

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

16 October 2012

Report of the Chief Executive

**The Armed Forces Community Covenant
(Leadership and Culture)**

1. Purpose of the Report

To inform Cabinet of progress in adopting the Armed Forces Community Covenant and to agree the next steps in supporting service and ex-service personnel in Derbyshire.

2. Information and Analysis

Background

The Government has recently been progressing work to rebuild the Armed Forces Covenant, the moral obligation which binds the Armed Forces, the Government and the Nation. The new National Covenant was published in May 2011, along with details of a range of additional measures such as the Armed Forces Community Covenant to support members of the Armed Forces community.

The new Community Covenant seeks to link the wider community with Armed Forces communities and to strengthen relationships between local authorities and the Armed Forces. The Community Covenant has a number of aims which include:

- Encouraging local communities to support service and ex-service personnel in their areas.
- Nurturing public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.
- Recognising and remembering the sacrifices and challenges faced by the Armed Forces community.
- Encouraging activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life.
- 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.

At its meeting on 20 September 2011, Cabinet agreed to adopt the Armed Forces Community Covenant to formalise and enhance the links between the Council and the Armed Forces. Over the last year, the Council has supported the needs of service and ex-service personnel in a variety of ways. This has included:

- Offering specific advice to ex-service personnel through the Council's website on a range of issues such as, health and wellbeing, money matters, housing advice, disability and mental health support. The website also provides links to veteran specific organisations such as Combat Stress.
- Providing information about organisations that help ex-service personnel such as SSAFA Forces Help and Royal British Legion in the Council's free guide to community services in Derbyshire.
- Ensuring Call Derbyshire staff are trained to ask callers if they are ex service personnel, and if so, they signpost them to organisations that provide targeted services.
- Working in partnership with The Gamelea Countryside Training Trust and Futures Homescape to address employment, training, finance and health needs amongst ex-servicemen and women.
- Providing a number of properties at a peppercorn rent to the Heanor Veterans Project, which has been set up to assist ex-service personnel suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, re-settle into the community
- Ensuring that problems facing ex-service personnel such as alcohol and substance misuse and mental health issues are incorporated in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy which prioritises those suffering from health inequalities.
- Piloting an initiative to advertise County Council vacancies on an Armed Forces website.

Current Position

The majority of local authorities in Derbyshire have now signed individual Covenants in their area. However, to strengthen joint working and to ensure a consistent approach is engendered across the county, all local authorities have agreed to resign a **joint** Community Covenant. The formal signing of the Armed Forces Community Covenant for Derbyshire will therefore take place at a ceremony on 19 November 2012 which will be attended by senior representatives of the County Council, District and Borough Councils and the Armed Forces.

The formal joint signing of the Community Covenant for Derbyshire demonstrates a commitment to the Armed Forces community. Whilst the County Council and individual local authorities across Derbyshire are carrying out a range of activities to support service and ex-service personnel, an opportunity exists to build a stronger co-ordinated approach which will also allow for wider strategic links to be made with the voluntary sector, business and private individuals.

The County Council is also currently exploring the possibility of hosting a Jobs and Advice Fair for service and ex-service personnel at County Hall in early 2013. The event would provide service and ex-service personnel with career, training and educational opportunities from a wide range of organisations from across Derbyshire and would also provide employer's access to highly skilled personnel. A number of groups and organisations who are able to offer advice and support across a range of issues such as health and housing would also be attending on the day.

Although the County Council is leading the arrangements for both the formal Community Covenant signing and the Jobs and Advice Fair, the gathering of partners to sign the Covenant presents a further opportunity to develop a range of co-ordinated approaches to supporting service and ex-service personnel. It is therefore proposed to engage with key partners to plan the Jobs and Advice Fair at the forthcoming event on 19 November 2012. This will also provide an opportunity for partners to consider the creation of a Community Covenant Partnership in Derbyshire and to explore the potential opportunities presented by the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, further details of which are set out below:

- **Community Covenant Partnerships**

The Armed Forces Covenant recommends that where areas have signed a Community Covenant, Civilian Military Partnerships are established to oversee the Covenant. Civil/Military partnerships are seen as an excellent low-cost way to demonstrate support for the Armed Forces community and to help build an understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces. A number of areas have already established Community Covenant Partnerships and these are seen as a vehicle for ensuring that the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered in the planning of services. Such partnerships are also a basic requirement for accessing the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme.

- **Community Covenant Grant Scheme**

Whilst much of the work on issues affecting service and ex-service personnel and their families is carried out utilising existing resources, £30 million of Government funding has been allocated to an Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme over the next four years. The Scheme will support projects that deliver tangible results, meet the overall aims of the Community Covenant and which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces community and the wider community in which they live.

The fund is only open to communities that have adopted a Community Covenant. An application for funding can be submitted by any part of the community. This might include volunteer groups, charities, and public bodies such as schools. The Scheme will consider applications for sums between £100 and £250,000. The Grant Scheme will be administered by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of the Government although bids will need to be considered in the first instance by either a Community Covenant Partnership at a local level or at a minimum, the local authority and a local armed forces representative to the Community Covenant. Bids that the Partnership is happy to endorse would have to be submitted to the Ministry of Defence to be considered by the Community Covenant Grant Panel.

Next steps

The Council will need to ensure that it considers the full implications of the Community Covenant in the provision of its services and it is recommended that the following activities are undertaken over forthcoming months:

- Build on current practice and identify new opportunities for supporting service and ex-service personnel.
- Work with partners on identifying the issues that may affect all service and ex-service personnel and their families in Derbyshire. For example, prioritising access to social housing and improving GP's awareness of mental health issues affecting ex-service personnel.
- Develop an action plan identifying key work areas, to be monitored on a regular basis.

In addition, work will take place over forthcoming weeks to consider the possible development of a Community Covenant Partnership for Derbyshire and the implementation of the Community Covenant Grant Scheme across the county. These initiatives may well present opportunities across Derbyshire for a wide range of partners to undertake activities that are not currently available or possible within existing resource constraints.

It is recommended that further reports on the implementation of the Armed Forces Community Covenant be brought to future meetings of Cabinet in due course.

3. Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: financial, legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

4. Key Decision - No

5. Call-in

Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No

6. Officer Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Note progress on the adoption of the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Derbyshire.
2. Approve the joint re-signing of the Armed Forces Community Covenant at a ceremony taking place on 19 November 2012.
3. Approve the planning of a Jobs and Advice Fair for service and ex-service personnel.
4. Agree the next step proposals in supporting service and ex-service personnel in Derbyshire.

Nick Hodgson
Chief Executive