

# Communities Committee

Item No.....

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| <b>Report title:</b>   | <b>Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant Annual Report 2016-17</b>        |
| <b>Date of meeting:</b>  | <b>8 March 2017</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>This paper provides Communities Committee with an annual progress report on Norfolk's Armed Forces Community Covenant strategy and action plan. Overall, progress on the action plan over the last year has been strong, and a national independent review has rated Norfolk's Covenant in the top 20% of all UK covenants.<br><br>Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary, non-binding commitment by the County Council to support members of the local armed forces community, in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice. Norfolk has a large armed forces community, with operational bases at RAF Marham and Robertson Barracks Swanton Morley. Overall, according to the MOD quarterly location statistics report (January 2017) there are 2,480 serving personnel and their families based in Norfolk plus an additional 370 civilian workers. An additional 80,000 serving personnel use the Stanford Training Area (STANTA) each year. In addition, MoD statistics released in Autumn 2016, show 49,000 veterans living in the County.<br><br><b>Recommendations:</b><br><br>Communities Committee is asked to:<br><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Consider and comment on progress of the Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant</b></li><li><b>2. Note that a revised strategy and action plan for 2017-2020 will be brought to Communities Committee for information in due course, following endorsement by the Covenant Board.</b></li></ol> |   |

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Policy context

- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. 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 Government also stated that:
  - 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.
- 1.4. In June 2013, the Chancellor announced that £10 million per annum would be allocated in perpetuity from the financial year 2015/16, to ensure the continued achievement of the Government's Armed Forces Covenant commitments.
- 1.5. In 2015 an all-party parliamentary group was set up to inform parliamentarians on all aspects of the national Armed Forces Covenant and its implementation. The Group is next due to report on progress on the national Covenant in April 2017.

## 1.6. Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant

- 1.7. Set up in 2011<sup>i</sup>, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant is a well-established part of the National Community Covenant programme. A national independent review last year rated it in the top 20% of all UK covenants<sup>ii</sup>.
- 1.8. 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 embed and sustain activity, 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.
- 1.9. Norfolk's Covenant comprises of three main priorities supported by an action plan, agreed annually and monitored by a Covenant Board. The aim of the plan is to coordinate actions across the county to support Norfolk's armed forces community. More details about the three priorities and action plan are set out in section 3 below.

## Norfolk's Covenant Board

- 1.10. Norfolk's Covenant Board is a multi-agency partnership chaired by Norfolk's Armed Forces Commissioner, Tony Tomkinson. The Board meets formally twice a year to oversee delivery of agreed priorities and actions.
- 1.11. The Board membership includes the County Council's Chairman, David Collis, as the formal NCC member champion, and Cllr Hilary Cox. It also includes elected members from local District councils and representatives from RAF Marham, Swanton Morley Barracks, The Royal Navy, the Reservist Forces represented by 3<sup>RD</sup> Royal Anglian Company, Norfolk Cadet Forces, Job Centre Plus, Cotman Housing, Public Health, Economic Development and the following charities: Royal British Legion; Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association; and the RAF Families Federation.
- 1.12. The Board reports annually on progress on the action plan to Communities Committee.
- 1.13. A full list of Board membership is contained in appendix 1 of this report.

## 2. Norfolk's Armed Forces community

- 2.1. Norfolk is home to the following operational bases:
  - **RAF Marham** is celebrating its centenary this year and has secured its future through the MOD and Government placement of the Lightning II Jet at the base (this will replace the Tornado Force from 2018). Introduction of the Lightning is supporting 20,000 UK jobs and a £300M infrastructure investment at the Base.
  - **Robertson Barracks** at Swanton Morley (formerly RAF Swanton Morley which was taken over by the Army in 1995) is currently home to the 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards (a Welsh regiment also referred to as the QDGs). In 2015 after 15 years, the former residents, The Light Dragoons (also known as the Northern Calvary) left the Barracks and moved to Yorkshire, as part of the Army's rebasing plan. 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards took up residence at the Base after returning from Germany.
  - **Stanford Training Area (STANTA)** is a training facility owned by the Ministry of Defence, controlled by the British Army and run by the Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG). The site is closed to members of the public and has been used since 1942 to train military personnel for combat.
  - **Remote Radar Head (RRH) Neatishead** provides radar, ground-to-air radio and data links coverage as part of the UK Air Surveillance And Control System (ASACS), in support of national and NATO air defence.

