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More than £500k rent for empty council HQ

Thousands also
paid out on bills

SIC tests will 'get
to root of cause'

EXCLUSIVE

BY ADAM GUEST

More than half a million pounds in rent has been shelled out by Shetland Islands Council on its vacant North Ness headquarters – a year on from the evacuation of the building.

Figures obtained by *The Shetland Times* under a Freedom of Information request show the SIC has paid £536,239.40 to landlord Shetland Leasing and Property (Slap) between 20th September 2016 and 26th September this year.

The local authority has also paid about £6,000 in electricity costs over the same period and about £18,000 in water costs.

Rent alone equates to the pay of roughly 18 teachers in Shetland.

According to Robert Sinclair, executive manager of the council's capital programme, the water cost is "the rateable value/stand-

ing charges element of the bill" and water consumption has been "negligible".

Director of the SIC's corporate services department Christine Ferguson said more tests were to be carried out on the building in the coming weeks and there would be more information about this released to the press and made public.

She was not able to provide a timetable for the testing but further tests were "to get to the root of the cause". Legal discussions about the building were ongoing, she said.

Load testing would be taking place, Ms Ferguson explained.

"It's essentially to see how the building performs under different levels of loading, particularly in areas where we have seen deflection."

She said the local authority had started to look at what its plans would be at the point when it can move back into the building.

"What we're really wanting is to get to a point where we can have a detailed timeline," she said.

But Ms Ferguson said they did not yet know when they could move back into the building as this would depend on the outcome of the tests.

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Pupils get ready to enter new school for first time



Ready for their first day at the new AHS are (back, from left): Elise Smith, Danny Clubb, deputy head teacher Ann Marie Scollay, Niamh Hall, deputy head teachers Patrick Robertson and Barney Redman, Morgan Leask, Imogen Teale, Cheryl Hunter, Ritchie Kerr. Front: Ellie Lynch, Jodie Sutherland, Emma Anderson, Wayne Leask, Matthew Robertson and Stephen Leask.

Photo: Stephen Gordon

BY JIM TAIT

Today is a momentous day for isles education with the Anderson High School welcoming most of Shetland's secondary pupils into its new home at Clickimin for the first time.

Those in fourth, fifth and sixth year started back after the October break while first, second and third year pupils will follow suit on Monday.

This week councillors and local media representatives were invited on a guided tour of the £55 million project which includes the new school and its nearby hostel (see separate story on pages six and seven).

The main building, which took just over two years to complete and can accommodate over 1,000 pupils, is dominated by the spacious atrium in the centre which includes an auditorium/assembly hall and dining areas.

Overall the school comprises around 30 classrooms, and over 70 rooms if you include the science, art, home economics, craft and design, IT, business and music departments.

A substantial part of the ground floor is devoted to the school's additional support needs (ASN) department, previously contained in a separate

building on the old Knab site. It is said to be very similar to its predecessor with regard to floor space.

Also on the ground floor are craft, design and technology rooms for metalwork and woodwork, the main office, head and senior teachers' offices and toilets. Moving upstairs the first floor comprises another dining area and large departments for music, computer, business and home economics.

On the second floor are languages and mathematics classrooms, science laboratories and the school library, while on the third floor can be found English, art and social science (history, geography and modern studies) rooms.

Valerie Nicolson, who has spent over 14 years as AHS head teacher, a period which included uncertainty over the location of the new school, said the new building was even better than she had expected.

She said: "It has come together so much better than I anticipated. I think the central spaces are attractive and welcoming. The corridors are wide and the classrooms spacious. The colour scheme works well alongside the use of glass and stainless steel."

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Don't forget to put your clocks back

This weekend marks the end of British Summer Time, meaning an extra hour in bed on Sunday morning.

The UK reverts to Greenwich Mean Time at 2am on Sunday, so clocks go back to 1am at that time – just in time for Hallowe'en.



Ferry funding call follows faults

New demands have been made for the Scottish government to live up to its promises on fair ferry funding.

Shetland Islands Council's transport and environment chairman Ryan Thomson says the Holyrood administration needs to find the money to help fund internal ferries.

His plea comes on the back of several ferry breakdowns. Mr Thomson says there have been 15 occasions – all resulting in cancellations – since July when the council's ageing fleet of ferries has required repair work.

The most recent disruption was on Monday when the Bressay ferry *Leirna* developed a fault. The issue had also led to renewed calls for the council to consider the possibility of installing fixed links.

Mr Thomson says that would best serve the North Isles and Lerwick North councillor Stephen Leask believes a tunnel to Bressay would be the right solution for the isle rather than ferries.

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AHS OPENS

Excitement all round during tour



Looking up through the atrium from one of the ground-floor dining areas.

Photo: Dave Donaldson



Stairs and tiered seating from the first floor down.

Photo: Dave Donaldson

- Middle of building is dominated by imposing four-storey atrium
- Smart design and 'incredible furniture' in new halls of residence

BY JIM TAIT

A group of councillors and SIC officials, along with representatives of the local media, received a guided tour of the new Anderson High School and its nearby hostel on Monday afternoon.

The council's project manager for the development Trevor Smith and senior teacher Peter Moncrieff, who has overseen the move from the former Knab site, explained the layout of the new building.

They began at the school hall with its tiered seating which can accommodate at least 160 and can be used for senior pupil assemblies or concerts. Mr Moncrieff said they already had plans for a production at the end of the year.

Further on through the atrium there is a large space which can seat around 360 pupils in two separate dining areas. Heading up the wide stairs to the main kitchen and dining area you get a sense of the massive scale of the building.

The yard at the back was ideal for deliveries and skips, Mr Smith said, and there was also room to have external seating in the future, where pupils could "go outside and have their lunch". They certainly wouldn't have been doing that in Monday's weather!

The tour continued through the first floor, beginning with the music department where the first classroom boasts an impressive line-up of over 30 keyboards with linked computer screens. There are two larger rooms for music, a multitude of stores and a number of smaller rooms where pupils can get tuition in a one-to-one setting.

In the middle of the music section is something called a "break-out" area, which re-uses some benches from the old school and also has bins where pupils can deposit their backpacks.

Heading along the corridor the east side of the first floor is predominantly for computing and business studies classes. In one of the rooms, teacher Elaine Isbister was singing the praises of the new establishment. "It's absolutely fantastic," she said, adding that a bucket in the window to catch drips was no longer necessary.

The remainder of the floor is taken up with two rooms for craft, design and technology (CDT), and four large rooms for home economics. Particularly sensible is the

location of the latter, adjacent to the school's main kitchen.

It is onwards and upwards again via the same stairwell, one of four in the school, to the second floor where you emerge in the heart of the science department. Twelve laboratories are split equally between chemistry, physics and biology.

The science technicians are based close to the lift as they need access while a couple of skeletons look out from one of the rooms. Not keeping them in the cupboard is perhaps a good move!

The library is in the middle, looking out over the atrium, and there is plenty of space for books and tables at which to browse them. It seemed a bit open-plan for some who may prefer a bit of privacy, however.

The remainder of the second floor is devoted to mathematics (nine classrooms) and languages (five), while there are also rooms for information and communications technology (ICT), something which can also be found on all the other floors.

Heading up to the top of the school, the third floor is home to the English, art and social sciences (history, geography and modern

studies) departments. Again over 20 classrooms are incorporated.

At the eastern end of the top floor is an unusual feature, an outside area adjacent to one of the art rooms which is covered in beach stones. It is doubtful if anyone will ever be allowed regular access but it is a nice touch all the same.

Mr Smith, after managing to round everyone up, then announced that it was back down to the ground floor via the stairs again. There are a couple of lifts in the building but presumably pupils will as a rule have to use foot power.

First stop back downstairs was one of the rooms for woodwork, which along with metalwork comes under the CDT banner. It was explained that teacher Joe Robertson had impressively renovated some of the old woodwork tables which had come from a previous home, one of which had been used at Skerries.

Almost half of the ground floor is given over the additional support needs (ASN) department, previously located above the former school on the Knab site. Mr Smith said the floor area for ASN would be very similar to that which it had left.



Head teacher Valerie Nicolson in her new office.

Photo: Dave Donaldson

Head teacher Nicolson: 'It's only going to be brand-new once – this week is it'

« Continued from front page

The idea of having everything under one roof has so far proved popular with teachers, and there was a great buzz of excitement during Monday's tour with several of them hard at work in their new classrooms.

Ms Nicolson said at this stage most folk seemed delighted with their new surroundings.

"It is such a different working environment," she said. "Simple things like all arriving in school together, through the one front door, with pupils, bring a sense of school community that we struggled with sometimes on the old site."

She said she particularly liked the library, with its open wall into the dining areas and its separate teaching space. There were also a couple of exceptionally interesting classrooms, with dual or triple aspect, giving such unusual views across Lerwick and beyond.

"I would love to teach in these," Ms Nicolson said.

While some may feel there is lost space with the massive atrium in the middle of the building, Ms Nicolson said it was a feature she supported.

"Over the years I have seen the 'street and atrium'

concept in a number of large secondary schools and I think we have been lucky enough to get the best development of the model.

"We have a 'figure of eight' with the hall and library forming the middle section. I think this allows the pupils to move around the building without congestion, at the same time as giving staff clear lines of sight across corridors and storeys."

Regarding the official opening ceremony, Ms Nicolson said she had no information to share at the moment. The SIC children's services department was supporting the school with that and once the pupils were back they would be able to start thinking about the next steps.

She did not see any obvious drawbacks from not having a gym hall in the school, which means PE teachers having to be based in the former Bowler's Bar at the Clickimin Centre and pupils having to regularly head across for classes.

Ms Nicolson said: "PE is very popular subject in AHS and the school is fortunate to have such good physical education resources on site with our proximity to Clickimin Leisure Centre.

"It does mean that our four PE teachers are based in a separate building, but they are pleased to not be

transporting pupils every hour from the old school to Clickimin.

"When we were at the Knab we did not have enough PE space on site, and so many pupils travelled across Lerwick for PE. It is good that we now have more teaching time."

As a former resident of the Bruce Hostel for girls during her time as a pupil at the old AHS, Ms Nicolson agreed that the new halls of residence was a far cry from the old buildings at the Knab.

She said: "Those of us who stayed in the Bruce would not recognise the modern halls the pupils will move into this week."

"We shared bathrooms and there was one TV room for *Top of the Pops* on a Thursday night."

"Society's expectations has changed. Youngsters are spending a significant part of their life away from home and it is good to see the privacy afforded by the en-suite shower rooms and the range of leisure activities available. I really do think the halls are splendid."

As regards the overall concept Ms Nicolson said it was too soon to pinpoint areas of concern. The important thing was to settle in to what was an such an exciting development.

She added: "It's early days. I'm still at the stage

of being delighted and surprised by what this building is offering.

"I am quite sure that as the weeks progress there will be things we want to improve but, for now, this is a building to cherish."

"It's only going to be brand-new once. This week is it. We all have to make the most of it."

SIC education committee chairman George Smith, who served as vice-chairman under his predecessor Vaila Wishart when the building work began, also expressed his delight that the new school was opening.

"It's been a long time in coming," Mr Smith said, "but I'm absolutely delighted to see the finished product."

"Everyone who has had the opportunity to view it cannot but be impressed with the space [and] all aspects of it – the learning space, the assembly space, the social areas."

"Also the fact that it's a big building, but its easy to move around. Everything is very handily placed."

"The spaces are tremendous. The environment for teaching and learning has to be inspiring for teachers and pupils, and at the end of the day that's what's important."

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AHS OPENS

for visitors

The toilets provoked mild controversy, as they are without main doors and passers-by can see pupils at the washbasins. The theory is that being open-plan can apparently deter any bullying behaviour which could occur.

There is a spacious main office, much bigger than the cramped room at the old AHS, an equally large pupil support room and offices for head teacher Valerie Nicolson and her assistants.

Mr Moncrieff, as a parting comment, said he had visited some other new schools including at Eastwood and Inverness. The new Lerwick building was, without doubt, the best of them, he added.

A much smaller party, with the councillor contingent now reduced to Lerwick members John Fraser and Beatrice Wishart, then moved across to the new hostel, controversially named "The Anderson High School Halls of Residence".

A pressure group wants the SIC to reconsider and give the hostel the name the pupils chose for it, after former warden George McGhee. But for now it is stuck with the unpopular moniker, which is already embazoned on the walls inside the main door.

Taking charge of the hostel tour was service manager Nick McCaffrey, who explained he was "the new George", and former NHS Shetland chief executive Sandra Laurenson, who has been working on the AHS project.

We began at the north end of the building, where a veteran snooker table from the old Janet Courtney Hostel has been lovingly recovered and takes pride of place in one of the main recreation rooms.

"We're still figuring out what some of the rooms are going to be used for," Mr McCaffrey said, "but

we see this as a relaxing room, a gathering point. They were also still wondering what to do with the preponderance of cupboards, he added, as there were far more than had been anticipated. The residents would probably dictate that.

"This building has been designed in a very, very smart way," Mr McCaffrey said. "We are never more than 30 feet from an exit."

There is also a small gymnasium included. There were "bits of kit" still to come and if he had a wish he would have liked to have seen more gym equipment available, Mr McCaffrey said. As a former bodybuilder he may be somewhat biased though.

Spacious lounges, television rooms, a study/library, comfortable dining room and state-of-the-art kitchen. You name it – this hostel has it.

Sturdy tables from the Janet Courtney had been retained, but some of the plush new leather seating is probably not what anyone would expect in a halls of residence.

"The furniture is absolutely incredible," Mr McCaffrey said.

The first and second floors contain over 100 bedrooms, mostly single occupancy and all with ensuite facilities, while in the single-storey south wing is separate accommodation for longer-stay pupils from outlying isles such as Foula and Fair Isle.

At the moment there are six who stay over at weekends, Mr McCaffrey said, and there is also a guest flat where pupils' parents can join them for weekends if required.

Mr Fraser said: "This is an absolutely amazing facility. I hope that all the bairns who come here just love it and thrive – and I am sure they will."

