

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<i>Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant</i>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<i>Councillor Graham Harris – Cabinet Member for Community, Health &amp; Housing</i>
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>	<i>Martin Holt</i>
<b>REPORT AUTHORS</b>	<i>Paul Nanji 01494 732110 pnanji@chiltern.gov.uk</i>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED</b>	<i>All</i>

### 1. Purpose of Report

To inform members on the Armed Forces Covenant and Action Plan

### RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet recommend to Council to adopt the *Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant and associated 2016/2017 action plan*.

### 2. Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant plays an important role in bringing together the wider community and armed forces personnel and their families. This plays an important role in helping reduce social isolation, improving health & wellbeing and facilitating education and employment opportunities.

2.2 Chiltern District Council is a member of the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Community Covenant group and works closely with the armed forces community supporting a range of initiatives including:

- Improving access for children of service personnel to schools and other community based social and sporting activities;
- Improving employment opportunities by matching armed forces skills to their civilian counterparts and providing links between employers and ex-service personnel;
- Improving understanding and awareness of historic conflicts that help bring together different generations and share knowledge.

### 3. Background

3.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant was published by government in May 2011 and whilst not a formal legal document its key principles have been enshrined in law through the 2011 Armed Forces Act. The legislation obliges the Defence Secretary to

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report annually on progress made by the government in honouring the covenant. It is a voluntary statement of mutual support between civilians and the armed forces within local communities that encourages mutual understanding and brings the two parties together. Every local authority in Great Britain has now signed a Covenant.

The aims are to:

- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community and to nurture understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the armed forces community
- recognise and remember the sacrifices made by the armed forces community;
- encourage activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life
- encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement

3.2 Covenants in each community are specific to local needs and the scheme recognises that one size does not fit all. Consequently, the nature of the support offered locally will be determined by both need and capacity of each local authority area.

3.3 On the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2012 the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant (See Appendix 1) was signed by the County Council, all four district councils, NHS Buckinghamshire, the Clinical Commissioning Groups, Thames Valley Police, Bucks Fire and Rescue, Thames Valley Probation, Job Centre Plus, Community Impact Bucks, representatives of the Armed Forces Charities, representatives of local charities the business community and the armed forces community. All signatories agreed to work and act together to honour the Covenant. (Appendix 1)

#### **4. Content of Report**

4.1 Adopting the Buckinghamshire *Armed Forces Covenant formally* demonstrates the Council's support and commitment to strengthen its link between the community and armed forces personnel, their families and veterans.

4.2 The 2016/2017 Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan (Appendix 2) details various projects and initiatives that Chiltern District Council in association with other partners is supporting. These include being an active representative at the covenant's forum group meetings and working collaboratively with member organisations to bring military personnel and their families closer to the communities they live within.

- 4.3 Practical examples include supporting local town and parish councils and community groups to promote and organise World War One centenary events to commemorate battles and other significant events including the Gallipoli campaign April 2015, Battle of the Somme July 1st 2016, Battle of Jutland May 31st 2017 and Armistice Day November 11th 2018.
- 4.4 The Council's personnel committee now advertises vacancies on the Jobs4reservists website and Career Transitions Partnership, where appropriate. The Council is also working towards Bronze level status in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme which includes promoting being armed forces-friendly and open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners.
- 4.5 The four district councils housing teams are working collaboratively to support ex-service personnel address their housing issues. A positive example includes ex-service personnel (i.e. those who served within the last 5 years) being exempt from the qualification requirements that apply to our social housing waiting lists and are free to register.
- 4.6 The Council also helps enable armed forces personnel access local universal local services such as youth clubs and play schemes for their children and other community groups including sports clubs and social activities.

## **5. Corporate Implications**

### 5.1 Financial

There are no additional resources associated with supporting the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant and all projects will be undertaken within existing budgets.

### 5.2 Environmental

Many events and activities organised through the *Covenant will utilise open space and increase awareness of the local countryside.*

### 5.3 Equalities

Buckinghamshire *Armed Forces Covenant* directly supports a diverse range of community projects and proactively enables armed forces personnel and their family's access local services.

## **6. Links to Council Objectives**

- Work towards safe, healthy and cohesive communities.

## **7. Next Steps**

7.1 Feedback from the Communities PAG will help inform Cabinet's decision to formally adopt Buckinghamshire *Armed Forces Covenant*.