

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

Reporting on the endeavours of your councillor on your behalf

Soon after we reconvened from the council recess, the council computer system was "reconfigured". This means that councillor e-mail addresses have returned to what they used to be, in my case: **stephen.clackson@orkney.gov.uk**

Following a whole day's Special General Meeting to allow councillors, as the final stage of the recruitment process, to listen to candidates' presentations and interview them, Orkney Islands Council now has a new Executive Director of Education, Leisure & Housing, Mr James Wylie, replacing Mr Wilfred Weir, who is retiring. James is well known around Orkney schools, having latterly been OIC's Head of Education (Curriculum & Community Learning), and I wish him well in his new role.

At the first meeting of the new academic year of the Orkney College Management Council, community rep, Beverley Clubley was elected the new chair, to replace Cllr John Ross Scott, who failed to get re-elected onto the Management Council.

The draft annual statement of accounts for 2018/19 presented to the Monitoring & Audit Committee shows a Harbour Fund balance of £249,565,000. I asked if any of this was earmarked for the repairs, maintenance and improvement of marine assets, such as North Isles' linkspans. The Head of Finance replied that within this fund sits the Miscellaneous Piers Fund, which is earmarked for this purpose and currently stands at £6,879,000. I believe Sanday's linkspan is scheduled next.

I met with Council officials to discuss speed limits around Isles' schools, which are the only ones in Orkney (and much of the rest of the UK) still above 20mph. To progress this, it would be helpful if Isles' schools ensure they have up-to-date travel plans, and that parent councils and community councils make their wishes known to OIC (again!). I doubt anyone needs reminding that 90% of pedestrians hit by a vehicle travelling at 40mph will be killed, and 50% at 30mph, yet at 20mph 90% will survive—not to mention that at 20mph a driver has more time to take evasive action and avoid collision in the first place.

At the meeting of the Education, Leisure & Housing Committee, it was good to hear of the funding that North Ron and Papay have received through our Strategic Housing Investment Plan. As a corporate parent, I brought up the problem of what our care-experienced youngsters can do with their stuff when they leave their care home to go away to study. Without storage facilities back in Orkney, they have to schlep their entire worldly goods with them wherever they go. OIC is looking into this.



Councillors meeting with members of Extinction Rebellion Orkney (photo by Cllr Steve Sankey)

Along with a few other councillors, I met with members of Extinction Rebellion Orkney in the Council Chamber. We had a constructive dialogue, which demonstrated that our respective ecological aims are really not all that different.

Other meetings I have attended this month include: a members' political session, a meeting of the Sanday Community Council (twice!), planning training, a meeting of the Orkney Health & Care Committee (well done to Kalisgarth on their inspection results), the first meeting of the new Digital Strategy Consultative Group, and an Orkney Ferries' Board meeting. Following a decision we made at an earlier Board meeting, the period that multi-journey books of vouchers are valid for will be extended from 1 year to 500 days from the date of purchase. I'm sure this change will be welcomed by ferry users, especially those who in the past have ended up with vouchers left unused after the expiry date.

Assistance with travel costs to/from hospital may be claimed from the NHS by patients and escorts if the trip involves crossing 5 miles or more of sea, which means all residents of the outer North Isles are eligible. To claim, you submit a form (available from Balfour Hospital reception and island surgeries), which must be officially signed at your appointment, along with your receipts/tickets.

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