

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	12 October 2016
Subject:	Armed Forces Community Covenant Update		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Armed Forces Community Covenant		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an annual update to Members on the work done by Gloucester City Council to support current and ex-service personnel as part of the Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant and to seek ongoing endorsement of such activity.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) Activities to support current and ex-service personnel as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to the Covenant be endorsed;
- (2) An annual update of achievements against the covenant continues to be received and that this is timetabled into the Cabinet Forward Plan.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Gloucester City Council, along with the five other District Councils, the County Council and Gloucestershire NHS and Gloucestershire Police Authority, signed up to the Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant on 27 February 2012 (Appendix 1). Cllr Dawn Melvin is the Member Champion for supporting the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

3.2 Principles of the Armed Forces Community Covenant

- 3.2.1 The Armed Forces 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.

- 3.2.2 The purpose of this Community Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Gloucestershire and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community, particularly those who have given the most. This includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel their families and widow(er)s in Gloucestershire.
- 3.2.3 For Gloucester City Council and partner organisations, the Community Covenant presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community.
- 3.2.4 For the Armed Forces community, the Community Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life and encourages members of the Armed Forces community to help their local community.

3.3 Gloucester City Council's Specific Measures

- The City Council support staff who are members of the Territorial Army (TA) or other military support service through flexible employment arrangements.
- Building control provide a free advice service and do not charge for any applications made for extensions or alterations to a domestic property for armed forces personnel returning with any disability.
- The City Council will continue to work with the armed forces on a number of events including the sale of poppies for Remembrance Sunday and the promotion of Armed Forces Day through staff newsletters and inclusion in the Council's events calendar.
- The Armed Forces Day committee, which representatives of the City Council sit on, is already planning an event to celebrate next year's Armed Forces Day. They have considered what the true meaning of the day is i.e. a way to say thank you to our serving forces. We should not be asking them to give up another day of free time to work and man stalls, which we're aware may have been the case recently. We will continue to contribute to this event via the events budget and we believe the event being planned for next year will allow residents to show their pride in the Armed Forces but at the same time ensure the serving personnel can enjoy it.
- The City Council continues to work in partnership with the Armed Forces to increase links to the local service units by welcoming service personnel and their families to the area by supporting various activities including sporting and charity events, and developing the potential for Ministry of Defence (MOD) discounts.
- The Council will continue to support the British Legion's Poppy day through an arrangement with GL1 for free use of accommodation for their Remembrance Sunday event. Linked to this, in partnership with Amey (the Council's Street Care contractor) we will ensure that planting around the war memorial is in good order throughout the year and especially for Remembrance Sunday.

- The war memorial at the cenotaph and the war graves at Gloucester cemetery will continue to be maintained to a high standard to recognize the sacrifices made by service personnel.
- The City Council will continue to support Army Recruitment Events by allowing access to suitable sites.

3.3.1 As well as continuing to deliver the specific measure listed above the City Council delivers a range of support services, as can be seen in section 3.4 below:-

3.4 **Current Activity**

3.4.1 **Housing Advice / Homelessness**

3.4.2 Members of the armed forces have a local connection to the district of their choice. This includes those currently serving; those who have served within the immediate preceding 5 years; bereaved spouse or civil partner who has recently or will cease to be entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse (and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service); existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.

3.4.3 Special rules are required for those in the armed forces to comply with The Localism Act recognising the services they have offered the country. On discharge members of the armed forces, with a Homeless priority need (dependent children or vulnerable as a result of disability) will be awarded Gold band for 6 months from the discharge date. Applicants who are homeless but with a non - priority need are given Silver band from their discharge date. Should they become homeless again within 5 years of the discharge date and have a priority need and are unintentionally homeless, applicants will be awarded Gold band again for 6 months from Notice being received. Non-priority need or Intentional homeless applicants will be awarded Silver band, backdated for 6 months from the date of the Notice being received.

3.4.4 Over the past 12 months, nine applicants have been rehoused in Gloucester through the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Choice Based Lettings scheme where they had been a member of the armed forces.

3.4.5 Managers within the Housing Advice and Homelessness Services receive regular updates from the Countywide Homelessness Coordinator regarding vacancies in Alabare schemes. Alabare is a charity that supports vulnerable, homeless and marginalised people. They provide specialist support for armed forces veterans who struggle to cope with life outside of the military. The reports they send cover the South West and Wales so officers are able to look at a wider variety of options to prevent homelessness within the armed forces community. We also work with the British Legion who can look at possible financial assistance for clients who may require support with furnishing properties, finances to secure accommodation and give general support to clients who need support. In addition, ward Councillors have supported the scheme since its inception and continue to provide advice and support.

3.4.6 Benefit Claimants

3.4.7 Where applicants are in receipt of housing benefit (HB) and/or council tax support (CTS), in common with most local authorities, the City Council has adopted a policy to disregard as income some extra elements of war disablement pensions.

- The intention of the policy is that Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Support (CTS) claimants who get certain war pensions should get more HB/CTS than they otherwise would. This currently applies to 19 cases.
- In 2015/16 the Council awarded an extra £29,481 in HB as a result of this policy, and the Council received subsidy from DWP covering 75% of this expenditure - therefore the cost to the City Council of this policy in 2015/16 was around £7,370.

3.4.8 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

3.4.9 There is further help with housing costs through the use of DHP.

- The City Council has a local procedure on awarding DHP and, under this procedure, the client team would disregard as income some extra elements of war disablement pensions (the same as in housing benefit). There is no requirement to record this. However, Officers believe the number of DHP customers who have benefited from this will be low.

3.4.10 Under-occupation reductions in Housing Benefit

3.4.11 Legislation does have a provision to assist armed forces personnel in that a bedroom used by members of the armed or reserve forces will not be counted as a 'spare' room whilst they are away from their main place of residence. This is providing that they have an intention to return to the property and they were in fact treated as a non-dependant person prior to their absence.

3.4.12 Museum of Gloucester and Gloucester Life Museum

3.4.13 The City Council offers discounts to Defence Privilege card holders and staff attend the Freshers Fair each year at Imjin Barracks to let the residents know about all the things on offer. In addition, the Museum of Gloucester and Gloucester Life Museum welcome all military personnel and veterans. The museums hold a wide variety of exhibitions, events and activities at both museums throughout the year, as well as being places to come to find out about Gloucester's history, to enjoy our collection of world renowned works of art, to reminisce and sometimes simply to reflect.

3.4.14 Guildhall

3.4.15 The Guildhall offer discount to military personnel to the Cinema and are also signed up to a scheme where the venue is listed for military personnel to find.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

4.1 Many of the measures referred to in section 3 developed from discussions with Armed Forces personnel regarding the needs that they identified and required support from the City Council and other agencies to provide. There is ongoing dialogue through the Council's Partnerships and Engagement Team with military personnel to ensure a good relationship continues.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

5.1 There are no alternative options for consideration as the report is primarily an update of an ongoing commitment.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 It is important that Cabinet, and Members generally, understand the commitments made within the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012 and that these are reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant and consistent with legislation and the needs of serving and ex-serving service personnel.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet receive an annual update of achievements against the covenant and that this is timetabled into the Cabinet Forward Plan.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

9.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

10.1 There is a risk that Members and Officers overlook the commitments within the covenant during the course of the year. An annual review of the covenant will ensure that Members and officers keep the commitments of the covenant in the forefront of their minds.

10.2 There are opportunities to strengthen the relationship further with servicing and ex-serving personnel through the application of ABCD which has been applied to issues of isolation and community engagement.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

11.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

12.1 There are no community safety issues associated with this report.

Sustainability

12.2 Monitoring outcomes against the covenant will ensure that the covenant is sustainable and continues to develop and grow.

Staffing & Trade Union

12.3 There are no staffing or trade union implications.

Background Documents: None