

Verwood Town Council Meeting – Tuesday 17 January 2012

County Councillor Report – Cllr. Spencer Flower

The Armed Forces Community Covenant – In May 2011 the Government published its response to the Task Force which reviewed the Military Covenant. The Government's response included encouragement for local areas to agree an Armed Forces Community Covenant with its local armed forces. The Government envisages local authorities taking the leading role in the Community Covenant Scheme, with local health, education, business and voluntary sector representatives also being involved.

The Government's aspirations in this area were discussed at the last meeting of the Dorset Military and Civil Integration Sponsor Group (MCISG). The Group agreed to promote the establishment of a Dorset Armed Forces Community Covenant as a statement of principles for the County area.

Dorset Leaders and Chief Executives at their meeting on 21 September supported the principle of a community covenant and recommended its adoption by all councils. It is planned for the Leader and other key stakeholders to sign the Covenant at the Annual DSP Conference on Friday 20 January.

The Covenant is designed to be a statement of principle and intent and does not, of itself, commit any of the local authorities to deliver their services in a fundamentally different way.

It gives voice to the moral obligation to treat members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families with respect, support, and fair treatment. It is based on the principles that all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and their families should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services' in some cases special consideration may be appropriate, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved. Dorset is well-placed to carry through the principles of the covenant into appropriate action as local authorities.

What has County Achieved in 2011 – In these difficult times it is perhaps worth pausing to remind the Community about just what had been achieved in the year. Thanks to the Olympics, the long awaited Weymouth Relief Road is now open, a programme of highway and transport improvements in Weymouth has been implemented, and there has been substantial regeneration at Osprey Quay.

The Jurassic Coast has celebrated the tenth anniversary of its designation as a Natural World Heritage Site, and the excellently refurbished Durlston Castle is now open. The caterers from Moors Valley have the concession and are already establishing a good reputation for quality of food and service.

Of course we should not forget the secondary school pupils in East Dorset who now have the new QE School built by the County to a very high specification and standard.

The appropriate inspectorates have assessed our Children's Services as excellent and our Adult Social Care Services as performing well. Road casualty figures across Dorset have shown a dramatic reduction, leading to a prestigious Prince Michael International Road Safety Award. We have in place the Dorset Waste Partnership bringing together the collection and disposal of waste across the 6 Districts/Boroughs and the County Council. We have launched a Local Enterprise Partnership across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole which has already attracted additional Government funding to help with the development enterprise in our County. So, much achieved, but as always more to do in 2012.

It has been announced that the Queen will be coming to the South West, as part of her Diamond Jubilee celebrations, on 1 and 2 May. It is hoped that this will include a visit to Dorset. As we all know Dorset this year will stage the sailing events for the Olympic and the Paralympic Games, presenting the County with unique challenges and opportunities to sell its self to the world.

The County Council will strive for increasingly close working with National Health Service colleagues, including setting up a Health and Wellbeing Board and preparing for responsibility for public health services to pass to the County Council in April 2013. We will also be trying to make sense of the mammoth Localism Act and the White Paper on Public Services.