

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place 100th Issue Supplement

A review of your councillor's first nine years in office

Orkney Islands Council has done a number of notable things since I was elected in May 2012. As our decisions are made collectively, for most of them I can take only a share of the credit, but there are some where I have exerted significant influence. For example, as an active member of OIC's Constitutional Reform Working Group, I was involved in establishing the *Our Islands Our Future* initiative and informing the *Islands (Scotland) Bill*, which was enacted on 6th July 2018. Also, from the start, I pushed for OIC to "actively invest" to earn its own income, and I supported the creation of OIC-owned windfarms (although my constant reminders that not all of them have to be sited here in Orkney, fell on deaf ears!). At the level of individual initiative, one is reliant on the support of one's colleagues—a single vote can stand between success and failure!

I can claim credit for a list of successes in shaping or reshaping Council policy. Here are the main ones in chronological order:

- Introducing Sunday drop-in flights to Sanday and Stronsay;
- Preventing a licence being granted to a bookmaker to open a betting shop in Kirkwall with fixed-odds betting terminals;
- Retaining Isles-based registrars (reported on BBC Radio Scotland);
- Putting North Ronaldsay School "on stand-by" rather than being "mothballed" (it has recently been "re-activated"!);
- Securing Kettletoft Harbour House for purchase by the Sanday Development Trust;
- Stopping a cut being made in OIC's grant to community councils (for which Westray CC kindly sent me a thank-you letter);
- Reversing a cut of £65,000 affecting additional support for learning (reported on TV);
- Resisting charges being levied for pupils to stay at the Papdale Halls of Residence;
- Introducing a council tax discount of 50% on second homes required by islanders in order to work on the Mainland;
- Facilitating adjustment of the early Covid-19 ferry timetable to assist haulier logistics;
- While schools were closed during "Lockdown", getting their facilities made available to assist community initiatives;
- Extending the scope of OIC's Covid-19 business-support payments;
- Pushing for more spending on roads repair and maintenance in our 2021/22 budget.

Some other successes:

- Getting the doorstep at Loth waiting room, which was a trip hazard, replaced with a safe one of my own design;
- Improving the visibility of the island lane-marker signs at Kirkwall Harbour by lengthening the shortened poles (ever ongoing);
- Upgrading the WiFi service available to pupils' rooms at the Papdale Halls (although I understand it has recently got worse!);
- Distributing surplus wheelie bins to households on islands without a bin lorry service (with freedom to use as you choose);
- Extending validity of discounted multi-journey books of ferry tickets to 500 days and eligibility of car tickets to 2 registrations;
- Obtaining voting rights for student representatives on the Orkney College Management Council;
- Making a new updated comments/compliments/complaints card available to the public.

Other areas of direct influence that I have had as a councillor include:

- Enlightening the Local Government Boundary Commission on the impact geography and transport links have on our ward;
- Engaging with the Scottish Ambulance Service and supporting ward constituents at public meetings with them;
- As a member of OIC's Empowering Communities Steering Group, supporting the piloting of Island Link Officers;
- Highlighting to the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service the difficulties inherent in recruiting in the Isles (which has led to changes).

It's not all been success, though, and I've had few failures (which I shall nevertheless continue to pursue), such as:

- To get reinstated statutory protection for Orkney's honeybees against the importation of diseased stocks;
- To re-open polling stations in the Isles;
- To change the KGS timetable to enable Isles' pupils to come in on Monday mornings and have a 3-night weekend at home;
- To retain modern language assistants in Orkney's secondary schools;
- To have *education* included as one of our Council Plan's "strategic priority themes" (NB latest *Daily Record* league tables!);
- To install 20mph speed limits around Isles' schools;
- To improve the state of Eday's West Side Road;
- To introduce question & answer sessions at our general meetings (to make our "senior councillors" more accountable).

As OIC's representative on the University of the Highlands & Islands Foundation, Highlands & Islands Science Skills Academy, Dounreay Stakeholder Group, and the Scottish Councils Committee on Radioactive Substances, I have played an effective ambassadorial role for Orkney, raising our profile where we were at risk of being forgotten.

Confidential casework takes up quite a lot of my time, and helping resolve the problems of ward constituents in their interactions with Orkney Islands Council is probably the most rewarding part of being a councillor.

In my 9 years as a councillor, I have striven to be out and about in the North Isles Ward. (Not easy, given its constituents live on 13 separate islands, not well connected to one another by transport links.) Until the pandemic hit us, I attended in person meetings of each of the Ward's eight community councils, meetings of many of its parent councils, and AGMs of some of its development trusts. I've supported and participated in many community events in the Isles, and given speeches at Christmas tree lighting events. Being (before the pandemic) a regular traveller on the ferries has given me further opportunities to engage with ward constituents. I have even held impromptu surgeries over breakfast at my B&B accommodation in Kirkwall. (Sadly, surgeries I held in the Isles were all poorly attended.) Despite the pandemic, I have still been able to keep the folk of the North Isles Ward informed of my doings through my *Letter from School Place*, which has now reached its 100th issue!

Keep safe!

