

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

A report from your councillor, fifty years after the first Orkney Islands Council election.

The 7th May marked 50 years since the first election to the new Orkney Islands Council. (The election was held on a Tuesday.) Twenty-three seats corresponded to 23 wards (no multi-member wards back then). Five councillors representing one ward each covered the area of today's North Isles Ward. The five elected were: Christine Muir (North Ronaldsay & Sanday), Jack Scott (Westray), Jackie Groat (Eday & Stronsay), Nigel I Firth (Rousay), and Tadeusz Zawadski (Shapinsay). Every candidate for the Council stood as an independent—no political parties participated. The newly elected OIC existed as a shadow authority until 1975, when it took over local government in Orkney from Orkney County Council, Kirkwall Town Council and Stromness Town Council.

The 6th May marked 25 years since the first election to the first Scottish Parliament since 1707. Jim Wallace (Liberal-Democrat) was elected for Orkney. Until 2004, the new Parliament met in the General Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland. The first First Minister was Donald Dewar (Labour) of what was then known (less egotistically than today) as the Scottish Executive.

Speaking of First Ministers, I don't believe the latest leadership drama at Holyrood bodes well for our ferries' "taskforce" (see my [Letter Issue 120 — January 2023](#)). Last time there was a change of First Minister at the Scottish Parliament, it delayed developments by six months.

There have been a couple of changes of leadership at North Isles schools. Fellow physicist, Dr Tim Ross moves from Westray to head Papa Westray, and the "weel-kent" Mrs Kristen Muir will be taking over at Sanday after the summer break. (I wonder how many of Mrs Muir's pupils know that a framed watercolour painting she did as a schoolgirl hangs in one of the North Isles ferries. Do you know on which ship and where, and of what?) I'd like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Sanday's departing headmaster, Mr Stewart McPhail, and his wife, Lorna, who've been stalwarts of the School since they arrived in 2019. Very much a "can-do" couple, their emphasis has been on practical solutions and kindness, which they were also called upon to deploy, for a time, at Eday School.

And there may be yet another leadership change in the offing, this time at the Palace of Westminster, depending on the result of the General Election on the 4th July. Do make sure you are registered to vote.

At our mid-term "re-shuffle" at the Special General Meeting and the Special Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee, I am pleased to report that I was not "shuffled" at all. I remain a member of the Policy & Resources Committee, the Education, Leisure & Housing Committee and the Monitoring & Audit Committee; I will carry on representing OIC on the Dounreay Stakeholder Group and on the Scottish Councils Committee on Radioactive Substances (this is where being a PhD in physics helps), and I shall stay serving on the Constitutional Reform Consultative Group and the Empowering Communities Steering Group. This means I can continue to focus my efforts on those areas of council activity that I am best qualified for and experienced in. Other appointments will be reconsidered at forthcoming committee meetings. I retain (as this was a five-year appointment) the responsibility of the senior position of Depute Convener of the Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board.

Other meetings I've attended at School Place this month include: a confidential members' briefing with the Chief Executive; various meetings concerned with establishing the Orkney Towns Board (required to disburse the £20 million funding coming our way from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund); a joint briefing session of the Integration Joint Board, NHS Orkney and OIC; and a seminar on community consultation and engagement. I also had an online-only meeting of the University of the Highlands & Islands Foundation (as OIC's rep).

In the Isles, I went to Shapinsay to attend a meeting of their community council (giving up the opportunity to meet celebrity classicist Professor Mary Beard in order to do so!), but my trip to Papay to attend the meeting of their community council was curtailed at Kirkwall Airport on account of fog. I hope my booked journey to attend the next meeting of North Ronaldsay Community Council will not suffer the same fate.

In the world of development trusts, I attended Sanday Development Trust's public "planning meeting", and I went along to the AGM of the Rousay, Egilsay & Wyre Development Trust and enjoyed their "community showcase".

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Letter from School Place is also
available on-line at clackson.info



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