

Verwood Town Council Meeting –Tuesday 27 September 2011

County Councillor Report –Cllr. Spencer Flower

OfSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Children in Care –The inspection is now almost complete. The process is very demanding, having begun on Friday 26 August with a phone call when many of the senior managers were on holiday. By Tuesday 30 August DCC officers had made 350 documents available to the inspection team. On Thursday 1 September the inspection team were provided with a list of more than 2000 cases so that the sampling process could begin. During the first week many of our administrative staff worked very long hours to ensure that everything was in place including a very complicated timetable.

Once on site the inspectors sampled more than 30 cases in detail and looked at many more, interviewed at least 200 staff, Councillors and partner representatives, and spoke to 79 children and young people as well as 29 parents. During the final week they will interview another 150 people or so. We received feedback on Friday 23 September and then wished them goodbye for another three years. The result is embargoed until mid October, which gives time for OfSTED and the Council to agree the factual content of the report and any moderation that may be agree.

Children and Young People in Care Awards Day –Annual awards day for children and young people in care was held on one of the few dry days this summer. As a result more than 90 children, their foster carers and some of their families attended. The Chairman of Council presented the awards at the Orangery garden in Merley, a beautiful walled garden that allows us to provide a family day out with bouncy castles, circus skills, mini golf, lots of other attractions and of course a barbecue. It was a terrific success.

School Test and Examination Results –Final accredited results for all children and young people are not yet available although it seems that our schools have had steady results this year very much in line with last year. GCSE results remain well above national averages with approximately 60% of Dorset young people achieving 5+A*-C grade. At age 11 the test results were not so strong being in line with or a little below national averages in some subjects. Again verification may make some changes. Raising standards at primary level continues to be a key area for our work in the coming year. We continue to be very successful in the early years where we have a closing gap between the average profile for five year olds and that for those in the bottom group for early development.

School Transport –There have been problems on a number of school bus routes following the transport re-procurement which took place earlier this year. The bus operator - Damory have been open in explaining the issues facing them in the implementation of this substantial new contract, and the number of the problems that have occurred. Following detailed discussions, managers have been assured by Damory that it has suitable plans in place to correct the problems and improve performance. Future performance will be closely monitoring to ensure we keep on track.

We have launched an internal investigation at the insistence of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to probe into the issues we've experienced during the transition into the new contract. The Council takes this matter extremely seriously and will do everything we can to prevent this sort of failure from happening again.

The county council has incurred additional costs in managing the failure of some services. We have made it clear to Damory that we will be seeking to recover costs.

Many families have also expressed concerns related to changes to the county council's concessionary school travel policy. These include a reduction in the number of free school transport places and an increase in the cost of school bus passes.

The policy on concessionary fares and the number of seats available changed in June and parents were informed of this. If parents are unhappy with decisions about their child's entitlement they can appeal against the decision. We are organising extra appeal hearings to make sure we can process them as quickly as possible.

None of the school bus routes in Verwood and Three Legged Cross have been affected.

SGF/22.09.2011