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the reporter

WINTER 2013

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE NOW BOASTS ...

SCHOOLS ESTATE SECOND TO NONE

8-PAGE PULLOUT GUIDE TO YOUR COUNCILLORS – INSIDE



Closure of offices

All council offices will be closed on Wednesday 25 and Thursday 26 December 2013 and Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 January 2014.

Festive period - Refuse and recycling collection programme 2013/14

There will be some changes to collection arrangements over the Festive period as outlined below.

Week Commencing 16 December 2013

Black/Green Bin and Glass Bin Collection - there will be no change to collection days.

Week Commencing 23 December 2013

Blue Bin and Glass Bin Collection – collections will take place as normal on Monday 23 and Tuesday 24 December 2013. There will be no collections on Wednesday 25 December, thereafter collections will be carried out one day later as follows:

| Normal Collection Day | New Collection Day |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Wednesday 25 December | Thursday 26 December |
| Thursday 26 December | Friday 27 December |
| Friday 27 December | Saturday 28 December |

Week Commencing 30 December 2013

Black/Green Bin and Glass Bin Collection – collections will take place as normal on Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 December 2013. There will be no collections on Wednesday 1 January and Thursday 2 January, thereafter collections will be carried out two days later as follows:

| Normal Collection Day | New Collection Day |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Wednesday 1 January | Friday 3 January |
| Thursday 2 January | Saturday 4 January |
| Friday 3 January | Sunday 5 January |

Please ensure your bin is out for collection before 7am. We cannot guarantee the time that your bin will be emptied but it will be emptied on your day of collection. The only exception to this will be during periods of extreme weather when we must wait until road conditions improve or if access is restricted.

Over the Festive period we all tend to generate more refuse and recycling material than normal e.g. drinks bottles and cans, papers and magazines, wrapping paper and old Christmas cards. You can take additional refuse, recycling material and real Christmas trees to one of your local Household Waste and Recycling Centres that are located at:

Hamilton Road Industrial Estate, Strathaven.
College Milton, Peel Park Industrial Estate, East Kilbride
Blantyre Industrial Estate, Blantyre
Strutherhill Industrial Estate, Larkhall
Castlehill Industrial Estate, Carluke
Eastfield, Cambuslang Road, Rutherglen

For all enquiries relating to litter, dog fouling, illegal dumping, graffiti, fly posting, waste collection or disposal, asbestos removal, removal of glass or syringes, recycling, grounds maintenance or waste education, call the Land Services Helpline on 0303 123 1020 (local rate call) or email landservices@southlanarkshire.gov.uk.

Urgent registration arrangements

All offices closed in line with the closure of offices section detailed above. In addition, the Hamilton and Rutherglen offices will close at 3pm on 24 and 31 December and will be closed all day on Saturday 28 December. Arrangements for the registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the delivery of other Council Services during the festive period will be displayed at the relevant offices.

In the event of an emergency (for example to carry out a death registration where the deceased has to be taken out of the country) during either holiday period please contact our out of hours contact service on 0800 242024 who will contact a Registrar on your behalf.

Social Work Resources

All offices closed as Closure of offices section.

If you have a social work emergency when your local social work office is closed contact the Emergency Social Work Service on 0303 123 1008.

Prepare for winter driving

Winter can be the worst time of the year for driving - frozen radiators, breakdowns, icy roads and there are many hazards that can catch you out if you are not prepared. For trouble-free motoring this winter follow these tips.

Check your lights, anti-freeze, brakes, battery, tyre tread, tyre pressure, windscreen wipers and washer bottles. Make these checks before winter sets in – and throughout the winter. Check weather forecasts and travel bulletins – listen out for police warnings.

Leave plenty of time for your journey – better late than never.

Watch out for the dazzle from the sun – use your visor.

Watch out for ice forming under trees and bridges – you can tell you are on ice if the car runs more quietly and the steering is light.

Think about carrying an emergency kit including, an ice scraper, spade, road salt, torch, blankets, food and drink – especially for journeys out of town.

For further information contact Road Safety phone: 01698 453620.

Paying your rent should be top of your Christmas list



Rent ✓
Presents ✓
Turkey ✓
Tree ✓
Clothes ✓
Panto ✓

If you're behind in your payments, please contact us – we can make arrangements for affordable payments to help you clear your arrears.

Contact your local housing office now to find out how we can help.

Phone: **0303 123 1012**
www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk

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COUNCIL LEADER'S PRIDE IN MAKING AREA A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK

IT'S my pleasure to welcome you to the Winter 2013 edition of The Reporter.

As a resident of South Lanarkshire, this is your magazine and is designed to give you up-to-date and accurate information about council services.

I'm determined to help local people make the most of our services and to encourage you all to help us shape them.

That's why this edition of The Reporter includes a special, pull-out guide to your councillors.

These eight pages will make sure you know who your local councillors are and how to get in touch with them. Please feel free to remove the guide from the centre of the magazine and keep it safe for future reference.

Elsewhere in this magazine you will find news of some of the important work that's being done across our area.

In education alone, this includes details of the progress being made by our magnificent Schools Modernisation Programme.

All our 19,338 secondary pupils are now learning in modern schools, with 70 per cent of primary pupils also in refurbished, rebuilt or new accommodation. Work on the remainder is ahead of schedule.

I'm immensely proud of the fact that we have created the best schools estate in Scotland, and doubly so when you look at the results.

Another feature in this edition celebrates the achievements of our kids, who are getting better and better exam results and improving their life prospects.

Among others, you'll also find articles on how 1000 new homes are being built and an update on how we are creating jobs and employability schemes, plus an insight into such diverse areas as sheltered housing, our leisure centres and our parks.

There's also information on our roads – not just our improvement programme but also some timely tips on dealing with any severe winter weather than comes our way in the next few months.

I hope you find this edition of The Reporter interesting and informative and that, as you read it, you share my pride in the work that is being done every day to make South Lanarkshire a better place to live and work.

Eddie McAvoy,
Council Leader



1000 NEW HOMES

THE PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOMES TO ADDRESS THE CHRONIC SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN SOUTH LANARKSHIRE IS A KEY COUNCIL COMMITMENT, REPORTS **ANDY LIVINGSTONE**

PLANS have been revealed to build nearly 1000 new homes to give a major boost to the supply of social housing in South Lanarkshire.

Every year, the council produces an updated Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) setting out the priorities for developing new, affordable housing over the following five years.

The idea is to allow longer-term planning to maximise the development of affordable homes and the current SHIP has been published to show the plans for 2013-18.

Over that period, the programme for supplying affordable housing has the capacity to provide up to 781 completed properties.

In addition, a successful bid for the Greener Homes Innovation Scheme will provide funding for 20 new-build council homes in Fernhill and 12 Clyde Valley Housing Association homes in Strutherhill.

A further 172 homes will be built through the Clyde Valley Network's Innovation-funded programme, bringing the total number of new affordable homes planned in South Lanarkshire to 985.

Council Leader Eddie McAvoy said: "The availability of affordable housing is a key priority of the council.

"There is high demand and long waiting lists for social housing right

across South Lanarkshire. At the same time, the supply of properties has drastically decreased since the introduction of the Right to Buy 30 years ago – more than 42,000 council homes have been lost across South Lanarkshire in that time.

"The decision to abolish the Right to Buy will protect existing and future council stock but we need to increase the housing available to meet local needs.

"The addition of nearly 1000 new homes will therefore make a huge difference, bringing fresh opportunities to ease the pressure on our waiting lists, and I look forward to seeing these programmes develop over the next few years."

The new housing will be developed across all four of the housing market areas in South Lanarkshire, with 250 properties planned for Hamilton, 357 for East Kilbride, 249 for Rutherglen and Cambuslang, and 129 for Clydesdale.

Subject to the funding that becomes available and discussions that will be held with the various partners involved in the programmes, other forms of affordable housing that are less dependent on subsidies, such as intermediate rent, shared equity and low-cost home ownership, may form part of the new developments.

CLASS ABOVE

STATE-OF-THE-ART EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES REMAIN A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE COUNCIL, AS THE AMBITIOUS SCHOOLS MODERNISATION PROGRAMME CONTINUES APACE, REPORTS **SARAH BURROWS**

THE council's ground-breaking £827million Primary Schools Modernisation Programme continues apace, with 89 new or refurbished primaries already completed throughout South Lanarkshire.

A total of 131 primary schools are being modernised as part of the highly ambitious building project.

Nine stand-alone nursery centres and a Social, Educational and Behavioural Needs (SEBN) secondary school are also included, talking the total number of schools being renewed or rebuilt through the primary schools project to an impressive 141.

Of these, 46 include a nursery class and, with 19 Additional Support Needs (ASN) bases, and 14 community wings also included in the rebuild programme, it means that entire school communities can benefit from first-class new buildings.

The council has already completed a Secondary Schools Modernisation Programme that delivered 19 brand-new or refurbished secondaries throughout the area.

The KEAR Campus in Blantyre opened recently for secondary-aged pupils with specific social, educational and behavioural needs, meaning that all of the area's secondary pupils are now taught in brand-new buildings.

More than 70 per cent of primary-aged pupils – almost 17,000 – are learning in state-of-the-art buildings

This figure is set to increase dramatically by summer 2014, as another seven schools will be delivered before Christmas 2013 – Auldhouse Primary School, Carstairs Primary, Lanark Primary, Maxwellton Primary and Greenburn Primary, Neilsland Primary and Woodlands Nursery and Sandford Primary.

Meanwhile, there are another 13 schools currently under construction and due to open during the first half of next year.

These are Coalburn Primary, Lesmahagow; East Milton Primary, East Kilbride; Forth Primary; Lamington Primary, Biggar; Leadhills Primary; Long Calderwood

Primary, East Kilbride; South Park Primary, East Kilbride; St Bride's Primary, Cambuslang; St John's Primary, Blackwood; St Leonard's Primary, East Kilbride; St Mark's Primary, Hamilton; St Mark's Primary, Rutherglen and St Mary's Primary, Larkhall.

One of the highlights of the year was the opening of the new £7.5million Park View Primary in Cambuslang, the first entirely new school the council has built since the 1970s.

The state-of-the-art school is providing a 21st century learning environment for the growing population in and around the area.

The striking new building includes seven classrooms, fully equipped gym hall, pupil dining room and kitchen, stage, staff facilities, library and IT suite.

The school boasts a variety of flexible accommodation that can be used for formal and informal learning.

Externally, a new 21-space car park was provided and children are enjoying their new playground facilities and all-weather Multi-Use-Games-Area.

Head teacher Maria Speirs said: "Our new school is a happy, vibrant and innovative place in which to learn and work.

"We are looking forward to continuing to build on the successful partnership with the children, families and local community to create a school that we will all be proud of."

Council Leader Eddie McAvoy welcomed the new Park View school as a "superb asset" to the local community.

"The investment in creating a completely new school is testament to our ongoing commitment to education and to giving young people the very best start possible," he said.

"Our Schools Modernisation Programme is the very best in Scotland, if not the UK.

"By 2016, all of our children, from our youngest nursery pupils to secondary-aged students, will be taught in one of these bright and modern buildings.

"Schools are the building blocks to ensure our young people get every chance to reach their full potential."





Pupils at the new Park View Primary in Cambuslang are pictured on the first day of the new summer term, when the school welcomed youngsters for the first time

Picture by Anne-Janine Nugent



TRIPLE 'A' RATED:
Eva Harvey and
brothers Lewis and
Ewan each scored
A grades in five Highers
and are staying on at
school for sixth year

MAKING THE GRADE

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE RECORDS BEST EXAM RESULTS IN FIVE YEARS, AS ATTAINMENT LEVELS INCREASE WITH PUPILS' HARD WORK PAYING OFF. SARAH BURROWS REPORTS

PUPILS celebrated exam success with record results across South Lanarkshire, with the overall performance up on last year giving schools their best results since 2009.

This year, there has been improvement in the overall results for pupils in fourth, fifth and sixth year in all areas, with the highlights including:

- An increase in the number of pupils in S4 gaining five or more awards at Foundation, General and Credit levels
- An increase in the number of pupils in S5 gaining one, three and five Highers
- An increase in the number of pupils in S6 gaining one, three and five Highers and a record number of pupils passing at least one advanced Higher.

Among those celebrating were Duncanrig Secondary School's 16-year-old triplets Eva, Lewis and Ewan Harvey who, between them, achieved 15 A-grade passes in their Higher exams.

The siblings' passes, including the core subjects of English and Mathematics, range across the spectrum of arts/humanities and sciences in a shining endorsement, both of the quality of learning and teaching at their school, and of their own hard work.

Eva celebrated A passes in Higher Maths, English, Biology, Chemistry and Geography.

Ewan was delighted with his As in Maths, English, Chemistry, Physics and RMPS. Not to be beaten by his siblings, Lewis achieved A grades in Maths, Physics, English, RMPS and Music.

Councillor Jean McKeown, Chair of Education Resources, welcomed the improving attainment levels.

"I am delighted that the determination and commitment of staff to work with pupils to raise attainment and improve literacy and numeracy is clearly evident following publication of the SQA exam results," she said.

Former Lesmahagow High School student Charlotte Slavin, below, was also celebrating after being accepted to Cambridge University to study Geography.

Charlotte achieved eight 1s at Standard Grade, 5 As at Higher Grade – all at band 1– and three As at Advanced Higher.

She was the school's Dux Medallist in 2012 and her outstanding S6 successes were celebrated at the prize giving again this year.

Head Teacher Margaret Ross said: "We are all delighted with Charlotte's success. She studied hard but managed to also maintain a good work-life balance.

"She contributed to school events and was a role model in terms of her behaviour, attitude and relationships with those around her.

"In many ways, she influenced the 'success through hard work' ethos we are establishing within the school. She was modest about her achievements but confident she knew where she wanted to go and determined to attain at the highest level."

Charlotte and her peers in S6 must have inspired Lesmahagow High School's 5th year pupils because an increased number of them attained excellent results – four pupils gained five As at Higher and three gained 4 As.

Margaret Ross said: "For a small school, I think that is remarkable. Our 5+ at Level 6 went up from seven per cent in 2012 to 13 per cent, and our 3+ at Level 6 rose from 19 per cent to 26 per cent.

"Staff work very well with pupils and are highly committed and aspirational for them."



JUST THE JOB4U

THE COUNCIL RUNS A NUMBER OF EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE KICKSTART THEIR CAREERS, REPORTS JAMES DAVITT

IMPROVING the job prospects of those struggling to find work and helping kickstart their careers remain key priorities for South Lanarkshire Council.

The authority runs a number of programmes designed to help unemployed people into jobs, as well as providing incentives for small businesses to recruit additional staff.

Routes to Inclusion, the South Lanarkshire Jobs Fund and South Lanarkshire Works 4 U are examples of the council's direct action to help tackle the jobs crisis.

To date, almost 4000 people have found their way back into work or training thanks to one of the authority's successful access programmes.

Funding of more than £4.3million was secured to continue the council's employability objectives to the end of the financial year in 2014.

The South Lanarkshire Jobs Fund has been running for more than two years, providing a wage subsidy to small to medium-sized businesses prepared to take on people under the age of 25.

More than 500 young people across South Lanarkshire have found jobs thanks to the council-backed scheme.

Employers are paid 50 per cent of the national minimum wage for 26 weeks, with many of the young people being given full-time posts at the end of the period.

One small business to have benefited from the council's employability programmes is Happy Feet Nursery in Larkhall.

They have employed Montana Wharton, above, as a trainee

nursery nurse. "Before I got the job, I was given lots of support and guidance, particularly when carrying out first aid, manual handling, food hygiene and customer service training," explained Montana.

"I have gained full-time employment at Happy Feet Nursery, which I am enjoying very much.

"My journey has been a positive one and it is still continuing."

Nursery manager Shirley Clark said they were delighted to help young people learn and achieve their goals.

"Montana is working towards her Level Three in Childcare and Education and is a prime example of what young students can achieve while on the programme, if they are being fully supported by their employer," she added.

"The wage subsidy helps employers to take on young people and put them through an apprenticeship."

Council Leader Eddie McAvoys said he was delighted with the success of the South Lanarkshire Jobs Fund over the past couple of years.

"It demonstrates that, as a council, we are committed to helping our young people find jobs," he added.

"I would ask any businesses, who would like to take on a young person, to make contact with us and let us help them capture the local talent that is out there."

The council recently received a boost for the fund from the Scottish Government's Youth Employment Scotland (YES) initiative and aims to support small businesses to create a further 250 jobs. Through the



'AS A COUNCIL, WE ARE DETERMINED TO MINIMISE THE EFFECTS OF THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN ... AND WE ARE PUTTING OUR MONEY WHERE OUR MOUTH IS'

council's Routes to Inclusion Programme, South Lanarkshire Works 4 U, during financial year 2012/13 the number of unemployed people who found jobs was 1753.

A total of 2217 people completed one of the council's many jobs access programmes.

Councillor Chris Thompson, Chair of South Lanarkshire Council's Enterprise Resources Committee, said: "These figures show the tremendous work being done in South Lanarkshire to secure jobs and training for people. We have been particularly successful in securing jobs or places on our programmes for young people.

"As a council, we are determined to minimise the effects of the economic downturn on the young people of South Lanarkshire.

"We want to cushion them, and local businesses, from the negative impact of the downturn as far as possible.

"The figures demonstrate that, as a council, we are putting our money where our mouth is."

Among the programmes supported by South Lanarkshire

TASK FORCE PLOTS FUTURE FOR TOWN

CREATING jobs, improving business opportunities and developing long-term strategies for the town is the main focus of the East Kilbride Task Force.

At the latest meeting of the multi-agency group a draft action plan was agreed, with financial commitments for the coming months and years.

The plan includes a list of priority actions, including:

- £1.3million funding for employability programmes for the town
- £125,000 to establish a dedicated training centre
- A new "incubation" scheme to encourage new, small businesses
- In the longer-term, a focus on key strategic sites in the town, infrastructure improvements and opportunities for social house building.

The £1.3million commitment by South Lanarkshire Council and its partners for employability programmes will result in 320 jobs for local people, 120 training places and 20 places in full-time education.

Skills Development Scotland will work with the council on jobs access schemes, along with the council's own South Lanarkshire Works 4 U.

Councillor Chris Thompson, chair of both the Task Force and the council's Enterprise Services Committee, said: "The commitment to providing help for people to find jobs and training is an extremely important one.

"Everyone knows how difficult the job market is at the moment and any help we can provide can only be a good thing.

"Helping people back into work is one of the most important things we can do to help stimulate the local economy."

South Lanarkshire College has applied for money from the European Regional Development Fund to provide an extension to their existing facility, which will create more training places for unemployed people, small companies and community groups to help increase the skills of the people of East Kilbride.

The building will make use of the best practice in accessibility and the latest technologies in energy efficiency and ICT, and will foster more opportunities for partnership work in the town.

A commitment has also been made by the Task Force to establish a training centre that will focus on the retail sector but also provide support to various local businesses.

● The Action Plan was agreed as a draft and is now going to each of the partners for approval.



Works 4 U in the last year has been the Youth Jobs Fund, which supports job-ready school leavers who are experiencing difficulty finding work or training.

It offers a 50 per cent wage subsidy for 50 weeks.

There is also the South Lanarkshire Jobs Fund, which supports individuals aged 18 and over and includes support for graduates.

This initiative offers a 50 per cent wage subsidy for six months and is focused on small businesses that could grow if they take on extra staff.

Both initiatives will be supported by more than £1.6m over the next 12 months.

Councillor Thompson added: "Although we are delighted by how well we have performed over the last 12 months, we are aware there are even more challenges ahead of us.

"We are determined to meet them head on and continue to provide the people of South Lanarkshire with as much support as possible."

Meanwhile, an innovative project has found work for 10 long-term unemployed people

as energy advisors. The South Lanarkshire Council scheme involves a new training and employment initiative that delivers a local energy advice service.

Called Dea:SL – Domestic energy advice: South Lanarkshire – the main aim of the project is to reduce the number of households experiencing fuel poverty.

It does so by providing a face-to-face service for vulnerable residents on the best use of energy in their home.

Advice is given on a range of issues, including how to make the most cost-effective use of heating systems; ensuring the

customer gets the best tariff deal available; addressing billing and fuel debt issues caused by incorrect tariffs; wrongly estimated bills and simple billing mistakes; helping householders access energy-saving measures (for example, insulation) and helping householders access emergency financial assistance that may be available.

● Anyone interested in the South Lanarkshire Jobs Fund, from either an employer's or individual's point of view, should call 0800 731 0444. Alternatively, email info@rtws.org.uk



DOZENS of cats, dogs, puppies at a South Lanarkshire rescue centre will be cosying up to warm, cuddly blankets this winter thanks to the new yarn bombing craze, *writes Mhairi Anderson.*

Known as urban or guerrilla knitting in Europe, it is becoming as much of a phenomenon as graffiti street art, with fibre artists covering everything from water towers to buses.

South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture has been encouraging the resurgence of the traditional craft of crocheting and knitting, with staff teaming up with experienced crafters across the area to teach children and adults.

This culminated at the East Kilbride Summer Fest with trees, lampposts, benches, pillars and chairs being covered in bright yarn.

But, what became of all the colourful knitting and crochet that materialised

all over the town during the summer?

Well it's going to the dogs – literally – because dozens of blankets knitted as street art have been donated to the ScottishSPCA Rehoming Centre in Hamilton.

Benny Martin, South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture's Cultural Services Manager, explained: "It was felt from the outset that the yarn creations must also have a more permanent and useful purpose when Summer Fest was over."

After just a moment's 'paws' for thought, the graffiti knit artists decided that the woolly items be taken apart, re-made into blankets and donated to the ScottishSPCA to help keep the dogs and cats at the Bothwell Road re-homing centre warm and cosy.

"So, that's just what we have done and we would like to thank everyone involved for their enthusiastic and heart-warming response to our project and assure them that all their hard work, fun though it was, has gone to a very good cause indeed," added Benny.

To many, knit graffiti is joyous and whimsical, taking a traditional craft to new levels.

And it has resonated strongly



here in South Lanarkshire, as it has everywhere from London and New York to Paris and Peking.

Almost 100 people from a wide range of age groups took part in the yarn bombing project – from Girl Guides working towards their knitting and crochet badges, to a 94-year-old lady, who went along to take part and also taught the children how to



crochet. Donations of yarn arrived from loft clear-outs, from under-the-bed storage and a large

03000 999 999
scottishspca.org

YARN'S yappy ENDING



amount was bought by our knit graffiti artists from local charity shops all over South Lanarkshire.

With around 40 cats, 30 dogs, rabbits and other small animals at any one time to care for, all donations of food and bedding are gratefully received at the busy centre.

And when it came to picking a poster girl or boy to say 'thank you' on behalf of the SSPCA and all the other Bothwell Road residents for all the blankets, one gal stood out head and shoulders above the rest.

Enter Bubba stage right, who was only too happy to steal the limelight and be the star for the day.

Bubba is a lovely cross Staffie, who has been a resident at the Bothwell Road home since February this year.

She is a great big softy and has a fabulous, outgoing personality to match. "Bubba

had quite a serious weight problem when she came to us," explained Senior Animal Care Assistant Claire Aiton.

"She weighed in at 40kg and, thanks to our weight management programme, healthy eating and exercise, is now beginning to get her lovely figure back.

"She is absolutely brilliant with people and, though not so happy with other dogs, she would benefit greatly from being the

centre of attention of a loving family who

would continue her weight management programme and give her lots of exercise.

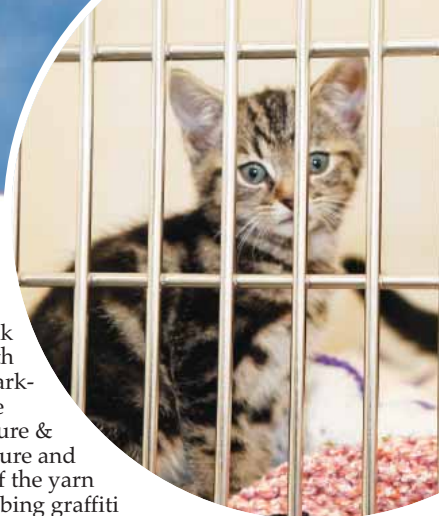
"We, on behalf of all of our wonderful cats and dogs here at Lanarkshire Animal Rescue and Rehoming centre, would like to

thank South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture and all of the yarn bombing graffiti artists for their gift to the centre.

"We are grateful for all donations, in any shape or form, to help care for the many homeless pets we look after day after day, year after year."

