

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Overview & Scrutiny Cabinet	Date:	4 October 2021 13 October 2021
Subject:	Armed Forces Community Covenant Update		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Gloucester City Council – Specific Measures		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update to Cabinet on the support offered to current and former members of the armed forces, reservists and their families as part of our commitment to the Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant ('the Covenant').

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the information contained in the report and make any recommendations to Cabinet.
- 2.2 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that -
- (1) Work undertaken to support current and ex-service personnel as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to the Covenant be endorsed.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 An Armed Forces Covenant exists between the people of the UK and the Armed Forces and their families. It lays out the principles that should exist in the relationship between the Armed Forces and the rest of the Nation, including respect, support and fair treatment. It makes clear that no-one who has served should face disadvantage from their service and that, in some cases, special consideration is appropriate.

- 3.2 A Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant ('the Covenant') stands alongside the Armed Forces Covenant and is a voluntary statement of mutual support between the people of Gloucestershire and the local Armed Forces community.
- 3.3 Through its membership of the Covenant, Gloucester City Council has made a commitment to the wider Armed Forces Covenant, to support the Armed Forces community within Gloucester and the wider County. Cllr Andy Lewis represents the Council as its Armed Forces Champion and this position is appointed to (or re-appointed to) annually by the Council. In addition, we now have an Armed Forces Officer Champion and an operational Lead Officer based in the Community Wellbeing Team. They will be working towards several outcomes this year and liaising regularly with partners.
- 3.4 In following these commitments, the Council is involved in a number of areas to support the Armed Forces, their families and those who have served to be a part of the wider community. The aims of the Covenant are as follows –
- 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 such as volunteering;
 - Promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community;
 - Recognise and remember the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces community at many annual events.
 - Encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life.
- 3.5 The 2011 census results indicated that over 300 serving members of the military were living in Gloucester at the time of the survey, not including partners or children. The results of the 2021 census will be available in February 2022 and will provide us with a more accurate picture.
- 3.6 In January 2019 the Ministry of Defence estimated that by 2028 there will be 1.6 million veterans living in the UK with over a half of all veterans being aged 65 or older and 87% of all veterans being male.
- 3.7 Gloucestershire is home to 18 Army Cadet detachments with 2 of these being located in Gloucester, namely - Malmesbury Road Platoon and the Gloucestershire ACF Band & Corps of Drum.
- 3.8 In the previous 12 months, 13 individuals who identified as service or ex service personnel have been re-housed in Gloucester through the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The reasons for re-housing were as follows; homeless or threatened with homelessness

(5), urgent/significant medical welfare (2), overcrowding (2), downsizing (1) with the remaining 3 having a low housing need.

- 3.9 The armed forces bill of 2006 was renewed this year and makes provision for a further period of five years, ending no later than 2026. Now known as the Armed Forces Bill 2021, it requires the council to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in terms of housing.
- 3.10 We are required to comply with the Code of Guidance on Homelessness 2018 and have regard to armed forces personnel in our housing allocation scheme. In addition, we are committed to improving housing outcomes for members and ex-members of the armed forces. The countywide Homeseecker plus allocations policy gives additional preference in terms of re-housing armed forces members. Members of the armed forces have a local connection to the district of their choice. This greater level of choice evidences the additional preference afforded to those who are serving or have recently served in the armed forces.
- 3.11 In addition to any duties owed under the homelessness legislation, on discharge members of the armed forces with Homeless priority need (i.e. dependent children or vulnerable as a result of disability) will be awarded Gold band for 6 months from the discharge date. Those that are homeless with a non - priority need are given Silver band from their discharge date. Should they become homeless again within 5 years of the discharge priority need or unintentionally homeless applicants will be awarded Gold band again for 6 months from Notice being received.
- 3.11 The 'duty to refer' applies to the Ministry of Defence under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, therefore they are required to refer any service personnel facing homelessness within 56 days to the local housing authority. This enables access to housing services as early as possible in the process and increase access to social housing.
- 3.12 The charity Alabare run a 12 bed home for veterans based in Longlevens which is the second of their Gloucestershire properties.
- 3.13 A list of specific measures that the Council implements in support of the Covenant is included at Appendix 1 and covers areas such as housing advice & support, enabling and supporting events and charitable causes and access to Council services. It is these customer facing aspects of the Council which are likely to be more relevant to our Armed Forces.
- 3.14 The Council is also represented by Councillors and senior officers at several annual events to mark a range of important dates such as Remembrance Day but also events to celebrate our local armed forces community operating out of Imjin Barracks. Sadly, as was the case in 2020, many of this year's public events have been celebrated virtually due to Covid 19. However, the Council recognise both the historical and ongoing sacrifices and efforts of our armed forces by marking key dates with the flying of flags outside North Warehouse and running social media campaigns.

- 3.15 Our District Council partners in addition to Gloucestershire County Council are also signed up to the Covenant and continue to work together to improve how councils can collaborate as a network, with a particular focus on -
- 1) Identifying where contributions can be made to the South West Regional Development Project;
 - 2) Obtaining a better understanding of the needs of children and young people in the armed forces community;
 - 3) Understanding our workforces better in terms of their connection to the armed forces.
 - 4) Aligning our services and sharing resources to increase the support available to veterans and their families
- 3.16 The Armed Forces Community Covenant Meeting, organised by Gloucestershire County Council, has been meeting in 2021. Meetings are scheduled quarterly with the next one due to take place at the end of September.
- 3.17 The Community Wellbeing Team have started making connections to relevant charities, organisations and other agencies to discover how the council can work in partnership to better support the armed forces community. Most notably, SSAFA (Soldiers, Seamen, Airmen and their Families Association) and the Occupational Therapy team at Gloucestershire NHS Trust. Through these connections, the Community Wellbeing Team are able to;
- Support the mental health of injured veteran's by matching them into meaningful volunteering opportunities
 - Help integrate veterans and their families into their local community through community building activities
 - Enhance the support of SSAFA and the Occupational Therapists by linking them to other resources and services such as the Community Wellbeing Agents who have access to schemes such as exercise on referral at Aspire Leisure Centre
- 3.18 There are several mental health organisations represented at the armed forces community covenant partnership meeting. This provides the council with close links to vital counselling and therapy services which officers can refer veterans and their family members to, if necessary. The council also works closely with the community wellbeing agents and social prescribers who can support with low level mental health conditions.
- 3.19 The Armed Forces Covenant Fund launched in 2015 provides £10m each year to support members of the Armed Forces community. Applications are welcomed from Local Government, to support local delivery of Armed Forces Covenants. Armed Forces Covenant Fund: Force for Change programme has is open for applications until 19 November 2021. The Council is exploring ideas to apply in partnership with the Occupational Therapy team.

3.20 The Council's website which was updated this year, includes a page dedicated to information about the support we offer to Armed Forces Personnel and veterans and includes resources and links to other pages.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

4.1 For the Armed Forces Community, the Covenant encourages the integration of service life into civilian life and encourages members of the Armed Forces community to help their local community.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

5.1 There are no alternative options for consideration

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 The Council are committed through the Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant to work in partnership and act together to honour the covenant. The council encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in the City and work to recognise and remember the sacrifices that they have, and continue to make.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

7.1 The council will be applying for the Bronze Defence Employer Recognition Award in Autumn/Winter 2021. The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant. To achieve bronze status, the council have to:

- pledge to support the armed forces, including existing or prospective employees who are members of the community
- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- promote being armed forces-friendly and be open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners.

7.3 The results of the staff survey will indicate if the council need to better support veterans, reservists, or staff who have family members currently serving. An internal working group will be created if there is enough interest and suggestions will be taken forward for improvements to HR policies and/or the delivery of front-line services.

7.4 Gloucestershire County Council will be rolling out an online training program for front line services on armed forces awareness within the next year. This is so staff can effectively sign post and ensure people are receiving all of the support they need.

7.5 Gloucester City Council remains committed to our Armed Forces community and an annual update report for Cabinet will continue to be provided each autumn.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 Financial implications are discussed within the report and appendix associated with this report.

(Finance have been consulted in the preparation of 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 of this report)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

10.1 N/A

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 comments associated with this report.

Sustainability

12.2 There are no sustainability comments associated with this report.

Safeguarding

12.3 There are no safeguarding comments associated with this report.

Staffing & Trade Union

12.4 There are no staffing or trade union comments associated with this report.

Press Release drafted/approved

12.5 This report re-iterates the Council's support for the Armed Forces Covenant and although the content of the report may not naturally be considered news worthy there has been high level political pressure around supporting our Armed Forces Community from senior Government Ministers over the Summer months. The report may provide an opportunity however to formally acknowledge the interest shown by Government in this area of work, re-iterate

our commitment to the Covenant and confirm our thanks and gratitude to both veterans and serving personnel within Gloucester.

Background Documents:

Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant

Appendix 1 – Gloucester City Council Specific Measures

Theme	Measure(s)
Organisational Development	Staff who are members of the Territorial Army or other military support service are, supported through flexible working arrangements contained in HR policies
Building Control	For Armed Forces personnel returning from duty with a disability, the Council provides free Building Control advice and will not charge for any applications made for extensions or alterations to their home.
Remembrance Sunday Event	The Council continues to work with armed forces on events including the sale of poppies for Remembrance Sunday and the promotion of Armed Forces Day through internal & external communications and inclusion in the Council's events calendar.
Armed Forces Day Committee	The Council's Armed Forces Champion has previously been involved with the Armed Forces Day Committee, but the committee has not met since before the pandemic and there has not been any news on when they will regroup.
British Legion Poppy Day	The council will be meeting with the military and Royal British Legion in mid-September to plan this year's event. It will take place on Sunday 14th November will consist of a service at the Gloucester park memorial, a military parade through the city gate streets and a Cathedral service in the afternoon.
War Memorial, Cenotaph & War Graves	The Council commits to maintaining the war memorial at the cenotaph in Gloucester Park and the war graves at Tredworth Cemetery, to a high standard.
Army Recruitment Events	The Council will continue to support recruitment events by enabling access to suitable sites
Housing Advice & Homelessness	In the previous 12 months, 13 individuals who identified as being armed forces or ex service personnel have been re-housed in Gloucester through the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Choice Based Lettings Scheme with our allocations policy enabling them to benefit from priority need.
Benefit Claimants	Where applicants are in receipt of housing benefit (HB) and/or council tax support (CTS), the City Council has adopted a policy to disregard as income some extra elements of war disablement pensions. The total expenditure for 2020/21 war disablement pension is £23,546. The council received a subsidy of 75% of this value totalling £17,660. Therefore, the cost to the council is £5,886.
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	The Council provides further help with housing costs through the use of DHP, with a local procedure enabling us to disregard as income some extra elements of war disablement pensions (the same as in housing benefit) when awarding payment.

Under-occupation Reductions in Housing Benefit	Legislation continues 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, 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.
Access to Council Venues	The Council offers discounts to Defence Privilege card holders to use at the Guildhall. Access to the Gloucester Museum is free of charge.