



COUNCIL – 23RD APRIL 2013

SUBJECT: ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Minister for Local Government and Communities, Carl Sargeant, wrote to Leaders and Chief Executives of Local Authorities and Chairs of Local Service Boards on July 2012 calling for an Armed Forces Community Covenant (and supportive scheme) to be put in place at a local level. He also asked that an Armed Forces “Champion” (usually an elected member) be identified. The purpose of such a scheme is to ensure that the armed forces community has equality of access to local public services, and are not disadvantaged by their military service. This report recommends a proportionate Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme for consideration, development and adoption by Caerphilly County Borough Council and the Caerphilly Local Service Board (LSB).

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 An 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 at a local level, the Armed Forces Covenant introduced nationally by Central Government in 2011, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces Community.
- 2.2 In addition, the Welsh Government have subsequently produced a ‘Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales’, with the Welsh Local Government Association promoting an Memorandum of Understanding between Local Government and the Armed Forces, and requesting all local authorities to sign a community covenant with the Armed Forces. The aim of an Armed Forces Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the service community in their area, and develop an understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community, which includes both serving and former serving personnel (veterans) and their families.
- 2.3 The Royal British Legion has also published a “Best Practice Guide to Community Covenants” to facilitate the above.
- 2.4 This report provides an overview of Armed Forces Community Covenant schemes and recommends a proportionate scheme for consideration, development and adoption by Caerphilly County Borough Council and the Caerphilly LSB.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 “Caerphilly Delivers” is the Single Integrated Plan which is being developed as the 5 year delivery framework for the Caerphilly Borough Community Strategy. This is required by the Welsh Government to be put in place by April 2013. The Minister for Local Government has

requested that the needs assessments feeding into the development of Single Integrated Plans take into account Armed Forces communities and the inter-related factors which impact on the health and well-being of individuals, such as housing, education and healthcare provision.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 There are now many examples of Armed Forces Community Covenants in place across Local Authorities in Wales and England, which look quite different from one location to another. Community Covenants are schemes where one size does not fit all, and the nature of the support offered is determined by (and proportionate to) the size and extent of the Armed Forces community locally, its needs and capacity.
- 4.2 Internet research has found Welsh examples in the Isle of Anglesey County Council, Swansea City & Borough Council, Powys County Council, Newport City Council, Monmouthshire County Council and Torfaen County Borough Council. Notable is the Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council which has an all embracing Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme due to its sizeable Armed Forces Community at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) base at RAF St. Athan and the surrounding area.
- 4.3 Members will be aware that whilst the Caerphilly County Borough Council area does not have any armed forces establishments, it is a traditional recruiting area for certain of the armed services. The full extent of the Armed Forces community (serving and veterans) living in the county borough is unknown.
- 4.4 All Armed Forces Community Covenants exist to redress any disadvantages that the Armed Forces community faces in comparison to other citizens, and to recognise the sacrifices that they have made. Pledges set out within Community Covenants define the scope of the Covenant, and are signed-up to by a senior representative from the Local Authority or Local Service Board (e.g. The Leader or the Chair) and a senior representative from the Armed Services, who will sign on behalf of the Armed Forces Community. In areas with a large Armed Forces presence the pledge tends also to be signed by those representing veterans or families groups, such as the Royal British Legion, and the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association (SSAFA), etc.
- 4.5 When an Armed Forces Community Covenant is signed, local groups and organisations are then able to bid for funds from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, which is administered by the MOD. The aim of this grant scheme is to financially support projects, at a local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces community and the wider community in which they live.
- 4.6 The aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant in areas which have a high proportion of the armed forces typically focus on:-
 - allocating a specific officer/department to lead on Armed Forces Community covenant work
 - nurturing public understanding and awareness of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community
 - establishing an Armed Forces Community Covenant “Champion”
 - securing ‘buy-in’ from Councillors and senior members of staff
 - 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.
 - encouraging the civilian community to extend their support beyond Armed Forces Day, throughout the year and on longer-term projects that benefit their local community
 - creating opportunities for the Armed Forces community to work closely with the council and other partners

- supporting employment of Service leavers and Service families by drawing together local employers for recruitment fairs
- providing opportunities for the Armed Forces to talk about their experiences on operations, through regular meetings and reviews.
- evaluating the impact and reach of the Armed Forces Community Covenant

4.7 In areas with a low proportion of armed forces personnel, Covenants have focused on:-

- establishing an Armed Forces Community Covenant “Champion”
- allocating a “lead officer” for Armed Forces Community Covenant work
- securing ‘buy-in’ from Councillors and senior members of staff
- installing a mechanism to ensure that the Armed Forces Community are aware of the support available to them, for example through a dedicated Armed Forces Community Covenant page on a Council’s Website
- allowing for measures/support to be put in place at a local level, which are being applied by public service providers. For example, access to housing, education, leisure facilities, etc.
- recognising and remembering the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces Community, especially on Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Day
- giving higher prominence to Cadet Forces, the Royal British Legion and Veterans Associations
- free/discounted access to leisure facilities and discounts at shops and restaurants

4.8 Caerphilly County Borough Council is already meeting the needs of serving armed forces personnel and veterans in the following ways:-

4.8.1 **HOUSING** - currently the Council follows the requirement of homelessness legislation around “priority need”. This ensures a priority approach which enables ex-armed service personnel to obtain housing advice, consider options, and eventually to obtain council, social or private housing.

