

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	17 JULY 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	15
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, 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 4.12-14).

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 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 22nd March 2017.
- 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 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.
- 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 SSAFA 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.

New Covenant fund

- 4.8 A new Covenant fund has recently been launched, with £10 million available every year.
- 4.9 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
- 4.10 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
 - deliver valuable local services to the Armed Forces community.
- 4.11 There are two further application rounds this year, with deadline dates of 6th Oct 2017 and 5th Jan 2018.

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

- 4.12 The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same.
- 4.13 '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.
- 4.14 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>

**READING ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT
ACTION PLAN MAY 17**

The Armed Forces Community Covenant's key objectives:

Recognise, Remember, Integrate and Support

Armed Forces community comprises serving personnel (regular and reserves) and their dependants; and veterans and their dependants.

HQ 11 Infantry Brigade Workstrands:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Economy and Skills
- Education, Children and Young People
- Environment and Infrastructure
- Safer & Stronger Communities

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
HEALTH AND WELLBEING - <i>To ensure that the wellbeing of the Armed Forces community is not undermined by the nature of service life</i>				
<i>Recognise:</i> <i>Map and identify veterans status and represent special requirements of Armed Forces community in order to allow NHS to meet needs</i>				
1	Feedback and input to Health and Wellbeing Board	ROSO 7 Rifles	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual report on health related actions to Board in July • Regimental Medical Officer to be invited to future meeting/s once in post
3	Devise protocol for GPs to register Veteran status	Clinical Commissioning Groups	ongoing	<p>GPs currently being encouraged to record status and a number of measures have been designed by the CCGs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '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

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
				2016). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parkside Family Practice piloted registering status as part of flu immunisation programme (Autumn 2016); other practices being encouraging to do the same
4	Raise awareness of and signpost to Veteran's Mental Health Service for the South Central region	Covenant partnership/ Armed Forces charities/other partners	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JCP, SSAFA, RBL promote the service • SSAFA and RBL working with South Central Veterans mental Health Service within current casework • CCGs have been raising awareness at council of practice meetings, on CCG websites, and on social media • Veterans Mental Health Service to attend next 7 Rifles 'health fair'
5	Development of a leaflet on accessing health services to be translated into Nepalese	Clinical Commissioning Groups/SSAFA/RBC	Spring 2014	ACHIEVED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSAFA runs classes with ex-Gurkha community using leaflet • Funding gained from covenant fund for developing the booklet further and printing and translating into Nepalese; revision due for completion by March 18.
6	Develop and promote a discount scheme for serving personnel (both full time and reservists) for arts and leisure facilities in Reading	RBC/ ROSO 7 Rifles	Promotion summer 2013	ACHIEVED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme developed and in place for leisure centres • Delivery of scheme via the Defence Discount Scheme being considered for leisure centres • Use of 'tickets for troops' by Hexagon
7	Consolidation of appropriate contact/ support lists in order to provide better signposting	ROSO 7 Rifles/ RBC	2014	ACHIEVED Reading Borough Council website includes key support contacts at: http://www.reading.gov.uk/article/7300/Reading-Armed-Forces-Community-Covenant

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
ECONOMY AND SKILLS - Enhance the economic prosperity of Service personnel (including reservists), their families, and Veterans whilst benefitting the local economy wherever possible				
Integrate: Ensure Armed Forces benefit from ongoing economic development in county				
Support: Facilitate a sustainable pathway for Service leavers into civilian employment				
8	Keep local authorities and business updated on re-structuring of Defence	ROSO 7 Rifles	ongoing half yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing provided at March 2017 working group meeting; 7 Rifles actively recruiting
9	Work with local businesses to encourage employment of Service leavers and Reservists	Reading UK CIC/ Jobcentre Plus/	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JCP promoting Veterans Interview Programme to employers; promoting relevant employer events; circulating requests from employers for Service leavers MOD employer engagement strategy to promote to employers the value of employing Reservists 7 Rifles work with Gravity Personnel to promote the benefits of recruiting Reservists UK CIC and Business Improvement District newsletters promotion of benefits of employing Reservists 7 Rifles attendance at First Friday Club for businesses in Oct 16; future attendance planned Ongoing briefing sessions between 7 Rifles and JCP 7 Rifles presence Broad St in 2016, and again in June/July 17; next Hexagon job fair due Oct 17
10	Encourage Jobcentre Plus to register Veterans	Jobcentre Plus	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobcentre Plus systems allow recording of Veteran status, though for JSA claimants only, but advisors are finding that interview times are becoming shorter with less opportunity to ask additional questions, therefore monitoring is incomplete Ongoing briefing sessions between 7 Rifles and JCP
11	Promote the Armed Forces (Regular and	Reading UK CIC/ 7 Rifles/	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost daily recruiting activities in Oxon, Bucks and Berks in support of Operation Fortify recruiting initiative

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
	Reserve) as a career for the residents of Reading, particularly young people Not in Education, Training or Employment	Jobcentre Plus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JCP advisors kept up to date with Armed Forces vacancies, and promote Army Reserve generally MOD employer engagement strategy Ongoing briefing sessions between 7 Rifles and JCP 7 Rifles presence Broad St in 2016, and again in June/July 17; next Hexagon job fair due Oct 17
12	Support Service leavers, former Armed Forces personnel and reservists to access careers guidance, CV support and interview preparation courses	Jobcentre Plus / New Directions/ other partners	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SERFCA have set up jobs4reservists website, promoted via Reading UK CIC e-news New Directions offer an employability course in partnership with JCP, covering employability and essential IT skills - for Universal Jobmatch, CV creation, job applications and interview preparation Advice and support contacts promoted via RBC Armed Forces Covenant web page: (www.reading.gov.uk/reading-armed-forces-community-covenant) and new Armed Forces Covenant website: (www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk)
13	Defence discount service/ card	Reading UK CIC	2014/15	Awareness raised with Business Improvement District businesses
14	Promotion of relevant events to businesses/ employers	Reading UK CIC/ROSO 7 Rifles/Jobcentre Plus	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JCP and Reading UK CIC general promotion of relevant events Employer Engagement event Sandhurst March 17 Next Hexagon job fair due Oct 17
15a	Development of Reading Borough Council protocol for employment of Reserve Forces personnel	RBC	March 2014	ACHIEVED Agreed at Personnel Committee March 2014
15b	Promotion of Armed Forces Covenant to employers	RBC/ Reading UK CIC/ Covenant partnership	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article in Reading UK CIC e-News Work with MOD Defence Relationship Management to engage employers: DRM to attend Reading First Friday Club

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
<p>EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE - <i>Develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Service children; remove and negate disadvantage which results from the mobility of Service life. Develop youth opportunities across the community, supporting the Cadet Forces.</i></p>				
<p>Integrate: <i>Promote an understanding of the needs of Service children so that they are not disadvantaged in the state education system</i></p>				
<p>Support: <i>Enable optimal educational opportunity for Service children within the context of the state education system</i></p>				
16	Survey schools to determine numbers of Service family pupils and ensure schools maximise the value of the Service Pupil Premium by encouraging registration and promoting best practice in utilisation of funding	RBC/ Schools in Reading Borough area/ 7 Rifles	annual survey (next due Jan 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest figures (Jan 17) - 15 service children in Reading schools • Reminder to encourage parents to inform school of Armed Forces status sent to schools in Autumn 16 • Best practice examples of how service pupil premium spent in other areas to be circulated to schools
17	Being sensitive and supportive to the possible emotional and psychological needs of some Service children	RBC/ Schools in Reading Borough area/ 7 Rifles	ongoing	Reminder to encourage parents to inform school of Armed Forces status sent to schools in Autumn 16

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
<p>ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE - <i>Ensure that the wider Armed Forces' infrastructure requirements (inc Housing) are met in synchronisation with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and cognisant of the requirements of the local community. Where possible, create efficiencies with the local community</i></p>				
<p>Support: <i>Develop a common understanding of infrastructure needs of the Armed Forces community, in order to inform Local Authority planners to optimise provision. This incorporates a common, equitable housing protocol for Veterans within the local area.</i></p>				
18	Develop and implement a plan for the identification of Veterans locating to the Reading area in order to ensure that they are informed and included in relevant initiatives	ROSO 7 Rifles / RBC/ charities	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some Veterans claiming JSA can now be identified and support offered • Support, initiatives and opportunities disseminated via charities' existing mechanisms (e.g. SSAFA, RBL, Reading Ex-British Gurkha Association, Forgotten British Gurkhas) • Total number of veterans in Reading difficult to ascertain
19	Ensure Veterans receive equitable treatment in allocation of social housing	RBC	ongoing	<p>ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporated into Reading Borough Council's Housing Allocations Scheme • 58 households have been given additional priority for housing via the Housing Register since 2011; 10 currently on the register
20	Explore options for facility sharing in line with local needs and Defence Infrastructure Organisation plans	PSAO HQ Coy 7 Rifles/ RBC	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of Brock Barracks for community purposes agreed and promoted via alternativevenues.org • Promoted to community groups via Reading Voluntary Action newsletter and Reading Borough Council website

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES - <i>Develop a stable and robust Armed Forces community which integrates into the wider society, whilst retaining a sense of itself</i>				
<i>Integrate: Promote common understanding and closer integration between military and civil communities</i>				
21	Ensure that appropriate links are in place between the Local Authority and Armed Forces in order to allow the effective activation of Military Aid to the Civil Community (MACC) in the event of a civil emergency (e.g. severe weather event) and/ or community projects where manpower is required	RBC/ XO 7 Rifles	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil emergency liaison in place • Armed Forces assistance during flooding events in 2014
<i>Support: Support civil agencies in their dealings with members of the Armed Forces community, in order to optimise outcomes and use resource more efficiently</i>				
22	Establish and implement domestic violence protocol between Service and Civil Police, agencies and charities to recognise military needs and ensure equitable service	ROSO 7 Rifles	ROSO to advise	ACHIEVED Protocol in place
23	Identify key areas for application of Community Covenant grant funding which will benefit both the	RBC/Covenant partnership/ ROSO 7 Rifles	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant fund promoted on RBC website and via Reading Voluntary Action • Successful bid for £21,730 for 'health weeks' project aimed at raising awareness of health and social care services amongst the ex-Gurkha community, December 2012

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
	civil and Armed Forces communities			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful bid for £10,000 for museum centenary project, December 2013 • New Covenant grant fund launched Aug 2015 • Successful bid from REBGA for two Nepalese community development workers (£14,500) • Successful bid from SSAFA for funding to update, develop and print copies of a health booklet translated into Nepalese (£1,000)
24	Encourage organisations and communities to sign up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant	RBC/ Covenant partnership/ ROSO 7 Rifles	Ongoing	Signatories include Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Reading College and University of Reading
RECOGNISE AND REMEMBER - <i>Encourage recognition and remembrance of the unique sacrifices made by Armed Forces personnel in defence of society</i>				
Recognise: <i>Support civil events that allow the community to recognise the Armed Forces</i>				
25	Support the annual Armed Forces Day	PSOA HQ Coy 7 Rifles/RBC	Annual (June)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Forces Day planned for 25th June 2017 in Broad St and Forbury Gardens • Reserves Day 21st June 2017
26	Armed forces participation in public events as appropriate	RBC/ PSAO HQ Coy 7 Rifles (PSOA HQ Coy)	ongoing	Numerous recruiting and other community events throughout the year
Remember: <i>Commemorate those members of the Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice</i>				
27	Plan and conduct remembrance event at Brock Barracks as focal point for annual armistice event in Reading	PSAO HQ Coy 7 Rifles	ongoing	Event planned for Nov 2017 in Forbury Gardens
28	Plan and conduct appropriate event(s) in	RBC/ Adjnt 7 Rifles/	Aug 2014 - 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful bid submitted to Community Covenant Grant Fund by Museum service for funding to support their forthcoming exhibition, 'Reading at War',

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress
	support of the centenary anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War	communities		<p>to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Royal British Legion commemoration services on 6th July and 4th Aug 2014 at Reading Minster • Operation Reflect activities including 7 Rifles visits to 5 primary schools • Commemorative paving slabs for home towns of Victoria Cross winners, placed with Trooper Potts VC Memorial • Trooper Potts VC Memorial unveiled in October 2015 outside the Crown Courts in Reading • Further activity likely in 2018

List of abbreviations

SSAFA – Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association
 SERFCA – South East Reserve Forces and Cadets Association
 ROSO – Regimental Operations Support Officer
 RBC – Reading borough Council
 NHS – National Health Service
 GPs – General practitioners
 JCP – Jobcentre Plus
 CCGs – Clinical Commissioning Groups
 MOD – Ministry of Defence
 JSA – Job Seekers Allowance
 TBC – to be confirmed
 AF – Armed Forces
 BID – Business Improvement District
 PSAO HQ Coy – Permanent Staff Admin Office HQ Company
 TM or TM(V) – Training Major
 CCRF- Civil Contingency Reaction Force
 CIMIC – Civil Military Corporation
 Adjnt - Adjutant