

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

My 160th monthly missive informing the folk of the North Isles Ward of what I am up to as their councillor.

As we are all too well aware, fuel prices have skyrocketed thanks to the antics in the Middle East perpetrated by the orange-faced man and the man with the lilac-rinse combover. At the General Meeting rounding off the latest meetings cycle, as well as the usual minutes of the previous committee meetings to approve and second, an item had been submitted by the Orkney Ferries Board requesting approval for an immediate 10% surcharge on our inter-island ferry fares to contribute towards the inflated fuel costs. Cognisant of the knock-on impact this would have for our island communities, particularly in terms of increased haulage costs and shop prices, I supported an amendment to defer any surcharge until 1st July, after we have had a chance to engage with the new Scottish Government on additional financial support. Without a way of covering this additional financial burden, we could be faced with a 36% cut in services, which would be an utter disaster for the Isles. It is noteworthy that Government-funded ferry companies such as Northlink and CalMac are not levying surcharges. I asked whether Orkney's buses are putting a surcharge on their fares, and I was told they are not, meaning, if the 10% surcharge is imposed, only the "inter-Isles buses", i.e. our ferries, would be subject to an increase in fares.

Other meetings I have attended in person since my last [Letter](#) include: a regular Orkney Health & Care briefing at School Place; a meeting of the UHI Stakeholder Group at Orkney College; Sanday Development Trust's AGM (at which we were treated to a presentation on the Sanday dune regeneration project); and a meeting of Stronsay Community Council.

At the latter, I was lucky to catch the presentation on the National Islands Plan given by the Plan's Team Leader and the Scottish Government's Islands Communities Policy Advisor. (I had missed their presentation at OIC that morning owing to its coinciding with my being on a ferry travelling between islands—an irony that I hope did not go unnoticed!) Information on the National Islands Plan can be found on the Internet at this URL: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-2/> I was there in 2013 at the beginning of the timeline shown on page 5 of the Plan, serving on OIC's Constitutional Reform Working Group. Our then Council Convener (equivalent in function to today's convener and leader combined), Dr Steven Heddle was the lead instigator of the "Our Islands – Our Future" campaign. In the September 2013 issue of my *Letter from School Place*, I reported: "We had a very successful 'Our Islands – Our Future' conference. Speakers included academics, politicians and representatives from Faeroe and Åland."



I received a very hospitable welcome when I travelled (by sea via Westray) to attend the meeting of Papay's community council. The following day, I had a fabulous time at Papa Westray Community School, meeting the staff and the pupils and being given a guided tour. (The photographs above show Headmaster Dr Tim Ross and me outside the School.) I gave the pupils a presentation about the Council and what I do as a councillor, and, after a delicious lunch, showed them some film footage of Reynir, the rescued Sanday otter. I was very impressed with the pupils' engagement and the questions they asked me. Just like she gave the First Minister when he visited in February last year, the school cook, Mrs Rendall kindly provided me with some of her (now famous) chocolate brownies to take home with me. I am available to visit any of the North Isles schools if they would like me to. Just get in touch. Education is one of my main interests, sitting, as I do, on the Education, Communities & Housing Committee, the UHI Orkney Stakeholder Group and the UHI Foundation, and being a fully-registered teacher with the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

The photograph below right shows me after the General Meeting outside the newly-refurbished public entrance to the Council Offices. The ivy has gone, and the green & gold cast-metal Orkney Islands Council plaque is missing! Where is it?

Stephen

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