● If you would like more information on the work of the ScottishSPCA, how to donate or if you would like to give a pet a happy home, then please call 03000 999 999.

For more information on South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture's courses and craft classes throughout the year visit www.southlanarkshireleisure.co.uk



PICTURES BY HELEN BARRINGTON



HUBBA BUBBA:
Senior Animal Care Assistant Claire Aiton with her canine companion, Bubba, and adorable kittens, above, all of whom have been benefiting from the blanket donations

ONRIGHT

£19M IS BEING SPENT THIS FINANCIAL YEAR ON THE ROADS NETWORK, REPORTS JAMES DAVITT



ALMOST £19million is to be spent in the current financial year improving roads across South Lanarkshire's expansive network.

The council's ambitious Roads Investment Programme is now in its fifth year, with the £126million scheme continuing until 2019.

With approximately 2200km of roads in South Lanarkshire falling under its responsibility, it is the council's biggest asset, valued at around £3.2billion.

Councillor Chris Thompson, Chair of the council's Enterprise Services Committee, said: "Since the Roads Invest-

ment Plan began back in 2008, we have seen a gradual improvement year on year in the condition of our roads.

"This long-term approach to improving the condition of our roads has been commended by Audit Scotland.

"We are not complacent, however, and appreciate that much work remains to be done, particularly on minor roads, which is why we have committed additional funding of £12million per year through to 2019."

In East Kilbride, almost £250,000 was spent improving the B743 Muirkirk Road. This well-used link between South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire benefited from resurfacing and a

renewal of the road markings.

Stewartfield Way also benefited from resurfacing and road markings renewals, costing almost £190,000. Substantial improvements were also made to the A749 Kingsway, with £165,000 spent on carriageway and footway resurfacing, renewal of road markings, relocation of street lights and the installation of a Toucan pedestrian crossing.

A refuge area in the central reserve was also created to help pedestrians crossing.

The main route through the Village in East Kilbride, Stuart Street, was resurfaced and line markings renewed at a cost of £77,000.

The total cost committed to

TRACK



works in East Kilbride for 2013/14 is just under £5million.

Among the schemes completed in the Hamilton area since April was the A72, known locally as the Clyde Valley Road. Alongside the more traditional resurfacing work completed, there was also innovative slope stability repair work carried out.

This involved using “electrokinesis”, where water is driven off the slope electrically and thereafter drained conventionally.

The total cost for the scheme is anticipated to be approximately £1million and it was completed two days ahead of schedule.

Other notable schemes completed in Hamilton included

Bardykes Road, where £300,000 was spent on resurfacing, and Low Waters Road, where just over £100,000 was also spent on resurfacing.

In total, just under £5million was committed across the Hamilton area for resurfacing works during 2013/14.

More than £6.5million will be spent during the same period in the Clydesdale area.

Some of the schemes completed include the A73 Pettinain, where almost £380,000 was spent on works including drainage, kerbing and carriageway resurfacing.

Station Road in Law benefited from £130,000 spent on carriageway resurfacing and

£75,000 was spent on improving Priory Avenue in Lesmahagow, again on carriageway resurfacing.

In Rutherglen and Cambuslang, almost £2.5m has been committed to improving roads for 2013/14.

There has already been £100,000 spent on carriageway resurfacing and refreshing line markings at Blairbeth Road in Rutherglen.

And £82,000 was spent on carriageway resurfacing improvements at Lilybank Avenue in Cambuslang to improve access to newly built



primary schools. Councillor Thompson added: “We have a scoring system in place regarding resurfacing schemes that ensures roads most in need of repair are treated in order of priority.

“Regular safety inspections are carried out across South Lanarkshire and we allocate substantial funding each year to undertake safety repairs.”

Our service to you

Salt usage and spend



Due to harsh weather conditions we have increased our salt stock to allow us to keep roads open during severe weather.

Time taken to cover route



It took us less than **3.5 hours** to cover each gritting route.

Length of road network



Vehicles and equipment

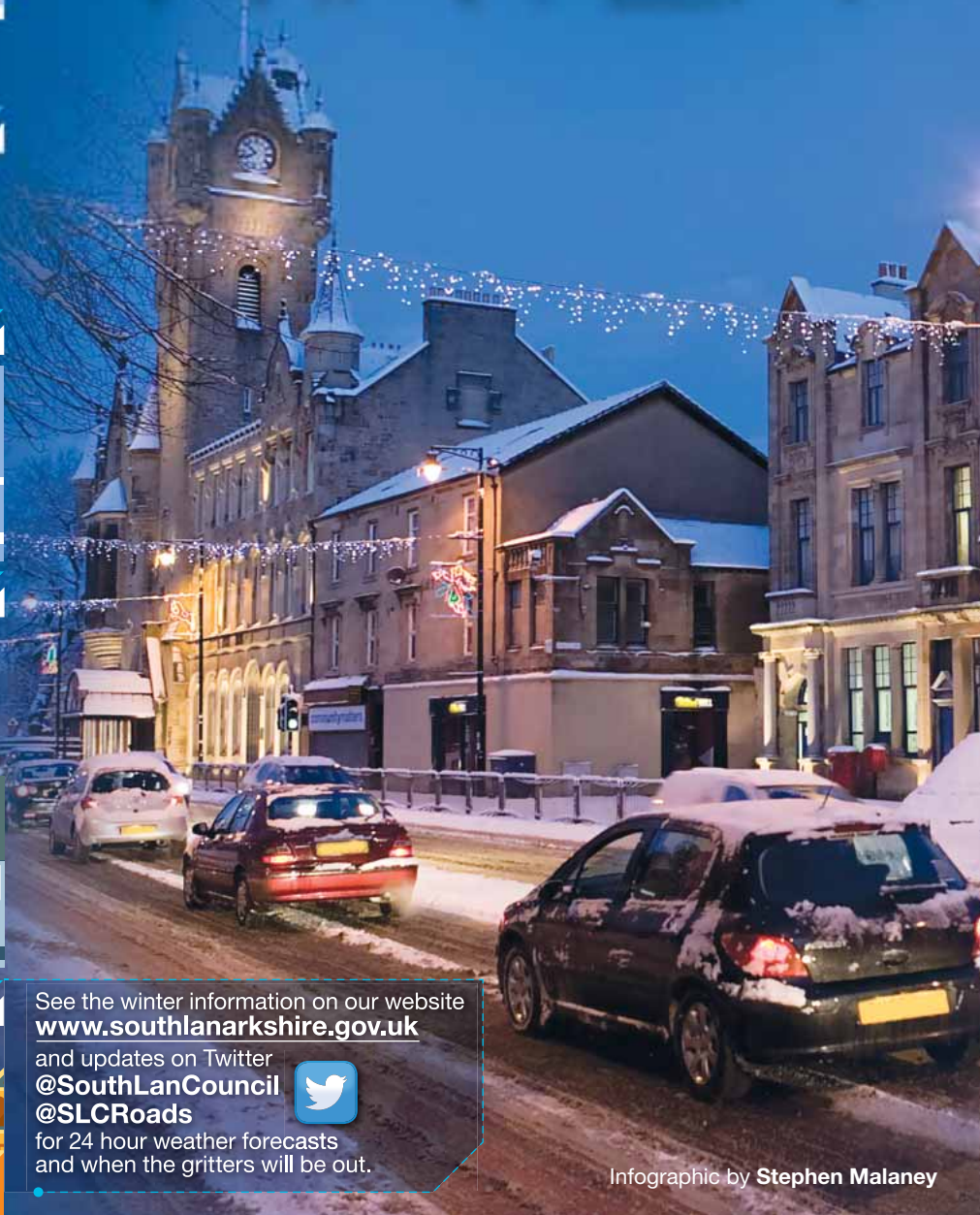
We can call on our fleet of **54 gritters**, **43 snowploughs**, **one snowblower**, **24 tractors**, **22 lorries**, **six loaders** and **200 roads workers** to salt the roads, clear snow and keep road and footpaths maintained by us in a safe condition as far as possible.



Number of grit bins



WISE UP TO WINTER



See the winter information on our website www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk

and updates on Twitter **@SouthLanCouncil** **@SLCRoads**



for 24 hour weather forecasts and when the gritters will be out.

Infographic by **Stephen Malaney**

STAY SAFE IF BIG CHILL STRIKES...

BLIZZARDS, freezing rain, fog, icy conditions and temperatures plummeting below zero – welcome to winter, *writes James Davitt*.

At one point or another, the chances are we will experience all of these conditions here in Scotland during the coming months and, if we are really unlucky, a combination of them all within a few hours.

That's why preparations for winter begin long before the first frost of the season begins to bite.

With 2287km – or 1400 miles – of road network to look after, the challenges facing South Lanarkshire Council are enormous.

Keeping the traffic moving during periods of severe weather is one of the toughest

challenges facing any local authority. And that's why resources must be targeted at the main routes across the road network.

South Lanarkshire Council will this year grit 52 per cent of the network when snow or ice is forecast, which is above the Scottish average of 44 per cent.

Chair of South Lanarkshire Council's Enterprise Services Committee, Councillor Chris Thompson, said: "Every year, we face a number of challenges as a council to combat the effects of winter.

"We are as well prepared as we can be but there may always be unique circumstances that prove to be beyond our control.

"That is why, this year, we are reiterating our message to the public to ask them to help

How to help yourself

In the car



If you have a vehicle make sure it is well prepared before winter weather sets in:

- **Be sure it has recently been serviced**
- **Check your tyres are correctly inflated and have plenty of grip**
- **Make sure you have adequate antifreeze in your radiator**
- **Check all your lights are working**
- **Replace your battery if it's not reliable.**



Consider putting in a **basic emergency kit**. This may include:

Ice scraper and de-icer, torch that works (and some spare batteries), **shovel, small bag of salt, boots, first aid kit, jump leads, local road map** (should you need to find an alternative route), **warm clothes and blankets.**

At home



Do you have a snow shovel? Footpaths in residential areas will generally not be gritted by the council, so you can help by clearing your own footpath and helping less able neighbours.

Top tips when snow arrives

● **Shovel snow using as large a blade as possible.** Making a line down the middle of your path and shovelling the snow to either side can also make things easier.

● **Use ordinary table salt on your path to stop ice forming.** Locations of grit bins are available by visiting www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk.

● **Let the sun melt the ice after you've shovelled off the snow.** This will only work if daytime temperatures are well above freezing.

themselves as much as they can. And, if they are able, we would also ask that they help out neighbours – particularly those who may be elderly or are not able to tackle shovelling snow or ice.

“The presumption has to be that roads outwith the precautionary gritting network will not be treated, other than in situations of serious hardship.”

Class A and B roads will be treated as a priority, as will rural roads in Clydesdale that are the only way in and out of towns and villages. In urban areas, district and local distributor roads will be treated, as will access routes to hospitals and vehicle access to schools.

An important factor in winter preparations is weather forecasting. The council receives

three forecasts a day from Meteogroup, Europe's largest private weather business.

The forecasts are received at 7am, noon and again at 7pm, with nine weather stations across South Lanarkshire allowing Meteogroup to provide detailed forecasts.

Gordon Mackay, Head of Roads and Transportation Services, said: “If the forecast is marginal, for example, temperatures are set to be a degree or two above freezing, it can pose us a real problem.

“With such a vast area, there can be real differences in conditions between areas. We don't take any chances, if frost is forecast we will grit but, if the temperature is marginal, we may deploy a few patrol gritters to monitor conditions as they develop.”

Keep heat up and costs low in icy weather

RISING fuel costs hit everyone in the pocket but pose particular problems to elderly people and families on low incomes.

Chair of South Lanarkshire Council's Housing and Technical Resources Committee, Councillor Alex McInnes, said: “Many of our most vulnerable members of society are facing up to the harsh realities of fuel poverty.

“As well as helping to improve the energy efficiency of our housing, through upgrading and installing heating systems, and improving the insulation through cavity and loft insulation schemes, we also help people experiencing financial difficulty by providing advice and support through our Money Matters Advice Service.

“It's also important that people recognise there are a number of things they can do themselves to help keep their home warm and domestic fuel costs down.”

