

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

Championing the communities of Orkney's North Isles.

The agenda of the Policy & Resources Committee (P&R) meeting was so huge (see photograph below of me holding the papers) that we could not complete all the items at a single sitting, and some had to be deferred and taken at the following General Meeting (see below).

At the P&R meeting I tried to get the item on the North Isles linkspan system upgrade discussed in public, but the legal opinion was that, as the exempt information (e.g. procurement details) would still have to be excluded from the public forum, informed and substantive discussions would be hampered. I had to accept that argument but requested a press release on our decision be issued afterwards, which it was—see page 2 of the 27th November edition of *The Orcadian*. The dilapidated control cabins (which I drew attention to back in February—see [Issue 145](#)) are going to be replaced by something much better; modern control systems will be installed, and key hydraulic components are to be renewed. The work is due to commence early next year with completion by the autumn. I am pleased that my call for us to be focussing on improving the critical infrastructure on which our lifeline inter-island ferry services depend (as reported on the front page of the *The Orcadian* 30th October) is now being heeded and acted upon.

In the item entitled “Council Climate Change Study”, I asked about whether any calculation is being made of the indirect greenhouse gas emissions caused by the Council's use of the Internet and e-mail traffic. I was told that this is currently not required by Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Reporting (PBCCDR). I believe this is a serious omission, as the assumption is otherwise made that the Internet has no impact on the climate, yet the datacentres it relies upon are major consumers of energy, exceeding that of many small countries.

The last General Meeting of the full council of 2025 incorporated the 13 items left over from P&R (see above) plus an additional item on public service reform, which meant it went on for considerably longer than is customary. In the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2024/25 the contribution that older people make to our society was rightly acknowledged: **“People over 65 years of age support our community in many ways—acting as unpaid carers, child minders, and volunteers, amongst many other roles. Their contribution, as wise, experienced, stable, citizens, to the communities and the society, is considerable, providing continuity and stability in our social fabric”**. One of those “many other roles” is, of course, being Orkney Islands councillors, of which a little over one-third fall into that category, and next year that will rise to nearer one half.

Other meetings I have participated in this month include: confidential members' briefings; a meeting of the Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board; a meeting of the Sport & Leisure Member/Officer Working Group on outdoor education; a budget-setting challenge seminar; and an Orkney Health & Care briefing. The penultimate meeting I attended before we broke up for Christmas was of the House Working Group, at which one topic was the Council's revised flag-flying policy, which I had successfully got “referred back” at the General Meeting.

In the Isles, I went along to a meeting of Westray Parent Council, flew to North Ronaldsay for the shortest meeting of their community council I have ever attended (we finished before 9 p.m.!), and went back home for the lighting of Sanday's Christmas tree.

If you have ever built, or are building, a house in Orkney, Robert Askey would welcome hearing about your experiences for a book he is writing on the subject. He can be contacted at: robert_askey@hotmail.com

At the end of 1938, German painter and printmaker Otto Pankok (1893-1966), whose artworks were declared “degenerate” by the Nazis, sent his friends the New Year's greeting “1939 ist mit Vorsicht zu betreten” (“1939 should be approached with caution”). I have much the same feeling about 2026 !

We must resolve to find Pandora's Box and release Hope (Ἑλπίς).



Cllr Dr Stephen Clackson
Member for the North Isles Ward,
Depute Convener Orkney & Shetland VJB

West Manse, Sanday
stephen.clackson@orkney.gov.uk

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

