

Agenda Item No: 15
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 9 November 2017
Report Title: The Armed Forces Covenant
Report Author & Job Title: Will Train
Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer
Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Gerry Clarkson
(Cllr Stephen Dehnel – Member Champion for Military Covenant and Ceremonial Liaison)



Summary: The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly. This commitment is made in recognition of the sacrifices they make on behalf of the country. The Covenant is not designed to give Armed Forces, Veterans and their families preferential treatment compared to other citizens but it should ensure that they get a fair deal and are not disadvantaged because of their Service.

This report outlines an action plan for delivering the Council's commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant and strengthening support for the Armed Forces Community.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Approve the action plan outlined at paragraphs 16 to 18 and appendix 2.**
- II. Note the appointment of the Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications to the role of lead officer for the Armed Forces Covenant.**
- III. Re-affirm its support for the Armed Forces Covenant.**

Policy Overview: The Armed Forces Covenant was signed by the Council in May 2014. It has links with the Council's Lettings Policy, which includes specific sections related to social housing applications from the Armed Forces; however all Council policies should ensure that no member of the Armed Forces community faces disadvantage compared to other citizens in

the provision of public services.

Financial Implications:

The majority of actions identified under the plan at appendix 2 can be achieved using existing resources, however supporting bids for Covenant Fund grants (appendix actions G1, G2) may have a capital consideration. Any requests for such funding would be assessed on a case by case basis using the Project Initiation Document (PID) mechanism as appropriate.

Legal Implications

The Armed Forces Covenant is enshrined in the 2011 Armed Forces Act.

Equalities Impact Assessment

The purpose of the Covenant is to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged in the provision of public services, and that special consideration is given where appropriate.

Other Material Implications:

There are reputational risks to the Council associated with failure to deliver under the Covenant if any members of the Armed Forces community feel that they have been disadvantaged as a result of their Armed Forces connection.

Exempt from Publication:

NO

Background Papers:

Adoption of Armed Forces Community Covenant, report to Cabinet - 13 March 2014

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Report Title: The Armed Forces Covenant

Introduction and Background

1. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly. This commitment is made in recognition of the sacrifices they make on behalf of the country. The Covenant is not designed to give Armed Forces, Veterans¹ and their families preferential treatment compared to other citizens but it should ensure that they get a fair deal and are not disadvantaged because of their Service.
2. There is no set formula for a local authority to follow in providing support to its Armed Forces Community, but it should observe two key principles when writing and implementing policies that impact upon the local population:
 - A. That the Armed Forces Community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and
 - B. That special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured and the bereaved.

Current Position

3. The Council signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in May 2014 with the aim of encouraging support for the Armed Forces community in Ashford and recognising and remembering the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces community. The Covenant was co-signed by Major Phil Linehan, Officer Commanding for the 133 Field Company of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), part of 103 Battalion of the REME based at the Army Reserve Centre on Sir Henry Brackenbury Road, as well as representatives from the voluntary and community sector.
4. In 2015, the Covenant was rebranded from three forms to one, and the former Corporate and Community Covenants have now been subsumed into the Armed Forces Covenant (the Covenant). The aims of the Community Covenant as signed by the Council remain, however the main principles of the Covenant are as described in paragraph 1.
5. Councillor Stephen Dehnel serves as the Council's designated Armed Forces Champion through his role as Member Champion for the Covenant and Ceremonial Liaison. The position of lead officer for the Covenant has been vacant since the former Head of Communications and IT left the organisation in 2016, and from this point there has been no work done at an officer level to

¹ Veterans are defined as anyone who has served at least one day in the Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations. Many former Armed Forces personnel in the UK choose not to define themselves as Veterans, and may use the term 'Service Leaver'.

develop the Covenant, engage the Armed Forces community or build relationships with relevant organisations and community groups.

6. Part of the role of the Borough History, Heritage and Commemoration Task Group is to liaise with the Member Champion for the Covenant and Ceremonial Liaison on all forms of memorial services and commemorative events. The Council's Cultural Services team and the Task Group are working with Cllr Dehnel on a number of projects related to the commemoration of the First World War which will support engagement with the Armed Forces Community.

The Armed Forces in Kent

7. 11th Infantry Brigade and Headquarters South East is one of the British Army's seven Adaptable Force Brigades, comprising of Regular and Reserve units. The Brigade is the Army regional point of contact for the eight counties of the South East of England, and leads on community engagement at a County and Unitary council level within its area of responsibility.
8. District level engagement is led by a network of Community Engagement Task Force Commanders. Ashford Borough Council falls under the area of responsibility for the Commanding Officer of the 36 Engineers Regiment, based at the Invicta Park Barracks, Maidstone. This area of responsibility also covers the Districts of Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.
9. The Regiment is a multi-capbadged and multi-skilled organisation, consisting of the following squadrons under the command of the Regimental Headquarters of the 36 Engineers Regiment and the Queens's Gurkha Engineers:
 - A. 50 Headquarters and Support Squadron
 - B. 20 Field Squadron
 - C. 61 Field Support Squadron
 - D. 69 Gurkha Field Squadron
 - E. 70 Gurkha Field Squadron
10. Supporting Corps are the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME); Royal Logistics Corps (RLC); Adjutant General's Corps (AGC) – Staff and Personnel Support Branch and Gurkha Staff and Personnel Support Branch (SPS/GSPS) and the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC).
11. Due to the array of specialist trades held by the Royal Engineers in addition to their varied combat engineering skills, Engineers are in high demand for many employments and the Regiment has been heavily engaged in recent years with little respite. Recent deployments have included Cyprus, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya and Nepal.
12. The presence of the other Armed Forces in the County is limited, and as such the focus for engagement under the Covenant lies with the Army. Medway is home to a satellite division (Hawke Division) of HMS President, the Royal Naval Reserve Unit associated with London. Royal Air Force presence in the County is limited to the Defence Fire Training and Development Centre at

Manston, which provides fire training to the RAF, MOD and contractor firefighters.

13. A summary of Regular and Reserve Army units based in Kent is included as Appendix A. Cadet organisations for the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army and Royal Air Force are all active within the Borough.
14. There is limited information on the numbers of Regular and Reserve personnel and families. The 2011 census recorded 170 members of the Armed Forces resident within the Borough², and 450 people within the Borough who were the spouse, same-sex civil partner, child or step-child of a member of the Armed Forces³.
15. Similarly, there is limited information available on the number and profile of Veterans living in the Borough. The MOD's Annual Population Survey: UK Armed Forces Veterans residing in Great Britain for 2015 estimated a Veteran population for Kent of circa 80,000⁴. Estimates from a study by the Royal British Legion and Experian mapping suggested a veteran population in Ashford of just under 9,000 in 2010⁵, and research conducted by the Gurkha Welfare Trust estimates that the Borough is home to around 1,000 ex-Gurkhas⁶.

Covenant Action Plan

16. Delivering on the Council's commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant will require Member and officer support across the authority on a range of actions, led by the Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications. Analysis of multiple local authority implementations of the Armed Forces Covenant by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) and the Local Government Association (LGA) has led to the identification of a core infrastructure for delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant at a local authority level:

Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An elected Member champion • An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Covenant Forum or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year. It includes the following: military representatives; military charities; public sector representatives; effective Council Members (senior elected Members on Cabinet); and the officer champion. Each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years. • In some places (for example London) Councils may wish to establish a mechanism for collaboration at a sub-regional level. This could include: joint forums and action plans, applications for the Covenant fund, training packages and a shared web presence.

² 2011 Census AF001 dataset, Office for National Statistics

³ 2011 Census AF002 dataset, Office for National Statistics

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-population-survey-uk-armed-forces-veterans-residing-in-great-britain-2015>

⁵ http://www.kpho.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/43816/Veterans.pdf

⁶ October 2016. <https://www.gwt.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=6cbc5fbf-9cf3-42a5-b614-ea84dd5a0118>

Vision and Commitment	Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed • Policy reviews • Enthusiasm and commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web page or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces community • A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces community can expect from the Council • A route through which concerns can be raised • Training of frontline staff • A vehicle for reporting action and achievements such as an annual report, newsletter or forum minutes

17. Some of the identified infrastructure (an elected member champion and web presence to support delivery of the Covenant) is already in place within Ashford, and the action plan outlined below seeks to address other aspects of the core infrastructure. The action plan has been constructed in co-ordination with Councillor Dehnel and is informed by best practice from Covenant partners and other local authorities. Further detail is available in Appendix 2.

- A. **Organisation review.** Checking how the Council is fulfilling its duties under the Covenant, ensuring that we are supportive of members of the Armed Forces community resident in the borough and working within the authority. With the adoption of policies relating to the employment of reservists, the Council may be eligible for an award under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.⁷
- B. **Staff contact.** Training frontline staff to ask customers whether they or a member of their immediate family have ever served in the British Armed Forces, ensuring that the digital transformation does not disadvantage the Armed Forces community, updating and refining our web presentation for the Covenant.
- C. **Pathways.** Training staff to make appropriate referrals to external services, charities and partners and working with the Armed Forces Network (Kent and Medway NHS) to develop pathway documents for local authority areas of responsibility.
- D. **Partnership working.** Close working and liaison with the Armed Forces, charity and voluntary sector organisations and community groups.
- E. **Health and Wellbeing.** Working with the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board, the Ashford CCG and the NHS Armed Forces Network to address health and wellbeing issues affecting the Armed Forces community.
- F. **Housing.** Regularly reviewing our lettings policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose with regard to the Armed Forces community.
- G. **Covenant Fund.** Supporting bids for grant funding in the Ashford area.
- H. **Recognise and Remember.** Working with the Borough History, Heritage and Commemoration Task Group to ensure that commemorative and remembrance events in the borough are well supported and of the highest standard.

⁷ Organisations may self-nominate for a Bronze award. Silver and Gold awards require external nomination. As of September 2017, Bronze award holders in the County include Maidstone Borough Council, Medway Council, the Ashford CCG and Tenterden Town Council. Kent County Council currently hold a Silver level award.

18. The majority of actions identified within the plan can be achieved within existing resources and increased capital spend is not anticipated. Supporting bids for grant funding from the Covenant Fund may have a capital consideration, but such projects would be assessed on a case-by-case basis utilising the Project Initiation Document (PID) mechanism as appropriate.

Implications and Risk Assessment

19. The lack of definitive information on the size of the Armed Forces community in the Borough means that it is difficult to predict the level of support that the Council will need to provide to this community. Regular engagement with the Armed Forces, voluntary and charity sectors and relevant community organisations is likely to provide a better picture of the Armed Forces community in Ashford and its needs.
20. There are reputational risks to the Council associated with failure to deliver under the Covenant if any members of the Armed Forces community feel that they have been disadvantaged as a result of their Armed Forces connection.

Equalities Impact Assessment

21. The purpose of the Covenant is to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged in the provision of public services, and that special consideration is given where appropriate.

Other Options Considered

22. The Council could offer a generic referral service, utilising the Council's website to provide information on voluntary and charity sector support for the Armed Forces community and directing residents to third party organisations as appropriate.
23. This is not recommended as the Council would potentially be acting counter to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in not taking account of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community in Ashford, and would not be meeting the commitment of partner organisations in the county including the Armed Forces.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

24. Delivery of the action plan outlined will re-affirm the Council's support for the Armed Forces Covenant, provide greater support for the Armed Forces community in the Borough and strengthen working relationships with the Armed Forces, voluntary and charity sectors and community organisations.

Conclusion

25. Adoption of the actions outlined within this report will re-affirm the Council's support for the Armed Forces community, enable the provision of more effective support for members of the Armed Forces community in the Borough and provide the means to strengthen the Council's partnerships with the

Armed Forces, voluntary and charity sector organisations and community groups.

Portfolio Holder's Views

26. Ashford has long valued and celebrated its military heritage and connections, and this re-affirmation of the Armed Forces Covenant will strengthen the commitment of the Council and the Borough's residents to supporting all members of the Armed Forces community.
27. The Armed Forces Champion has undertaken significant work to ensure the Council has a visible presence and point of contact for the Armed Forces community in the Borough, and the adoption of the actions contained in this report will ensure that appropriate officer support is in place across the authority to work with the Champion to further develop the Armed Forces Covenant in Ashford.

Cllr G D Clarkson, Leader

Armed Forces Champion's Views

28. It is imperative that once the new Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications is in post sufficient time, energy and direction is assigned to developing the core elements of the Covenant so that the internal processes support the external requirements
29. There is also an aspiration to see how Service personnel, past and present, can better access Ashford's increasing housing stock, including sheltered housing in collaboration with Service charities. Housing is especially important due to the increasing number of Reservists being deployed and as the Regular Services continue to disperse their families into the Community in ever increasing numbers.

Cllr S Dehnel, Armed Forces Champion

Contact and Email

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Appendix 1 – Armed Forces presence in Kent

Community engagement - County level

11th Infantry Brigade and HQ South East is one of the Army's seven Adaptable Force Brigades comprising of Regular and Reserve units. The Brigade is the Army regional point of contact for the eight counties of the South East of England, and is based at Roebuck House in Aldershot.

<http://www.army.mod.uk/structure/34892.aspx>

Kent County Council

Community engagement – District Level

36 Engineer Regiment (36 Eng Regt) is a Force Support Engineer Regiment and one of the busiest units in the Corps of Royal Engineers. It provides specialist engineer solutions to various force elements and remains poised to deliver theatre entry, indirect support to combat operations, military-civil transition and recovery. It is based at Invicta Park Barracks, Maidstone.

<http://www.army.mod.uk/royalengineers/units/28651.aspx>

Ashford, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells

The Royal Gurkha Rifles (RGR) are a unique unit in the Army with a reputation of being amongst the finest and most feared soldiers in the world. The **2nd Battalion (2RGR)** is a Light Role Battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, based at Sir John Moore Barracks, Folkestone.

<http://www.army.mod.uk/infantry/regiments/24001.aspx>

Dover, Shepway, Thanet

1 Royal School of Military Engineering Regiment (1 RSME Regt) provides artisan engineer training to the Corps of Royal Engineers and the wider Field Army, Fleet and RAF. It is located at Brompton Barracks, Chatham; the home of the Corps of Royal Engineers.

http://www.army.mod.uk/training_education/25904.aspx

Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Swale

The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (PWRR), known as 'The Tigers', is an infantry regiment that has been in every major conflict since the second World War and is one of the most decorated Regiments for gallantry in the British Army. **3rd Battalion (3PWRR)** is the Army Reserve Battalion of the Regiment, with the HQ Company based at Leros Barracks, Canterbury. The Regiment was granted the Freedom of the Borough on 30 June 1992.

<http://www.army.mod.uk/infantry/regiments/24949.aspx>

Canterbury

Connected to the Borough

The Intelligence Corps (INT CORPS) provides accurate, timely intelligence to give Commanders confidence while planning and executing operations. INT CORPS were based at Templer Barracks, Ashford until 1997, and were granted the Freedom of the Borough on 16 May 1979.

103 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (103 REME) are Reserve Engineers for London and the South East. **133 Field Company** is based at the Army Reserve Centre, Ashford, and were granted the Freedom of the Borough on 7 May 2009.

<http://www.army.mod.uk/remem/103bn.aspx>

Historic sites within the Borough

- Mark IV Tank (female), St Georges Square (WW1)
- Anti-Tank defence, Godmersham Park (WW2)
- RAF Ashford, Great Chart (WW2)
- RAF Headcorn, Headcorn (Egerton Forstal) (WW2)
- RAF Kingsnorth, Kingsnorth (WW2)
- RAF Wye, Wye (WW1)

Appendix 2 – Action Plan for the Armed Forces Covenant

Theme	Principle	Actions - supervised by Lead Officer and Member Champion	With support from
A	Organisation Review	1. Review of HR policies regarding reservist/veteran employment	HR
		2. Inclusion of Armed Forces community consideration in future equalities impact assessments	Policy and Performance
		3. Consider submission for Bronze Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Award/Forces Friendly Employer status	HR
B	Staff Contact	1. Ensure frontline staff are asking customers whether they or a member of their immediate family have ever served in the British Armed Forces.	Customer Services
		2. Provide staff with information on voluntary and charity sector support for the Armed Forces community	Customer Services
		3. Ensure digital transformation does not disadvantage Armed Forces Community	Digital Transformation working group
		4. Revise and improve web presentation on Covenant	Policy and Performance
C	Pathways	1. Supporting the Armed Forces Network to develop and deliver local authority focused Pathways	Housing/ Finance
		2. Embedding Pathways into customer contact process	Customer Services
D	Partnership Working	1. Regular liaison with 36 Engineers, KCC and County Champions to explore opportunities for joint working and support	
		2. Build effective working relationships with Armed Forces and related charity, voluntary and community organisations	Cultural Services
		3. Formation of Civilian Military Partnership Board to discuss issues affecting Armed Forces Community in Ashford	Member Services
E	Health and Wellbeing	1. Work with AHWB to address health and wellbeing issues affecting the Armed Forces Community	Health, Parking and Community Safety
		2. Include Armed Forces Network on AHWB circulation/priority setting	Health, Parking and Community Safety

Theme	Principle	Actions - supervised by Lead Officer and Member Champion	With support from
F	Housing	1. Regular reviews of Lettings Policy with regard to Armed Forces Community	Housing
G	Covenant Fund	1. Supporting appropriate bids for Covenant Fund grants in Ashford	Cultural Services
		2. Working with 36 Engineers to explore opportunities to deliver collaborative community projects with grant funding	Cultural Services
H	Recognise and Remember	1. Ensure that commemorative and remembrance events in the borough are well supported and of the highest standard	Heritage & History Task Group/Cultural Services/Member Services
		2. Plan commemorative events, Armed Forces day and Reserves Day in line with Community Engagement Matrix and in conjunction with Armed Forces events calendars	Heritage & History Task Group
		3. Publicise local events (Ashford 10k, Triathlon etc.) to 36 Engineers to encourage military participation	Cultural Services