

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**17<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**ARMED FORCES ANNUAL REPORT 2014**

**SUMMARY**

This report presents the second 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 Council note the progress report and support on-going work to implement the actions.

**BACKGROUND**

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
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 2012 as part of this commitment. 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, has been arranged for February 2015.
  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 (To Follow).
  6. In addition to our Community Covenant once all regional local authorities signed their individual Community Covenants a Regional Charter 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

Work is undertaken at a regional level and is detailed in para 31.

## **DETAIL**

7. Paragraphs 9 – 37 provide an overview of all measures taken to date to support the armed forces community through the Community Covenant in Stockton-on-Tees.
8. The Community Covenant acted as a catalyst to consolidate the work stakeholders were undertaking and set it within a policy framework. Last years' Annual Report identified the changes to policies and practice these have been summarised and updated in paras 10 - 27.
9. The work undertaken as part of the Community Covenant 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.
10. Catalyst as the VCS infrastructure organisation is the voice for the VCS in Stockton-on-Tees and they undertook a baseline review of VCS in Stockton. Information gathered during this exercise identified organisations undertaking relevant outreach work in the Borough which has been linked in with the appropriate Directories and networks.

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, the topics covered in this year are included as Appendix 2.
12. As part of the TVAFF Forward Plan one of the items in the forward plan was how the Third Sector can support the Armed Forces Community this has been reflected in local Directories.
13. 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.). To date Healthwatch has not identified any specific Armed Forces Community personnel or issues.
14. 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/>
15. The CCG Clear and Credible plan explicitly includes reference to the Armed Forces Community and veterans' agenda.
16. 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 over 200 Armed Forces Mental Health Champions across the Tees Valley to-date.
17. 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. One direct referral has come from this source to the local authority Armed Forces contact, this was from outside of the Borough and resulted in the client being referred to the relevant agencies in their locality
18. 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 have had a presentation from a number of providers and will be looking to see if there is need for this type of provision and identify how that may be addressed as part of their forward programme.
19. 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.

20. 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.
21. 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. This activity supports referral pathways
22. Our Service Directory was improved as a result of a stakeholder workshop this and can be found at <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/adultservices/supportforarmedforcespersonnel/> it is regularly updated.
23. Further work as part of the TVAFF has improved the sharing information to improve the contents of the sub-regional Armed Forces Directories, mapping of resources and identification of ex-service personnel need. This project is currently subject of a submission of a bid for a sustainable model of cross-sector support for Armed Forces Community to the National Community Covenant Grant Scheme.
24. Internally as part of our Employee Survey we identified 85 Armed Forces Community including 4 active reservists.
25. As part of our commitment to the Community Covenant the scope of the existing equality and diversity “golden” helpline number was 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.
26. 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.
27. This year has seen 22 specific calls to the helpline and they can be broken down as:

<b>Reason for Referral</b>	<b>Number</b>
Jobs / Employment	13
Access to Housing	12
Support network for relationships/ mental health	10
Benefits	8
Training	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

These cases were signposted to the appropriate help and support locally.

28. Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS) gave assistance to 162 cases which can be broken down :

<b>Reason for referral</b>	<b>Number</b>
Benefits	48
Utilities	41
Debt	21
Employment	10
Relationships	8
Housing	7
Legal	5
Tax	4
Training	3
Other	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>

29. Within Stockton there were 18 people who identified themselves as Armed Forces Community in SBC commissioned drug treatment services and 1 person in SBC commissioned alcohol treatment services.
30. Despite stakeholder organisations working well together and sharing information there may still be overlap of some of the statistics, due to data protection issues. We identified the need for the development of protocols for information and intelligence sharing work last year and this work has been undertaken on a regional level through a Forces in Mind Trust project on behalf of Association of North East Councils (ANEC) with support from the Institute of Local Governance (ILG). This project aims to map the existing landscape and identify any barriers, challenges and examples of effective practice. The first stage results will be reported in September and will be a feature of the Chief Executives meeting in September and the Leaders and Elected Mayors in October. An officer workshop will also be held in September. This work aims to improve information sharing across all stakeholders and this will allow us to eliminate any double counting that may have occurred previously.
31. 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 see Appendix 3, as part of the activities over £2,000 was raised from the Mayor's Duck Race to be shared between the Rifles Regiment's Care for Casualties, The Yorkshire Regiment Benevolent Fund and REME .
32. 2014 is a significant year for commemoration as it is 100 years since the start of the First World War and 70 years since the D-Day landings. Tees Valley were successful in an Arts Council funding enabled a year-long programme of events commemorating the First World War. The programme of events is attached at Appendix 4.
33. In 2013 Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council in conjunction with 102 Battalion REME Newton Aycliffe Territorial Army Centre piloted a Tactical Engineering Development (TED) course designed for NEETs and funded through the Community Covenant Scheme. During

2014 this youth programme has been expanded across the Tees Valley. There will be an evaluation report of the outcomes at a later date.

34. To improve links to employers and employment opportunities the Armed Forces Champion brokered a meeting between key employers in Stockton and key Armed Forces personnel. The Armed Forces have highly trained personnel returning to civilian life and some of our major employers have particular skill needs that these personnel may fit. The meeting gave the attendees the opportunity to discuss a range of possibilities from employment to support for reservists.
35. Very recently the Bishop of Durham has offered support from the Diocese in delivering the Community Covenant in Stockton.
36. In summary there is a wide range of information and support available through the multi-agency work and engagement across the Borough for the benefit of the Armed Forces Community that has been enhanced by the work on the Community Covenant.

### **NEXT STEPS**

37. 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:-
  - Develop Information and Intelligence sharing protocols in line with the findings from the regional Forces in Mind research
  - Updating of the JSNA
  - Further investigation of the needs of the Armed Forces Community including specialist Ex-Service personnel housing units across the Tees Valley, this work forms part of the Community Covenant Bid.
  - Improving the Directories and signposting as a result of the work through the Community Covenant Bid.
  - Investigate ways in which we can work with the Bishop of Durham and the Diocese to further enhance our Community Covenant
38. Cabinet considered the report at its meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2014 and a copy of the relevant minute extract is attached at Appendix 5.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

39. 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**

40. 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. N/A

## **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