

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**25<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2015**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**ARMED FORCES ANNUAL REPORT 2015**

**SUMMARY**

This report presents the third 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 Stockton Strategic Partnership 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 updates to both Members and updates on operational experiences and policy changes, and to be involved in community activities and events. See paras below
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. 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 – 52 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.

### **TEES VALLEY ARMED FORCES FORUM (TVAFF)**

9. As part of the implementation of the Community Covenant the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum (TVAFF) was established. Cllr Jim Beall was Stockton's Armed Forces Lead Champion and co-chair, with Colonel Andy Black, of this sub-regional Forum. Following the Council's AGM, Cllr Steven Parry was appointed as the new Armed Forces Lead Champion with The Army taking over full responsibility of Chairing of the TVAFF until 2016 when a new Chair will be elected.
10. This involvement since 2012 has enabled 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 key focus over the last year has been around identifying the needs of the Armed Forces Community within the Tees Valley and what information is currently held by each Authority. By gathering this information it will inform the Forward Plan for 2016/17. 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 and regionally.

11. 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 results will improve information sharing across all stakeholders.
12. During the last year, the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum supported a successful Community Covenant Bid from Stockton Sea Cadets for £70,000 to purchase a building that will act as a Headquarters for Stockton Sea Cadets and a Tees District Boat Station that will serve cadets and other groups across the Tees Valley.
13. The Sea Cadets managed to raise an additional £115,000 to purchase the building which was completed in May 2015. Work is now ongoing to raise funds towards the refurbishment which will hopefully start in January 2016.
14. Recent developments through ANEC have seen agreement from Leaders and Mayors to put arrangements in place for a regional elected member forum for engaging with senior armed forces representatives. It will be co-chaired by Cllr Dave Ledger (Northumberland) and Cllr Veronica Copeland (Darlington). This will inevitably impact on the TVAFF but as yet that impact is unknown until the remit of the new body is fully understood. The first meeting is to be held on HMS Calliope 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

#### **STOCKTON SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

15. Our SBC Service Directory is regularly updated can be found at <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/adultservices/supportforarmedforcespersonnel/>.
16. Internally as part of our Employee Survey we identified 85 Armed Forces Community including 4 active reservists who are supported and enabled to undertake their Reserve Forces duties.
17. 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 in Stockton 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 a range of referral pathways.
18. 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. The Customer Services staff were all given Armed Forces Awareness training and the requests for support are passed on to the relevant agencies.

19. Since September 2014 Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS) gave assistance to 135 cases which can be broken down :

<b>Reason for referral</b>	<b>Number</b>
Benefits and Tax	65
Consumer goods and Services	2
Debt	21
Financial Services and Capability	33
Health and Community Care	4
Housing	2
Legal	2
Relationship and Family	3
Other	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>

21. Annually in the Borough we celebrate Armed Forces week with a Flag raising ceremony with involvement from the Lord Lieutenant of Durham, serving members of each of the Armed Forces and Veterans from the Royal British Legion. A variety of stands, displays, activities by serving veterans and civilian support organisations is also present. Annually the Mayors Charity Duck Race which raises fund for our Armed Forces with Freedom of the Borough raises over £2000 and is launched by the Sea Cadets
22. To commemorate Battle of Britain Week the RAF flag is raised on the Town Hall with RAF Association veterans collecting donations.
23. Remembrance Day is commemorated in the Garden of Remembrance in the grounds of Stockton Parish Church where the Mayor launches the local Poppy appeal. Local Schools are invited to send groups and a remembrance service is held in the Garden with Veterans.
24. Last year, August 4th 2014 marked the 100th anniversary of Britain joining World War One. 1,245 war dead came from Stockton on Tees; their names listed in the town's Book of Remembrance.
25. From April 2014, sunflowers were planted by the people of Stockton, each flower bearing the name of a member of Stockton's community who went to war and never came home.
26. At the start of August, just as the flowers were coming into bloom and reaching their full potential they were cut down and taken to the town's Parish Gardens where a Garden of Memory was created. Events held from 2nd-5th August remembered the 1,245.
27. Preston Park hosted two exhibitions on World War 1, one by Artist Robert Perry and another developed by the Museum Service and Young People from Stockton named "We Remember". A film was made about the war and Stockton's connections to it, this can be seen on the heritage website <http://heritage.stockton.gov.uk/stories/poppies>

28. A touring exhibition was curated with other Tees Valley Museums and was displayed as part of Armed Forces 2014 on the high street went to Yarm and then Thornaby,
29. Museums are currently developing a project for 2016 on the Spence watercolour collection to coincide with the commemoration of the Battle of the Somme and an Heritage Lottery Fund bid for £34,000 has been submitted.

### **VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (VCSE) SUPPORT**

30. 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.
31. Catalyst, as the VCSE infrastructure organisation is the voice for the VCS in Stockton-on-Tees and they undertook a baseline review of VCSE in Stockton. They have close working relationships with organisations that provide support for those who have served in the Armed Forces such as Royal British Legion, SSAFA etc. In addition they have developed excellent links with the services that are generic but could be of particular interest to those in the Armed Forces Community; these include mental health charities, financial inclusion organisations, and charities that support specific health conditions or injuries. Links have also been formed with uniformed youth organisations. Catalyst can easily consult with these organisations, or call a meeting of organisations and interested individuals in the community to come together and discuss the needs of the Armed Forces Community as part of the Voice function.

### **HEALTH**

32. 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.
33. There is a dedicated section in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for the health and well-being needs of the ex-service community. It is currently being updated but can be found on the JSNA website <http://www.teesjsna.org.uk/stockton-ex-forces-personnel/>
34. NHS England has launched a dedicated NHS Choices page which provides healthcare and support for Armed Forces Community including serving personnel, reservists, families and veterans. <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/Pages/Militaryhealthcare.aspx>
35. The CCG Clear and Credible plan explicitly includes an Armed Forces Community and veterans' workstream which recently representatives from the TVAFF have been invited to attend.
36. Stockton Council has commissioned drug and alcohol treatment services which are providing services to the Armed Forces Community
37. Stockton Lifeline (Alcohol Service) is currently working with 5 ex veterans, 3 of which are also receiving support from SAFFA. Lifeline has a Veterans Champion who has been working closely with the Royal British Legion to discuss joining up of services. Lifeline have offered their premises on Skinner Street free of charge to RBL for their Summer Open Day and have offered a regular weekly/monthly room within the building to deliver outreach service E.g.

their Veterans Champion attended a meeting and delivered a presentation on support available to Veterans to the Billingham Branch of the Royal British Legion

38. CRI Stockton Drug Recovery Service has an identified ex Armed Forces Lead, as part of this role they delivered a presentation to the Gateshead Armed Forces Forum in relation to CRI services and the support that is offered, with tailored information for veterans. As a result of this a personal invitation was extended to the ex-armed forces lead to attend Finchale in Durham who work with over 200 veterans, from across the North East, by Melvin Peers, the Head of Armed Forces and Business Development.
39. CRI have 11 clients from the Armed Forces Community and utilise the North East Veterans Directory, staff have cited low level mental health needs as a key area of support for Armed Forces.
40. Birchtree Practice, Lawson Street have 4 patients from the Armed Forces Community who have a named Clinician Lead and Support Worker lead, both of whom were instrumental in putting together the Service Directory for Veterans. The Recovery Group held a working programme over 12 weeks to look at CV's work, training and they identified specific issues which the Armed Forces Community might face and how they can be supported

## **HOUSING**

41. With regard to Housing our Choice Based lettings agreement sees Armed Force Community receiving Priority 1 status. The number of servicemen and women and their families which have been given priority status in applying for Government sponsored affordable housing since this started in 2013 is 11.
41. The TVAFF have had presentations from a number of specialist housing providers for Veterans including Norcare and Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services, however there is, as yet, no robust evidence of need for this type of accommodation.

## **EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING**

43. 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.
44. 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.
45. The Tactical Engineering Development (TED) Course aims to provide real life skills leading to further training or employment for 16-19 year olds. This engineering 'Look at Life' runs as a one or five day residential course. TEDs is run in conjunction with the Tees Valley Military Forum and is sponsored by 102 Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.
46. Since March 2014, 84 young people from the Tees Valley have taken part. In April 2015 the course changed its name to Armed Forces Employment Pathway (AFEP).
47. The Department for Education definition of children service families is pupils in year groups reception to year 11 recorded as Ever 5 Service Children or in receipt of a child pension from the Ministry of Defence
48. In 2015 Spring census the percentage of pupils in primary schools, including special schools, eligible for Pupil Premium funding for those children from service families ranged from 0% to 3.9% (0-9 pupils) and for secondary schools the range is 0% to 1.9% (0-18 pupils) . There

are 50 primary schools and 11 secondary schools which have children from service families on their roll according to the 2015 spring census.

49. Pupil Premium 2015-16 Conditions of Grant stipulates that the Pupil Premium allocation per pupil from a service family is £300. A wide range of strategies, generic to the effective use of pupil premium funding, are currently in place; these also support children from services families. A range of ongoing differentiated challenge and support to priority Pupil Premium Schools is in place which strengthens Leadership and Management systems.

### **RBL SUGGESTED POLICY CHANGES**

50. The Royal British Legion selected 5 key policy changes they feel will benefit the Armed Forces Community and reduce the effects of disadvantage. The key policy changes are:
- a. Make tangible changes to your social housing allocations policy
  - b. Fully disregard military compensation payments when means testing for council delivered support
  - c. Priorities Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) applications where the disability is as a result of service in the Armed Forces
  - d. Consider the needs of the Armed Forces community in our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment / Single Integrated Plan and via Equality Impact Assessments.
  - e. Offer a school place to Armed Forces children who apply mid-term, increasing class sizes to accept them where necessary.
51. In Stockton we have already implemented all of these recommended policy changes:
- f. The housing allocations policy changes are facilitated through the Compass agreement which sees the Armed Forces Community prioritised within the top band for allocations.
  - g. Stockton has an enhanced local discretionary scheme which disregards military compensation payments when means testing for council delivered services such as council tax support and housing benefits.
  - h. With regards to the disabled facilities grant (DFG) Stockton adheres to strict timelines of all applications and each individual case is prioritised in terms of need and risk. All applications are processed in a timely fashion to enable those eligible to access the support and equipment they need quicker. The Occupational Therapy assessment service works with health providers, SSAFA, RBL and other support organisations and agencies to ensure that those injured get the fastest response possible.
  - i. The needs of the Armed Forces Community are identified in relevant Equality Impact Assessments and have their own strand in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
  - j. With regard to offers of school places in Stockton this statutory requirement is fully observed.
52. 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**

53. 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 Trust Report : Evaluation of Information Sharing Practice in the North East Mixed Economy of Service provision for ex-services personnel
- 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.
- Ensure links are made to reflect reservist in the Borough wide Volunteering Strategy, Volunteering Matters

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

54. 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**

55. There are no legal implications at this stage.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

56. 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.

### **COUNCIL PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

57. N/A

### **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

58. 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**

59. 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

Commanding Officer 102 Battalion REME Statement for Stockton BC AF Annual Report:

102 Battalion REME is mandated to “deliver an annual update, to include updates on operational experiences and policy changes, and to be involved in community activities and events” to Stockton Borough Council as their part in the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

Firstly, 102 Battalion are now 12 months in to the implementation of structural change due to Future Reserve 2020, and have not simply stabilised well but have made significant gains regarding some key priorities; Growth of the Reserve, Development of trade capability as the Army's equipment experts, Further building their strong reputation for supporting 'Youth' engagement through TEDS and AFEP (Tactical Engineering Development Scheme and Armed Forces Employability Pathway).

On the training front the highlight of our training year is the Annual Deployment Exercise. In 2014 our training was conducted on the Lydde & Hythe Ranges on the south coast. The training emphasis was on developing basic soldiering skills, with 130 officers and soldiers, whom also undertook a trip to Normandy to study the D-Day landings in this the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

My remit within the Tees Valley, as the Commanding Officer of 102 Battalion REME, is that of Task Force Commander for Tees Valley, the senior Military Liaison Officer (MLO). Stockton BC continues to embrace the Community Covenant concept, and in many aspects leading the way ahead of some other Local Authorities across the Tees Valley.

Stockton BC representation on the Armed Forces Forum remained unchanged for much of the year, with Cllr Jim Beall as Co-Chair and AF Champion, Laurayne Featherstone as Lead Officer and clerical support is provided by Sophie Haste. In June 2015, Cllr Stephen Parry and Officer joined the forum as the Armed Forces Champion replacement. My sincere appreciation for Jim, Sophie and Laurayne support since the inception of the forum is profound.

The Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum (TVAFF) has now been in assembly for almost 3 years, it continues to include the 5 local authorities of Stockton, Hartlepool, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland. We continue to meet 6 times per year at Stockton Road ARC, Middlesbrough. Collectively we explore a number of strands, for the improved awareness and inclusion of veterans, service leavers, reservists and their families' needs, including Health, Welfare, Education, Housing, Employment and Youth Engagement. The TVAFF continues to act as an extremely valuable platform on which to engage with all the Local Authorities across the Tees Valley and the working relationship with all the various bodies which attend the forum meetings continue to add real value to the community, particularly on behalf of the Forces Communities.

This year Stockton BC presented the Freedom of the Borough to 1 Battalion REME, a Regular REME unit based in Catterick, on 25<sup>th</sup> June, a wonderful day which was well supported by the local community. Initiatives to commemorate First and Second World Wars continue to be well publicised and supported. In recent months, Stockton BC have been 'paired' with 1 Regiment RMP, their local AR unit, which will better foster working relationship, this will be mirrored across the Tees Valley BC. This demonstrates their proactive, forward leaning commitment to the Community Covenant. As we explore the Corporate Covenant amongst the Tees Valley BCs, I would like to see Stockton BC once again lead by example.