

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

**REPORT TO
CABINET**

12 OCTOBER 2017

**REPORT OF
SENIOR
MANAGEMENT
TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Leader of the Council – Councillor Cook

ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT UPDATE

1. Summary

This report provides a review of the Council's commitment to its Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) and seeks authority to develop an Action Plan in consultation with all service areas of the Council to ensure that our commitment to the Covenant is up to date and fit for purpose.

Cabinet are also invited to consider approval in principle for a proposed Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum (TVAFF) Joint Funding bid to the Armed Forces Covenant Local Grants Fund to provide a full time outreach worker working across the Tees Valley improving and co-ordinating awareness and effective delivery of the pillars of the AF Covenant within the sub region.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to note the report and consider its response to the following recommendations:

1. That the local Armed Forces Community Covenant be brought up to date and made fit for purpose by implementing the proposals from the review of the existing covenant document (outlined at paragraphs 6-11);
2. Implement the proposed consultation on the draft Stockton on Tees Action Plan in consultation with all service areas of the Council (outlined at paragraph 11) ;
3. Support the development of a joint funding bid by the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum to the AF Covenant Fund, which would include each Council committing to invest a sum of money (approx. £5K year each) into the project beyond the funding period – on the basis that the sums saved through the project outweigh the investment.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

-There is a need to review the Council's commitment to its Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC).

-To consider participation within a joint funding bid by the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum to the AF Covenant Fund.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code)

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**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

Leader of the Council – Councillor Bob Cook

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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to note the report and consider its response to the following recommendations:

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BACKGROUND

1. The Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) was originally introduced nationally in 2000 as recognition of the formal of the duty of care owed to Armed Forces personnel, past and present.
2. The Covenant recognised that life in the Armed Forces was often quite different to the rest of society with Armed Forces personnel required to make sacrifices requiring them to go and work where required. This may mean their families having to move, sometimes with little notice, to unfamiliar areas, or alternatively, they and their families may have to live apart for extended periods of time and cope with the issues that this can bring. All of this can result in Armed Forces personnel and their families finding themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their civilian neighbours in accessing the goods and services that as citizens we should all expect.

3. The publication of a revised national Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) in 2011 saw the introduction of specific Covenant pillars; the details of those applicable to local authorities are attached at **Appendix 1**.
4. In response, this Council signed up to its own Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012 making a number of commitments of actions we intended to take in support of the pillars of the AFC; one of the commitments of which was to appoint an elected member Armed Forces Champion and this is a position currently held by the Leader of the Council.
5. There have been several changes in the landscape both regionally and nationally since this time, and this report provides the first review of the Council's commitment to its Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC).

DETAIL

6. It was immediately apparent during the review that some of the measures contained within our AFCC were no longer relevant; that all of the current pillars of the national AFC were not represented; and there was no specific action plan currently in place to illustrate how its aims and objectives would be delivered or its progress measured.
7. The Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum (TVAFF), established in 2012 and consisting of armed forces representatives and lead officers and Armed Forces Champions from each of the T.V. Authorities, introduced 4 new pillars to the Covenant which to date have not been reflected within Stockton's AFCC. The Armed Forces Act 2016 also required an Annual Report to be submitted by the Secretary of Defence to Parliament, usually in December each year, including aims, objectives and targets for the year ahead. The findings of this Annual Report are not currently considered against our own AFCC and it is suggested that it would be prudent to do so.
8. A North East Armed Forces Forum (NEAFF) was also established in 2016 to support and enhance the work of local forums such as the TVAFF, and since that time has focused its work on making more effective communication and co-ordination and developing better information about the ex-service community. Similar to the TVAFF, this Forum contains armed forces representatives lead officers and Armed Forces Champions from each of the 12 local authorities.
9. The TVAFF have also since developed an Annual Stock Take 'traffic light' monitoring tool to measure how well local authorities were meeting the needs of the armed forces community. The Stock Take is to be taken annually by the authority themselves but be audited by the Chair of the TVAFF to verify the grading.
10. A Stock Take of Stockton's support of the Covenant was undertaken in 2016 in consultation with colleagues and partners, the results of which are presented at **Appendix 2**. The results reveal that this Authority has been assessed as achieving an 'Amber' rating; meaning that less than 50% of the pillars of the Covenant had achieved a 'Green rating'. Within the Tees Valley, only Redcar & Cleveland have a similar 'Amber rating' with the remaining 3 authorities all having received a 'Green rating' in 2016. The TVAFF expects that all authorities as best practice, will develop an action plan to improve delivery against all of the pillars of the Covenant so that all pillars and authorities achieved a 'Green rating'.
11. An initial outline for a draft Stockton on Tees Action Plan has since been developed indicating key aims and actions designed to improve delivery against each of the pillars of the revised Covenant. The next stage is to consult with colleagues from other departments regarding its content and incorporate any further actions required. It is hoped that through development of such a plan, our commitment in support of the Armed Forces Community will continue and this will subsequently be recognised by the TVAFF in its annual Stock Take of our AFCC.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE INITIATIVES

12. In June 2013, the Government announced that £10M would be made available annually to the MOD to ensure the continued achievement of its Armed Forces Covenant Commitments. This funding, subsequently termed Armed Forces Covenant Local Grants, considers applications for practical projects which deliver rapid results in support of the Armed Forces Community. Funding priorities are set annually by the MOD's Covenant Reference Group. The current Priorities are:
 1. Veteran's gateway (2016/17 only);
 2. Families in stress;
 3. Strengthening local government delivery of the covenant
 4. Community Integration / delivery of local services
13. Gateshead and Tyneside authorities have since benefited from this funding in recent years in support of the successful introduction of outreach workers to support armed forces veterans on issues such as housing, mental health and employment. Over a 6 month period, the local authority's housing arm was able to demonstrate savings of £18k, whilst increasing income for Armed Forces clients. Other services such as A&E, Police etc were also able to demonstrate savings.
14. The TVAFF has since been asked by the MOD to develop a bid for funding for up to 3 years for a similar project in the Tees Valley employing a full time outreach worker. The Business Case for this is currently being developed by Hartlepool B.C.
15. The success of the bid is likely to depend on, amongst other things, it demonstrating that the outreach worker post is sustainable in the long term. Each of the T.V. local authorities has therefore been asked whether it will support such a position once any grant funding has expired. At this stage it is envisaged that this would amount to around £5k per authority per annum. Cabinet are therefore invited to consider whether it wished to support in principle the development of this joint funding bid.
16. The MOD introduced its Employer's Recognition Scheme in 2014 in order to recognise and thank employers who were providing exceptional support to the Armed Forces community. There are three levels of award – 'Bronze', 'Silver' and 'Gold', which is the highest available. This Council has already received the Bronze and Silver awards last year.
17. The criteria for achieving the Gold award is however much more wide ranging, requiring a third party nomination and substantiated evidence of impact gained over a sustained period. Very few organisations in the UK have received the Gold standard and Gateshead Council is the only local authority in the north east to receive it. Once the Gold Award has been achieved, it has to be re-assessed every two years to ensure that the organisation meets the requirement.
19. Our review of the current Armed Forces Community Covenant and Annual Stock Take of the pillars has identified a number of 'areas' to refresh, update and improve. Addressing these areas would seek to make a positive impact over a sustained period for our past and present Armed Forces personnel, which in turn may be recognised by the Employer's Recognition Scheme. A successful bid for Armed Forces Covenant Local Grant to fund a full time outreach worker would also have a positive impact.

NEXT STEPS

20. Delivering the Armed Forces Covenant effectively and successfully has proved to be a major challenge locally, regionally and nationally. Apart from the obvious financial factors, progress is being seriously hindered by three major obstacles, which still need to be overcome at each level:

- i. No-one knows definitively the size or demographics of the AF community in the UK as there is limited and patchy data available concerning their profile, needs and location. British Legion research estimates that it makes up around one in ten of the general population. The British Legion is running a campaign called 'Count them in' which is calling on the Government to include questions about the AF community in the 2021 Census, which would go a long way to helping resolve this issue.
 - ii. The absence of definitive and comprehensive data concerning the AF community severely impacts on strategic planning and commissioning of services to meet the needs of the AF community. Once the relevant information is in place service providers will be able to organise and target resources far more effectively, instead of drawing conclusions from incomplete datasets, which they are currently doing.
 - iii. There is a significant lack of awareness about the Armed Forces Covenant in society amongst both the Armed Forces community and the general public.
21. In order to make progress in overcoming these obstacles, and the other issues identified in this report, the following steps are suggested which if approved, would be taken to Cabinet/Council for approval:-
- Ensure that the local Armed Forces Community Covenant is up to date and fit for purpose by implementing the proposals from the review of the existing covenant document (outlined at paragraphs 6-11);
 - Implement the proposed consultation on the draft Stockton on Tees Action Plan (outlined at paragraph 11) ;
 - Support the development of a joint funding bid by the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum to the AF Covenant Fund, which would include each Council committing to invest a sum of money (approx. £5K year each) into the project beyond the funding period – on the basis that the sums saved through the project outweigh the investment.

Financial Implications

22. Outlined at paragraph 15 – estimated at around £5k per authority per annum should the outreach worker post prove to be sustainable in the long term.

Legal Implications

23. There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Risk Assessment

24. Low risk

Council Plan Implications

25. In support of our existing Armed Forces Covenant.

Equalities Impact Assessment

26. Not applicable

Consultation including Ward Councillors

27. Armed Forces Champion.

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Education related

'Pupil Premium' for children of service personnel, and training / education of service leavers.

Background Papers

- "The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016" by the Defence Secretary (Dec. 2016)
- "Armed Forces Covenant: 2010 to 2015" Government Policy paper (June 2016)
- "Our community – Our covenant: Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges" report by the Forces in Mind Trust (Aug. 2016)
- UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy 2016 - 20" (April 2016)
- Armed Forces Act 2006, 2011 and May 2016
- "The Armed Forces Covenant" (May 2011)
- "The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and tomorrow" guidance (May 2011)
- Cabinet Report – Regional Review of Health Needs of Ex-Service Personnel (Feb. 2011)
- Regional Health Scrutiny Committee Final Report (Jan. 2011)
- Service Personnel Command Paper (July 2008)

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors Not ward specific

Property No property implications