

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	11 October 2023
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 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 'The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.' <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>
- 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. These commitments include:

- Encouraging local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas.
- Encouraging 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.
- Promoting understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.
- Recognising and remember the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces community at many annual events.
- Encouraging activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life.

3.4 “On Census Day (21 March 2021), 1.85 million people in England and Wales reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. This represents 3.8% (almost 1 in 25) of the total population aged 16 or over. Of these, 76.3% (1.41 million people) previously served in the regular forces, 19.5% (361,000 people) in the reserve forces, and 4.3% (79,000 people) served in both the regular and reserve forces. Overall, 7.0% of households (1.75 million) in England and Wales included one or more persons who had served in the UK armed forces.” Source <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/>

3.5 In Gloucestershire, there are a total of 27,418 veterans, the veteran population by ward, according to the Census 2021 data is as follows;

- Gloucester 5,123
- Cheltenham 4,401
- Tewkesbury 4,799
- The Forest of Dean 3,915
- Stroud 4,794
- Cotswold 4,401

3.6 The Armed Forces Act (2021), requires the council to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in terms of housing. In the previous 12 months, 4 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 as homelessness (2), significant or urgent medical warfare (1) and unknown (1).

3.7 We are required to comply with the Code of Guidance on Homelessness 2018 and have regard to current and former armed forces personnel in our housing allocation scheme. The countywide Homeseeker Plus Allocations policy gives additional preference in terms of re-housing armed forces members when deciding on which area they would like to live in.

3.8 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.

- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 A list of specific measures that the Council implements in support of the Covenant is included at Appendix 1.
- 3.11 The Council is also represented at several annual events to mark a range of important dates such as Remembrance Day. In November 2022, the city council events team supported the Royal British Legion in delivering a successful Remembrance Day memorial service.
- 3.12 In June 2023, the Gloucester Armed Forces Day event was organised and managed by The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum. Unfortunately, the Gloucester Armed Forces Day Committee was unable to organise a large-scale event due to work and personal commitments. However, The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum, with limited resources, delivered an enjoyable event which brought together multiple charities, organisations and services and was well attended by local people.
- 3.13 In addition to providing support with the organising and delivery of key dates, the Council recognise both the historical and ongoing sacrifices of our armed forces with the flying of flags outside North Warehouse and social media campaigns.
- 3.14 The Council is an active member of the Armed Forces Community Covenant Meeting, organised by Gloucestershire County Council.
- 3.15 Officers are connected to relevant charities, organisations, and other agencies to discover how the council can work in partnership to better support the armed forces community. Through these connections, the Community Wellbeing Team can help veterans find meaningful volunteering opportunities and community building activities and signpost to relevant mental health support if it is needed.
- 3.16 An Officer regularly attends the Veteran's Hub, organised by Gloucester Rugby Foundation in partnership with local teams from Help for Heroes, Op Courage and Veterans UK. This hub takes place every second Wednesday of the month from 10:00-12:00 at Kingsholm stadium and is a good opportunity to meet local veterans, as well as network with other professionals who are working to support the armed forces community.
- 3.17 The Council's website 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.

3.18 The Council are currently a Bronze Defence Employer Recognition Award holder under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS). 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. In order to achieve bronze, organisations must;

- 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.
- Hold policies which enable reservists, cadet instructors time off to train and volunteer.

3.19 As stated above, the Council holds a Military Reservist Policy as well as a Special Leave Policy which provides staff with time off in respect of periods of mobilisation. These policies are easily accessed on the staff intranet.

4.0 Social Value 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 Armed Forces Partnership has been working alongside Gloucester Community Networking (GCN) and The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum (SOGM) on the creation of an Armed Forces Hub, a place where the armed forces community can access specialist support and guidance. GCN and members of the partnership will host a monthly hub, starting in October from the SOGM. Officers will represent the Council at these sessions, to provide relevant support and signposting. We have also been working with Housing teams from across Gloucestershire Councils to secure housing advice at the Hub.

- 7.2 Following the success of the Defence Employer Scheme Bronze Award, the Council is planning to apply for the Silver Award in coming years, with a timeline yet to be determined.
- 7.3 Officers will be present at the Gloucestershire Constabulary Open Day on September 23rd. This will be in partnership with Andy Hadrick, a veteran who manages the Armed Forces Outreach Vehicle. The Armed Forces Outreach Vehicle is available for any public event, for members of the armed forces community to access signposting and information.
- 7.4 Officers will promote and encourage front line council staff to complete an e-learning package, developed by Warwickshire County Council. The training raises awareness of the armed forces community, the issues they face, and what can be done to improve their quality of life. The e-learning also explains the covenant including the commitments required of the local authority.
- 7.5 A staff survey is currently open, to discover the number of staff that are part of the armed forces community, and to provide staff with the opportunity to make suggestions on what the council can do to better support the ex-forces and those still serving.
- 7.6 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.

Background Documents:

Gloucestershire Armed Forces Community Covenant