

Council responses to the Armed Forces Community Covenant

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Military Covenant is a long held concept that was written into law in 2011. It recognises the mutual obligations between the nation, the Government and the armed forces
- 1.2 In May 2011 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) published the Armed Forces Covenant and announced measures to support the Armed Forces Community. One of the key measures announced was the launch of the Armed Forces Community Covenant - a voluntary initiative, which encourages local action to breath life into the principles of the covenant – that there be no disadvantage as a result of Service and special treatment, where justified, for example in the case of injured personnel. It covers a wide range of services including healthcare, housing, education, employment and welfare.
- 1.3 Council resolved unanimously, in March 2012, to adopt the covenant and an official signing ceremony took place at the Homecoming Parade for The Mercian Regiment in June.
- 1.4 The Deputy Leader subsequently met with representatives of 49 Brigade (representing serving and reserve Armed Forces personnel) and the East Midlands Area Manager of the Royal British Legion (RBL) (representing the Armed Forces Community - serving served and their dependents), to discuss how the covenant could best be applied in Derby. Notes of the key points discussed are at Appendix 2.
- 1.5 It became clear during the meeting that RBL provides over 40 services that complement the council and its partners' work, at no cost to the council, but internal and external awareness is low. Around 20-30% of the population is entitled to seek RBL support.
- 1.6 Recommendations 2.1 to 2.10 came out of those discussions and will lead to further partnership working and possible applications for external grant funding.
- 1.7 By signing up to the covenant and engaging with 49 Brigade and RBL the council can access the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, a national fund of £30 million for the period 2011-2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To raise awareness of directors and managers across the council and partner organisations of the intentions of the covenant and of the existing services provided by RBL.
- 2.2 To explore the practicalities of a presence by RBL advice services in Derby Direct.
- 2.3 To work with Derby Homes to review their Allocations Policy, making certain that the new statutory provisions are in place to ensure personnel leaving the Armed Forces are not barred from waiting lists, on the grounds they do not have a local connection.
- 2.4 To work with health partners, particularly Clinical Commissioning Groups, GP practices, Royal Derby Hospital, Mental Health Trust, East Midlands Ambulance Service and dentists, to ensure patient registration for personnel leaving the Armed Forces is straightforward and their often complex needs are understood.
- 2.5 To work in partnership with the Job Centre Plus 'Armed Forces Champion and the RBL, to develop initiatives which would promote and strengthen the employability of Service leavers
- 2.6 To work with the University of Derby and Derby College to actively promote further and higher education opportunities to Service leavers.
- 2.7 To work with local businesses, through groups including the Cathedral and St Peter's Quarter BID companies, to encourage retailers and service providers to adopt the 'Heroes Welcome' initiative, to offer discounts or incentives to Service personnel.
- 2.8 To encourage the Mayor's Office to work with the local armed forces recruiting office, to host signing-on and Oath of Allegiance ceremonies in the new civic suite.
- 2.9 To consider appropriate membership of, and thereafter to establish, a Community Covenant Grant Scheme Working Group, to co-ordinate and approve applications from the city for submission to the Ministry of Defence.
- 2.10 To recognise and celebrate the contribution and harness the skills of employees who are reservists or ex-service personnel.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To honour the commitment and undertaking Council made on behalf of the city when it publicly pledged support for the Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2012
- 3.2 To enable applications to be made to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme.
- 3.3 To continue to honour Council's public pledge in future years to those in our city, and their families, who are serving or have served in the Armed Forces.



