

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**REPORT BY MANAGING DIRECTOR**

<b>TO:</b>	<b>HEALTH &amp; WELLBEING BOARD</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>15<sup>th</sup> July 2016</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>READING'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT AND ACTION PLAN - MONITORING REPORT</b>		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>Cllr Lovelock</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	<b>Leader of the Council</b>
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>Corporate Policy</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>
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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 7<sup>th</sup> 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, 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.
- 2.2 To agree to future reporting on an annual basis, rather than six monthly.

**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 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

4.4 In addition to the Council, the covenant has been signed by 7 Rifles 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 16th March 2016.

4.7 Progress to date against the actions in the action plan is shown in Appendix A. Several of the actions in action plan have now been completed. Successes to date include:

- Reading was awarded £21,730 from the Community Covenant grant scheme for an integration project for Veterans, aimed at raising awareness of health and social care services amongst the ex-Gurkha community in particular; health weeks have been delivered in August and December 2013 (both attended by at least 90 people), and February 2014 (attended by 60), including workshops and health checks.
- The Museum service was awarded £10,000 from the Community Covenant grant scheme to support their exhibition, 'Reading at War', to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War in 2014, along with a leaflet on Reading's military heritage and the commissioning of a poet to deliver workshops in primary schools.
- Reading Ex-British Gurkha Association was awarded £14,500 under the new Covenant Fund for two Nepalese community development workers.
- Armed Forces personnel can now be given extra priority when applying for social housing on the Housing Register, as part of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme.
- A domestic violence protocol is in place between the Service and the Police, to recognise military needs and ensure equitable service.
- A leaflet on accessing health services has been translated into Nepalese and is being used by SSAFA to run classes.
- Reading Borough Council now has a protocol in place for employment of Reserve Forces personnel.
- 'Operation Reflect' activities to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War included 7 Rifles visits to 5 primary schools.
- Job Centre Plus staff now receive regular briefings from 7 Rifles.

#### New Community Covenant fund

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

- 4.9 The following four priorities have been set for the financial years 2016/17 and 2017/18:
1. Veterans' Gateway
  2. Families in Stress
  3. Improving Local Covenant Delivery (clusters of LAs only)
  4. Community Integration / Local Service Delivery
- 4.10 Under priority 4, the MOD will fund projects of up to £20,000 that respond to the local needs of the Armed Forces Community and improve recognition of the Armed Forces Covenant, and that:
- help integrate Armed Forces and civilian communities across the UK
  - deliver valuable local services to the armed forces community.
- 4.11 There are two application rounds this year for priority 4, with deadline dates of 22 June and 2 November 2016. The next working group meeting in Sept 2016 will discuss any potential bids for November submission.

## **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](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-covenant-pledge)
- 10.11 Armed Forces Covenant Fund  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund)