

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Date:	7 October 2024
	Cabinet		16 October 2024
Subject:	Armed Forces Community Covenant Update		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Community Engagement		
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 '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 district, 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, 6 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 (3), significant or urgent medical warfare (1), and low housing need (2).
- 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 2023, the city council events team supported the Royal British Legion in delivering a successful Remembrance Day memorial service.
- 3.12 On 6 June 2024, Gloucester marked the 80th Anniversary of the D Day Landings, in honour of those who made huge sacrifices to liberate north-west Europe. Alongside many other towns and cities, Gloucester's beacon on Robinswood Hill was lit in recognition of those who took part. The Mayor, Cllr Lorraine Campbell lit the beacon and read a tribute to mark the occasion. Among those who attended were representatives of the city, the Sheriff of Gloucester, Councillor Pam Tracey and Gloucester Town Crier, Alan Myatt.
- 3.12 On 29 June 2024, the Gloucester Armed Forces Day event was organised and managed by The Gloucester Armed Forces Day Committee with support from multiple Armed Forces charities and organisations. The event was well attended and highlights from the day included a military parade, RAF fly-past and musical performances.
- 3.13 Community Wellbeing supported the Armed Forces Outreach Vehicle at the Big Health Event 2024, offering signposting and support to Veterans and their families.
- 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 (AFCC) Partnership Meeting, organised by Gloucestershire County Council.
- 3.15 The following actions have been achieved by the AFCC Partnership over the last 12 months:

- NHS Gloucestershire signed up to the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Accredited Veteran Friendly Practice scheme, whereby, GP practices are supported to increase their understanding of the health needs of veterans and the services available to them. They are able to appoint a clinical lead who is trained to act as a champion for issues relating to veteran healthcare. NHS Gloucestershire has already encouraged 70% of practices to sign up to the scheme, with more practices currently in the process. This project has been shortlisted in the Military and Civilian Health Partnership category of the 2024 Health Service Journal Awards with the results due to be announced in October.
- In April 2024, The Veteran's Cafe opened at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum and has been running every second Thursday of the month. It is supported by Gloucestershire AFCC Partnership members with advice services available from 10.30am to 12.30pm.
- A travel card providing free bus travel was made available to veterans who are seeking employment in Gloucestershire in April 2024. The travel card is available to veterans over aged 16 who are claiming Universal Credit or receiving a DWP benefit in Gloucestershire. It provides free bus travel throughout Gloucestershire.

3.16 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. This includes the County Council Armed Forces webpages which have been updated this year in collaboration with AFCC partners, and are now more detailed and user friendly. <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/your-community/the-armed-forces-covenant/>

3.17 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 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.

4.2 Veterans and their families are encouraged to connect with their local community builder, should they wish to meet neighbours or to create new activities in their local area.

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 following motion was approved by Council on 19th September 2024:

“At present, 150,000 members of the Armed Forces community receive compensation awarded by the UK Government for support with the ongoing costs of an illness or injury acquired in Service. This Council believes that these payments should not be treated as income in benefits means tests, and notes that local authorities are not mandated to exempt military compensation. Civilian compensation awards are usually exempt, whereas military compensation is considered as income, and some of the poorest members of the Armed Forces community are denied the support which their civilian counterparts receive.

This Council therefore agrees to ask Cabinet to consider amending its Council Tax Support Scheme so that compensation awarded to members of the Armed Forces is disregarded when calculating Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support / Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments and Disabled Facilities Grants so that our Forces personnel and veterans are dealt with in the same way as civilians are when it comes to compensation for support with the ongoing costs of an illness or injury acquired in Service.”

Following the discussion, it has been agreed that the Council will consider making such an amendment to the Council Tax Support Scheme and this work will be progressed in due course.

7.2 Following the success of the Defence Employer Scheme Bronze Award in 2022, the Council plan to apply for the Silver Award. However, there are elements that require support from HR, such as improving the recruitment and selection process, and there is currently not enough capacity to make these changes.

7.3 Community wellbeing will be present at Gloucester Day on Saturday 7th September 2024. 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 Community wellbeing will continue to 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 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 (7.1) 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