

SUBJECT:	<i>Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Councillor Paul Kelly - Cabinet Member for Community, Health & Housing</i>
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WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All</i>

1. Purpose of Report

The PAG is asked to advise the Portfolio Holder on the following recommendation(s):

RECOMMENDATION:

That Cabinet agrees to the continued support of the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant and agrees the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant's associated 2016/17 action plan.

Cabinet to consider the advice of the Portfolio Holder and any comments arising from the PAG.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant plays an important role in bringing the wider community together with armed forces staff and their families, helping reduce isolation, improve health and facilitate education and employment opportunities. South Bucks 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 projects including:

- Children of service personnel having access to schools and other community based social and sporting activities
- Improved employment opportunities by matching armed forces skills to their civilian counterparts and providing links between employers and ex-service personnel
- Improved 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 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.

Its 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. This is a scheme where one size does not fit all, and the nature of the support offered will be determined by both need and capacity. Every local authority in Great Britain has now signed a Covenant. Many local authorities including this council have an "Armed Forces Champion". The role of the Champion is to ensure that the local authority achieves its commitments to the armed forces community and that any challenges are resolved.

3.3 On the 5th 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.

4 Content of Report

4.1 Adopting the Buckinghamshire *Armed Forces Covenant formally* demonstrates the Council's support to strengthen links 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 South Bucks District Council in partnership with other stakeholders is supporting. These include the Council 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 The county wide covenant working group meets regularly to update its action plan which has four key objectives: Recognise Remember, Integrate and Support. It has five work strands: health and wellbeing; education and children and young people; economy and skills; environment and communities; recognise and remember. Examples include helping organise a series of events to commemorate World War One battles and other significant events including, outbreak of war August 1st 2014, First day of conflict August 4th 2014, Gallipoli campaign April 2015, Battle of the Somme July 1st 2016, Battle of Jutland May 31st 2016, Passchendaele June 17th 2017 and Armistice Day November 11th 2018.

4.4 There have been community led remembrance events across the District since 2014 including processions, services, exhibitions and intergenerational work with schools and the armed forces charities including the Royal British Legion. Town & parish councils, community organisations

and schools intending to commemorate the First World War and requiring support are asked to let us know about their plans by contacting the Councils Joint Community and Leisure Team.

4.5 The Council also plays an active role in helping the armed forces communities access local services including housing services, benefits schemes youth clubs, community groups and many other key local services. The Council's HR Committee has agreed to advertise vacancies on the Jobs4reservists website and Career Transitions Partnership, where appropriate.

4.6 In recognition of its work the Council could achieve Bronze level status in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme This scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, aligning their values with the Armed Force Covenant.

4.7 In relation to social housing, ex-service personnel (i.e. those who served within the last 5 years) are exempted from the qualification requirements that apply to our housing waiting lists and are free to register.

5 Corporate Implications

5.1 . Financial

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

5.2 Environmental

None

5.3 Equalities

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

6 Links to Council Objectives

- Work towards safe, healthy and cohesive communities

7 Next Steps

That, following the advice of the PAG to the Portfolio Holder, the Cabinet agrees to the continued support of the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant and agrees the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Covenant's associated 2016/17 action plan.