



Making the difference

Chairman's Report

November 2011

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT to the 2011 AGM

This is my sixth report to an Annual General Meeting as Chairman of the Society. It's my pleasure, once more, to report that the charity and the work for which it is responsible for delivering continues to flourish in what are still very difficult times economically and amid an ever changing and shrinking public sector landscape. Indeed this year has been another monumental and indeed historic year in the history of the charity and Vranch House. This year has seen the 50th anniversary of the society and dare I say we have never been in such good health, as an organisation, as we are today. As in previous years the school and clinical centre continue to maintain their excellence in all that they do in delivering the services that our public authority partners procure from us. Indeed I am pleased to say that in these uncertain times it is testament to all that is good about the charity that we have been asked to take on even greater service delivery in the past year in the areas of specialist wheelchair assessment and provision and Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

As we know, in the period since the economic downturn in 2008 Vranch House could quite easily have been lost to the community if we had not been seen as a centre of excellence in both education and clinical care for disabled children throughout Devon. To still be here and indeed taking on new work is indeed a remarkable achievement. An achievement in which you have all played a part and I thank you most sincerely for that.

Of course to celebrate our Golden anniversary we could have quite easily held a gala event to celebrate fifty years of success. That though would have been far too easy for us here at Vranch House!

This time last year when the building of the new Children's Specialist Assessment Centre was well under way I said how this project would give us the opportunity to secure our future as a provider of first rate clinical care to disabled children in the area, so it was an opportunity we could not give up. However, this most complex of projects stretched the capacity of staff at Vranch House in a way that they have probably never experienced in their time here. The majority of the burden has fallen on the Chief Executive and it's clear to me that without his energy, excellent project management skills, diligence and foresight this centre would not have been built. My sincere thanks and congratulations go to him, his senior management team and administration staff who have all supported him with their usual enthusiasm allowing him and ultimately the charity to successfully deliver this fantastic new facility.

So it was very fitting that on our 50th anniversary the close relationship between Honeylands and Vranch House has resulted in this wonderful new building.

The new Honeylands could not have happened without the extraordinary partnership between the charitable and statutory sectors. Without the amazing generosity of Hutchison Whampoa, the Honeylands League of Friends, Lady Gillian Ford and the fundraisers, donors and project team from Vranch House there would be no building.

Without our statutory partners in NHS Devon, Devon County Council and the Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Trust there would not have been a project, and so we are grateful to have had the opportunity of working with them.

As I said in my speech at the official opening, the building, however magnificent, is still just a theatre for our main actors and they are the staffs of Honeylands and Vranch House and the children and families this entire campus is here to serve. They are right in the centre of the stage.

Of course we cannot ignore the current economic conditions; I've been warning of that for over three years now but we really are living through extraordinary political and economic turmoil and we are not immune to those challenges. We should not forget that we have staff working for us who in effect have taken a pay cut due the 0% settlement from both our health and education partners for the last three years when we see rising prices in the cost of living. As I said last year, I can assure them that we deeply value their fantastic loyalty to Vranch House and the management team will continue to do everything they can to reward that loyalty and dedication. As I say every year, our ability to provide excellent services with a high value for money to the taxpayer will become ever more important. I remain, as always, confident that Vranch House will respond to that challenge.

As I finish my report, to the AGM, I am reflecting on its contents and getting a sense of déjà vu! I always seem to be able to report another fantastic year for the charity! I always say that I cannot promise the next year will be as positive. Perhaps next year will be quieter, but then again, here at Vranch House we like to challenge ourselves in the belief that only if you challenge yourself to do better will you ever improve. Well, I believe, even given the current constraints it is perfectly possible for us to gather here again in twelve months time to celebrate a successful fifty-first year!