

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**11 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**ARMED FORCES ANNUAL REPORT 2013**

**SUMMARY**

This report presents the first Annual Armed Forces Report to Council. It summarises the work to date with the Armed Forces and the progress so far on the implementation of Stockton's Armed Forces Community Covenant. It also outlines proposed projects for the coming year and includes a statement from the Commanding Officer of 102 Battalion REME.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

- a) Council note the progress report and support on-going work to implement the actions.
- b) Council endorse the report.

**DETAIL**

1. On 18<sup>th</sup> January 2012 the following motion was submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.1. Moved by Councillor Cook, seconded by Councillor Beall:-

"The Council recognises the contribution the Armed Forces community makes in defence of the realm, often sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. The Council also recognises the vital role the families of Armed Forces personnel have in supporting their operational effectiveness."

The motion requested Council support the signing of a local community covenant in partnership with the Armed Forces community. To agree to work and act together to honour the national Armed Forces Covenant. To work with the Armed Forces community locally, recognising and remembering the sacrifices made and in the provision of help and advice to support integration into civilian life."

2. The motion was carried with full Council support.
3. Following the motion to Council Stockton Council and partners signed the Stockton Armed Forces Community Covenant on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2012. The Covenant is intended to encourage support for the Armed Forces working and residing in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees,

and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of the community. The Covenant commits the Council and Renaissance partners to:

- support employees who volunteer for reserve duties;
  - ensure that the voice of serving and ex-service personnel is heard through the Council's engagement mechanisms;
  - report annually to Council on the impact of the Covenant;
  - identify key officer and Member champions, and implement the other recommendations of the Regional Scrutiny Review of the Health Needs of the Ex-Service Community.
4. The Armed Forces have in return committed to deliver annual updates to both Members and updates on operational experiences and policy changes, and to be involved in community activities and events. A Members Policy seminar was delivered in October as part of this commitment. We will be requesting a further seminar once the Armed Forces are in a position to inform us how changes to the services and local Armed Forces bases/units will impact on our Borough, probably early 2014.
  5. As part of their commitment to the covenant an annual statement has been prepared by the Commanding Officer for 102 Battalion REME and this is presented at **Appendix 1**.
  6. The Armed Forces Community Covenant identified 4 Member Champions Cllr Steve Nelson, Housing and Community Safety, Cllr Mike Smith – Transport and Regeneration, Cllr David Coleman – Access and Communities with Cllr Jim Beall – Adult Services and Health and Deputy Leader being the lead Member Champion.
  7. The actions from the Regional Healthy Scrutiny Committee on the Health Needs of the Service Community were at this point incorporated into Stockton's Community Covenant which recognises the contribution made by the Armed Forces as a whole. The final report of the Regional Health Scrutiny Committee following its review of the health needs of ex-service personnel was considered by Cabinet in February 2011. The review was an innovative and wide ranging piece of work covering physical, mental and socio-economic needs. The project received contributions from all 12 of the region's local authorities, the Ministry of Health, Department of Health, NHS bodies, and ex-service charities and personnel themselves, amongst others.
  8. The review's 47 recommendations sought to ensure that ex-service personnel and their families are not disadvantaged due to their service in the Armed Forces. An action plan was developed and monitored by the regional committee until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. Stockton's actions were incorporated into the delivery of the Community Covenant.
  9. Many of the recommendations were for external organisations (eg. NHS), or for local authorities but could be undertaken on a regional basis. For example, ANEC has agreed to take forward work in relation to improving the quality of the data flow between the armed forces and local authorities. Once all local authorities signed their individual Community Covenants a Regional Charter (Appendix 1) was signed on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012 on behalf of the following partners:
    - The Armed Forces Community in the North East
    - The Association of North East Councils (on behalf of all of the 12 Councils in the North East Region)
    - The NHS in the North East
    - The Royal British Legion
    - JobCentrePlus
    - Northumbria Probation Trust
    - Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust

- North East Chamber of Commerce
  - The Prison Service
  - Voluntary Organisations North East (VONNE)
  - Northumbria Police
  - Durham Police
  - Cleveland Police
10. Paragraphs 11 – 32 provide an overview of all measures taken to date to support the armed forces community through the Community Covenant in Stockton-on-Tees.
  11. As part of the implementation of the Community Covenant the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum (TVAFF) was established, our Armed Forces Lead Champion Cllr Jim Beall is the co-chair, with Colonel Andy Black, of this sub-regional Forum. This enables Stockton and the other local authorities to continue to work together to improve services that cut across all areas e.g. include Housing, Health and Employment and Training. A Forward Plan has been developed which identifies key topics to tackle together e.g. Employment, Education, Health, Housing, Welfare, Youth Activity and Other Activity. There is a recognition that whilst there is learning from each other and the ability to share some common objectives and solutions across the Tees Valley there are also some issues that need to be addressed locally.
  12. One of the areas that all local authority areas identified that needed improving was our intelligence around the Armed Forces Community. In order to identify Armed Forces Community personnel all Local Authority funded frontline services ask the question of their customers “have you served in the UK Armed Forces?” This now occurs in Adult Social Care, Supporting People, Customer Services, DAAT commissioned treatment services, Housing Options, Stockton District Advice and Information Services and in all of our resident Consultations.
  13. In Stockton a workshop event with relevant service areas and key stakeholders was held in February 2013. One of the outcomes was a better awareness of the range of information that is being collected, and how this can be brought together to improve services. Our Service Directory was improved as a result of this and can be found at <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/adultservices/supportforarmedforcespersonnel/>
  14. Further work as part of the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum has started to share information to improve the contents of the sub-regional Armed Forces Directories.
  15. This work will be built on with a workshop in the Autumn which will concentrate on sharing of information between organisations and partners this will ensure that the service-users get a seamless service and referral pathways will be clearer. This project is currently subject to a regional bid for Forces in Mind funding to help facilitate better information sharing and intelligence gathering.
  16. Our Residents Perception Survey in October 2012 and subsequent refresh of the Viewpoint Panel have greatly improved our intelligence of our Armed Forces Community. We now know for example that 17,430 (14%) of the adult population belong to the Armed Forces Community, 9% have served in the Armed Forces and 5% have family members who have served in the Armed Forces. The spread of the Armed Forces Community is as follows:
    - Central – 36% equates to 6,725 people
    - Northern – 28% equates to 4,880 people
    - Eastern – 22% equates to 3,835 people
    - Western – 14% equates to 2,440 people

17. Further work is being undertaken to identify particular issues that this community has which will be shared with partners in Stockton which will be able to inform service planning and service improvements.
18. Internally as part of our Employee Survey we identified 85 Armed Forces Community including 4 active reservists.
19. As part of our commitment to the Community Covenant the scope of the existing equality and diversity “golden” helpline number has been widened to become the Armed Forces Community helpline for Stockton Borough. The helpline is backed up through use of the website and links to relevant services.
20. In conjunction with the helpline and as part of our commitment to the Community Covenant we have delivered awareness training to frontline staff in Customer Services, SDAIS and Housing Options. This has resulted in a number of referrals to the helpline number. The main subjects of these referrals are Housing, Benefits and Mental Health issues.
21. The work undertaken as part of the Community Covenant has acted as a reminder about some of the services that are already in existence e.g. Middlesbrough CAB provide a dedicated Money and Benefits advice service for veterans funded by the Royal British Legion (RBL) and the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF). This is intended for people across Teesside (including Stockton). Workers undertake home visits or outreach appointments to SDAIS if necessary.
22. Catalyst as the VCS infrastructure organisation is the voice for the VCS in Stockton-on-Tees and they are currently undertaking a baseline review of VCS in Stockton. Information gathered during this exercise will be used to assess who is undertaking relevant outreach work in the Borough. This will then create an opportunity to ensure that relevant organisations are then linked in with the Directories and networks as appropriate.
23. As part of the TVAFF one of the items in the forward plan is how the Third Sector do or can support the Armed Forces Community.
24. Support for the Armed Forces Community was included in the specification for Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and the continued provision of the Stockton Service Navigator Project which accepts GP/self/third sector referrals for clients with health and well-being needs. The service provides assessment and onward signposting and referral to help clients access the range of support they need, e.g. healthy lifestyle interventions, debt/benefit advice, support for carers, advocacy support, parenting and relationship issues etc.).
25. There is a dedicated section in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for the health and well-being needs of the ex-service community. It can be found on the JSNA website <http://www.teesjsna.org.uk/stockton-ex-forces-personnel/>
26. The CCG Clear and Credible plan explicitly includes reference to the Armed Forces Community and veterans’ agenda.
27. As part of our partnership with TEWV we have offered Veteran Mental Health Awareness Training to our frontline staff and our partner’s frontline staff resulting in the creation of 155 Armed Forces Mental Health Champions across the Tees Valley to-date.
28. As part of the regional work on Veteran’s Mental Health we supported the publication of Life Force North East: A Practical Guide for Working with Military Veterans (copies available on request) and we have shared these with stakeholders across the Borough. It is aimed at community based support agencies who work with Armed Forces Community. It provides an insight into military culture and identifies some of the issues which veterans may face when they leave the Armed Forces. It also provides details of organisations who can provide advice and support both to the Armed Forces Community and the agencies who come into contact with them.

29. With regard to Housing our Choice Based lettings agreement sees Armed Force Community receiving Priority 1 status. As yet there is no specific provision for Ex-forces personnel, similar to the Norcare Veterans Centre in Gateshead, in particular further work is necessary before a need can be assessed in the Tees Valley. The TVAFF will be looking to see if there is a need and identify how that may be addressed as part of their forward programme.
30. The Career Transition Partnership local employment consultants (working as part of the Regular forces Employment Organisation) work with Local Authorities and/or Armed Forces Networks/Forums to provide an assessment of the likely level of demand and need for employment and skills. A representative regularly attends the TVAFF and updates on service leavers and likely employment and other support needed.
31. JobCentrePlus in Durham and Tees Valley have adopted an approach of identifying Armed Forces Champions in each JobCentre. Through this Armed Forces Community can access support to help them retrain, gain skills and access specialist RBL funded training through Finchale College.
32. Annually in the Borough we celebrate Armed Forces with Freedom Parades and Armed Forces Day with a well-received week long programme of activities in June.
33. 2014 will be a significant year for commemoration as it will be 100 years since the start of the First World War and 70 years since the D-Day landings. Tees Valley have been successful in an Arts Council funding bid which will see a year-long programme of events commemorating the First World War. The events are primarily educational and all children across the Borough will be engaged in activities in schools, libraries and museums.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

34. There have been achievements across each of the pillars of the Community Covenant but there is still some way to go. In the coming year work will be undertaken on the following priorities:-
  - Protocols for Information and Intelligence sharing
  - Updating of the JSNA
  - Expansion of the Youth Programme across the Tees Valley (currently piloted in Redcar and Cleveland)
  - Expansion of the TEWV Veterans Mental Health Awareness Programme
  - Improved links to employers and employment opportunities
  - Investigation of the need for specialist Ex-Service personnel housing units
  - Submission of a bid for a sustainable model of cross-sector support for Armed Forces Community to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme.
  - Commemoration of the First World War and the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day landings.
  - Establish an Armed Forces Community of Interest group as part of the LSP refresh.

Cabinet considered this matter on 4 September 2013 and a copy of the relevant minute is attached at **Appendix 2**.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

35. The actions are to be met through existing services and budgets and /or secured external funding. The preventative nature of the actions, greater awareness of dedicated charitable services, available to ex-service personnel and signposting to these, and more efficient referral processes, could lead to savings for local authorities and partner organisations.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

36. There are no legal implications at this stage.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

34. This review of the health needs of the ex-service community is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk. There may be a reputational risk should the Council fail to make progress on previously agreed recommendations.

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

35. This report has particular relevance to the following themes: Economic Regeneration and Transport (in relation to the employability of the ex-service community, and the ability of reservists to continue in mainstream employment), Healthier Communities and Adults (in relation to general health needs of the community), and Environment and Housing (in relation to the housing needs of the community).
36. The supporting themes of Stronger Communities (in relation to the involvement of voluntary and community groups in the provision of services for ex-service personnel, the aim of promoting equality of opportunity for all sections of society, community involvement events and recognition for the armed forces), and Older Adults (in relation to services for older ex-service personnel) are also relevant.

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

37. This report is a progress report on previously agreed recommendations and commitments and is therefore not subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

## **CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS**

N/A

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Education related? No

Background Papers

- Regional Health Scrutiny Committee Final Report, January 2011
- Cabinet Report – Regional Review of Health Needs of Ex-Service Personnel, February 2011

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors Not ward specific

Property No property implications