

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

2018/19

## 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 their families and to veterans, 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 and a vibrant Reservists population (6 Reservist Regiments). There are 4000 regular military personnel serving at the stations and over 100 reservists'. In addition there are 1,800 Cadets and some 300 Cadet Officers and Adult Volunteers. The Board is conscious of the fact that RAF Halton is due to close in 2024.

## 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 including Clinical Commissioning Groups, The Royal British Legion, SSAFA the Armed Forces Charity, BHT, CCGs, all 3 emergency services, together with a number of business, Job Centre Plus, sports, cultural and arts organisations. In total we have 48 (up from 20 last year) 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 who meet once per quarter. Their aim is 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 5 work strands with multiple actions 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. We are delighted to see one of our key objectives of having veterans recognised within the health sector being realised. Doctor surgeries are now recording whether a person is a veteran and the MoD are now issuing veterans with their own special card. Additionally, and tragically, research is being undertaken by Bucks New University on veteran suicide rates which are alarmingly high.
- Education and Children and Young People. We promote the **Service Pupil Premium** provided by the Department for Education, to State maintained schools, Free schools and Academies in England who have children of Regular Armed Forces personnel among their pupil population to provide additional (mainly pastoral) support. I am pleased to report that I personally have intervened in seeking to obtain local school placements for service children when their parents are moving into our county.
- Economy and Skills. Facilitate a sustainable pathway for Service leavers into civilian employment. We are working with the Officers Association and MOD's Career Transition Partnership to develop links so that we can, through our Board, help both veterans and those about to retire from the Armed Forces find suitable employment. We also held a joint BBF/Covenant Business Leaders Dinner on 14<sup>th</sup> March where some 14 potential new companies were recruited to support our Covenant and to work to employ ex-servicemen as well as working with their staffs to support their

aspirations to become reservists. I am delighted to report that the Navy and Army met their reservists target this last year whilst the RAF exceeded their target!

- Environment and Communities. 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. Additionally, promote a common understanding and closer integration between military and civilian communities. The Veterans Gateway is a scheme which, when working properly, should help enormously in this area.
- Recognise and Remember. Support civic events that allow the community to recognise the Armed Forces and vice versa. (See Events below).

## Funding

The MoD's Covenant Fund priority for the year ahead include Community Integration, Delivery of Local Services and Families in Stress and provides funding to help in these areas. The Board will continue to lend its support to appropriate bids from Buckinghamshire. Unfortunately, no bids have been successful so far this year but we are working closely with our 2 RAF stations and Community Impact Bucks to support their bidding process.

## Events

The County Council has been involved in organising:

- The celebration of the RAF 100 anniversary celebrating 100 years since the formation of the RAF. A parade by RAF Halton was held at Chesham followed by a Civic Service in St Mary's Church on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018. The RAF Regiment Band and RAF Halton's parade was truly inspiring.
- The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the cessation of World War 1 which was commemorated on Remembrance Day on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018 with events following the national programme:
  - Starting in Aylesbury Market Square at 6am led by our Lord Lieutenant with a piper playing The Battle is Over which was followed by breakfast provided by RBL.
  - Individual Remembrance events were then held across the County at which our Chairman and many members were represented.
  - After all Remembrance Services had been held we then turned our theme from remembrance to celebration with a celebratory event being held in The Oculus where musical performances were held together with many stalls being set up in The Street trying to emulate the sheer joy experienced by the country a century earlier.
  - This was followed by an Aylesbury Town Council Service in St Mary's Church, Aylesbury led by the Bishop of Buckingham
  - Finally, at 1900 in Market Square a bugle played The Last Post followed by a beacon of light being lit.
- A successful Armed Forces Day was held at Wycombe Air Park on 29<sup>th</sup> June this year where some 12,000 people attended. The weather was very much as ordered, if not a bit too hot, which is something we do not often say in the UK! The flying display, led by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster was splendid and went without a hitch. The stall holders were delighted with their sales whilst the veterans' village, reservists and cadets' areas also received many visitors. The whole event was funded through sponsorship by local businesses with BCC contributing £2,000. It was a great tribute to our armed forces, their families, reservists and cadets that they received such public recognition.

- **Way Forward**

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

**BILL BENDYSHE-BROWN**

**THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S ARMED FORCES CHAMPION**

**CHAIRMAN OF THE CIVILIAN, MILITARY PARTNERSHIP BOARD**