Public thanks from the family of Mr Alaa El-Banna

On Thursday the 30th July my husband Mr Alaa El-Banna, who was the General Surgeon at the Western Isles Hospital, suddenly passed away. The next day when he was starting his transfer to Glasgow, the hospital staff lined the driveway and arranged for a piper to play while they all said their final goodbyes. On the Saturday a one-minute silence took place at 1pm, led by the Hospital Chaplain. This included the hospital staff and some of the community and was joined by ourselves and other family members and friends.

Highland hospitality is recognised worldwide but I can’t express how overwhelmed I, along with his daughter and son have been with the kindness shown. It has meant so much to us to see how much Alaa meant to so many people including friends, colleagues and patients. He would have been happy to know how appreciated he was but at the same time embarrassed by all the attention.

It seems so inadequate, but we would like to thank everyone for the help given and kind words and wishes that have been on Facebook and in all the cards and letters that have been sent.

Hopefully by the springtime a memorial bench will be set in place within the Hospital gardens for us to visit with fond memories.

And special thanks go to Helen Gallacher (Hospital Chaplain), Susan Macauley (Accident & Emergency Manager), Dr Mhairi Murdoch, and friends Donald and Catherine Maciver.

With much love to all, Anne, Sally and Ahmed.

Alasdair Allan MSP/BPA
Surgery Notice

In light of Scottish and UK Government guidance regarding the COVID-19 pandemic my constituency office is currently closed. My staff and I are still working, although, in line with the current guidance, we are doing so from home.

I can still be contacted via www.alasdairallan.scot as well as by telephone or email as detailed below.

Telephone: 01851 700 357
Email: alasdair.allan.msp@parliament.scot

www.alasdairallan.scot

Barbers walk-in reopens

By Annie Delin

The Barbers on Kenneth Street has thrived on the innovations needed after lockdown, but now they are looking forward to one of the regular features of men’s haircuts – the walk-in.

Gracie Macleod and Catherine Campbell made a careful return to service as soon as Scottish Government regulations allowed, but customers had to take on board a lot of changes.

Always keen to put customer service first, the pair had the inspired idea of creating a walk-through video ahead of opening, so that customers could see their new, carefully distanced layout and appreciate how the appointment system would work.

With 12,000 views of the video and a surge of customer appreciation, that approach has paid off.

But now something of the pre-Covid way of doing things is making a return, with walk-in appointments on offer as well as the new-style booking ahead.

400km in four days to mark Memory Walk and 40th Anniversary

A team of ten Island supporters will be walking 40km each over four days to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Alzheimer Scotland Action in Dementia.

The event will also mark the start of the Alzheimer Scotland Memory Walk on the 19th and 20th September.

The team of ten – Anne-Marie Allison, Anne Blyth, Johan MacDonald and three sisters Marie MacMillan, Cathy Chisolm and

Alison MacKay are joining four staff members to take part in the challenge.

Staff member Donald Angus MacInnes had the idea of walking 40K over 4 days leading up to our Memory Walk weekend and the rest of the team were keen to get on board.

“We are hoping that our friends, family and the local community will support the team members taking part in the challenge.”

One of those involved, Marie MacMillan, said: “Our mum Ishbel started going to Solas two years ago when her dementia wasn’t as advanced.

“It was well recommended by locals in the community, so we were delighted when she was offered a place at the Solas day centre.

“As mum is sociable, we knew it was ideal for her, and the day care organisers Christine, Maureen and colleagues do an amazing job.

“Mum used to come out laughing after a fun-filled day. We would highly recommend the service to anyone who has a family member with dementia”

As well as using traditional individual sponsor sheets, people can donate digitally via justgiving.com

To register FREE for this year’s Memory walk visit https://www.alzscot.org/memorywalk

If people would like to buy an Alzheimer Scotland t-shirt to wear for their walk or if they have any queries about organising a challenge of their own please contact mmacinnes@alzscot.org.

Friends of The Nicolson

A recently formed charitable Trust to assist pupils of The Nicolson Institute with the cost of travel to the mainland

Find out how you can help advance the next generation of Nicolson pupils at www.fotn.org.uk

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Point colours in Northern Tanzania

The colours of island football team Point FC are in action on the slopes of Kilimanjaro after the community consultant for wind farm charity Point and Sandwick Trust brought them out to Africa.

Alasdair Nicholson was making the trip – postponed from March to August due to the coronavirus crisis – in a personal capacity but was pleased to bring with him the strips, surplus after Point and Sandwick Trust had sponsored new ones, as a gift for the children of Anhae primary school.

He also brought them footballs and pens, donated by Point and Sandwick Trust, and biology textbooks for the neighbouring Daranjani secondary school.

Alasdair has been making regular visits to this part of Africa since 2015, primarily to develop local skills in community enterprise. His trip this year renewed his contacts with Ndoro Cultural Tourism Enterprise, who are interested in hearing about the progress of community projects in the Outer Hebrides such as the Point and Sandwick Coastal Community Path, and also with the school, who had asked for the science resources during a previous visit.

In an email from Africa, Alasdair described the response to his visit and the school’s situation.

He said: “Anita Moshe, the headmistress at the primary school, was very welcoming. The classrooms were clustered around on raised ground in ridges, with very rough rocky paths between. The only flat clear area was the sports field. Ndoro Cultural Tourism Enterprise took me there and we went to P7 who sang welcome songs.

“With the class teacher the junior Point strips, emblazoned with Gael Force Marine and Point FC branding, were handed out. The whole class, teachers and headmistress included, went immediately and joyfully to the playing area where three footballs donated by Point and Sandwick Trust were also handed over.

“Those with whole strips and some with just shorts immediately put them on and the class split into two teams – those with the strips and others. The girls, not to be outdone, were given one of the footballs and were as enthusiastic as the boys. Not wishing those without strips to feel left out the girls were first in line for a Point and Sandwick pen and all were happy.

“The Head said the school also needed many things – rubbers, pencils and rulers – and that if it were possible to help them with two laptops in the future that would help them enormously.

“I said the football kit was a gift from the junior team from Point, in Scotland, and I had meant to deliver them in March but it had been impossible at that time. The donation was from them.

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“Biology texts were then donated to Daranjani Secondary School, on the slopes of Kilimanjaro, Northern Tanzania, and another welcome from the staff who previously had a small consignment last year. The science pupils gathered near the science huts and there was a welcome speech from the head girl and the biology master.

“Ndoro Cultural Tourism Enterprise then said to the school that they were pleased to be working in partnership with Point and Sandwick’s community consultant who was there in a personal capacity but with fraternal greetings people to people.”
Across the seas from St Kilda

A St Kilda mailboat managed to travel more than 1,000 miles across the ocean, link several countries - and get a postcard delivered on Prince Charles on the Balmoral Estate.

Ten years ago, to mark the 80th anniversary of the evacuation of St Kilda on August 29, 1930, the National Trust for Scotland made a 'mailboat', filled it with postcards and launched it into the Atlantic Ocean from Hirta.

It contained just seven postcards, including one to the Prince of Wales, the National Trust for Scotland patron, and another to the last resident of St Kilda before they were evacuated from the Island on this day in 1930.

In the week of the 90th anniversary of the evacuation, the cards were delivered to their destinations. And the NTS has a group of Norwegian children to thank for helping get the mail delivered.

From the late 19th Century onwards, the islanders occasionally launched messages into the sea in tiny waterproof boats in the hope that they would be picked up by passing ships or make it to more populated places and be sent on. The means of communication was developed in the 1870s by journalist John Sands, when he became stranded on St Kilda. In 1877 Sands launched a mailboat, which was found in Birsay in Orkney nine days later, and a boat was sent to rescue him and nine shipwrecked Austrian sailors.

In September 1885 the islanders faced starvation when a severe storm ruined their food stores. Alexander Gillies Ferguson, a 14-year-old schoolboy who had heard of Sands' mailboats, launched five such craft containing messages asking for help. One of the boats quickly arrived in Gallan Head, Lewis, and the resultant publicity saw £110 raised, provisions bought and a boat chartered.

The NTS explained “In the summer of 2020, the boat that we launched in 2010 was found in Birsay in Orkney nine days later, and a boat was sent to rescue him and nine shipwrecked Austrian sailors. The NTS forwarded his card to his son John Gillies in Ipswich. It was one of John’s relatives – the schoolboy Alexander Gillies Ferguson – who launched the 1885 mailboat that started the St Kildan tradition. Another card was sent to Dr Murdo Macdonald. Murdo’s great-great-grandfather Donald Macdonald lived on St Kilda until the 1820s and then moved to Harris. The card to Murdo was written by his sister Janette Macdonald, who visited St Kilda on a day trip in 2010.

The final card was written by Susan Bain, the NTS Western Isles Manager, to our Patron, HRH Prince Charles, The Duke of Rothesay, who visited St Kilda in 1971 with the Queen. His card was delivered to Birkhall, his Scottish home on the Balmoral Estate. He replied to Susan saying: “I was delighted to receive your postcard and fascinated to hear about its decade-long journey to reach me, via the Arctic Circle no less! In such a fast-moving world it is touching to know that the tradition of a simple “mail-boat” from the remote Island of St Kilda can safely travel so far.”

I have never forgotten my visit to this amazing archipelago in 1971 and I so look forward to returning one day, not only to remind myself of its rugged beauty, but also its extraordinary history and breathtaking bird life. As Patron of the National Trust for Scotland, I am immensely grateful to all those who work to preserve our heritage through caring for special places like St Kilda.”

At Comhairle nan Eilean Siar we are looking for foster carers to meet the needs of those children who are unable to live with their birth families.

If you want more information then please contact Fiona or Anne on 01851 822748

email: anne.mackenzie@cne-siar.gov.uk

We are waiting to hear from you.
TRANSATLANTIC DETECTIVE STORY

By Annie Delin

The Stornoway history detectives have been at work again, this time cracking a mystery that spans a century of island history and crosses the Atlantic twice.

Stornoway Historical Society (SHS) put out a call for information just over a week ago (22 August), when they were contacted by a householder from Silver Spring in Maryland USA, who had found a mystery signature of a carpenter concealed within his 80-year-old house.

American Scott Elliott wanted to know whether carpenter Jack Morrison, who had signed his name on 18 November 1940 and given his address as ‘Stornoway, Lewis, Scotland, UK’ could be traced to any living relatives.

Helpfully, Jack had also scratched the name ‘Jernie’ below his signature – and as any cove knows, it’s the nickname that makes all the difference in Stornoway genealogy. The SHS appeal via social media was very effective, reaching Jernie’s nephew Gordon Morrison in Glasgow. He was quick to respond to the history detectives telling what he knew.

He said: “There’s a fair chance that this could be my Uncle Johnnie, whose SY nickname was Jernie. He was the older brother of Donald John (Audie) and Donald Duncan (Hilton).”

“He was a carpenter to trade and emigrated to the US around about 1920, spending a number of years in New York before moving to Pennsylvania. He landed on his feet in Pennsylvania, getting a job as personal chauffeur to Alan Scaife, the steel magnate. He was a keen fisherman and returned to Lewis a few times in his retirement.”

“I do not know if he worked in Maryland (neighbouring state to Pennsylvania) but the unusual nickname and being a carpenter suggests it may well have been him.”

That put SHS secretary William Fouger onto a definite lead about the house that Jack built, and before long SHS chair Malcolm Macdonald was able to add a complete family history to Gordon’s outline.

John ‘Jernie’ Morrison was one of a family of seven, three girls and four boys, born to George and Mary Morrison (née Macdonald) who were married at Killarney, Manitoba, Canada in 1892.

George had organised the emigration of a group of 30 families, 17 from Lewis and three from Harris, to emigrate to Manitoba in 1889 on the offer of free farmland. His brothers Hugh and John went with him and their descendants remain Canadian citizens to this day.

But George and his wife Mary were not so settled. Although they had five children in Canada and lived in a Gaelic-speaking community, they decided to return to Lewis around 1905. Jernie made his first transatlantic crossing with his parents and siblings when he was no more than a toddler.

George opened a shop in Back before the family moved to Stornoway — to Plantation Road and to Scotland Street, before finally settling above their new shop, at 61 Cromwell Street, the store that is now the Good Food Boutique.

Hilton (Donald Duncan) had/been a radio operator during the second world war, and transformed the general store into the radio dealership D D Morrison when he, Audie and their brother Neil took it over on his father’s death in 1948.

But by this time Jernie had made his return crossing of the Atlantic, heading for New York in 1920. He did well in the USA, according to his nephew Gordon, who describes his Uncle John as ‘a great raconteur’.

By the time he signed this plank of wood at a house in Maryland in 1940, he had worked as a foreman painter in a large hotel in New York and had been gardener, horse groom and chauffeur to a newspaper editor.

But the mystery of why his signature appears on this particular house in Maryland USA remains.

Gordon said: “I wonder could there have been a Lewis connection to the building of the house, as at this time there was an extensive network of exiles who helped each other out. The nickname, Jernie, is the strongest piece of evidence.”

Homeowner Scott Elliott told Stornoway Historical Society: “The plank is actually a piece of original horizontal sheathing taken from the middle of the front second floor exterior wall, which was covered by wood shingles. The plank was embedded construction, I’ve assumed it was signed by a carpenter and probably not an owner.”

A spokesman for Stornoway Historical Society said: “The Stornoway Historical Society exists to record the heritage of Stornoway and district. It also wishes to assist members, islanders and visitors with queries they may have about the area we represent.

“In this instance, we are delighted to participate in some detective work so that we have been able to identify a Stornoway man who left his mark in the USA, 80 years ago.”

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Musical light on Dark Places

Stornoway-group The Broken Ravens released a new single called Dark Places on Monday 31 August.

They have a new singer, local boy Gordon Smith (ex A Promise to No One), and they say that he ‘really has rekindled the fire.’

They recorded the track at Shabbey Road Studios - aka Kevin Clark’s garage - and had Jason Shaw master the track.

Jason lives in Amsterdam and recently recorded Kevin’s brother Charlie’s new album which Kevin played drums on.

The Broken Ravens were supposed to be touring Eastern Europe this year, with shows in Bulgaria and Romania and returning to the Rock In The Wine Valley festival in Bulgaria to open the mainstage, playing alongside Lacuna Coil and Judas Priest.

Alas, says Kevin, “due to CV19, we had to cancel everything and decided to put all our efforts into finishing off the Shabbey Road demos we had been plugging away at.”

The single is available through all digital retailers and they hope it starts the machine up again. “We are currently finishing of the last off our demos before recording an album or EP to release later in the year to help us pave the way for international live shows next year, fingers crossed.”

The band has also filmed a video out at Arnish Point with Iain MacKinnon directing, Fiona ‘Chas’ Mackenzie, Rod Morrison and Sam the dog. All done on Iain’s iPhone, Lot’s idea and superbly executed by all involved. “Very fortunate to have such talented friends,” says Kevin.
By Annie Delin

A young runner who dedicated her summer to raising funds for island causes finished her marathon challenge on Monday 17 August on her home ground.

Catherine Donner, aged 11, had been running every day for 50 days, having set herself the target of running 100 miles to raise £500 for two of her favourite causes – local leisure and community centre Spornis and Western Isles Support for Cats and Kittens (WISCK).

When it came to it, Catherine smashed the time, the distance and the target total. She achieved 100 miles running in 47 days and kept going, ending with a total distance of 108.34 miles and almost £1,300 raised in cash.

Catherine’s final day’s running was an event in itself, on a route near her home in North Dell that started at Comunn Eachdraidh Nis and finished at Sporns, with a crowd of school and running club friends joining her on the route.

Catherine said: “There were lots of people clapping and cheering at their houses as we passed by and cars beeping. It felt really nice to have people cheering and joining me.

“When we reached Sporsnis, there was a crowd of people clapping and cheering us, it was amazing. Simon (Sporns manager) made a wee speech and gave me a certificate. It was him that had arranged the surprise and made my last run so special. I shall remember this forever. The certificate is right now hanging in my bedroom.”

Posting on social media, a spokesperson for Spornis said: “Catherine has done incredibly well and we wanted to make her final run a bit special. We are very impressed by this girl’s efforts to help us to fix the roof, which is in a dire condition.”

Equally delighted with Catherine’s huge efforts are the committee of WISCK, who designated her their ‘hero of the summer’ in their latest newsletter.

Chair of WISCK Cat Campbell said: “We are so proud and amazed at the effort Catherine has put in throughout this fundraising challenge. The sum of money she has raised will help us to neuter feral cats and to keep young kittens until they are old enough to find loving new homes. It’s an amazing accomplishment.”

