

# Communities Committee

Item No.....

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| <b>Report title:</b>  | <b>Annual Report of the Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant 2017-18</b> |
| <b>Date of meeting:</b>   | <b>7 March 2018</b>   |
| <b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>   | <b>Tom McCabe, Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services</b> |
| <b>Strategic impact</b><br>The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary commitment by a local authority to support members of their local armed forces community. Its aim is to ensure that members of the armed forces community receive the support they need in their local communities in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice.  |   |
| <b>Executive summary</b><br><br>This paper provides Communities Committee with the annual progress report on Norfolk's independent Armed Forces Covenant Board's Strategy and Action Plan 2017/19.<br><br>Overall, progress against the Board's Action Plan has been good. The Plan is being delivered to timescale and there are no delays or exceptions to report. Norfolk's Covenant is rated in the top 20% of Covenants by the Forces in Mind Trust.<br><br>In order to build on this success and in recognition of major changes in the UK Armed Forces, the Board is seeking to create a stronger, more ambitious strategy for 2018 and beyond, to better meet the expectations of Government. To do this, during 2018, the Board will host a conference to engage local agencies, armed forces and Ministry of Defence (MOD) representatives to enable a more detailed understanding of the issues in Norfolk to be addressed and use this information to determine forward strategy.<br><br><b>Recommendations:</b><br><br>Communities Committee is asked to:<br><br><b>1. Consider and comment on progress against the Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan (detailed in Appendix 1).</b><br><br><b>2. Nominate appropriate Communities Committee representatives to attend the conference, outlined in Section 3.</b> |   |

## 1. Introduction

### Policy context

- 1.1. The Ministry of Defence launched the National Armed Forces Military Covenant in June 2011 in recognition of the contribution and sacrifice service personnel make for their country.

- 1.2. The Government's expectations of local authorities were summarised in its policy paper published in 2015 to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community "have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen":
- The Armed Forces Community *should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens* in the provision of services; and that
  - Special consideration is appropriate in some cases especially for those who have given the most.

### **Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant**

- 1.3. Set up in 2011, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant (NAFC) is a well-established part of the national covenant programme.
- 1.4. The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary, non-binding commitment by a local authority to support members of their local armed forces community. Its aim is to ensure that members of the armed forces community receive the support they need in their local communities in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice; nurture public understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the armed forces community (including veterans); and encourage activities, which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life.
- 1.5. The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant comprises of three strategic priorities supported by an action plan, agreed annually and monitored by the Covenant Board.

### **Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board**

- 1.6. Norfolk's Covenant Board is an independent multi-agency partnership chaired by Norfolk's Armed Forces Commissioner, Tony Tomkinson. The Board meets twice a year to oversee delivery of agreed priorities and actions. The Board membership includes Cllr Kiddie as the NCC Armed Forces Member Champion.
- 1.7. A full list of Board membership is contained in Appendix 2.
- 1.8. The Board reports annually on progress to Communities Committee each March.

### **Norfolk's Armed Forces Community**

- 1.9. Norfolk has a large armed forces community, consisting of those currently serving and their families, reservists, those who have served and military charities. Norfolk is home to operational bases at RAF Marham and Robertson Barracks at Swanton Morley, as well as the Stanford Training Area.
- 1.10. There are around 2,420 serving personnel and their families based in Norfolk plus an additional 380 civilian workers. An additional 80,000 serving personnel use the Stanford Training Area (STANTA) each year. Included in

these overall numbers are over 1,000 children from armed forces families. Norfolk has an active cadet force of over 2,000 young people.

- 1.11. MoD statistics show 41,000 veterans living in Norfolk, and as of 31 March 2017 figures show that 8,843 residents in Norfolk were in receipt of pensions / compensation under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), War Pension Scheme (WPS) and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS).

## **2. The Covenant Board's priorities and actions 2017/18**

- 2.1 The Board's three priorities for 2017/18 reflect the national focus:

- Building Communities
- Health, Welfare and Housing
- Employment, Education and Skills

- 2.2 Appendix 1 to this report sets out contextual information about each of these priorities and summarises the key actions that have been delivered by the Board in 2017/18 to achieve agreed actions.

## **3. Developing priorities and actions for 2018/19 onwards**

- 3.1 The Board is seeking to create a stronger, more ambitious strategy for 2018/21, to position it to meet the expectations of Government and respond to changes in the UK Armed Forces. To do this, the Board will host a conference in June 2018 to engage local and national agencies, representatives from the armed forces and the MOD to enable a more detailed understanding of the issues in Norfolk to be addressed and use this information to determine forward strategy.
- 3.2 The output from the conference will not only inform future direction of the Board but will also be used to influence and guide local government services to more effectively support the armed forces community.
- 3.3 The Board's strategy and action plan will be revised following the conference, and will be brought to Communities Committee for information.

