

READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

DATE OF MEETING:	12 th July 2019		
REPORT TITLE:	READING'S ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND ACTION PLAN - MONITORING REPORT		
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1. 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 Reading Armed Forces Covenant.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the progress against the actions set out in the Reading Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan (appendix A), in particular the section on Health and Wellbeing.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2011, the Government published the 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 'Covenant for Communities' 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. THE PROPOSAL

Background

- 4.1 The aims of the Armed Forces 'Covenant in the Community' 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

4.2 The Reading Armed Forces Community Covenant was launched at the Afghanistan Homecoming Parade at Brock Barracks on 7th July 2012.

4.3 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.

4.4 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 Armed Forces 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 Armed Forces Covenant and Action Plan

4.5 The Reading Armed Forces Covenant working group with key stakeholders meets on a six monthly basis, the most recent held in March 2019. Partners continue to report that the meeting is valuable.

4.6 Progress to date against the actions in the Action Plan is shown in Appendix A. A number of the actions have now been completed. Significant successes since 2012 include:

- Reading was awarded £21,730 from the 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 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 ensure service and civilian families/individuals are supported and treated equitably.
- 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

- 4.7 The Action Plan includes a section on health and wellbeing with the following actions:
- Feedback and input to the 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
- 4.8 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 Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) regarding the recording of Veteran status by GPs:
- CCGs have developed guidance for practices on registering patients from the Armed Forces community
 - Information on CCG web sites and social media
 - 308 Veterans currently recorded in Reading practices as at Dec 2018
 - As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, Military Veteran Aware accreditation will be rolled out nationally to practices over the next 5 years
 - Discussions between the Reading branch of the Royal British Legion and the lead for Veterans at Berks West CCG re Veterans and NHS services

Covenant Grant Fund Trust

- 4.9 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.
- 4.10 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.
- 4.11 Applications can be made at any time for this programme in 2019/20, but the following timetable applies:
- Applications submitted by 9 September 2019 will be decided before the end of November 2019.
 - Applications submitted by 2 December 2019 will be decided before the end of February 2020.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 An application was made to the Covenant Fund by New Directions in Sept 2018 for a project to deliver adult learning to Reading's Gurkha community, combining English language teaching with classes to teach life skills and leisure interests - e.g. cooking and gardening. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO READING'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The work on the Armed Forces covenant is in line with the overall direction of the Reading Health and Wellbeing Strategy and contributes to a number of the Strategy's

eight priorities, including the following as they relate to the Veteran community, through strengthening the support provided to Veterans and service leavers:

1. Supporting people to make healthy lifestyle choices
2. Reducing loneliness and social isolation
3. Reducing deaths by suicide
4. Reducing the amount of alcohol people drink to safe levels

5.2 The proposal recognises that plans in support of Reading's 2017-20 Health and Wellbeing Strategy should be built on three foundations - safeguarding vulnerable adults and children, recognising and supporting all carers, and high quality co-ordinated information to support wellbeing. The proposal addresses these by providing support to the Armed Forces community and their families, including Veterans.

6. COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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. 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. 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. 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. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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