

Cabinet - 7 November 2013

Report of the Interim Chief Executive

Electoral Division affected:

All

Lancashire County Council's Armed Forces Community Covenant
(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contacts for further information:

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Executive Summary

An Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of support by UK councils for serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families. The aim of the covenant is to encourage communities to support the services in their area and promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Note the development of Community Covenants in Lancashire and welcome the work done by the Champion for the Armed Forces Veterans, the county council and its partners to support the Armed Forces community.
- (ii) Approve the Community Covenant attached at Appendix 'A'.

Background and Advice

1. The Government published the Armed Forces Covenant in May 2011, setting out the relationship between the nation, the state and the Armed Forces. The Covenant states that "those who serve must not be disadvantaged by what they do" and seeks to "redress the disadvantages that the armed forces community faces compared to others and recognise sacrifices made."
2. The Covenant has already affected policy through additional provision and other state support for bereaved or serving personnel and/or their families and the introduction of the Community Covenant, a complementary pledge at the local level for communities voluntarily to support the Armed Forces, backed by a £30 million grant scheme. Extensive government guidance is available.

3. The aims of the Community Covenant are to:
 - Encourage local communities to support the Armed forces and its personnel in their areas;
 - Promote awareness and understanding of issues affecting the Armed Forces among the wider community;
 - Enable military personnel and their families to access services and facilities within the wider community;
 - Support re-settling or re-locating military personnel and their families;
 - Promote access to suitable employment and training opportunities for those in transition or preparing to leave active service.
4. A majority of all UK councils (including all councils in Scotland) have now signed their own Community Covenants in association with other public sector bodies, charities, voluntary groups, business groups and the military.
5. A copy of the County Council's proposed Covenant is attached in Appendix 'A' and, subject to Cabinet approval, the official signing event of the Covenant is planned for Friday 29 November 2013 at County Hall. The Leader of the County Council will sign the Covenant on behalf of the County Council and all other signatories will attend the event to sign on behalf of their respective local authorities and organisations.
6. **The Community Covenant Grant Scheme:** The Secretary of State for Defence allocated £30 million funding from 2011/15 to support Community Covenants. The scheme aims to provide financial support to local projects which strengthen ties between the Armed Forces and the wider community in which they live. An Armed Forces Community Covenant and a Community Covenant Partnership must be in place before funding can be accessed.
7. The Grant Scheme will consider applications for local projects (£100 to £250,000) that deliver tangible results and meet the overall aims of the Community Covenant Scheme. So far, the grant scheme has disbursed £5 million from the first six rounds of bids. From financial year 2013/2014 the community covenant grant scheme will be administered on a regional basis and £10 million per annum will be available. The fund will be distributed through a number of regional panels, chaired on a rotating basis by the Royal Navy, Army and the Royal Air Force.
8. The Community Covenant and the accompanying grant scheme seek to support local initiatives. Government believes delegating the allocation of the grant scheme to regional panels will allow this money to reach the areas which will benefit the most. The armed forces covenant team at the Ministry of Defence and H.M. Treasury will retain oversight of the process.
9. The County Council already supports serving personnel, their families, and veterans through a number of programmes (e.g. support for veterans through the Volunteer Hub) and members and officers currently work in ways that support the principles of the Covenant. The Chairman of the County Council hosts annual receptions for local military representatives and veterans, and the County Council

marks Armed Forces Day. The County Council also supports the Royal British Legion each year. Plans are already underway to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War.

10. In November 2011, Cabinet appointed a Champion for Armed Forces Veterans to "assist the Leader and appropriate Cabinet Members to work with the organisations that support ex-servicemen and women to work even more closely together and to ensure that veterans and their families get the support they deserve." The Champion has an annual allocation of £10,000 to support his role.
11. The current Champion has held extensive discussions with his counterparts across the county and with representatives of the Armed Forces and ancillary service organisations. Officers, working with the Champion, have also reviewed current practices in other UK councils.
12. The Covenant is a commitment of mutual recognition and support between the civilian community, the Armed Forces, and veterans. Signatory councils have made this public commitment prior to the development of substantive action plans, subsequently developed once partnership structures and priorities have been firmly established. Engagement work leading up to the signing of our Covenant has therefore focused strictly on exploring and identifying potential policy options for collaboration, public engagement or customised treatment.
13. In the vast majority of cases where such policy options have been implemented additional investment has not been required and existing systems have been adapted to meet the needs of this particular community.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

Community Covenants may look quite different from one location to another. The Government says the scheme "is one where one size does not fit all," and the nature of the support offered will be determined by both local need and capacity.

Community Covenants are now well developed in Lancashire and work is underway in most districts to identify potential areas for intervention. The County Council already intervenes in ways that reflect Covenant principles and county officers may be already engaged in this type of activity.

The number of Covenants in Lancashire to date indicates a risk to the County Council's public standing if support for a specific group does not emulate support for similar groups or other councils' support for the same group.

Financial

Recent analyses of cost implications concede the constraints currently facing the municipal sector but stress the relatively low marginal costs of adapting existing systems to take service families and veterans into account. Government guidance suggests that "those who serve must not be disadvantaged by what they do" and while routinely-enhanced provision could undermine public support for the military, most councils clearly believe that the Armed Forces should be given a greater level of priority than they receive currently.

Future partnership work may lead to specific projects with their own cost implications; any potential future costs will be considered on a project basis. An assessment of cost implications ought to consider the potential for accessing the Covenant's grant scheme.

Equality and Diversity, Human Rights

It has been recognised that those individuals who have served within the Armed Forces face a range of challenges and difficulties once they leave service. Through the adoption of Community Covenants councils commit themselves to acknowledge and recognise the importance of the contributions that these individuals have made and develop a range of actions to help support this group and their families.

A specific Equality Analysis should be undertaken on any future action plans related to this policy area.

Legal

The Covenant is not legally binding and does not therefore have any direct legal implications. It is possible that it will be invoked to support challenges to actions or decisions by the County Council which are not in line with the Covenant.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
The Armed Forces Covenant	March 2011	Kieran Curran, Environment Directorate (01772) 536068
The Nation's Commitment to the Armed Forces Community: Consistent and Enduring Support	July 2009	Kieran Curran Environment Directorate, (01772) 536068