The following Energy Savings Trust tips can improve the comfort of your home, save money and play a part in protecting the environment:

- 21C should be a comfortable setting for your central heating, although you may need it higher if you're elderly or infirm
- turn down the radiators in the rooms you don't use regularly
- keep doors and windows closed to seal off draughts
- keep warm by wearing several layers of clothing
- draw the curtains at night to keep the warm air in, and the cold air out
- move furniture and curtains away from the front of radiators, as they stop heat from getting out
- use low-energy light bulbs and turn off the lights in any room not in use
- only boil the water you need in a kettle – don't fill it every time
- turn TVs and computers off completely. Leaving them on standby uses 85 per cent of the energy they use when switched on. They are also a potential fire risk
- switch off phone and other chargers when not in use and don't leave appliances connected to chargers once fully charged.

Help to make your home warmer

The Energy Savings Scotland Advice Centre can help maximise your income, reduce your fuel bills and improve the energy efficiency of your home.

Services on offer include:

- free expert energy advice
- benefits and tax credit checks and advice on low-cost energy tariffs if you can't afford to heat your home
- cavity wall and loft insulation for older households and those on one of a range of benefits

● **For more info, and to see if you could benefit from any of the above, visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland or call 0800 512 012.**



ECO HOME OF THE future

WHO WOULDN'T WANT A HOME THAT PRODUCES MORE INCOME THAN IT COSTS TO HEAT EVERY YEAR? **LYNNE CARSTAIRS** REPORTS ON THE ECO SHAPE OF THE FUTURE FOR HOUSEHOLDERS

FUEL poverty is rarely far from the headlines and tackling it in today's economy is a subject of hot debate on the national political agenda.

Yet right here in South Lanarkshire, an innovative project may just have hit the Holy Grail – a carbon-zero home that generates 10 times more income than it costs to heat each year.

The award-winning 'Aurora House' is a unique four-bedroom, detached property, built within the grounds of South Lanarkshire College in East Kilbride.

Designed, delivered and funded by the college, Dawn Homes and more than 50 commercial partners – including South Lanarkshire Council – it is used for training, skills development and knowledge exchange within the industry.

The project is firmly anchored to the belief that, for approaches to lowering energy use to be effective, they need to be within the reach of all.

Thus the energy required to heat this house is a fraction of that of a conventional new home. There is no gas supply, no chimney and no electric heaters.

Neither are the technologies niche, nor ridiculously expensive but they have been designed in such a way that they can be modified or replicated by mainstream house builders.

In other words, this is no theoretical 'tomorrow's world', this is genuinely the home of the future.

Building Standards surveyors at South Lanarkshire Council are amongst the many industry partners learning from Aurora House.

Interest was first piqued when the college approached the local authority looking for advice and guidance on building regulations.

Building Standards Team Leader Alan McAuley takes up the story: "The house showcases the low-energy technologies and high insulation levels that are capable of reducing energy bills to zero.

"Through this partnership, our teams have been able to see first-hand the technologies that will be used in the very near future as part of mainstream





Building Standards surveyors Patrick Campbell and Darren Cross are convinced that the new Aurora House is the way of the future for low-cost, energy-efficient homes

new housing projects. We are all learning a great deal, giving us, as a service, a real edge in applying the new standards related to the Scottish Government's target of 'significant reductions' in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020."

The link between college and council is also boosting the knowledge and career paths of the authority's new generation of building standards surveyors, including Patrick Campbell and Darren Cross.

Both are regular visitors to Aurora and are delighted at the hands-on learning opportunities it provides.

Patrick, 28, joined South Lanarkshire earlier this year, after 10 years at neighbouring North Lanarkshire, where he completed his studies.

"The house is one of very few to be built that easily achieves the highest possible energy performance rating – an 'A' rating," he explained.

"Currently, most older housing achieves a 'D' rating and even most new housing usually achieves a 'C' rating. For us to have the chance to learn about these innovations in such a hands-on way is invaluable.

"I am confident now that I can pass on what I have learned to our customers, which will stand the service in good stead as the 'future' development of construction becomes a reality."

His colleague Darren Cross, 27, who has worked to become a surveyor after starting as an admin skillseeker a decade ago, is quick to agree.

"The Eco House visits have vastly increased my awareness of sustainable technology," said Darren.

"Seeing it up close, if you like, helps a lot when it comes back to the business of assessing developments. Not only do I have the legislation and advice on paper, I can now visualise exactly what it will look like."

Walking around the house, it seems like any other new-build show home. Although Aurora features a 'plant room', which houses all of the major components that make the house tick, these would, in reality, be

discretely incorporated into the design of a house.

Nonetheless, nothing seems futuristic or contrived, despite the many innovations that distinguish it from the pack.

These include krypton gas-filled triple glazing, sun scoops – portholes that allow light into areas of the house without windows – low-energy bricks, underfloor heating, water-saving sinks and baths, photovoltaic and thermal roof panels – all within an energy-saving timber frame design with outstanding levels of insulation.

An unobtrusive 'ground source heat exchanger' in the garden collects naturally pre-warmed air from underground and feeds it into the house.

James Jamieson, inset, is a curriculum manager in the Faculty of Construction.

A former plumbing and heating engineer, he switched to teaching 14 years ago and has been involved since the 'birth' of the Aurora House project.

His enthusiasm for the project is boundless and he genuinely wants to spread the word that this can be the home that today's generation of young people will come to expect, offsetting fuel poverty once and for all.

He explained: "What we have built here is a home in which all of the technologies are current and widely available.

"They mirror incoming building standards legislation and can comfortably be included in homes that will be affordable and attractive to all, no matter where they are on the housing ladder.

"In fact, someone buying a house like this would be in the enviable position of having net energy to sell back to the national grid each year – generating an annual income in excess of £1000.

"As it is only costing around £66 per year for energy, the sums speak for themselves.

"I am excited to think that homes like Aurora could be the norm in a few short years, and that the next generation of homebuyers will benefit from technology that, only a decade or so ago, seemed implausible."



AN ICONIC BUILDING IS RESTORED TO ITS FORMER GLORY, AS BEFITS ITS..

GRAND DESIGN

Report by Mhairi Anderson / Pictures by Anne-Janine Nugent

ONE of South Lanarkshire's most iconic buildings has been returned to its former glory after a £5.35million face lift.

Lanark Memorial Hall reopened in June after undergoing extensive renovation and repair.

South Lanarkshire Council was determined from the outset to ensure a sympathetic restoration and upgrade of the prominent three-storey building to ensure that it retained its historic features.

The project was funded by the council with help from a Heritage Lottery Fund award of £199,000 and £127,500 from Historic Scotland.

Councillor Hamish Stewart, chair of the Community Services Committee and chair of the Board of South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture, acknowledges the project took much longer to complete than planned but is delighted with the results.

"This wonderful building is once again a focal point for the community, with fantastic new facilities to be enjoyed," he said.

"Legal agreements were a little more complicated than was anticipated. Ground works, too, were affected at critical points in the project by extremely wet summers and unusually long, cold winters.

"And unforeseen ground conditions led to the steelwork of the new-build part having to be redesigned during the project."

Internally, upgrading work has included the installation of a new sound and lighting system, IT equipment, replacing furnishings and fittings, including kitchen and bar facilities.

Externally, detailed landscaping has been carried out, as well as improvements to the fabric of the iconic building.

The Grade B-listed Lanark Memorial Hall is steeped in history. Not only is it an important landmark for the people of South Lanarkshire, it has been a focal point for many years as a meeting place and cultural venue for the people of the town and wider area.

The foundation stone for the hall was laid in 1925 and the building itself was erected in 1926, as a tribute to the men of Lanark and district who lost their lives during the First World War.

Now the much-loved venue has once again become a popular community hub and cultural venue for the people of Lanark and visitors alike.

A very popular feature is the electronic kiosk, above, that enables visitors to research their local heritage.

● Visit www.slleisureandculture.co.uk for info on the full range of activities and shows coming up at Lanark Memorial Hall.



MEETING the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs ...

This is the eloquent definition of sustainable development by a leading international commission and it encapsulates perfectly South Lanarkshire Council's ethos on sustainability.

The council's updated Sustainable Development Strategy seeks to reconcile the three recognised pillars of sustainability, namely environmental, social and economic development.

Balancing these three key elements to enable the local community to thrive sustainably is the golden thread running through all of the council's plans, policies and developments.

As a council, South Lanarkshire leads by example, knowing that it can influence the actions of residents and local business to embrace sustainable behaviour.

Thus the core themes of the strategy include:

- **Sustainable Council** that considers its own impact on the environment and what it will do with its staff and partners to minimise it
- **Sustainable Environment** that considers the quality of the local environment and what the council is doing to protect and enhance it for local people
- **Sustainable Communities** that considers how the council will help local communities to be more sustainable and be better prepared for Scotland's future low-carbon economy.

The council's sustainability strategy can be seen in action across the broad spectrum of its services from waste management, to glass recycling, to sustainable energy and fuel, expanding cycle routes and electric cars, to park-and-ride and walk-to-school schemes, to name but only a few.

The updated strategy has been developed through consultation with a wide range of people from all sectors of society.

These include community groups, businesses, young people, schools, the youth council and the Scottish Youth Parliament, a range of organisations and sustainability partnership members.

There was also input from the Citizens' Panel survey, which helps the council to understand residents' needs and priorities.

Chair of Community Services, Councillor Hamish Stewart, said: "This strategy is relevant to everyone who lives and works in South Lanarkshire and we will work with partners, local businesses and communities to enable the people of South Lanarkshire to live more sustainably and enjoy the benefits of a high-quality environment.

"We recognise that sustainable development is about improving the environment for both current and future generations.

"And our starting point is to be environmentally responsible in the way we deliver services.

"The council has a key role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment on which, ultimately, we all depend for our health and wellbeing.

"The way we plan for local development, provide housing, promote sustainable transport, manage waste and help our children learn about the environment has a big impact on the ability of local people to live more sustainably."

MOVING HEAVEN & earth TO SAVE PLANET

THE COUNCIL'S NEW, UPDATED SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY AIMS TO ALLOW THE ENVIRONMENT TO THRIVE, AS MHAIRI ANDERSON REPORTS

DEADLY COCKTAIL

A TIDE OF ILLICIT BOOZE IS POSING A SERIOUS HEALTH RISK TO PEOPLE UNAWARE OF THE GRAVE RISKS THEY ARE RUNNING. HERE, **LYNNE CARSTAIRS** REPORTS ON THE DANGERS, NOT JUST OF HOOCH, BUT OF FAKE FAGS AND, FOR ALL PARENTS, POTENTIALLY LETHAL TOYS

IT seems just too good a bargain to pass up – a couple of bottles of vodka for a good few quid less than usual.

It would be daft not to – except a couple of shots of this vodka is likely to leave you with permanent kidney or liver damage, or even kill you.

Still think it's too good to pass up?

Yet thousands of Britons do risk their lives every day by drinking fake booze in a racket worth £1billion a year.

Little do they realise that the fake booze, often 51 per cent proof, is in fact a lethal cocktail of the industrial alcohol used in cleaning fluids and anti-freeze.

One of its deadliest ingredients is methanol and just a tiny drop alone can destroy the optic nerve.

Bootleg booze is a massive problem across Britain and, in September, right here in South Lanarkshire, a task force, led by HMRC (Revenue and Customs) and backed by the council's Consumer and Trading Standards, netted 1570 litres of beer, 1880 litres of wine and 1282 litres of spirits during a crackdown.

The aim of the inter-agency initiative was to target the illicit alcohol supply chain – from those producing and storing it, to the retailers and wholesalers selling it on to the public.

Where there are concerns about the legitimacy or origin of the alcohol itself – whether it's fake – Environmental Health seize and test the suspect product.

It is a team effort that, at its core, is designed to protect the consumer.

Councillor Hamish Stewart, Chair of Community Services, warned the problem of moonshine had reached massive proportions.

"In towns and cities across the UK, there are illicit distilleries being run by organised

criminal gangs on a huge scale," explained Councillor Stewart.

"And the product is distributed throughout the UK. Consumers here are also the targets of product being brought into the UK from 'unknown' sources.

"The ingredients in fake vodka can lead to catastrophic consequences for those consuming it – the deadliest ingredient in the majority of fake spirits is methanol.

"But, for the bootleggers, it's cheap to use while its poisonous effects can take hours to show.

"At the very least, victims will suffer bouts of severe abdominal pain. But, ultimately, it could be fatal."

Chris Brett, HMRC's Alcohol Taskforce manager in Scotland, said: "The South Lanarkshire operation was part of ongoing work with our partner agencies to target the illicit alcohol supply chain.

"We are committed to stopping this criminal activity, which costs the taxpayer around £1.2billion in unpaid revenue each year.

"Taskforces are specialist teams that undertake intensive bursts of activity in specific high-risk trade sectors and locations across the UK.

"The alcohol taskforce alone is expected to bring in around £4million."

Another money spinner for organised crime gangs is fake fags.

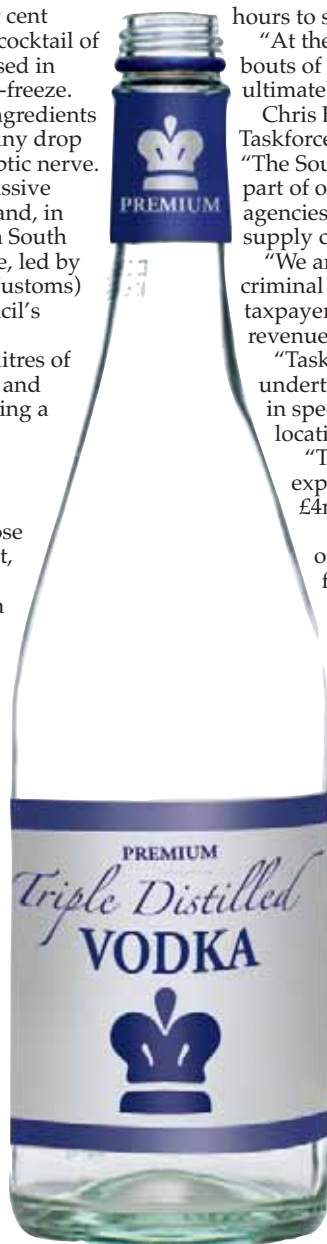
Smokers can often be tempted by cheap, counterfeit cigarettes in the belief it's a victimless crime that saves them hard cash.

But just like fake booze, counterfeit fags are laced with highly poisonous ingredients and highly unsafe levels of tar.

An estimated one million fake fags are seized in the UK every day with smokers unaware of the risks involved.

Councillor Stewart revealed: "What we're increasingly seeing is that, as supply lines have been disrupted by agencies such as our own, it has become difficult and more expensive for the international smuggling gangs to get their hands on genuine cigarettes.

"As a result, they are starting to manufacture their own fake versions in 'factories'



● BOOTLEG BOOZE CAN LEAVE YOU **BLIND**

● **METHANOL** FOUND IN MOONSHINE VODKA

using tobaccos contaminated with much higher levels of tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide and lead than genuine brands.

"It is near impossible to tell from the outside packaging whether you are buying fakes or not, even if they have health warnings and a tax stamp."

A recent investigation by the University of St Andrews revealed substantial contamination in counterfeit cigarettes by heavy metals, including the human carcinogens cadmium and arsenic.

Added Councillor Stewart: "This is a very worrying find for the health of those who are heavy and habitual smokers of counterfeit cigarettes.

"And, that is why, together with our partners in the Health Service, Customs and Excise and Police, we want to stamp out this nasty and potentially deadly trade."

Counterfeiters are increasingly sophisticated and, in some instances, it can be almost impossible to distinguish the fake from the real deal.

However, under close scrutiny, consumers should be looking out for the following:

ALCOHOL

- Spelling mistakes on the label
- Bottles of the same product looking different

- Bottles not filled to same level

- Label not straight

- Smell of nail varnish

CIGARETTES

- An unusual or unexpected taste

- Spelling mistakes and altered logos

- Low-quality labels and packaging

- Foreign safety warnings or no health warnings at all

- Often sold in street markets, car boot sales and pubs

- Most copied brands are Super Kings, Benson & Hedges, Lambert & Butler, Camel, Embassy Number 1, Embassy Regal and Golden Virginia tobacco.

In fact, for the consumer tempted by a bargain or two, there is little untouched by the counterfeiter.

And, as the festive season approaches, shoppers are being urged to be wary of a growing 'discount' market

flooded with fakes. Toy stores have announced their "must-have" toys for Christmas.

Kids' favourites for this year include a Furby Boom, Sesame Street Big Hugs Elmo, LeapPad Ultra, Nerf Elite Rapid-strike CS-18 and Flutterbye Flying Fairy.

And, if parents were to fork out for all 12 toys, they would have to part with close to £500 based on the recommended retail price of each.

No wonder then that, in such difficult financial times, many hard-pressed parents look for alternatives.

Unfortunately, Trading Standards officers fear that this factor will play into the hands of those selling fakes and forgeries.

The biggest concern is over small parts that can become easily detached and present a choking risk to youngsters. Paints or chemicals used might also not be within safe limits.

So the team is warning all consumers to be vigilant, as saving money could mean risking safety.

Councillor Stewart added: "There is no doubt that some of the top-end toys could prove expensive, particularly with those families on a tight budget.

"Manufacturers, retailers and consumer bodies, such as ourselves, are working together to keep the fraudsters at bay but the risk posed by fake goods, particularly toys, remains.

"In essence, if a price seems too good to be true, then it usually is.

"I fully understand the desire to save money at this time of year but safety should always be the first priority."

"As a general rule it's worth remembering that the CE mark is the benchmark

for toy safety across

Europe.

"If a toy doesn't have this, don't buy it!"





THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR
FOSTER CHILDREN OF ALL AGES,

FAMILY

THERE are children from babies to teenagers in South Lanarkshire right now who need a family for the chance to get the best out of life.

And the council's Family Placement Team is keen to speak to anyone interested in adoption or fostering.

The team is being supported in its recruitment drive by local people who have successfully adopted a child, or who are involved in fostering.

Among them are adoptive mothers, Michelle and Lyndsay.

"When someone calls you 'Mummy', you've just got to be their mother", said young South Lanarkshire mum Michelle, when she was asked to consider what adopting her son had brought to her life.

For Michelle and her husband, adoption was the natural choice when they discovered they couldn't have children and, in their case, the process from application to bringing home their son took just under a year.

"When we applied, the process seemed a bit nerve-racking but, when we contacted South Lanarkshire Council, they did so much to let us know what to expect and walked us through the whole thing, that it all seemed to fall into place very naturally," she explained.

"There are a lot of questions and research but, when you see how hard they work to make sure they match the right parents to the right children, you realise it is worth it.

"The classes we attended helped us understand why children need adoption, to think about issues they face growing up and about the situation of children in care.

"It was during those classes that we first read our son's profile and we knew straight away he was our perfect match."

And three years ago, the couple adopted sisters aged three and four.

"We had originally thought of adopting a baby but then we were given approval for one or two children up to the age of four," explained Michelle. "We put a lot of careful thought into it and even made a list of pros and cons of having two children.

"But the adoption service clearly knew what they were doing, because we just can't imagine the girls with any other family."

Michelle admitted the assessment process was very thorough.

She added: "But having been through it, we realise how important it is to fully engage with it.

"The team is very committed to ensuring families are well matched and that does help reassure you that they are helping you get it right."

Of course, life has changed considerably since the two young sisters came into their lives and, according to Michelle, all for the better.

"I can't remember what it was like having five minutes to myself or not having to pack a survival kit to go out for dinner," Lyndsay joked. "But the girls are most

MATTERS

definitely worth it. We gave them a safe, loving home when we adopted them but we can't even start to quantify what we are receiving in return."

And Michelle has no hesitation in encouraging others to also consider adoption.

"It is sad that some people, who can't have children but want them, won't even consider adoption," she said.

"There are families out there who could give a child in care a permanent family and, I promise, that what that child can give back is more than you can possibly imagine."

But for some children and young people, it's not a new family they need but a safe and supportive place to stay when it is clear they can not remain at home.

The reasons for this can range from parental illness to an unsafe environment and it is in these circumstances that foster carers provide a vital service.

Phil, who has been providing foster care for 25 years, said: "In all the years, I have never had a child who has been in care because they have been in trouble.

"And whether they come for six days, six weeks or six years, you know you can give them memories for life."

Phil and fellow foster carers, Gladys and Gill, have, along with their families, found themselves specialising in fostering teenagers.

Gladys explained: "I decided to foster older children because I love the interaction you get with them.

"You can really talk about issues that crop up and they keep you young, active and in touch.

"By showing these children and young people what life can offer, taking them on holidays and trips, giving them a chance to live in a nice, safe home, you can instil a work ethic and aspiration that will give them a chance to succeed in life."

All three foster carers agree that the support they receive from Social Work on an ongoing basis is very important.

"The support you get from Social Work is second to none, said Gill. "They are always at the end of the phone when you need them.

"And, over the years, the training they offer has just kept improving, both in quality and in how they make sure the training you get is right for your situation."

In addition to what might be described as 'traditional' foster care arrangements, South Lanarkshire Council is also keen to recruit people to deliver more specialised Intensive Fostering, a scheme that can offer a real lifeline to children facing some of the worst life chances.

● **If you think you could be a child's future, please phone the family placement team on 01698 454895 between 8.45am and 4.45pm, Monday to Friday, or email familyplacement@southlanarkshire.gov.uk.**





PLAY THE ACE CARD



NEW LEISURE CARD IS THE KEY TO ARTS, EXERCISE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNGSTERS, REPORTS **ANNIE STUART**

ACE memberships can be bought at 20 sport and physical activity venues, four cultural venues and six golf courses around South Lanarkshire – for info visit www.slleisureandculture.co.uk. ACE membership is available for young people aged 16 and under. A 50 per cent concession is available for Leisure for All cardholders. A 20 per cent discount is also offered for the siblings of one full-paying child, or for a child that is already a swimming lesson member. Once your ACE membership is activated, you can book ACE activities by calling or visiting your local leisure centre or cultural venue.

DUNCAN Buchanan and Liam Docherty have a schedule that would leave most people exhausted.

“Monday is dodge ball night and, on Saturday mornings, we’ve got camera club, and I’m learning guitar,” explains the 10-year-old.

“I’m on the waiting list for guitar, too, and, sometimes, we just go and play pitch and putt or tennis,” adds Liam, who is 11.

Add in swimming, the occasional game of badminton, athletics and drums, and it’s a wonder the boys manage to find time to go to school and catch up with their families every once in a while.

The two boys, from East Kilbride, are making excellent use of South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture’s new ACE card, a groundbreaking initiative that Gerry Campbell, SLLC general manager, believes is a first in Scotland.

“We provide a wide range of services to different customer groups in South Lanarkshire, and we had been considering introducing a junior membership,” he explained.

“We had looked at several ways to do this but realised it was a perfect opportunity to engage with our customers and ask them directly what they thought of an inclusive membership for arts and sports activities.”

Gerry adds: “We carried out an extensive consultation process, involving 304 users and non-users of cultural and leisure facilities and the results were overwhelmingly in favour.”

A working group was set up to put the idea into practice, bringing together the best activities for this age group – including dance, drama, music, songwriting, arts and crafts, new media, swimming, racquet sports and fitness classes – in an affordable package.

ACE, which stands for Arts Culture Exercise, was launched at the Get Active Lanarkshire Event on June 1 and, according to Gerry, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

“The health and wellbeing benefits of taking part in sport and arts activities are well documented,” he added.

“One of the biggest advantages of making ACE an affordable package that brings together sporting and cultural activities is that more young people can get access to them.

“We often see young people attending several arts classes before

they find what’s right for them. As far as we know, no one else is doing anything like this in Scotland.

“It is innovative, exciting and we believe will really help families and young people access the services available to them.

“That was the key aim for us and it is already having a significant effect.”

Duncan’s mum, Catherine, and Liam’s mum, Debbie, are both impressed by the ACE card.

“It is fantastic value, which really matters when you have several children who all want to do different activities,” explains Catherine, an administration assistant who has two older sons, Mathew, 15 and 14-year-old Conor.

“I know with the ACE card, that the £21.20 comes out of my bank account at the start of the month, and I don’t have to worry about it. It’s great at this time of year, coming into autumn and winter, when the kids won’t get outside so much.

“When they’re a bit fed up, and it’s raining, they can go and use up their energy playing a game of badminton, or go for a swim, and that’s all included in the cost.”

Catherine adds: “Duncan is always on the go and he loves to try different things. I think it’s important to encourage children to experience different sports and activities when

they are young and, hopefully,

fully, it will keep them active and healthy as they get older. “But the cost can mount up, so the ACE card really helps with that.”

Debbie Docherty agrees: “It’s a fantastic price when you consider that so many different activities are included.

“Once Liam had signed up for the card and I realised what good value it was, I also got one for my other son, Jack, who is three.

“He was doing a gymnastics course and I realised that, for roughly the same price I was paying for that, he could do so much more with the ACE card.”

Jack is now enthusiastically enjoying a bounce class, gymnastics and football.

“The boys love trying out new things but they probably would not have been able to do everything if it hadn’t been for the ACE card – it just becomes too expensive,” adds Debbie.

“One of the biggest benefits is the flexibility. You’re not tying yourself into lengthy, expensive contracts, where you feel under pressure to buy expensive equipment, and the kids end up stuck doing something they don’t really enjoy. If they decide they don’t really like the activity, it’s easy to stop and change to something else.

“For example, Liam and Duncan tried athletics to begin with but didn’t enjoy it as much as they had thought they would. So they switched to dodge ball and they love it.” As Liam and Duncan

approach secondary school age, both Catherine and

Debbie are conscious of the benefits of keeping them occupied and active.

“The ACE card helps you to lay the groundwork for what’s ahead,” says Debbie.

“You don’t want them getting to high school and hanging

around, doing nothing. “Hopefully, by encouraging them to get involved in different activities, they’ll find the ones they love the most and stick with them.”

Catherine agrees: “It’s great because it combines arts, culture and sport, so

they can do a whole range of things across the three areas. The next thing Duncan wants to try is drama, while Liam is on the waiting list for guitar lessons.”

She smiles: “We’re just not entirely sure where they are going to fit it all in!”



MUSICAL MEMORIES

PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DEMENTIA ARE UNITED BY THE POWER OF SONG THANKS TO NEW CHOIR, AS EUAN DUGUID REPORTS

THE melodic verses of the haunting sea shanty, *Lowlands Away*, drift through the bustling streets of Hamilton town centre.

It's Wednesday morning and inside the sanctuary of St John's church hall, Musical Memories Choir carefully rehearse the powerful lament.

But this is no ordinary choral group.

The lives of all the assembled are, in some way, affected by dementia.

Many are currently coping with the early stages of the condition.

Others are close family and friends who have adopted a full-time caring role.

All are united by the power of music.

"Singing has been shown to have a highly beneficial impact for people with dementia, both in terms of mental stimulation and social support," Musical Memories Chairperson Anna Neill explained, over pre-practice tea and assorted biscuits.

"Learning a few verses is an achievable challenge because they have the support of the group.

"There are people here who have never sung before but the choir has become the highlight of their week."

From novices to seasoned baritones, the male and female members are expertly led by Shona Brown, a professional musician with a voice – and an infectious zeal – that fills the

hall. Since the choir's inception two years ago, Shona, of SoundRoutes, has been teaching songs ranging from Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World* to *Drunken Sailor*.

Today, the songstress effortlessly shifts the group's tempo from the mournful *Lowlands Away* to Johnny Cash's energy-packed *Jackson*.

The resonating vocal versatility sets a fitting audible backdrop to a bold, new chapter in the choir's existence.

Teeda Boyd, formerly a Dementia Advisor of Alzheimer Scotland, was responsible for forming the choir – as a pilot project – in 2011.

Today, Teeda, in her role as Locality Development Officer for Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire (VASLan), has been key to helping the choir become a permanent fixture – and in control of its own destiny.

"When the choir was set up it was paid for by a donation from Hamilton Bowling Club and kept going by other donations," explained Teeda.

"Since March this year, they have become a fully constituted group enabling them to make a successful funding application to the Lottery."

Teeda's provided support and training to enable the choir to become independent and constituted as part of VASLan's vital work in the nationwide Reshaping Care for Older People (RCOP) programme.

RCOP is looking at ways to



support the growing numbers of people aged 65 years and over, focusing on providing more care and supports at home and in the community.

Teeda added: "As part of RCOP, we are also looking to help local people and groups develop and contribute to the services and support their community needs.

"My role here has been to work with the choir, to help them get established and to get some funding so they can run as a group on their own.

"It's giving them the direct control to shape their future and provide vital support to those who need it most."

The innovative work comes at a vital time.

Over the next six years, there is expected to be 25 per cent more older people who may need some sort of assistance to live well in their own homes.

In response, RCOP is combining the expertise of third sector organisations, such as VASLan, with partner agencies, including NHS Lanarkshire, North and South Lanarkshire Councils and the independent sector.

Key partners – including South Lanarkshire Council – are now able to refer people affected



by dementia, and their carers, to the choir for extra support.

Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Advisor James McStay also continues to support the choir through his presence at the weekly practice. He is available to provide information and advice about all aspects of dementia to the members.

Jack Pennie, 84, who is affected by the early stages of the condition, is feeling the direct benefit.

"I've been in the choir for two years and it's certainly helped me with my memory," said the former furniture sales manager.

"We have song sheets but we try to remember the words. Everyone is working together – at the end of the day music is the main focus and we're very supportive of each other."

Jack added: "Being part of the choir has been a huge boost because dementia can be a frightening condition. You can quickly feel alone but being among others in the same boat has been a huge comfort to me."

Jack's wife Sally, 79, is his main carer and she, too, has found solace in singing.

"It's good to meet other people in similar situations," Sally explained. "The singing means everyone has something

in common and it's an immediate icebreaker.

"Dementia can be a frightening prospect for the carer, too, and, again, having people around you who have complete empathy is a huge support."

Musical Memories meet every Wednesday morning and is currently practising hard for a number of private bookings towards the end of this year.

● If you would either like to book or join Musical Memories contact Anna Neill on 07751602648 or 01555 660329.

And you can see the choir in action on YouTube by following this link <http://bit.ly/1c7H87N>

DOOR-TO-DOOR BUS SERVICE IS A VITAL LIFELINE FOR ISOLATED RESIDENTS

A door-to-door bus service is providing a crucial lifeline for vulnerable members of the community who may otherwise feel isolated in their own homes.

The MyBus initiative aims to reach those who live in remote areas, the elderly, or with a disability, who find accessing public transport generally difficult.

It is a wheelchair-accessible service that can be booked in advance and aims to give people greater freedom and independence at the click of a mouse or simple phone call.

South Lanarkshire Councillor, and SPT Vice Chair, Denis McKenna said: "This vital service makes a real difference to the communities it serves.

"The eye-catching orange livery is easy to spot and the service is even easier to book.

"I would encourage anyone in South Lanarkshire, who hasn't considered it before, to give it a go.

"If you live in a rural area poorly served by public transport or if you are having difficulty using conventional bus services, you should really take advantage of this excellent door-to-door facility."

Run by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), MyBus is a free service for Strathclyde Concession holders.

It is a bookable bus service that takes customers directly from their home to their destination and can be used for shopping, visiting friends, attending local clubs, GP appointments, hospital visits and much more.

It can also meet users from train stations that have wheelchair access.

The driver can help them on and off the bus but not into or out of their home. Users can, however, take along a friend to help them.

Bookings can be made up to two hours before travelling but it is recommended that users book the day before.

Please remember to have destination and date to hand when booking.

Before using the service you must hold a Strathclyde Concessionary travel card and register with the MyBus service.

● **More information and application forms are available from Q and A offices, at Strathclyde Partnership for Transport offices or by phoning 0845 128 4025.**



PEOPLE *helping* PEOPLE

COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE TO HIGH-INTEREST LENDERS AND BIG, HIGH STREET INSTITUTIONS IS ATTRACTING INCREASING NUMBERS OF NEW CUSTOMERS, AS **ANNIE STUART** REPORTS

THEY are known all over the country as the 'people's bank' and, for many, they are a route out of debt and despair.

Credit unions provide accessible savings, low-cost loans and other financial services in local communities.

They are community-based, not-for-profit financial co-operatives, managed and run by volunteers and staff.

Credit unions are not just for people who are struggling financially – they also appeal to those who want to bank ethically and benefit their community.

There are five credit unions in South Lanarkshire – Cambuslang, Hamilton, W.H.E.B Credit union in Burnbank, East Kilbride and Blantyre and South Lanarkshire Credit union.

All have their own policies and guidelines but, generally, the rule of thumb is the same.

To join, you must save regularly for a set amount of time, after which you can borrow on the strength of your savings.

Ian Burnett, below, is manager of Blantyre and South Lanarkshire Credit Union, which is the biggest in the area with around 13,400 members.

"We're known as the 'people's bank' and we are run by a board of directors who are all volunteers," explains Ian.

"Our tagline is 'people helping people' – it's not about competing with banks, because we simply don't have the resources to do that, it's about helping the people within our communities to manage their money."

BSL Credit Union opened its doors in 1991 and shortly after extended its reach to cover Uddingston and Bothwell.

From 2009, it has welcomed members from all over South Lanarkshire, working in partnership with a number of other organisations, such as Citizens Advice, local housing associations, employability groups and NHS Lanarkshire.

Recently named as one of the UK's top 30 community credit unions, it has distributed £35million worth of loans over the past 22 years and, this financial year alone, it has granted £4million and has helped members save £9.5million.

"When I joined in 2006, we had around 2000 adult members and 400 juniors, and we now have 10,000 adults and around 3400 young people, so it has expanded enormously," explains Ian.

The growth is due in part, he believes, to a shift in attitudes towards credit unions.

"The credit union used to suffer from a bit of an image problem," he smiles. "People saw it, unfairly, as a 'poor person's bank', or somewhere for older people.

"The truth is that most members are ordinary, working people and families from all walks of life.

"Our members are owners, too, as they receive a £1 share in the credit union when they join. And they know their money is safe with us." Ian adds: "There is a growing

awareness of the services we provide. When we first opened our doors, we offered one loan and one savings account.

"Now, we have a variety of products and services on offer, including an ordinary savings account linked to a loan, an instant access account, a pre-paid debit card and a Christmas savings account."

Work done by credit unions in local schools is having a considerable impact on attitudes to debt in the community.

At Blantyre, a dedicated project officer has been working with 27 primary and secondary schools across South Lanarkshire in a bid to get more young people involved.

"The aim is to change thinking from a debt culture to a savings culture, and that starts with young people," explains Ian.

"Our project officer helps schoolchildren set up their own credit union – effectively they 'apply' for the jobs as volunteers and tellers, then run it themselves. It's like a giant piggy bank and very successful."

He smiles: "I spent some time on one of the interview panels and I was amazed by the confidence shown by the children involved – they were fantastic.

"And, if they develop good attitudes towards money and savings, the hope is they will stay with us and become adult members in the future.

"There will also be a knock-on effect in the wider community, as they encourage good habits at home and other family members get involved. We look after people from cradle to grave – the only thing we do not have is the resources to provide mortgages."

As welfare cuts and issues, such as the bedroom tax and Universal Credit continue to have an impact on people, Ian predicts credit unions will become even more sought-after.

"Our aim is to provide what our community needs," he says. "We'd love to see more professional people join our board, to help us turn our vision into reality.

"We're not here to chase or hound people, we will sit down with them and agree a repayment plan that suits them.

"We have all been in similar situations at some point in our lives, so we are willing to listen to people and that puts them at ease.

"They know they are not faced with high-paid whizz kids but, instead, ordinary people, like them,

from their own community." He adds: "And I like to think we go the extra mile for our customers.

"The most unusual loan request we have received was from a woman saving up to obtain a loan to have fertility treatment.

"Happily, she received her loan and had the IVF treatment and there was a successful outcome."

Ian adds: "Sometimes, people come in for our help but, really, they need support of a different kind. We work in partnership with other organisations, so we can refer them to the right place.

"A gentleman, who came to us following our partnership working with a local housing association, needed to fund a new bed.

"He had mobility problems – so we also arranged to pick up the bed, deliver to him, and take away his old one. That's what I mean by going the extra mile."

One of the credit union's most successful products in recent years has been its Freedom loan, now known as Freedom2, which encourages people to move away from high-interest doorstep lenders and payday loans.

So far, more than £800,000 in Freedom2 loans have been granted to around 3400 people and the savings to members, compared to what they would have spent on expensive high-interest loans, is estimated at around £669,000.

Ian explains: "That is money in our members' pockets, spent in the local community.

"We have also worked out that those people, some of whom have never saved in their lives, have banked savings of £142,000.

"Recently, a lady who had a Freedom2 loan approached us to ask if she could top it up to borrow for Christmas."

Ian smiles: "It turned out she had actually paid off the loan three months ago, and was saving money.

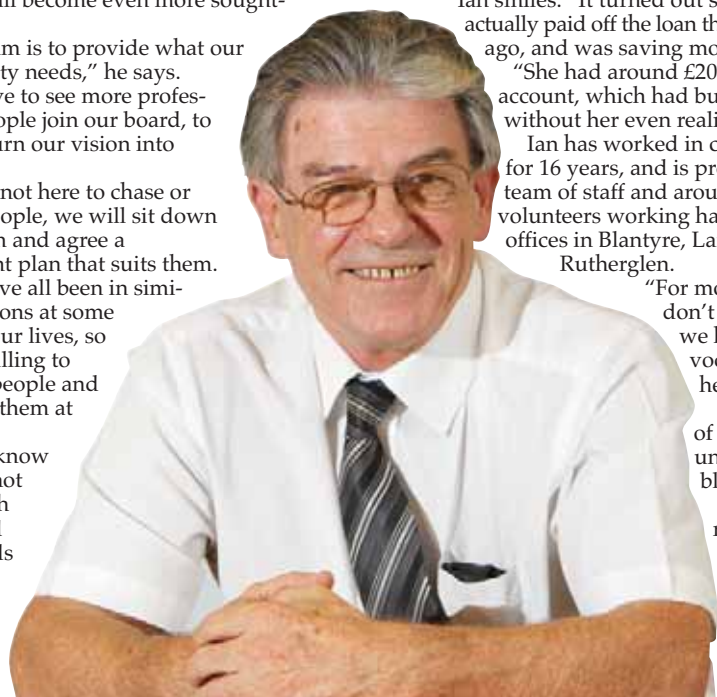
"She had around £200 in her account, which had built up without her even realising it."

Ian has worked in credit unions for 16 years, and is proud of the team of staff and around 30 volunteers working hard in their offices in Blantyre, Larkhall and Rutherglen.

"For most of us, we don't have jobs, we have vocations," he says.

"The ethos of the credit union is in our blood."

"You really have to believe in what you are doing to work here."



WRITE *At Home*

RESIDENT CHRONICLES MANY HAPPY YEARS
SPENT IN SHELTERED HOUSING COMMUNITY



BY ANDY LIVINGSTONE

IF anyone is ever in any doubt about the benefits of living in sheltered housing, they need only talk to Andrew Aitken.

Physically, he is healthy and full of life, both on foot and behind the wheel of his car. Mentally, he is just as active, not only completing word puzzles and sudokus on a daily basis but even keeping in touch with his family through his iPad.

He is articulate and considerate in conversation, whether chatting about everyday life or recalling stories from decades before.

He is a great advert for someone in their 80s. Except that Mr Aitken is 94.

A resident of Waverley Court in Bothwell for an impressive 34 years, he has enjoyed every minute of his time there and has even credited the experience of living in sheltered housing with extending his, and his late wife's, longevity.

"Before we came here we lived in an area where everyone else was working," he explained. "Sheila, my wife, was in a wheelchair and had MS, and I was retired, but there was no one around us during the day. It was no life.

"Then our local councillor, Theresa Maxwell, suggested Waverley Court to us, and coming here transformed everything. I am certain it put at least 10 years on my wife's life because, suddenly, we had company.

"There were things going on and people around us to take our attention, and that makes a huge difference. There has always been a great atmosphere in the community here. Everyone has looked out for each other and got on well.

"And there is a very nice community hall where there is constantly something to look forward to.

"For instance, there are lunch clubs on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we have a meeting on a Monday when we arrange entertainers to visit, or organise a bus for a trip to, say, Lanark Loch, where we like to go about twice a year.

"This year, we will hopefully go to the Falkirk Wheel – I have been before and it is wonderful. We play cards and dominoes, and I love watching Countdown each day – especially the numbers part of the show – it helps that I was a teacher of Maths and Science, of course." He tapped his head: "The important thing is to keep your brain active. "After all, if you don't use it, you lose it."

According to Andrew, that's what made the move into sheltered housing so



valuable for the couple. There is always something for residents to do, whether in their own home or with the people around them.

"I'll always be grateful for the extra years it gave my wife," said Andrew. "Once you get older, it is easy to get stuck in the house, so it is great to have so many activities right on your doorstep that get people out and mixing with each other."

His relationship with his wife spanned most of his life and is a storybook tale of two people who were meant to be together. They met as children through a group run by the church choirmaster, Mr Jones.

Andrew was a boy soprano and Sheila, whose mother played the piano for them, was in the chorus.

There was a smile in his eyes as he remembered the first time he spoke to her.

"The principals would be taken out to church halls to do performances and, the first time that we met up for one of those, I saw that Sheila had a case for her outfit. I offered to carry it for her and she said, 'No!'"

Andrew laughed: "It didn't put me off, though. We started going out when we were 14. I went to Uddingston Grammar, and she was at Hamilton Academy, and my train would come in 10 minutes earlier than her one at the end of the day.

"I used to wait till she arrived and then carry her schoolbag home for her.

"When my mother found out, she was furious at such behaviour. I had been seen carrying a girl's bag in public. I apologised – but I didn't stop carrying her bag."

While he was serving for the six years of WWII with the RAF as an amouner / fitter, Andrew and Sheila were married and the pair went on to spend the next 56 years together. Sadly, Sheila passed away 13 years ago.

A host of wonderful memories were gathered in that time, many of them captured for posterity in an unusual but evocative fashion – a book that Andrew compiled during his time at Waverley Court.

It is much like a diary or log of his time there, containing anything that reflects the small community living there over the past 34 years. It includes everything from photographs and newspaper cuttings, to meticulously recorded details of the names of every person who has lived there, together with the date they arrived.

"It came about because, when we first came here, I said to my wife that we didn't know anyone, so the most important thing was that we had to fit in," he said. "So I started this diary – it was a way of becoming part of the life of the people here and helped us feel like we belonged to the place from the start.

"It has continued over the years and I still keep it up-to-date even now. There are a lot of happy memories in these pages."

The happy atmosphere at Waverley Court is something Andrew holds dear.

"I don't think you would find anyone here who would say anything against it," he said. "People help each other, look out for each other and get on with each other. That is what is important – that is what makes a place home."

MEMORY LANE:

Tenant Andrew Aitken has lived in the same sheltered property for more than three decades and has gathered a host of happy memories, chronicled in a diary he has kept since the day he moved in, including precious photos of Sheila, above, with some of the friends they made over the years

THE *people's* PARK

THE SCOTTISH PUBLIC HAS SPOKEN AND STRATHAVEN PARK IS THEIR FAVOURITE, AS MHAIRI ANDERSON REPORTS

A SOUTH Lanarkshire park has been crowned Scotland's favourite park, weeks after scooping the prestigious Green Flag for the first time.

Strathaven Park topped the People's Choice Awards in Scotland and came fourth overall in the whole of the UK.

It was the only Scottish park to rank in Britain's top 25.

The news was welcomed by Stephen Kelly, Head of South Lanarkshire Council's Facilities Waste & Grounds Services.

"To be awarded the Green Flag for Strathaven Park was really great for the town, and for our staff, who have worked so hard together with the local community and South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture to improve the standards of management in the park since last year," he said.

"To be voted number one in Scotland, and fourth overall in the UK in the People's Choice award is just fantastic.

"I am delighted for all involved that their hard work and diligence has brought such just rewards indeed.

"We have an excellent working partnership with emphasis on community involvement and we would not have achieved this award without the efforts of all concerned."

The green flag has been proudly displayed since the park passed the tough criteria with flying colours. The Green Flag

Award is the benchmark for quality green spaces and it is administered by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the independent environmental charity.

Parks are assessed by volunteer judges who usually have a background in parks management, conservation or ecology.

They judge against eight criteria, testing whether the park or green space is:

- welcoming
- healthy
- safe and secure
- clean and well-maintained
- sustainable
- manages conservation and heritage
- has community involvement
- markets itself, and has good management.

The news delighted the hard-working team whose efforts to keep the park looking beautiful year round have now been recognised at a national level.

Ground Services team member Michael Finnigan explained:

"Our line manager told us we were going for this award and, while we and the public, from what they say, already thought the park was lovely and maintained to a good standard, we thought it was a worthwhile exercise.

"That it would give us an independent look at how the park was and what might be needed to improve it.

"So, while it was a lot of work



to keep up the high standard, it was worth it as our team has now been recognised for all the commitment and dedication."

Carole Noble, Head of Environmental Services for Keep Scotland Beautiful, hailed the award as great news for Strathaven and South Lanarkshire, with Strathaven Park "rightly being awarded for its quality".

"It's a fantastic park, a great asset for the local community and a brilliant family day out," added Carole.

"We're very proud of the council, the park managers and, particularly of the local volunteers, who work all year round, in rain or shine, to make Strathaven Park beautiful.

"Just like in our other campaigns, such as Clean Up Scotland and Beautiful Scotland, great people make great places, and these awards are for them."



Enjoying their visit to Strathaven Park are toddler Rory Jackson, main, with Daisy Mercer, 11, and her eight-year-old sister, Heidi, and brother Tom, five, below

Members of the local community have also been working tirelessly to raise funds for play and recreation in the park and actively encouraging everyone, far and near, to go along and enjoy its facilities.

Ground Services team member James Armour said: "When we found out that we had received the Green Flag Award, the entire Strathaven grounds team felt very proud, as this was the first park in South Lanarkshire to win such an award.

"We have been complimented by lots of people from the Strathaven area who use the park every day but, what is more special, is that we are being approached by members of the public, who are not from Strathaven, complimenting us on how good the park looks.

"It's just great." Caroline Jackson, of East Kilbride, isn't surprised Strathaven has been voted Scotland's favourite park.

"I love this park, it is really brilliant. It has the best toddler park, is safe for the kids and has lots of events throughout the year for everyone," she says.

"In fact, my husband and I have been coming along to enjoy the events in the park for many years now, even before our son was born.

"My friends and I pack up a picnic and come through from East Kilbride regularly with our children and have great days out."



WHEN Britain's best-selling author of all time weighs into the fray, albeit, under a pseudonym, you can be sure that the crime novel remains very much *the genre du jour*, writes *Eileen McAuley*.

And the latest borrowing figures from South Lanarkshire's 25 libraries confirms that our collective appetite for chiller thrillers is far from sated.

However, while JK Rowling, under the nom de plume Robert Galbraith, achieved critical and commercial success with her first crime novel, *The Cuckoo's Calling* - admittedly, after the gaff was blown - British writers are being routinely slaughtered by their American counterparts in the popularity stakes.

According to the latest league table of most borrowed adult fiction titles, 17 novels by US-based crime and thriller writers appear in the top 20.

Nine of them were written by that pulp fiction goliath James Patterson.

In total, 10 US-based authors writing in the crime and thriller genres appear in the Top 20 Most Borrowed Authors list. Only MC Beaton, Ian Rankin and Agatha Christie represent UK crime and thriller writers.

Other authors in high demand at local libraries include Tess Gerritson's *Last To Die* and Lee Child's *Wanted Man*, both of whom had readers queuing up.

Gerritson's latest novel is from her popular *Rizzoli* and *Isles* series, which has also been translated into a TV

police drama starring Angie Harmon and Sasha Alexander, below and right.

"Scottish writer Denise Mina has also been maintaining her popularity in crime novels, with *Gods and Beasts*,"

said Diana Barr, Libraries and Museums manager.

Also among the most popular authors at local libraries are David Baldacci, Quintin Jardine, Michael Connelly, Harlan Coben and that master of the legal thriller, John Grisham.

Topping the most wanted list among younger readers is Rachel Caine, whose vampire novels *Glass Houses* and *The Dead Girls' Dance* are capitalising on the continuing thirst for blood-sucking heroes and heroines.

Also continuing to captivate younger readers are the various escapades of Harry Potter and his wizard chums, with *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and *The Goblet of Fire* both currently trending in the top 10.

Stephanie Meyers' *Twilight* franchise also remains a firm favourite, with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The Ugly Truth* also popular.

"Harry Potter is steadily adding new readers, though is not experiencing the same high demand as when the books were first published," explains Diana.

"Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series is also gathering a faithful following."

While British readers may be fixated on American crime, both on page and on screen, the five 'millionaire' authors who have clocked up more than one million borrows, according to the Public Lending Right, also includes children's authors Daisy Meadows, Jacqueline Wilson and Francesca Simon.

According to the Public Lending Right, children's novelist Dame Jacqueline Wilson, creator of *Tracy Beaker*, is the UK's most borrowed author of the last 10 years, with more than 16.5million loans over the past decade. While

American chillers and thrillers undoubtedly dominate the most borrowed titles, it was a completely different story 10 years ago.

Then, it was British authors who ruled the literary roost in Britain, with romance and five books by Catherine Cookson featuring in the top 10.

Nowadays, the prolific Nora Roberts is the new sheriff of the romance genre, with more than 200 titles to the various names under which she writes.

And while romance novels do continue to engage readers, there is little doubt that the public have turned to crime.

British writer Lee Childs offers this explanation: "In the decade following 9/11, I believe crime fiction has become more important in peoples' lives," he said. "It gratifies their desire for safety and security and the rule of law, because at the end of the crime novels, order is restored.

"And in the US crime fiction and thrillers, the canvas is bigger and the stakes are higher, making them particularly successful in this context."

But Diana Barr thinks there is a relatively simple explanation for the fascination with crime and all its facets.

"More than what is happening in society influencing book choices, what people really want is a good, old-fashioned page-turner," she said.

"That book where you know you should put it down and go to sleep but you just can't resist reading one more chapter.

"A book has to engage you quickly, it has to grab readers early on or they just aren't interested."

According to Diana, borrowing in South Lanarkshire does broadly reflect borrowing trends in the UK, in that



THE SCENE .. DO NOT CROSS .. CRIME

seven out of 10 of the most borrowed books are crime thrillers.

"If readers like the main character, they will get into a series and often the author can't get the latest books out fast enough.

"It is a natural human interest to follow their exploits once you have become engaged."

In South Lanarkshire, libraries with their vital, free community services and space remain a crucial resource for people of all ages.

With 60,000 members, around 20 per cent of the population, those working hard to maintain local libraries in the community want to see that grow.

New technology, such as e-readers, makes life interesting for libraries in terms of borrowing and the future could see readers downloading books from library websites.

But for now, South Lanarkshire's 25 libraries - and two mobile libraries covering the mainly rural areas in Clydesdale - are determined to get the message out that they are open for business and evolving all the time to appeal to readers - young and old - across the community.

Long gone is the old-fashioned, stuffy image of a silent book emporium with a tomblike atmosphere, where readers were scared to breathe for fear of incurring the wrath of a tutting librarian.

Modern libraries are places where people can study, read, relax and meet - nowadays it's all about information, education, imagination.

Diana explained: "When people have a little spare time, they will read. They like to escape into a book.

"Libraries are facing lots of competition. People can pick books up at the



supermarkets cheaply when they're doing their weekly shop.

"But we want to get the social aspect of reading out there in the community.

"The library is a great environment and we hope to make reading a family affair. Mums, dads, grandparents, carers often come to the library to borrow books for the children and we hope that, while they are there, we can interest them in borrowing books for themselves."

Diana believes that getting readers in to experience what the library has to offer first-hand can open up a whole new world to people.

"Wandering into the library creates a physical use of it and there's the serendipity that you chance upon something you might not have thought about reading," she added. "There are reference books and free internet access for information and education. Books, by

their nature, fire the imagination, and imagination works across all ages.

"It takes you places you haven't been yet or lets you read about things you hope never to experience."

● Visit www.sleisureandculture.co.uk for more info on your library and the various facilities it offers.



CRIME SCENE .. DO NOT CROSS

THRILLS, CHILLS & SPILLS

Crime novels top the most-borrowed book lists at South Lanarkshire libraries as readers continue their love affair with macabre and grisly tales of serial killers and their victims

Benefits are changing – could this affect you?



Benefits are changing for people of working age

The UK Government's Welfare Reform Act is making big changes to the benefits system. This may affect you if you are of working age and on benefits or claim benefits from time to time.

This is what's due to happen this year:

- Since April 2013, housing benefit has depended on the size and age of your family. For example, if you live alone but have two bedrooms, you don't get housing benefit for the extra room. The Council and housing associations have been working with tenants who are affected.
- Since April 2013, a Scottish Welfare Fund has replaced crisis and community care grants previously dealt with by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Council has arrangements in place to deal with these requests.
- The Scottish Government is taking on responsibility for council tax benefit from the DWP. Councils are administering the new Council Tax Reduction Scheme and there will be little change in the next year.
- Since 10 June 2013, Personal Independence Payments (PIP) have replaced Disability Living Allowance for all new claimants aged 16 to 64. From 7 October, existing DLA claimants who request an uprating or who have fixed awards due to expire after the end of February 2014 are also being asked to claim PIP. (The majority of DLA claimants will not be affected before October 2015.)
- Since July 2013, a benefits cap has limited the amount of money households can receive, reducing the income of some larger families and people in more expensive accommodation.
- A new system of Universal Credit which brings together a number of benefits is due to be rolled out across the UK. At first this will only be for new claims, but eventually, it will apply to everyone of working age on benefits. This will be paid calendar monthly in arrears and tenants will be responsible for paying their own rent, it will not be paid directly to their landlord. We are waiting for confirmation when this will be introduced in our area.

The switch to managing money monthly in arrears is not going to be easy, particularly for people who are receiving less help because of the new housing occupancy rules. There are some steps people can take that will help them cope better in the months ahead.

- Join a Credit Union and try saving a small amount every week. Credit Unions provide a safe and convenient place to save your money and allow access to low-cost loans.
- Open a bank account if you don't have one.
- Keep a budget of what things cost – like your weekly food shop, electricity bills and rent.
- If you are already finding it difficult to pay debts and they are mounting up, contact Money Matters or Citizens Advice and they will help you look at options to make things more manageable.
- Pay-day loans, credit from doorstep lenders or shops doing weekly payments can be very expensive. If you need a new washing machine, TV or other essential goods, your local Credit Union is a much cheaper option and if you are in receipt of Benefits then contact the Council as you may be entitled to a Community Care Grant.
- If you are on benefits and considering moving house, check out the housing occupancy rules and avoid taking on rooms you will not get any allowance for.
- People need to apply for the new benefits online. There is free access to the internet and advice on courses at libraries and young people can use Universal Connections Centres.
- Try to keep healthy and well – but if you are feeling low, Lanarkshire's Well Connected programme makes it easier to take part in activities and services to improve your well being. Visit www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.
- If you are trying to get back to work, contact South Lanarkshire Works 4U. There are a number of schemes that can help you prepare for this.

Useful contacts

South Lanarkshire Council

Housing enquiries 0303 123 1012
(for information on occupancy rules)

Money Matters 0303 123 1008
(for advice on benefits and debts)

Council tax and benefits 0303 123 1011

South Lanarkshire Works 4U
0800 731 0444
(for support with returning to work)

Scottish Welfare Fund 0303 123 1007
(for Crisis and Community Care Grants)

Minicom 0303 123 1017
(if you are hard of hearing)



www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Citizens Advice

Hamilton 01698 283477

East Kilbride 01355 263698

Rutherglen/Cambuslang 0141 646 3191

Clydesdale 01555 664301

Credit Unions in South Lanarkshire

Scotwest
www.scotwest 0845 634 7634
Open to anyone who lives/works in West of Scotland

BSL (South Lanarkshire)
www.blantyrecreditunion.org.uk
Blantyre 01698 711112
Larkhall 01698 884156
Rutherglen 0141 641 4750

Cambuslang Credit Union
www.cambuslangcu.org.uk 0141 641 0888

Hamilton Credit Union 01698 252200
WHEB, Burnbank
www.whebcreditunion.co.uk 01698 667600

East Kilbride Credit Union
www.ekcreditunion.co.uk 01355 224771



Adult Protection in South Lanarkshire

Most adults manage to live their lives in a safe and secure manner. However, for some, their ability to keep safe and to protect their wellbeing, property or finances will be a challenge. Adults can be more at risk if they develop dementia, or they suffer from mental illness or where alcohol or drugs have taken their toll.

Unfortunately there is often someone willing to take advantage of people in such situations.

Fortunately, legislation has been introduced in Scotland that allows councils to support and protect adults who are at risk of being harmed. This legislation is the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007.

Nowadays, most people are aware of the need to protect children. However, there appears to be a much lower awareness and understanding in terms of the need to protect some adults.

Our view is this must change

Adult Protection is not just the business of professionals such as the Police or Social Workers; it is everyone's business to keep adults safe. We all have a responsibility to be vigilant to ensure the wellbeing and safety of adults who may require support. This in turn, can play a large part in terms of keeping our communities safe.

What is harm?

Harm is caused by another person's conduct or by the adult themselves. The Act covers all types of harm including:

- neglect
- financial
- physical
- psychological/emotional
- sexual
- self-harm

(the above list is not exhaustive)



For further information on **adult protection** please visit our website www.adultprotectionsouthlanarkshire.org.uk

What can I do?

If you are being harmed, or know someone who is being harmed, it is important to tell someone.

You should never ignore any suspicion that an adult is being harmed. You should:

- listen to what is said
- observe what is happening
- write down exactly what you see and hear
- tell the adult at risk what you will do next

What should I do?

You should report your concerns to Social Work Resources, however, if the adult at risk is in immediate danger, contact the Police.

A Social Worker will investigate the adult's circumstances whilst balancing their right to choose how they live their life.

For further advice or information contact Social Work Resources on

0303 123 1008

Immediate danger contact Police on

999

Police non-emergency call

101

If someone needs medical help contact the person's GP or NHS 24 on

0845 242424



Stay well this winter - plan ahead

Look after yourself this winter by keeping warm and well.
If you do get ill, know who to turn to.

During November

Get flu jab if eligible. Invites are sent out by GPs to over 65s, carers and 'at risk' groups.

Check you have enough of your regular medicines to cover the holiday period.

November/December

Restock your home medicine cabinet with paracetamol or ibuprofen.

For more home remedies ask your pharmacist or visit www.nhsinform.co.uk

Early December

Make appointment with GP or nurse for any planned follow ups needed before Christmas.

25-26 Dec + 1-2 Jan

Remember GP surgeries are closed on these days.

Keep the NHS 24 number (08454 24 24 24) handy.

SELF CARE



- Keep a well-stocked medicine cupboard.
- Treat coughs, colds and flu by keeping warm, resting and drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen can reduce high temperatures and ease aches and pains.
- Most people recover from viral infections like cold and flu in 4 – 7 days.
- Antibiotics won't help with flu, colds and most coughs and sore throats.
- Don't visit friends or relatives in hospital if you are ill, particularly if you are suffering vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

PHARMACIST



- Your pharmacist can offer advice on common complaints including coughs and colds, sore throats, stomach upsets, head lice and athletes foot.
- Minor Ailments Service offers free advice and supply of medicine without having to see a GP.
- Check www.nhs24.com for pharmacy opening times over the festive season.

DENTIST



- For check ups, routine care and emergency appointments contact your own dentist.
- If you are not registered with a dentist telephone or visit a practice in your area and ask if you can register with them. If you require help and advice out of normal working hours, call NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24, Monday - Friday, 6.00pm - 8:00am and all day on weekends and public holidays.

OPTOMETRIST



- Lanarkshire's Eye Health Network Service (LENS) treats a range of minor eye conditions such as red eye, sudden changes in vision, and any kind of pain in and around the eyes.
- Many LENS opticians (optometrists) are open Saturday and Sunday, call 08453 130 130 for more details.

GP



- For more serious illnesses, including vomiting, ear pain, sore tummy and back ache make a routine appointment with your GP.
- GP surgeries are closed for public holidays on 25-26 December and 1-2 January. They are open on 24, 27, 30 and 31 December and 3 January.
- Cancel your appointment if things change and you no longer need it.

OUT OF HOURS



- If you are too ill to wait until your GP opens then contact NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24. If required, you will see a GP, nurse or paramedic from the Lanarkshire Out Of Hours Service.
- NHS 24 can advise on dental emergencies if you are not registered with a dentist, call 08454 24 24 24. For registered patients, call your own dentist.

MINOR INJURIES



- For cuts, burns and sprains, visit minor injuries services within A&E departments at Hairmyres, Monklands and Wishaw Hospitals (9am-9pm) and stand-alone minor injuries units at Kello & Lady Home Community Hospitals (24 hours).

A&E / 999



- For serious emergencies go to A&E at Hairmyres, Monklands or Wishaw General hospitals or call 999.
- A&E departments are open throughout the festive period, including public holidays.
- Call NHS 24 if you are unsure what to do on 08454 24 24 24.