## **4. Norfolk County Council - Employer Recognition Scheme**

- 4.1 Norfolk County Council is currently Bronze level under the MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The scheme is a national initiative which demonstrates an employer's commitment to working with the armed forces community and recognises the valuable contribution members can make to the civilian employment market.
- 4.2 The County Council has identified that it already substantively meets the criteria for the next level of the scheme, Silver. This will put the Council in line with other lead authorities in the Covenant and provide demonstrable evidence of the authority's support for the armed forces. Work is therefore progressing to obtain the Silver level award.

## 5. Financial Implications

### Local funding

- 5.1 Norfolk County Council currently makes available £20k of funding annually that can be used to directly support the work of the Board. The overall allocation is monitored at each Board meeting and a formal process is in place to approve funding bids on a rolling programme.
- 5.2 The table below outlines the allocation to projects during the past 12 months:

| Project  | Amount         |
|--|----------------|
| RAF Marham Friends and Families Day  | £3,000         |
| Cherry Tree Academy funding – to enable the academy to join the Better to Best, school improvement programme   | £3,250         |
| The veterans stabilisation programme run by Walnut Tree and Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust to improve the mental health and wellbeing of veterans in Norfolk | £10,000        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>£16,250</b> |

- 5.3 This funding enables the Board to support local projects which deliver the Board's priorities and also provides a source of match funding for schemes such as the MOD's Covenant Fund. Any unallocated balance will be carried forward to the following year, to make it available for future projects.

## 6. Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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### The Covenant Board's priorities and actions

1. The Board's three priorities for 2017/18 reflect the national focus:
  - Building Communities
  - Health, Welfare and Housing
  - Employment, Education and Skills
2. The following section of this report details some of the key actions that have been successfully delivered by the Board in 2017/18.

### Priority 1: Building Communities

The constant shift that some individuals experience as a result of military life can lead to a feeling of isolation from the world outside of their military 'family'. An important element of the Covenant is to ensure that the serving and settled community have the opportunity to come together, building a mutual understanding and sense of the wider community. This will become even more important when the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) is actioned (for more information see below).

### The Covenant Board delivered the following activities to support this priority:

3. Work has continued to seek ways in which the Board can improve support for the armed forces community in Norfolk. The Board has explored the potential for developing a Norfolk wide Covenant Pledge which clearly sets out what the community can expect from local authorities.
4. Discussions revealed a mixed appetite for such an approach mainly due to current competing pressures on services and a desire to 'mainstream' the issue.
5. To move this forward The Board is seeking to identify a range of resources that can be accessed by Norfolk's councils and their services as needed. This will establish a more consistent approach across the county.
6. In August, the County Council's Library Service undertook mobile library visits to RAF Marham, Robertson Barracks and Carbrooke in Watton (where some families from RAF Honingham in Suffolk are based). This enabled children of serving families to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge who might not otherwise have had access to the scheme.
7. 2018 sees the conclusion of events to commemorate the centenary of the end of World War 1 across the country. In 2014 a fund was established by the Board to assist communities with this commemoration. This year is the final year of the grant being available and at the time of reporting a last round of advertising was taking place to ensure that as many communities as possible had the chance to benefit.

8. Work to establish a mechanism for identifying, sharing and responding to issues identified through referrals to The Royal British Legion (RBL) and Soldier, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA), is proving complex. The conference referenced earlier in this report will examine the issues connected to collaborative working, including information sharing and begin a dialogue between a wide range of organisations all involved in the care and support of the armed forces family.
9. The Covenant Board worked with representatives from the military and emergency services cadet forces in Norfolk to identify opportunities for joint training exercises. This has helped to forge some useful links between the groups.
10. Members of staff who are part of the Reserves were encouraged to come to work in their uniform for Reserves Day in June 2017. Reserves Day is held nationally ahead of Armed Forces Week to recognise the valuable contribution made by Reserves and to encourage interest from the civilian community. Through this national event it is hoped to promote and celebrate Norfolk County Council's support of the Armed Forces community.

## **Priority 2: Health, Welfare and Housing**

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| Good quality housing and access to health and welfare services are essential to serving families. This priority therefore addresses the needs of serving personnel and their families during and after military life. |
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11. Communities Committee will be aware that housing is currently provided for serving personnel and military families by the MOD. Consultation by the MOD on a 'Future Accommodation Model' (FAM) seeks to address a number of issues including the rising cost of maintaining the current housing stock and criticism from military families about the quality of accommodation. If taken forward the model will build upon financial assistance schemes to allow serving personnel and military families to rent in the local community or get a mortgage.
12. The FAM presents some of the most significant changes that the military community has experienced for some time and will have a major impact upon local communities and services in the surrounding areas. Trial areas for FAM are expected to be announced in early 2018. It is thought unlikely that Norfolk will be amongst this trial, however the Committee will be kept updated.
13. The health and welfare of the serving community are largely addressed by the MOD, however this does not extend to their families. An example of how this impacts is through dental care, where nationally re-deployed families have struggled to access local, affordable dental services. In addition, the frequency of redeployment for some, means that they can experience issues with waiting lists for medical treatment. The NHS has committed to improving this situation as part of the national Armed Forces Covenant.
14. A veteran is anyone who has served in the armed forces for a day or more. This means that the description of veteran can mean very different people, with different experiences and issues. Amongst this group can be some of the most vulnerable members of society. This includes so called 'early-leavers' many of whom will have embarked on a military career only to find this cut short at an earlier age with

perhaps few career prospects and potentially underlying mental health issues. Older veterans can experience isolation, especially if they have had difficulty adjusting to civilian life. Research also shows that experience of military life can make it particularly difficult for some veterans to ask for help, especially from people who don't have experience or knowledge of military life.

**The Covenant Board delivered the following activities to support this priority:**

15. There are a significant number of charities working in Norfolk to assist both serving and veteran communities. These charities play a vital role in helping those in need with specialist knowledge and first-hand experience of what it is like to have served. The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board has offered support to these charities, to encourage and foster an integrated approach to supporting veterans where possible.
16. In June 2017, the Government launched the Veterans' Gateway, a 24/7 one-stop-shop for service leavers, veterans and their families. The initiative was led up with the Royal British Legion and the Armed Forces Charity (SSAFA) to help improve the complicated landscape that exists around military charities and provide a single point of contact for those in need.
17. To embed the Veterans' Gateway in Norfolk the conference referenced in this report will be used to raise awareness among Norfolk's charity sector and public service providers of the Gateway. The conference will also assist in identifying potential barriers preventing veterans getting the help and support they need from the sector. The conference will also seek to begin a conversation about the veteran of the future in recognition of the changing face of the armed forces.
18. In response to concerns about the MOD's Future Accommodation Model, engagement has taken place with the Norfolk Housing Reference Group and the Norfolk Strategic Planning Forum to raise awareness among local government officials of potential local housing pressures.
19. The Board continues to support RAF Marham with its request for improved access to dental services for serving families. Two applications for funding (MOD and the RAF Benevolent Fund) failed to secure funding on the grounds that services are provided by the NHS and should be adequate. The work has now been linked with research being carried out by HealthWatch Norfolk into the effectiveness of dental service provision for all communities in West Norfolk. A report is due in February 2018 which will be brought to Communities Committee and Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April and May respectively. Personnel representing the families of RAF Marham remain determined to secure a better dental service, particularly for the children, many of whom are not registered and do not have check-ups. This work also links with a letter written by the Secretary of State for Health in January 2018 about the current primary care dental contract notifying the continuation of a trial (to March 2020) to change the way NHS dentists are paid to ensure activity to prevent as well as treat disease.
20. Veterans and Armed Forces issues, including the role of the Covenant, now form part of the curriculum for all GPs nationally and are tested in the Royal College of General Practitioners membership exam. NHS England is also working with the Royal College of General Practitioners to develop a veteran's awareness

accreditation programme for GP practices that is being piloted in the Midlands before roll-out to other regions.

21. NHS England has commissioned pilots in six areas of the country: Norfolk/Suffolk; Nottingham; South West (Devon & Cornwall); London; North West and West Midlands to set up Liaison and Diversion services to assist serving personnel and veterans in the criminal justice system.
22. The Liaison and Diversion Service for Norfolk and Suffolk is provided by Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust and Julian Support, working with key partner Project Nova (Walking With the Wounded).
23. The programme refers individuals who are actively involved with the criminal justice system prior to any sentence, and those who have been recognised as having an identified vulnerability, to an appropriate treatment or support service.
24. The programme is assisting with the identification of serving personnel and veterans in the system. This information helps to improve the care options for individuals as well as providing an opportunity to enhance the services provided to their families. In 2018/19 there will also be an opportunity to extend the provision of support to veterans who have mental health problems.
25. NHS input into Norfolk's Covenant Board has been strengthened with the addition of the East of England's Armed Forces Commissioning Manager. This is an important step in the Board's ability to make strategic links and ensure that NHS commitments in relation to the veterans and the families of serving personnel are delivered in Norfolk.
26. Ongoing in the Board's work is awareness raising with frontline staff at housing associations, Job Centre Plus and GP practices in order to improve general understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant and the needs of veterans. It is vital that all of the services involved understand the needs of the current and ex-serving community in order to best meet their needs.

### **Priority 3: Employment, Education and Skills**

Education and skills are essential to serving families. This priority therefore addresses the needs of children of serving families and also their parents during and after military life.

Nationally, work is underway to ensure that the qualifications that an individual gains while serving are transferrable into civilian life. This is in recognition that in the past this has been a barrier to employment as service leavers and veterans have not necessarily been able to translate their skills and experience past their military life. This has also been linked with misconceptions amongst some civilians of what a veteran can contribute to a workforce.

It has also been recognised that the spouse of a serving man or woman can be put at a disadvantage as far as employment because of the need to move with their partner when they are re-deployed. This can extend to children as well when it comes to their education and later employment.



**The Covenant Board delivered the following activities to support this priority:**

27. Norfolk Community Learning Services (NCLS) worked closely with the spouses of The Welsh Cavalry (1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards based at Swanton Morley) to provide 1-2-1 advice on career options and adult learning opportunities. Although this work was well received, issues remain due to lack of child care on the base preventing spouses from attending courses (this is partly due to an extensive deployment schedule experienced by the base this year). In response to this, NCLS accommodated the deployment schedule to create two days of family learning activities during school holidays when half of the service personnel were back on base.
28. At Key Stage 1 and 2 Norfolk's serving family children continue to perform higher than their civilian counterparts. The analysis of KS3&4 results is awaited.
29. In recognition of the pressures experienced by local schools due to military life, Norfolk's Covenant Board assisted the Cherry Tree Academy at Marham to bid for funding to join the "Better to Best" programme. The programme has given the Head Teacher and staff access to support and resources to help the schools develop. The programme has been well received and the schools have been able to continue to improve their practices. Both the Infant and Junior Schools have retained their "Good" Ofsted ratings.
30. The Board has continued to support families re-deployed into Norfolk by providing advice and guidance, along with schools on issues such as allocation of reception places and school transport. Much of this work has been delivered in partnership with welfare officers from the bases who act as the first point of contact for the families. This has been particularly important in the lead up to families moving from the USA as part of the establishment of the F35 Lightning II. By offering this service the Board has built strong links with the serving community and developed solutions to local issues.
31. The Job Centres in Norfolk are strengthening their contribution to the Armed Forces Covenant by raising awareness through staff training. For example, they invite serving personnel to speak about careers in the armed forces so job coaches can advise veterans seeking work. They also run events where staff learn about the support available from local charities. This is particularly necessary if job seekers have personal problems that need solving before they can access employment opportunities.
32. The Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust runs "Step Into Health" Days for service leavers, veterans and their families. This enables participants to learn about hospital departments, to see behind the scenes and to undertake work experience ahead of applying for jobs. Over 70% of those opting for work experience secure jobs in the NHS.

### Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant Board

The membership of the Board is made up of:

- Armed Forces Commissioner; Tony Tomkinson (chairman)
- Norfolk County Council; Councillor Keith Kiddie
- District Council representatives (x2);
  - Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen (Breckland Council),
  - Councillor Elizabeth Nockolds (Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk),
- Representatives from the Armed Forces (x4);
  - Major Tom McIlwaine (British Army)
  - Major Gavin Rushmere (British Army Reservists)
  - Wing Commander Stewart Geary (RAF)
  - Cdr Richard Pethybridge (Navy)
- Representatives from the Armed Forces charities (x3);
  - John Boisson, Royal British Legion,
  - Kevin Pellatt, The Armed Forces Charity SSAFA;
  - Lisa Thipthorp, RAF Families Federation.
- Representative for Reservist Forces and Cadets; Jamie Athill
- Job Centre Plus armed forces lead; Mark Goldsmith.
- NHS representative in Norfolk; Derek Holesworth, Commissioning Manager.
- NHS England (Midlands and East); Ann Berry, Senior Armed Forces Commissioning Manager
- Representative for skills & employment; Jan Feeney, Norfolk County Council.
- Housing representative; Chris Haystead (Norwich City Council)
- MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme; Ivor Bartrum
- Education representative: Simon Davis, Norfolk County Council