

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 JULY 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	16
TITLE:	READING'S ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND ACTION PLAN - MONITORING REPORT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
SERVICE:	CORPORATE POLICY	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	JILL MARSTON	TEL:	0118 937 2699
JOB TITLE:	SENIOR POLICY OFFICER	E-MAIL:	jill.marston@reading.gov.uk

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).

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 in March 2018. Partners continue to report that the meeting is valuable.
- 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.
- Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association (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; leaflet now updated and printed.
- 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.

Covenant Grant Fund Trust

- 4.8 The national Covenant grant fund was launched in 2015 by the Ministry for Defence, with £10 million available every year. Since April 2018, the fund has become the independent Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and makes grants to support members of the Armed Forces community.
- 4.9 Under the 'local grants and digital developments programme', the trust will fund projects of up to £20,000 that support community integration or local delivery of services. Applications are open to charities, local authorities, schools, other statutory organisations, Community Interest Companies or armed forces units.
- 4.10 There are four application rounds for this programme in 2018/19, with remaining deadline dates of 29th July, 30th Sept, and 17th Dec. There have been some initial discussions about a potential bid to improve visibility of the Royal Berks Cenotaph from Oxford Rd via the keep entrance.

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

- 4.11 The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same.
- 4.12 In July 2017, the Council was successful in applying for the 'bronze' award, as a result of our work to develop the Armed Forces covenant with partners in Reading, as well as the Council's 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 Armed Forces Covenant fund (now Trust).

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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