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The Anderson High School teachers and other staff got together for a photograph in the new building on Monday morning.

Photo: Garry Sandison



A snooker table from the old Janet Courtney has pride of place in the new hostel.

Photo: Dave Donaldson



The plush surroundings of the AHS halls of residence.

Photo: Dave Donaldson

Consultation continues over former Knab site

Folk will be asked for their say on plans for the old Anderson High School site – with another public consultation planned for next month.

SIC capital programme chief Robert Sinclair said the focus was on developing masterplan proposals, based on a brief created with community input in 2014.

"The team are currently working towards a con-

sultation workshop during November when emerging design proposals will be discussed with the community".

Edinburgh architects 7N have been appointed to produce a "masterplan" for the redevelopment of the Knab site.

Last year councillors decided to start a consultation to gather public opinion on the redevelopment

of the 6.5-hectare area. The council has been told the site could potentially accommodate 276 houses. But a mixture of residential, commercial and public buildings was the option favoured by some residents who spoke to *The Shetland Times* ahead of the consultation.

Comments received by the council indicated that there was a desire for a "well-designed,

mixed use and residentially compatible development in future", the local authority stated earlier this week.

The council has given results of their previous consultation to help 7N in early stages of its planning.

There are three listed buildings at the site – the Bruce Hostel, the Janet Courtney Hostel and the original Anderson Educational Institute building.

Impressive scale – but watch out if you suffer from vertigo!



BY STEPHEN GORDON

It was a privilege to see around the new Anderson High School, albeit as a hanger-on with the local media circus.

On this educational journey were also a few councillors. By all accounts, it was thought that some of their number had been miffed at not being invited to the official key handing-over event, apparently hijacked by the chief executive Mark Boden.

The press and councillors are hardly the most natural bedfellows and SIC leader Cecil Smith did little to engage with those around him during the tour, though I did see him touch a chair.

Peter Moncrieff (who I'd last really talked to when caddying four our respective dads at Shetland's golf course when it was next to the airstrip at Sumburgh – no health and safety issues then-a-days) was pulled in from retirement to steer our merry band around, along with the project manager from the council, Trevor Smith.

This was just before head teacher Valerie Nicolson told us to "behave". I assume she was joking.

The scale is impressive and like Mareel it is "an incredible space". Orange seems the predominant colour of the doors and facings; the future is orange? Along with grey, it gives a rather industrial feel to the building but it's aesthetically quite pleasing.

A comparison with the old school is difficult. I remember being at the old site when the last extension was opened.

Already the windows were leaking and it was pot ugly, but there was a great sense of elegance, history and continuity with the original building, and the 1960s part had at least some character.

No-one could deny the setting at Bellevue was spectacular with vistas over Bressay Sound.

I was told it took 21 years from when a school was originally planned for the Knab site to its fruition at Clickimin.

And let's not forget that the turf at the original school was days from being turned over when the casting vote of one councillor, who had school traffic go by his front door morning and afternoon, halted the decision for redeveloping the original site.

The scale of the new school is very impressive but watch out if you suffer from vertigo. Councillors Amanda Westerloch and John Fraser inadvertently formed a double act. "Dee results is no dat bad Amanda, dunna dey hit," he quipped, as she looked nervously from the third-floor balcony. There are vast corridors in which you can hardly see one end from another.

Later Mr Fraser showed his enthusiasm for the project by saying he would "be back". A voice from the party was heard to say: "Du still haes a lot ta learn."

There are lots of stairs, all good in these health-conscious times, and the art department is on the top floor with impressive views. Asking if I was supposed to be able to see pipes in the ceiling, the project manager told me: yes, this was the design.

It can look a bit unfinished but then consider the Pompidou Centre in Paris!

One feature that did seem quite striking were the pebbles covering a flat-roofed area just outside several of the rooms – this will make the scories feel well at home!

It will take time for the school to take on its own character. Like many modern buildings, it could be an airport lounge, hospital, prison or any municipal building.

No doubt it will come alive once everyone settles in and teachers' and pupils' trepidation is to be expected. In the end, it has to be about the people, not the place.

This week one teacher explained that the new AHS was originally the design of an Australian school. "That's why the non-slip surface is on the ceiling," he told me.

Tours are being planned

People are to be given the chance to tour the new Anderson High School at Clickimin in Lerwick next month.

The council will open the school's doors to interested parties on Saturday 4th and again on Saturday 11th November.

The guided tours will take place between 11am and 3pm and are expected to last around an hour.

Anyone interested in attending is encouraged to book in advance, providing a booking name, the number in the party, a preferred start time and date and contact details.

To make a booking people are asked to email AHS.opendaybookings@shetland.gov.uk or call (01595) 808080.

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