

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT BY MANAGING DIRECTOR

TO:	HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD		
DATE:	9th October 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	6
TITLE:	READING'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT AND ACTION PLAN - MONITORING REPORT		
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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community.
- 1.2 Reading's Community Covenant was launched on 7th July 2012 at the Afghanistan Homecoming Parade at Brock Barracks.
- 1.3 This report presents a six monthly update on progress against the actions outlined in the action plan, including a number of health related actions, and on the general development of the Community Covenant.

2.0 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the progress against the actions set out in the Armed Forces Community Covenant action plan.

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2011, the Government published a new Armed Forces Covenant, as a tri-Service document which expresses the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community.

- 3.2 The Community Covenant complements the Armed Forces Covenant but enables service providers to go beyond the national commitments. It allows for measures to be put in place at a local level to support the Armed Forces and encourages local communities to develop a relationship with the Service community in their area.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

Background

- 4.1 A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the nation, the government and the armed forces, at the local level.
- 4.2 The aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant are to:
- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas
 - nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the armed forces community
 - recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the armed forces community
 - encourage activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life
 - to encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement
- 4.3 The Reading Armed Forces Community Covenant was launched at the Afghanistan Homecoming Parade at Brock Barracks on 7th July 2012.
- 4.4 In addition to the Council, the covenant has been signed by Brigadier Baverstock, Regional Brigade Commander 145 (South) Brigade (now HQ 11 Infantry Brigade), on behalf of the Armed Forces, and a range of other key partners.
- 4.5 Reading doesn't have a large military 'footprint', with no regular forces stationed in the town. However, Brock Barracks is the headquarters for the Territorial Army unit 7th Battalion The Rifles, and Reading is home to a large ex-Gurkha community. Reading's Community Covenant therefore focuses on Veterans and Reservists and aims to be proportionate in its scope to the size of the Armed Forces community in Reading.

Further development of the Community Covenant and action plan

- 4.6 The Community Covenant working group with key stakeholders meets on a six monthly basis, the most recent held on 21st July 2015.

4.7 Progress to date against the actions in the action plan is shown in Appendix A. Several of the actions in action plan related to health and wellbeing have now been completed:

- A leaflet on accessing health services has been translated into Nepalese and is being used by SSAFA to run classes.
- A discount scheme for serving personnel (both full time and reservists) for leisure facilities in Reading is in place
- Reading Borough Council website includes key support contacts at <http://beta.reading.gov.uk/communitycovenant>

4.8 7 Rifles are keen to connect with the Health & Wellbeing Board; the Regimental Operations Support Officer is due to attend this meeting, with the Regimental Medical Officer possibly attending in future.

New Community Covenant grant fund

4.9 A new Community Covenant fund has recently been launched, with £10 million available every year.

4.10 The priorities this year are:

1. community integration projects
2. the coordination and delivery of support to the armed forces community
3. projects which address issues facing veterans in the criminal justice system

4.11 There will be 2 application routes:

- small grants for projects requiring up to £20,000 (1 year projects)
- large grants for projects requiring between £20,001 and £500,000 (up to 3 year projects)

4.12 The deadline for the next round of small grants is 17th Dec 2015.

4.13 7 Rifles are interested in applying for funding for a public concert, to be organised by RBC with the band provided by the Armed Forces, under the priority of community integration. 7 Rifles would also like to bid for funding to produce some display boards to install outside of Brock Barracks, showing the history of the Barracks. A bid around mental health services for Veterans is also in development.

4.14 A meeting of organisations working with the ex-Gurkha community took place in February with a view to starting to identify common needs that may be addressed through the Community Covenant fund. It was agreed that a working group meets periodically, organised by the main ex-Gurkha groups in rotation.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The development of an Armed Forces Community Covenant for Reading contributes in particular to the Council's strategic aim to 'promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all' by working to ensure that both serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel can access appropriate support and are able to integrate well into the community.
- 5.2 This work also relates particularly well to the Sustainable Community Strategy's 'people' theme where 'we look after each other' and the 'prosperity' theme by aiming to ensure that veterans and reservists are not excluded from the economy.

6.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Two of the key aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant are to:
- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas
 - encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement

7.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The covenant is intended as a vehicle for partners across Reading to help enable Veterans or Reservists to access health services, particularly mental health services, training and employment opportunities.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The general power of competence, introduced as part of the Localism Act 2011, replaces the well-being power from February 2012. The Act gives local authorities the power to do anything which an individual generally may do, which they consider is likely to be of benefit (directly or indirectly) to the whole or any part of their area. It therefore gives local authorities the power to do anything they want, so long as it is not prohibited by other legislation.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 £30m of central government funding was allocated over four years to 2014/15 to financially support Community Covenant projects at the local level which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the armed forces community and the wider community in which they live. Reading has submitted bids in three bidding rounds. £10m per annum has now been made available in

perpetuity from 2015/16 onwards through the new Armed Forces Covenant fund.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Armed Forces Community Covenant guidance notes, July 2012,
www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-covenant-pledge
- 10.11 Community Covenant Grant Scheme: terms and conditions,
www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund