



Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant

Thursday 27 April 2017

Report from Bill Bendyshe-Brown

Background

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. It sets out the relationship between the nation, the government and the armed forces and recognises that the whole nation has a moral obligation to members of the armed forces and their families, and it establishes how they should expect to be treated. Although it had been proposed by government that the Covenant be enshrined in law, in February 2011 they decided that there was no need to make the Covenant law, proposing instead to cover it in an annual report to Parliament.

Buckinghamshire has always had strong and proud links with the Armed Forces. It has 2 RAF stations in Halton and Wycombe together with the Language School in Beaconsfield (now decommissioned) and a vibrant Reservists population (7 Rifles Regiment). There are 4000 regular military personnel serving at the stations and over 100 reservists.

Current Situation

In recognition of its commitment to the local armed forces and their families the County Council signed an agreement to honour the Community Covenant in July 2012. We have also had the support of a whole range of organisations, including our District Councils, Milton Keynes Council, military affiliated charities, Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Groups, The Royal British Legion, SSAFA, the emergency services, together with a number of business, sports, cultural and arts, organisations. In total we have more than 20 organisations involved, all of whom are committed to a strong partnership between the Armed Forces and civilian communities in Buckinghamshire.

These organisations all come together in a Military Civilian Partnership Board which meets once per quarter to develop, maintain and deliver an action plan for a more strategic working relationship between partnership organisations, integrate service charities into these plans so that they have a proper forum to help veterans across the county, and to seek funding from MOD to help with local project delivery. The Action Plan has 6 work strands supporting the 4 key objectives of the National Armed Forces Community Covenant: Recognise; Remember; Integrate; and Support.

- Health and Wellbeing. Map and identify the needs of Service personnel (serving, veteran, reserve and families) in order to allow their needs to be better understood and, where possible, to be met.
- Education and Children and Young People. Promote an understanding of the needs of Service children so that they are not disadvantaged in the state funded education system to achieve best outcomes.
- Economy and Skills. Facilitate a sustainable pathway for Service leavers into civilian employment.
- Environment and Infrastructure. Develop a common understanding of infrastructure needs of the Armed Forces community, and veterans, in order to inform Local Authority planning and provision of new homes and existing housing allocation.
- Safer and Stronger Communities. Promote a common understanding and closer integration between military and civilian communities.
- Recognise and Remember. Support civic events that allow the community to recognise the Armed Forces.

Funding

Over £43,000 has been realised this past year from the MoD Fund. “The House at Pooh Corner”, based in High Wycombe, which provides sessional early years education for service families and local civilian families, received a £20k grant for a mobile outdoor play kit and storage facilities. The equipment is being used to benefit many RAF community groups, childcare facilities, community events and other RAF stations. This has already created strong local links between the Armed Forces community and civilian communities.

£20k was received to extend Community Impact Bucks’ successful model of linking people with organisations and groups in their local communities through volunteering to foster stronger, more meaningful, relationships between the station community and local civilian community; by facilitating volunteering outside the RAF station at High Wycombe and by bringing the local community into the station, helping integration and building mutually beneficial relationships.

The sum of £3200 was also awarded for Buckinghamshire Mind to deliver Armed Forces Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) across the county of Buckinghamshire. MHFA for the Armed Forces Community is a specially designed programme providing the basis for increased mental health resilience amongst veterans and serving personnel and their families.

The MoD’s Covenant Fund priorities for the year ahead will include Community Integration and Delivery of Local Services and also Families in Stress.

Events

The County Council contributed towards Remembrance events held across the County last November at which our Chairman and many members were represented.

A successful Armed Forces Day was held at Bletchley Park in June 2016 and planning is well underway for the 2017 Event to be held on Saturday 17th June at Aylesbury Rugby Club between 12pm and 7pm.

A Reception was held in January for the Business Community in Buckinghamshire to promote the Covenant and to highlight the role of Reservists, Cadets and employment opportunities for retiring servicemen.

The Partnership Group was also pleased to support the Maybe Magazine project 'The Secret County – Buckinghamshire Reflects on WWII' which was conceived and produced by a team of veterans and volunteers.

Way Forward

The Partnership Board will be developing future funding bids to the MOD to support its work and will continue to promote the Community Covenant to the public and armed forces at large.

RECOMMENDATION

Council is asked to note the Annual Report

**BILL BENDYSHE-BROWN
THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S ARMED FORCES CHAMPION**

