situation is developing daily, and the council is actively involved in the planning with other first responder agencies such as NHS and Police to deal with an outbreak in Moray. There's an information page on the council's intranet, and this has been provided to managers for distribution in hard copy to our colleagues that don't use a PC as part of their work. You can access the intranet from your home computer too, of course but we've summarised what the council's got in place for staff elsewhere in *Connect*.

It was a delight to see first-hand young people enjoying the sport of fencing, and what a tribute it is to the dedication of one of our colleagues over the last decade. With the support of the council's Active Schools section, Robin has grown the sport in the area to the point where primary school pupils are getting hooked on this elegant sport – a great achievement.

Lots more in *Connect* this month, including some budget information that was agreed on March 3. More details of the savings and spendings are on the website.

You all know we occasionally have fun with headlines. There's an inspiring story of apprentices on [page 16](#) with a headline 'Angelic Upstarts'. Readers of a certain age will remember The Angelic Upstarts as a trail-blazing English punk band, formed in 1977. The band released eight studio albums in their first decade. Their debut single, 'The Murder Of Liddle Towers', was one of Mojo magazine's best punk rock singles of all time.

I'll get my coat...



Peter Jones
Communications Officer



Sharon Dunbar
Media & Communications
Officer



Angus McNicholl
Designer



HeadsUp

Elaine McRae, Acting Catering Manager

Dear Colleagues

Over the past 14 months I have been in the position of Acting Catering Manager. You may be surprised by what I'm about to say: catering is not just about cooking. It's about nutrition, diversity and inclusion for all. My team's job is to ensure that children in Moray always have access to a healthy, balanced diet.

I started working for the council as a school cook at Hopeman Primary in 2004. As a single mum of two, the job was ideal as it gave me the freedom and flexibility to maintain a job and care for my children.

After my children had grown up and I had remarried, I was successful in being promoted to Assistant Catering Officer. This position gave me the best grounding to progress within the department.

The department is constantly evolving, and is currently in the last phase of introducing the provision of lunch and light teas to local authority and partnered nurseries within Moray, under the Early Learning and Childcare expansion. This year will also see significant changes to legislation, meaning we'll have to reduce

the amount of red meat, sugar and processed meat offered to children in schools.

One of the major concerns just now is child poverty within the area. We're working alongside other departments to identify where we can help tackle this issue. Experiences in my personal life have helped me empathise with those struggling to provide for their families on a tight budget – I know how tough it can be.

I feel that working from the ground up has given me the respect for all my colleagues on the front line, dealing with the day-to-day running of each school kitchen. Without the support and commitment of these fabulous people, the catering team could not function to the best of its ability.

Since I've been in this position, I've been supported and guided by a lot of different people along the way who have given me confidence to deal with the diversity of the role. I can't thank them enough.

When I'm not at work, I'm spending time with my family, including our crazy dog! At the moment, I'm spending

most of my time helping to plan my daughter's wedding. The wedding fayres are all fun and games until my bank account knows about it! I've also been shopping with my son to furnish his first home. Thankfully, this one's on him. Phew.

At the beginning of this year, I had a big birthday (21 again, of course) and celebrations will continue throughout the year. I've already been lucky enough to be treated to a luxury spa weekend. However, next we're planning to skip the luxury and go on a road trip around the North Coast 500. This year I will indulge, next year the wedding diet will commence...

Best wishes
Elaine

**YUM!
WE LOVE OUR HOMEMADE
SCHOOL MEALS**





FENCING

GARDE!



In a rural area such as ours it's understandable that when fencing is mentioned, it's the stock-proof variety that springs to mind.

But for a growing number of enthusiasts the term means an elegant sport that has gained a strong foothold in Moray – thanks to the vision of one of our colleagues.

12 years ago keen fencer Robin Paterson, manager of the Early Learning and Childcare programme, established the Elgin Duellist club. His ambition was to have a regular meeting place to develop the sport in Moray.

What started off as a one-man band has grown every year since, and the club now has members of all ages, many of them

ELGIN



Duellist Fencing Club

colleagues here in Moray Council. Several have qualified as instructors, helping fencers young and old develop their techniques.