On Monday 24 August, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar named ten winners of its world photography day photo competition.

The winning images include landscapes, sunsets and pictures of the people and wildlife of the Western Isles.

A statement from the Comhairle said: “The competition proved to be very popular with a high number of entries showcasing all that makes the Western Isles so special.

“Choosing just 10 photos from these fantastic submissions was an incredibly difficult task and a massive congratulations must go not just to the winners but to all the competition entrants.”

The full list of winners is: Derek Mackinnon with Dail Mòr star trails and aurora, Jane Taylor with great-granny with great-grandson (pictured), Bernhard Anderson with noctilucent cloud, Gordon Macdonald with cirrus trails at sunset, John Dyer with St Kilda -once seen, never forgotten, Gary Ford with Culla Bay, Benbecula, Gordon Ross with Harris sunset, Scott Davidson with Callanish and the cosmos, Roddy Maclean with the Braighe, storm Brendan (pictured), Barnaby Ashton with Shiants puffins.

Great-granny with great-grandson

The Braighe, Storm Brendan

Photo winners praised
These are part of series of articles in EVENTS and on welovestornoway.com celebrating the work of WILL after three years

From place to place with the Western Isles Lifestyle Lottery

Given the higher level of population within this area, it was expected to benefit from the highest level of funding. The support from both businesses and individuals has been tremendous. The majority of the area’s funding was distributed to Stornoway Amenity Trust to continue the upgrades they had provided to the community over the last 20 years and the Lottery Team were only too happy to join their Committee to assist them in their Summer planting and Christmas lighting projects.

In addition to these two main projects, however, additional sums were granted to:
- Set up the popular Lego Club with Western Isles Libraries;
- Provide LED colour changing lighting on the Porter’s Lodge and “YMT” Bridge;
- Purchase character outfits which have been used by a variety of community groups for events;
- Install bench sets at Coll beach;
- Install a bench on Church Street in partnership with Acute Psychiatry Unit, WI Health Board;
- Organise the hugely successful Disney Day in the Town centre;
- Finance the Gress Memorial unveiling event;
- Finance the now very popular Peppa Pig Walk;
- Powerwashing and replanting of Laxdale Memorial (Craggan’s corner);
- The money has been used for, amongst other things, new flags and lights on the poles on South Beach. The summer planting displays have been beautiful throughout the summer months and the ongoing maintenance of the wooden sculptures has been vital, with the addition of the “Stornoway” bench, all crafted by Uisdean Paterson, as well as seating in Perceval Square.

“The money has been used for, amongst other things, new flags and lights on the poles on South Beach. The summer planting displays have been beautiful throughout the summer months and the ongoing maintenance of the wooden sculptures has been vital, with the addition of the “Stornoway” bench, all crafted by Uisdean Paterson, as well as seating in Perceval Square.

“But perhaps the most important support has been for the Christmas lights and the celebrations, including fire work displays, connected with turning on the lights. The hugely popular appearances in the Town Hall of the Frozen themed shows in 2018 and the parade with Peat and Diesel in 2019, for instance, would not have been possible without the support of the Lottery.

“Although SAT has now ceased to exist as of last Christmas, we wish to express our thanks to Western Isles Lottery and expect it will continue from where SAT left off to further support good causes throughout the islands.”

SPOTLIGHT ON... UIG, BREASCLETE & LOCHS

Muineachain Community Trust initially undertook to manage the funding raised within this large area of Lewis and we pay thanks to them. We have been unsuccessful in sourcing a replacement group who would be happy to work alongside us to promote the benefits of the lottery within the community and manage applications for funding.

A total of £3,551.80 has already been distributed but there could be a substantial increase in funds raised if a group were to be in a position to uptake the challenge. We would be really pleased to hear from anyone interested!!

- Lochs Community Centre received an award of £760.80 for the set-up of a Youth Café in the area;
- Uig Community Centre received an award of £1,206.00 to purchase a variety of play equipment for both local children and visitors to the centre;
- Knoet/Kroet Glebe Playpark received funding of £1,249.00 for their new play facility. The funding was used to purchase goal posts to extend the park’s public facilities as well as additional seating.
- Uig Soft Balls Club received an award of £336.00 to purchase equipment to start up. Volunteers in the area were available to provide training and run the club.
- The park committee were recently dismayed to discover that their hand sanitising units were maliciously emptied. The Lottery Team were equally as dismayed and stepped in with funding to ensure the park was maintained safe for everyone by replenishing their suppliers.

Any group interested in supporting the Lottery in this area are invited to contact us via our Western Isles Lottery facebook page or by emailing us at wicommunitysociety@gmail.com

SPOTLIGHT ON... BROADBAY & POINT

The winner of the special WILL third anniversary draw with a 1st Prize of £1,500 was Martha Cunningham from Aignish, Point. The 2nd Prize of £77.31 was won by Ms M from Tong, Isle of Lewis; and the 3rd Prize of £51.54 went to Mairi Macdonald from Amhor, North Uist.

The support from both businesses and individuals has been tremendous. The majority of the area’s funding was distributed to Stornoway Amenity Trust to continue the upgrades they had provided to the community over the last 20 years and the Lottery Team were only too happy to join their Committee to assist them in their Summer planting and Christmas lighting projects.

All organisations are currently experiencing the cost of ensuring their facilities are COVID safe and the popular Newmarket Playgroup is no exception.

The park committee were recently dismayed to discover that their hand sanitising units were maliciously emptied. The Lottery Team were equally as dismayed and stepped in with funding to ensure the park was maintained safe for everyone by replenishing their suppliers.

Cally and Janet Paterson handed over a cheque for £250 to committee members Murray and Louis of Newmarket Playpark Association. Also pictured is Alex Murray beside one of the units.

NEWMARKET PLAYPARK RECEIVE BOOST FROM WESTERN ISLES LOTTERY
Bristow soars past 1,001 tasks

By Annie Delin

HM Coastguard’s Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter team at Stornoway in the Western Isles were in action in the early hours of Friday 28 August at the end of a week which saw them complete their 1,000th tasking.

The team were called out at 2.15am to uplift a sick patient from St Brendan’s Hospital in Barra and recover them to Glasgow for treatment, with Barra Coastguard Rescue Team also called to man the landing site.

The 1,000th tasking since Bristow Helicopters was awarded the search and rescue contract for HM Coastguard came on Tuesday 25 August. Rescue helicopter R948 was called out to help a group of people stuck on coastal rocks near Ardmair, north of Ullapool.

Captain Dan Lewis, senior first officer Marc Grant, winch operator James Lyne and winchman Andy Walker were the team on duty, lifting one person to the safety of the beach, while the others were able to return to their vessel.

HM Coastguard’s UK Search and Rescue helicopter service, operated by Bristow Helicopters, is in its fifth anniversary year. Bristow was awarded the 10-year contract by the Department for Transport in March 2013.

Captain Stuart Cunliffe, chief pilot at Stornoway, said: “I am immensely proud of the lifesaving work the team at Stornoway has been delivering since 2013. This milestone would not be possible without their unwavering dedication and commitment to helping those in need.

“The Western Isles and wider Scottish coast present many challenges, often experiencing high winds and rough sea conditions in remote locations. Our team work closely with the emergency services including police, ambulance and fire and rescue to ensure the ongoing safety of the public.

“We are proud to celebrate five successful years working on behalf of HM Coastguard, and maintaining the very highest safety and efficiency standards, which the team is renowned for.”

In addition to responding to incidents, the Stornoway crew also conducts regular training exercises with HM Coastguard’s locally-based teams and other services including the RNLI.

Stornoway’s purpose-built helicopter base is one of 10 bases located around the country, placed in areas where search and rescue incident rates are high. As well as the operational flying crew, there’s a behind-the-scenes team including servicing engineers who keep the team flying.

A spokesman for HM Coastguard – Western Isles, Skye and Lochaber, said: “Here’s a special mention to the dedicated and incredibly capable crews of Bristow Helicopters, who operate SAR helicopters for HM Coastguard. Always a welcome sight at an incident.”

Murals form part of playpark boost

Tong Hall has launched a mural competition in partnership with An Lanntair arts centre and Tong School.

The Tong Recreation Association started the new mural competition as part of the new renovations at the Tong Playpark.

This summer will see a range of new equipment installed in the playground for local young people and families to enjoy. As part of this project the TRA want to include the creative designs of the local children to create a very special and unique play environment.

The TRA are asking primary aged children who live in Tong to submit their drawings based around the theme of ‘outside play’. The project is running in partnership with An Lanntair’s Full Circle project. An Arts Worker will support volunteers of all ages from the community to collate the winning designs and paint a large mural on the playground wall.

TRA Vice Chair Kathryn Lamont Smith said, “We are so grateful to all the funders for their support of this project. The play park is such an important resource for young people in the village and the TRA are working hard to improve the facilities there. We hope the new playground will bring colour and joy to so many, both young and old.”

This project has been made possible through the support of The National Lottery Awards for All, The Scottish Landfill Communities Fund and Third Sector Helbides.

How can you take part:
• Send your drawing based around the theme of ‘outside play’ to: Tong Hall, Tong, Isle of Lewis, HS20 6HS by September 30th.
• Make sure to include your name, age, address and contact number.
• All participants must be of primary school age and live in the Tong area.

The Tong Recreation Association is a group of local volunteers who work to run the hall and various activities for the local community. Tong Hall celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2016.

Full Circle is run by An Lanntair to enable families to experience the arts together and to be creative. Full Circle reduces the barriers to participation by providing high quality, inspiring and free opportunities to access the arts. The project is funded through the Aspiring Communities Fund with support from the European Social Fund.

SPOTLIGHT ON ... ISLE OF HARRIS

The Harris Communities have greatly benefitted from the Lottery, having received a number of grants for a variety of projects. Harris Voluntary Services initially managed the funding and thanks go to Kenny MacLeod who has been the knowledgeable contact in terms of where funding was needed over the last 18 months. We are keenly seeking another organisation to take over the management for the good of the area.

To date the following grants have been awarded:

• A total of £2,627 was raised during the first year of the Lottery to install a Hearing Loop System in venues for those hard of hearing. The purchase of Christmas lighting was also possible with these funds;
• The newly formed South Harris Historical Society were awarded a grant of £812.52 for the purchase of equipment to enable the restoration and preservation of historical memorabilia;
• £2,627.00 was presented to purchase a much needed Community Personal Address system and the upgrade of the Christmas lights display;
• The famous Harris Football Club received a grant of £720.67 to enable them to rejoin and again compete in the Lewis & Harris League;
• Harris Guides welcomed the opportunity to care for floral displays placed around Tarbert in Summer 2019 at a cost of £1,100. The Guide group were awarded £750 for all their hard work;
• South Harris Agricultural Show were grateful to receive £887.80 to upgrade their show facilities; and
• The Lottery Team surprised Tarbert Community Centre Committee by surprising them with a cheque for £3,000 on the day they can a community sale in their hall. The funds will be used to further enhance the upgrade to their building.

Supporters of the Lottery continue to grow in the Harris area and it would be of great benefit if a replacement management group for Voluntary Action Harris could be found.
Do you want to develop spiritual consciousness and the capacity to serve society? Would you like to have elevated conversations, explore timeless spiritual values and fundamental questions? What tools do we have which enable us to arise and create unity?

Open to everyone, uplifting programs on Zoom will answer these questions. To get the link please call or text 07798700443.

Peace has to be created, in order to be maintained. It will never be achieved by passivity and quietism.

Dorothy Thompson

It is easier to be passive; more convenient to stay still. Comfort and inertia try to convince us that we ought to remain stagnant, the risks of arising try to keep us silent and seated....they risk alienating us from our most fundamental impulses to be forces of positive change, of support, and service in our own families and communities. New meditation and conversation packs are now up on the Elevate site - link in bio!

. . . #LetsElevate #HowDoYouElevate #change #racism #equality #love #humanrights #antiracism #socialjustice #SpiritualEvolution #Inspiration #elevate #courage #hope #wisdom #bahaï #justice #passivity

“World peace is not only possible but inevitable”. The meetings are open to everyone, to get the link please call or text 07798700443.

bahaiteachings.org
bahai.org.uk elevate

Honour for WW2 code-breaker

A Stornoway man who served a key role in the Second World War was honoured on Saturday 15 August as part of the 75th anniversary commemorations of the allied victory.

Kenneth Nicolson, who is 95, received a formal presentation at his home on Macaulay Road from the Lord Lieutenant of the Western Isles, Donald Martin, and the secretary of the British Legion, Donnie Maciver.

Kenny was presented with the British Legion’s Victory 75 coin, which is inscribed: “In grateful appreciation for your contribution towards the Allied war effort during World War II.”

He was also given a personal letter of commendation and, on behalf of the Royal British Legion, Donnie MacIVER presented Kenny with a copy of a book about Bletchley Park, known as Station X, where Kenny served as a cryptographer and teleprinter operator.

Kenny’s name is inscribed on a brick on the Code Breakers’ wall, constructed at Bletchley Park in 2016 as a memorial to all those who contributed to the shortening of the war and the saving of thousands of lives through their highly secret work.

A member of the Royal Signals Corps, at Bletchley Park between 1944 and 1946 Kenny served as part of the Radio Security Service, the organisation responsible for the interception of German Abwehr communications.

In 1946 he was also a member of the Special Communications Unit, which provided secure communications links to overseas HQs. In that role he was in Egypt from May to December 1946.

The presentation was a replacement event for what was due to be a full ceremonial occasion in Edinburgh in May this year, as Donnie Maciver explained.

He said: “The British Legion asked late last year if we had a veteran able to travel to Edinburgh for VE day, where Kenny was due to be treated to three nights in a hotel, wined and dined and to participate in a parade.

“All that went by the board due to Covid-19, but we recently learned there was to be a presentation of a commemorative coin and letter and we arranged for that presentation to take place here in Stornoway.”

Lord Lieutenant Donald Martin, who presented Kenny with his award, said: “Kenny has a most distinguished record of service during the Second World War, serving with the Royal Signals Security Service, stationed at Bletchley Park, where he is commemorated on the Code Breakers’ Wall, as well as serving at Arkley, Forfar and Egypt.

“To commemorate his service towards the Allied war effort during the Second World War, Kenny was awarded the Legion’s anniversary coin. It was a proud moment for him, and for Donnie and I, to be able to present the award and to express our thanks to him for his part in serving King and country during the four years of the Second World War.”

The anniversary was also marked by low-key official events at the War Memorials in Stornoway and Tarbert.
A book which is to be published to mark the 150th anniversary of The Nicolson Institute in Stornoway has received backing from community wind farm organisation Point and Sandwick Trust.

The Trust, which invests the profits from its wind farm in projects which will promote the social, educational, cultural or environmental wellbeing of the people of the Western Isles, is providing financial support for the remaining phase of the book, which is to be published by Acair ahead of the anniversary in January 2023.

The book is being written by, among many other people, retired educationalist Iain Smith, who was Point and Sandwick connections and previously co-authored another Acair publication, Saints and Sinners, a collection of tales of islanders from the late 19th and early 20th Century.

Saints and Sinners showed how educational opportunity, or otherwise, shaped the course of these islanders’ lives and the book on the Nicolson chimes with that theme, telling the story of the school’s development and also the stories of some of its most famous alumni.

As well as helping the authors to write the book, the money also helps Acair keep its production line running, as small publishers have been hit, along with so many business, by the pandemic.

Acair manager Agnes Rennie said they had been discussing the idea for the book “for a number of years” and stressed: “This is the kind of book that’s a long time in the making.”

The grant will help Iain Smith, who lives in Glasgow, continue his research locally. However, Agnes said it was also helpful for Acair “to know the support is there to enable the book to go ahead.”

She said: “For a small publisher like Acair, it’s a real challenge to keep production, to keep working on books at the moment, while there is a greatly reduced income through book sales. We are really, really encouraged by the support of Point and Sandwick Trust to enable this project to progress – because it’s only for this project, it’s not for anything else.

“The book itself is a wide-ranging book which encompasses some essays about specific periods in the history of the school, starting with the set up and establishment of the school, and goes on to tell the story of the school and its engagement with the community through vignettes of pupils who have passed through the school and who in various ways have gone on to show the benefits of education – and that takes us right up to the present day.”

Donald John MacSween, general manager of Point and Sandwick Trust, said they were happy to support a book that would promote social, educational and cultural wellbeing.

He said: “This project is very much aligned with the founding principles of Point and Sandwick Trust and we have no doubt Iain Smith and the others involved will create a significant and important piece of work, that will be a fitting celebration of the Nicolson at 150.

“It’s great that these stories are being captured and shared and we are also very pleased to have been able to help Acair to keep their production cycle moving during what has undoubtedly been a very challenging time for so many businesses.”

Dr Frances Murray, rector of The Nicolson Institute, said the book would be a “unique piece of work” and that its collection of case studies of individuals would be “a piece of local community history that runs parallel to the history of the school”.

She said it was “great that we’re able to celebrate 150 years” and welcomed the funding for the remaining research phase as it was “at an important stage”.

It is hoped that, once published, the proceeds from sales can go towards assisting today’s pupils in being able to travel to the mainland to participate in competitions and other events.

Iain Smith said it was “very helpful” to know there was some money behind the project, which was born out of a conversation with retired Glasgow University professor Malcolm Nicolson, who had inherited papers on the Nicolson from his father, Angus, a geography teacher at the school.

During the early 1970s, Angus Nicolson was one of the teachers running a Friday afternoon activity group and he had set up his group of pupils the task of going through the archives and writing up the history of the school.

Some of the material was published in the school’s centenary magazine Sgathan in 1973 but other material has never been seen before and Malcolm approached Iain about it four years ago.

The decision was taken to lodge the material with the archive of Museum nan Eilean and when Iain had the opportunity to look through it, he was struck by how much had not been published. Thinking it was “material of great interest”, Iain said he became quite excited by it and at the prospect of a publication to tie in with the 150th anniversary.

In a parallel development, Museum nan Eilean was also in possession of a series of letters by former Nicolson rector, W J Gibson, and his wife. These letters, bequeathed to the museum’s archive by the couple’s daughter, were transcribed by museum staff working from home during the lockdown period and, said Iain, “proved to be a hugely valuable historical resource”, discussing numerous aspects of 1910s and 1920s island life such as prohibition and the impact of the Spanish flu.

A number of the letters will be included in the book which will begin with the state of the school’s centenary magazine Sgathan in 1973 but other material has never been seen before and Malcolm approached Iain about it four years ago.

The book is being written by, among many other people, retired educationalist Iain Smith, who has been discussing the idea for the book “for a number of years” and stressed: “This is the kind of book that’s a long time in the making.”

The grant will help Iain Smith, who retired from full-time work 10 years ago, has been working on the book “more or less continuously for four years” and paid tribute to the “large group of people” who work with him, including Bernad McDougal, the audio editor at Museum nan Eilean, and her colleagues; individuals from Stornoway Historical Society including Malcolm Macdonald and Ken Galloway; and Nicolson Institute rector Frances Murray.

“It’s shaping up at the moment,” said Iain. “I hope it will be something like 300-plus pages, split into 18 chapters, and that we’ll publish it by the end of 2022, in time for the 150th anniversary which is very early in January 2023.

“It keeps me occupied in my retirement.”
Warm send-off for retiring Kirsty

By Annie Delin

Thursday 27 August saw colleagues offering a warm-hearted farewell to ‘one of the good guys’, as Kirsty Macdonald stepped down after 23 years at the helm of Volunteer Centre Western Isles (VCWI).

Although the event itself had to be muted because of restraints imposed by distancing regulations, genuine affection and a stream of good wishes sent Kirsty on her way to a well-deserved retirement.

Kirsty has managed VCWI since 1997, not only running the island organisation but contributing nationally to the volunteer sector, from which colleagues say she will be greatly missed.

Since her arrival at the organisation as a development worker, Kirsty has helped transform the Volunteer Centre Western Isles into a thriving charity with the needs of volunteers and the community at its heart, while steering it through challenges and times of change.

Stornoway girl Kirsty attended The Nicolson Institute before gaining a degree in Celtic studies at Edinburgh University. During her time there she learnt to drive a double-decker bus so that she could operate a mobile playbus in the city.

After training as a primary school teacher in London she taught English in Sudan and then returned to the UK for a job in primary school teaching in Cardiff. A short-lived post with HM Customs and Excise followed and she later qualified as an amenity horticulturist, designing gardens in South Wales.

Her first job in the voluntary sector was with Age Concern in South Wales, before moving back to Lewis and to her post at VCWI, where she says she has loved every minute and is very proud of the work ethos created, having always strived to maintain a calm, balanced and considerate approach to the work, staff and volunteers.

Her skills were invaluable over the past few months as volunteers became the backbone of an unprecedented community mutual support effort during the fear and uncertainty which surrounded lockdown and coronavirus.

During the height of the pandemic, Kirsty worked as part of the team to help coordinate and place volunteers in communities throughout the Western Isles, through the Scottish Government’s Ready Scotland COVID response.

For Kirsty, what brings her most pride in a job that she describes as ‘a privilege’ is her success in creating a place that is great to work in. She has told colleagues that it’s about the team and what they can do together, and she is proud to be part of a team that makes such a difference in the Western Isles.

A spokesperson for VCWI staff and board of trustees said: “Kirsty’s commitment and quiet persistence has been a major factor in the success of the Volunteer Centre.

“As a manager she was able to maintain that delicate balance between achieving the aims of the organisation and caring for the welfare of her staff. We will all miss her greatly.”

Social distancing meant that her send off at the end of August was low-key, with colleagues and volunteers attending two small gatherings on Thursday and Friday.

But many other co-workers from near and far paid tribute to Kirsty’s impact on their lives through an online group greeting card set up by her jobshare partner Suzanne Macaulay.

Among tributes paid was one by members of the team at Volunteer Edinbrough, who said: “Kirsty, you will be so missed. Your wisdom, warmth and positivity has made spending time with you a complete joy. Thank you for everything you have done for volunteering in Scotland – your legacy will be long felt.”

Chief executive of Volunteer Glasgow David Maxwell also paid tribute to Kirsty’s impact on the national volunteering scene when he said: “Your friendship, expertise, dignity and humanity have been a constant source of help and inspiration. You have provided a vast range of insights and expert judgements to ensure we collectively deliver the best value for the people of Scotland.”

One Stornoway colleague and partner worker summed up the sentiments of many in the Western Isles, saying: “You have made such a wonderful difference to so many people. You are amazing and always with dignity, respect and serenity. You will be very missed in your work by everyone you have touched.”

Kirsty’s retirement will allow her to spend more time on her garden and with husband Glenn Osborne and their dog Belle.

A second event on Friday 28 August allowed colleagues in Uist and Barra to join Kirsty by Zoom meeting to say their farewells.

Islands growing older

The population of the Western Isles is growing measurably older, with the average age creeping upwards, according to a report from National Records of Scotland (NRS) released on Thursday 27 August.

And among the figures released, there is clear evidence that the Western Isles is showing the greatest evidence in Scotland of district-wide increase in median age – the age at which half the population is older and half younger.

It’s part of a trend across Scotland which sees rural and island communities ageing at a greater rate than those in cities.

The figures are shown in so-called ‘data zones,’ each averaging 791 people, established during the last census in 2011 and used to calculate the populations of larger areas of Scotland, such as wards and parliamentary constituencies.

The statistics show that, over the last decade, 94% of Western Isles data zones became older in terms of median age.

For example, the rural area of Aird, Point (pictured) has seen a fall in all ages under 64, but a rise in those aged 65 and over, most significantly a rise of 41.2% among the over-75s.

By contrast, in the area designated as Stornoway West the population has seen a fall in the under-24 age-group of 8.6%, but a rise among those of working age, between 45 and 64.

Denise Patrick, head of population and migration statistics at NRS, said: “In the last decade mainly rural councils, as well as those in the West of Scotland, have seen a higher proportion of their areas decrease in population. During the same time cities have seen more areas increase in population.

“Many small geographical areas change in population over time. There are many reasons for this including births and deaths, as well as migration into and from the area.”
Despite being a country that only came into existence in 1861 when King Victor Emmanuel of Piedmont was proclaimed king of Italy, Italian food has conquered the world and there are few major cities anywhere in the world that cannot boast of a first class Italian restaurant. Italian food is much more than just pizza or pasta and enjoys an international reputation for fresh flavours, perfect combination of natural ingredients with a colourful appearance and a reputation for being one of the healthiest diets in the world.

Because of its incredible diversity in landscape, vegetation, climate and cultural heritage, some would argue that there is no such thing as Italian cuisine only Sicilian, Piedmontese, Neapolitan, Venetian, Florentine, Genoese and so on and on across the whole spectrum of regional cooking. Although Italy is rich and internationally famous for its historic: cultural heritage, Italian food and wine are twin magnets for many visitors to Italy. In 2018 an estimated 62 million visitors came to Italy making it the fifth most visited country in the world. Of these 62 million, over four million came from the UK.

Probably the two foods that we associate mostly with Italy are pizza and pasta and both have been around for a long time. The word pizza has been found in manuscripts dating as far back as 10 AD. However, the modern pizza, with a tomato base, was only created in Naples in the late 18th century. Pasta is considered an Italian speciality and there is evidence that Italians were eating pasta as far back as 4 BC.

As well as superb food, the Italians also pride themselves on the quality of their wine. In terms of quantity, Italy is the world’s biggest producer of wine, producing over 48 million hectolitres two years ago. This is the equivalent of a vast wine lake when one considers that one hectolitre is 100 litres. With more than 350 regional wines and 500 native Italian wines to choose from, one cannot go wrong with a choice from Chianti to Barolo and Pinot Giggio to Valpolicella and many other quality wines in between these popular heavyweights.

In modern Italy the traditional culinary borders have become more blurred and there is no longer a precise geography of food. In the past the great differences were between the north and the south of the country. It was said that before the war you could divide Italy according to cooking fats. There was butter in the north, pork fat in the centre and olive oil in the south. The Italy of polenta, rice and boiled meats was in the north, and the Italy of pizza and dry pasta was in the south.

Black pepper was used in the north and hot, red pepper in the south. In the north they cooked with wine in the south with tomatoes. However, the past 40 years have seen the “invazione pizzaiola” and the adoption of pasta, hardly eaten in the north before, in every corner of Italy. Mass produced food has brought standardisation with the same factories making all the different regional salamis and cheeses. The use of olive oil has become widespread when in the past a bottle might have lasted a whole year for a family in the north.

Italy, like all wealthy industrialised nations has succumbed to fast foods and to a proliferation of hamburger, sandwich and salad bars. Nonetheless, regional cooking has survived and is regaining status with growing interest in traditional cooking and a return to genuine produce from artisan producers. The influential Slow Food movement started in Italy and has spread to many other places where traditional food and regional cooking are still held in high regard. The generation that cooks in the old way, the “nonnine” or “little grandmothers”, is still there, and inspirational chefs like Jamie Oliver still go to them for recipes and culinary tips.

There are probably many millions of Italian recipes in countless cookery books but I am going to stick with two very traditional Italian recipes, Seafood Pasta and delicious Tiramisu.

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The Linda Norgrove Foundation...after 10 years

This October marks the tenth anniversary of our daughter Linda’s kidnapping and death during a failed rescue attempt following which we set up the Linda Norgrove Foundation.

In these ten years the foundation has gone from strength to strength. Thanks to our supporters, we have sent around £1.5 million to help women and children affected by the on-going war in Afghanistan. Since 2010 we have funded a diverse range of projects from a women’s shelter to projects for children from one of the largest refugee camps to water provision in rural villages.

All of our work is detailed on our website: www.lindanorgrovefoundation.org

We now give sponsorships to over 100 young women studying at universities, most of whom will become doctors or midwives.

We have funded a diverse range of projects from a women’s beekeeping cooperative to surgeries for children and mothers to a children’s circus to water provision in rural villages.

This year...a virtual 10k

We have planned our usual event but have had to adapt and so we are going virtual.

The year following our daughter’s death our first big fundraiser, a 10k on the Balkans Peninsula, was organised by Tony and Kirsty Wade. This has become an annual event and has grown to include participants wherever they are in the world.

Due to the uncertainty associated with Covid-19 and restrictions on gatherings of more than 30 people for outdoor events, this year we plan to hold a virtual 10k.

There have been years when hardies have battled against the wind and rain to complete the ten-kilometre course around the peninsula. None of that this year. Pick a good day, Run, walk or cycle wherever you are on, or off, the island any day during the first ten days of the tenth month of the tenth year of the Foundation in remembrance of Linda.

Every penny raised will go to fund a young Afghan woman to study to become a doctor.

Sign up on our website, buy one of our Sun Yellow tee-shirts, and send us a photo telling us where and what you will, or did, do. Encourage your friends or family to join you. Thank you for your support.
An Lanntair Pod Menu

Deochan Teth / Hot Drinks

- Green Parrot Coffee
- our coffee is 100% Arabica bean, sourced ethically and sustainably.
- Americano / Cappuccino / Latte / Mocha / Hot Choc / Espresso

Clipper Teas
- Breakfast / Earl Grey / Fruit / Green / Herbal Teas

Taigh-fuine Cidsin / Kitchen Bakery

- Gluten Free Courgette & Avocado Cake
- Maple & Pecan Slice
- Gluten Free Lemon Cheesecake
- Toffee & Honeycomb Cheesecake

- Belgian Chocolate Cake
- Handmade Caramel Shortcake
- Rainforest Alliance Gluten Free & Vegan Chocolate Brownie
- Gluten Free Carrot Cake
- Double Chocolate Fudge Cake

Ceapairean Ciùird / Craft Sandwiches

A Selection of breads artisan seeded rolls, ciabattas, baguettes & wraps

Example fillings:
- Smoked Salmon, cream cheese & Baby Spinach
- Crispy Bacon Caesar
- Honey Roast Ham Salad
- Cheddar Cheese Salad Bloomer

From fairies to pirates, alien planets to the Arabian desert: in our new FREE online drama classes, Evelyn will be using Zoom to connect with young people, helping them to develop new drama skills.

An Lanntair’s FREE Saturday Art Club online will see artists Netty Sopata and Alice Macleod guide participants through creative projects, including drawing, painting, making, designing and more.
Our new Primary 1 intake -
Primary 1A, Primary 1B and Gaelic Medium 1

Primary 5 brightening up the playground with positive adjectives

Primary 7B have enjoyed being outdoors for our PE lessons. Our daily Fit Fifteen sessions encourage us to move more; improving our fitness and our focus when we return to the classroom.

P2A Soft Start-Developing fine motor, visual spatial and problem solving skills

Here are GM5/6 making Gaelic posters for the Mòd this year and we chose kindness as our topic. Seo sinn a’ déanamh postairean Gàidhlig airson a’ Mhòd am-bliadhna agus thagh sinn caoibhneas mar chuspair.
Bumper skywatch days

By Annie Delin

Aviation enthusiasts in the Western Isles had a big day for sightings on Thursday 6 August with unusual aircraft appearing in the skies over Lewis.

RAF Brize Norton gave early warning at 1pm that their C-17 Globemaster would be operating around Stornoway during essential training for 99 Squadron.

Mid-afternoon, the spectacular sight of the massive plane over Lewis drew all eyes to the skies as the aircraft made low passes over Stornoway and the surrounding area.

RAF Brize Norton is home to the RAF’s Strategic and Tactical Air Transport (SAT) and Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) forces, with the Globemaster a long-range, heavy lift strategic transport aircraft used for combat, peace-keeping and humanitarian work worldwide.

The aircraft’s design allows it to make steep approaches to small airfields at relatively low speeds, and yesterday also gave sky-watchers a clear view of the detail as landing gear was deployed and re-stowed.

The Bell 505 JetRanger helicopter that flew in to land later in the afternoon made a complete contrast. With capacity for just a pilot plus up to four passengers, it’s often used as a private or corporate travel option as well as for first-time pilot training.

Spotters Roy Macleod also clocked a US Air Force MC-130 Hercules transport plane over Carloway at the start of August. The USAF 352nd Special Operations Group are currently in regular operations from their operational base at RAF Mildenhall.

And towards the end of the month there was an island view posted on Twitter on Wednesday 26 August by 99 Squadron RAF, based at RAF Brize Norton.

Their A400M Atlas was operating around Stornoway and Prestwick on Wednesday during routine training, and the crew obviously liked what they saw as they descended over Stornoway airport.

They tweeted: “Not many sunbathers on this beach in Stornoway, so luckily we didn’t rain too many afternoons with our enormous shadow!”

“Thanks for having us and for the positively tropical scenery at Stornoway airport!”

Cruelty warning over hens

By Annie Delin

Chickens dumped alive on the Pentland Road in Lewis led the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) to issue a warning over animal cruelty on Monday 31 August.

The Scottish SPCA says there will be ‘consequences’ for anyone found to have abandoned an animal. The warning comes after the eleventh recent incident of poultry being dumped in the same spot on the Pentland Road.

The animal welfare charity was alerted to the latest incident by a dog-walker who found a hen while walking her dog in the area on Friday 28 August. She posted an appeal on social media and the incident was reported by a local member of the public.

‘Annie Delin’ is the name of the hen who is now living a happy life with a bucket of feed for the abandoned animal. The SSPCA says that this is not the first time we have had reports of hens and ducks in need of rescue over the last few years. They say they have been rescued and rehomed but think they are doing the best thing for the birds by releasing birds to fend for themselves is not a solution and could lead to prosecutions. Maggie Adams, SSPCA Inspector said: “Although we appreciate that the owners may have been overwhelmed by the amount of birds and ducks in their care, releasing birds to fend for themselves is not a solution and could lead to prosecutions. Unfortunately, this is not the first time we have had reports of hens and ducks in need of rescue over the last few years. Anecdotally, it seems to have become a dumping ground.

“As a result of the public responding to the call, the SSPCA was alerted to the incident. We are currently investigating the incident, and we are working to identify the person responsible.

“The SSPCA would like to remind people that it is illegal to release birds or other animals without proper care. We are working to identify the person responsible and will take appropriate action.

CalMac Community Fund 2021

The West Coast’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are set to benefit from the latest round of the CalMac Community Fund.

From October 1st, the Fund is seeking applications from non-profit organisations which make a difference to local communities by tackling social isolation, poor mental health, loneliness and/or poverty.

Groups operating across the CalMac network can apply for an award from the fund between £500 and £2,000.

In 2019, the CalMac Community Fund supported 76 groups across the west coast, benefiting the lives of children and young people. Projects included access to swimming, Highland dancing, sailing and video-skills.

Gordon McKillop, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager for CalMac, said: “The CalMac Community Fund was created to make a difference to those most in need across our West Coast communities. It is also a fantastic way for us to connect with our communities.

“The COVID-19 pandemic placed a huge strain on people’s lives and there has been a lot of community work going on to help those affected. We would love to hear more about these projects and would encourage those eligible to apply for an award.

“The Community Fund was really well received when it was originally launched and we were able to help 76 groups. I am looking forward to hearing more about the great work that is taking place to help those in need.”
Scottish Crofting Federation

SHEEP EARNINGS MANIPULATION BY SUBSIDY

By Patrick Krause

Stage 3 of the progress of ‘the agriculture bill’ through the Scottish Parliament took place during August with the vote unanimously confirming that the Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill can move on to become Scottish legislation. The legislation also gives government the power to simplify or improve in the coming turbulent period. The legislation also enables current agricultural support schemes to continue operating beyond 2020, which is essential for the wellbeing of our food production to enable current agricultural support schemes to continue operating beyond 2020. This was introduced to try out new ways of doing things ready for 2024 which is when the new Scottish agriculture and rural development system really starts.

One of the things we want to get away from is the three-part regionalisation of Scotland. This was opposed by practically all who responded to the consultation, except the farmers, of course, yet it was introduced. We object because rough grazing found in ‘Region 2’ and ‘Region 3’ pays a pittance compared to the good quality arable or permanent grassland found in ‘Region 1’. Of course, most croft land is in Regions 2 and 3. The Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme, known as ‘the ewe-hog scheme’ was introduced to try to compensate for the very low basic payments on the rough grazing. The idea is to pay on the replacement lambs usually kept for maintaining the flock. It has been found though, that because no cap was put on the number of lambs that can be retained, large producers are keeping back large numbers of lambs that qualify for the payments, not based on replacement but simply on attracting numbers of lambs to move sheep from the better grazing to Regions 2 and 3 in order to get the payments.

Inevitably some – few – people find ways of benefiting from subsidies that were not intended. We will have to be very wary of this in the creation of a ‘sheep compensation scheme’ which would need to be in place if we suffer the consequences of a no-deal exit next year and the bottom falls out of the lamb trade. There were ‘entrepreneurs’ who got rich during the last foot and mouth disease outbreak and we do not want to see this happening again – profiteers gaining whilst producers suffer in the slaughter of the lambs.

Manipulation of the market by government grant-aid is considered the norm but these processes can have serious negative consequences if they are not thought through properly.
Auction sales succeed despite Covid-19

Lewis and Harris Auction Mart announced on Saturday August 29 that they had agreed with their partners at Dingwall Mart on a date for the third sale of the new season.

There will be sales of cattle and sheep at the Stornoway Mart in Steinish on Tuesday 6th October. More details via Lewis and Harris Auction Mart www.lhamarts.com

Earlier the organisers said that the first Covid-19 sale of livestock went better than could have been hoped for, with sale days on Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 August running like clockwork.

Directors of the Lewis and Harris Auction Mart described the sale as ‘an exceptional couple of days’ and said: ‘The first sale in the Covid-19 era has been a success and we’d like to thank everyone who made it all work.

‘Thanks to all the sellers and buyers, old and new, who supported the event. All were so patient with the safety measures that had to be in place and a big thanks to the volunteers and staff from our own team and from Dingwall Mart who staffed the sales and ensured as smooth an operation as possible.

The turnout at Steinish mart was broken down into two days to allow the best use of buyers’ time, after they arrived by air from the mainland on Tuesday afternoon.

Over 4,100 store lambs were sold on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, with auctioneers from Dingwall and Highland Marts describing the stock as ‘looking in great bloom’.

There was an overall increase of £9.60 on the corresponding sale last year, with top prices paid for cross lambs from 6 Valots at £110, Suffolk cross lambs from 4 Park, Barvas, at £78 gross and Texel cross lambs from Anerley Cottage, Back at £77.

The sale was unusual not only in being split across two days, but also because it was livestreamed on social media, something mart directors declared ‘a huge hit’. More than 9,000,000 viewers viewed the live stream on Facebook, with a further 2,000 searching it out via the website.

A spokesperson for Dingwall and Highland Marts said: “A big thank you to all locals attending the sale for observing the COVID protocols.”

The next sale at the Steinish mart was set for Wednesday 9 September and live-streaming was also planned for that sale at https://www.facebook.com/auctionmart/

Stornoway Trust welcomes court verdict

On August 19, the Stornoway Trust welcomed the news that the Court of Session has upheld a decision made by the Crofting Commission, and subsequently by the Scottish Land Court, not to grant applications made by four townships under section 50b of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993.

In an appeal hearing held on July 2nd, the Court of Session heard that the Commission’s adjudication was that approval of the 50b application would be to the detriment of the landlord, who had an existing lease agreement with Lewis Wind Power for the creation of a wind farm in the same area. It is this view which has now been verified by the Court of Session.

Responding to the verdict, Stornoway Trust Chairman, Norman Maciver, said: “In this case, the landlord is the community and so, approval of the 50b application made by these four townships would have been detrimental to the Stornoway Trust Estate as a whole, and to the wider interests of the Western Isles. We are grateful to the Court of Session for coming to such a speedy conclusion in this matter and I hope that the townships, having had time to reflect, would not now want to damage a project which will ultimately benefit not only their own shareholders but the whole community.”

Iain MacIver, Factor of the Stornoway Trust added: “We are relieved that the Stornoway Wind Farm project can finally now move forward. At this present moment, the Western Isles economy is in need of as much good news as it can get. It has always been the Trust’s belief that our close collaboration with the Comhairle, and in the partnership between ourselves as landlord, and Lewis Wind Power as developer, we have the best chance of creating meaningful development in this area: development which will have a positive impact on the Estate in its entirety.

“I believe this is not just good news for the Trust, but ironically also for the appellants, who, in my view, would have been exposing themselves and those they represent to considerable risk had they been successful in their ill-considered actions. As things currently stand, however, if the project proceeds as planned, they too can look forward to a share of rental revenues, which to them will be worth in excess of half a million pounds per annum.”

The Lewis crofters involved issued the following statement in response to the ruling. A spokesperson for the four crofting communities of Sandwich North Street, Sandwich East Street, Melbost and Branahuie and Aignish said: “While we are naturally disappointed at the decision to turn down our appeal, we warmly welcome the Court’s perceptive and helpful comments which they added to the decision and we hope that they will be studied and acted upon by Members of the Scottish Parliament and by Government Ministers.”

In its Decision the Court said: “As a postscript, it could be said that this case does identify general concerns about the development of what might be understood croft land, including common grazing. The needs of the crofting communities are not identical to those in the late Victorian era. As with other applications to the respondents [the Crofting Commission], it could be left to them to decide upon the appropriateness on the development, having regard to everyone’s interests, in terms of the factors in section 50A(7) of the 1993 Act. That is not permitted under the current legislation. Such a development would require section 50B(3b) to be repealed.”

The crofters spokesperson continued: “We agree wholeheartedly with that analysis and it is why we took the appeal to the Court in the first place. Whereas the Crofting Commission has a clear duty under the Act to reach its decisions on applications made to it by balancing the full range of affected interests, including the interests of the landowner, the estate, the crofting community and the wider public interest, applications made by crofting communities to develop their common grazings are uniquely subject to what our case has shown is an effective veto by the landowner alone, without consideration of the other interests.

“This veto is not right or sensible. Moreover, as it affects half a million hectares of common grazings in the Highlands and over 500 crofting communities, it is crippling the potential of crofting communities to use their common land for sustainable development such as community energy projects that we wanted to pursue.

“We believe the Court was absolutely right, therefore, to say that our case has highlighted a real problem in the Crofting Acts and we believe it is now up to the Scottish Parliament to revise the law to reform the law along the lines indicated by the Court. Section 50B(3b) needs to be deleted so that future development proposals that have come from crofting communities can be considered by the Commission in the normal, balanced way, taking proper account of the interests of all the parties involved.

“The law needs to be made fit for purpose for the economic and social needs of the 21st century, not the Victorian attitudes and priorities of a bygone era. This simple reform could radically transform the economic potential of our Highland communities and in the coming weeks we will be writing to MSPs to inform them of the issue and to ask for their help.”

Action on dog attacks demanded

Scotland needs a clear and consistent approach to tackling livestock worrying, including increased penalties, robust enforcement and more supportive education for dog owners, says Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), the organisation which represents landowners and rural businesses.

In their written evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee on the proposed Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Amendment (Scotland) Bill, SLE highlighted the extreme financial and emotional stress livestock worrying incidents can cause for all involved, as well as the harrowing animal welfare issues.

Emma Steel, Policy Assistant at SLE, said: “Livestock worrying is a tragic issue for our members, it can have a massive impact on the animal owners and on the business and we believe that increased penalties and robust enforcement are vital to its prevention.

“We fully support increasing the penalties for livestock worrying, as proposed in this Bill. The current range of penalties do not reflect the seriousness of this type of incident, and we believe the maximum penalty of £5000 suggested in this Bill should in fact be raised higher for the most serious cases, to reflect the gravity of these crimes and to act as a stronger deterrent.

“A consistent approach to recording livestock worrying and attack incidents will be vital to providing a clear picture of the ongoing scale of the issue and will allow us to understand the effectiveness of these new measures. Police Scotland can play a vital role in addressing livestock worrying, and we would like to see appropriate resources and training to ensure a full investigation can be carried out into all reported incidents.

“While strengthening the legislation around penalties and enforcement is important, we also believe additional supportive measures could be introduced to help reduce incidents of livestock worrying and attacks.

“For example, we would like to see more education and awareness campaigns on the dangers posed by dogs around livestock, and more training provided for dog owners on how and when to control dogs around livestock.”
SCF Young Crofters plea for access to land

Access to land was highlighted as an obstacle at an online event hosted by the Scottish Crofting Federation’s young crofters in August. The event showcased croft work, aspirations and concerns of young crofters.

The day was chaired by young crofter, Donald MacKinnon, SCF’s vice-chair who said: “We had a great gathering with over 60 people participating. The video presentations made by young crofters showing us their enterprises were very inspiring and the discussions that followed were vibrant and illuminating.

“We covered topics including local food, horticulture, direct selling of meat and other products and the Scottish Crofting Produce Mark.

“The lack of available land kept coming up and is clearly a major obstacle for young folk wanting to get into crofting.”

Donald continued, “Fergus Ewing, cabinet secretary for rural economy, addressed the gathering and we concluded the day with a very interesting session where panel members from Scottish Government, Crofting Commission, SNH, SAC and SCF gave their views on the big picture, the main issues for crofting.

“This led to many questions and discussion covering hot topics such as access to land, croft housing, local food supply, peatland management, climate change, control of geese – too many questions, in fact, for the time available.

“Lack of access to land is a key issue and it was heartening to hear Rod Mackenzie, convener of the Crofting Commission, also state this as a priority of the commissioners.

“You can say it was a successful event, and we intend to hold regular online gatherings for younger folk, drilling in on specific topic areas. Access to land will be high up there.

“We closed with informing the gathering that we will take nominations for the Euan MacRae memorial cup for ‘Best newcomer to crofting’, and for ‘Young crofter of the year’ from the beginning of September to mid-October, with the awards presented towards the end of the year.

“We didn’t know how this would go, as it was our first attempt at holding a full gathering online,” Donald concluded, “but video-conferencing technology has come a long way and we were able to get people together from all over, be shown around crofts, survey participants, have panel discussions and much more.

“A recording of the gathering will be up on our YouTube channel soon. This is certainly to be continued!”

Improving looks of Stornoway

At the start of the pandemic crisis and lockdown, many people found themselves with time to look at their homes and gardens.

With some good weather at the start of the summer, houses were being painted and gardens revitalised. Many more people were now out walking for their daily exercise and it was obvious that the effort that many in Stornoway were putting into improving their gardens was a delight for all those out walking.

The Rotary Club of Stornoway felt it was worth showing some recognition and encouragement to everyone who had made a special effort to improve the appearance of the town during the pandemic crisis.

It was decided to limit their project to the town of Stornoway but even that involved checking all of the 119 streets in the town.

Only front gardens visible to the public walking were considered and the judging was not based on any horticultural skills, but just on the appearance and care that some people had taken over their front garden.

The diversity was amazing from the old traditional houses in town with mature gardens that had taken decades to develop to the open plan of a street like Nicol Crescent where all the gardens seemed to be awash with colour.

It was lovely to see the planters on Seaforth Road being well maintained and pots of colourful flowering plants in some front gardens supplementing rows of similar houses. There were front spaces decorated with colourful objects rather than plants which all added to the interesting walks around the town.

The categories that the Club looked at during mid-August while the gardens were at their best were:

- Large mature garden – good planning, layout, well-trimmed bushes/shrubs, mixture of plants
- Small garden - good use of limited space
- Colourful garden – big selection of colouring blossoms
- Decorative garden - use of objects/shapes/colour to add to bright/cheerful/interesting garden
- Pot and window box gardens - flats/houses onto street where ground planting not possible
Back to school rated successful as masks are added

By Katie Macleod

A fter five months of lockdown, schools in the Western Isles reopened to all staff and pupils in August. “It’s been very positive. I think young people are glad to be back, I think parents are glad that the young people are back, and I think teachers are really glad to be back in school working directly with the young people again,” said Bernard Chisholm, Director of Education, Skills, and Children’s Services at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Island schools opened to staff on 10th August, and for pupils from 12th August onwards, with some classes and schools operating on the basis of a phased return. Speaking in a live broadcast on the Comhairle’s Facebook page on 26th August, Bernard reassured parents and the wider community that the risk assessments put in place prior to reopening had “stood up,” and although small adjustments were being made where necessary, the return to school had been successful.

“We’re happy that everybody is keeping up with the induction training they’ve had, so the environment is safe. I think the children are feeling safe, I think the young people are acting responsibly, and I think our teachers are doing a great job in reinforcing that in all the classes.”

Although schools have fully reopened, new health and safety measures mean that it is not quite a return to normal for staff and students. Pupils are now required to wear face coverings in all communal areas of secondary schools, such as corridors and social areas, following Deputy First Minister John Swinney’s announcement last month that the new rules would come into force on 31st August.

“Most parents and young people as they’re out and about – and every one of us can see this in the town – are wearing them appropriately when they go into shops,” said Bernard, acknowledging that mask wearing is already in place in other public areas. Reusable face masks are being provided to all pupils for use in school, and pupils with medical concerns are exempt from the mask requirement – although disciplinary measures will be in place for pupils who refuse to comply without a genuine reason.

The national guidance update from the Scottish Government also requires face coverings on school transport, but this was a precaution already being taken in the Western Isles. “Our position locally was that masks should be worn on all transport, and that was because of the complexity of the services we have here,” said the Comhairle’s Senior Education Officer Donald Macleod.

That complexity involves situations where children are travelling on a dedicated school bus in the morning but a shared one in the afternoon, or where they may need to take multiple buses to reach school each day. And while some pupils do have to travel on school and public transport, Bernard reiterated that parents should take their children to school where possible, as recommended by the Scottish Government.

