

Staff Connections Ceanglaichean Luchd-obrach



Staff Bulletin | April 2020 | Issue 38

Spotlight edition



Ambitious

Sustainable

Connected

Message from the Chief Executive

Dear Colleagues

It is clear that the Council has responded really well to the unprecedented situation we are in. Staff across the Council have adapted to change in many ways, changing their roles and changing the way they work and deliver services. This issue of Staff Connections illustrates just some examples of how staff have adapted to the necessary changes and demonstrates what a truly flexible workforce means. It also highlights the strong values of our staff.

The adaptation of our IT is a good example as the network which only supported 500 people working remotely 3 weeks ago, and now can support some 4000 staff. Our IT staff have done a really good job and work is currently underway to make our network more resilient and flexible and to protect critical services. A message will go out shortly to clarify arrangements and give you further guidance on this as we must continue to improve our IT capacity to respond to the increasing demand in the current context.

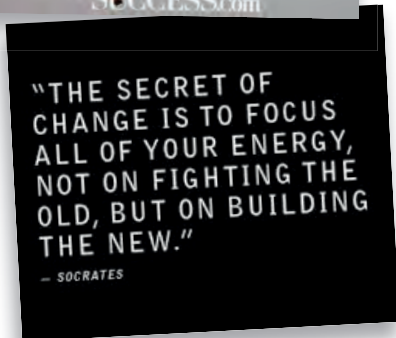
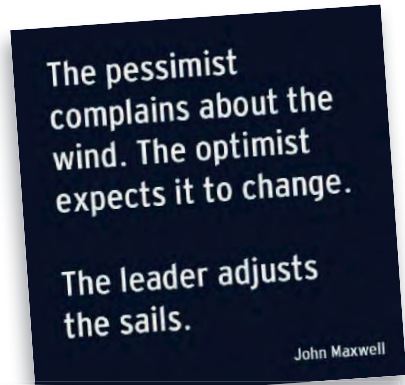
We are dealing with immense change and challenge as the national and regional circumstances are rapidly developing and new guidance and policy is coming out on a daily basis. How we react and respond to everything is critical and it has been humbling to see all your efforts which have been absolutely outstanding in the care, resilience and support you have collectively demonstrated in recent weeks.

Over the coming weeks, I can't emphasise how important it is that you must continue to follow public health guidance and keep yourselves and your families safe and well - that is the priority.

Thank you for all that you are doing, both as a member of staff and a member of your community in responding to the Coronavirus emergency.

Take care and keep safe,

Donna Manson Chief Executive





Anne, volunteering from home on the Council's Shielding Helpline.

Name:

Anne MacDonald

Post title:

Animal Health & Welfare Officer

New role:

Shielding Helpline Operator

Anne's caring nature is vital support for shielding helpline

Normally, Anne Macdonald is The Highland Council's, Animal Health & Welfare Officer based in Caithness House, Wick Area Office. Anne has switched her caring skills and volunteered to work from home on the Council's Shielding Helpline for the extremely vulnerable. She is taking calls from vulnerable people who must self-isolate to protect themselves or members of their family during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Anne said:

"I hope that in these very worrying times, for some folks I can be a friendly voice on the other end of the phone and help to coordinate the assistance they need to get through this safely. I have taken calls from all over the Highlands ranging from elderly callers to young families who are shielding to protect their children going through medical treatments."



Anne's caring nature shines through on the Shielding Helpline.

Information on

Shielding

for the extremely vulnerable can be found on the council's website or if you require immediate assistance and fall into one of the vulnerable groups, please phone:

01349 886669

www.bit.ly/HC-Shielding



Parking Enforcement Team



Name:
Philip Barron

Parking Enforcement Officers Drive Forward Aid

People are used to seeing the Council's Parking Enforcement Team out and about across the Highlands but now instead of issuing tickets, they are focussed on getting behind the wheel to play a key logistical role in their communities.

Philip Barron, Parking Supervisor, based at Rose Street car park in Inverness, whose normal role is managing and directing the daily duties of 19 Parking Enforcement Officers said: "As a team we wanted to step forward to offer practical support. We are not carrying our usual enforcement role, so we have manpower and transport to assist our communities."

Over the last few days the team has brought together 31 council fleet vehicles from right across the Highlands which are earmarked to be used in transporting necessary equipment and supporting local community hubs.

Philip, who will be managing logistics, added: "The team, who are based in Inverness, Fort William, Skye and Caithness are now operating as drivers to work with local community hubs in providing food deliveries and support to people who need it the most." For example, yesterday team members transported vans equipped with refrigeration units from Inverness to the Community Hubs in Lochaber and Skye.

Philip added: "As a team we are delighted to be able to provide this transport service. Pulling together the fleet at short notice was a challenge for multiple agencies but now we have vehicles where they are required, our staff are ready to drive and do deliveries wherever they are needed."



Name:

Susan Webster

Post title:

Systems and
Change Assistant

New role in:

Council's Welfare
Team

From IT to Welfare, Susan's role has completely changed

For someone who normally deals with information technology and support in Highland Council's Finance Service, Susan Webster has stepped up to the call to assist with the Council's COVID-19 response.

Susan was working as a Systems & Change Assistant in the Council's Finance Systems (IT) and Change Team based at Council headquarters in Inverness when COVID-19 broke and she is now doing an amazing job guiding and leading the Council's Welfare Team during what is a peak time for the organisation.

From previously mainly working in IT, she is now managing a team of 11 who are supporting customers by responding to welfare issues on anything covering finances, benefit entitlements, free school meals, and food deliveries and applying for these benefits on their behalf via telephone and email.

Her team are helping people in local

communities across the Highland region while working and managing these very challenging roles from home. Susan said: "It has been a privilege be able to provide instant advice and assistance to people who literally overnight faced uncertainty and confusion in their daily life. It has been very mentally stimulating and I am very pleased to be able to help people which in turn has given me a great feeling of fulfilment that I am making a difference."

**For further help
on benefits and welfare visit
the council's website at this
link or phone
0800 090 1004
[www.bit.ly/Help-with-
paying-rent-and-tax](http://www.bit.ly/Help-with-paying-rent-and-tax)**



Name:

Donna Sutherland

Post title:

Corporate Audit Manager

New role:

Virtual Team Leader for Helpline

Many staff, right across The Highland Council are adapting to new and different roles to assist with the sustained emergency response to Coronavirus.

Donna Sutherland's normal day job is Corporate Audit Manager, but her role since the outbreak has been Virtual Team Leader for the COVID-19 Helpline.

Donna's main duty is to act as liaison and support the staff and volunteers who are involved in manning the different parts of the helpline, which includes Eden Court volunteers, the Third Sector Interface and Highland Council staff across different Services.

She commented: "This can involve tasks such as obtaining clarification on processes/where to go for further advice, updating scripts for the groups of staff who take the calls, dealing with any problems that come up, forwarding on offers of help and/or urgent requests for assistance.

"This has covered matters such as queries about assistance for businesses, offers of accommodation, requests for school places by key workers, queries about school meals, requests for assistance with Council Tax and details of individuals in need of assistance."

Donna is also required to review the daily call statistics and organise further staff if needed. She added: "This is a very different role to my day job and without trying to sound trite, I'm enjoying being part of something that is making a difference and helping people. I guess my role helps everyone - the staff and volunteers who need to know where to



Name:

Donna Sutherland

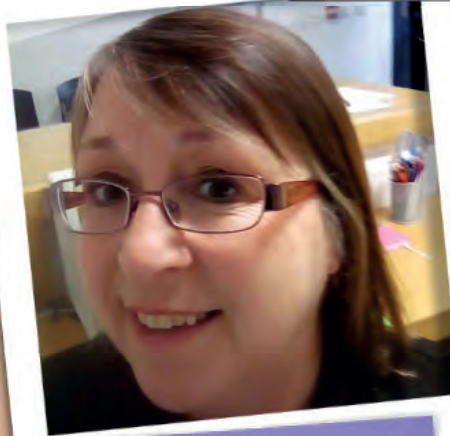
obtain information in order to help those in need. I'm also helping assist those in need by following through on any queries/ requests for assistance, to ensure that they are directed to the correct officers and can be addressed."

Donna's new role is Highland wide, but thankfully she is able to work from home.

COVID-19
Freephone Helpline
0300 303 1362

Providing assistance; and to collect details of individuals and community groups looking to volunteer.

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm



Name:

Denise Walsh

Staying connected in the North

P1/2 Class Teacher Denise Walsh who was covering at Lybster Primary School in Caithness has been using Google Classroom to check in with her pupils daily. She used a live feed every day and all of the children joined in.

Denise read the children a story

or a poem and set them a "challenge" for the day. Some of her challenges were designed to help their sense of being responsible citizens within their own households – like encouraging them to tidy their rooms and make their beds. Other challenges were designed to 'raise the stakes' a bit such as "Do something kind".

Denise said: "Even for our youngest pupils, we are thinking very creatively about how to keep them engaged and developing their sense of social responsibility even though they are not with their classmates".



Name:

Jo Murray

Post title:

Victorian Market
Manager

New role in:

Strathspey Resilience
Delivery Team

Inverness Victorian Market Manager Jo Murray has taken on a 'market-ley' different role to help with Highland Council's response to the coronavirus outbreak. She is now part of the welfare response and has been working with the Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey Resilience Delivery Team.

The team was set up after the outbreak with the purpose of creating a food distribution hub in the Highland capital and the wider region. After assisting with the set-up of the Inverness Distribution Hub, Jo is working from home and responding to the calls received to the Helpline.

Jo said: "I assisted in the initial set up and continue to support the team. I am now calling our clients who phoned our Helpline for Inverness, establishing their needs and linking them with the relevant support."

She said the role was extremely challenging at first, with many of the clients they were

dealing with being vulnerable and understandably anxious.

"I've been able to reassure them that we can help and in a couple of instances we've been able to respond to some emergency situations. It's very rewarding being able to help the community."

Jo said the team is forming "fantastic community links with voluntary groups," who are coming forward to offer assistance. Although the welfare response has been ad-hoc so far, the team is improving efficiency every day. She added: "Although I am still dealing with Victorian Market matters in the background (which still continue) I am now focused on delivering support to those in our community who require assistance with food shopping and prescription pick-ups, amongst other things."



Name:

Emma Blake

Helping the most vulnerable

COVID -19 has presented a number of specific challenges to some of the Council's most vulnerable homeless clients.

Housing staff quickly identified that a number of clients are not digitally connected in any way.

This means that during periods of isolation and social distancing, they are unable to even engage

with their support workers, other key services or maintain their benefit claim.

Emma Blake, who normally oversees the contract management of support to these clients, rose to the challenge of providing a mobile phone to clients until the lockdown restrictions are lifted. Working in collaboration with Housing staff in Dingwall, Tesco stores in Dingwall and Inverness and our Housing Support providers, Emma has successfully sourced and distributed a phone for every

client that has needed one across the whole of the Highlands. Emma's innovative and proactive actions will be a welcome to clients who could otherwise very quickly become isolated and experience a deterioration in their health and wellbeing as a result of the current restrictions. The whole wider Housing Service has pulled together to provide support. Emma Morris and her team of Repairs Co-ordinators, and Laura MacDonald, a Housing Management Assistant, have been working closely with the Tenant Participation team to carry out telephone welfare checks on elderly and vulnerable tenants. Although Emma's team and Laura are both in the habit of talking to tenants in their normal roles, they are finding this task particularly "inspiring and very rewarding".



Name:

Laura MacDonald



Name:
Rory Cross

From 'Active Schools' to Community Hub co-ordination - Rory supports his community

Rory Cross was employed as an Active Schools Coordinator with High Life Highland and is now volunteering as Team Leader at the local Community Hub in Dingwall during the COVID-19 response.

The local Community Hub that Rory is working at in Dingwall is one of a group of hubs across the region at Nairn, Aviemore, Inverness, Fort William, Portree, Ullapool, Invergordon,

Golspie and Wick. The Local Community Hubs are co-ordinating activity to support people across Highland. They are not open to the public to ensure the Council complies with public health social distancing guidance. Staff from the Council and partner organisations are working alongside community groups to provide this local support. Rory said: "My new role is firstly to work with the Hub

Manager, Di Agnew to help get the Hub operational after that I will coordinate the team of volunteers with the receiving, processing and delivery of goods to vulnerable people.

The Dingwall Community Hub has been established to support vulnerable communities in Dingwall, Seaforth, Black Isle and Eastern portion of Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh with the provision of food and medicines.

Rory added: "While I am based at the Hub in Dingwall and I also assist with the delivery of goods. We are working with many local community groups and volunteers who have mobilised to assist people in their communities who are in need of help and we are extremely grateful to them for their response in the local area."



Photo (Right to Left):
Rory Cross at the Dingwall Community Hub with some of the staff and volunteers Ian Goode, Di Agnew, Kirsty MacLean, Glenys Brown, Wilma Kelt and Alan Fraser.

Staff working in the hub still have to follow social distancing whilst working

Anyone interested in helping local groups can phone the Council's COVID-19 Helpline at 0300 303 1362 and select the 'want to offer support' option.

Name:
Roddy Dowell

From planner to grant assessor – Roddy switches his skills

Highland Council Planner, Roddy Dowell has switched his skills from dealing with planning applications to processing COVID-19 Business Grant applications.

As part of its response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Scottish Government is making grants available for certain businesses and has asked the Council to administer the Grant Scheme on its behalf within the Highland Council area. Normally based in Inverness Town House, Roddy - like the rest of the Business Grants Team - is now working from home. He said: "As the demand for processing planning applications dropped off almost overnight I was more than happy to volunteer and was quickly earmarked a role with my skills set to help process the many business grant applications we are receiving. We are processing applications from across the Highland area as efficiently as possible to ensure that people get help when they need it most."

Businesses across Highland are starting to receive their grants from the COVID-19 Business Grant Scheme. The grant scheme, which now includes self-catering premises, will bring over £94m emergency funding to around 10,000 Highland businesses.

