



Speed checks: PC Garden monitored the speed of vehicles at Colpy.



Regular target: New recruit PC Nicole Garden checked out the damage at the Inverurie and District Men's Shed polytunnel.

## Diverse role in the community a key element for new officers

**T**HROUGHOUT Aberdeenshire Police Scotland work day in and day out to keep the towns and villages of the North-east safe and alongside long-serving officers are the newest recruits to the force, known as probationers.

One of these is 26-year-old Nicole Garden who has been working alongside community police officer PC Steve Middleton in Inverurie and our reporter Christy Annand was invited to come along for the day and record the workings of the two in action.

PC Garden made the decision to get into policing in 2015 after studying fashion design at the College of Dundee and being accepted in to Gray's School of Art.

Before joining the force, she worked for Aberdeen City Council at Marischal College for three years when she realised that policing was the right path for her.

Speaking to the *Advertiser*, Nicole said: "While working for the council, I found that I really liked working with the public, so that was a main factor in what attracted me to police work."

"I also enjoy the shift work and the diversity of the job, every day is different and you don't know what you are going to be faced with."

"I love to help people, and this job is so self-rewarding."

"It can also lead to many other things such as dog handling or mountain rescue."

Hailing originally from Ayrshire, Nicole attended Tulliallan College at Kincardine for 11 weeks, and will work as a probationary police officer for a further six weeks before moving on to work with a local policing team in Inverurie.

She will continue to study and gain experience over the next two years, with exams throughout, including a fitness test.

One of her responsibilities is to keep a portfolio of the work that she has done to show her competency in becoming a police officer.

Their first detail was at 10.30am when they headed to the Inverurie and District Men's Shed polytunnel, which has been a repeat target of vandalism.

Commenting, PC Middleton said: "We have recovered some forensic evidence which has been sent for analysis and will hopefully determine the identity of the culprits involved in the vandalism."

At 11.30am, Strathburn School was the next stop, where local councillor Judy Whyte met with the officers.

The Park Smart initiative is a campaign between Police Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire, Garioch and North Marr Community Safety Group.

It will launch in March and aims to educate parents and children about the importance of parking safely around schools.

PC Middleton said: "The banners outside of the schools help to press home the dangers to anyone parking on a yellow line outside a school."

Words and pictures by **CHRISTY ANNAND**

"It is selfish and endangers the children."

"We attend more or less on a daily basis at local schools to check on this problem, but unfortunately have now had to resort to enforcing the statute by issuing parking tickets as some folk don't learn or listen."

"I can tell you that this action is well received by parents who have taken the time to park legally nearby, they often thank us for our efforts when they see us issuing a parking ticket to illegally parked vehicles."

However, Strathburn School is not the only school in the area to have been plagued with these issues, so the three then headed to Kellands School to meet with head teacher, Graeme Mollison, who said: "There are issues with parking reported nearly every day."

"A lot of cars are parked illegally at Martin Brae, and 99 per cent of the parents at the school want to see a change."

Councillor Whyte added: "My advice would be for people to leave in plenty of time so that they are able to park safely and legally."

The Park Smart initiative will launch in March, and will include giving the children lessons about safe parking and holding education evenings with the parents so that everybody can understand the importance of parking safely around schools.

At noon, a quick visit to Colpy was made to monitor the speed of vehicles in the area.

A speed survey camera had been installed due to a number of complaints from residents who claim that cars often drive too fast just a stone throw away from outside their front doors.

PC Middleton explained: "Members of the public often contact us directly or through their Community Council when they are concerned about speeding in their village or town within a 30mph limit."

"Our speed survey camera can record the amount of vehicles passing it and the average speed for up to a two week period."

"This information is fed back to the committee and other interested parties."

"Councillors are also given the information should they feel action might have to be taken for any safety issues found."

"We also attend at hot spots with a speed gun."

"This is a highly visible presence and motorists usually obey the speed limit when they see the police."

He added: "You never know when an officer operating a speed gun is around the corner, so when in town, slow down!"

At 12.30pm, PC Garden and PC Middleton patrolled Inverurie town centre during the academy lunchtime.

Although there were no major issues, school pupils were asked to remember not to block the pavement for other pedestrians, they were polite and moved back.

The pair explained: "Keeping the public safe is our duty."

"We have increased our foot patrols in the town centre and it is reassuring to shoppers and retailers alike."

"We have to deter shoplifters from thinking that our area is an easy target."

"A ring-round system was introduced by Police Scotland to the majority of town centre businesses and is there to alert fellow businesses should a shoplifter leave their premises. "We also try to show a presence near the Market Place area at lunch time when the school children head down to the local bakers and the like."

"It's not that they are badly behaved, it is more the numbers congregating on the pavement."

"This can be intimidating for

pedestrians and shoppers but our presence helps to reassure folk."

The afternoon saw a flurry of incidents for the pair including an enquiry at Millfield Terrace which was followed up to ensure that an abandoned vehicle has been removed following complaints by local residents, the car was removed.

The officers attended Inverurie Railway Station following a standing complaint of vehicles parking on double yellow lines where one vehicle received a fixed penalty ticket as did another nearby.

Static speed checks were carried out in Blackburn and Kemnay and this resulted in several drivers being pulled over and educated about the dangers of speeding.

At 3.15pm they attended Kemnay Primary School, where a standing complaint regarding vehicles being parked opposite the school on High Street on double yellow lines had been made.

Four drivers were educated, and one empty vehicle received a fixed penalty ticket and a male driver was warned regarding attempting

to park illegally within a disabled bay in Kemnay.

Several complaints about this have been received by police recently and some cars found parked were ticketed.

A standing complaint of cars parking on double yellow lines on Prospect Road, Westhill Industrial estate saw further action with cars almost blocking the road to HGVs by parking opposite each other also dealt with

At 5pm, a request from a member of the public was made as to legislation regarding fireworks and PC Garden delved back into her law books to ensure she got it right.

Following a welcomed meal break, the duo were back in action to attend Hatton of Fintray Community Council to present the police report for the area.

Members were updated in relation to any queries raised at last meeting and any new issued were noted down.

Finally, at 8pm, PC Garden and PC Middleton were off duty, after a long day of keeping a watchful eye over the local community.



Park smart: Local councillor Judy Whyte (left) and PC Garden by one of the banners promoting the Park Smart initiative outside Strathburn School.



On the beat: PC Garden and PC Steve Middleton carried out foot patrols in the town centre.