

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD		
DATE:	14 JULY 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	17
TITLE:	READING'S ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND ACTION PLAN - MONITORING REPORT		
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**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community.
- 1.2 This report presents an annual update on progress against the actions outlined in the action plan, in particular the 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 Covenant action plan (appendix A).
- 2.2 To note that RBC is nominating itself for the bronze award of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (paras 4.14-16).

**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.
- The Museum service was awarded £10,000 to support their exhibition, 'Reading at War', to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War in 2014.
- Reading Ex-British Gurkha Association was awarded £14,500 under the new Covenant Fund for two Nepalese community development workers.
- SSAFA was awarded £1,000 to further update their leaflet on accessing health services, which has been translated into Nepalese and is being used by to run classes.
- 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.
- 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.

#### Health related actions

4.8 The action plan includes a section on health and wellbeing with the following actions:

- Feedback and input to Health and Wellbeing Board
- Devise protocol for GPs to register Veteran status
- Raise awareness of and signpost to Veteran's Mental Health Service for the South Central region
- Development of a leaflet on accessing health services to be translated into Nepalese

- Develop and promote a discount scheme for serving personnel for arts and leisure facilities in Reading
- Consolidation of appropriate contact/ support lists in order to provide better signposting

4.9 Progress on each of these is summarised in the attached action plan. In particular, re GPs recording Veteran status, a number of measures have been put in place by CCGs:

- 'READ' codes provided to practices from Spring 2016.
- CCGs have developed guidance for practices on registering patients from the armed forces community
- Information on CCG web sites and social media (from June 2016).
- CCG attendance at Armed Forces Day event in Wokingham, together with South Central Veterans Service and associated media coverage (June 2016).
- Parkside Family Practice piloted registering status as part of flu immunisation programme (Autumn 2016); other practices now being encouraging to do the same.

#### New Covenant fund

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

4.11 The following priorities have been set for 2017/18:

- families in stress
- strengthening local government delivery of the covenant
- Armed Forces Covenant: local grants
- a single grant to produce a map of need for the Covenant Fund
- a single grant to produce an outcomes framework for the Covenant Fund
- a single grant for the provision of a digital support programme for the Covenant Fund

4.12 Under the local grants priority, 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.

4.13 There are two application rounds this year for priority 4, with deadline dates of 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017 and 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018.

#### Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

4.14 The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same.

4.15 'Bronze' award holders are self-nominated by employers who pledge to support the Armed Forces, promote being Armed Forces-friendly and are open to employing reservists and veterans.

4.16 Reading Borough Council meets the criteria for this award through our work to develop the Armed Forces covenant with partners in Reading, and through our own housing allocations policy and protocol for employment of Reservists.

## **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 submitted bids in three bidding rounds. £10m per annum was made available in perpetuity from 2015/16 onwards through the new Armed Forces Covenant fund.

## **10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 Armed Forces Covenant Fund  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund>