

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

A regular report from your councillor who is determined to combat bullying and to defend democracy.

The Education, Leisure & Housing Committee was presented with the Care Inspectorate's report following their inspection of the Papdale Halls of Residence in August last year. I was alarmed and dismayed to read that a few of the young people staying there had said they'd experienced bullying by other young people. (I am also dismayed that it takes external inspectors to reveal that this behaviour is going on.) As I said at the meeting, the Halls accommodate young people ranging in age from 12 to 18, none of whom should be exposed to any form of bullying, and they have the right to feel safe in what is essentially their home during the week. Indeed, such a right is enshrined in Article 3 of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which the Council has been promoting through its programme of "Rights Respecting Schools" accreditation. Most pupils staying at the Papdale Halls and their parents are my ward constituents, so if any of you have concerns about the level of service you are receiving there (or the level of any other OIC service you receive), do not hesitate to contact me about it.

The results of a compulsory review of polling districts and polling places came up at the Policy & Resources Committee meeting. Changes made back in November 2011 (six months before I became a councillor) removed all polling stations from the Isles, and for all practical purposes compelled the Isles electorate to vote postally whatever their preference. I have grave concerns about this enforced voting by post on 3 counts: 1) You are obliged to vote before the political campaign has ended; 2) There is a risk of coercion by other household members to vote in a certain way when you don't have the security of secrecy offered by a polling booth; 3) You are reliant on the reliability of the Royal Mail, which has been lacking in some Isles of late. Consequently, I tabled an amendment (seconded by Cllr Thomson) for there to be a thorough review of restoring polling places in the Isles, but it was defeated 13 votes to 7. There is not really any further I can take this, as only 3 responses to the public consultation were received from the Isles (and one of those was mine!) so we can only assume that the Isles electorate is happy either to vote postally or to do a day trip to the Pickaquooy Centre, with no option to vote in person on their own island. Cost is cited as a reason for the closing of the polling stations in the Isles, but I say, given the current state of politics in the world, we have to value democracy not put a price on it.

Other meetings I have attended since my last [Letter](#) include confidential members' briefings with the Chief Executive, a budget-setting consolidation seminar, a meeting of Sanday Community Council, and an extra Policy & Resources Committee meeting. A family bereavement meant I had to be away in Germany for some time. Ute and I appreciate the expressions of condolence we have received.

The First Minister's announcement of a £5 million grant towards the Scapa Deep Water Quay Project (yet to be approved by councillors) was headline news in the 13th February issue of *The Orcadian*. You may have read my comment on page 7: "I wish that during his visit Mr Swinney could have found the time to take a ferry to one of the outer North Isles, where I am sure he would have been shocked by the dilapidated state of the linkspan control huts. Given the parlous state of the equipment controlling our linkspans, I would rather he'd offered his £5 million towards upgrading our existing lifeline harbour infrastructure." I hope the members of the Scottish Government read *The Orcadian*.

There does appear to be some good news on the ferry front, with the Scottish Government agreeing to increase the yearly revenue funding of Orkney's inter-island ferries to £28.8 million and to provide £2 million of capital funding.



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

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