

## For publication

### Armed Forces Covenant – Chesterfield Borough Council Action Plan (TV000)

<b>Meeting:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	05.04.22
<b>Cabinet portfolio:</b>	Town Centre and Visitor Economy (Armed Forces Champion)
<b>Directorate:</b>	Corporate
<b>For publication</b>	

#### 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 2022/23.

#### 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 Reason 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 three 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 – now back to face to face)
- 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 with some face to face in 2021/22)
- 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 and 250 engaged in 2021/22)
- Attain the Bronze Award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme in 2020 and Silver achieved in 2021
- 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 Beyond 2023

Derbyshire County Council and Derbyshire districts have been working together on the covenant since 2012. During this time the partnership have recognised that as Derbyshire has very little overt military presence e.g. military bases the armed forces community is largely hidden across the County. We wanted to gain a better understanding of the composition of the armed forces community in Derbyshire and to explore the needs of the community including spouses, partners and children and identify any gaps in information and support.

4.7 The partnership developed a successful bid from the Government's Armed Forces Covenant funding and were awarded a research grant. Derby University were procured to undertake the research study. The study was concluded in April 2021 and the report available to the partnership in June 2021.

4.8 Key findings included:

#### Armed Forces Community members in Derbyshire

- An estimated 38,000 veterans live in Derbyshire (approx. 4% of the population)
- Estimated 114,000 armed forces community members if each veteran has at least two connected family members
- On average 210 armed forces personnel a year have resettled in Derbyshire after leaving the service
- Derbyshire is home to 450 currently serving armed forces members
- 440 serving personnel have a spouse / partner living in Derbyshire
- 705 service children were educated in Derbyshire schools in 2019/20

#### Employment

- 74% of working age respondents reported being in employment which is slightly less than the Derbyshire average at 77%
- 89% had made their employer aware of their armed forces history / connection
- 85% had not experienced disadvantage in employment due to their armed forces history / connection
- Some issues of concern were raised with some veterans considering that skills and experience gained in the forces were not always recognised in civilian life
- Spouses and partners had experienced challenges with frequent moves and childcare challenges due to in effect single parent status while their partner served in the forces
- Reservists were concerned about some employers being inflexible regarding leave for training etc.

#### Health and social care

- 53% of respondents had a long term disability or ill health and of those 51% said that this was potentially due to their armed forces history

- 37% reported that they had mental health needs connected to their armed forces history
- But 50% had not made their GP aware of their armed forces history
- 24% of respondents frequently or very frequently felt isolated or lonely

#### Accessing services

- The most frequent services used by respondents were GPs, opticians, dentist and hospital
- 17% used library services, 10% mental health services and 9% adult education
- 44% had received support from at least one armed forces charity
- 91% felt that they hadn't experienced any disadvantage in accessing services

4.9 This information has been used to adjust provision including Veterans Hub and communication activity and will be invaluable alongside the Census 2021 data regarding armed forces community in developing the next Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2023 – 2027. This is a key action for 2022/23.

#### 4.10 Armed Forces Act 2021 implications

The Armed Forces Act 2021 received Royal Assent in December 2021. It further enshrines the Armed Forces Covenant into law to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing public services. Clause 8 amends Part 16A of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to introduce a duty to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. Chesterfield Borough Council and Derbyshire partners are already signed up voluntarily to these principles via the covenant signing.

4.11 The Act requires the Secretary of State for Defence to lay draft statutory guidance before Parliament, which will come into force at a date to be specified by the Secretary of State. The Ministry of Defence is developing the statutory guidance in consultation with colleagues from across central government, local government and the third sector. We understand that the Ministry of Defence intends to commence the due regard duty later in 2022 and that the final statutory guidance will be published ahead of that to give councils time to prepare for its implementation.

- 4.12 The new guidance will also be essential to developing the new action plan for 2023 – 2027.

## **5.0 Alternative options**

- 5.1 The Armed Forces Act 2021 enshrines the Armed Forces Covenant in law. Derbyshire County Council, all Derbyshire Districts and Armed Forces organisations have voluntarily progressed the covenant since 2012 and significant progress has been made. No alternative options are available currently as we are awaiting the final guidance and will need to reflect this in future action plans.

## **6.0 Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 There is no new Government funding attached to the Act. The Ministry of Defence have made a commitment to review potential new burdens costs for councils one year after the commencement of the duty. It is important that any new burdens costs that may arise from implementing the duty are kept under review and fully funded by government.

## **7.0 Implications for consideration – Legal**

- 7.1 The Armed Forces Act 2021 received Royal Assent in 2021, we are currently awaiting statutory guidance, this will be key to shaping our new action plan.

## **8.0 Implications for consideration – Human resources**

- 8.1 Since 2012 our commitment to the armed forces community has been built into our core business. No additional human resources have been identified at this stage but we will need to review this once the Armed Forces Act 2021 guidance is available.

## **9.0 Implications for consideration – Council plan**

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

## **10.0 Implications for consideration – Climate change**

- 10.1 The plan is considered to be neutral from a climate change perspective, however individual activities are assessed for climate change impact and opportunities to reduce negative impact and promote positive change.

## **11.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity**

- 11.1 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.

## **12.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management**

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action	Impact	Likelihood
Additional burdens following the enactment of the Armed Forces Act 2021.	M	H	<p>Strong Derbyshire partnership approach since 2012 – voluntarily signing and progressing the armed forces covenant.</p> <p>Partnership consideration of statutory guidance when available.</p> <p>MOD have committed to review additional burdens after 1 year of the guidance being in place – assessment for new burdens funding.</p> <p>LGA is working with national government regarding local government engagement and challenges.</p>	M	M

### **Decision information**

<b>Key decision number</b>	<b>1092</b>
<b>Wards affected</b>	<b>All</b>

## Document information

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