



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET REPORT

Report Title	The Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant Annual Progress Report
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AGENDA STATUS PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	12 November 2014
Key Decision:	No
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Customers and Communities
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Cllr Brandon Eldred
Ward(s)	Non-specific

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This is the second annual report to Cabinet advising of progress on the actions arising from the Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan which have been implemented by the council and its public, community, voluntary and private sector partners, in support of the Armed Forces, since the covenant was approved by Cabinet on 13th February 2013 and by Full Council on 11th March 2013.
- 1.2 This report also advises Cabinet of proposed future actions to be delivered in support of the Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet affirms its continuing support for the Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant and notes progress to date and proposed future actions.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 In May 2011 the Secretary of State for Defence published the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant is intended to be a moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. A key element of it is the Community Covenant which is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. The aim of the Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces in their area and to promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of the issues that they face.
- 3.1.2 For the purposes of the Armed Forces Covenant, Armed forces personnel means a person who is serving in the regular forces or a person who has served in the regular forces within five years of the date of their application for an allocation of social housing under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, and within five years of discharge.
- 3.1.3 It also refers to bereaved spouses and civil partners leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner. It also covers serving former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service.
- 3.1.4 The principle behind the Covenant is that the Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage because of its military service. In some cases, such as the sick, injured or bereaved this means giving consideration to enabling access to public, voluntary or commercial services that civilians do not receive.
- 3.1.5 The Covenant covers issues such as housing, education and welfare support after military service has ended.
- 3.1.6 Although there is not a large military presence in Northampton or the wider county, the council has strong civic links with C Company, The Royal Anglian Regiment (the successors to the Northamptonshire Regiment) and with The 9th/12th Royal Lancers. Both regiments recruit locally and it is likely that such recruits will resettle here once their service has ended.
- 3.1.7 On 3rd October 2012, Cabinet agreed to support the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant. The 3rd October report instructed officers to develop proposals indicating what actions the Council could take to give effect to the principles of the Covenant in Northampton.
- 3.1.8 The Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant was subsequently approved by Cabinet On 13th February 2013 and by Full Council on 11th March 2013.

3.1.9 On 4th March 2013 there was a formal signing ceremony for the Community Covenant when representatives of the Armed Forces, the Council, the charitable and voluntary sector and the civilian community of Northampton added their signatures to the covenant in recognition of their commitment to the Northampton covenant.

3.1.10 The actions and initiatives arising from the Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant, which are being implemented by the council and its partners in support of the armed forces in Northampton, have been incorporated into an action plan.

3.1.11 A multi-agency steering group has been established to keep the action plan under regular review, to manage and monitor its delivery and to add new actions as they are identified and agreed.

3.1.12 The action plan includes activities to deliver against the themes in the covenant, which are housing, health and wellbeing, education & training, access to council services and support, benefits and tax, recognition and assistance.

3.1.13 Key actions that have been completed since the action plan was established include:

- A single point of contact for service personnel with housing enquiries has been identified.
- All customer services staff have been briefed by the Army Engagement Team, as well as representatives from the AFCC Steering Group, Northampton Volunteering Centre and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The Covenant has been promoted to the Public via leaflets and displays in the One Stop Shop.
- All Northampton Borough Council managers received training on the AFCC
- In partnership with Royal British Legion, launched the Christmas Presents for the Armed Forces campaign in our One Stop Shop.
- A page, on Northampton Borough Councils website, has been created, for members of the Armed Forces and their families to access, which advertises the availability of support and services. The link is as follows: www.northampton.gov.uk/communitycovenant
- Housing Allocations Policy has been amended to include additional priority for ex-armed forces personnel.
- 'No Second Night Out' - Introduce new initiatives to tackle rough sleeping amongst ex-Armed Forces personnel.
- Adaptations and disabled facilities grants provided to disabled war veterans.

- Armed Forces have been incorporated within Hate Crime and Discrimination policies and e-learning.
- Awareness raised of war memorials across the Borough - photos on website.
- Funding Application submitted to the WW1 Commemoration fund / grant for the refurbishment of the war memorials within the Borough.
- A programme is in place to identify and make appearance improvements to War graves across the town.

3.1.14 Armed forces events that have taken place in the last 12 months include:

- Armed Forces Day took place on 28th June in conjunction with the Lancers Parade.
- A church service was held in All Saints church to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of WW1.
- We joined the national lights out event by holding a candle lit service on All Saints Plaza.

3.1.15 Forthcoming armed forces events include

- ANZAC Day – 100 year commemoration (25 April 2015)
- VE Day (8th May 2015)
- Armed Forces Day (27th June 2015)
- VJ Day (15th August 2015)

3.2 Choices (Options)

3.2.1 On 13th February 2013, Cabinet approved the Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant and its associated action plan. Cabinet can choose whether it wishes to continue support the covenant.

3.2.2 Cabinet can choose which actions and initiatives it wishes to see implemented in the coming year.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 The Northampton Armed Forces Covenant sets out the council's policy on support and assistance to the Armed Forces in Northampton.

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 Resource implications arising from proposed actions and initiatives will be met from within existing budgets or from monies secured from external funding applications.

4.2.2 A national grant scheme has been established which enables local projects to bid for funding as part of local Community Covenant arrangements. Bids for funding need to be considered by local signatories to a Community Covenant, before then being submitted to the Ministry Of Defence for consideration by their Community Covenant Grant Panel.

4.2.3 The stated aim of the Community Covenant Grant Scheme is 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'.

4.2.5 Consideration will continue to be given to how the national grant scheme can be used to advance the Northampton Armed Forces Covenant.

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report. Legal and professional advice has been sought in relation to specific actions to ensure what is proposed is in accordance with relevant statutory provisions and council policy.

4.4 Equality

4.4.1 The Northampton Armed Forces Covenant makes a positive contribution to the equalities agenda in Northampton for the Armed Forces. All proposed actions and initiatives have been appropriately screened to achieve maximum positive impact for the Armed Forces community and to ensure there are no unintended negative consequences.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

4.5.1 The military and their key community representatives, SSAFA and the Royal British Legion, were consulted on the Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant. The council's key public, community, voluntary and private sector partners have also been consulted.

4.6 How the Report Delivers Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 This report is consistent with the broad aims of the council's Corporate Plan and has the potential to contribute to a wide range of the Council's priority outcomes.

Background Papers

The Armed Forces Covenant – MOD May 2011

Report to Cabinet, 13/2/13 – Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant

Report to Full Council, 11/3/13 – Northampton Armed Forces Community Covenant