NOVEMBER 2026 | FINANCE

BUSINESS BULLETIN

The future of money
Invisible infrastructure removing barriers for business
Page 10

Navigating mortgage rates
Rates uncertainty to continue, but support is available
Page 56

Cover Story:
Shaking up finance with Cooper Parry

Partner Claire Clark on smashing stereotypes and challenging convention
Page 38



Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce



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Contents

NOVEMBER 2026
Focus on Finance



Lifestyle: Finance director test drives latest Porsche EV



New council Chief Exec can 'reset relationship with business'



RBS report calls for stronger collaboration between business and government

Regulars

PAGE |

VIEWPOINT 4
Russell Borthwick, AGCC

POLICY UPDATE 20
Ryan Crighton, AGCC

RESEARCH 45
Samira Heshmatzadeh, AGCC

ON THE MOVE 70
Who is going places in the region?

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Westminster is acting on business rates... now Scotland must follow suit

For years, we have watched our high streets struggle against a combination of rising costs, changing shopping habits and a business rates system that too often penalises the very businesses we should be encouraging.

Empty shopfronts have become an all-too-familiar feature of our towns and cities, while independent retailers, hospitality operators and entrepreneurs face an increasingly difficult battle to make the numbers work.

The UK Government's commitment to levelling the playing field between online retailers and shops offers an opportunity to change that, but whether Scottish businesses benefit will now depend on decisions taken at Holyrood.

Any move to tackle VAT avoidance by overseas sellers using online marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay is welcome, particularly if the additional revenue helps fund meaningful business rates reductions for high-street businesses.

For too long, bricks-and-mortar retailers have faced an uneven playing field, competing against online sellers who do not always face the same tax obligations while carrying the additional costs of maintaining physical premises.

Making online marketplaces responsible for collecting VAT owed by sellers is a sensible step towards fairer competition. But the more important question for businesses north of the border is what happens next.

Business rates are devolved, meaning the Scottish Government controls the system here. Any additional funding generated through the Barnett formula as a result of an English relief package should be directed towards supporting Scotland's struggling high streets.

Scottish retailers face precisely the same pressures as their counterparts in England. They should not find themselves at a further competitive disadvantage simply because ministers on opposite sides of the border make different choices.

There is also an opportunity for Scotland to go further, rather than simply replicate what Westminster has done.

Earlier this year, backed by Chambers of Commerce, DC Thomson launched its excellent *Fresh Start* campaign across *The Press and Journal*, *The Courier* and *The Sunday Post*, highlighting a straightforward change that could help breathe life back into our town and city centres.

Under Scotland's existing Fresh Start Relief scheme, businesses taking over qualifying commercial premises that have stood empty for at least six months can receive a 100% business rates discount for their first year.

The problem is that six-month qualifying period. It creates a perverse incentive in a system that should be encouraging landlords to find tenants and entrepreneurs to open businesses as quickly as possible.

The Fresh Start campaign's proposal is refreshingly simple - remove the six-month waiting requirement and make the 12-month relief available immediately when qualifying vacant premises are brought back into productive use.

It is difficult to think of a more practical intervention to support high-street regeneration.

Imagine an entrepreneur looking to open a café, independent shop or small business on Union Street in Aberdeen, or in the centre of Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Inverurie or any of Scotland's other towns.

The first year is invariably the hardest, with fit-out costs, recruitment, stock, utilities and countless other expenses arriving long before the business has established a reliable customer base.

Removing business rates from that first year's calculations could make the difference between a business opening its doors or an opportunity being abandoned. And the benefits would extend far beyond the individual premises.

Every occupied shopfront helps generate footfall, supports neighbouring businesses, creates employment and contributes to the wider appeal of a town centre.

Empty units, by contrast, can become a drag on entire streets, discouraging investment and reinforcing a perception of decline.

Of course, business rates reform alone will not solve every problem facing our high streets. Accessibility, parking, public transport, safety and the quality of the surrounding environment all matter enormously.

But there is little point investing millions in regenerating our town centres if the tax system continues to discourage businesses from occupying the premises we are trying to bring back to life.



Earlier this year, backed by Chambers of Commerce, DC Thomson launched its excellent *Fresh Start* campaign across *The Press and Journal, The Courier* and *The Sunday Post,* highlighting a straightforward change that could help breathe life back into our town and city centres.

Scotland already has business rates relief schemes, including the Small Business Bonus Scheme and targeted support for retail, hospitality and leisure. These provide valuable assistance, but they do not remove the case for further reform.

The Scottish Government should now examine how any additional Budget funding can deliver wider rates reductions while also adopting the practical changes championed by the Fresh Start campaign.

It should also assess the cost of reform against the wider economic benefits of bringing vacant properties back into use, rather than treating relief simply as revenue forgone.

Our high streets need businesses trading, people spending and confidence returning. Westminster has opened the door. Holyrood must now give Scotland's high streets the fresh start they deserve.

Russell Borthwick
Chief Executive

OUR PREMIER PARTNERS

The Chamber sits at the heart of the North-east business community and one of our core aims is to help create the economic conditions and business environment which will allow this region to flourish.

Our premier partners see the value of a strong regional Chamber and choose to engage with us at this level to reinforce their ongoing commitment to the region and its economy.

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C David McCracken – Arts & Business Manager

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C Georgi Hristov, Technical Director

Cuts completed on explosive-filled WW2 ship

Aberdeen-based company CUT recently completed diamond wire cutting on the SS Montgomery in the Thames Estuary.

This high-profile project was completed by the book, quickly and safely.

CUT did cuts on the masts and boom of the SS Richard Montgomery, a sunken shipwreck laden with 1,400 tonnes of wartime explosives.

The vessel, which sank in 1944 off the Kent coast, posed a significant risk due to its cargo, and experts believed that reducing the masts' height to below sea level would alleviate pressure on the wreck's structure.

The masts were removed using CUT diamond wire cutting machines and unique diamond wire and will be transported to Chatham's Historic Dockyard in Kent for preservation and public display.

The US government has supported efforts to keep the masts in the UK for public display, with the US ambassador to the UK backing the initiative. Efforts to salvage the cargo vessel, known as a Liberty ship, in 1944 were abandoned when it flooded about a month after it ran aground.

On completion of the last cut, an excellent Customer Satisfaction Report was provided to CUT. CUT received the award for this project due to its outstanding safety record, track record of similar salvage operations and reliability.

Maritime Minister Keir Mather said: "The SS Richard Montgomery is one of the most extraordinary wrecks in the world - a piece of wartime history that has rested in the Thames Estuary for over 80 years. Preserving this remarkable part of Anglo-American history also means future generations can learn about the extraordinary risks faced by the merchant sailors during the Allied war effort."



Aberdeen welcomes 54,000 cruise tourists in record season

Port of Aberdeen is celebrating another record cruise season, with visitor numbers up 26% on 2025 to 54,000 and bookings now extending to 2033.

2026 marked a step change for the port. Almost half of its 71 cruise calls involved vessels measuring 220 metres or longer, and combined gross tonnage increased by 24% to almost 2.5 million. The 294m-long Norwegian Star was one of 13 maiden calls and set a new benchmark as the longest vessel ever to visit Aberdeen.

Cruise lines operated across expedition, luxury, premium and mainstream markets, and Viking was Aberdeen's busiest cruise line with 21 calls throughout the season.

Bob Sanguinetti DL, CEO, Port of Aberdeen, said: "Cruise tourism is creating an ocean of opportunity for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, bringing visitors from around the world and supporting local businesses. We're working closely with VisitAberdeenshire and regional stakeholders to bring new cruise lines to the region and strengthen relationships with our existing operators."

This tourism boost brought additional footfall and spending in local attractions, shops and hospitality businesses across the region. Greyhope Bay reported a marked increase in turnover on days cruise ships docked at South Harbour, providing increased funding for activities, events and projects benefiting the local community.

Cruise tourism also prompted it to introduce guided coastal walks showcasing local history and wildlife, with a stop for coffee and cake. Garioch Heritage Centre in Inverurie has welcomed regular cruise passenger visits over the past two seasons, with volunteer guides offering insight into the area's culture and lifestyle.

VisitAberdeenshire's 'Welcome to Aberdeenshire' volunteer programme continued to go from strength to strength. The programme's 42 volunteers contributed 1,250 hours throughout the season, providing a warm quayside welcome and helpful advice to cruise guests.

This earned the scheme an Aberdeen City & Shire Thistle Award for the Best Community Tourism Initiative and the Lord Provost's Volunteering Award for 2026. Alba Bagpipes added a traditional Scottish welcome, with pipers and dancers greeting cruise guests.



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The future of money

By Ryan Crighton

For centuries, the evolution of money has been a story of making transactions easier. Coins replaced barter, banknotes reduced the need to carry precious metals, and electronic payments transformed the way people and businesses exchange value.

Now, another financial revolution is gathering pace, and its implications could extend far beyond the banking sector.

The next generation of digital money promises not simply to move funds more quickly, but to change how commercial transactions are conducted, contracts are fulfilled and businesses manage their finances.

For companies grappling with rising costs, squeezed margins and persistent productivity challenges, the potential benefits are considerable.

Judith Chilvers, Director of Digital Asset Solutions at Lloyds Banking Group, believes the future lies in increasingly connected financial ecosystems, where money, assets, contracts and information can interact seamlessly.

It is a vision in which payments become faster, administrative processes become automated and businesses spend less time managing transactions and more time creating value.

And while much of the public debate about digital currencies has focused on cryptocurrencies and the prospect of a digital pound, the real economic opportunity may lie in something considerably more practical...getting paid faster.

The cash flow revolution

For many businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, cash flow remains one of the greatest barriers to growth.

A company can be profitable on paper while struggling to pay wages, purchase materials or invest in new equipment because money owed by customers has yet to arrive.

The consequences ripple through supply chains, with delayed payments to one business creating financial pressures for several others.

Digital financial infrastructure could help address this longstanding problem.

One of the technologies highlighted by Chilvers is tokenisation, which allows conventional financial assets, including bank deposits, to be represented digitally and transferred using shared ledger technology.

Combined with programmable payment systems, this could allow money to move automatically when agreed commercial conditions have been satisfied.

Consider a construction company delivering a housing development in Aberdeenshire.

Under traditional arrangements, a subcontractor completes a stage of work, submits an invoice, waits for approval and then waits again for payment.

In a more integrated financial system, completion of that work could trigger a verified digital instruction, automatically releasing the agreed funds.

The same principle could apply to an engineering company supplying equipment to an offshore energy project, or a manufacturer delivering components to an international customer.

Payments that currently involve multiple administrative stages could eventually be completed with significantly less manual intervention.

For businesses, that could mean greater certainty over incoming revenues, reduced financing costs and less working capital tied up in unpaid invoices.

A productivity dividend

The potential economic gains extend beyond faster payments.

Across the economy, businesses devote considerable resources to financial administration, from reconciling accounts and processing invoices to checking contractual obligations and managing transactions between different organisations.

Much of this activity is necessary, but it does not directly generate additional products or services. The development of programmable money and smart contracts could change that equation.

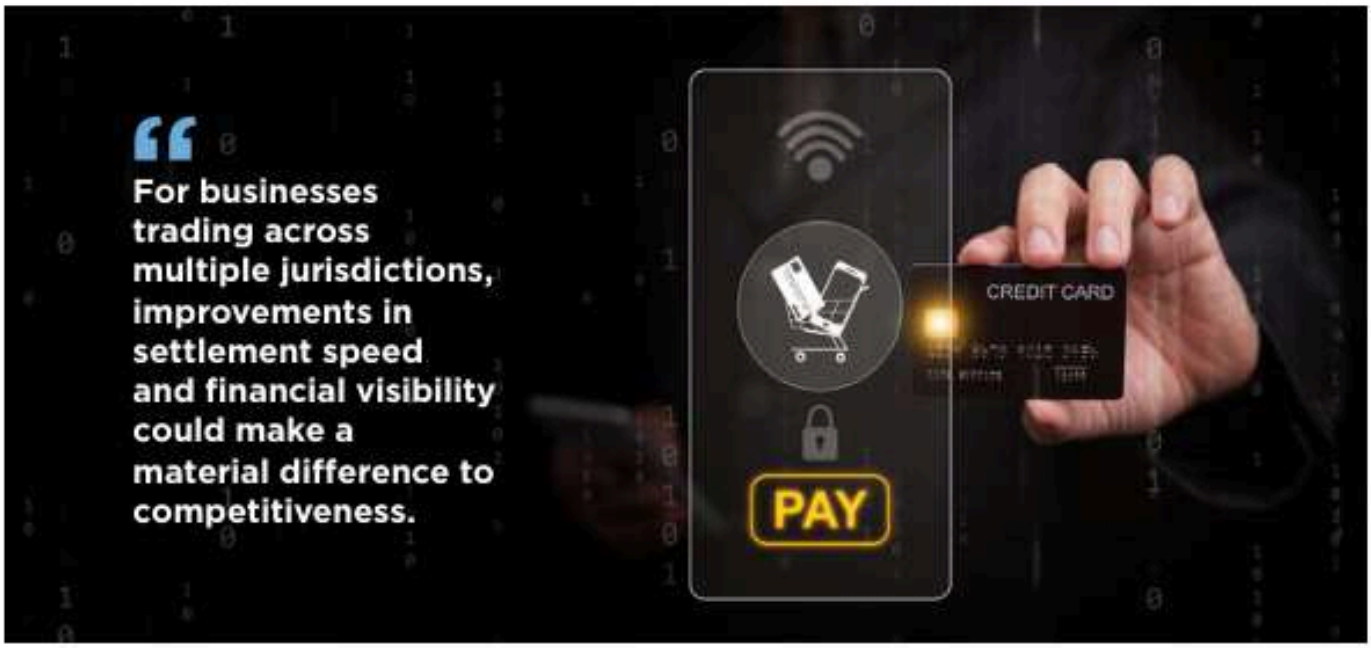
A smart contract is a digital arrangement capable of executing predefined instructions when specified conditions are met.

In practical terms, it could link a commercial agreement directly to the payment process, reducing the need for repeated checks, manual authorisations and duplicated record-keeping.

For a business operating across multiple suppliers, contractors and customers, the cumulative savings could be significant.



The next generation of digital money promises not simply to move funds more quickly, but to change how commercial transactions are conducted, contracts are fulfilled and businesses manage their finances.



For businesses trading across multiple jurisdictions, improvements in settlement speed and financial visibility could make a material difference to competitiveness.

There are also opportunities to integrate these systems with artificial intelligence, allowing businesses to automate routine financial processes, identify discrepancies and improve the accuracy of cash flow forecasts.

Such developments could be particularly valuable in sectors characterised by complex supply chains, including energy, construction, manufacturing and logistics.

The important distinction is that technology would not simply make existing administrative tasks quicker. It could eliminate some of those tasks altogether.

That is where the greatest productivity gains may ultimately be found.

Breaking down borders

International trade presents another opportunity.

Despite advances in digital banking, cross-border payments can still involve multiple intermediaries, differing operating hours, currency conversion costs and delays in settlement.

For exporters, these inefficiencies create uncertainty and tie up capital that could otherwise be deployed elsewhere.

New forms of digital money, including tokenised bank deposits and appropriately regulated stablecoins, could eventually make international transactions faster and more transparent.

A North-east engineering company exporting specialist equipment to Europe, for example, could benefit from greater certainty over when payment will arrive and how much it will receive.

For businesses trading across multiple jurisdictions, improvements in settlement speed and financial visibility could make a material difference to competitiveness.

There is a wider economic argument here, too.

When businesses can access their money sooner, they are potentially better placed to invest, recruit and expand.

Multiply those improvements across thousands of companies and the benefits could extend well beyond individual balance sheets.

Trust remains the currency that matters

None of this means the transition will be straightforward. New financial technologies bring questions about regulation, cybersecurity, interoperability and the protection of customer funds.

Tokenised bank deposits, stablecoins and central bank digital currencies are not interchangeable, and their legal and regulatory characteristics differ considerably.

Businesses will also need confidence that automated payment systems can accommodate disputes, errors and the messy realities of commercial relationships.

A payment triggered by an incorrectly recorded delivery, for example, could create problems rather than solve them.

Human oversight, clear contractual safeguards and robust governance will therefore remain essential.

Nor should technological innovation be confused with an automatic solution to late payment. Companies that deliberately delay settling invoices will not necessarily change their behaviour simply because faster infrastructure exists.

Nevertheless, the direction of travel is significant.

For Britain, which has long enjoyed an international reputation for financial services, there is an opportunity to help shape the technologies and standards underpinning the next generation of global commerce.

And for businesses, the implications are potentially transformative.

The greatest innovation in finance may not be a new currency that consumers can see or hold, but an invisible infrastructure that allows money to move more intelligently throughout the economy.

If that infrastructure can reduce friction, release working capital and free businesses from unnecessary administration, its contribution to economic growth could be substantial.

The future of money, in other words, may be less about what we use to pay and much more about what becomes possible once we do.



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Danny Smith
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Who are your customers?

We have a really varied customer base, ranging from businesses here in Aberdeen and across the UK to customers and partners worldwide. We work with suppliers, manufacturers and other freight forwarders across a range of industries. That variety is one of the things we enjoy most, as every customer and shipment can bring a different requirement or challenge.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Market uncertainty is probably our biggest challenge at present. Global trade, costs and customer requirements continue to change, sometimes very quickly. At the same time, that creates opportunity. Customers increasingly value freight partners who can be flexible, responsive and find practical solutions when circumstances change, and we see that as an area where AMT Intercargo can continue to grow.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Build strong relationships and don't underestimate the value of your network. Business will always have its ups and downs, but having trusted customers, suppliers and partners around you makes a real difference. Be approachable, deliver what you say you will and keep talking to people – you never know where the next conversation, introduction or opportunity might lead.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

For us, it's the opportunity to be part of the wider Aberdeen business community. Chamber membership gives us the chance to meet businesses from different sectors, build new relationships and stay connected with what is happening across the region.



Arlene Ewing
Managing Director
Anderson Strathern
Asset Management

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

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Who are your customers?

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What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

AI integration given the explosion of AI tools within our sector. It's imperative to harness AI even in these early stages and to understand its power.

Other challenges include consolidation within our sector, larger firms becoming even bigger in terms of assets under management and client numbers.

Retail banks have come back into our space, remerging through consolidation – NatWest and Evelyn Partners most recently. Retail banks previously left our sector due to advice rules and greater regulation.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Embrace everything that is new. We live in a world that is unforgiving when it comes to a reluctance for change.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

The reach across different businesses and sectors. The ability to assist other members with their own business or clients is something that we are well known for.

MEMBER MEET the MEMBER



Edmund Smith

Axis
Business Development Manager

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Axis is a leading independent consultancy delivering world class well operations, reservoir and subsurface studies, and low carbon solutions to the global energy industry. Founded in 2001 and headquartered in Aberdeen, Axis supports well and reservoir consultancy projects from exploration to decommissioning across the UK and internationally.

Who are your customers?

Our customers operate across the global energy sector, including traditional oil and gas exploration and production, decommissioning, and a growing range of low carbon industries such as carbon capture and storage (CCS), hydrogen, geothermal and broader energy transition projects.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is adapting to an increasingly complex and fast moving energy landscape, while our greatest opportunity lies in leveraging our deep technical expertise to support clients as they embrace new technologies, decommissioning needs, and the transition to lower carbon solutions.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Stay open to collaboration, invest in building trusted relationships, and always look for opportunities to combine expertise - because partnership is often the catalyst for innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

The best thing about being a Chamber member is the ability to connect with a diverse network of forward thinking organisations, opening doors to collaboration, shared insight, and opportunities that strengthen both our business and the wider community.



Kevin Gaffney

CEO
DDK Positioning

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

At DDK Positioning, we ensure you always know exactly where your assets are - anywhere in the world.

Our Precise Point Positioning technology provides resilient, centimetre-level accuracy, giving maritime and offshore operators confidence even when traditional positioning systems fail.

Who are your customers?

We work with offshore energy companies, vessel owners and anyone who needs reliable, high accuracy positioning to keep their operations running safely and efficiently.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our big challenge is helping the industry understand how vulnerable traditional GPS has become. The opportunity is huge: we can offer a truly resilient alternative, even in the most remote locations, and demand for dependable positioning is growing fast across global maritime and offshore sectors.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Keep talking to each other. The best ideas and solutions usually come from open conversations and sharing challenges - not from working in isolation.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

For me, it's the people. The Chamber creates a great space to connect, learn from others, and build relationships that genuinely help move the North-east forward.

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Argosy Control Engineering announces three-season deal as main sponsor of Inverurie Loco Works FC

Aberdeen-based Argosy Control Engineering Ltd has been confirmed as the main sponsor of Inverurie Loco Works FC for the next three seasons, marking an exciting new chapter in the long-standing relationship between the two organisations.

Argosy is a proud supporter of the Highland League side, and a well-known name within the Inverurie Locos community, having sponsored the team's kit since 2014.

The new sponsorship deal encompasses kit and stadium branding, in addition to supporting many other key elements within the club. Argosy also sponsored the prestigious Inverurie Locos annual Business Lunch, which was to take place at the Marcliffe Hotel this month.

For over 30 years, Argosy has been providing high-quality engineering and protective coating solutions to the energy sector and other emerging industries.

Based in Bridge of Don, its projects are delivered globally to key energy hubs including the US, Norway and Brazil through the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) supply chain.

Commenting on the announcement, Chris Daley, Co-Owner and Managing Director of Argosy Control Engineering, said: "Growing up in Inverurie, I've always had a passion for football and the Locos in particular.

"It's been an absolute pleasure to support several Inverurie football clubs, including the Locos, for the past 12 years. Myself and the wider Argosy team are thrilled to strengthen that long-standing relationship by becoming their main sponsor.

"Given that our ethos and core values are closely aligned, it's a proud moment for us to see our logo displayed on the front of the Locos players' jerseys."

Mike Macaulay, Chairman, Inverurie Locos, added: "Our aim is to build and nurture a successful and sustainable community-focused football club, competing at the highest level of the game.

"Working closely with Argosy for the past 12 years, we have seen first-hand how deeply they share those values and are committed to investing in the club's success.

"The partnership will provide valuable commercial support as the club continues to invest in its first team, youth development and wider community activities."

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Perhaps it's time we talked Aberdeen up

By Scott Willox | Director | Goldstar Services

Aberdeen has a habit of talking itself down. We've all had our moments of being an Abermoanian at times, haven't we? "Our economy is shrinking. Times are too hard. Business is too difficult. We're all doomed..."

Some of that may well be true (hopefully not the doomed bit!), but I'd argue that the same concerns will be heard in most UK cities right now.

Aberdeen is facing one of its toughest challenges to date. Global circumstances and uncertainty over energy policies are felt quite acutely in our region, and we don't have to look far to see their impact across many sectors.

Cost pressures mean customers are watching every pound, businesses are scrutinising every spend, and everyone is being asked to do more for less. That's the landscape. We're operating in a tough market. Complaining about it won't change it.

What can change is how we respond. For us, that means staying relentlessly focused on quality — and, crucially, consistent quality.

Choice is good and competition is good. A healthy market needs both. Customers should have options, and businesses should have to earn their place. But there is a simple principle that shouldn't get lost in the noise: we are in business to serve our customers. Properly, consistently, professionally.

We all look at the bottom line, naturally. But price and value aren't the same thing. True value for money has a way of revealing itself over time. A cheaper purchase or service that underperforms, needs replacing, or creates additional problems, isn't necessarily a saving. It can simply be a false economy.

That's something we, at Goldstar, have believed in for 45 years.

Across the commercial and domestic cleaning sectors, we've built our business around providing the service, experience, and support our clients need — and staying close enough to understand and adapt if those needs change.

Because standing still isn't an option.

Yes, it's tough. So, we diversify.

We adapt. We grow. We listen. And we keep our focus firmly on the client.

And perhaps that's a lesson for Aberdeen more broadly.

We are still a 'work-in-progress' region as we navigate our way through global and domestic challenges and their impacts. But there is investment. There is progress. The energy transition is rooted in our region and already well underway, utilising the leadership, talent, experience, and technologies that have built our standing as leaders in the global oil and gas industry. More generally, there are ambitious businesses, talented people, and plenty of reasons to be optimistic.

While we see examples of sectors in trouble, we can also be part of a concerted drive to make our city an attractive place to live, work and invest.

We should look closer to home for opportunities to build sustainable partnerships, support one another, and create a more stable, thriving future for our region.

Competition doesn't have to mean pulling each other down. Perhaps we'd all be better served by raising the standard — and talking Aberdeen up while we're at it.



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Britain needs more than Google Maps to solve its fuel crisis

By Ryan Crighton, Director of Policy



The Prime Minister has a new answer to Britain's rising fuel prices. Google Maps.

Motorists can now use the app to compare petrol and diesel prices at filling stations, with ministers proudly announcing that the initiative could save the average car-owning household £40 a year.

It is a useful idea. Greater transparency should encourage competition between retailers and help drivers find cheaper fuel.

But the backlash to the announcement exposes a much bigger frustration. At a time when energy security has become one of the defining economic challenges of our age, ministers are celebrating an app feature rather than confronting the deeper vulnerabilities in Britain's fuel supplies.

Google Maps might tell you where to find cheaper diesel. It cannot guarantee that the diesel will be there.

Twenty-six years ago, Britain discovered just how fragile its fuel supply chains could be. Protests at refineries and distribution depots brought the country close to a standstill. Petrol stations ran dry, supermarkets struggled to keep shelves stocked and businesses warned they were days from closing.

It was an extraordinary reminder that modern economies cannot function without fuel. A quarter of a century later, Britain faces a different but potentially more serious vulnerability.

In the early 2000s, the UK produced enough diesel to meet its own needs. Since then, much of that refining capacity has disappeared, with the closure of Grangemouth and Lindsey last year accelerating the decline.

Today, more than half the diesel Britain consumes comes from overseas. That matters because, despite the transition towards electric vehicles, diesel remains the lifeblood of much of our economy.

It powers the lorries delivering food to supermarkets, the vehicles serving construction sites and farms, and much of the machinery keeping British industry moving. Emergency services, military vehicles and critical infrastructure also depend on it.

For years, our growing reliance on imports attracted little attention. International supplies were plentiful and prices relatively stable. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine removed a major source of European diesel, while conflict in the Middle East has demonstrated how quickly global energy markets can be disrupted.

Britain and Europe have become increasingly reliant on supplies shipped across the Atlantic from the United States. Any restrictions on American exports would create further pressure on an already vulnerable market.

This is where the Government's approach to the North Sea deserves much greater scrutiny.

Opponents of new developments such as Rosebank argue that North Sea oil contributes little to British energy security because much of it will be exported. That misunderstands how European energy markets operate.

Britain is part of an integrated refining system in which crude oil moves between countries according to the capabilities of individual refineries.

Oil produced west of Shetland might be shipped to the Netherlands, refined into diesel and subsequently



supplied to consumers and businesses across Europe, including Britain.

Its contribution to our energy security does not disappear simply because it crosses an international border.

Every additional barrel produced in the North Sea adds to the supplies available to Britain and its European allies, reducing the amount that must be sourced from more distant or geopolitically uncertain producers.

Of course, increasing domestic production would not automatically reduce pump prices. Oil is traded internationally, and refining capacity, taxation and distribution costs all influence what motorists pay.

But it would strengthen the resilience of the wider energy system on which Britain depends.

There is an equally compelling economic argument. Supporting North Sea production would protect skilled jobs, sustain the supply chain businesses needed to deliver the energy transition and generate tax revenues that could help fund relief on fuel duty or household energy bills.

Replacing some imported energy with domestic production would also improve Britain's balance of payments.

None of this requires abandoning net zero. It requires recognising that the transition will take decades, during which Britain and Europe will continue consuming substantial quantities of oil.

The real policy challenge is therefore twofold: supporting investment in domestic production while protecting and rebuilding the refining capacity needed to turn crude oil into usable fuels.

The Government's fuel-price comparison scheme addresses a genuine problem for motorists, and greater competition at the pumps is welcome. But transparency is not the same as security, and finding the cheapest filling station is no substitute for ensuring reliable supplies.

The fuel blockades of 2000 showed what happens when fuel cannot reach consumers. Today's danger is that too much of the fuel we need must first reach Britain from somewhere else.

The Prime Minister can help motorists navigate that problem with Google Maps. Addressing its underlying causes will require decisions about North Sea investment, refining capacity and Britain's place in Europe's energy system.

Britain needs an energy security strategy, not just a better way to find the nearest petrol station.

NOR Group signs largest contract in its history, fuelling new investment in Aberdeen



NOR Group, an international provider of equipment and expertise to the offshore, subsea, survey and marine industries, has signed the largest contract in the company's history.

The long-term agreement covers a broad range of equipment and will trigger new investment in NOR's UK operation, further strengthening Aberdeen's role as one of the company's key international hubs.

Tore Gautesen, CEO of NOR Group, said: "Securing the largest agreement in our history shows the confidence customers place in NOR for large-scale, long-term commitments. We have strong ambitions and long-term perspective for the UK, and this gives us even more confidence to invest further in Aberdeen, in line with our strategy."

Jostein Jansen, CCO of NOR Group, commented: "This is the result of a strong commercial effort and close cooperation across NOR. The scope is substantial, spanning a wide range of equipment over a long contract period. It's exactly the kind of partnership we want to build with our customers, and it strengthens NOR's position as a global rental partner."

Richard Main, Managing Director of NOR UK, added: "This is a fantastic result for the UK team. The investment that follows will strengthen our local capabilities, equipment availability and ability to support customers as we build for the long term in Aberdeen."

NOR Group continues to expand its international rental operations, investing in equipment, people and local capabilities across its hubs in Norway, the UK, the Americas and APAC.

The Aberdeen operation is an important part of this international network, combining local knowledge and technical support with access to NOR's wider global rental fleet and expertise.



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Mezzo by Kevin Dalgleish

Modern, Michelin Guide food and investment in our city

By Jason Stewart, Commercial Director, Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

Jason Stewart, Kevin Dalgleish and Joni White.







Recently I was invited to hold a member meeting at Amuse by Kevin Dalgleish for a business lunch, so invited Joni White, Business Development Director for Premier Partner Worley to join me – two birds, one stone!

Kevin was there to greet us as we arrived at the restaurant nestled in Aberdeen's Queen's Terrace. It is clear from the moment you walk in that a lot of effort has been put in to make the venue welcoming and symbolic of our region's rich local larder and world-famous food and drink offering.

During our meal, we got speaking about how businesses have adapted their client entertaining in recent years, now typically dining in smaller groups, spending less per head.

It was interesting to hear how Government decisions are impacting on workforces, too. Kevin proudly explained how 80% of his staff have been there since the opening of Amuse four-and-a-half years ago. Changes in ENIC and National Minimum Wage have, however, made bringing in and training new staff more difficult. Joni agreed from Worley's perspective, with it feeling like companies are competing for the same people in specialised, necessary roles.

There was plenty of room for positivity though, with Kevin beaming about his plans to keep investing in his home city by opening a brand-new restaurant at 155 Union Street. Mezzo – Italian for 'middle' – will be welcoming guests in Q4 this year. He spoke about using this new eatery as a platform to grow his loyal workforce, with 20 new hires in time for launch.

Mezzo has the potential to be a staple for client entertaining and those looking for an upmarket hangout to enjoy good company and even better food and drink. Split over two floors, expect healthy, fresh deli take-away food such as pasta, and even Iberico ham, as well as ice cream and cheesecakes.

Guests upstairs can take advantage of stunning views overlooking Aberdeen's Union Terrace Gardens with their favourite tipple. Diners will enjoy the quality Amuse has become renowned for – including showcase sharing plates and Pilsner Mezzo – a 3.5% ABV light lager. Mezzo will also launch the 155 Club, with a limited number of founding members. Ideal for client entertaining, the 155 Club will provide members with the ability to store a selection of wines in a reserved area of the Mezzo wine cellar.

It is planned for Mezzo to be open from midday to midnight on selected days of the week, with plans for live music and potential for outdoor seating later. Personally I cannot wait to try it out for myself, perhaps for my next Chamber member meeting!

Where's Molly?



Here I am! Follow me on my travels here, there and everywhere across the North-east to experience all our region has to offer. From food and drink and fun days out to fashion and hospitality, keep up with every issue to see where I visit next.





Fly Cup Enterprises, Inverurie

I had the pleasure of visiting Fly Cup Enterprises recently to tour its site and enjoy a fine piece in the café with my colleague Cara Gardiner, Fly Cup's rep at Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce. We were welcomed by Philip Wood and the lovely trainees on shift.

Fly Cup Enterprises is an Inverurie-based charity and social enterprise established over 25 years ago to provide opportunities for adults and young people with learning disabilities and difficulties within the catering industry. Fly Cup currently has over 30 trainees working throughout the week, some of whom come from as far as Banchory.

A sense of community

Something important to Fly Cup is building a sense of community and being a space where people can come together, which is reflected through every aspect of the business. The café offers a Pensioners Lunch deal on Tuesdays and hosts the Royal Voluntary Service Blether & Cuppa Club, as well as ladies' days.

The site also has meeting spaces, one of which can accommodate up to around 50 people, and six offices to rent which will hopefully be fully occupied by the end of 2026.

Once we had our tour of the site, we settled in the cosy atmosphere of the café to peruse the offerings of the day and hear more about what goes into each item on the menu.

Phillip explained that Fly Cup has multiple retail partners that it supplies bakes and other catering to across Aberdeenshire. They use as many local suppliers as they can, to benefit the local area as much as possible, including local butcher meat for their homemade sausage roll which sets it apart from bigger chains close by.

'The best carrot cake between Inverness and Edinburgh'

The choice became clear for us when Cara's eyes landed on a freshly baked cheese scone, and mine found the beautifully decorated carrot cake.

One of the trainees kindly took our order and returned shortly after with our bakes, along with a decaf vanilla latte for Cara to wash down her scone with.

Phillip let me know at this point that one returning customer had described the carrot cake as "the best carrot cake between Inverness and Edinburgh", and as a self-proclaimed carrot cake connoisseur, I must agree!

Not only was the cake decorated beautifully, the slice that came to the table was also generously sized to say the least. After one bite I knew I would be telling anyone who would listen about this slice of cake for the rest of the week.

On the other side of the table, Cara expressed her enjoyment of her scone and coffee, telling me: "This is a seriously cheesy cheese scone, I would highly recommend."

Once we had savoured every last mouthful, we purchased a variety of tray bakes to take back to our colleagues and share a small taste of Fly Cup.

My whole experience at Fly Cup was lovely from start to finish. It was wonderful to hear about all the different areas of the business, how much they value keeping things local and the work they do with their trainees. It's clear to see the passion and hard work that goes into every aspect of Fly Cup.

Looking ahead, the team are gearing up for another busy festive season after serving over 100 Christmas dinners throughout December 2025.

Fly Cup has also begun rolling out its own range of microwave meals, from stovies to curries, made in-house and ready to heat up later so people can enjoy Fly Cup at home too.

MOTOR MOUTH

'SUBSTANTIAL' MACAN 4 PERFECT FIT FOR BUSINESS AND FAMILY LIFE

By Sarah Wallek
Finance Director,
Motive Offshore Group

When I was asked if I would be interested in test driving the new Porsche Macan 4 EV, I jumped at the opportunity. Despite being a fan of the Porsche brand, I have never actually driven one before.

As an existing owner of an EV car with home charging facilities, topping up the Macan overnight was straightforward. It's also a great fit for where we're headed as a business, transitioning our fleet to hybrid and electric vehicles is key to Motive's commitment to reducing our carbon footprint.

I received the car late afternoon and that same evening had a drive to Stonehaven. Driving the Macan first time in the dark, took a little adjustment. Initially I felt the vehicle was wider than it is and found myself positioning the car more to the centre of the road. However, in daylight the following morning that concern quickly disappeared. The Macan is a solid vehicle, its dimensions are deceiving and it's not as wide as I initially thought.

We took the Porsche for a proper test drive along the roads to Tarland, Braemar and Ballater and the weather conditions were perfect. What struck me immediately was the quality of car. The Macan is exceptionally well-engineered, feels very secure on tighter bends and long sweeping corners, and the acceleration was effortless. I was very impressed with the performance of the car, the all-wheel-drive system gives confidence, and I truly enjoyed the experience of driving the car, it never felt intimidating. It just delivered the power in a smooth and controlled manner that suits my kind of driving and everyday journeys.

For my day-to-day requirements, reliability, comfort and safety is essential. With regular visits to Motive Offshore sites across the North-east of Scotland at Boyndie and Peterhead, I want a vehicle that is comfortable over distance and gives confidence in all road and weather conditions. Outside of work, we often travel to Dundee to support the Aberdeen Lynx ice hockey team, making comfort equally important on longer journeys. The Macan excels in all these areas.

One area of particular interest and consideration for me is the Macan's ability to tow. We regularly tow our son's racing boat and trailer to racing events with our diesel SUV, and many of the races are located a few hours south of Aberdeen.



The Macan can have a towbar fitted and can tow up to 2,500kg with a braked trailer. However, with EVs, journey planning becomes an important consideration. With range of up to 350 miles and Porsche's integrated charging planner, it helps to plan charging stops during a journey. My only reservation is manoeuvring a trailer into charging locations, they're not really designed for towing vehicles pulling into them.

The car interior has a sporting feel to it with the 60 second Sport Chrono stopwatch mounted on the dashboard, and the Drive Mode selector button on the steering wheel for instant switch to Normal / Sport / Sport Plus / Off Road mode. You notice the change with each setting, throttle response giving a more dynamic driving experience.

The level of comfort is impressive, electrically adjustable front seats gives excellent support, and three rear passengers have plenty legroom. Motive is a company that prides itself on staying ahead of technology, and I was truly impressed by the sleek digital layout and dashboard integration. Accessing navigation, calls, and charging info took zero effort, which is exactly what I need when managing a busy workday on the road with the Bose surround sound system and premium technology package.

A specific highlight was the colour of the car, Lugano Blue, very nice and compliments the Macan, and stands out making it noticeable, along with the 21-inch Macan Design wheels and Matrix LED headlights.

Porsche has made good use of storage space, front and rear compartments. To test the size of the rear boot I put my golf clubs and trolley in it, both fitted nicely with additional space left.

So, would I have a Porsche Macan 4?

Absolutely!

Excellent build quality and impressive EV technology. It feels substantial, it's enjoyable to drive, and comfortable for both business and family life. The only factor for me making the switch today would be towing long distances with a trailer, where charging infrastructure still presents some challenges. However, as charging places improve and battery technology develops, that concern is likely to diminish.

For me, the Porsche Macan 4 is the best electric SUV currently available.



Teddy Hingley, Business Development Manager, Porsche Centre Aberdeen







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BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Max Findlay
Business Development Consultant,
Escone Solutions Limited

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

Having been in the workplace for over 40 years now, I've worked with so many wonderful and inspiring people. It would be difficult and unfair to pick one out.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

Being involved in sales for many years, I've been on a number of different sales courses. However, rather than adopt one set methodology, I prefer to pick bits out of each course. One thing that has stuck with me all these years is to ensure that customers are aware that "no" is okay. This often breaks down the barrier between customer and sales person and gives them a way out if needed. I have found that it makes them more relaxed and trusting about dealing with you. People buy from people, especially those they can trust.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned in business?

Again, with a career of over 40 years, I've learnt a lot and still am. You are never too old and experienced to not keep on learning, particularly in the software and IT industry. My biggest lesson when dealing with customers is treat them as you would like to be treated as a customer. Look after them and they will look after you. Make sure you do as you promise and get back to them when you say you will. You have two ears for a reason so listen to them rather than talk at them. It's not rocket science.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

I have had a number of achievements over the years ranging from achieving sales targets to being recognised with an award for product knowledge. However, I am most proud about the reputation I built as an account manager who developed deep and trusting relationships with my customers. Some of these lasted over 25 years where the customers have become more like friends. I always put customer care ahead of sales and if you get that right, the sales will follow.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

The North-east is like a small town which means that when doing business, the customer or prospect will more than likely know someone you know. Whilst that can work in reverse for some people, it's a great way to spread the word on good products and services and you can quickly develop a reputation for quality work.

The North-east also a variety of industries from the traditional to the more cutting edge and this offers a great opportunity in business.

QUICK-FIRE ROUND

What was your first job?

My first real job was as a factory accountant with K-Shoemakers in Kendal where my boss would mark you down for being five minutes late. A valuable lesson.

Who or what inspires you most?

Seeing someone give good service to a customer which should be the norm rather than the exception.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

I'm a pretty easy-going guy so let most of these phrases wash over me but I really don't like people talking over each other in a meeting or on a call.

How do you relax?

Not being as spritely as I once was, I enjoy curling and watching football.

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My Career Journey

Kieran Taylor
Managing Director,
Welsh & Taylor Wealth



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Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

My late father has been the biggest influence on my career. Although he never ran a business, he instilled in me a strong work ethic, a desire to aim high, and the importance of doing things the right way. He worked hard to provide for his family, and that sense of responsibility and purpose is what motivates me every day - building something meaningful not just for myself, but for those around me.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

Value Builder has been the most impactful training I've undertaken. It fundamentally changed how I view business growth, helping me understand the eight key drivers of business value and how to scale sustainably. It also enabled me to map out a clear plan for future growth and to build a business that is attractive to clients, employees, and potential acquirers alike.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned in business?

That nothing ever stands still. Businesses must constantly evolve, adapt or risk falling behind. The landscape will always change, whether through regulation, technology, or client expectations. The businesses that succeed long term are those that remain resilient, forward-thinking, and willing to adapt to their environment while staying true to their core values.

What's been your proudest career achievement?

I don't think I've reached it yet. I'm always working towards what's next, and I believe that as your business grows, so do your ambitions and aspirations. For me, it's about continual progress, setting bigger goals, building something lasting, and striving to be better each day than the one before.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

Without question, the people. There's a strong sense of loyalty here, when people give you their word, they genuinely mean it. Clients are supportive, relationships are long-lasting, and there's a real desire to see local businesses succeed. While we may have a reputation for being "Abermoaners", the North east business community genuinely wants to see others thrive and grow.

Quick Fire Questions

What was your first job?

Working in Sandy's Chipper in Stonehaven at the age of 15.

Who or what inspires you most?

Becoming the best version of myself and doing things the right way, so I'm remembered for my character as much as my success.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

"Synergy." Especially "let's find some synergies". Yeah, let's not...

How do you relax?

Golf, long walks with my wife and daughter, and YouTube documentaries on obscure and historical topics.

If you had the power to change one thing in the world, what would it be?

Budget decisions and governments led by people with real life working and business experience, better decisions would follow.

John Clark Motor Group holds £1bn-plus turnover and grows balance sheet through a year of market disruption



Chris Clark, Group Managing Director of John Clark Motor Group

John Clark Motor Group (JCMG), one of Scotland's leading motor retail groups, has reported turnover of £1.065billion for the year ended December 31 2025.

This is the third year in a row that the group has traded above the £1billion mark. Net assets rose again to £126million, and the group remains ranked among the top 20 motor retail groups in the UK.

2025 was a year of significant disruption across the motor trade. The April 2025 increase in employer National Insurance contributions raised the group's National Insurance costs by 13%, adding to its fixed costs, and the challenge of recruiting and keeping workshop technicians pushed up wage costs across the industry.

From September onwards, the cyber-attack on Jaguar Land Rover's IT systems disrupted new vehicle supply across their dealer network, including the group's Land Rover dealerships. At the same time, used car prices fell sharply in the closing months of the year.

Alongside these external challenges, the costs of relocating, developing and opening new franchises added further pressure to the cost base, although these investments are already contributing positively in 2026.

Against that backdrop, the group delivered a profit before tax of £12.9million (2024: £19million) and EBITDA of £28.3million (2024: £33.7million).

It ended the year with cash at bank of £21.9million (2024: £20million) and a strong, highly liquid balance sheet. The group has since returned to growth, with profit before tax for the first half of 2026 ahead of the same period last year.

Chris Clark, Group Managing Director of John Clark Motor Group, said: "I could not be prouder of our team. 2025 threw a great deal at us: a tough economy, falling used car values, and the cyber-attack on Jaguar Land Rover, which hit vehicle supply to our Land Rover customers just as the busy September registration plate-change period got under way.

"Through all of it, our people stayed focused on our customers. They kept our workshops and showrooms running, and they welcomed new colleagues and new brands into the family."

FirstGroup strengthens Aberdeen coach business with acquisition of J.D. Peace & Co Aberdeen Ltd



FirstGroup plc is expanding its coach operations in Aberdeen with the acquisition of established local operator J.D.Peace & Co Aberdeen Ltd, also known as Peace Coaches.

The business operates a fleet of 20 vehicles, providing home-to-school transport for local authority and independent school customers, alongside private hire and cruise ship shore excursions.

Peace Coaches joins First Bus-owned King Coaches, strengthening the group's existing presence in Aberdeenshire and bringing together two established local businesses with complementary operations and customer bases.

The business will be overseen by Neil Simpson, General Manager of King Coaches. Existing services, contracts and bookings will continue as normal, with the focus on providing continuity for customers and colleagues while exploring opportunities created by the two businesses working more closely together.

The acquisition forms part of FirstGroup's strategy to develop a diversified UK and Ireland coach portfolio, which now comprises approaching 600 vehicles and employs more than 700 people.

Gareth Davies, Managing Director (Coaching) for First Bus, said: "We already have a strong coach operation in Aberdeen through King Coaches, so bringing Peace Coaches into the business is a natural next step for us in the region.

"Peace Coaches has an experienced team, an established customer base and strong expertise across school transport, private hire and cruise work. Together with King Coaches, that gives us an even stronger base from which to serve customers and develop our coach operations in the North-east of Scotland.

"Our immediate focus is on continuity. Peace Coaches customers will continue to receive the service they know, while the team will benefit from being part of a wider coach business with the resources and expertise to support future growth.

"We're very pleased to welcome the Peace Coaches team to First Bus."

Why cost-cutting on safety is bad for business

arco®
Experts in Safety

In my role at Arco, I often get asked by customers: "How much does safety cost?". That's fair enough and I get that budgets are tight. But what I typically reply is: "Ask yourself, what's the financial impact of getting safety wrong?" Here's why...

As a business owner, you'll probably spend a lot of time looking at ways to cut costs, or make wiser investments. However, trying to save the pennies when it comes to health and safety can be bad for your long-term business health.

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), workplace injuries and work-related ill health cost businesses like yours £22.9 billion annually. It's a stark figure that shows the importance of proactive prevention rather than reactive intervention.

With discount safety you discount lives

When it comes to health and safety, it's always wiser to see the bigger picture. Unfortunately, the biggest mistake organisations often make is measuring the cost of safety rather than the cost of unsafe decisions.

In fact, as a business leader, there's nowhere to hide from an inferior safety strategy. If you fail to lead effectively on health and safety management, you could spend up to 18 years in jail. It could also see your company punished with heavy fines.

For smart operators, this is where safety becomes a financial strategy rather than a compliance requirement. Organisations that understand risk are often better placed to prioritise investment, target resources effectively, and build long-term resilience.

But to achieve these benefits, it means putting a pause on comparing the price of PPE in isolation. Instead, it's more effective to assess the wider impact on incident reduction, operational uptime, employee wellbeing and workforce retention.

Safety support you can rely on

Although it's easy in principle for organisations to assess safety through the lens of business value and total cost of risk, it can be challenging to follow through. That's why Arco helps organisations understand the true cost of risk and identify practical opportunities to reduce it.

By combining safety expertise, risk insight and fit-for-purpose solutions, Arco supports you in making informed decisions that protect people and performance. Ultimately, this helps companies of all sizes move from cost to value-based decisions and enjoy a much stronger ROI on safety.

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New Chief Executive can 'reset council's relationship with the business community'



Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce has welcomed new Aberdeen City Council Chief Executive Andy MacDonald's arrival, marking a "fresh start".

Andy joined the council in 2018 and was Executive Director for Corporate Services and Interim Chief Executive prior to his appointment on a permanent basis. He was selected as the council's permanent Chief Executive following a recruitment and selection process led by a cross-party Appointment Panel.

He said: "Aberdeen is where I live and work, and where I have built my life over several years. That gives me a very personal commitment to the city's future, and to making a positive difference for the people and communities who make it what it is.

"It's a real privilege to be appointed Chief Executive. Aberdeen is exceptionally well placed to seize the opportunities ahead and I want to play my part in helping the city be ambitious, welcoming and inclusive, with opportunity for everyone.

"I've seen first-hand what can be achieved when the council works closely with communities, businesses and partner organisations. I'm proud of what has already been delivered, but I also know there is much more to do. My focus will be on building on that work and making a positive difference for the people of Aberdeen every day."

Russell Borthwick, Chief Executive of Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, welcomed Andy's appointment, saying the move marks a chance to "reset the council's relationship with the business community".

He said: "It was clear from the Assessment Centre that Andy has genuine affection and ambition for the city.

"He is keen to use his appointment to herald a fresh start in terms of how Aberdeen City Council participates in and contributes to the work of the regional economic partnership.

"I was particularly pleased that he views this as an opportunity to reset the council's relationship with the business community, with a focus on growth, investment and place and I'm very much looking forward to following up with him."

Councillor Alex McLellan, Chair of the Appointment Panel, said: "The recruitment process attracted candidates of a very high calibre, but Andy consistently demonstrated the qualities we were looking for in our next Chief Executive.

"Andy brings extensive leadership experience spanning both local government and the private sector. His knowledge of the organisation, and his dedication to Aberdeen gave the appointment panel confidence that he can provide strong and effective leadership for the council and the city.

"We are delighted to have made this appointment."



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OPINION

Growth, technology and talent:

What's on the business agenda for 2027?



Authors: Grant Morrison, Office Managing Partner – Aberdeen, Head of Oil and Gas, RSM

Shannon Dowdles, Partner, Corporate Tax, RSM

As we move towards the end of 2026, business leaders across the North-east are balancing challenges with opportunity. What consistently stands out is the strength of the region's business community. Despite economic uncertainty, companies continue to diversify and look for opportunities to create a competitive advantage.

Here are some of the key areas that business leaders have on their agenda for the coming year.

Securing growth in an uncertain world

Global and domestic economic uncertainty remains a key concern for many businesses as geopolitical tensions, changing trade relationships and shifting regulatory requirements create a challenging market.

The most successful organisations are able to maintain a clear long-term strategy, while remaining agile enough to respond to changing market conditions.

Reviewing operational resilience, scenario planning and liquidity management is crucial for sustainable growth.

Organisations with a clear understanding of risk are better placed to prepare for and manage potential challenges and pursue new opportunities with confidence.

At RSM, we work with businesses to strengthen their resilience while pursuing growth.

Through strategic advisory, risk management, financial planning and transaction support, we help leadership teams to assess available opportunities, understand the challenges and make informed decisions with greater confidence in an increasingly complex environment.

Preparing for the next investment cycle

One of the defining characteristics of successful businesses is their willingness to prepare for opportunities before they emerge.

Whether attracting external investment, pursuing acquisitions, entering new markets or investing in innovation, preparation for the next stage of the business lifecycle is essential.

Businesses that maintain high-quality financial information, strong governance and a clear strategic narrative are far more attractive to investors, lenders and potential partners.

Our transaction advisory,due diligence, corporate finance and assurance teams work alongside management to ensure organisations are well positioned to capitalise on future investment opportunities.

Where additional capacity is needed, we also provide experienced professionals to support critical projects, transformation programmes and periods of increased demand.





Technology and artificial intelligence move to the boardroom

An increasing number of organisations are using AI and advanced analytics to improve operational performance, automate routine processes, strengthen financial controls and support decision-making.

However, the key to unlocking AI's full potential lies in ensuring technology transformation efforts are responsible and sustainable. Boards should be considering AI culture readiness, governance frameworks, cyber security implications, data quality and ethical use alongside the potential efficiency gains to manage risk and ensure return on investment.

Our technology, risk and consulting specialists help organisations to adopt digital solutions and AI while understanding and managing the associated risks. From governance frameworks and cyber security assessments to data strategy and operational transformation, we support businesses in turning technological innovation into measurable business va

People remain the biggest differentiator

Amid all the discussion around technology and investment, one fact remains unchanged: businesses succeed because of people.

For many organisations, talent management is now one of the most important elements of their growth strategy. Employers increasingly need to offer more than competitive salaries. Career development, workplace culture, flexibility and wellbeing are all becoming critical factors in attracting and retaining staff.

Leadership teams should be looking at whether they are creating environments where people want to stay and build their careers.

We help organisations attract, develop and retain the talent needed to achieve their growth objectives. This includes providing workforce planning, reward and incentives advice, leadership development and HR consulting support, to build and nurture high-performing and engaged teams.

Looking ahead

Our region's greatest strength is not a single industry or technology; it is the capability, expertise and determination of businesses and people operating here.

As we look towards 2027 and beyond, the organisations that will thrive are those willing to embrace change, invest in their people, leverage technology intelligently and take a long-term view of growth.

At RSM, we are committed to helping organisations across the North-east navigate complexity, unlock opportunity and deliver sustainable long-term growth.

The opportunities are there. The challenge for businesses lies in ensuring they are well-positioned to capture them.

To discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact grant.morrison@rsmuk.com or shannon.dowdles@rsmuk.com



Cooper Parry bursts onto Aberdeen finance scene after market disruptor takeover

By Danny McKay



Cooper Parry is the new name everyone is talking about in the finance scene in Aberdeen, rocking the boat and challenging stereotypes.

After acquiring Aberdeen-based "market disruptor" Hutcheon Mearns a year ago, Cooper Parry is aggressively expanding into Scotland and the North-east.

Having worked for Hutcheon Mearns for over a decade and now a Partner at Cooper Parry, Claire Clark CA explained: "Cooper Parry is a national professional services firm, but we like to think we do things a bit differently to the conventional players in the market.

"We're really looking at responding to clients' needs in new ways and just breaking the mould.

'Let's not be conventional, but let's also just be decent people'

While historically Cooper Parry (CP) has been known as the "rebels of accountancy", CP now sees itself as a "next gen" professional services firm.

Asked about that "market disruptor" tag and challenging industry stereotypes, Claire said: "Our ethos has always been to challenge the norm. Let's not be conventional, but let's also just be decent people. I think that's a big part of who we are.

"A lot of our services have come out of a client need, and a lot of that has come from just going out and speaking to people and listening.

"I think sometimes too many traditional firms will go and try and sell a service, they don't go and listen to the client, understand what's going on and think about how best placed they are to deal with that.

"I actually find that a lot of our successes have come through just having open, honest conversations with people. You're not hard-selling anything, you're just talking about your experience and your knowledge and you build a rapport.

"I think that's really important and I think it's often underestimated in the finance profession. Personality and relationships are really important."

'Aberdeen is built on innovation and I think the finance industry has to innovate as well'

Having worked in finance in the Granite City for 25 years, Claire noted its ties to the ups and downs of oil and gas, but added: "Actually, I still think there's a lot to go for and a lot to deliver. I think it's really important that people still invest in the city and the finance scene.

"Aberdeen is built on innovation and I think the finance industry has to innovate as well, to think about what the city needs now from its finance scene. It's maybe not what it always was. Thinking about the current climate and the challenges it has



and what we can do to help that. I think everyone has got their role to play in that."

While finance and accountancy can carry connotations of dull, stuffy offices, suits, and personality-vacuum number-crunchers, Cooper Parry could not go further against that grain.

Claire said: "Early in my career, I felt like I needed to conform to that sort of stereotype and I was definitely much quieter and thought I had to conform to progress, probably because I was a trainee and was young and trying to learn.

'It's always been part of my strategy to grow across the UK'

"Now I think I just need to be myself. I think that's a really important part of this, as you grow as a person you should just be comfortable being who you are. You may not fit with everyone and that's fine, as long as you've been honest and true to yourself.

"I think that's particularly true of women as well, that you feel like you have to conform. I'm a big believer in just being yourself. People will appreciate you for your honesty."

One thing Hutcheon Mearns, and now CP, does differently is its team of interim specialists.

Claire explained: "Quite often high-growth businesses need really good resource and you're very much beholden to who's available in the market at any point in time, and you maybe don't want to commit long-term to someone.

"So Craig Hutcheon, founder of Hutcheon Mearns, saw a gap to have a team of people who are really good, industry-experienced, practice-trained accountants who companies can just call on when they need them.

"That's the team that I now oversee."

Hutcheon Mearns and CP's eagerness to do things differently and refusal to accept the status quo has also enabled them to attract top talent from elsewhere.

'We don't need to do things the way they've always been done'

Claire said: "At Cooper Parry there are so many people who have come from mid-tier Big Four firms who are obviously brilliant people but possibly feel a bit hamstrung by all the parameters that are put in place.

"A lot of people are thinking 'actually, I can see a way to do this differently' – and this is the place for that."

More flexible working arrangements have also proven to be a draw.

"We actually had a lot of people leave jobs and come part-time to us because they couldn't be part-time with their old employer, and they would contract them back," Claire continued.

"Cooper Parry has been the same, a lot of the same sentiments around different ways of working and thinking differently. They have a policy where you can work from anywhere at any time forever.

"We have people who go to New York and work from there for two weeks, and there's someone who lives in France.

"We don't need to do things the way they've always been done."

On top of their similar outlooks and strategies making Hutcheon Mearns and CP a good fit, the acquisition has enabled both to expand geographically and in terms of their service offering.

Claire said: "In addition to the culture fit - which is definitely unquestionable as everyone is very similar with similar mindsets – it also made loads of sense strategically.

"We bring some different service lines that they don't have, like specialists and finance recruitment, and they brought service lines that we didn't have, such as tax, audit, wealth management and wider digital solutions.

"There's really just so many different services that we can now provide to clients that we didn't have the capacity to offer before."

And the acquisition has brought benefits for employees too.

Claire went on: "Adam Maitland who was a partner here in Aberdeen is now Head of Corporate Finance for Cooper Parry nationally. There's a lot of interesting things to go after and we really feel like we're part of a partnership where everyone is working together.

"For me, the biggest thing has been recruiting a partner in the north of England to build out our finance specialist offering. That's been a huge milestone for me personally because it's always been part of my strategy to grow across the UK."

From Scottish Roots to Global Markets

By Bethany Cross, Brand and Marketing Manager at Dean's of Huntly



From our home in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Dean's has grown from a small family kitchen enterprise into a recognised Scottish food brand. The story began more than 50 years ago, when Helen Dean started baking shortbread to her own recipe.

Today, we continue to build on those foundations, combining traditional baking methods and a strong sense of provenance with the quality standards, production capability and commercial expertise needed to serve customers in the UK and overseas. Exporting gives us the opportunity to introduce new audiences to authentic Scottish shortbread, while broadening our customer base and creating a more resilient balance of markets.

The acquisition of Duncan's of Deeside represents an important step in strengthening our position in the premium Scottish biscuit and shortbread sector. The strategic rationale for the deal includes increasing the combined business's market share and drawing on the expertise, capabilities and synergies of both companies. From an export perspective, the acquisition is particularly valuable because it broadens our portfolio and opens opportunities in new international markets, allowing us to reach a wider range of customers with two established Scottish brands. By combining complementary products, market knowledge and customer relationships, we can offer overseas partners greater choice, strengthen our routes to market and build a more resilient platform for sustainable international growth.

Building viable export business means understanding what each customer and market requires, responding with the right product and pack format, and delivering consistently. We work across branded and own-label opportunities, supplying products suited to retail, gifting and foodservice. Our approach is centred on sustainable, considered growth: nurturing established customer relationships, responding to opportunities in developing markets and adapting its offer where appropriate. Rather than applying one model everywhere, the business recognises that each destination can have its own preferences, commercial expectations and regulatory requirements. This flexibility is supported by continued investment in product development and operational capability. Innovation allows us to respond to changing expectations without losing the character and distinctive taste at the heart of the business. New opportunities are considered not simply as individual orders, but as the potential beginning of long-term partnerships built on trust, reliable service and a shared understanding of the market.

Recent financial support is also helping us turn international ambition into sustainable growth. We have secured a £4.9 million funding package from Bank of Scotland, comprising trade finance solutions and an invoice finance facility. The package will support increased production capacity, the development of new customer relationships and effective cash-flow management as our export operations expand. With demand growing in markets including Australia, China, Japan, the United States and across Europe, access to flexible finance gives us the confidence to fulfil larger overseas orders, manage longer trading

“ Looking ahead, international growth will remain an important part of our strategy as we see the opportunity to build lasting recognition for the Dean’s and Duncan’s brands...







cycles and continue investing in our people.

Moving food products across borders involves much more than arranging transport. Every shipment must be supported by accurate information and the correct documentation, completed within the required timescales. When requirements differ by destination, even a small omission can create avoidable delays. Efficient export administration is therefore a practical part of protecting customer relationships and maintaining confidence in the supply chain. Dean’s values the support provided by the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce international trade documentation team, particularly in relation to Certificates of Origin. Their knowledge and responsive service help ensure that the paperwork accompanying shipments is complete, correctly prepared and ready when it is needed. For our business, the value of that relationship lies not only in processing individual documents, but also in having an accessible source of expertise. When a market has a particular requirement, the team can provide practical guidance. That dependable local support helps reduce uncertainty, supports compliance and allows Dean’s colleagues to focus their time on customers, production and future growth. It is a good example of how regional business support can contribute directly to international activity. Although documentation often sits behind the scenes, it plays an essential role in helping products travel smoothly from Huntly to their final destination. For a growing exporter, having experienced people who understand the process provides reassurance and strengthens the wider export operation.

Looking ahead, international growth will remain an important part of our strategy as we see the opportunity to build lasting recognition for the Dean’s and Duncan’s brands and for the quality, craftsmanship and provenance associated with Scottish baking. Developing new markets can support scale, encourage innovation and create new ways to present the company’s ranges to consumers, retailers and trade partners.



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WORDS OF ADVICE



Caroline Steele
Head of Finance,
IKM Testing UK

Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you.

My management style is built on empathy, respect, and leading by example. I would never expect others to do something I wouldn't do myself. I strive to be dependable, approachable, and supportive, fostering trust and collaboration. It has helped me build a team with similar values who strive to succeed together.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

Earlier in my career one of my biggest challenges was finding the confidence to share my views with senior stakeholders and speak publicly. I addressed this by recognising the value of my experience, preparing well, and stepping outside my comfort zone. This not only strengthened my confidence but also helped me become a more effective communicator and leader.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

The best advice I've ever received was, *'You can't put a price on fun'.* At first it sounded like an excuse for poor financial decisions, but it's actually a great life lesson. Work hard and plan for the future, but don't keep putting life on hold. Sometimes you've got to drink the champagne on a Tuesday 😉

What's your top tip for someone joining your organisation today?

Be curious, be brave, and keep learning. Don't assume that 'we've always done it this way' is the right answer. Take advantage of development opportunities such as Graduate Apprenticeships and never stop building your skills. Your fresh perspective could be exactly what's needed to drive positive change.



Shabnum Hanif
Founder & Managing Director ,
IntrospeXion

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

IntrospeXion is where psychology meets operational risk. We work in high-pressure industries where human behaviour isn't a "soft" issue; it can be the difference between a good decision and a costly one. We get under the skin of what drives people, teams and workplace cultures, then turn that insight into safer decisions, stronger leaders and better-performing organisations.

Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you.

I lead with trust, openness and a lot of autonomy. I believe if you bring talented people into a business, you should give them the space and confidence to bring their own expertise, ideas and personality to it. As we've grown, I've realised leadership isn't about being the smartest person in the room; it's about bringing great people into the room and allowing them to shine.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

One of the biggest barriers has been challenging the perception that psychology and wellbeing sit on the periphery of business.

I tackled that by staying focused on what the data tells us. The evidence is clear: when organisations face pressure, change and uncertainty, supporting people becomes more important, not less.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

Business: Don't wait until you feel ready. Back yourself, take the opportunity and grow into it: readiness often comes after, not before.

Personal: Stop measuring your life against someone else's. The grass isn't greener on the other side; it's greener where you water it.

What's your top tip for someone joining your organisation today?

Be curious, be creative and don't be afraid to think differently. At IntrospeXion, we're not interested in simply fitting into what already exists or being constrained by where people think traditional psychology belongs.

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Beyond the balance sheet: Why business confidence is the economy's leading indicator

Research Chamber

Throughout this series, we've explored how evidence informs decisions across tourism, infrastructure and energy. Finance is no different. Behind every investment, recruitment or expansion decision sits a common factor: confidence. Understanding that confidence and where it is heading, is a valuable form of market intelligence.

Financial statements tell us where a business has been. They report turnover, profit, cash flow and assets, providing an essential picture of performance. But by the time those figures are published, market conditions may already have changed.

That is why business confidence matters.

Confidence is often described as a leading indicator of economic performance because it influences the decisions businesses make today that shape tomorrow's economy. Whether a company chooses to recruit, invest in new equipment, enter a new market or postpone spending can depend as much on expectations about future conditions as on its current financial position.

This is why business sentiment is closely monitored by governments, central banks and investors. The British Chambers of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey (QES), for example, has tracked business confidence for almost four decades and is an important measure of business sentiment. It provides an early indication of how businesses are responding to changing conditions, often before those changes are reflected in official economic statistics.

Confidence, however, reflects perception as well as underlying conditions. It can shift ahead of, or occasionally diverge from, what later happens in the economy. This makes it useful as an early signal but it should be considered alongside other evidence rather than in isolation.

What the latest data tells ust

For the North-east, this insight is particularly valuable.

The latest Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce QES, covering Q3 2026, presents a mixed picture. Domestic sales and orders remain weaker than the UK average, while investment plans remain relatively subdued. At the same time, there are signs of improvement in several areas: regional cash flow strengthened during the quarter, workforce numbers moved into positive territory, and expectations for both turnover and profitability improved.

The picture on confidence itself is also relatively stable. The proportion of businesses expressing higher levels of optimism about Aberdeen's future is broadly unchanged from the same quarter last year. This suggests that, while businesses continue to face significant pressures and uncertainty, overall regional sentiment has not deteriorated.

These findings matter because confidence influences behaviour. When businesses are more confident, they may be more willing to recruit, invest and expand. When confidence weakens, investment and recruitment decisions can be delayed. Across an economy, these individual decisions provide an important signal of changing conditions.

From measurement to insight

This is where research becomes more than measurement.

Understanding business confidence gives policymakers an early indication of emerging pressures, provides investors with context on market conditions and helps businesses benchmark their own experiences against wider regional and national trends.

Whether evaluating the economic impact of major events, assessing the opportunities presented by energy transition, measuring the outcomes of infrastructure investment or tracking business sentiment through the QES, the objective is consistent: transforming data into meaningful insight that supports strategic decisions. This approach sits at the heart of the Research Chamber.

In an uncertain economic environment, combining financial performance with wider market intelligence can help organisations identify emerging risks, recognise opportunities and understand their own performance in context.

Looking beyond the balance sheet does not diminish the importance of financial results. Rather, financial performance and business sentiment provide different, complementary perspectives on the economy.

Because while financial accounts tell us where we have been, business confidence offers a valuable indication of how businesses are viewing the road ahead.

For businesses wanting to benchmark their own experience against the wider region, the Quarterly Economic Survey is open to North-east businesses each quarter, with findings shared with participating businesses alongside the published results.



Samira Heshmatzadeh,
Senior Research Executive,
Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

samira.heshmatzadeh@agcc.co.uk

Working offshore, LOGIC (IMHH) Scheme and the energy sector:

Are you adequately protected from claim and negligence?



Author: Matthew Williams, Head of Office, Marsh

Businesses working in and supporting the oil and gas industry face challenges from an insurance and risk perspective. Offshore and land-based work each bring different hazards. Layer on complex contractual chains, potential for high-value losses, environmental risks, regulatory scrutiny, and cross-border legal complexity. The result is a risk landscape that demands specialist protection.

Not all insurers have the expertise or capacity to insure businesses operating in the oil and gas industry. If your business doesn't work exclusively in the sector, there's a real risk: your coverage may be generic commercial liability insurance with endorsements or exclusions that don't address your sector's specific risks.

A good example is insurers' rights of subrogation. Insurers will insist on recovering claims they pay when loss was caused by a third party's negligence. Insurance policies require that rights of recovery are maintained at all times, meaning any hold harmless or similar agreements would constitute a material breach. If your business operates under the LOGIC Mutual Hold Harmless framework, you need to ensure your liability wording accepts these contract conditions.

It is also important to consider how claims are funded. On paper, policy limits may look identical between insurers, but the reality could be very different. If insurer A operates on a "defence costs inclusive" basis and insurer B on a "defence costs in addition" basis, that represents a fundamental difference to your claims outcome. A complex legal case involving multiple claimants will generate substantial legal bills which will erode the policy limit quickly for insurer A but not for insurer



B – leaving indemnity limits to deal with the actual claim. For your business, this distinction could mean the difference between adequate protection and significant uninsured exposure.

Environmental clean-up and pollution is often an overlooked aspect of cover. General liability cover will appear to provide protection for claims arising from accidental pollution. But it's not uncommon for policies to include pollution liability on the policy schedule itself. Cover under a liability policy is often limited to pollution to third party sites only (so no clean up cover for pollution to own premises) and pollution caused by a sudden incident (so no cover for clean-up arising from gradual pollution).

When choosing insurance cover, consider what wider support is available both pre and post loss. Some insurers provide risk management support to mitigate loss and assist your health and safety objectives. Others go beyond settlement and provide medical and vocational rehabilitation services. This support could significantly reduce your overall exposure.

All businesses operating in the sector should have insurance protection designed to address the unique risks they face. The issues outlined above - subrogation clauses, defence cost structures, and environmental exposures - warrant careful review.

Contact Marsh's oil and gas insurance specialists in Aberdeen to discuss your current coverage in detail.

OPINION

MARSH

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Matt Williams | 07512 595181
matt.williams@marsh.com

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JBP marks half a century of excellence by announcing major capital investment in Inverurie headquarters

John Bell Pipeline Equipment Company Ltd (JBP) is marking its 50th anniversary in 2026 with more than a celebration.

The Inverurie-based pipeline and valve specialist has announced a significant six-figure capital investment in its Thainstone headquarters, with construction of a new 700 sq ft reception and client meeting facility due to commence in December 2026 and complete in March 2027. As part of the same project, the company's existing reception area will be converted into a dedicated canteen and breakout space for its employees.

The investment, designed by Inverurie-based architects McWilliam Lippe, will transform both the client-facing and employee facilities at JBP's purpose-built complex at Camiestone Road, Thainstone. The new reception and meeting facility will provide a contemporary, professional environment for the international clients and partners who visit the company's Aberdeenshire base, while the conversion of the current reception into a modern canteen and breakout area reflects JBP's commitment to the wellbeing and experience of its people.

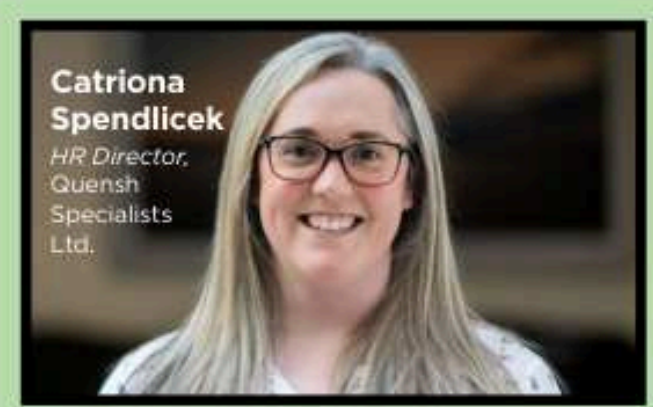
The development is a statement of intent from a business that has never stood still. Having purchased the freehold of its 6.5-acre Thainstone complex outright in 2022, JBP is now investing further in the physical environment to match the ambitions of the business.

Willie Moir, Managing Director, John Bell Pipeline Equipment Company Ltd, said: "I am extremely proud to be leading JBP at such a significant milestone. 50 years is quite the achievement, and it is a testament to the dedication of every individual who has been part of this business. JBP is a progressive, proactive and professional company, and together with the current management team, we will continue to nurture our success, develop new opportunities, and build on the outstanding legacy that has been established.

"This investment is a reflection of where JBP is heading. As we celebrate 50 years in business, we wanted to mark this not just with words, but with action. A modern, world-class reception and meeting environment sends a clear message to our clients, our people and the wider industry — JBP is here, we are growing, and we are investing in the future of this business and this region."



WORDS OF ADVICE



Catriona Spendlicek
HR Director, Quensh Specialists Ltd.

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Quensh is a local consultancy specialising in bespoke HR and HSEQ support. We work with businesses across a wide range of industries, providing practical, commercially focused advice to help them manage their people, meet their obligations and overcome challenges.

Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you.

I'd describe my management style as direct but supportive. I lead by example, set high standards and give my team the support and autonomy they need to succeed. I like to stay close to my team, understand their challenges and help them deliver an exceptional service.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

One of the biggest challenges in HR is keeping pace with constant change. I've tackled this by embracing continuous learning, staying curious and being willing to step outside my comfort zone. I've also learned that asking questions and drawing on the expertise of others is a strength, not a weakness.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

Be adaptable. Things rarely go exactly to plan, particularly in business and HR. Being able to adapt quickly, stay positive and approach challenges with an open mind is a valuable skill that will serve you well both professionally and personally.

What's your top tip for someone joining your organisation today?

Keep an open mind. Consultancy can be very different from an in-house role, with exposure to different businesses, industries and challenges. Embrace the variety, ask questions and don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. You'll learn far more by getting involved and giving things a go.

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The FSE Group is helping ambitious companies in the North East of Scotland realise their growth potential with **flexible loans** from £100,000 to £2million from the British Business Bank's Investment Fund for Scotland.

The FSE Group has specialised in backing high-growth businesses with projection-led funding since 2002. **Our team in Scotland is led by Norrie Cook, who is supported by a team of experienced Investment Managers, David Robertson, Jim Pritchard, Patrick Burke and Dave Young, and Investment Associate John Thomson.** Each brings expertise in supporting businesses at different stages of growth, providing not just funding but also the guidance needed to scale successfully.

Unlike traditional lenders, FSE takes a projection-led view, focusing on the strength of a company's growth plans, management team and market opportunity rather than relying solely on past trading performance or tangible assets. This approach is already enabling Scottish businesses to accelerate their development.

Aberdeenshire-based subsea equipment specialist **Legasea** recently secured a £250,000 loan to help grow its team from 25 to 30 employees and establish a new base in Luanda, Angola. The company is targeting growth to £15 million in revenue by 2030.

LEGASEA

> "This investment will help us grow our team, build on our progress in Angola, and support more clients looking for a better solution."
>
> Lewis Sim, Co-founder and Managing Director, Legasea

Debt finance can be a powerful tool to support activities such as product development, recruitment, marketing and expanding premises. For businesses across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, this represents a unique opportunity to access growth capital tailored to their needs, delivered by a team embedded in Scotland's business ecosystem.

Our North East customers work with David Robertson. With over 35 years in financial services - 25 in the North East of Scotland - David has a strong understanding of the region's opportunities and challenges and is looking forward to working with the business community, connecting with local SMEs and helping to structure funding that supports sustainable growth.

To find out how The FSE Group can support your business growth journey visit www.thefsegroup.com or contact David directly: david.robertson@thefsegroup.com



David Robertson

The FSEGroup

Working with British Business Bank | Investment Fund for Scotland

A new era of decommissioning: What we're learning from today's projects



Author: Andrew Ellis, Commercial Director, Peterson Energies

A record £2.6billion was spent on UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) decommissioning in 2025, according to the NSTA, and that momentum has continued into 2026. Many assets have reached CoP, many more projects are progressing through the pipeline, and an estimated backlog of 500 UKCS wells remains awaiting final abandonment.

Together, we can maximise the value and opportunity this significant decommissioning programmes creates for the supply chain while ensuring efficient, cost-effective, and sustainable solutions for operators.

Decommissioning represents the next chapter in the lifecycle of an offshore asset and, as the North Sea matures, we can regard it as an important part of the UK's wider industrial capacity: one capable of sustaining jobs and skills, strengthening supply chains, and supporting infrastructure that is needed for the development and delivery of all-energy scopes.

Infrastructure and integration

The UK has a position of strength. Years of North Sea activity have created significant logistics, engineering and decommissioning expertise, supported by a coastline with established ports and infrastructure capable of handling complex offshore projects.

One location that demonstrates our coastline's capability is Dales Voe at the Port of Lerwick in Shetland, where we work alongside decommissioning and dismantling specialist Brown & Mason.

Dales Voe has one of the strongest quaysides in the UK, engineered to accommodate loads of up to 60 tonnes per square metre, and has previously welcomed the world's largest heavy-lift vessel.



It demonstrates an important principle for the next phase of decommissioning: the right infrastructure, in the right location, combined with an experienced and integrated supply chain can influence not only how efficiently projects are delivered, but where their economic and environmental value is retained.

Retaining value from infrastructure

Brown & Mason's recycling and reuse approach makes it clear that rather than viewing decommissioning simply as the process of removing infrastructure, we can increasingly view it as part of a wider lifecycle – one in which materials, industrial capability, skills and knowledge all have the potential to carry value forward.

How success is measured broadens with this mindset - encompassing environmental performance, supply chain impact, and what is ultimately retained from the asset and the activity surrounding its removal.

Designing the next generation with the end in mind

Every decommissioning project in the UKCS provides lessons that extend beyond oil and gas - across engineering, logistics, lifting, transportation, dismantling, material recovery, and collaboration.

With a maturing renewables market, we are already considering, as a logistics partner, how easily infrastructure can ultimately be dismantled, how materials can be recovered, and the supply chain opportunities there will be.

It is great to see that these points are being considered from the outset throughout the energy landscape.

An industrial capability worth retaining

At Peterson, we have been involved in several major decommissioning workscopes over the past 10 years and see this as a significant growth market for the next decade. It's an incredibly complex space, handling huge pieces of kit. Safety and sustainability are at the forefront and the need to ensure project plans are robust is of the greatest importance.

The UK's total remaining oil and gas decommissioning liability is estimated at approximately £43.4billion, while the UK faces a crucial 10-year transition window where up to one-third of its earliest offshore wind assets reach their originally anticipated end-of-life.

These figures demonstrate huge potential to move forward with a renewed approach to ensuring future decommissioning projects exemplify the North Sea's expertise – and, crucially, create a legacy in the skills we retain and the knowledge we carry forward for the North Sea.

OPINION

BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Christine Dodds
Finance Director,
Peterson Energies

What are the most pressing challenges that your sector faces today and why?

The energy and industrial services sectors are navigating a period of significant change. We need to balance maintaining secure and affordable energy supplies today while investing in the transition to lower-carbon solutions for the future. At the same time, businesses are dealing with cost inflation, increasing regulatory requirements and competition for skilled talent. The organisations that succeed will be those that can remain financially resilient while adapting quickly to changing customer and stakeholder expectations.

What is the hardest lesson you have learned in your career to date?

That technical expertise alone is not enough. Early in my career, I believed that having the right answer was the most important thing. Over time, I've learned that bringing people with you, understanding different perspectives and communicating clearly are just as important as the analysis itself. Even the best strategy will struggle if people don't understand it or support it.

What is the most valuable piece of business advice you have ever received?

Always look at the bigger picture. It's easy to become focused on the immediate issue in front of you, but the best decisions are made when you understand the wider strategic context, the risks, the opportunities and the long-term implications. That advice has served me well throughout my career.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date and why?

Rather than a single project or role, I'm most proud of the trust I've built with colleagues, leadership teams and boards over the years. Being seen as someone who can provide objective advice, help solve complex problems and support organisations through periods of change is something I value greatly. Those relationships are built over time and are incredibly rewarding.

If you could make one thing happen tomorrow that would benefit North-east Scotland, what would it be?

I would accelerate investment in skills, infrastructure and innovation to position North-east Scotland as a global leader in both energy security and the energy transition. The region has exceptional talent, expertise and entrepreneurial spirit. Supporting those strengths would help create sustainable opportunities for future generations and maintain the area's economic importance for many years to come.

What was your first job?

My first job was in retail while I was studying. It taught me some important lessons about customer service, teamwork and the value of hard work, all of which have stayed with me throughout my career.

When would you like to retire?

I'm focused on continuing to learn, contribute and make a positive impact, so I don't have a fixed retirement date in mind. As long as I'm enjoying the challenges and adding value, I'd like to remain involved in business, mentoring and board roles.

What did you have for breakfast?

Overnight oats and a black coffee.

Who, or what, inspires you?

I'm inspired by people who combine ambition with humility and who create opportunities for others to succeed. I've been fortunate to work with a number of leaders who remain curious, keep learning and make thoughtful decisions even in challenging circumstances. I also find inspiration in people who overcome adversity and give back to their communities.

the MEMBER MEET the M



Kayleigh Paterson-Donald

Charity Development Lead
Gathimba Edwards Foundation (GEF)

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

GEF is a small children's charity and, thanks to our supporters, we are proud to have built a brighter future and improved the quality of life for over 700 children in Kenya and North-east Scotland through our three pillars of Education, Shelter and Wellbeing.

Who are your customers?

As a charity, we don't really speak in terms of customers. We have the children and families who are supported through our work, and then we have the supporters who fund and enable our work.

What is the biggest challenge you're facing at the moment?

Rising costs are probably our biggest challenge, as every pound we raise must work harder to support the communities we serve. For example, North-east families with disabled children often have to choose between basic bills and the specialist equipment or therapies their children need.

Our biggest opportunity, though, is collaboration. There's a huge amount of goodwill within the North-east business community, and I'd love to see more businesses and charities working together to share skills, networks and resources and ultimately create a bigger impact.

What is your word of your fellow Chamber members?

Do what makes you happy! Working in the third sector can be hard going at times, most charities are understaffed, so there are definitely challenging days. But if you love what you do, most of the time work doesn't really feel like work. Find something you're passionate about and stick with it!

What's the best thing about being a Chamber member?

The Chamber gives us a fantastic platform to share the work we do. We're very grateful for the support of fellow Chamber member Bold St Media, who help us share our stories through the Bulletin.
I also love meeting members from different sectors and hearing about what they do. There's a real sense of community within the Chamber, and I think that's what makes being a member so valuable.



Florence Igboayaka

CEO
The Period Place

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

The Period Place is a charity dedicated to supporting holistic wellbeing for women and girls spanning physical health, mental wellbeing, and financial resilience.

Through workshops, mentorship, events, and open dialogue, we create inclusive spaces where both women and men can learn, engage, and help break stigma around women's health.

Who are your customers?

Our primary work is community-based, supporting women and girls directly.

We also work with corporate organisations to deliver inclusive workplace programmes covering women's health, menopause, and financial wellbeing, while engaging men as allies in creating supportive workplace cultures.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is growing sustainably while preserving the depth and trust of our community work.

Our opportunity lies in increasing collaboration with businesses that recognise the importance of supporting women's health and wellbeing at work.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Be intentional about inclusion. Supporting women's wellbeing benefits entire organisations and communities.

What is the best thing about being a member of Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce?

Being part of Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce provides a platform to connect, collaborate, and amplify conversations around inclusive wellbeing, helping us extend our impact across the region.

MEMBER MEET the MEMBER



Laura Pike
Financial Adviser
The Pike Partnership Ltd

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

From teacher to financial adviser, I have built a career guiding others.

Through my work as a neurodiversity coach, I can help bring greater understanding and a more tailored approach to every client. Through The Pike Partnership, I help people talk openly, build trust, and transform their financial futures with confidence.

Who are your customers?

My clients are people seeking financial advice, particularly those who value a more tailored, personal approach to meet specific needs.

I often support individuals navigating major life changes - such as divorce, inheritance, sudden loss, or unexpected wealth.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge right now is the uncertainty in the markets.

Our biggest opportunity is budget changes, as this in turn creates a huge market for people looking for any sort of advice.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Don't be afraid to be different!

You never know what will set you aside from everyone else.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

Meeting new likeminded people.



John Duncan
Interim Head of Commercial Services
University of Aberdeen

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

The University of Aberdeen's catering and commercial services team helps bring the campus to life.

We deliver high-quality food, hospitality, conferences, events, retail and commercial services that enhance the experience of students, staff, visitors and external partners.

We combine exceptional service, sustainability and commercial expertise to create welcoming spaces, memorable experiences and valuable income which supports the university's wider purpose.

Who are your customers?

Anyone and everyone who experiences the University of Aberdeen beyond the classroom.

We look after students and staff enjoying daily campus life, to conference delegates, tourists, visitors, alumni and commercial partners.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

The financial pressures across the sector are apparent, well-documented and represent the biggest challenge to our organisation.

These challenges have seen us realign our focus to adapt from a traditional support function to becoming a meaningful revenue generator.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Be open to telling Aberdeen's story better. We have world-class facilities, skills and experiences to offer. We need to be as focused on promoting Aberdeen as we are in running our own businesses.

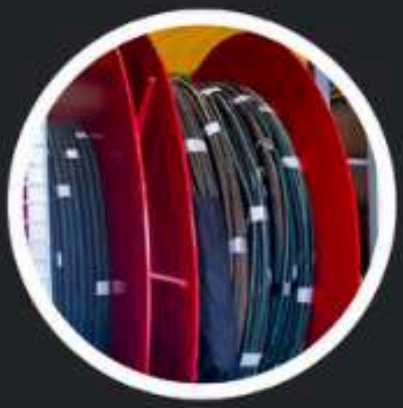
What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

For me, it's the wealth of expertise that becomes readily available to you.

We have already successfully partnered with several other Chamber members since I began my current role. It's a genuinely useful and valuable resource.

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My Career Journey

Jamie Melvin
Co-Founder,
Thoughts and Crosses



In partnership with

DYW North East Developing the Young Workforce | NoWrongPath

Describe your early career path.

I left school and went straight into an Electrical Maintenance apprenticeship with OPITO and SLB in the Wireline Department. I finished my apprenticeship during the 2015 oil downturn but was lucky enough to move into a role preparing and calibrating downhole tools. After further training in Abu Dhabi, I headed offshore as a Trainee Wireline Field Specialist, eventually working my way up to Senior Field Specialist. Most of my time was spent in the North Sea, with the occasional trip further afield.

How did you arrive in your current industry?

While I was working offshore, my partner and I started a small business making personalised cards and gifts. We gradually started getting requests for wedding signage, which eventually led us into the wider world of wedding and event décor. Fast forward a few years and we've grown Thoughts and Crosses into one of Aberdeen's leading wedding and event décor businesses. It's quite a change from working offshore, and certainly not where I expected to end up, but I've really enjoyed building something of our own.

What's the best thing about your job?

Definitely seeing everything come together on the day. So much work goes on behind the scenes, from the initial planning right through to the final setup, and it's always satisfying to stand back and see the finished result. Every wedding is different too, which keeps things interesting.

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

Back yourself sooner and have more confidence in your own ideas. Don't be afraid to take a chance or try something completely different. If you'd told me at 18 that I'd eventually leave the oil industry to run a wedding décor business, I'd probably have laughed! But sometimes the opportunities you least expect turn out to be the best ones.

What's something surprising that most people wouldn't know about your job?

Probably how much physical work and logistics are involved. People see the finished venue looking great, but behind that are early starts, late finishes, vans full of equipment and a lot of planning to make sure everything runs smoothly. Some weekends we're setting up and collecting from several weddings and events across different venues, so it's a constant juggling act. It's definitely not as glamorous as people think!

What does the future look like for you?

I'd love to see Thoughts and Crosses continue to grow and develop. The wedding and event industry is always changing, so we're constantly looking at new ideas, trends and ways to improve what we offer. A big focus for us going forward is building a strong team around us and continuing to grow the business without losing the personal touch that's got us to where we are today.

Quick-fire questions

How do you unwind in your time off?

Usually watching a good TV series, it has to be something binge-worthy!

What did you want to be when you were little?

I was always building things with LEGO, so probably an engineer!

What was your first job?

A local paper boy.

Mortgage uncertainty tipped to continue – but help is at hand

By Molly Massie

As average mortgage rates hit a three-year high in recent months, experts from law firm Laurie & Company have delved into what has caused the current instability – and looked at what we can expect moving into the new year.

Recent statistics showed house sales, prices and demand all dropped in September, with benchmark mortgage rates soaring to their highest level for three years.

The latest data from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) revealed that its measure of buyer enquiries fell to minus 22 in September from minus 18 in August.

Agreed sales also slipped to minus 18 from minus 16 over the same period, while the measure for house prices dropped to minus 32 in September from minus 28 in August, according to the closely monitored survey.

With uncertainty reigning, Mary-Jay Morton, a Partner at multi-service legal firm Laurie & Co, said she had noticed a trend of buyers being slower to submit bids on properties and less committal recently in the housing market.

She said: "What I find is buyers have been a lot more cautious this year. A purchase is now a very considered decision especially if it is a second home. Mortgage affordability, Additional Dwellings tax and the hike in Council Tax all being contributing factors.

"Normally, you put your property on the market, people view it, they'll note interest and they'll offer, but we've discovered that people are not doing this. They're deliberating and they're not actually being very decisive in purchasing."

She went on: "At the end of the day it's got to be affordable. It's all down to just shopping around for the best deal and getting locked into something so you know what your expenditure is going be over the next couple of years because things are in such a state of flux."

'We've had ludicrously low interest rates for so many years'

Mary-Jay highlighted the impact global factors have on interest rates and how the Bank of England's base rate affects mortgage affordability which can make people feel almost "stuck".

Managing Partner Linda Fyffe predicted that, despite being held through recent global events, interest rates will not be held for much longer and could increase by a quarter of a percent, before the end of 2026.

However, Mary-Jay reassured that any potential increase would not likely represent a huge percentage and that the increments are "quite gentle", so there will not be a sudden jump to rates we may have seen decades ago.

Linda added: "We've had ludicrously low interest rates for so many years, when back in our parents' time, 16% was the norm. If you compare it to that, 5% does not seem that bad."

Mary-Jay and Linda did add this is somewhat relative, as people nowadays may have more extravagant lifestyles, with two cars, mobile phones and multiple foreign holidays, compared to the average homeowner in the 70s.

But with mortgage rate instability forecast to continue into the new year, Laurie & Co, which has branches across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, highlighted the support that's available both right now and for prospective future homeowners.

'Embrace change, don't fear it'

"We've got all these different schemes and incentives that are actually trying to encourage and help people, including the First Time Buyers Scheme that's just been relaunched and is available from the Scottish government," Mary-Jay explained.

The main advice for those currently with a mortgage or seeking one in the near future is to live within your means, whether that means one fewer holiday, meal out, cinema trip, or, as Linda put it, "not buying those shoes".

She continued: "Even just household bills and council tax are horrendous now. People are borrowing money and so with mortgages you just have to adapt to the change. Pull your reins in a wee bit if the interest rate goes up or shop about for a new deal if necessary.

"If you're able to embrace change, not fear it, accept it and you can adapt to it and work hard, then I think you'll always be fine. Accept that nothing stays the same and just adapt to it. Keep plugging away and you'll get there, it'll be fine.

"That's how I managed to keep going despite a lot of challenges and fears with this business and it's worked. Just put in the graft. Look at different ways to deal with what's



going on because you can't change what's going on with the economy, all you can do is adjust."

More than a decade on from the 2015 oil crash, Mary-Jay said the effects are still being felt in the property market locally.

She said: "I think there is still an economic downturn in terms of property, although that is somewhat centralised to Aberdeen and the surrounding area. It was like a light switched overnight, the market changed and that's still kind of current.

"Although there is still a turnover and volume of properties, people are maybe not getting the value for them or they bought that property so many years before and it has now halved in value, so they could be in negative equity."

Managing Partner Linda Fyffe added that, although it has "taken a lot of effort to get there", things were now close to returning to pre-crash levels.



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Nationwide Building Society. Nationwide House, Pipers Way, Swindon, Wiltshire SN38 1NW.

My Career Journey

Angela Gibb
Project Engineer,
Forsyths Ltd.



In partnership with

DYW North East Developing the Young Workforce | NoWrongPath

Describe your early career path.

Throughout school, my interests were mainly creative, passing Advanced Higher Graphic Communication, Art & Design and submitting my art portfolio to universities around Scotland. I was accepted into Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design in Dundee and had a fantastic four years studying and graduating with BDes Hons Degree in Graphic Design.

How did you arrive in your current industry?

During my summers at university, I covered various admin and account roles at a fabrication company. I then joined Forsyths as they were opening a brand-new facility in Dyce, initially working in reception, at that point I had never imagined a career in engineering. I started with no knowledge of technical terms like pipe spools or flanges, but with the support and guidance of my team, I was given the opportunity to step into a Trainee Project Engineer role. I quickly developed both the technical and commercial skills required, progressed into a Project Engineer position, and went on to lead multiple projects.

What's the best thing about your job?

The variety is the best part of my job, no two days are the same. Each project and client brings different requirements, timelines and specifications, which keeps the role both challenging and engaging. As someone who thrives on organisation, I particularly enjoy the planning involved, managing an ever-evolving workload while maintaining strong communication with colleagues, clients and suppliers.

I'm especially proud to have overseen some of the largest and most complex projects Forsyths has undertaken. There's a real sense of satisfaction in delivering these successfully as a team, meeting client expectations while ensuring projects are completed on time and to a high standard.

What has been your proudest achievement to date?

I was the Project Engineer responsible for numerous projects on the INEOS upgrade of the Forties pipeline at their Grangemouth facility, Kinneil which had to be run to schedule, to avoid the complete shutdown of the 80 offshore assets in the North Sea.

I was particularly proud of myself when my commitment and considerations to the overall project execution of the contract had been recognised by the INEOS Management team, by way of letter to Forsyths.

They acknowledge that I "was always available, provided regular, accurate tracking and dealt with all the challenges effortlessly, which enabled us to accurately plan a large programme of site construction".

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

There is so much pressure at that age to know what career you want to choose for the rest of your life, but don't feel stressed. Choose what makes you happy and it will all come together eventually. I've seen people in their forties re-train and completely change their career path. You have your whole life to find the right thing for you.

What's something surprising that most people wouldn't know about your job?

It's how hands-on and fast-paced the role is. A lot of my time is spent in the workshop, working through technical queries and managing live updates from clients. I regularly collaborate with the quality control team and it's not unusual to find me out in the yard coordinating with haulage drivers to ensure the correct materials are loaded and dispatched.

Relationships are also central to the role. While I manage projects independently, I work closely with internal teams, transport providers and subcontractors to meet tight deadlines. Building trust and maintaining reliability with everyone involved is essential to delivering successful projects.

Stronger collaboration between government and business vital to unlock Scottish mid-market growth new report finds



Kevin Havelock, Mid-Market Champion for Royal Bank of Scotland"

The Royal Bank of Scotland and NatWest Group have published a report into Scotland and the UK's mid-market businesses.

Titled The Middle Speaks: narrowing the mid-market conversion gap through technology, talent and trade, it finds that mid-market businesses, defined as those with turnover of £10million to £100million and/or 50 to 500 employees, are often overlooked by support designed for smaller firms or large corporates.

Analysis in the report by Scale Up Institute identifies over 4,400 Scottish mid-market businesses who collectively employ 644,000 and have an annual turnover of £122billion, reflecting the immense contribution that the mid-market makes to the Scottish economy. However, despite creating jobs, driving innovation, strengthening supply chains and supporting local communities across Scotland, the segment remains relatively underserved and not well understood.

The report argues that mid-market businesses represent one of Scotland's greatest growth opportunities. However, for this opportunity to be unlocked mid-market businesses need to be supported, especially in three key areas - tech, talent and trade -where they lag behind the specialist skills, leadership capability and organisational resources available to larger companies. Tackling this 'conversion gap' is key to ensuring future growth in this segment.

As the number one bank for Scotland's mid-market businesses, the Royal Bank supports more businesses this vital segment that any other bank and sees first-hand the contribution they make to local economies, employment and growth. The report is the product of engagement with over 200 mid-market businesses across the UK and members of the Mid-Market Growth Council.

The report highlights three areas of challenge and potential opportunity:

Tech: Scottish mid-market firms increasingly recognise the need to adopt AI and digital technologies to remain competitive, improve productivity and support better decision-making.

Talent: Despite Scotland's strong base of higher-level qualifications, firms reported significant shortages across technical, vocational and experienced leadership roles, with employers outside the major cities facing particular difficulties attracting and retaining talent.

Trade: Scottish mid-market firms see access to markets, exports and procurement as major growth opportunities, but complex application processes, supply-chain uncertainty and geopolitical instability continue to constrain them.

The report also sets out four key recommendations to support mid-market Scottish businesses.

Kevin Havelock, Mid-Market Champion for Royal Bank of Scotland, said: "Scotland's mid-market businesses are an essential component of our economy, but one that often falls between the cracks in policymaking when compared with small businesses and larger corporates.

"This report makes an important contribution on how government and industry can together equip them with the expertise to continue to innovate at home and successfully export to international markets.

"Throughout my engagement with Scottish mid-market businesses I am consistently impressed by their growth aspirations, they just need the right support in the right areas - like tech, talent and trade - to realise that ambition.

"As Scotland's largest bank for mid-market firms, the Royal Bank will continue to lead the discussion around tackling the conversion gap so that these businesses can unlock their full growth potential."

Floating foundation for Buchan Offshore Wind achieves DNV certification milestone

Buchan Offshore Wind has achieved Basic Design Certification from DNV for its BW Ideol designed concrete Damping Pool® floating support structure, marking a major technical milestone in the development of the near 1GW floating offshore wind project.

The certification was formally awarded by Sille Grjotheim, Director for Floating Offshore Wind, DNV at the Floating Offshore Wind Conference in Aberdeen. Presented to Clare Lavelle, Project Director, Buchan Offshore Wind, the award recognised the significant progress made in developing and validating Buchan's foundation design as the project advances towards commercial-scale delivery.

DNV has provided important independent validation of the design Buchan has selected as its preferred floating foundation, and the certification gives further confidence in the project's technology and its pathway towards commercial-scale delivery.

Commenting on the award Clare Lavelle, Project Director, Buchan Offshore Wind, said: "Achieving DNV Basic Design Certification is a significant milestone for the Buchan project, reflecting the expertise, commitment and hard work of the team and is an important step towards the industrialisation of floating offshore wind in Scotland.

"The opportunity for floating wind is no longer about proving the technology. It is about moving to commercial-scale deployment, establishing serial production and building the supply chains and infrastructure needed to create a competitive new industry. Buchan has an important pathfinder role to play in making that transition and helping establish Scotland's capability to manufacture concrete floating foundations at scale."

BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Colin Dawson
Managing Director
Dax Group

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

This is a hard one to answer, but I'd have to say my wife, Caitlin. She is my most consistent sounding board and the person who brings clarity when I drift off course. Beyond that, I haven't followed a single blueprint. I've preferred to build my own path, learning in real time and taking lessons from a wide range of people and experiences rather than one defining influence.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

The Entrepreneur Development Programme at MIT is, without question, the most effective training I've undertaken. It's an intense week, but the impact is immediate. I attended in January 2026 and still find myself applying the fundamentals. It provides a clear, practical framework for thinking about business that cuts through noise and holds up under real pressure.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned in business?

Value alignment and trust matter more than almost anything else. If values don't align, it rarely works in the long term. That applies equally to hiring, partnerships and clients. I've learned to act on early signals. If something feels off at the start, it usually is, and those issues only become more expensive to fix later.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

Winning Start-up of the Year at the 2026 Northern Star Business Awards stands out. At the time, it felt like just another milestone, but the reaction afterwards was more telling. It was an emotional moment for the family, reflecting on how challenging the journey had been. That recognition felt like a turning point, both in terms of confidence and the trajectory of the business.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

For me, it comes back to values. There's a strong, often sceptical mindset in the North-east that nothing is ever quite good enough. While it can be challenging, it creates a relentless focus on improvement and innovation. You're working with organisations that expect progress and are willing to push for it, which raises the standard of everything you deliver. If it works on a cold day in Aberdeen, it will work anywhere!

What was your first job?

Cleaning trays in a bakery in Portsoy. First full-time – I took a year out after school and worked as an ad hoc Steward offshore, normally in the galley.

Who or what inspires you most?

Different people inspire me in different ways, but the underlying driver is progress. I'm motivated by the idea that every iteration should be better than the last, whether that's in how we operate, deliver or think. That continuous push to improve is what shapes how I work.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

"Low-hanging fruit." It sounds harmless, but it often signals a focus on short-term wins over meaningful impact. Is a quick win really a quick win if you're creating technical debt? Most of the real value sits in the harder problems.

How do you relax?

With a start-up and a toddler, "relax" looks a bit different. I tend to switch off by being outside doing something practical, painting fences, cutting the grass, getting through jobs I've started. It's not glamorous, but there's a sense of satisfaction in finishing something, and that's what helps me reset.

If you had the power to change one thing in the world, what would it be?

There are plenty of big issues in the world, but I'd focus on reducing unnecessary regulation that limits simple, everyday quality of life.

My Career Journey

Claire MacAngus
Commercial UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) pilot,
Flylogix



Describe your early career path.

I grew up in Belfast and moved to Edinburgh to study midwifery, leading to 17 years working with the NHS across various different departments, though I'd always had a fascination with learning to fly. I took a career break to spend some time with my four children and it was during that time I decided it was now or never. It had always been in the back of my mind, especially after doing a bit of work with air ambulance crews on the nursing side, which gave me a real appreciation for aviation. I took a flying lesson, got the bug, and the rest, as they say, is history.

How did you arrive in your current industry?

I arrived at Flylogix with a commercial licence in my hand but very little industry experience. I knew I wanted a soft start rather than heading straight into the airlines. I was nearly 40, learning to fly with four young children at home and no family support nearby, so I was realistic about wanting to build my confidence gradually. I looked at a few options – air traffic services, ramp duties, working airside at an airport – and then Flylogix popped up. It felt like exactly the right fit; a small company with genuinely advanced technology, offering a lot of mentorship and support for someone brand new to aviation. I haven't looked back since.

What's the best thing about your job?

The technology is mind-blowing. It still amazes me that we can fly an uncrewed, fixed-wing aircraft, three metres wide, up to 400 nautical miles offshore and bring it back safely, all while sharing the airspace with other air traffic. I still remember the first time I launched a drone and thinking 'I'll never see that thing again', but of course I did. It's so futuristic and it's fantastic to be trusted to operate such a serious piece of engineering. I love telling people what I do because almost nobody expects it. That reaction, the sheer surprise and excitement people have when they hear about it, is a brilliant part of the job.

What has been your biggest career challenge to date?

Going from being a highly experienced midwife, someone who had seen it all across multiple disciplines, to being a complete beginner again has been the biggest challenge by far. Flylogix has been a fantastic incubator for that transition. We work as a three-pronged team of aviators, technologists and engineers, and I've had to get comfortable admitting what I don't know, whether that's engineering or the finer points of aviation regulation. I've never tried to pretend I'm more experienced than I am, and I think that honesty is exactly why I wanted a soft start in this industry in the first place. It's humbling, but it's also been an incredible way to learn from the ground up.

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

Never doubt yourself; hold onto that belief and follow your instincts. When you're young, constructive criticism can feel personal or a bit sensitive, but as you get older you realise it's just people helping you build real experience. Don't let doubt, yours or anyone else's, hold you back from something you actually want to do.

What's something surprising that most people wouldn't know about your job?

There are two things that genuinely shock people. The first is that we fly offshore at all, and specifically beyond visual line of sight – it's one thing for people to picture a drone flying over land, but the idea of it going out hundreds of miles over the sea feels far more alien to most.

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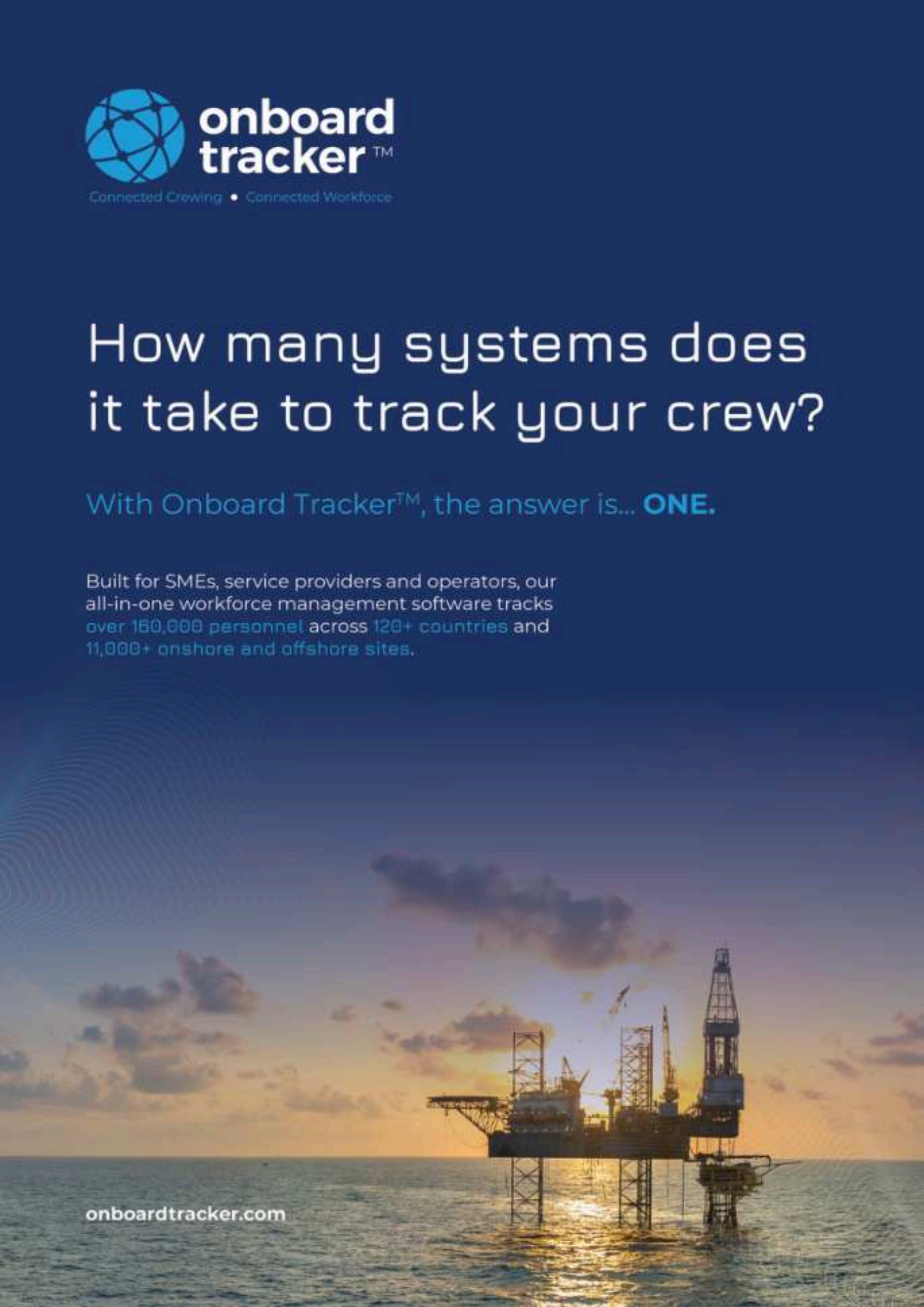
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OPINION

Time to move our obsession with training to an obsession with competence - smashing cross-sector barriers



Author: Claire Buchan, Business Development Manager – Specialist Services, ASCO

No matter where you go in the world, you'll meet someone who honed their craft in Aberdeen. Our skills pool is special and unique, and underutilised.

The North Sea has been a training ground enabling the global development of oil and gas. It bred the most competent workforce in energy you'll find anywhere.

It took 60 years, and some devastating lessons, to build this world-class, safety-critical workforce. Why keep it restricted to one sector?

I can't be the only person both excited and frustrated by this opportunity? Imagine what we could achieve if experience could move more easily.

We have been discussing the barriers for years. Credit is due to those in oil and gas and wind who have tried to address them. The Energy Skills Passport is welcome progress, but failed to capture industry and worker imagination. Only 688 users, fewer than 0.6% of the total target workforce, had registered by March 2026.

The cyclical nature of oil and gas means redundancies will always be part of the picture, yet the skills of the people affected need not be lost with them. If their competence were recognised elsewhere, they could move into sectors like construction, renewables or defence and remain available when demand returns.

Many of those industries have genuine skills gaps. But more pressingly, they have a transfer of competence gap. It's hard to justify a skills shortage when experienced people are standing on the other side of a line drawn by paperwork. The problem isn't a lack of ability, it's that the proof doesn't travel.

What's needed now is to extend these efforts, recognising competence across more industries. True competence mobility means employers can fill skills gaps with experienced people, and those people can be confident that their expertise will be recognised.

Our region is currently hosting some of the most significant energy infrastructure investment seen in a generation. My hometown, Peterhead, has gladly welcomed highly skilled workers from Europe and the UK who have come to support these projects. That's brilliant, but what opportunities have local people with years of relevant experience missed through having the 'wrong certifications'?

Why must each industry build its own workforce? Dare I ask out loud, is there an arrogance to each industry thinking it's truly unique, or just a lack of insight and understanding? Industry and safety requirements should signpost a pathway, not create a barrier.

Where competence can be demonstrated, we should recognise it and target the gaps. Different hazards, equipment and operations demand proper preparation. Repeating equivalent learning simply to gain another accepted ticket deserves scrutiny.

Imagine moving from offshore into infrastructure, gaining experience, then into renewables or back into oil and gas. Employers gain a broader workforce; people gain choices and stronger careers; talent stays available.

ASCO is designing cross-sector pathways, combining operational experience, Workforce Solutions' recruitment insight and ASCO's lifting, training and assessment expertise. Serving energy and infrastructure industries, we see the demand and capability. We're taking steps to connect them.

To make this a reality, employer acceptance is essential. We're working to ensure our lifting training and competence assessment meet each relevant industry's requirements, creating routes without waiting for collaboration challenges to be resolved.

Experience takes years to build, but targeted competence assessment can help an experienced person cross into a new sector much sooner. And the sooner we act, the larger the workforce available tomorrow.

If talent could move as readily as demand, there's no telling what our industries could achieve together, and at ASCO we intend to find out.



OPINION

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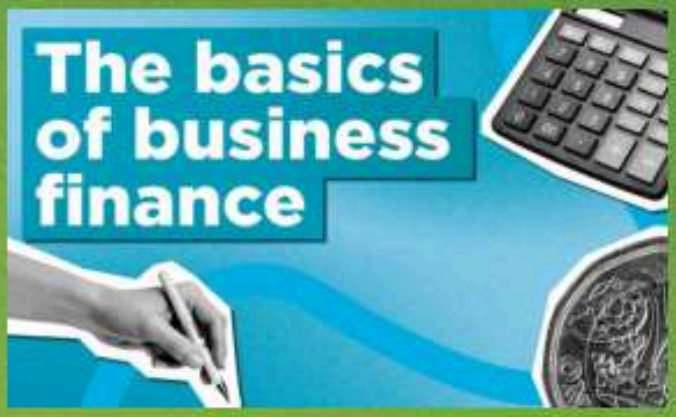
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Rally Scotland confirms 2027 World Rally Championship dates

Rally Scotland will take place from September 28 to October 3 2027, following confirmation of the 2027 FIA World Rally Championship calendar by the FIA.

The dates set the schedule for the WRC's return to the UK and Scotland's first full round of the championship. It will arrive less than a year after Elfyn Evans, co-driven by Scott Martin, sealed the 2026 FIA World Rally Championship Drivers' title at last week's Rally Italia Sardegna, becoming the first British driver to take the crown since Richard Burns in 2001.

Rally week begins on Tuesday September 28 with the first of two days of reconnaissance – or recce – when drivers and co-drivers will cover the route at controlled speeds, making and refining the pacenotes they will rely on when the stages go live.

The pace rises on Thursday morning with shakedown, the crews' full-speed pre-event test and their final chance to assess car set-up before the rally gets under way. The event start follows later that day. From Friday to Sunday, the world's leading rally crews will tackle the main competitive legs, with Sunday bringing the rally to its conclusion.

Rally Scotland will be headquartered at The Event Complex Aberdeen, with Rally HQ and the Service Park based at the venue. Competition will take place on closed forest gravel roads across north-east Scotland.

Hugh Chambers, CEO of Motorsport UK, said: "This is an exciting milestone. With the dates confirmed, fans, teams and everyone involved in Rally Scotland have a clear target: September 28 2027 in Aberdeen.

"Over six days, culminating on October 3, the World Rally Championship action will be back in the UK, attracting a global audience to the best of Scottish gravel roads. There is a huge amount of work ahead, but this is another important step in making Rally Scotland a reality.

"Elfyn Evans becoming Britain's first WRC Drivers' World Champion in 25 years gives the championship's return to the UK even greater significance, and gives fans another reason to look forward to Rally Scotland in 2027."

Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, Stephen Flynn, said: "The Scottish Government is delighted to have played a role in bringing the World Rally Championship to Scotland from 2027-2029 with funding of more than £6million.

"This event will showcase to a global audience what Scotland has to offer and will attract thousands of visitors, teams, and fans from around the world, bringing significant benefits to both the north-east and national economies.

"Scotland has a strong track record of delivering major events, and with the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games, the Tour de France Grand Départ and The Open in 2027, and UEFA EURO 2028, we are building on that reputation. This adds another major event to that list."

The confirmation follows the announcement of the BBC's three-year WRC broadcast agreement, which will bring live coverage of every championship round to UK audiences from 2027 to 2029, including extensive live coverage of Rally Scotland.

Further route, ticketing, volunteering and spectator information will be announced in the coming months.



One partnership complete cutting edge solutions











Applus+ UK and Core Cut Offshore announce strategic collaboration to deliver integrated industrial cutting and asset integrity solutions.

The collaboration brings together both companies' complementary capabilities to deliver enhanced solutions for clients.

By combining Applus+ UK's experience in engineering, inspection, rigging, rope access, asset integrity and specialist maintenance with Core Cut Offshore's expertise in specialist cutting, controlled demolition and HP/UHP water jetting, the companies can support clients in addressing complex industrial challenges across the offshore, marine infrastructure, and petrochemical sectors.

The combined capabilities and specialist services of both companies are ideally suited to delivering value for clients throughout the full asset lifecycle from construction, maintenance, repair, remediation and decommissioning.

(Left to right): Scott Ritchie, Iain Hawley, David Wilson, Danny Watson. Below (left to right) Danny Watson, Core Cut Offshore Commercial Director & Iain Hawley, Applus+ UK Operations Manager

David Wilson, Core Cut Offshore Operations Director, said:

"Combining complementary services such as rope access, rigging and specialist cutting or inspection, UHP surface preparation and specialist coatings will deliver real value for our clients and their projects. Both companies have a strong track record of solving complex challenges with innovative, practical solutions. Having previously worked successfully with Applus+, our clients are already seeing the benefits of fewer vendor interfaces and highly capable multiskilled teams."

Iain Hawley, Applus+ UK Operations Manager, said:

"Both organisations bring extensive experience of working in complex and hazardous environments, making this partnership ideally positioned to deliver a more streamlined approach to challenging maintenance, repair and decom missioning projects. There is a shared commitment and enthusiasm across both companies to deliver innovation and value for clients, whether through the adoption of new technologies or by applying cross-industry knowledge and best practice."

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Simon Bachelor

Leading professional services firm AAB has appointed Simon Bachelor as Head of Hotel Accounting as the firm continues to invest in specialist sector expertise and regional growth across the UK and Ireland.



Stephen Sidlo

Aberdeen Football Club is continuing to strengthen its off-field operations with the appointment of award-winning marketing leader Stephen Sidlo, as Marketing Director.



Leonie Nimmons

Commercial litigation and insolvency specialist, Leonie Nimmons, has rejoined Aberdein Considine LLP, eight years after stepping down from the partnership to focus primarily on her family business.



Matthew Bartlett

Albyn School has announced the appointment of Matthew Bartlett as interim Head of School, bringing three decades worth of education experience to the role.



Alison Hazell

Ashtead Technology, a leading provider of integrated subsea technology solutions to the global offshore energy sector, has appointed Alison Hazell as Chief Marketing Officer.



Steve Warren

Assured Occupational Health, based in Dyce, Aberdeen, has welcomed Steve Warren to the business as Client Coordinator, who brings with him a decade of experience in the sector.

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Jenna Simpson

Aberdeen-based children's charity Befriend a Child has announced the promotion of Jenna Simpson, who has almost 20 years' professional experience across the charity and community sectors, to Head of Fundraising and Marketing.



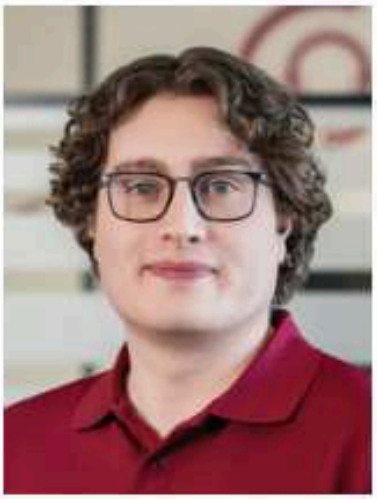
Greig Scott

Technology and cyber security provider Brightridge has appointed well-known North-east IT services professional Greig Scott as Sales Director, further strengthening its Aberdeen team as the business continues its expansion in the region.



Megan McCulloch

Glen Tanar Estate has welcomed Megan McCulloch to the team as its new Events and Experience Coordinator, supporting the continued development of the estate's weddings, events and visitor experiences.



David Coyle

iO IT Services has strengthened its technical team with the appointment of David Coyle as Systems Consultant, supporting the Aberdeen-based IT provider as it continues to grow its customer base and expand its capabilities.



Scott Lee

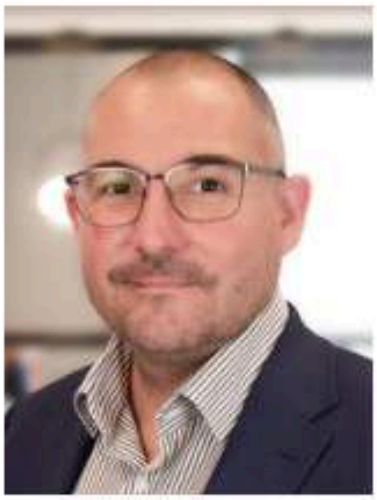
J+S Subsea has welcomed Scott Lee to the team as Business Development Manager, strengthening the company's business development capability as it continues to grow its client base and presence across the subsea and offshore energy sectors.



Helena Gray

The James Hutton Institute has announced the appointment of Helena Gray to its board as a Non-Executive Director, bringing over 20 years of experience in both the UK and Scottish public sector.

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Stuart Christie

Consultancy leader in flow measurement and provider of digital solutions and software products, Kelton has announced a leadership appointment, with Stuart Christie stepping into the role of Managing Director.



Mary-Jay Morton

Mary-Jay Morton has been promoted to the position of Partner at Laurie & Co, joining Managing Partner and Private Client Partner Linda Fyffe and Private Client Partner Caroline Stephen in directing the firm's operations in Aberdeen, Aboyne and Ballater.



Donald Macleod

Global underwater technology leader MacArtney has appointed Donald Macleod as Managing Director of its UK and Ireland business, the company's largest operation outside Denmark.



Chloe and Claire

Flexible workspace provider neoworx Aberdeen has welcomed Chloe and Claire as Hosts at The Quadrant, welcoming guests, supporting members and helping businesses make the most of the workspace and its facilities.



Jacqui Keddie and Tracy Thorn

Dr Gray's maternity team is preparing for a new chapter as Midwifery Manager Jacqui Keddie moves into a national role and Tracy Thorn takes over as Midwifery Manager for Moray.



Stanley Morrice

Aberdeenshire business leader Stanley Morrice MBE has become Chair of Opportunity North East (ONE), succeeding founding Chairman Sir Ian Wood KT GBE, who passed in July.

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Richard Griffiths

Multinational law firm Pinsent Masons has elected Global Head of the firm's Property Group, Richard Griffiths, as Managing Partner, working alongside Senior Partner, John Maciver.



Catriona Penny

The Royal Bank of Scotland has announced the appointment of Catriona Penny as its Venture Banking Director, expanding its support to Scotland's most high-growth and the investors backing them.





Surayyah Hamza Sambo and Tobechukwu Okampka

Aberdeen-based SRLK EV has welcomed Surayyah Hamza Sambo and Tobechukwu Okampka to its team following the successful completion of internships with the company.



Lee Steele

STATS Group, the pipeline technology specialist, has appointed Lee Steele as Business Development Manager for UK, Europe and Africa, who will be responsible for developing opportunities within the onshore and subsea pipeline sector across the three regions.



Graham Ledingham

Aberdeen-based Underwater Contracting Ltd (UCO) has appointed Graham Ledingham as Energy Business Lead, bringing more than 30 years' experience to the role.



Phil Milton

The British Rig Owners Association, part of the UK Chamber of Shipping, is pleased to announce the appointment of Phil Milton, Chief Executive Officer of Well-Safe Solutions, as its new Chair.

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£1.2million community pitch investment announced for Cormack Park

Aberdeen FC Community Trust (AFCCT) has secured significant funding towards the installation of a third community pitch at Cormack Park, the training facility it shares with Aberdeen FC.

The project is being made possible by contributions from The Pitching In Fund, supported by the UK Government; the Scottish FA, through its Member Support programme; the Scottish Football Partnership Trust; and Intelligent Play technology.

Alongside this, the Cormack Family Foundation will be making a significant contribution to the funding required to allow the project to go ahead.

Together, this funding represents an investment of around £1.2million in a new community pitch at Cormack Park.

The new pitch will allow AFCCT to increase the number of community football programmes delivered, with a particular focus on increasing participation amongst underrepresented groups.

It will also provide additional access for local grassroots clubs and support Aberdeen FC's growing girls' and women's football programme.

Work on the new community pitch is expected to be completed in spring 2027. AFCCT will keep supporters, stakeholders and the local community updated as the project takes shape.

Peter Davidson, AFCCT Chief Executive, said: "We're extremely grateful for the support of both the Scottish FA and the Cormack Family Foundation, which will allow us to install a third community pitch at Cormack Park, the training facility we share with Aberdeen FC.

"We are looking forward to getting started and sharing progress with supporters, stakeholders and the local community over the coming months."

AFCCT would like to extend its thanks to the UK Government, the Scottish FA, the Scottish Football Partnership Trust and the Cormack Family Foundation for bringing this project to life.

More than $1tn of UK and Ireland energy projects in pipeline, EIC database reveals

More than 1,800 energy projects are proposed or under development across the UK and Ireland, representing potential capital expenditure of more than $1tn if they all proceed, according to EICDataStream, the Energy Industries Council's global project database.

Against this backdrop, project developers, operators, contractors and supply chain companies were to convene at EIC Connect UK & Ireland Energy 2026 in Manchester this month to discuss energy projects and the opportunities and challenges surrounding them.

Stuart Broadley, CEO of the EIC, said: "There are plenty of projects in the pipeline, but for supply chain companies the real question is where the work is and when opportunities are likely to come to market. EIC Connect is all about putting this kind of information in the same room as the companies developing and delivering those projects, and giving supplier chain businesses the chance to speak to them directly."

The EIC Connect series is hosted across the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe and the Middle East. It provides the latest project and supply chain data and analysis, based on the EIC's proprietary global datasets and market expertise.

Partners for EIC Connect UK & Ireland Energy 2026 include Reflex Marine as Principal Partner, RSK as Supporting Partner. Other partners include OPITO, TRS Staffing Solutions, Valmet, and Eastgate Engineering.

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