Businesses who have not applied are encouraged to go to the Council's website to determine whether they are eligible for either the Small Business Grant or the Self-Catering Business Grant.

COVID-19 Small Business Grant

1. Before you apply (You are here)
2. How do I apply?
3. Once you have applied

Related pages

COVID-19 Self-Catering Business Grant

Before you apply

As part of its response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Scottish Government is making grants available for certain businesses and has asked the Council to administer the Grant Scheme on its behalf within the Highland Council area.

Does my business qualify?

To establish if your business is eligible or not, please refer to the Scottish Government's website pages or the Scottish Assessor.

If you do not qualify please see our further information and support page.

Eligibility for this grant is defined by the Scottish Government. To be eligible your business premises must have been occupied on Tuesday 17 March 2020. Only businesses who are currently on the Non-Domestic Rates register may apply for this grant (i.e. businesses who pay council tax will not qualify).

Businesses operating in a qualifying premises

Information on how to apply for the grants is on the council's website at:

www.highland.gov.uk/coronavirus/businessgrant

Self-catering businesses

There is a separate grant available for self-catering businesses. If you have a self-catering business, to apply please follow the guidance on our Self-Catering Business Grant page.

Spotlight on Communications & Resilience Team

Normally behind the camera, writing the story or planning for civil emergencies - The Highland Council's Corporate Communications and Resilience team has had to adapt in the response to COVID-19.

Since mid-March, the Communications and Resilience Team has completely shifted their focus of work to emergency response and recovery. Prior to this, much work has been done in modelling and exercising for pandemic flu incidents together with partner organisations. Business continuity planning has been an essential part of planning and much of this had been necessary, in preparation for Brexit.

The team is now mainly home-working and are successfully keeping in touch on a regular daily basis via Skype, phone, Whatsapp and emails. Daily work for the entire team has changed since the Council declared emergency

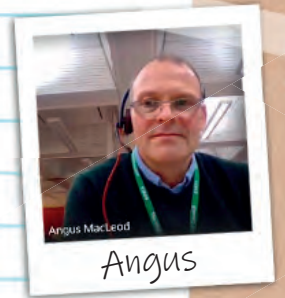
COVID-19 procedures on the 16th March, supporting the Gold Strategic group and the Council's Silver tactical response group for COVID-19, chaired by Angus MacLeod, normally Brexit and European Coordination Officer, as well as the regional and national Resilience Partnership response supported by Resilience Officers Andy Donovan and Stephen Mardon.



Andy

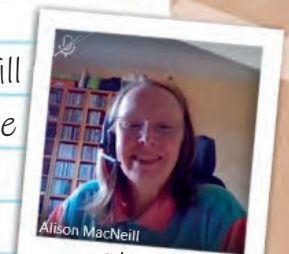


Stephen

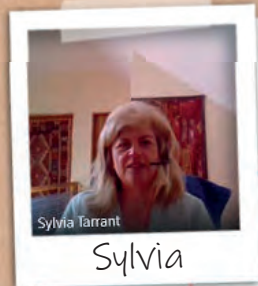


Angus

Meanwhile, Communications and Engagement Officers, Alison MacNeill and Sylvia Tarrant, Duncan McKenzie and Kirsty Rodger, are handling a marked increase in both external and internal communications -dealing



Alison



Sylvia



Duncan



Kirsty

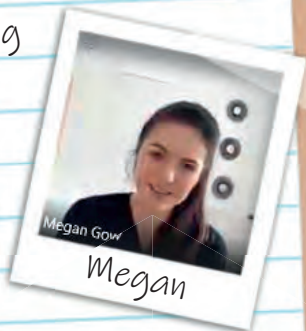
with increased daily media enquiries; producing daily COVID-19 reports; writing and issuing news releases; public messaging on social media and monitoring feedback; producing newsletters and videos from home.

They are supported by Graphic Designer, Kirsty Foster who, working from home, is continuing to design newsletters, branding and imagery for social media and web-messages.



Kirsty

Admin Assistant Megan Gow continues to collate the daily news briefings, and provides admin support to the Team and the Silver tactical group, all working from home!



Megan

Ruth Cleland, Communications and Resilience Manager says:

“The team is shifting and adapting the way in which we work - rapidly responding every day to a dynamic situation and rising to all the challenges which emerge.”

The team has also changed the way in which it publishes news releases – providing an additional focus on the COVID-19 response and internal communication with all news releases being made available to staff now working from home; posting news on the council website and staff intranet, as well as the staff facebook page and social media and updating:

www.highland.gov.uk/staffconnections



Ruth



spectrum

.life  is

the Council's new Employee Assistance Programme.

Discover Spectrum.Life, our new online health and wellbeing service, by watching the video here:

www.bit.ly/Discover-Spectrum-Life

and signing up using our organisation code.

Organisation Code

j5n2Rh73