Although the club has had medal success in national competitions and a potential Team GB member among its ranks, Robin says recent developments have shown the real value of the sport.

"We have a 10-year plan to introduce 'plastic fencing' to every primary in Moray," he said. "Plastic fencing simply means we're using plastic swords instead of metal. Some schools have already taken it up and I can see it spreading quickly."

Club members and teachers, Jon Goulding and Fleur Hamelin, are opening the doors to the sport for pupils in secondary schools in Moray. Jon is shortly launching a fencing club at Buckie High, meanwhile Fleur has already established one at Elgin

Academy through the council's Active Schools sessions.

Many of these outreach sessions has been made possible with support from the council's Active Schools programme. With this support the club has delivered plastic fencing in three-week taster sessions to children in P3 to P7. This year, children from the Forres ASG primary schools have taken part.

Many pupils who took part in these plastic fencing sessions in the previous two years have gone on to become members of Elgin Duellists.

Connect dropped into one of Fleur's regular Friday afternoon fencing classes at the school to see what's involved. Fleur said she used to enjoy fencing class when at school in France.

"When we moved here my son wanted to have a taster session at the Duellist club," she said.



Primary pupils try out Fencing with plastic épée



“It’s not about winning medals, it’s about what we can give back to the community.”

Robin Paterson

“As I fenced in school I was delighted to see it offered in Moray.

“When I saw that all ages were taking part, and adults were fencing with young people I decided to join. It means my son and I can fence together, and there aren’t many sports where adults and children can compete together on equal terms like that.”

That was nearly four years ago, and Fleur is now an instructor with a class of 20 students at Elgin Academy. As there are three types of fencing technique – foil, épée, sabre – two of Robin’s young club members – Academy students Irena and Oliver – assist her class with tuition.

Fleur is a foil fencer, and her young assistants use sabre and épée.

Foils began as safer and lighter practice weapons used by duellers to hone their skills. The term ‘foil’ is derived from the French word ‘refouler’, meaning ‘to turn back’. The foil blade is usually very flexible, around 35 inches in length and square in cross section. This sword is lighter in weight than both the épée and the sabre.

The épée is as long as a foil, but has a much heavier blade with a triangular cross-section and fluting along the sides of the blade. The shape, weight and fluting originated with the rapier, an ancient duelling sword on which the épée was based.

Unlike the foil and épée, which are exclusively thrusting weapons, the sabre is used to both slash and thrust. The history of the sabre goes back to its use as a military weapon, particularly among cavalry.

Until recently, for the first three months of fencing tuition all that was taught was the technique before a student was ever allowed to pick up a sword and fence with an opponent. The modern way is an emphasis on learning through games. This maintains the interest of young people especially, as instead of talking about technique it's more hands-on and fun. It's another way of achieving the same end through a different approach.

Robin says the emphasis on sport – not just fencing – is changing.

He said: *"We're seeing now that it's not just about medals and competitiveness to attract funding from grant-giving bodies."*

"All sports governing bodies are looking at the added value their sport can bring – social inclusion, changing lives and learning in different ways. In the past, funding levels for clubs were determined by how many medals were secured at the Olympic Games or international competitions. For a sport like the GB basketball team, which had high participation levels but never gets medals, the funding was limited."

In addition to the schools programme, one of the ways the Elgin fencing club is diversifying and spreading its benefits is as part of a national initiative called Project 40, using the sport as a medium to support people who've experienced trauma.

"We're working with counsellors from Moray Rape Crisis Centre



Fleur Hamelin with her Elgin Academy fencing class

for the six-week programme. In supporting women who have experienced sexual abuse or domestic violence, we're exploring personal boundaries, what it means to be in a dangerous place and what it takes to step out of it.

"It's very innovative and hugely rewarding for us as instructors to see the difference it is making."

Robin and the club members are understandably enthusiastic about the future of the sport, and how the skills are transferable off-piste.

"I'm fascinated with it; from a coaching perspective it's helped me in work from a management viewpoint. It helps me find positive ways to interact with people, shows me how people learn and how to use different approaches."

The club has grown over the years and it can thank the council's Acting Educational Resources Manager, Kim Paterson, for her part in getting it off the ground.

Robin said: *"I've got so much to be grateful for to Kim; if it wasn't for her support we wouldn't have been able to set up the club."*

"We now have over 30 members and satellite clubs being formed, one of our fencers picked for the national Scottish team – it's not inconceivable he could make the British team – and scores of fencers on the youth development series."

"We feel really happy and, thanks to the support from Moray Council, as a club we're in a good place."

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL MEALS DAY



Thursday 12 March 2020

Each year our 252 colleagues in school kitchens across Moray serve up more than one million meals! So although 12 March is International School Meals day, really it's another day in the office for our catering colleagues.

What it does offer though, is a chance for us to celebrate their efforts in feeding our thousands of schoolkids healthy, homemade, nutritious food. This year the aim of the day is to get young people thinking about where their good comes from and who provides it.

In Moray we're one step ahead, because on the back of every menu it details our trusted local suppliers:

- Fresh milk from Graham's Dairy in Nairn
- Free range eggs from Allarburn in Elgin
- Fresh bread from MacLean's Bakers in Forres
- Seasonal vegetables from Swanson's Fruit & Veg
- Quality meat from Fraser Brothers butchers in Forres

"There are strict nutrition targets, and regulations setting out what we can and can't feed pupils, which is set to get even tighter with new legislation being introduced later this year," says Catering Manager, Elaine McRae.

"This will be challenging as we look to keep as many of our firm favourites on the menu, however what can be guaranteed is that our hardworking colleagues in every school kitchen will continue to cook and serve up thousands of delicious, healthy meals every school day."

Winter Grit

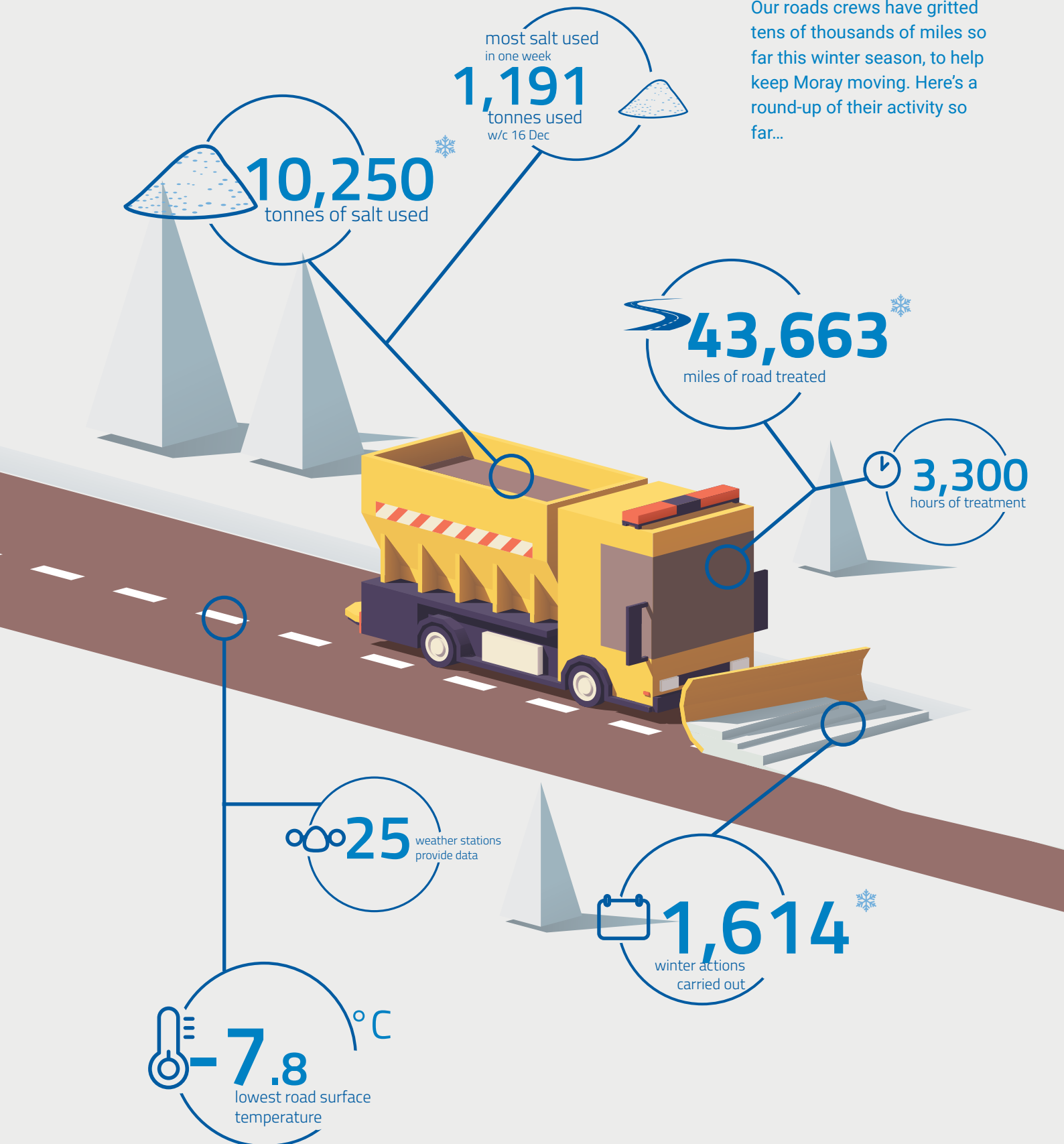
30 Sep 2019 - 23 Feb 2020



Priority 1 routes only

With the absence of the coveted 'white stuff', it has felt to many like a mild winter. In fact road surface temperatures have dropped as low as -7.8°C!

Our roads crews have gritted tens of thousands of miles so far this winter season, to help keep Moray moving. Here's a round-up of their activity so far...



HR Noticeboard

Employee Conference

It doesn't seem like five months since we wrapped up the 2019 conferences, but we'll be starting to plan the 2020 events very soon!

These events give you the opportunity to find out about a range of improvement activity going on across the council, speak with colleagues and hear about the work they're doing, and to have discussions with senior managers.

More information about this will be shared as arrangements are finalised and invites will be sent out later in the year – so we hope to see you there.

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

Take a Break

At the end of this month we'll be a quarter of the way through the year and perhaps in need of a break – whether off to sunnier places, a 'staycation' or getting those home improvement jobs done!

It's worthwhile mentioning how important it is for everyone to take regular breaks for their health and wellbeing, so perhaps a timely reminder to think about booking leave over the forthcoming months and throughout the year if you haven't already scheduled it in.

Social Engagement

Do you have an interest or passion that you would like to share with like-minded employees?

Would you like to lead an employee interest group or activity?

If you are interested in leading an interest group or activity for employees, get in touch and the Workforce Culture team will support you in making it happen.

Contact: hr@moray.gov.uk or 01343 563261



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

Stay Informed

As you might have heard, the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020.

The agreement with the EU includes a transition period that will run until 31 December 2020. During this time, very little will change for EU citizens in the UK.

However, with Brexit remaining at the forefront of the news, it's a good time to remind colleagues who may be affected of the key dates and support available for those wishing to apply for settled status.

The UK Government's EU Settlement Scheme opened in full on 30 March 2019 with the deadline for applying to the EU Settlement Scheme being 30 June 2021.

EU citizens and their families will have to apply to the UK Government's EU Settlement Scheme by 30 June 2021 in order to continue living, working and studying in the UK after that date.

Applications to the Settlement Scheme are made online, and can be accessed via a computer, tablet or mobile phone.

Information will be shared on the Interchange and *Connect* over the next month to help signpost employees to relevant help and support. To find out more employees can visit <https://www.gov.uk/staying-uk-eu-citizen>

Citizens' Rights Project, in collaboration with Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), will be offering a further series of briefing events in March about Brexit, citizens' rights and the EU settlement Scheme for local authorities and national organisations supporting EU/EEA citizens and their family members.

These are free briefing sessions with the next ones scheduled as follows:

Aberdeen: Friday, 27 March 2020, 9.30 – 11.30am, Town House, Union Street, AB10 1AQ

Inverness: Friday, 27 March 2020, 3 – 5pm, Spectrum Centre, 1B Margaret Street, Inverness, IV1 1LS

Additionally, Citizens Advice Scotland are delivering a support and advice service for all citizens affected by the UK Government's EU Settlement Scheme, resident in Scotland with more complex needs or particular challenges. Part of the service is a freephone national helpline available on: **0800 916 9847**.

IMPROVEMENT & MODERNISATION

The council faces a challenging financial situation and the Improvement and Modernisation Programme (IMP) has been identified as key to support the delivery of further savings and improve the financial stability of the council. It's essential however that the programme is seen as an ongoing change programme instead of a one-off exercise.

Change is all around us in our daily lives – how we do our shopping, heat our homes, read books or communicate with friends and family. Very little is the same as it was 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

It's no different within the council as customer demand, legislation, technology and dare we say, the need for financial savings, have all dictated the need for change.

Many of us will remember a time in the workplace when there were no computers, let alone one on every desk. Gradually, as we've progressed from electric typewriters to word processors to an office computer, we got used to working with them at work and at home. It's not limited to just changes in the office either, with the need for recycling resulting in a change from the old metal bins to the coloured wheelie bins we're so familiar with now.

Recent initiatives within the council have seen both Designing Better Services and Digital Services tackling some key projects to deliver change including:

- the introduction of the contact centre and access points to manage customer enquiries.
- flexible and mobile working for staff, enabling them to work from most locations including home.
- housing DLO staff using smartphones to manage their jobs when out and about
- a range of services provided online and available to the public 24/7
- changes to the way we procure goods and services

If we've learned anything from these projects it's that change doesn't happen overnight, but it is possible to make a difference with smaller incremental changes that build up over time.

With the current financial climate we all need to start considering the types of changes that will make a difference through:

- changing the way we provide services
- transforming our services, possibly through the use of technology
- redefining our services – do less or ask others to become involved
- income generation – increase our income through charging (e.g. brown bins)

The Improvement and Modernisation Programme has identified a number of initial projects that will be developed over the coming months. Some of these are ready to implement, including the interchange registration which will allow the interchange to be fully accessible to everyone from home using their personal device from the start of this month. Other exciting changes are planned for parents to use an online portal to access services for absence reporting, viewing their child's timetable and much more.

Over the coming months we will be keeping you informed of what's happening with the Improvement and Modernisation Programme, and asking you to get involved by putting forward ideas for change, possibly taking part in small trials or tests of change and generally being ambassadors for change to set us on track for our next transformational journey.

Whatever we do will rely on everyone pulling together to shape the future and, whether your natural instinct to change may be to fear it, resist it or to avoid it as much as possible, if change is constant and inevitable why not embrace it and influence how we move forward together?

While there's an initial plan of action it should be a joint effort to tackle change and not just down to one individual or group to come up with ideas. We all access council services, understand how other people access services and can translate what happens in our daily lives to the council environment. Whether it's an idea to use automated home solutions within a council setting, or to develop click and collect style services, you may be onto something – so let's all get involved.

interchange Registration

From 2 March you'll start to see a new padlock symbol next to some documents and policies.



Our new interchange registration programme, a secure and convenient way for all staff to access the information they need, in or out of the office.

Currently only staff with access to the network, such as those working out of HQ, can access everything. From 2 March however, anyone can access restricted files from their phone, tablet or home computer, using their login details.

Registration is quick and easy, with a step-by-step guide available for anyone needing a hand.

This will make it much easier for colleagues working remotely, for example refuse collectors or cleaners, to access documents key to their roles within the council, while also ensuring greater protection of, and access to, sensitive information.

All you need to register is your personal details and employee number, found on your payslip, so make sure to sign up at your earliest convenience.



Spring

walking & cycling
challenge

It's back! Are you ready?

We're raring to go with our annual Healthy Working Lives challenge, pitting teams of cyclists and walkers against each other in friendly competition to win 'The Wee Spring Challenge'!

