

ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

Cabinet Members	Councillor Ray Puddifoot Councillor Douglas Mills
Cabinet Portfolios	Leader of the Council Improvement, Partnerships and Community Safety
Officer Contact	Glenda Greenfield / Lyn Summers Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services
Papers with report	None.

1. HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	<p>A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement, at local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.</p> <p>The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Service Community in their area and promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community. It is also to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in the borough and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by its members. This includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel their families and widow(er)s</p> <p>It is supported by the Community Covenant Grant Scheme which has been established to financially support projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live.</p>
Contribution to our plans and strategies	This delivers local partnership working
Financial Cost	There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Corporate Services and Partnership.
Ward(s) affected	All

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet:

- 1. Welcomes the principle of a local Armed Forces Community Covenant;**
- 2. Delegates authority to the Leader of the Council to sign up to and establish an Armed Forces Community Covenant between the Borough and the Local Armed Forces Community and;**
- 3. Delegates authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and local Armed Services, to agree and submit any bids for the Community Covenant Grant Scheme.**

Reasons for recommendation

The Covenant outlines the Government's aspiration that the Armed Forces Community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. The Government will consider positive measures to enable equality of outcome with other citizens, as well as consider special treatment for the injured and bereaved, as proper return for their sacrifice. Cabinet is asked to agree the principle of the local Community Covenant and delegate the necessary decisions to Members and Officers to pursue this.

Alternative options considered / risk management

To not adopt an Armed Forces Community Covenant.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

None at this stage

3. INFORMATION

Supporting information

3.1 The Community Covenant

A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement, at local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.

The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Service community in their area and promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community.

People have become involved in supporting the Service community through Service charities, or more recently by participating in Armed Forces Day. The Community Covenant scheme aims to build on this local level of support.

The aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant are to:

- encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas
- nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community
- recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces Community
- encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life
- to 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 Participants in the Community Covenant

The Community Covenant represents a relationship between the Armed Forces Community and any or all of the following:

- public service providers (Local Authority and health service providers etc)
- private industry (such as shops, restaurants, non-public service providers)
- Charities and veterans groups
- Community groups
- Individual members of the public

3.3 Established Covenants

The Community Covenant has been launched in four locations in England – Hampshire, Portsmouth, North Yorkshire and Oxfordshire. In addition Vale of Glamorgan in Wales is the first authority to launch a community covenant in Wales.

3.4 Developing a Local Community Covenant

All Local Authorities in England are being provided with government guidance and encouraged to establish a Community Covenant in their area.

The establishment of Civil/Military partnerships is an excellent low-cost way to demonstrate support for the Armed Forces community. It builds an understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces and ensures the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered in planning local services.

It is expected that most Community Covenants will be led at Local Authority level.

3.5 The Community Covenant pledge

This document sets out what a Community Covenant seeks to achieve in a particular area and this will be signed by representatives from all parts of the Community. In most cases the lead signatories will be a senior representative from the Local Authority and one from the Services who will sign on behalf of the Armed Forces Community.

The standard document is a high level statement of support and Local Authorities are encouraged to make a copy available on their website once signed.

3.6 Public Service support

Public Service providers are already delivering a number of tailored services for the Service community. Additional support can take a variety of forms and will be determined by the capacity of the Local Authority. Examples of best practice include:

- Establishment of Civil/Military Partnership Boards
- Providing opportunities for the Armed Forces to talk about their experiences on operations
- Support to employment of Service leavers and Service families by drawing together local employers for recruitment fairs
- Free/discounted access to leisure facilities and discounts in shops and restaurants
- Armed Forces Involvement within Community Projects

3.7 Business support

A number of organisations already offer discounts through the Forces Discount scheme (www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk) and businesses may choose to join this existing scheme or create their own. Additional support might take the form of support to employment for the families of Service personnel who can at times find themselves faced with difficulty securing employment when moving to a new location.

3.8 Local community support

By promoting activity that integrates the Service community into local life, this will help to make the Service community feel part of the community instead of it simply being somewhere they live for the term of a posting. This might include running youth groups or sports clubs that include Service children, establishing support networks for Service families who often find themselves isolated when Serving partners are on operations

3.9 Local Armed Forces involvement

The Community Covenant is intended to be a two-way arrangement and there should be opportunities for the Armed Forces to support their local communities in a variety of ways, such as getting involved in community regeneration projects or taking part in educational and sporting events or enabling the community to use their facilities e.g. the music recording studio at RAF Northolt.

3.10 The Community Covenant Grant scheme

On 16 May 2011 the Defence Secretary announced that £30M of central Government funding over the next four years to support the Community Covenant.

The Community Covenant Grant Scheme will financially support projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live.

The Grant Scheme will consider applications for projects that deliver tangible results and meet the overall aims of the Community Covenant Scheme. It will be administered by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Applications must be submitted jointly by at least two parties to the local Community Covenant: one from the Armed Forces Community (such as a Service unit, a veterans' group, or a families organisation), and one from the wider community (such as a Local Authority or service provider, a commercial organisation, or a private individual).

The grant scheme will consider applications for funding between £100 and £250,000, to be spent on projects which promote closer ties with, or a greater understanding of, the military in the local community. Examples could be:

- a public exhibition showing recent activity of the local Armed Forces unit, such as a tour in Afghanistan
- one-off activities such as an activity camp involving the Armed Forces and young people
- a community outreach project that brings together veterans with their non-Service equivalents to highlight what support is available to them in their local community.

The first panel sat in October 2011, and the next panel will sit in December 2011. (The deadline for bids to reach the MOD Covenant Team is 30 November 2011). Bidding panels will also take place in March 2012 and at quarterly intervals thereafter. The fund will only be open to communities which have adopted a Community Covenant, but this will not be sufficient in itself – the nature of the project will be the key consideration.

Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

The Community Covenant Grant scheme has been launched by the MOD which invites communities to apply for funding to run projects which strengthen the bonds between the Armed Forces and the public. Bids can only be submitted from areas which already have a Community Covenant in place. There will be match funding opportunity available.

Up to £30m over four financial years has been set aside to help communities undertake projects that promote greater understanding between the military and civilian populations.

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4. EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

4.1 What will be the effect of the recommendation?

- The Community Covenant will encourage local communities to support the Service community in their area and promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community.
- It will 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 with the local community.
- It will give an opportunity for local businesses, the voluntary sector or community groups to engage with the armed services community, veterans and service families.

4.2 Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Armed Services Covenant is a Government initiative, which has the support of all political parties. Consultation with Armed Forces Services groups, veterans' groups and charities and local businesses/community groups would be prudent. Advice and guidance on best practice is available from the initial four local authorities in England who have adopted the scheme, and is being promoted through the LGA and MOD websites.

Officers will work with the Leader of the Council to identify relevant and suitable partners to work with to develop the Hillingdon Covenant.

5. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed the report and is satisfied that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of the report. It should be noted that bids for funding can only be submitted from areas which have a Community Covenant in place.

Legal Services

The power to take the measures recommended in this report above derives from the council's power under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 to do anything it considers likely to improve or promote the social or economic wellbeing of its area. The power may be exercised for the benefit of all or any persons resident in the council's area. Additionally, exercise of the power must be consistent with the Sustainable Community Strategy for the London Borough of Hillingdon. In this instance, two priorities identified by the Strategy (improving health, housing and social care and where opportunities are open to all) render the exercise of the council's well-being powers relevant in relation to the Council's Armed Forces Community Covenant.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Armed Services Covenant (MOD document)

Community Covenant Pledge template (MOD document)

Community Covenant Grant scheme criteria and guidance (MOD document)