- 2.2. Overall, according to the MOD quarterly location statistics report (January 2017) there are 2,480 serving personnel and their families based in Norfolk plus an additional 370 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, who attend school in Norfolk. Reservists from the County make a valuable contribution to the armed forces and Norfolk also has a very active cadet force made up of over 2,000 young people.
- 2.3. RAF Marham currently employs over 3,500 people. This number is due to increase dramatically with the move from Tornado Force to Lightning II jets which will also see a change in the make-up of the base as the RAF are joined by Naval personnel in a joint task force.
- 2.4. Robertson Barracks at Swanton Morley is currently home to 400 soldiers (185 families) from the 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards. In 2016 the MOD announced that Robertson Barracks will be closed from 2031. Although the impact of this will not be known for some time the intention to fully close the Barracks will have a profound impact on the surrounding area.
- 2.5. Tracking veteran numbers remains a national issue. This is in part because many individuals do not wish to identify themselves as having served and some form part of the homeless population. MoD statistics released in Autumn 2016, show 49,000 veterans living in Norfolk. Figures also show that 2,020 residents are in receipt of a war pension and a further 85 in receipt of an Armed Forces and Reserve Forces compensation scheme payment.

### **3. The Covenant Board's priorities and actions**

- 3.1. The Covenant's three priorities for 2016/17 reflect the national focus (which were reconfirmed at the MOD's National Community Covenant conference on 29/11/16):
- Building Communities
  - Health, Welfare and Housing
  - Employment, Education and Skills
- 3.2. The following section of this report details some of the key actions that have been successfully delivered by the Board in 2016/17.

#### **Building Communities**

- 3.3. 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 community 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 Armed Forces accommodation strategy is actioned (for more information read para 3.14 of this report).

- 3.4. The following activities have helped to support this priority:
- 3.5. The Covenant supported 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards (QDGs) to hold a Regimental Day in July. The day involved local businesses, community groups and youth groups from the area holding a 'welcome' event to communicate to the military community what was on offer in the area. This helped not only in practical terms to inform the regiment, following their move from Germany on what Norfolk has to offer but also provided an opportunity for local people to visit the base and get to know the people living and working there.
- 3.6. RAF Marham's Friends and Families Day helps to bring together people who live and work on the base with the local community. This well-established event was even more important this year as it fell during the base's centenary celebrations. In recognition of this the Board were able to assist the event through a financial contribution.
- 3.7. The Covenant supported the QDGs to take twenty children from both the local military and settled community in Swanton Morley on a residential activities trip during August to Ross-on-Wye. Although children from both communities attend the same school(s), the trip provided an opportunity to enjoy leisure time and build important skills together, strengthening the sense of community inside and outside the Barracks.
- 3.8. 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.
- 3.9. Nationally between 2014 and 2018 events are being held up and down the Country to commemorate World War One. In 2014, in recognition of this, the Board established a World War One fund to enable communities to commemorate the end of the War. Since then, on the Covenant's behalf, the Norfolk Community Foundation has awarded 44 grants totalling £12,839 for projects to refurbish memorials, hold events and ensure that the people of Norfolk can remember those who have fallen.
- 3.10. In July 2016, the Covenant supported the opening of a World War Two Fighter Pen at Scottow Enterprise Park (former RAF Coltishall). The restoration project was coordinated by the County Council and was completed with grant funding from the MOD Covenant Fund in order to ensure that this nationally significant site was not lost to future generations. To commemorate the opening veterans in custody at nearby HMP Bure made two benches which were placed at the site. Coltishall Memorial Flight brought along replica model World War Two planes and organised a fly-past by a Typhoon.
- 3.11. The Covenant Board worked with representatives from the military and emergency services cadet forces in Norfolk to identify any common ground

and opportunities for joint training exercises. This work is ongoing and has helped to forge some useful links between the groups.

- 3.12. Linked to the work above the Covenant Board recognised that there are a number of uniformed organisations (such as the Police and Fire Service) in addition to the Armed Forces who work with young people helping to build their confidence, teach them new life skills and bring young people together. To help promote these organisations the Board funded the production of z cards, detailing contact information for ten different organisations. These cards will be distributed at community events to promote opportunities for young people.
- 3.13. In addition to the projects mentioned above, the Board, in partnership with Norfolk County Council's Chairman and other organisations marked a variety of significant events in the military calendar including Armed Forces Week, The Battle of the Somme and The Battle of Britain.

## **Health, Welfare and Housing**

- 3.14. Committee will be aware that housing is currently provided for military families by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Recent consultation by the MOD on a 'Future Accommodation Model' 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 military families to rent in the local community or get a mortgage.
- 3.15. In conjunction with the Future Accommodation Strategy, the MOD has also agreed a 'Better Defence Estate' Strategy. This strategy aims to support military capability by providing a smaller but better quality estate for the armed forces and their families out to 2040 and beyond. It is a detailed, long term plan to reduce the defence built estate by 30% and provides a framework for the geographical positioning of forces across the UK. The strategy has been developed in partnership with military leaders and sets out where investment will be concentrated and where sites will be sold to deliver a significantly smaller estate which is more efficient and better enables military capability. As a result of this strategy the decision has been made to close Robertson Barracks at Swanton Morley in 2031.
- 3.16. Overall these present 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.
- 3.17. The health and welfare of the serving community are largely covered 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 Community Covenant.

- 3.18. 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 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 that don't have experience or knowledge of military life.
- 3.19. The following activities have helped to support this priority:
- 3.20. The Covenant supported Healthwatch Norfolk to carry out research into the experiences of veterans' from Norfolk and Suffolk's regarding mental health services. This research was captured in a report published in May 2016 and later turned into a short film, to increase awareness of the issue. The Board are currently exploring ways in which this work can be promoted with other Armed Forces Community Covenants across the Country.
- 3.21. The Board was responsible for producing the "Tell us" poster, designed to encourage veterans to identify themselves as such so they can receive the help and support that they need. The poster provides useful information on where an individual can access support tailored to their health needs as a result of their military service. There has been ongoing work to ensure that these posters are displayed in GP practices. In 2016 the Board worked with Norwich City Council's Neighbourhoods and Community Enabling Team to ensure the poster was displayed in all the City Council's community centres and the County Council's Library and Information Service. The impact of this action will continue to be monitored.
- 3.22. With Healthwatch Norfolk, the Board has continued to explore ways to encourage GPs to record when a patient identifies themselves as a veteran. This is part of a larger piece of work to improve understanding of the specific needs that some veterans have when it comes to medical care and in response to requests from veterans to deal with professionals that have an understanding of military life.
- 3.23. The Covenant supported Public Health's research to develop a suicide prevention strategy for Norfolk, with specific information relating to veterans. In Norfolk there are on average 77 suicides per year which is higher than the national average. The most recent statistics (over the last ten years up to 2016) identify that 76 percent were male, and a significant proportion of them were aged 45-59. This supports national research which shows that some veterans find it difficult to adjust to civilian life, leading to an increased risk of suicide. Veterans, along with men in general have been identified within the strategy as a specific at risk group who need to be considered when commissioning future service delivery.

- 3.24. There are a significant number of charities working in Norfolk to assist both serving and the veteran community. 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 Board has offered support to these charities, to encourage and foster an integrated approach to supporting veterans where possible.
- 3.25. 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 Community 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.

### **Employment, Education and Skills**

- 3.26. 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.
- 3.27. Nationally, work is underway to ensure that the qualifications that an individual gains while serving are translatable into civilian life. This is in recognition that in the past this has been a barrier to employment as 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.
- 3.28. 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 education and later employment.
- 3.29. The Board is working with Norfolk Community Learning Services and the QDGs to develop an adult learning programme for the spouses of serving soldiers. This will enable spouses to gain qualifications and seek employment not only while in the County but also in the future.
- 3.30. Working with the County Council's Education Adviser for Service Children, the Board supported schools with a large cohort of armed forces children to write applications for the MOD Education Support Grant Fund. These have helped to fund a science 'park' project at Cherry Tree Academy at RAF Marham and the training of two members of staff at Shouldham Primary as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants.
- 3.31. The annual school census results are a key source of data used to calculate schools' funding. In relation to children of military families the Service Children Premium helps schools to support the unique challenges children with parents in the armed forces can often face. As of 2017 the NCC Education Adviser for Service Children will sit on the Armed Forces Community Covenant Board to ensure that issues relating to service children are fully understood and inform wider strategy across Children's Services



- 3.32. The Covenant 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. By offering this service the Covenant has built strong links with the serving community and developed solutions.
- 3.33. The Covenant continues to support the VETS East (Veteran Employment and Training Service) programme, originally launched in November 2015. This seeks to co-ordinate employment support to veterans in Norfolk and Suffolk

## **4. Next steps**

- 4.1. Over the last six months, the Covenant Board has overseen a review, to strengthen governance arrangements and consider forward strategy for 2017/20.
- 4.2. The review has highlighted a range of important issues, such as:
- Emerging issues for Norfolk's Armed Forces community, which may impact on local communities, which the Covenant will be well placed to address
  - How intelligence from local charities can best be shared and used to ensure a joined up approach to helping veterans
  - Continuing to work strategically with health and social care providers to ensure they are aware of the needs of veterans, the current serving community and their families
  - The need to strengthen the Community Covenant's profile within the County Council, District and Borough Councils to ensure staff are fully aware of the needs of the armed forces and veteran community
- 4.3. At its next meeting on 17 March 2017, the Covenant Board will consider a new draft strategy and action plan for 2017-2020, based on the review findings. It will also consider opportunities to refresh the way that the Covenant Board works in order to ensure it remains proactive and able to meet the needs of the armed forces community.

## **5. Financial Implications**

### **Local funding**

- 5.1. Norfolk County Council currently provides £20k of funding to support the work of the Armed Forces Community Covenant, The overall budget 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, in support of the Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant:

| <b>Project</b>  | <b>Amount</b>  |
|---|----------------|
| Supporting RAF Marham Friends & Families Day  | £3,000         |
| Summer Reading Challenge  | £807           |
| 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards 53 Seater Coach for the 10th Sept 2015 for the Welcome to Norfolk Reception (late invoice)   | £225           |
| 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards Regimental Day and for a residential stay for armed forces and local children  | £3,000         |
| Grant to a local Army Cadet, selected along with 9 others to represent Great Britain in a trip to Thailand to commemorate the 75th anniversary for British soldiers who were captured and made prisoners of war by the Japanese during World War 2. | £200           |
| Norfolk Community Foundation to deliver the Norfolk Community Covenant's WW1 fund   | £5608          |
| Grant to the 3 Royal Anglians for a community event   | £500           |
| National Armed Forces Community Covenant Conference   | £69            |
| Armed Forces Commissioner expenses  | £339           |
|   |                |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>£13,748</b> |

- 5.3. This funding is invaluable, as it allows the Covenant not only to support local projects which deliver the Covenant's priorities but also provides a useful source of match funding for schemes such as the over-arching Covenant Fund run by the Ministry of Defence (see para 3.6 for more information on the Covenant Fund). Since 2012, the local Covenant Board has levered in an additional £423,196 external funding to support the Norfolk armed forces community from sources such as the Covenant Fund.