Aside from the wearing of masks, physical distancing is another change to the day-to-day realities of school life. In nurseries and childcare settings – which are operating outside when possible – physical distancing is not required between children and their key workers, but the adults must distance from each other where possible. In secondary schools, pupils are encouraged to practice social distancing, and in all schools teachers need to maintain physical distance from each other, as well as from pupils, where they can.

Extra hygiene measures were introduced when schools reopened, and include the likes of hand washing at every entry to a building, increased ventilation, one-way systems, and the closure of communal water fountains. “Because of the risks, a lot of communal activities have been put out of use, and one of these is communal water drinking fountains. In schools we’ve provided an alternative water supply for pupils to be able to access safely, and also a full roll-out of new refillable water bottles,” explained Donald.

There are also restrictions in place at school buildings: parents and visitors are not allowed in the premises, contractors can only enter buildings for critical maintenance work, and there is no daytime public access to shared facilities like libraries, sports halls, and swimming pools.

In terms of concerns about the virus, Bernard noted that schools have been working with public health organisations on Test and Protect procedures, ensuring there is a rapid response to staff or pupils who display coronavirus symptoms, and that plans are in place in case of local outbreaks, as has happened elsewhere in Scotland. He also added that the local situation and school protocols will be reviewed weekly, with staff and parents receiving regular updates. “Schools are safe, staff are working well, most people in every circumstance are compliant, and if that carries on, I’m reassured that we’ve got a safe environment in our schools for young people to learn.”

Outcomes upgraded after pressure

By Katie Macleod

A s a result of the coronavirus lockdown, Scotland’s National Qualification exams were cancelled this year for the first time since their introduction in 1888. The Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) announced in mid-March that the exams would not be going ahead as usual in May and June, and in late April, a new system was put in place across the country to award grades based on a combination of analysis of past results and teacher estimates, among other factors.

When the exam results were announced on 4th August, however, the SQA’s moderation of teacher estimates meant that around 125,000 results had been downgraded, affecting roughly 75,000 pupils across the country.

Following public pressure – including a letter from Eva Peteranna, a 5th year Spior Lionacleit pupil, that went viral on social media – the Scottish Government announced on 11th August that the results would be amended and upgraded to reflect the original teacher estimates.

Based on the initial results from the SQA, the Western Isles saw 2823 presentations (what would usually be exams) to the SQA, with overall pass rate of 87.1 per cent (an increase of 1.5 per cent) on 2019. While individual students have received their new results from the SQA, the updated data is still being analysed at a local authority level.

In a statement in August, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar said: “In what has been an exceptional year in terms of disruption to schooling, the Comhairle recognises and celebrates the significant achievements of our young people. We appreciate and would like to thank all the pupils and school staff for their hard work and commitment in bringing this year’s awards to a positive conclusion in very challenging circumstances.”
Building our communities

e-Sgoil national offer for Scotland goes live

Young people from across Scotland are being offered access to a national, on-line education resource providing the opportunity to:
- participate in an extensive series of live early-evening study support webinar lessons from their own homes
- benefit from specialist teacher input during the live, real-time webinar lessons
- access subject specific resources in advance of the webinar lessons

This offer seeks to complement the education provision being provided by schools and local authorities across Scotland. The e-learning National Offer will provide free, live, interactive webinar lessons in an extensive range of subjects for Level 5 and Higher courses.

Based at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, e-Sgoil Study Support webinar lessons are scheduled to run for a period of eight weeks in the first instance and employ a ‘flipped learning’ approach, where participants engage in prior learning using supplied resources before attending a real-time 45-minute webinar, hosted in Glow. All e-Sgoil webinar lessons are delivered by subject specialists, assisted by a second teacher.

The following courses on offer: Business Management, Chemistry, Computing Science, Eachdraidh, English, French, Gaelic, Gàidhlig, History, Mandarin, Maths, Music, Physics, RME, Spanish, Digital skills lessons are also offered.

This study support provision is a key strand of a comprehensive National e-Learning offer which includes vacancy and supply cover to meet the staffing requirements of schools across the country, a programme of remote learning opportunities for interrupted learners – including accredited courses in Literacy and Numeracy - and a diverse range of curriculum enrichment activities, involving a number of external partners.

Angus MacLennan, Head Teacher of e-Sgoil commented: “e-Sgoil is delighted to work in partnership with Scottish Government, ADES, Education Scotland, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and Local Authorities to offer senior phase pupils from across Scotland this opportunity to participate in a wide-range of webinar lessons that will reinforce school-based learning.

“Sessions will start week commencing Monday, 7 September 2020, so I would encourage prompt registration via the e-Sgoil website at www.esgoil.com.” (Pupil Glow login details and Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) are required as part of the registration process and are available from local schools.)

Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector and Chief Executive of Education Scotland, said: “This is an important additional opportunity for learning and teaching in Scotland, and I want to thank teachers, local authorities, parents, children and young people for the incredible work they have been doing to adapt to the ever-changing situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Whilst blended learning is a contingency that may still need to be enacted, we are aware of growing interest from practitioners, and learners themselves, in continuing key aspects of remote learning. This will also help where some learners require to self-isolate or schools close. Senior phase pupils will be able to access the e-Sgoil study support webinar lessons and younger learners can experience enrichment to their learning via Glow, our online learning environment, which continues to support learning outside of the classroom.”

Carrie Lindsay, President of ADES said: “ADES is delighted to be working in partnership to deliver a range of courses through e-Sgoil to support our young people. e-Sgoil provides opportunities to enhance learning where young people may feel that in these unusual times their learning may have been interrupted. It also offers learning to extend what might already be on offer in some schools. By working with all local authorities and using a range of expertise we will be able to reach many more young people than only what can be offered by each individual school.”

Education Secretary John Swinney said: “Our experience during the Coronavirus pandemic has shown all of us how involved is the education system of the value of investing in digital and distance learning. This exciting new work by e-Sgoil will play an important role in the coming academic year and beyond, in supporting parents as well as teaching staff and pupils by providing high quality lessons for senior phase pupils at Level 5 (Higher) and Level 6 (Higher). I am delighted to see e-Sgoil embark on the next phase of the project – and I am delighted to see this work being rolled out at the same time as the Scottish Government’s investment of £25 million to support digital inclusion for schools, which is expected to benefit around 70,000 children and young people.”

Year One of the Gaelic First policy sees 60% enrol in GM

By Katie Macleod

When schools in the Western Isles reopened in August after lockdown, the start of the new term also marked the beginning of a new chapter for Gaelic education, with the first intake of Gaelic Medium pupils under Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s new Gaelic First policy.

Announced in February, the Gaelic First policy of enrolment means that pupils entering Primary 1 in the Western Isles are automatically enrolled in Gaelic Medium Education, unless their parents request otherwise.

“I’m pleased to say that parents have maintained their commitment to Gaelic First. About 60 per cent of the children coming into school this year are enrolled in Gaelic,” said Bernard Chisholm, the Comhairle’s Director of Education, Skills, and Children’s Services, in a Facebook broadcast at the start of September.

He added that extra support plans had been put in place to help Gaelic Medium pupils and parents after lockdown. “We’re trying to make sure that those youngsters coming into school for the first time will benefit from the enrichment. That means some additional staffing, online support, together with other activities, making that a rich experience.”

The added support for Gaelic Medium Education post-lockdown is being introduced in a variety of ways. Parents of primary-aged Gaelic Medium pupils, for example, will now be able to access additional support from the new Adult Literacies Gaelic Tutor, who has been appointed with support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s COVID fund.

Through e-Sgoil, the Comhairle’s digital learning service, the tutor is there to support parents of primary-aged Gaelic Medium pupils, whether that’s through help with Gaelic homework, interacting in Gaelic more generally, or simply learning useful phrases they can practice at home with their children.

Two Gaelic Immersion Centres are also in the works, based on the successful Welsh model of language immersion. “They’re for pupils whose families might want to be involved, say with children at P2 or P3 stage, and they want an immersive experience so they can get up to speed with the language, and then be able to slot into their local primary school Gaelic Medium as quickly as possible. It’s like a ‘hot housing’ experience for them in the language,” explains Angus MacLennan, Head Teacher at e-Sgoil.

“We need to emphasize the importance of the community in supporting children through our language, it’s part of our culture, and I think there are opportunities here,” said William MacKornald, Head of Education and Community Learning, in a Comhairle Facebook broadcast earlier this summer. “The language depends on talking and listening in the first instance for Primary 1, and we’ll look at providing them with as many opportunities as possible to help them acquire language skills.”

On a national scale, Gaelic is also part of the new e-Sgoil National Offer, a comprehensive programme which aims to improve equity of access to live interactive lessons in a range of areas of the curriculum, e-Sgoil’s purpose has always been to enhance equity in terms of subject choice for all pupils, irrespective of their geographic location on which school they attend, and it when it comes to Gaelic, the opportunities are greater than ever before.

“There’s now ability to aggregate classes, and tell pupils who have had no opportunity to do Gaelic in their own schools, that for the first time there’s a national offer of National 5 and Higher where these pupils can do a crash course in the language,” says Angus. Nearly 50 students from across the country – a mix of school pupils and adult learners – are currently signed up to take National 5 and Higher Gaelic classes through e-Sgoil.

Angus adds that the range of subjects on offer to schools across Scotland in the medium of Gaelic is increasing, from fluent and learner Gaelic classes, to History, Geography, and Art taught through the medium of Gaelic, e-Sgoil pilot projects offering STEM provision to Gaelic Medium Schools across Scotland have also proved successful.

“We’re gathering Gaelic-speaking teachers across Scotland and looking for more to join us so that we can extend the range of subjects that are on offer to any school that is involved in Gaelic Medium education.” And as well as subject teachers, three part-time Principal Teachers have recently been appointed to help develop Gaelic Medium Education in three of the islands’ four secondary schools.

It’s not just traditional school subjects that are being offered in Gaelic, but those that are industry-specific, too. Foundation Apprenticeships, which combine classroom learning with practical work placements, are available through the medium of Gaelic in the likes of Creative and Digital Media, Childcare, and Social Care, and the opportunities are set to increase.

“We also work with a number of organisations to make sure that they offer services through the medium of Gaelic as well as through English,” says Angus of the curriculum enrichment opportunities being developed. Whether that’s Edinburgh Zoo doing school sessions in Gaelic via e-Sgoil; Skills Development Scotland appointing a Gaelic-speaking Modern Apprentice who will become a Gaelic-speaking Careers Officer; or Gaelic singing and songwriting “Leugh le Linda” sessions being launched in conjunction with the Gaelic Books Council, the additional opportunities for Gaelic learning are only growing.

“If you’re learning a language, it’s really important that you’re able to interact with people, to tell you where you’re going wrong, or to encourage you when you’re doing well. It’s really important to have that kind of live interaction,” says Angus. To that end, the Comhairle is looking to widen the support available to children with additional support needs in Gaelic Medium, too.

These developments in the curriculum and elsewhere are all part of Gaelic: A Faster Rate of Progress, an initiative led by Deputy First Minister John Swinney which has seen Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and organisations including Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig work together to increase the rate of Gaelic growth since the programme’s launch in 2018.

As these recent developments show, the effects are being seen in classrooms in the Western Isles and further afield, from the intake of the new “Gaelic First” Primary 1 pupils entering Gaelic Medium Education, to the increased online opportunities for Gaelic language learning nationally.
The following advice and guidance applies equally to parents and pupils and should be considered carefully in relation to attendance at school.

**What are the symptoms of Covid-19?**

NHS guidance states that the main symptoms of Covid-19 are as follows:

- **A high temperature –** this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (37.8°C or higher).
- **A new, continuous cough –** this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- **A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste –** this means you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

People with Covid-19 typically have at least one of these symptoms.

**Could my symptoms be a cold? I'm not sure.**

It can be difficult to distinguish symptoms of Covid-19 from that of common seasonal illnesses such as colds and flu. A blocked or runny nose and sneezing are not common symptoms of Covid-19 and, equally, it is uncommon to have a fever accompanying a cold, but parents are encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance.

If a school or nursery pupil is displaying symptoms that you are unsure about, keep them at home and monitor the development and progress of symptoms closely. If you are concerned or believe that they are the Covid-19 symptoms described above, visit NHS Inform for more information and consider requesting a test.

**My child or someone in my household has possible Covid-19 symptoms. What should I do?**

If you believe that any member of your household is displaying any of the symptoms of Covid-19 described above, you must act quickly.

- **Self-isolate:** All members of the household must immediately self-isolate. Children in the household must not be sent to school or nursery.
- **Ask for a Test:** All members of the household with symptoms should be referred for a Covid-19 test. There are three ways to request a test in the Western Isles, detailed here.
- **Inform:** Ensure that you promptly notify employers and any schools or nurseries that your household is self-isolating and awaiting testing.

**What happens if a pupil begins to show Covid-19 symptoms in school?**

Symptoms of the virus can develop at any time and that means that schools have carefully prepared to respond to any pupils or staff who begin to display symptoms during the school day.

- The symptomatic person will immediately be taken to an identified isolation room by staff wearing protective personal equipment.
- Their parents/carers or emergency contacts will be informed.
- The pupil must be collected and taken home as soon as possible.
- Siblings or other household members in the same or other schools will be contacted and sent home.

**How do I request a Covid-19 test in the Western Isles?**

NHS Western Isles provides access to Covid-19 testing and there are three ways to request a test for any symptomatic members of your household.

1. **Online:** Complete the NHSWI Online Testing Referral Form.
2. **Email:** Send an e-mail with your details to whb.covid19queries@nhs.net.
3. **Telephone:** Call the local Covid-19 helpline: 01851 601151.

The telephone line is staffed Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm, with an answering machine service available out-with these hours. You will be contacted by NHS Western Isles staff to book a testing appointment time. NHS Western Isles aims to test as soon as practicable.

**Should I inform work, school or nursery that we are self-isolating?**

Yes. It is important that you inform any employers, schools or nurseries attended by your household that you think you have Covid-19 symptoms. Schools are required to record any absences related to Covid-19 using special set of codes and it is important that school offices are informed of absences and the reasons for them. Any unexplained absences will be followed-up by school staff.

**How do we self-isolate?**

If you think you have symptoms and haven’t yet been tested or have received a positive test, it is very important that you and all the members of your household self-isolate. This means that everyone in the house must stay at home and not go to work or school and should not travel, visit retail premises or have contact with other households. Further advice on self-isolation can be found here: NHS Inform Self Isolation Guidance.

**I have received a negative test result. Can I go back to school/work?**

In the following circumstances, it is possible for the members of a household to go back to work and school and end the period of self-isolation.

You can return to work, school or nursery after a negative test result if:

- everyone in your household with symptoms receives a negative test result too;
- you are well enough and have not had a fever for at least 48 hours.

You must inform the school or nursery of an intention for a pupil to return following a negative test result and staff may, with your consent, seek evidence of the outcome of the test.

You cannot return to work, school or nursery after a negative test result if:

- you have been told you are a close contact of another patient by the Test and Protect service;
- you have a negative test result but someone in your house has a positive test;
- someone else in your household has Covid-19 symptoms and has not been tested or has not yet had confirmation of a result.

After returning to school following a negative test, you must continue to be vigilant of symptoms. If pupils begin to display any of the identified symptoms again, they must immediately self-isolate and seek a re-test.

**I have received a positive test result. What now?**

If you or any member of your household receives a positive test, your whole household (and any members of an extended household) must self-isolate and NHS Test and Protect procedures will be initiated. You will be contacted and asked to identify recent contacts and they will be traced and contacted.

Household members with symptoms must continue to isolate for 10 days from onset of the symptoms and any other members of the household (or extended household) for 14 days.

Immediately upon confirmation of a positive test result, you must inform any school or nursery settings attended by the household and you should also inform employers. Similarly, you should discuss any return to school after isolation with the Head Teacher.

**What is involved in Test & Protect (Test, Trace and Isolate)?**

Test and Protect is the process initiated after confirmation of a positive test result. NHS contact tracing staff will:

- contact you by phone or text message – there’s no need to log in to a website;
- ask you who you live with, who you have been physically close to recently and where you have been;
- decide which of these people might be infected based on how long they spent with you and how physically close they were (typically, closer than 2m for more than 15 minutes);
- contact these people to tell them to isolate for 14 days.

As someone who has tested positive, your identity will not be shared with contacts unless you have provided consent for it to be shared.

Please be vigilant of scams and fraudulent callers purporting to be contact tracers. There is advice available on NHS Inform about how to avoid contact tracing scams. Anyone calling to contact trace will be able to tell you how to confirm they are genuine.

**When could I return to school or work after a positive test?**

You may return to school, nursery, work and other activities after the full period of self-isolation has ended and you are sufficiently well, being free of fever for at least 48hrs. The minimum self-isolation requirements are as follows:

- A person with a positive test: 10 days self-isolation from onset of symptoms with a return to school/work on 11th day subject to being free of fever for 48hrs.
- Other household members: 14 days isolation from contact with a return to school/work on the 15th day, subject to continuing to be symptom-free.

**We have recently returned home after travel abroad. Do we need to isolate or seek a test?**

Depending on what country or territory you were travelling from and anyone else travelling with you may need to self-isolate (quarantine) for fourteen days. The current list of countries with restrictions and exemptions is available from the Scottish Government. The list is being frequently updated and travellers are responsible for ensuring compliance with quarantine rules.

Children travelling back from any restricted countries must observe quarantine rules in full and cannot attend school or nursery until their 14 day self-isolation has concluded. The full quarantine period must be observed even if you are tested and in receipt of a negative result.

**Will a school or nursery be closed if a positive case is linked to it?**

Any decisions about the impact of a positive Covid-19 case on the operation of a school will be determined following an assessment undertaken by the Comhairle and NHS public health officials. This assessment will consider the circumstances of the individual case and the degree or contacts and risks presented. The reporting of one positive case may not result in the closure of a whole school but could lead to a class or year group being asked not to attend for an agreed period.

If additional positive cases are linked to the same school, this will affect decisions about the safe operation of the school and could be classified as an outbreak.

In all cases, parents will be kept informed of impact on school operations and the Comhairle has contingency plans in place for education to continue, should restrictions be placed on the opening of any schools.

**Where can I find out more information?**

The following web links provide the latest and most up-to-date information about requirements and guidance in relation to Covid-19.

- NHS Inform – Covid-19 Guidance
- Scottish Government – Coronavirus Pages
- NHS Western Isles – Outer Hebrides Covid-19 Website
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – Coronavirus Pages
- Parent Club
Sgioba Ball-Coise an Rubha.

Pròiseact gu ruige seo, le stèidheachadh "stand" ùra aig pàirc a ruighinn – an t-ionmhasachadh calpa as motha ann am 4 Lùnastal, leis an sgioba-stèidheachaidh a' leantainn air chompanaidh-tron ghlasadh-sìos agus fhuair iad barantas pròiseact a chuir dheth. Chùm an sgioba orra a' bruidhinn ris a' deiseil mus do thòisich an ghlasadh-sìos.

"Bha iad ag obharr cha mhòr fad an là air Dihaoine agus Disathairne agus a-rithist air Dihaoine airson chuir a chuir air," thuirt Iain. "Fhuair iad air a h-uile càil a ghaladh iad a dheanamh, ann an trì lèileathan. Bha e 'sìongtachadh.'

Thuig an sgioba cuidteachd moladh do na luch-louch-airson a bhith mothachal air cleachdaithe Sàbaid na sgìre.

Thuirt an sgioba: "Tha fadachd oirnn airson an ath sheusan.

Thuirt an sgioba: "An toiseach bha sinn an dùil gum biodh a h-uile càil airson a h-uile càil airson an t-seusan ùr ball-coise a bhiodh an t-seasan ùr ball-coise a bhiodh ann an trì làithean. Bha e iongantach."
HHP work praised as Norman retires

The work of the Hebridean Housing Partnership has far exceeded original expectations. But it’s essential that the commitment to new development and refurbishment continues to make life happier and better for tenants.

That’s the view of retiring chair, former councillor Norman Macleod who praised the work of the present board and the leadership of the organisation.

HHP’s 14th and first remote Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 28 August 2020; Members and other participants joined the meeting from across the Outer Hebrides and further afield, by using Microsoft Teams video conferencing.

They say “the technology worked very well,” and we were able to conduct all business almost as easily as if we were able to meet in person.

“Our Chair, Norman Macleod welcomed all in attendance and thanked everyone for their contributions over the last year, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown.

“Special mention was made of the 26 new homes for social rent and 17 for Shared Equity along with the investment of £4.5 million to improve our existing homes by upgrading bathrooms, kitchens and heating systems.”

Macleod recognised the important role we play in providing high quality affordable housing and the key contribution we make to the local economy through employing staff and contractors.

The Membership present approved the following resolutions:

- To appoint CB Services as our External Auditor until our next General Meeting; and
- To donate £5,000 of the surplus at 31 March 2020 to 5 local charities, which are:
  o Western Isles Association for Mental Health (WIAMH);
  o Western Isles Hospital League of Friends;
  o Volunteer Centre Western Isles;
  o Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative (WICCI); and
  o Hebridean Mountain Rescue Team.

Donald Macleod, HHP’s Director of Finance & Corporate Services presented the Annual Report and Financial Statements to 31 March 2020.

Calum Macdonald from CB Services confirmed they were prepared in accordance with the relevant accounting standards and applicable legislation, and that a clean audit report was provided.

Chief Executive, Dena MacLeod closed the meeting, by paying tribute to serving Board Member, Mairi Brenner who sadly passed away shortly after last year’s AGM. The passing of former Board Members, Archie Campbell and Gerry Macleod was also marked.

At the previous day’s meeting the Board were also informed of the resignation of David Blaney, and he was thanked for his service to housing over a number of years.

Ms Macleod also thanked the Board Members and staff for the important part they play in making a difference in our communities. Tenants were also thanked for their contribution and in particular for looking after each other during these difficult times.

This was Norman Macleod’s final meeting and as such he was graciously thanked by Ms Macleod, and Councillor Norman Macdonald for his long service to housing, his chairmanship and his advocacy for quality homes for people to enjoy family life in the Outer Hebrides.

At the Board meeting following the AGM, Mr. Iain Macmillian was appointed as the new Chair. Commenting on his appointment, Mr Macmillian said: “I am proud to have been appointed as Chair of HHP for the next year. I look forward to working with Board colleagues, HHP staff and Community Planning partners to build on the success of HHP in providing safe and secure homes within our communities.”

A short video interview with our retired Chair, Norman Macleod is available on our website.
PLANNING APPLICATIONS DURING AUGUST 2020
The following planning applications are pending consideration by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. All information and accompanying documents are publicly available on the CnES website.

ISLE OF LEWIS

Renovation and change of use of building, Stornoway

WIFIIS Ltd has applied for planning permission to renovate and change the use of the former Murdo MacLean’s shop at 25-27 Cromwell Street. The work would create one ground floor retail unit, a restaurant/café and five one-bedroom flats. Work would also include the demolition of 18B Kenneth Street.

Remove trees, Stornoway

WIFIIS Ltd has applied for planning permission to remove two sycamore trees at 25-27 Cromwell Street. The two trees are said to be relatively young and located close to a store boundary. They are said to significantly impinge on the ability of the applicant to develop the site as currently proposed.

New house, Callanish

Anna MacInnes of 11 Callanish has applied for planning permission to erect a house at 35 Callanish. The house is to consist of four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a kitchen/family room, a lounge and plant/store/room. Work is to include creating a new access and parking suitable for two cars.

New house, Point

Garry Macleod of 3 Manor Park has applied for planning permission to erect a house at 7 Branaughie. The house is to consist of four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen/dining/living area, a lounge and a utility room. Work is to include installing an air source heat pump.

Removal of branch, Stornoway

Planning permission is sought to remove a branch of a chestnut tree at Thistle Cottage, 33 Matheson Road, Stornoway. This would create a 3.8 metre clearance above the driveway.

New agricultural building, Lochs

Iain Macleod of 7 Grimshadder, Lochs, has applied for planning permission to erect an agricultural building at 7 Grimshadder, Lochs. The building is to be 9 metres long, 5 metres wide and 4 metres tall, and is to consist of dark grey box profile.

New house, Point

Colin and Donna Maclean of 36 Sheshader, Point, have applied for planning permission to build a house at 18A Upper Bayble, Point. The house is to consist of four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen/dining/living area, a lounge and a utility room. Work is to consist of creating a new access and parking suitable for two cars.

Extend agricultural building, Shawbost

Iain Mackay of 5 South Shawbost has applied for planning permission to extend the agricultural building at 8 South Shawbost.

External work on house, Stornoway

Andrew Clark of 21 Lewis Street has applied for planning permission to do external work on the house at 21 Lewis Street. Work is to include replacing the bosset cement render sections on the main house with wet-dash finish and over-rendering all external elevations with wet-dash finish, including rear extension, chimney stack and front boundary wall.

New Nissen hut and access road, Lochs

Peter MacInnes of 26d Crossbost has applied for planning permission to erect a Nissen hut and create an access road at 26d Crossbost, Lochs. The Nissen hut is to be 12 metres long, 7.31 metres wide and 3.81 metres tall and used for agricultural purposes. Work is to include creating a parking space for one car.

New off-road access, parking and turning space, Back

Katie Macleod of 66 Back has applied for planning permission to create a new off-road access, parking and turning space suitable for two cars at 66 Lighthill Back.

Alaerd and extend house, Bragar

Lucia Campbell of 26 North Bragar has applied for planning permission to alter and extend the house at 26 North Bragar.

New house, Coll

Alasdair Maciver of 7 Airigh a Bhreidhe has applied for planning permission to attach a greenhouse to the gable of the house at 7 Valtos, Uig. The greenhouse is to be 6 metres long, 2.5 metres deep and 2.4 metres tall.

Greenhouse, Uig

Calum Buchanan of 7 Valtos has applied for planning permission to attach a greenhouse to the gable of the house at 7 Valtos, Uig. The greenhouse is to be 6 metres long, 2.5 metres deep and 2.4 metres tall.

ISLE OF HARRIS

Extension to house, Kendibig

Mr & Mrs MacLennan of 2 Kendibig have applied for planning permission to extend the house at 2 Kendibig.

Camping pod, Quinidian

DI Macleod of Holasmul, Quinidian, has applied for planning permission to erect a camping pod at Holasmul, Quinidian. The building will be 5 metres by 3 metres and will contain a shower room, kitchen area and living space for use by two guests. The unit will be located at the rear of the dwelling house.

Finding the right number for your council services...

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<td>Working Together for the Western Isles</td>
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Back to school

As the schools return, NHS Western Isles expects to see a rise in the number of children and adults reporting all kinds of respiratory illnesses.

But this year, it’s different – because your new cough or fever could be due to COVID-19 infection.

If you or your child or other household members have symptoms fitting with COVID-19 – fever OR new continuous dry cough OR loss of change in sense of taste or smell – then you should not go to work or send any of your children to school and/or nursery.

You should isolate yourself and your household and access a test.

You can do this by:

- completing the NHS Western Isles Online Testing Referral Form at: www.coronavirus.wi.nhs.scot
- e-mailing your details to: wi-hb.covid19queries@nhs.net
- telephoning the local COVID-19 helpline: 01851 601151 (open 9am-5.30pm Monday to Friday, with an answering machine available outwith these hours)

If the test is negative, the household can return to their normal activities, however a positive test should trigger Test and Protect contact tracing.

Your household member who is positive must self-isolate for 10 days. The remainder of the household must continue to self-isolate for 14 days to break the chain of transmission of the virus and help protect vulnerable people from contracting it.

If another household member develops symptoms during their period of self-isolation, they can seek a test whilst following the self-isolation guidance.

Update on General Dentistry

Lockdown rules are changing all the time, and it can be hard to keep up.

Castleview Dental Practice in Stornoway is now offering a slightly different range of treatments.

Some media reports have led patients to believe their service is back to normal. This isn’t quite true - the practice is able to offer more urgent and emergency treatments, but a number of restrictions remain in place.

Treatments which involve water spray and use of suction can only be offered for the relief of urgent problems.

It means the Practice cannot offer things like new crowns, or root treatments.

These restrictions are all about keeping both patients and staff safe, and Castleview Dental Practice will regularly update its Facebook page as the situation changes.

Castleview Dental Practice is open from 9am-3pm each Monday to Friday.

Please call the Practice on (01851) 704400 before attending, as social distancing rules mean patients are seen on an appointment basis only.

When should I request COVID testing?

You should request a test only if you develop symptoms (fever, new continuous cough, loss of taste or smell) or you have been asked to by Test and Protect. Testing is only reliable if you have coronavirus symptoms, a person can be incubating the virus and it would not show on a test until a few days later. That is why it is advised to test when a person has relevant symptoms.

If you have symptoms, even if they are mild, you are expected to stay at home for 10 days from the start of your symptoms. Do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital. All other household members should isolate as a household for 14 days even if they don't have symptoms themselves. This is because they might have the virus but are not yet showing any signs of it.

To access a test you can:

- complete the NHS Western Isles Online Testing Referral Form at: www.coronavirus.wi.nhs.scot
- e-mail your details to: wi-hb.covid19queries@nhs.net
- telephoning the local COVID-19 helpline: 01851 601151 (open 9am-5.30pm Monday to Friday, with an answering machine available outwith these hours)

If the test is negative, you can return to your normal activities, however a positive test should trigger Test and Protect contact tracing.

If your symptoms get worse during the 10 days of self-isolation or have not improved after 10 days, you need to continue to self-isolate and phone 111.

Stay safe. For more information visit www.nhsinform.scot
Donation of Pulse Oximeters

A number of pulse oximeters have been distributed across the Western Isles, following a kind donation from The Sandpiper Trust.

A pulse oximeter is a small, lightweight device used to monitor the amount of oxygen carried in the body. This noninvasive tool attaches painlessly to your fingertip, sending two wavelengths of light through the finger to measure your pulse rate and how much oxygen is in your system.

Alison Moggach, Nurse Practitioner and Resuscitation Trainer, who has provided training in Barra on the Skills Unit for a number of years, arranged with Claire Maitland from the Sandpiper Trust for these to be distributed throughout the Western Isles.

NH1 Western Isles is very grateful for this very kind gesture and has expressed thanks to the Trust on behalf of our staff. The Sandpiper Trust saves lives across Scotland by improving rapid response medical care in rural areas.

The pulse oximeters are now used by nursing staff when they visit patients who require this type of monitoring.

Pictured right with the new pulse oximeters in Barra are: Staff Nurse Helen Sharples, Staff Nurse Catherine Macneil and Charge Nurse Frances Macneil.

Your breast screening appointment during COVID-19

We're sorry if your last screening invitation was delayed because of COVID-19. We're now restarting our screening programmes but have made some changes to how we deliver these services. These changes are to make sure we can keep you and our staff safe during this difficult time.

Staff will be wearing the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE), and our reception and waiting areas will be quieter. But we would like to reassure you that there is no change to the screening test itself.

If you’re able to attend your appointment, it’s important to do so. Screening can find early signs of cancer and allows us to provide referral and treatment if necessary.

Q. I've noticed some symptoms or signs of breast cancer what should I do?
Tell your GP if you have spotted any changes. Changes in your breasts (including the area up to your armpit) may be harmless, but you should get them checked straight away.

Q. Where can I get more information?
To find out more about breast screening, please go to the NHS inform website: www.nhsinform.scot/breasttest
Staff at your breast screening centre will be happy to help with anything you need to know. You can find the phone number on your invitation letter.

Cervical screening

We’re sorry if your last screening invitation was delayed because of COVID-19. We’re now restarting our screening programmes but have made some changes to how we deliver these services. These changes are to make sure we can keep you and our staff safe during this difficult time.

Staff will be wearing the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE), and our reception and waiting areas will be quieter. But we would like to reassure you that there is no change to the screening test itself.

Please call the number on your invitation letter to book your appointment. If you’re able to attend, it’s important to do so. Cervical screening can stop cancer before it starts.

Q. Where can I get more information?
For more information on cervical screening please go to the NHS inform website: www.nhsinform.scot/cervicaltest
More information and support is available through Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust: www.jostrust.org.uk/coronavirus-faqs
Staff at your GP practice will be happy to help with anything you need to know.

Assistive listening devices

The Audiology department at Western Isles Hospital has recently updated its availability of two devices that will assist hearing impaired patients and staff to communicate in any department or ward.

The first is a Portable Loop System for the Use of Hearing Aid users who have the Loop enabled on their aids. This is for use in a one-to-one consultation or in a group setting.

The second is an Audimed Personal Listening Device for the use of those with a hearing impairment, but without hearing aids, which can be used in a one-to-one consultation for face-to-face appointments.

Patients who require the use of assistive listening devices are requested to inform clinical staff before attending their hospital appointment.

Keep in touch with your local health service

Keep up to date with news and information on services and developments by:
• visiting our website at www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk
• liking NHS Western Isles on Facebook
• following NHSWI on Twitter

Help your local health service improve your care by providing feedback

Tell us about your experience by:
• speaking to a member of staff
• visiting our website www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/feedback
• sharing your story at www.careopinion.org.uk or tel. 0800 122 31 35
• telephoning 01851 704704 (ext 2408) on a Tuesday or Friday afternoon between 1pm and 4pm.
Donald John MacInnes liked the fact that when the telephone arrived on Scarp in 1947, the first call was to intimate his birth. Saturday August 8, 2020, was the anniversary of both events but it proved to be the day when Donald John was laid to rest on his native island.

On a glorious August morning, the funeral party made its way from Hushinish on the Harris mainland. The graveside service reflected Donald John’s love of the sea, love of Scarp, love of family, love of life.

There was a Gaelic psalm and a rendering of Chi mi’n Tir. His wife, Jill Farrell, added her own beautiful, impromptu tribute. Everyone agreed it was an exceptionally fitting send-off, of which Donald John would have been immensely proud.

I never saw a report and complained to Donald that while respecting his attachment to the oral tradition, it would be nice if he occasionally wrote something down. However, he steered it through the civil service to create Iomairt air an Oir – the Initiative at the Edge, based on six pilot areas, including of course Harris and Uig. It did good work until the silos reasserted themselves.

This involvement contributed to his appointment the following year as Chief Executive of Scotland Europa. Hitherto, the organisation was an alliance of business organisations and local authorities, but we now made it an arm of government so that Donald John became Scotland’s de facto ambassador in Brussels.

In a press profile at the time, it was put to him that his emergence was being spoken of darkly in some quarters as evidence of a “Gaelic mafia”. Donald John replied: “I’d love to find a Gaelic mafia. We need one desperately”.

Whenever he could be of help to the islands, his influence was at their disposal. The current council convener, Norman MacDonald, recalls an occasion when there was an issue about EU cabotage rules affecting island ferry services. They went to Brussels and found themselves before the EU Commissioner, thanks to Donald John. As far as the Scottish islands were concerned, the issue was never heard of again.

His great strengths were as a networker, delegator and encourager. He could give masterclasses in opening doors for others to pass through. His sociability and humour made him a star in the Brussels firmament but anyone who underestimated his sharpness of mind was making a big mistake.

Whatever he was doing, Donald John always found time to return to his home in Gruig, while Scarp itself is still used for grazing. He modestly referred to himself as “the king of Scarp” and his knowledge of the island and of neighbouring Harris communities is irreplaceable.

He was full of ideas and his commitment to the island economy never wavered. When I needed some local investors in Harris I invited Hebrides, he was one of the first to come forward. More recently, he was a huge supporter and encourager of Scarp’s current owner, Anderson Bakewell, when he mooted the idea of Harris Distillery, now a great success.

Hugh Dan MacLennan, who is co-writing a book to mark the 50th anniversary of evacuation, says there are now only 17 people left who were born on the island. Its lesson lives on for Scarp was never meant to die. Sadly, there are many other places “air an oir” where the same processes of avoidable decline continue.

Donald John died suddenly while on the Harris hills gathering sheep. He married Jill in 2006 and they formed a great partnership, enjoying life to the full in Glasgow, Harris or the high seas. He is also survived by the four children, Jane, David, Paul and Jon, and nine grandchildren by his previous marriage to Catherine; his youngest son Callum and his last surviving sibling, Steven, who is in Oban.

Lucas MacInnes, his eldest grandchild, read a poem at the graveside; an adaptation of The Boat by Raymond Carver. In Donald John’s ideal after-world, “there’ll be a place on board my Boat for everyone’s stories…and the true and the made-up, the ones already finished and the ones still being written”.

In addition, there is also the People’s Choice Award which will be open to a public vote from 19 October. Whilst it is expected that COVID-19 will feature across the majority of the award categories this year, the People’s Choice Award will specifically recognise staff and teams who have responded so magnificently to the challenge of caring for people during the pandemic, while at the same time maintaining a range of essential services and continuing to provide essential care.
Beatson tribute to Deej

By Annie Delin

A tribute fund has been set up in memory of Scalpay footballer Deej Mackay, who passed away early in August.

The popular man with a beaming smile and a love for life had received treatment at the Beatson Centre in Glasgow, and his family have set up a fundraiser to honour his memory and thank those who took such good care of him.

On the JustGiving page at https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/deejmackay the family have written: “When Deej was diagnosed with bowel cancer he never complained and took each challenge on with a positive attitude, the same as he did in life.

“We want to say thank you to Dr Alex Macdonald, oncologist, and the entire team at the Beatson Cancer Centre in Glasgow for their support and care during his treatment.”

Deej had most recently worked in Portugal for the shipping company Maersk, but despite being away from home for some time he was always considered a permanent feature of the Isle of Harris.

He had played full-back for Harris Football Club for many seasons and later turned out for Glasgow Island, where he was described as ‘a much-loved and loyal team-mate’. When at home, he played for the Harris Welfare team.

The huge respect and affection felt for Deej by his home community was shown at his interment at the Harris Welfare team.

And it’s also being marked in the response to the fundraiser, which is bringing in generous donations accompanied by tributes describing him as ‘a great friend’, ‘one of the best’ and ‘a real, genuine, likeable chap’.

£10,000 boost for charities

Secondary students across the Western Isles have raised vital funds and awareness for charities in their communities addressing a range of social issues.

Through The Wood Foundation’s Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI), young people from throughout the country represented causes they cared about in a bid to secure their school’s grant.

Mental health charities, health support services, and organisations supporting people requiring support in poverty were the top three issues to receive more than £600,000 of funding this academic year.

Jonathan Christie, Deputy UK Director at The Wood Foundation, said: “The sums secured by young people, £2m changes, for local communities is incredible. This is a unique form of delegated grant-making and puts the power in students’ hands, ensuring there’s representation of the causes which matter to them. As well as funds, there are vital awareness raising and relationship components, as well as a range of skills development opportunities for the young people themselves.”

Police chief’s report on road crime

By Annie Delin

The Western Isles’ senior police officer has sent a report to Stornoway councillors on proactive and safety work undertaken during the summer of lockdown.

Chief Inspector Ian Graham wrote to Stornoway councillors following requests for action on driver behaviour in the town, arising from numerous public complaints to councillors.

Road safety and road crime were priority areas for action identified in the Police Scotland local policing plan for the Isle of Harris region.

In the plan, which covered the period from 2017-20, Police Scotland said: “Road safety and road crime remains a local priority in Eilean Siar.

‘Whilst the overall number of people killed and seriously injured has reduced over the past three years, when fatal or serious collisions do occur they have a significant impact on families and communities.

‘We will continue to target and enforce inappropriate driving and behaviour whilst working alongside our partners and participating in initiatives to educate and promote positive outcomes.’

In his report to councilors, Chief Inspector Graham listed the offences which led to charges against drivers in Stornoway town during June and July this year.

This included eight charges of driving while using a mobile phone, 12 drivers without insurance, six charged for careless driving, three speeding offences and five other offences relating to seatbelts and registration plates.

In addition, 13 anti-social behaviour orders (vehicle ASBOs) were issued and three drivers had their vehicles seized due to repeat offences after an ASBO.

The charges do not include people who were warned or spoken to about their driving behaviour without charges being made, and relates only to offences within Stornoway town.

Other charges have been made elsewhere in Lewis and Harris.

Chief Inspector Graham said: “We are making a continued effort to improve driver behaviour in Stornoway town centre, both in response to public concern and in line with our existing local priorities.

‘Informing councillors on how we are tackling road safety and road crime is part of our work to ensure that people know we want the roads to be safer and that road crime and anti-social driver behaviour will not be tolerated.”

SY pantos are both put off

Stornoway Thespians Drama Club and Stuart Morrison Pantomimes have taken the decision to postpone their planned pantomime performances in December 2020 and January 2021.

The current public health situation, and hopefully we will be far enough through the crisis by then for that to go ahead.

Both the Thespians and Stuart Morrison with their audiences festive greetings when the season comes, please follow the guidelines, stay safe, and we’ll see you all next year.

Dj presenting a prize to the winners of the scarecrow competition, Samuel and Robert MacAlpins from Garrynahine, with their bike crew scarecrows (and mum and dad looking on)

DJ brings community closer together

By Annie Delin

Bringing people together at a time when the rules encourage us to stay apart is an immense challenge – but Carloway’s new social inclusion officer is more than up to the task.

Recently appointed by Carloway Community Association, Dj Macleod has been charged with promoting social inclusion in the district between Dalmore and Lochgavich, specifically by helping to set up daytime and evening activities in Breasclete and Carloway community halls.

Dj has returned to the island, and to the family croft at Arnol, with his wife Elizabeth, a lecturer in history at the University of the Highlands and Islands, and their baby daughter Mary Grace.

Carloway residents will remember Dj as the former youth worker for Carloway and when he worked for the Comhairle’s education department. More recently he’s been working in Dornoch and Tain schools as a behaviour support and inclusion officer, and it was from that role that he came home in March.

Dj said: “I lost my job at the beginning of the pandemic and we came home to help with the lambing. I was delighted when I saw this job advertised and I feel lucky to have been appointed, even though we’re starting the project at a time when social distancing restricts us to remote activities.

I have had to start with ideas which can bring people together remotely, and competitions are a good way to do that. We have had a scarecrow competition which was targeted at families working together across the generations.

‘That was won by the MacAlpin family from Garrynahine, including their twin boys Robert and Samuel, aged nine, with their brilliant tandem BMA bike scarecrow installation.”

Currently running is what Dj describes as ‘a slow burner’ – a potato competition, targeted at the younger generation.

About 20 individuals have taken up the offer of a complete potato-growing kit, including maincrop seed potatoes, fertiliser and a growing bag.

Each participant is responsible for planting and tending to their own crop, and will harvest their whole bag of potatoes on Friday 9 October, weighing the harvest and entering their total crop-weight remotely.

Dj said: “It will be judged by weight, and the winner will receive a trophy and a surprise extra prize.”

Activities like these are designed to begin a process of social inclusion which was the main aim of the post being created. Funding from the European Social Fund and the Scottish Government’s Aspiring Communities Fund underlines the significance of the work.

Dj said: “The main emphasis of the role is to encourage inclusion, especially within low income households, but every activity is open to all.

‘Carloway Community Association is leading the project in close partnership with Breasclete Community Association and Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabaigh (Carloway Estate Trust) and the aim is help reduce social isolation by increasing participation in community events, improving access to support services and signposting support for those who need it.”

Dj will also be taking time to examine and report on the provision of childcare in the district, as at one time there is no daily childcare provision for age 0-3 years at all. “It’s a big issue” said Dj, “and one that needs to be discussed at the highest levels.”

Physical meetings, groups and activities will begin once people can safely meet again in the community centres at Breasclete and Carloway, but in the meantime, Dj is getting people motivated and engaged through remote projects and renewing his networks and contacts.

SY pantos are both put off

Stornoway Thespians Drama Club and Stuart Morrison Pantomimes have taken the decision to postpone their planned pantomime performances in December 2020 and January 2021.

The current public health situation, and hopefully we will be far enough through the crisis by then for that to go ahead.

Both the Thespians and Stuart Morrison with their audiences festive greetings when the season comes, please follow the guidelines, stay safe, and we’ll see you all next year.

Police chief’s report on road crime

By Annie Delin

The Western Isles’ senior police officer has sent a report to Stornoway councillors on proactive and safety work undertaken during the summer of lockdown.

Chief Inspector Ian Graham wrote to Stornoway councillors following requests for action on driver behaviour in the town, arising from numerous public complaints to councillors.

Road safety and road crime were priority areas for action identified in the Police Scotland local policing plan for the Isle of Harris region.

In the plan, which covered the period from 2017-20, Police Scotland said: “Road safety and road crime remains a local priority in Eilean Siar.

‘Whilst the overall number of people killed and seriously injured has reduced over the past three years, when fatal or serious collisions do occur they have a significant impact on families and communities.

‘We will continue to target and enforce inappropriate driving and behaviour whilst working alongside our partners and participating in initiatives to educate and promote positive outcomes.’

In his report to councilors, Chief Inspector Graham listed the offences which led to charges against drivers in Stornoway town during June and July this year.

This included eight charges of driving while using a mobile phone, 12 drivers without insurance, six charged for careless driving, three speeding offences and five other offences relating to seatbelts and registration plates.

In addition, 13 anti-social behaviour orders (vehicle ASBOs) were issued and three drivers had their vehicles seized due to repeat offences after an ASBO.

The charges do not include people who were warned or spoken to about their driving behaviour without charges being made, and relates only to offences within Stornoway town.

Other charges have been made elsewhere in Lewis and Harris.

Chief Inspector Graham said: “We are making a continued effort to improve driver behaviour in Stornoway town centre, both in response to public concern and in line with our existing local priorities.

‘Informing councillors on how we are tackling road safety and road crime is part of our work to ensure that people know we want the roads to be safer and that road crime and anti-social driver behaviour will not be tolerated.”

SY pantos are both put off
A good START to Independence

By Annie Delin

Coming home from hospital after an operation, a fall or intensive treatment brings a whole new set of challenges - how do you take a shower if you're a bit unsteady on your feet? How do you make a hot drink if you have an arm in plaster? And what about those stairs….?

One team now operating around the Broadbay area – from Point to Tolsta – is ready to lead recent patients, or people who have been ill at home for a time, through the process of gaining confidence and regaining independence.

The Short-Term Assessment and Reablement Team (START) was set up just over two years ago to help people with health or social care needs to maximize their own independence by learning, or relearning, the skills for day-to-day tasks.

The emphasis is very much on regaining the ability to do things yourself, rather than having someone do it for you. That means, according to START reablement worker Rachel Craig, that each of the eight workers are ‘cheerleaders for a return to full independence’.

Rachel said: “People that have been in hospital – maybe having a hip or shoulder replacement, cancer treatment or a fall that has knocked their confidence – can find it quite daunting coming home and trying to negotiate basic activities like showering or making a cup of tea.

“We work alongside physiotherapists and occupational therapists (OTs) to assess how much people can do for themselves and how much they need help with. The START team is especially dedicated to working with people in a supportive, confidence-building way over a period of about six weeks. The length of time we will see them for depends on the needs of the individual.

“So, someone might start their time with us needing maximum support to do ordinary things like washing and dressing, but as their confidence returns we gradually back off. We might start assisting them to shower, and after a number of weeks we’ll just be standing outside the bathroom so that they know they can call us.”

For some people, practical changes might be needed to manage routine tasks, so the equipment provided by OTs – a sock aid to put your socks on, or a walking aid – will need to be learnt.

And for others, changes will need to be made to the house itself, to make it easier for the person coming home. Reablement workers can ask the OT to arrange for minor modifications but, if that’s not practical, they could spend time with someone practicing climbing stairs so that they are much more able by the time they do go home.

Rachel said: “We’ve got a really good track record on getting people back to independence, but for some clients we realise there may be a need for more long-term support, and that’s when we start looking to work alongside other services to give additional help.”

START has two flats at Dun Ileriay where people can come to stay for a few weeks if their home is outside the Stornoway/Broadbay area. Reablement support can then be made available to them in the flats, which are back in use now after a period of closure during the pandemic.

Rachel said: “It’s all about building confidence. If someone has had a fall, they might feel really nervous about going outside, so we would perhaps start with a little walk to the gate and then build up until they feel happy being able to walk to the shop like they used to.”

Anyone can refer themselves to the service or be referred by a health or social care professional. Their first contact will be with an assessor who will find out if START is the right service for them and agree a plan on how to support them to meet their goals.

Dependent on the agreed goals and level of need, a person may get a morning, lunch-time, tea-time or evening visit.

For example, a person who has their arm or wrist immobilised following a fracture will receive visits to help them learn how to wash and dress one-handed, or a visit at lunch time and teatime to learn how to use a special tea-making station.

Rachel said: “We work closely with clients to help them regain independence, reviewing their goals weekly and gradually withdrawing support as their confidence and ability increases.

“We’re there to cheer them on and build their confidence so that they can get back to their usual independent self.”

Weekly staff testing for Covid-19 is taking place routinely in all the care homes across the Western Isles. This is a critical component to monitor wellbeing in the care homes and provides reassurance to staff, residents and relatives.

Jennifer Martin has been seconded from her post at Airdslealach to support the staff testing process in Lewis and Harris. Along with a community nurse she visits the care homes on their designated testing days. Her role involves uploading each staff member’s personal and testing details into the Government data base after they have taken their test.

The test involves a throat and nose swab and takes minutes to complete. Currently each home offers tests to all available staff on and off shift once a week. Jennifer’s role includes uploading the information on to the database.

Jennifer states: “This can be time consuming, the benefit of me offering this service ensures that staff can continue with their daily duties without too much disturbance. Offering testing weekly benefits the service users and staff by promoting their safety during these times but also plays a vital role in enabling family members to visit their loved ones.”

The testing kits are collected and sent to the laboratory with the results being sent direct to the employer by text, phone or email within 24 hours.

Social Care

Staff testing in care homes

By Jack Libby, head of community care at CnES

As this month’s articles in EVENTS highlight, it has been a very busy summer for Social Care staff.

Not only do we continue to meet the challenges from the COVID pandemic, but we are also trying to partially resume services that had been stood down. The resumption of indoor visiting to our care homes is most welcome, and whilst it is not a return to business as usual, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

The resumption of visiting was not a forgone conclusion. Care homes had to satisfy a number of preconditions, including infection prevention and control measures and through having a high rate of staff compliance with the weekly COVID testing regime. We all thank Jennifer Martin for her support with this.

On a similar note of recovery, the START service is very much about movement in a positive, forward direction. Preserving and regaining what we are able to do for ourselves is critically important for our physical, mental, spiritual and social development. Whilst people are grateful for the support which they receive both formally and informally, retaining as much of our independence as possible is very much a priority for each of us, and also ensures that we better manage the ever-increasing demands on services. This is why reablement must be a key priority for services going forward.

It was also pleasing to see a further group of social care apprentices entering the profession and organization. Developing the young workforce helps with the larger strategy of developing the social care workforce, and I hope they each find their roles rewarding, that they encourage others to follow in their footsteps and have long careers.

Finally, a big thank you to all those involved in the creation of the twiddle boards. Keeping our residents with dementia stimulated is critically important. It got me wondering what version of a twiddle board would reflect my life and lifestyle.
Twiddle boards to soothe minds

An innovative project to support male residents with dementia, several Twiddle boards have been made locally.

Twiddle boards can be a soothing way of keeping someone with dementia occupied and can help stimulate a memory of past usage.

It is a table-top piece of equipment which is simply a square piece of wood attached with various locks, bolts, chain lock, light switch and familiar household gadgets that can be perfect manipulated and over and again.

Grateful thanks to Alex Murray, Construction, Jessenors UK and Medlock for their kind donation of materials, Hector MacDonald, Martins Memorial Shed project and CnES OHMEET Team (Outer Hebrides Managing Employment, Enterprise and Training) led by chargehands Calum MacKenzie and Christopher MacKenzie with participants John Fallon and Stephen Hawkins who were involved in the construction of the boards. The OHMEET Programme is a CnES led Employability Programme which is part of the Education, Skills and Training Department.

Apprentices tell of gains from experience of care work

There are a growing number of apprenticeships in the social care sector leading on to qualifications and work experience in highly skilled occupations which, in turn, provide a gateway to other areas of work, such as nursing.

And that’s great news for school leavers in the Western Isles, who can start on the earlier aspects of this career pathway while still at school, says Dolina Smith, the apprenticeships manager for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Emily Fairweather (pictured left in the group photograph) from Portvoller, Point, is looking forward to starting her apprenticeship in health and social care.

Emily says she has always enjoyed a caring role and fondly remembers the carers that attended to her grandmother. She feels that this is her opportunity to explore care delivery first-hand where she will gain the knowledge and experience of working as a care support worker in her local environment and achieve a registerable qualification.

Kelly Cameron (pictured middle in the group photograph) from Stornoway, made the decision to apply for a Modern Apprenticeship in Health and Social Care after working relief in the Dun Bristy care home.

She says that her time spent in Dun Bristy was the perfect opportunity for her to gain valuable experience of working within a care team. She enjoyed establishing good relationships with her colleagues and the service users and feels the Modern Apprenticeship will develop her skills in order to progress into a degree in Occupational Therapy.

Samantha Macaulay (pictured right in the group photograph) from Stornoway, is also enthusiastic about starting her new venture as a Modern Apprentice. She has always been passionate about care delivery and completed her Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services Children and Young People.

Samantha hopes to pursue a career in nursing and feels that this is the perfect opportunity to learn the principles of care within her community whilst gaining her qualification.

Christie Nicolson is a Social Care Worker in Berneray Care Home. “During the Covid-19 crisis, I have moved out of my house to protect my family while I continue to work as a carer. Working during Covid-19 is very challenging to say the least. It’s all new to us. I have had to learn new skills in care that I’ve never done before. Apart from that, it’s been all fun in lockdown with the service users. We are doing lots of activities with them including baking, singing and lots more! Seeing the service users happy and relaxed at such a difficult time keeps me happy! That’s why I love my job.”

Hannah Macdonald is a social care worker at Ardskeileach Care and Complex. “During this time it has been very challenging, I have been working extra shifts and changing my shifts for the service. Myself and my colleagues have experienced a lot of change in our work role and have managed to overcome this and work well together as a team. The hardest challenge I have found is service users not seeing their families, this has been made easier with modern technology. Although it has been a difficult time it has been made easier as the service users have coped so well.”

Dolina Smith emphasised the way the jobs in the care-home sector had become far more skilled over the years as the level of care had intensified in order to cope with the very large number of service users who have a range of impairments and varied levels of coping abilities. This allowed the posts to become excellent preparation for working within social services or to facilitate progression into nursing and allied health professions.

Changes to rules on care home visiting

From 24th August, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar care homes reintroduced indoor visiting to care homes.

The Scottish Government demands that care homes meet certain requirements prior to indoor visits commencing. They must:
- Complete their own risk assessments;
- Make the physical space ready to allow indoor visiting;
- Ensure there is adequate PPE to support safe visiting;
- Have an appropriate cleaning regime, in line with health protection guidance;
- Have adequate staff are in place to manage indoor and outdoor visiting simultaneously.

A Comhairle spokesperson said: “Through the continued hard work of care home staff in preparation for indoor visiting and through the evident partnership working between Health and Social Care managers, care homes are well placed to manage this next stage of the recovery plan.”

“Understandably, there are strict conditions attached to any visits taking place, and all nominated visitors will be provided with written guidance prior to visits.

“We have to manage the numbers of visitors carefully, avoiding too many visits on the same day. Ideally there will be a single nominated visitor, as this helps reduce the risk further but where there is to be a change of visitor, then we ask that the normal nominated visitor informs the care home of any proposed changes.

“We also ask that if for whatever reason a visitor is unable to attend a visit, then the notify the care home as early as possible, as this visit can be utilised by someone else. We once again want to thank residents and family members alike for their continued patience and understanding. It is more important than ever that we continue to conform to the national guidance in terms of infection prevention and control. It is by doing so that we have been able to move to this most welcome of developments.”

Barbara Mackay, the daughter of Catherine Macleod, has spoken of the experience of physically visiting her mother at Harris House since restrictions have been reduced.

“While being able to see my mother, whose ability to communicate with others has reduced significantly in recent months, has been beneficial, having to wear a facemask has further impeded my ability to communicate with her. Fortunately, the weather has been generally favourable in enabling us to meet outside. However, as we approach autumn and winter, the opportunity to meet outside will inevitably be reduced.

“At all times staff have been very supportive in arranging meetings, and in providing information about my mother’s condition. Facetime has been in some ways more beneficial than meeting outside.”

Fiona Christie, deputy chief executive of the Care Inspectorate, said: “The first indoor visits since March will be a positive step forward in how we can safely support residents and families in care homes. However, we have a responsibility to ensure the safety of residents and staff at all times and we strongly advise everyone to comply with guidance and to obtain advice from their GP if they are unsure about their own health and wellbeing.

“The key message from the Scottish Government is to avoid visiting if you are unwell or have been in contact with someone who has had a positive test for Coronavirus. And in the event of a resident being taken ill during their visit, we strongly advise all visitors to leave the care home immediately and follow guidance on self-isolating. This is to prevent Coronavirus spreading to other residents and staff members.”

Despite the new arrangements, Autumn and Winter are times when many care homes will remain well below capacity due to the continuing impact of complex and ongoing personal care needs.

The sector is also seeing an increase in staff turnover across all areas and roles, with a significant number of staff dedicating several hours per week to look after family and friends who are also in care homes.

The Scottish Government has already announced that it will be increasing the minimum wage paid to care workers from its current level of £9.50 to £10.60 per hour by April next year.

The Minister for Older People and Social Services, Joe FitzPatrick, MSP, said: “The challenges that care workers have faced over the last year are immeasurable. We are seeing unacceptably high levels of staff turnover and we must ensure that they are properly paid and valued.

“The Scottish Government has already made it clear that we want to see minimum wage levels for care workers in line with the minimum wage in the private sector by 2024-25. That is why this announcement is so important.”

The Care Inspectorate has launched a survey seeking feedback from care home staff on their experiences of indoor visiting.

Hannah Macdonald, a care worker at Ardskeileach Care and Complex, has spoken of her experience.

“Visits have been restricted and we have found that when we allowed visits, it was only a single visitor at a time. The visits were also limited to 30 minutes. Our residents really appreciated visitors being able to come and see them. I think it’s been a really good thing for the residents. It’s brought something back into their daily routine.”

Hannah said that indoor visiting is now a permanent arrangement.

“I think it’s a permanent thing. The visits happened for two months and now it’s permanent. It’s very good for the families to see their loved ones.”

Christie Nicolson, a care worker at the same care home, has offered her support.

“I think that indoor visitors is a really good thing. If we have any visitors, we have already had a single visitor. I think it’s been good for the residents. It’s made them feel better. They can see their family.”

Christie said that indoor visitors have become permanent.

“I think it’s permanent. We have had indoor visitors since August. We have two visitors now. It’s a very good thing.”

Samantha Macaulay, a care worker at the same care home, has also offered her support.

“I think that indoor visitors is a really good thing. If we have any visitors, we have already had a single visitor. I think it’s been good for the residents. It’s made them feel better. They can see their family.”

Samantha said that indoor visitors have become permanent.

“I think it’s permanent. We have had indoor visitors since August. We have two visitors now. It’s a very good thing.”
Studio Vans on road to success following advice from Business Gateway

A Western Isles based campervan conversion business has successfully launched after receiving a variety of expert advice during lockdown from Business Gateway.

Founded in June 2020 by chartered engineer, Rob Hall, Studio Vans Ltd make innovative, ready to go fit outs for campervan conversions. By collaborating with local and international makers and designers, Studio Vans offer a customisable service taking advantage of sustainable and premium crafted materials.

Rob and his team first engaged with Business Gateway following a recommendation from another local business. He was able to secure vital funding through the Outer Hebrides Young Entrepreneurs Start-up scheme and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Grants for Growth Scheme. This enabled the business to buy key manufacturing products and contributed to the fitout costs required to help get the business launched at their location in Balivanich, which is a unit leased from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). As Business Gateway and HIE work closely together to support businesses to develop, they were able to collaborate with Rob and support him with his application to lease the property.

Business Gateway also facilitated a number of introductions and networking opportunities and Rob has continued to receive a variety of support including advice on premises, company regulations and marketing. He has also been successful in securing funding through Highlands and Islands Enterprise, including a grant through the HIE Innovation programme.

Studio Vans has now introduced a waiting list to cope with demand from across the UK and has already confirmed partners to take operations overseas to Australia and New Zealand. Ongoing collaborations include Glasgow based designer Still Life Workshop, remoulding far-flung ocean plastic collected from the beautiful Uist beaches into innovative products for van owners.

Rob Hall, Founder of Studio Vans Ltd, said, “As we were relatively new to the island, engaging with Business Gateway was crucial in making new business connections through individual introductions, local events and virtual meetings across the country.

“As a direct result of Business Gateway introducing us to others, we have benefited greatly from local knowledge and culture that has helped us shape the direction and philosophies of the business during these early stages. Additionally, the practical business support on funding, business plans and company regulations has been a huge help during the initial start-up period.”

Alastair MacLeod, Business Adviser at Business Gateway, said, “Thanks to the key connections made through our introductions and the specialist start-up services we provided, Rob and his team were more than prepared when it came to launch the business in June. More specifically, by engaging with our DigitalBoost initiative, it has helped Studio Vans to develop their digital voice, through the creation of engaging social media content, which has been highly successful when it came to promoting the company.

“The recent expansion plans and the increase in customer traffic is testament to the ongoing hard work and dedication from everyone at Studio Vans. The future is looking very bright for Rob and his team and I’m excited to hear more about their up and coming endeavours.”

For further information about how Business Gateway can support your business, please visit https://www.bgateway.com/.

Business Gateway Outer Hebrides is delivered locally through Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s Economic Development service. We offer a range of support and advice to individuals setting up or developing business enterprises across the islands. To discuss your ideas and requirements further and to find out your eligibility for financial assistance, please call our local office on 01851 822775 and we will be pleased to direct you to one of our advisers.

CORONAVIRUS SUPPORT

Business Gateway is here to help you and your business through this difficult time. Our advisers are working remotely and continue to be able to offer support and guidance. The Business Gateway website is regularly updated with a wide range of relevant advice and information on things like business contingency, digital platforms, trading online, working from home, HR and more. All this useful content can be found at www.bgateway.com, where you will also find helpful webinars and the latest updates on the Government financial support for businesses.

The Comhairle’s website also contains up to date information on the Coronavirus situation. Please visit www.cne-siar.gov.uk/social-cam-and-health/coronavirus to see the latest updates.

To find out how Business Gateway can support your business, please contact us on businessgateway@cne-siar.gov.uk or 01851 822775.

Please follow us on Facebook for the most up-to-date COVID-19 information https://www.facebook.com/businessGatewayOuterHebrides/

DIGITALBOOST

Give your business some digital muscle with our digital health check. It only takes minutes!

Find out where technology could fit into your business and improve your performance, profits and people. Find gaps in your business’s digital performance. Get the advanced support you need to take the next step. For more information, contact us at Business Gateway on businessgateway@cne-siar.gov.uk.

Van interior following conversion

Bounceback Loans

The government has announced plans to offer Bounceback Loans up to £50,000 to support small businesses during the recession. The loans will be interest free for the first 12 months and 100% government backed. Applications will be open as of 4th May. You can find out more by visiting www.gov.uk/government/news/small-businesses-boosted-by-bounce-back-loans.

Support Finder

The UK Government has launched an online business support finder tool which shows some of the supports available to you and your business. Please note, this service mainly focuses on UK Government support schemes. Your business may also be eligible for support schemes operated by the Scottish Government or other agencies.

The business support finder tool can be accessed at https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder

Check In and Protect App

A Check In & Protect app has been made available through the Outer Hebrides Chamber of Commerce for local businesses. The app allows visitors to easily check-in to business locations and the data is automatically deleted after 21 days. Details on how it works and how to register your business are on their website here: https://outerhebrideschamber.co.uk/checkin-protect-app/

If you’d like to sign up to use the app as a visitor or customer and be ready to check-in when you next visit hospitality and other businesses across the Islands, you can sign up using the guest/customer registration: https://protect.outerhebrideschamber.co.uk/guest_home

OHYESS

BUSINESS START UP GRANT FUNDING

The OHYESS scheme is financed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and administered by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Grant funding for entrepreneurs, based in the Outer Hebrides with businesses in key sectors that have been trading for no longer than two years. The funding will be used towards capital costs only.

- Full time businesses—up to £2,500 grant
- Part time businesses—up to £1,250 grant
- Level of support—up to 50% of eligible costs

To find out more, please contact Business Gateway on 01851 822775 or businessgateway@cne-siar.gov.uk.

“Key Sectors - renewables & energy related activity, recycling, tourism, creative and other culture-based industries, food & drink, information technology, life, health and other sciences, research & development, innovation, manufacturing & processing, traditional industries (indigenous to the Outer Hebrides).
How to Build a Digital Marketing Plan  
Tuesday 8 September 2020, 1.30pm to 3.30pm  
This webinar will guide you through the steps needed to create a digital marketing strategy to meet your business objectives and create more leads.

Email Marketing for Business  
Thursday 17 September, 10.30am to 12.30pm  
This session will help those who currently use email marketing who want to improve their understanding of how to boost engagement, conversion and sales.

Video Production for Social Media  
Thursday 1 October, 1.30pm to 3.30pm  
Discover how the use of video helps people find your brand or website and how this kind of content has become a powerful way to engage with your audience.

All webinars will be held over Zoom and participants will be sent the links the day before each session takes place.

For further information or to book, visit www.bgateway.com/outer-hebrides or call 01851 668377