The following figures illustrate the number of ex-armed forces personnel, presenting with “priority need” in the county borough:-

- for the period June 2011 to March 2012, a total of 471 homeless applications were received of which **3** were from persons leaving the armed forces.
- for the period June 2010 to March 2011, a total of 484 homeless applications were received of which **4** were from persons leaving the armed forces.

4.8.2 **EDUCATION** - within the Directorate of Education under the criteria for Schools Admissions Arrangements for 2013/2014, there is the following provision:-

“Children of UK service personnel will be treated as in catchment if their application form is accompanied by an official Ministry of Defence (MOD) letter declaring a definite return date and confirmation of the new address.”

4.8.3 **LEISURE** - Recently introduced, serving members of the armed forces and veterans can now swim free of charge at Council Leisure Centres, using the Smartcard scheme. Attached at Appendix One is the “flyer” advertising this facility. Using the same scheme, serving members of the armed forces are offered concessionary prices to use other leisure facilities and are able to access to all library and leisure services, plus special events and promotions.

4.9 Cognisant of the emerging and ongoing healthcare needs (and other needs) of members of the armed forces and veterans, the Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABHB) is in the process of establishing a Gwent Armed Forces Forum. This initiative is supported by the Welsh Government. The initial meeting took place on 5th February, 2013 and was hosted by Councillor Alan Higgs at Caerphilly County Borough Council Offices, Ty Penallta. It was attended by Armed Forces Community “Champions”, lead Councillors and lead officers from

all the local authorities and the ABHB in the Gwent Region. Development of this Forum is ongoing.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This Council recognises that people have different needs, requirements and goals, and will work actively against all forms of discrimination by promoting good relations and mutual respect within and between communities, residents, elected members, job applicants and workforce. This Council will also work to create equal access for everyone to services, irrespective of ethnic origin, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religious beliefs or non belief, use of Welsh language, BSL or other languages, nationality, responsibility for any dependents or any other reason which cannot be justified.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Any financial implications will depend on how comprehensive and wide ranging Members would wish the Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme to be.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There will be a requirement to identify a specific Armed Forces Community Covenant “lead officer”.
- 7.2 Dependent upon the extent of the Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme adopted, additional resource may be required.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 All consultee responses have been considered within this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Given there are no armed forces establishments within the county borough, though the borough is a recruitment area for the armed forces, it is recommended that a proportionate approach is adopted in developing the Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme.
- 9.2 It is recommended that the Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme includes the following features:
- Identification of an elected member as the Caerphilly Armed Forces “Champion”
 - Confirmation of the “lead officer” (Howard Rees, CCBC Programme Manager)
 - Development of a Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant. A draft document is attached at Appendix Two.
 - Signatories for the Covenant confirmed as being the Leader of the Council (as Chair of the Caerphilly Local Service Board) and the identified military contact. As the scheme develops other partners may wish to become specific signatories. These might include the Royal British Legion, veterans or families groups (e.g. Gwent Veterans Association, SSAFA), reservists, cadet corps, Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Gwent Police, Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner, GAVO, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Caerphilly Business Forum, etc.

- Establish a Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant Forum, chaired by the Caerphilly Armed Forces “Champion”, with the above partners/organisations invited to become members of the Forum.
- Arrange a high profile Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant signing and launch ceremony.
- Create a Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme web page on the Council’s website. This would provide access to the Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant document, outline the scheme, list services available and provide useful tips on how to access these services. The web page would also provide an Armed Forces e-Directory, which would “sign-post” potential users to organisations/services/providers, nationally, regionally and locally.
- Members of the Armed Forces community would also be encouraged to identify themselves as such when they make contact or access services (by telephone, online or face to face) in order that they may be provided with all available help and advice from Caerphilly County Borough Council and other partners organisations.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To ensure that Caerphilly County Borough Council and Caerphilly LSB can demonstrate its ongoing commitment and support for the Armed Forces community living within the county borough and wider afield.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Not applicable.

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Appendices:

- Appendix 1 “Flyer” advertising free swimming for members of Armed Forces and veterans
 Appendix 2 Draft Caerphilly Armed Forces Community Covenant