### **National Funding**

- 5.4. National funding is available to Community Covenants through the over-arching MOD Covenant Fund. The Government initially allocated £30million in funding, over four years from 2011, in order to support Community Covenants. However, in July 2015 the MOD announced a new Fund; the MOD Covenant Fund, which is a £10 million annual scheme granted in perpetuity by the Government in recognition of the importance of the Armed Forces Community Covenant.
- 5.5. There are 2 application routes:
- Small grants for funding applications up to £20,000.
  - Large grants for applications between £20,001 and £500,000.
- 5.6. The following four priorities for applications were set by the MOD for the financial year 2016-17:
- Community integration (large and small grants).
  - The Veterans' Gateway.
  - Families in stress.

- Strengthening Local Government delivery of the Covenant.

5.7. The outcome of applications to external funding in 2016/17 are shown below:

| <b>Community Integration (small grants under £20,000)</b>   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Walking with the Wounded – “Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme” (currently awaiting decision)                    | £20,000                           |
| Matthew Project “Getting to know your community” (currently awaiting decision)  | £18,505                           |
| <b>Community Integration (large grants over £20,000)</b>  |                                   |
| The Rainbow Centre Nursery in Marham Special Educational Needs and School Club Extension                              | £290,000                          |
| Home Start, Swaffham “Reaching Out – Building Bonds” project  | £92,710.                          |
| <b>MOD Education Support Fund Jan 2017</b>  |                                   |
| The Cherry Tree Academy Schools for their science-park and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) project. | Secured partial funding of £4,500 |
| Swanton Morley Primary School for their STEM project.   | £11,565                           |
| St Martin at Shouldham Primary Academy to train two of their existing staff as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants. | £1,100                            |

## 6. Officer Contact

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

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### 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 David Collis
- District Council representatives (x3);
  - Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen (Breckland Council),
  - Councillor Elizabeth Nockolds (Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk),
  - Councillor Hilary Cox (Norfolk County Council).
- NHS representative; Derek Holesworth, Commissioning Manager.
- Representative for skills & employment; Jan Feeney, Norfolk County Council.
- Job Centre Plus armed forces lead; Mark Goldsmith.
- Housing representative; Jane Warnes, Cotman Housing.
- Representatives from the Armed Forces (x4);
  - Major Tim Jones (Army)
  - Major Gavin Rushmere (Army Reservists)
  - Wing Commander Stewart Geary (RAF)
  - David Elford (Navy)
- Representatives from the Armed Forces charities (x3);
  - John Boisson, Royal British Legion,
  - Stuart Fidler, SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association)
  - Lisa Thipthorp, RAF Families Federation
- Representative for Reservist Forces and Cadets; Jamie Athill
- Education representative: Simon Davis, Norfolk County Council

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<sup>i</sup> In March 2012, Norfolk County Council, along with District Councils signed the Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant in the presence of the Lord-Lieutenant of Norfolk Richard Jewson; Brigadier Harry Nickerson, Commander 49 (East) Brigade; Commander Gerry Northwood, Chief of Staff, Naval Regional Command, Eastern England; Group Captain David Cooper, Station Commander at RAF Marham; General The Lord Dannatt; representatives of our armed forces community and partner organisations.

<sup>ii</sup> A recent national independent review conducted by the Forces in Mind Trust, the LGA and Shared Intelligence placed Norfolk's Covenant in the top 20% of UK covenants (August 2016). It evidenced that Norfolk's Covenant is:

- Well managed by the County Council as its lead partner.
- Actively engaged with all forms of the armed forces community and key stakeholders both within Norfolk and nationally.
- Responsive to the needs of the military bases, serving men and women and their families.
- Supportive of local specialist veteran charities.

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- Successful at securing funding for local projects which have benefited not only the serving but also the wider community in which they are placed.
  - Actively implements an Action Plan and maintains a web site.