Derby City Council

COUNCIL CABINET
7 November 2012

Report of the Strategic Director for Resources

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 'Heroes Welcome' is an initiative, which began in Scarborough and has spread widely. It involves a partnership between local authorities, often through the civic office, and businesses, to promote discounts and incentives to recognise and thank Service personnel. Participating businesses promote the initiative and there is an umbrella website <http://www.heroeswelcome.co.uk/>
- 4.2 There is developing best practice around the covenant, with examples featuring in a recent joint publication of the LGA and RBL.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 None. Without a set of recommendations and a resultant action plan the signing of the covenant would be tokenistic.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer	Stuart Leslie – Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Financial officer	NA
Human Resources officer	Karen Jewell – Director of HR and Business Support
Service Director(s)	Stuart Leslie – Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Other(s)	Philip O'Brien – Head of Democratic Services

For more information contact:	Philip O'Brien 01332 643644 phil.o'brien@derby.gov.uk
Background papers:	Best practice guide to Community Covenants – LGA/RBL publication

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 – Implications

Appendix 2 - Notes of a meeting to discuss responses to the Community Covenant

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 None arising directly from this report, though successful applications to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme may support Council initiatives and services.

Legal

- 2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant has been written into law in the Armed Forces Act 2011

Personnel

- 3.1 None arising directly from this report

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 The covenant seeks to improve access to statutory and non-statutory services for armed forces personnel and /or veterans who live in Derby.

Health and Safety

- 5.1 None arising directly from this report

Environmental Sustainability

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report

Asset Management

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report

Risk Management

- 8.1 None arising directly from this report

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 9.1 The covenant has the potential to contribute to all of the priorities in the Derby Plan in respect of those who are Service personnel or veterans.

Appendix 2

NOTES OF A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE CITY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE, FOLLOWING THE SIGN-UP TO THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

PRESENT:

Councillor Ranjit Banwait –Deputy Leader of the Council
Lt. Colonel David Dawber – Community Engagement Officer - 49 (East Midlands) Brigade
Paul Mulingani – Area Manager East Midlands – The Royal British Legion
Philip O'Brien – Head of Democratic Services Derby City Council

The meeting began with a reminder of the principles that had been established by the decision of the council to sign-up to the covenant:

- Encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas
- Nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community
- Recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces Community
- Encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life
- Encourage the Armed Forces Community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement

Derby already performs well in many of these aspects, particularly honouring and remembering those who have served, through remembrance activities, Freedom and Homecoming Parades. The challenges presented by adopting the covenant relate to assuring

- That there be no disadvantage as a result of Service and special treatment, where justified, for example in the case of injured personnel.

The covenant covers a wide range of services including **healthcare, housing, education, employment and welfare.**

The group discussed the profile of the armed forces community within Derby, acknowledging that the city is not home to a garrison or any other permanent presence of full time personnel.

There are, however, around 30-40 members of the reserve forces operating from both Kingsway (Engineers) and Sinfin Lane (Medics) TA Centres.

Two regiments (Mercian and 9th/12th Royal Lancers) have the Freedom of the City as they, together with the Grenadier Guards, recruit locally. In addition the Royal Navy Submarine Service has Freedom and HMS Ambush is affiliated to the city, in recognition of the relationship between Rolls-Royce Marine and the service.

Derby has thriving Army, Air Force and Sea cadet units, all involved and engaged in civic life. There is also a Combined Cadet Force unit at Merrill College.

Welfare

The Ministry of Defence definition of a veteran is anyone who has served in HM Armed Forces at any time, irrespective of length of service (including National Servicemen and Reservists) <http://www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/defencefor/veterans/>. To become eligible for assistance from the Royal British Legion a veteran would have served a minimum of 7 days in the armed forces. Assistance is also given to the dependents of veterans, which means that somewhere between 20% and 30% of the UK population qualifies.

There is a lack of awareness of this wide range of eligibility both amongst those who qualify and, equally importantly, those in public and voluntary services, who signpost veterans. There is a real probability that many citizens of Derby do not realize they may qualify and a concerted effort is required to correct that. In a time of budget constraints for the council there is an opportunity to divert customers to the RBL welfare and advice teams.