Walkers are encouraged to hit their 10,000 steps per day to cover 896 km over the duration of the challenge (29 April – 24 May), while cyclists should aim for 56 km per week to cover 448 km. Teams ready to take on the walking challenge should sign up as a team of four, and cyclists as teams of two.

All teams registered will compete to finish all weekly stages of either the walk or cycle first. We'll publish updates on the interchange every Monday, with the winner announced at the end of the month.

Got what it takes?

Email catherine.ferguson@moray.gov.uk for a registration form – make sure it's returned by 15 April!

Walkers

- steps per person, per day: 10,000
- steps per team, per week: 280,000
- steps team challenge total: 1,120,000

Cyclists

- km per person, per week: 56
- km per team, per week: 112
- km team challenge total: 448



Angelic Upstarts

Gone are the days where apprenticeships were only for school leavers or those who wanted to work in a trade. Apprentices have evolved over time and there are now three different types: Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprentice. Which one you choose will depend on what stage you're at in your career.

Our most recent tranche of Modern Apprentices have been recruited within the Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) service. Kara Morrison, HR Adviser within ELC says they're benefitting from employing apprentices.

"Given the introduction of the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the number of funded hours for three and four-year olds from 600 hours to 1,140 hours per year, significant challenges arose from a workforce perspective.

"We could no longer rely on the normal pool of talent, so had to be creative looking at different ways of attracting, developing and retaining our talent."

Our ELC service recruited five modern apprentices last year, enabling them to work, learn and earn. At the end of the programme, they'll have achieved an SVQ 3 qualification, as well as valuable hands-on experience and let's not forget – being paid along the way!

In a recent satisfaction survey, our Modern Apprentices said:

- 100% were very satisfied with the ELC programme
- 100% received the support and guidance they required from their colleagues
- 100% agreed that the programme was sufficiently preparing them to be an Early Years Practitioner
- 100% would recommend a Modern Apprentice with Moray Council to others

This month we welcome another five apprentices to our ELC programme. A few changes have been made this time round, the most significant is the removal of the 16-24 years age restriction, now opening up this opportunity to everyone. As we strive to create an inclusive workforce, the removal of the age barrier also enabled us to improve equality, increasing the number of men in our workforce.

Looking ahead, we're hoping to participate in the Graduate Apprenticeship programme, enabling candidates to complete their degree in Early Learning & Childcare (SCQF Level 9) whilst increasing their skills, abilities and confidence along the way.

Our apprentices form a vital part of our workforce, supporting the service in developing talent and securing a workforce fit for the future. If your service is looking to improve their long-term talent pipeline or address skills gaps, apprenticeships could be just what you are looking for.

"86% of employers said apprenticeships helped them develop skills relevant to their organisation"
(Source: Apprenticeship Evaluation 2017: Employers)

Ricky Cox joins our Modern Apprenticeship programme this month, we took some time out with him to find out when he became interested in a career in ELC:

"When I was 16 I enrolled in a child care course in Basildon Essex. My mum and her friends encouraged me to do this as they were always telling me how good I was with children, and looking after the younger members of my family.

"Although I enjoyed the course in the beginning, being the only man on the course was very difficult. I often felt intimidated by the girls on the course and they weren't nice to me; they couldn't understand why I would want a career in childcare. I only stuck it three months and gave it up. Since then I've been a warehouse worker, janitor and a cleaner, and done odd jobs to support my family. I never really thought about returning to childcare.

"When we moved to Tomintoul and my son started nursery, I was invited along for Dad's Week. (A week where dads can drop in and out of nursery to see what their children have been learning) I really enjoyed the experience and the children enjoyed me being there. I went every day and loved it. At the end of the week the staff approached me and asked if I had ever thought of a career in childcare as they thought I had potential. They encouraged me to go on the relief list and apply for a job that was coming up in the nursery. Although I was unsuccessful with that job, I decided it was not going to put me off following my dream. The nursery manager forwarded me information about a "Men in Childcare" course and I signed up for it and was successful in getting a place. Then I saw an advert for the Modern Apprentice position and, encouraged by the ELC team, I applied and was successful.



“ I’m happy, as this is the first time that anyone has believed in me and given me the opportunity to have a proper career. ”

Ricky Cox

"I decided to take the Modern Apprentice position because, not only will I have a qualification at the end of two years, but I'll also have gained lots of experience, which should help me get a permanent position in the future.

"I'm nervous and excited at the same time about starting at Rothes Nursery, but I've been for a visit and the staff have been very kind and encouraging. I'm happy, as this is the first time that anyone has believed in me and given me the opportunity to have a proper career. I'm going to work hard and try my best, and hopefully this will lead to even more opportunities for me. It's Dad's Week again this week and I'm back in nursery, hopefully being a good role model to other dads. Who would have believed this time last year that I would be able to reach my dreams and be starting a new job in childcare!"

Getting about in Forres



Live in or near Forres? Use public transport to get around? Then you'll be pleased to hear of a new bus service in the town.

It'll link Forbeshill with the town centre, medical centre and include a loop round Tesco. We've also extended the service to include the new dental facility at Knockomie.

Currently our Dial-a-Bus is being used by some residents to access town-centre facilities. This will still be available should some residents have mobility difficulty getting to the bus stops along the route.

The timetable is available on our website at www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file130730.pdf.

Triple Grit!

Our colleagues have some grit! On December 14 Tara Gaughan, Sarah Castel and Susan Souter organised a triple grit exercise event at Moray Leisure Centre to raise money for Cash for Kids.

Each 30-minute high-intensity class had 14 participants, featuring cardio, strength and athletic workouts. Phew, sounds exhausting! Well worth the effort, as it raised a fantastic **£790.91!**



Parent Portal

Schools, Pupils, Parents; Working Together

We'll shortly be launching our Parent's Portal, the latest step in making life quicker and easier for families across Moray.

This national service has been developed to make it simpler for parents, no matter where they are, to be involved in their child's life at school, replacing the need for notes being passed back and forward by the child at the end of the school day.

Available online from your home or mobile device, Parents Portal gives you quick and easy access to:

- Check your child's timetable
- Approve permission slips
- Placing requests (such as if you're moving schools)
- Make online 'iPay' payments
- View school newsletters

and much more...

This new digital platform is a real game-changer for busy parents across Moray, especially those with hectic working lives from fishermen, military, farmers to office workers. It even covers if you have children at different schools, and with a mobile app version of the portal due to be released in August 2020, it's even more convenient for parents on the go.

Moray isn't the first region to roll out Parents Portal. In West Lothian, within a few weeks of launching in May 2019, more than a fifth of all families on their school rolls had signed up and started accessing services online. Many of the parents asked said the portal was very easy to use, and could even save them a lot of time.

When it comes to printing costs, it has the potential to save 4.6 million sheets of paper being printed by the council annually, something very beneficial for their carbon footprint.

We'll be making a formal announcement to the public when the portal is ready to launch. In the meantime make sure to keep an eye out and get ready to join in!



Shaping Up

Following on from our story last month about champion slimmer Paul Giles, three challengers have been in touch to share their stories.

Social care assistants Susan Logan, Diane Nicoll and Sue Rollison all joined Slimming World clubs to shed weight, and between them have lost 8stone 7lbs.

Having flexible hours has enabled the trio to devote time to their weight loss and fitness programmes. All say that their improved energy and mobility has made their tasks as carers for elderly clients much easier too.

Susan started on the programme in November 2018. She said her motivation was three-fold.

"I wanted to be a better role model for my children, to be

fitter and to do my job better," she said.

"Our work involves a lot of bending down, lifting and physical tasks, plus we're on our feet nearly all day. I knew I needed to lose weight if I was to do all that's needed."

Since starting the programme, Susan jogs up to 10k three or four times a week, she has bags more energy and feels a lot fitter. Her ambition is to shed another five stone this year and maintain her target weight.

Seeing holiday snaps of herself made Sue take the decision to lose weight.

"I used to hide and put myself at the back of groups when pictures were being taken," she said.

"I was very uncomfortable with

my weight. Now in just a year I've dropped three dress sizes to a 10, have more confidence and energy, and my knees don't hurt anymore!"

She added that walking through the door of the Slimming World club was the hardest step, but that after that the support there and among her work colleagues was tremendous.

Diane's motivation to take that step was her weight gain after stopping smoking last July.

"My uniform was getting too tight, and I could see the extra weight was affecting me," she said.

"But since I started on the programme 22 weeks ago I've lost well over a stone, and more is coming off each week. Now far from being too tight, my trousers keep slipping down!"



Whether it's Slimming World, swimming lessons or another activity that you wish to pursue to help you achieve your work/ life balance, the council's Flexible Working Policy is there to help.

The council encourages and supports flexible working to all posts, and wherever possible it will offer options designed to support both the needs of the service and the employee.

This applies to a temporary or permanent change, as service delivery must remain paramount in any decisions around an application. To date the council has supported different ways of working for a large number of our colleagues, including homeworking, holiday buy back, compressed hours, temporary reduction in hours with some employees having a combination of arrangements in place.



(H to L) Susan Logan, Sue Rollison and Diane Nicoll

Colleagues from lands and parks, working with engineers in consultancy, have been removing trees and shrubs from the bank of the River Lossie, between the Landshut Bridge and Grampian Furnishers, to make sure our flood alleviation scheme continues to protect homes and businesses in the area. We nipped out to get some shots of the tractor and robomower in action.



ROBOCROPS

(L to R) David Ferguson, Kailin Gordon, Andrew Newcome





On March 3 the council set its budget for 2020/21.

Among the savings made there is continued investment; more than £42 million will be invested in capital projects in 2020/21, including new-build and school refurbishments, harbours, road improvements, waste management, bridges and economic development. Funding for Health & Social Care Moray will increase by £1.79 million compared to 2019/20.

Grass cutting in council-owned open areas and parks will be reinstated, and grass cutting in council housing areas will continue in line with last year's arrangements. A report is also due to be brought back to councillors in August which will outline progress made in talks with the community around taking on public toilets, at which a decision could be taken to reverse the closures already agreed.

What has helped the council's financial position this year has been the recent changes to the council's finances, including an additional £1.6million funding from the Scottish Government and an additional £900k raised from the sale of council assets.

In addition to measures already agreed at previous meetings of the council, further savings of £104,000 was approved, including a reduction in funding for Moray Leisure Centre, Moray Women's Aid, and to recharge schools for the cost of music tuition for SQA pupils. This brings the total of approved savings for 2020/21 to more than £3 million. As part of the budget measures, an increase in Council Tax rates of 4.84% was agreed by councillors. full list of agreed budget measures is on the council's website.

Reserves of £2.34 million will be used to balance the budget for this financial year. This leaves our current reserves at £7.66 million, which is less

than we have previously had but should be sufficient to cover any emergencies or other unforeseen expenditure during the year.

Chief executive, Roddy Burns, thanked staff for their work over the past year in identifying £3million in savings.

"This progress has placed the council in a better position than we had feared at the start of this process, and I am enormously grateful to all staff for such sterling efforts" he said.

"Although there is much to be done to see the council through the next budget in 2021/22, we can focus upon the work transforming council services which should start to bear fruit and have an effect on our finances."

CORONAVIRUS

PROTECT YOURSELF



We have placed a lot of information and guidance for managers and staff on the intranet, including links to NHS sites that are constantly updated.

The council is preparing to activate its pandemic plan to manage this evolving situation, and to mitigate the potential effects on essential services.

Meantime staff are advised to follow the advice from NHS Scotland designed to reduce the risk of infection.



April sees the return of National Pet Month! Send us your best selfies with your pets – the more creative the better – and we'll share our favourites in next month's edition!

Send your selfies to:

ConnectNews@moray.gov.uk



NICE TRY!



We're always grateful to the Northern Scot for their permission to use the occasional picture of theirs in *Connect* and council publications, including one this week in our main story.

So we are delighted to congratulate one of the paper's staff snappers, Eric Cormack, whose picture won shot of the year at last month's Highlands and Islands Press Awards. It's taken during a women's rugby match in Huntly. We'll leave the caption to you...