

Verwood Town Council Meeting –Wednesday 23 November 2011

County Councillor Report –Cllr. Spencer Flower

Children’s services rated “excellent” by Government inspectors –Dorset County Council among the best performing in the Country. The latest assessment by Ofsted gave Dorset the top score for its overall performance this year, a rating achieved by fewer than one in five of 150 local authorities across England

The annual report – examining the council’s management of education, early years support, social care, youth services and fostering/adoption – has noted some significant improvements during 2011.

Day care for very young children and education provision for all ages were singled out for particular praise following the annual assessment this autumn, helping to push the overall children’s services rating up from “performing well” to “excellent”.

Ofsted stated that performance has improved since 2010. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better, and help children and young people learn and stay safe.”

Particular strengths highlighted in the report include:

young children’s level of development is well above the national average
children from families with low incomes do better than similar children elsewhere.

most primary schools are rated good or better, with more than a third “outstanding”
secondary education is “outstanding”, with exam results for 16-year-olds better than elsewhere.

special education provision is “outstanding”, and services for looked after children
fostering and adoption remain good

Inspectors give the thumbs-up to safeguarding and looked after children services –
rated as good, with outstanding features, by Ofsted.

Throughout September, inspectors spent time with Dorset County Council’s
children’s services directorate and partner organisations including NHS Dorset,
Dorset Police and local schools. As well as interviewing staff and councillors, they
also met 104 children and young people and 58 parents and carers.

Thumbs-up to safeguarding and looked after children services –Inspectors said that the leadership and management of safeguarding services for children and young people are outstanding and that there is excellent leadership from the county council, the Children’s Trust and the Dorset Safeguarding Children’s Board.

Ofsted were particularly impressed with how children and young people influence services. They highlighted the ‘young inspectors group’ - made up of children and young people from vulnerable groups – who have vetted a range of different services including libraries, sexual health clinics, leisure centres, and guidance centres. The young inspectors were

proud of the difference they had made to services and told Ofsted how they had benefited in terms of personal growth and confidence.

They said the overall effectiveness of services for looked after children, young people and care leavers is good and there is outstanding involvement of children and young people in influencing planning and service development.

This was highlighted through the Children in Care Council, which has attracted 91 looked after children who have taken part in various activities, including the recruitment of staff.

Inspectors were particularly pleased that representatives from the Children in Care Council always attend the council's Corporate Parenting Panel. Members of the Children in Care Council felt they had been listened to and gave examples of initiatives that had made a difference to them, including the establishment of the care leavers fund plus free and discounted access to activities across the county.

Overall, inspectors rated Dorset's ambition and prioritisation of both safeguarding and looked after children as outstanding.

Icelandic Banks [Result of Landsbanki court case] – It was announced two weeks ago that the Icelandic Supreme Court has found in favour of UK local authorities and other UK wholesale depositors. The judgment means that Dorset County Council's claim, along with those of other local authority depositors, has been recognised as deposits with priority status over other creditors' claims. This means they will be paid first when it comes to getting the money back and will recover almost all of the money that was on deposit with Landsbanki, which should be in the foreseeable future.

Dorset County Council has deposits of £15 Million with Landsbanki which have been frozen since 2008. This decision more than 3 years later is a huge victory. We expect to be in receipt of the first payment of 1/3 of the money on deposit before year end 2011.

The way in which the Local Government Association (LGA) and our legal advisers have co-ordinated the legal action with other local authorities has minimised legal costs whilst enabling us to advance the strongest possible arguments to secure this result. The cost of litigation to date amounts to less than 1 per cent of the amount we expect to recover.

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