The RBL has recently re-organised and chosen to centre their East Midlands operations on Derby. They are seeking prominent city centre premises to include a street frontage with office space above. This has the potential to improve the profile of services they offer dramatically, but so would a presence in the customer service area, Derby Direct, in the new Council House. At both premises the RBL could offer appointments for money and benefits advice and advice on Disabled Facilities Grants, where funds are specifically available for adaptations in the homes of veterans and their families.

Healthcare

The city council works in partnership with a number of organisations and institutions, including health services and the police, which interact with serving personnel and veterans, some of who may be in crisis situations. Complex physical and psychological conditions are becoming apparent and service providers may not be aware of special needs arising from things as diverse as PTSD and amputations. It is unlikely, for instance, that a police officer when called to a disturbance will ask those present if they have a service/military background, although that may be directly affecting behaviours.

Partnership working could improve frontline awareness in public sector organisations. An example is the Department of Health funded Royal College of GP e-learning package <http://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/index.php> - [Veterans' Health in General Practice](#), on Veterans' Health. Despite being free to everyone to use, not just GPs, take-up has been slow despite one in six practices being likely to have a link to the Service community.

Employment

Service leavers often experience difficulty moving into civilian employment. Despite having acquired a wide range of skills in the armed forces many veterans will experience longer than average periods of unemployment, which can lead to homelessness, poor health, and social exclusion. The council could consider an initiative to work in partnership with the Job Centre Plus 'Armed Forces Champion and the RBL to develop initiatives which would

promote and strengthen the employability of Service leavers – for example workshops to improve interview skills or to assist with the completion of application forms. Any adopted model could be further promoted through the Regular Forces Employment Agency office in Derby.

Housing

The Council's relationship with Derby Homes can facilitate a review of the allocations policy to ensure that new statutory provisions, to ensure that those leaving military service are not barred from waiting lists on the grounds that they do not have a local connection, are in place. The Council can also use discretionary powers to adjust its 'right to buy' policy.

Education

There are two aspects to this – one is embedded into practice. When Service personnel are re-located, for service reasons or on exit, their children are exempted from some of the local Schools Admission Code requirements. The council's Admissions Team and the Appeal Panel Manager are all aware of these exemptions and ensure they are applied.

There may also be scope for local further and higher education institutions, as well as our own Adult Learning Service, to make special provision, or allow concessions, for Service personnel and those who have recently left, to undertake studies to improve their employability.

In July 2011, Council resolved to support a scheme, launched by Chris Van-Hilton, to provide access to degree courses for ex-service personnel with disabilities, for which the University of Derby committed to providing two fee-free places. The Royal British Legion also supports the scheme, which could provide a model for wider implementation.

Profile raising

The Council employs reservists and veterans, but we may not know who all of them are. If we want to acknowledge their contribution, we may have to proactively seek them out and, if they are prepared to engage, involve them in Armed Forces Day events that are organized by the civic office and local ex-service groups.

Before the decant from the Council House the civic office engaged with local recruiting offices to host signing-on and oath of allegiance ceremonies in the Reception Room, attended by families of those joining up. Feedback from these events was positive, so they should be re-instated in 2013.

Opportunities should be identified, to promote the contribution, to the British armed forces, by our migrant communities, particularly from Commonwealth nations. Exhibitions and the gathering of recorded testimony could form part of existing Armed Forces Day and Black History Month activities.

Community Covenant Grant Scheme

By adopting the covenant the council is now able to submit bids for funding from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme. This national scheme seeks to distribute £30 million in the period 2011-2014.

As our covenant document was signed by a representative of The Royal British Legion and the serving forces community, from 49 Brigade, as well as Members of Council, including the Deputy Leader, we now have in place the necessary signatories to forward bids to the Ministry of Defence. Whilst that sign off group of three need not be increased and can be easily convened, the assessment of projects put forward, might benefit from the scrutiny of subject experts. The size and composition of any such working group will need to be thought through.

The meeting closed with agreement that a number of areas for progress had been identified and that Councillor Banwait would seek support from colleagues to take them forward.