

# Communities Committee

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| <b>Report title:</b>  | <b>Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant Strategy and Action Plan</b>      |
| <b>Date of meeting:</b>   | <b>7 November 2018</b>   |
| <b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>   | <b>Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services</b> |
| <b>Strategic impact</b>   |  |
| <p>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.</p>  |  |
| <b>Executive summary</b>  |  |
| <p>This paper provides Communities Committee with the mid-year progress report on Norfolk's independent Armed Forces Covenant Board's Strategy and Action Plan 2017/2019.</p> <p>It also sets out the Board's emerging forward strategy for 2019/2021, which is being developed by the Board following its successful first conference in June 2018, which was attended by Communities Committee representatives, local agencies and charities, the armed forces and Ministry of Defence (MOD).</p> |  |
| <b>Recommendations:</b>   |  |
| <p>Communities Committee is asked to:</p>   |  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Consider and comment on progress against the current Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2017/19 (outlined in Section 2).</b></li><li><b>2. Consider and comment on the scope of the Board's emerging forward strategy for 2019/21 (outlined in Section 4).</b></li></ol>   |  |

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) 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

- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases especially for those who have given the most.
- 1.3. The MOD published its Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report in December 2017 and members received a briefing on this at the Communities Committee in March 2018.
  - 1.4. Since March, the national Covenant has been further strengthened by the MOD in several ways – such as the establishment of a new Ministerial Covenant and Veterans’ Board to hold Government departments to account; work to develop a cross-Government Veterans’ Strategy; and the launch of a national Veteran’s ID card from 2019.

## **2. Norfolk’s Armed Forces Covenant**

- 2.1. Set up in 2011, Norfolk’s Armed Forces Covenant (NAFC) is a well-established part of the national Covenant programme.
- 2.2. Norfolk’s Covenant is a voluntary, non-binding commitment by local authorities 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.
- 2.3. This Committee has already received information about Norfolk’s independent Armed Forces Covenant Board (which oversees delivery of the Covenant), Board membership and current priorities and action plan. A summary is attached at Appendix 1 for reference.

## **3. Update on the Board’s current action plan for 2017/2019**

- 3.1. The Board agreed its current strategy for 2017/2019 in March last year. Communities Committee received an annual report on progress in March 2018.
- 3.2. The majority of actions within the action plan are being delivered to timescale. Some minor delays will be addressed in 2019/21. The delays are not significant, and the Board is comfortable with overall progress.
- 3.3. The following paragraphs provide a brief update on the three main workstreams, within the current action plan:
  - 3.3.1. **Dental Services in West Norfolk** - The Board continues to support RAF Marham with its request for improved access to dental services for serving families. Research carried out by HealthWatch Norfolk into the effectiveness of dental service provision for all communities in West Norfolk showed that both the civilian and serving family populations struggle to find dentists and receive timely treatment.
  - 3.3.2. At the Board’s request and with Communities Committee’s agreement, the issue of poor access to dental services was taken up by the Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) in April and May respectively. Having confirmed at HOSC there is under-provision in the West, the NHS is seeking to improve access to services by working with the Covenant Board and RAF Marham.
  - 3.3.3. **World War 1 Fund** - 2018 marks the conclusion of events to commemorate the centenary of the end of World War 1 across the country. In 2014 the Covenant

Board established a fund to assist communities with this commemoration. This year was the final year of the grant being available and many communities had the chance to benefit. Eighty-four grants were made for a range of community events, local history research projects, educational activities, new memorials, and the refurbishment of existing memorials. A review of the impact of the Fund will be undertaken next Spring once all the projects have been completed.

- 3.3.4. **Armed Forces Commissioner** - The appointment of a new Armed Forces Commissioner is underway with the advert published on 8 October and interviews taking place in the week commencing 12 November. The new Commissioner will go through a training and handover period before chairing the Covenant Board from 1 April 2019.

#### **4. Update on the Norfolk Armed Forces Conference held in June 2018**

- 4.1. The Board is seeking to create a stronger, more ambitious strategy for 2019/21, to position it to meet the expectations of Government and respond to changes in the UK Armed Forces. To do this, the Board hosted a conference in June 2018 where it engaged with local and national agencies, representatives from the armed forces and the MOD to enable a more detailed understanding of the issues in Norfolk needing to be addressed.
- 4.2. The conference was very well received, with over 150 delegates taking part from across Communities Committee; the serving forces; local and national military charities; spouses of serving personnel; local businesses and the wider public sector.
- 4.3. The Board is using the output from the conference to develop a new action plan and to influence and guide local government services to more effectively support the armed forces community.
- 4.4. Many of the issues raised by delegates reflect those already recognised by the Ministry of Defence in its Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report (published December 2017 and updated in July 2018) as key areas of focus: health; education and employment.

#### **5. The Board's proposed forward strategy for 2019/2021 following the conference**

- 5.1. The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board met in September to consider the issues raised at the conference. The Board's proposed forward strategy to address the issues raised at the conference falls under its three existing objectives: Building Communities; Health, Welfare and Housing; and Education Employment and Skills.
- 5.2. **Building Communities** – The Board will focus on: ways to promote understanding of Norfolk's armed forces community and to develop a covenant pledge that sets out what the armed forces communities can expect from the Covenant in Norfolk; improving information on civilian services available to the armed forces community, and encouraging military charities to sign up to the MOD's Veterans' Gateway and register with Cobseo (the organisation that regulates military charities).
- 5.3. **Health, Welfare and Housing** - The Board will seek to: ensure local health providers are aware of national schemes such as the NHS's Veteran Friendly

GP Scheme and the Veterans' Gateway; encourage consistency between local authority practitioners when working with the armed forces community; and work with the NHS to help those needing mental health support access it easily.

- 5.4. **Employment, Education and Skills** - The Board will look to: establish strong links between the military bases and local jobs market to benefit spouses and dependents; work with the Career Transition Partnership and the Department for Work and Pensions to explore the possibility of a mentoring scheme for those transitioning out of service life into employment in Norfolk, using veterans as mentors; and to identify best practice in schools and academies for spending the Service Pupil Premium.
- 5.5. The Board has established a Conference Task and Finish Group to further develop the projects and agree them in March 2019.

## 6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. 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 spending decisions.
- 6.2. This funding enables the Board to support local projects which deliver the Board's priorities and to provide a source of match funding for schemes such as the MOD's Covenant Fund. Because projects can span financial years, any unallocated balance is carried forward to the following year and is available for future projects.
- 6.3. The balance of the reserve at the 1 April was £28,401.
- 6.4. The table below outlines the allocation to projects during 2018/19:

| <b>Project</b>                                       | <b>Amount</b>     |
|--|-------------------|
| Supporting RAF Marham Friends & Families Day         | £3,000            |
| Catering at Halsey House – Board meeting             | £100              |
| NPS Graphics pull-up banners for conference          | £440              |
| Stand Easy Military Support for Veterans             | £5,000            |
| Photography for conference                           | £300              |
| Room hire for conference                             | £3,800            |
| Audio Visual for conference                          | £2,483            |
| WW1 Fund   | £5,465.25         |
| Sports Activities / Soccer School Robertson Barracks | £500              |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>£21,088.25</b> |

- 6.5. Planned expenditure for the remainder of the year will include the recruitment of the Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner.
- 6.6. The total expenditure in 2018/19 up until the end of August was £21,088.25. Funding will be drawn down from reserves to cover this. At this point in time an outstanding reserve balance of £27,553 will be carried forward to 2019/20. The Board will use this reserve balance to fund the major workstreams planned for 2019/2020, set out in Section 5.

## Recommendations:

Communities Committee is asked to:

1. **Consider and comment on progress against the current Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2017/19 (outlined in Section 2).**
2. **Consider and comment on the scope of the Board's emerging forward strategy for 2019/21 (outlined in Section 4).**

## Officer Contact

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

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### Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant

1. Set up in 2011, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant (NAFC) is a well-established part of the national covenant programme.
2. 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

3. 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.
4. The Board reports annually on progress to Communities Committee each March.
5. 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 Jerome Tyson (British Army).
    - Major Gavin Rushmere (British Army Reservists).
    - Wing Commander Stewart Geary (RAF).
    - Cdr Richard Pethybridge (Royal Navy).
  - Representatives from the Armed Forces charities (x3);
    - John Boisson, Royal British Legion,
    - Kevin Pellatt, The Armed Forces Charity SSAFA;
    - Lisa Thipthrop, 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: Kevin Blogg, Norfolk County Council.
  - Adult Social Services representative: vacant, Norfolk County Council.

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

6. 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.
7. There are around 2,300 serving personnel and their families based in Norfolk plus an additional 380 civilian workers (MOD statistics April 2018). An additional 80,000 serving personnel use the Stanford Training Area (STANTA) each year. There are over 1,000 children from armed forces families. Norfolk has an active cadet force of over 2,000 young people.
8. MOD statistics show 41,000 veterans living in Norfolk, and as of 31 October 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).
9. Specific to Norfolk, it was previously reported to this Committee that an expansion programme is underway at RAF Marham to enable it to operate the new F-35 Lightning fighter jet. The Station has received nine jets to date and an increase in both RAF and Royal Navy personnel for the Lightning Force. The Station is seeing a reduction in the Tornado Force as the jets are taken out of use.
10. Under its Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, the MOD has recently announced Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Trust has been awarded a Gold Level Award in recognition of its employment support to those who have served. This is the first Gold Level Award received in Norfolk. A Silver Level Award was given to The College of East Anglia.