

## Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place (actually from West Manse)

*Keeping the folk of the North Isles ward informed — with Orkney's only councillor newsletter*

The Seven Principles of Public Life, otherwise known as the Nolan Principles (after Lord Nolan, the founding chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life) are: 1) **Selflessness**, 2) **Integrity**, 3) **Objectivity**, 4) **Accountability**, 5) **Openness**, 6) **Honesty**, 7) **Leadership**. They apply to anyone who works as a public office holder, including local authority councillors. At the beginning of this year, the Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board (VJB) was presented with a second, even more damning audit from Deloitte, this time highlighting unlawful behaviour, and condemning the competence and effectiveness of its leadership and lack of scrutiny and challenge by the Board. For a 2<sup>nd</sup> time, the reasons I resigned from the VJB in August 2020 (*Letter*, issue 91) have been vindicated. As per the rubric of Principle 7, I was "willing to challenge poor behaviour", but my challenge went unheeded by other members. To have remained on the VJB thereafter would have prejudiced my integrity (Principle 2). As I said to *The Orcadian* and *The Shetland Times*, lessons could have been learnt 2 years ago, had members respected my concerns and conducted themselves and the affairs of the VJB in accordance with the Nolan Principles.

I was delighted to be invited to deliver the Immortal Memory at Sanday Community Association's Burns' Supper. I made a reasonable case (I believe), on the grounds that Robert Burns' father often spelt his surname "Burness", that he possibly had a distant family connexion with Sanday (although I conceded that there is also a Burness in Westray), noting also that his wife shared her maiden surname with that of Sanday's radical Free Kirk minister (and Orkney County Councillor), the Reverend Matthew Armour (1820-1903). One hundred and eighteen people attended the event, with great participation and a really good atmosphere. A much needed tonic for the island. I could not resist ending my talk with William McGonagall's tribute to the Bard, and in true McGonagallesque style I say: *Robert Burns, poet sublime, may he be remember'd for a very long time.*

According to folklore:

*If Candlemas Day be dry and fair, half the winter's to come and mair.*

*If Candlemas Day be wet and dull, half o' winter's gane at Yule.*

Well, Candlemas Day (2<sup>nd</sup> February) was rather mixed this year, being fairly dry and fair in the morning but turning wet and dull later on. So that has left us in a Schrödinger state as far as forecasting how much of this winter remains. We've been hit by a few storms, and there may be more to come. If anyone in Council property is experiencing water ingress or damp (or worse) which is not being attended to, do please let me know.

Whereas I support Council Leader, James Stockan's "open letter" to the First Minister, it disappoints me that he did not distribute it more widely. I am not convinced that many people in influential positions are avid readers of *The Orcadian*!

The letter addresses 3 areas of unfairness in the way Orkney is treated in the Scottish Government's "Fairer Scotland":

- 1) Lower per-head funding for Orkney compared to other island authorities (referred to in my *Letter* last October, issue 105);
- 2) Ferries – need I say more?
- 3) Digital connectivity – despite R100 ("reaching 100%"), Orkney is being left with the lowest level of coverage in Scotland.

The full open letter can be found on the OIC website at: <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/News?postid=5083>

I can also report that the Highlands & Islands Leaders' Group is calling on the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy to end the legacy electricity distribution charges that consumers in this region are saddled with. It is a supreme irony that, while we are net exporters of "green" energy to the rest of the UK, we pay the most per kWh for our power.

At a meeting of the Orkney College Management Council, we received an excellent College Housing Report by student reps Duncan Foxley & Francesca Meneghetti. Unlike many councillors, they fully appreciate the need for student accommodation if further and higher education are to thrive in Orkney. I've helped them understand the (often insurmountable) challenges Outer Isles students encounter when they want to attend courses at Orkney College and have nowhere to stay overnight in the town. If re-elected in May, I shall be working hard to overcome the stifling attitude towards Orkney College that is endemic at OIC.

Other meetings I have attended "virtually" this month include: a seminar on tourism infrastructure; Education, Leisure & Housing Committee; a budget seminar; and Monitoring & Audit Committee. The community council meetings I have "been at" are those of Sanday (in person), North Ronaldsay, Westray, Shapinsay (reported in *The Orcadian*), Papay, and Eday.

Many of you will have stayed at the Kirkwall Red Cross Hostel for medical-related reasons overnight or longer term. Currently, the Hostel is temporarily closed and is under review. Losing this facility would be a big blow for folk in the Isles, therefore, I urge everyone to leave messages of support at: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/complaints-and-comments>

Although the pandemic restrictions have eased considerably, Covid-19 has not gone away. There have been recent spikes in infection rates in Orkney. So please take care everyone.



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