

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 23 January 2014

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Customers and Communities

Report Author: Community Engagement Manager

Title: Armed Services Covenant

1. What is the report about?

An update on how the Council is delivering its commitment to the agreed Covenant with the Armed Services community.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information regarding the Covenant and report on initiatives undertaken since the adoption of the Covenant and previous reports to Scrutiny

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee comments on and endorses the actions taken.

4. Report details.

4.1 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 the national Armed Forces covenant which outlines the moral obligation between the nation, the government and the armed forces, at a local level. The principle aims of a Community Covenant are to:

- ❖ encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces Community in their area
- ❖ 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 social 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.

4.2 Full Council formally adopted the Covenant on the 11 September 2012 and asked Scrutiny to satisfy itself on the measures Denbighshire wished to adopt.

Communities Scrutiny endorsed its proposed activities at its meeting on 6 December 2012.

- 4.3 The Council agreed to nominate an 'Armed Services Champion' (Lead Member for Communities Councillor Hugh Irving) and a named 'Armed Services Lead Officer' (Community Engagement Manager).
- 4.4 The Denbighshire Armed Forces Covenant was formally signed at a special ceremony at the Territorial Army Centre, Prestatyn on the 2nd July 2013. In attendance were the Chairman, Leader and Lead Member representing the County Council along with senior representatives from the Armed Forces, the armed forces charities, public sector organisations working in Denbighshire, the Local Service Board and the voluntary sector.
- 4.5 A workshop has taken place with representatives from key armed services charities and public sector organisations to advance understanding of the issues facing armed service personnel and veterans. A Working Group (WG) has been established with interested organisations chaired by the Lead Cabinet Member. The role of this WG is to coordinate actions, identify gaps in provision and exchange information and good practice.
- 4.6 A key action identified by the Covenant was the need to establish a dedicated information page on our website with links to organisations who could give advice and support on issues ranging from welfare concerns to career advice. This page has now gone live and can be found by following this link.

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/resident/community-and-living/support-for-the-armed-forces.aspx>

- 4.7 Following the signing of the Covenant, projects in Denbighshire are eligible to seek funding from a Ministry of Defence Community Fund providing it meets the criteria of benefitting both the community at large and the armed services. The Army have approached the County Council with an ambitious project in conjunction with Bodelwyddan Castle Trust to develop a visitor / educational experience at the Castle comprising of a new comprehensive WW I trench system as part of the WW I Centenary. The trenches will be manned by civilian, veteran and service volunteers to form a living exhibit about life in the trenches.

The County Council through the Assets Management Group and CET agreed to support the application. We are delighted that the application was successful and a grant of £225,000 (the largest in Wales) has been approved by the MOD. It is anticipated the work will be completed by the spring and the project will be for five years. At the end of the five years the trenches will become the responsibility of the Castle Trust.

The role of the Council will be to monitor the financial aspect of the project and release funds accordingly and this will be done through our Finance Department.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The outcomes in the Covenant actively demonstrates our commitment to 'getting closer to our community' by demonstrating that armed services personnel and veterans are supported when they integrate back into civilian life.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

There are no specific costs associated with delivering the actions identified by the Covenant. Any agreed actions emerging from the Covenant or the Working Group will be borne by individual Services.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

An EqIA has been undertaken (see Appendix) in relation to the Covenant and it will have a positive impact. The main conclusions are:

-remove or minimise disadvantage through ensuring armed services personnel, their families and veterans so not suffer any disadvantage in accessing services.

- encourage increased participation of the armed services community to support integration in the local community.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

Extensive engagement has taken place with key organisations supporting armed service personnel and veterans. Ongoing consultation is facilitated through the Working Group.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Not required.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Reputational risks if the Covenant does not continue to be a document endorsed by the Council and its actions delivered on a partnership basis

11. Power to make the Decision

Council have asked Scrutiny to have an overview of the Covenant and its development.

Article 6.3.4(b) stipulates scrutiny's powers with respect to scrutinising policy objectives and performance.

Contact Officer:

Community Engagement Manager

Tel: 01824 706291