

For Publication

Armed Forces Covenant – Chesterfield Borough Council Action Plan

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	16.03.21
Cabinet portfolio:	Town Centre and Visitor Economy (Armed Forces Champion)
Directorate:	Corporate

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To report on progress made on the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan for 2019 – 2023 and approve further actions for 2021/22 onwards.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That members note the progress against the Chesterfield Borough Council Armed Forces Action Plan.
- 2.2 That the updated Chesterfield Borough Council Armed Forces Action Plan is approved for delivery.

3.0 Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 To demonstrate and reaffirm our commitment and support to the armed forces community.

4.0 Report details

- 4.1 The original Derbyshire Armed Forces Covenant was signed in April 2012. Derbyshire authorities adopted a collaborative approach to build upon the national covenant developed by the Ministry of Defence, working with the Royal British Legion.
- 4.2 As part of our commitment to the 2012 Derbyshire Armed Forced

Covenant Chesterfield Borough Council delivered a range of improvements and initiatives to demonstrate our commitment and support for the armed forces community including:

- Changes to many of our policies and practices to maximise support including housing allocations, homelessness, benefits advice service and concessions on services
- Maintained our commitment to advice services including Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre, Citizens Advice Bureau and Derbyshire Law Centre which also support the armed forces community
- Supported the Heroes Welcome scheme
- Enhanced our remembrance and recognition activities with a variety of ceremonies including freedom of the borough for local regiments, commemoration of Armed Forces Day, armistice day and remembrance Sunday commemorations and an extensive World War I 100 year commemoration programme

4.3 The national covenant was revised in 2019 by the Ministry of Defence, again, working with the Royal British Legion. The principles of the covenant remained the same:

- No member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen
- In some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved

These core principles should be taken into account when writing and implementing policies and should be integrated in services, support and engagement activity.

4.4 Derbyshire County Council and all Derbyshire Districts agreed to continue to work collaboratively to develop and commit to a new Derbyshire Armed Forces Covenant in July 2019. A Chesterfield Borough Council Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan to cover the period 2019 – 2023 was developed at the same time to support the overarching covenant activity.

4.5 The Chesterfield Borough Council Armed Forces Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1. During the first two years of the plan significant progress has been made including:

- Developing and signing the Derbyshire Armed Forces Covenant
- Nomination of an Armed Forces Champion
- Effective engagement with the Derbyshire Armed Forces Partnership
- Support the Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus to deliver the veterans hub (face to face in 2019/20 – virtual in 2020/21)
- Supporting CBC services and partner agencies to promote services, information, events etc. aimed at or of benefit to the armed forces community
- Working with Armed Forces Charities and organisations to develop an annual programme of events and activities to recognise and value the contribution of the armed forces community past and present. This includes Armistice Day, Remembrance Sunday, Armed Forces Day, commemoration of key dates (virtual and Covid-19 secure for 2020/21)
- support the Civic Cadet roles and encourage Armed Forces Cadet Units and other young people via schools, clubs and associations to take part in the annual programme of recognition events and activities (over 400 engaged in 2019/20 with virtual opportunities for 2020/21)
- Attain the Bronze Award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme
- Annual leave policy now includes up to 10 days paid leave days per calendar year to undertake reservist duties
- Concessions Policy across all service areas includes Armed Forces
- Improvements to key housing policies to respond to specific needs and circumstances of Armed Forces Community

4.6 Many of these activities are continuing for the remainder of the plan period and some are being enhanced for instance seeking to move from Bronze Award to Silver Award for the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. There are also exciting opportunities for improving future plans as a result of key Census data and the results of the Derbyshire Armed Forces Research project becoming available towards the end of 2021/22.

5.0 Alternative options

5.1 Signing the Derbyshire Armed Forces Covenant is voluntary, and Chesterfield Borough Council could choose to disengage from the partnership and not progress this agenda. This however would be extremely damaging to our reputation with key partners including Derbyshire County Council, other Derbyshire Districts and Armed Forces organisations. Significant progress has been made with our partners to demonstrate our commitment and support to the Armed Forces Community and we wish to maintain this momentum.

6.0 Implications for consideration – Council Plan

6.1 Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan is a key commitment within the Council Plan 2019 – 2023.

7.0 Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money

7.1 Since 2012 our commitment to the armed forces community has been built into our core business. Where specific additional activity emerging from the covenant, action plan and partnership have a financial impact, external funding and alternative resourcing models have been sought. This has included applications to the national Armed Forces Covenant Fund.

7.2 The Armed Forces Bill is likely to become an Act of Parliament during 2021/22. Clause 8 of the Bill sets out a proposed statutory duty for all UK public authorities to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. The Local Government Association have raised the issue of new burdens funding and are currently working with national government to ensure councils are sustainably funded as financial certainty and sustainability will help ensure local government can continue to maintain and improve services, including honouring their important local Covenant commitments.

8.0 Implications for consideration – Legal

8.1 The Armed Forces Bill is likely to become an Act of Parliament during 2021/22. The primary purpose of this Bill is to renew the Armed Forces Act (AFA) 2006 and, in so doing, continue in force the primary legislation governing the armed forces. Clause 8 of the Bill sets out a proposed statutory duty for all UK public authorities to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. Concerns have

been expressed by the Local Government Association that the Bill lacks detail and that it is therefore difficult to fully understand the implications for local authorities.

9.0 Implications for consideration – Human resources

9.1 Since 2012 our commitment to the armed forces community has been built into our core business. There have however been some competing demands on officer time during 2020/21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has led to some re-prioritisation of activities. These are detailed within the updated action plan at Appendix 1.

10.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action	Impact	Likelihood
Further disruption to progress due to Covid-19 pandemic.	M	H	Revised timescales in place for some activities to take into account competing demands on officer time. Virtual and Covid-19 secure alternatives developed for activities.	L	M
Armed Forces Bill – new duties.	M	H	Reviewing implications as the Bill progresses through Parliament and as guidance is developed. LGA is working with national government regarding local government engagement and challenges.	L	M

11.0 Implications for consideration – Community wellbeing

11.1 The actions within the Armed Forces Action Plan compliment and enhance the activity taking place as part of the community recovery and resilience plan overall.

12.0 Implications for consideration – Economy and skills

12.1 Part of the action plan is directly aimed at improving employment, skills and training access.

13.0 Implications for consideration – Climate Change

13.1 No specific implications have been identified.

14.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity

14.1 Equality analysis of the Derbyshire Armed Forces Covenant and our action plan has been undertaken with no negative impacts for protected characteristics identified. Our armed forces community includes a diverse range of people so the pledges and actions emerging from the covenant make significant positive contributions to all protected groups.

Decision information

Key decision number	1018
Wards affected	All

Document information

Report author
Donna Reddish – Service Director – Corporate
Background documents
These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.
None
Appendices to the report
Appendix 1 – Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan