
Armed Forces Covenant – Status Report

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	23 May 2024
Portfolio Member:	Cllr Jeff Brooks
Report Author:	Carolyn Richardson
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4544

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and update in relation to the Armed Forces Act 2021 and specifically request that West Berkshire Council sign the Armed Forces Covenant and form an Armed Forces Task and Finish group to ensure ongoing compliance and appropriate support to the military 'family' in the community.

2 Recommendations

It is recommended that Executive:

- (a) Note this report and the ambition of this Council in relation to the planned actions relating to the Armed Forces Covenant and compliance with the Armed Forces Act 2021.
- (b) Approve the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	£25m plus of central government funding was allocated nationally over four years to 2020/2021. No bids have been submitted by West Berkshire Council and therefore there is opportunity to submit bids. Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
Human Resource:	Checks in relation to the HR policies having regard to the Employers Recognition Scheme and other initiatives to be considered.

	Potential active recruitment of military 'leavers' to the Council.			
Legal:	By undertaking the recommendations set out in this report then the Council can be assured of compliance or work to be undertaken to ensure compliance with the legislation.			
Risk Management:	Non-compliance may result in litigation and negative press.			
Property:	None			
Policy:	National policy and legislation by way of the Armed Forces Act 2021 and the Armed Forces Covenant.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			The covenant is intended as a vehicle for partners across West Berkshire to help enable Veterans or Reservists to access health services, particularly mental health services, training and employment opportunities.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			As above
Environmental Impact:				None
Health Impact:	X			By implementing the legislation and the Covenant the health impacts on this community should be reduced.

ICT Impact:		X		Limited – support in setting up an email account
Digital Services Impact:		X		Limited – support in setting up a webpage.
Council Strategy Priorities:		X		
Core Business:		X		
Data Impact:				None
Consultation and Engagement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Stephanie Steevenson, Armed Forces Champion • Alex O'Connor, BCT • Rhys Lewis, BCT • Nick Caprara, Housing; • Rose Carberry, Education; • April Peberdy, Public Health; • Dave Wraight, CFS • Charlotte Martin, HR • Nicola Thomas, Legal; • Sarah Clarke, Service Director Governance & Strategy. • Clare Lawrence, ED Place • Pamela Voss, EMTAS Team Lead 			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Armed Forces Act 2021 (AFA21) came into force in December 2021 which has legal duties for Councils and other bodies to comply with.
- 4.2 This Council has long and proud relationship with the military having signed the Military Community Covenant in 2011, having policies in place for Military Reservists, and ensuring we do not prejudice against the military whether serving, their families or veterans.
- 4.3 Over recent years there have been several changes in relation to the Armed Forces covenant in West Berkshire, and across Berkshire, with the commencement of the AFA21 and the formation of the Royal County of Berkshire Civil Military Partnership Board in June 2022.
- 4.4 A key element of the progress and ambition of this Council is to reaffirm our commitment by the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant. This along with the formation of an Armed Forces Task and Finish Group will allow progress to be made with the action plan and ongoing compliance with the legislation ensured.

5 Supporting Information

Armed Forces Overview

5.1 **Appendix B** to this report provides:

- (a) An overview of the number of veterans and units in West Berkshire.
- (b) The Defence Employers Recognition Scheme, including the current status of this Council.
- (c) The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.
- (d) The Royal County of Berkshire Civil Military Partnership Board which this Council is a member.

5.2 The legislative requirements in relation to the Armed Forces Act 2021 are set out in **Appendix C** along with this Council's current status.

5.3 In late 2023 a report was tabled in relation to the support for the military community living and working, serving and veterans in West Berkshire. At that time an action plan was agreed.

5.4 The current action plan is set out in **Appendix D**.

Armed Forces Covenant

5.5 West Berkshire Council signed the **Community Covenant Partnership** in 2011. More recently, following the commencement of the Armed Forces Act 2021, the Community Covenant Partnership has been superseded by the **Armed Forces Covenant**.

5.6 The Government published the Armed Forces Covenant, as a tri-Service document which expresses the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community.

5.7 The Armed Forces Covenant, the 'Covenant', is a National promise to those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, to be treated fairly. It also aims to encourage charities, local authorities, businesses and communities and individuals to work together with the military to offer support to service personnel and their families as well as reservist and veterans.

5.8 The two principles relating to the Covenant are:

- (a) Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.

- (b) Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

5.9 Based on the above principles and to reaffirm our commitment to the military it is recommended that the Council sign the Armed Forces Covenant, which subject to approval will take place in June/July 2024.

Armed Forces Champion & Council Coordination

5.10 This Council has had an Armed Forces Champion for many years with the current Champion being Cllr Stephanie Steevenson.

5.11 The Councils current lead officer to the Armed Forces Champion is the Services Manager for Emergency Planning.

5.12 It has been agreed that going forward the Building Communities Together (BCT) team will be more involved and will lead following a transition period.

5.13 In addition, the requirement of the Armed Forces Act 2021 focuses on Housing, Health and Education therefore wider than one person and wider than Emergency Planning and Building Communities Together.

5.14 As a result, a local Armed Forces Task & Finish Group is being put in place to progress the actions and respond to any issues more coherently.

5.15 Over and above the compliance with the legislation a representative from Human Resources will be included in the T&F Group in order to engage more effectively with service leavers in relation to working in the Council.

5.16 The Task and Finish Group will therefore include representatives from the following services and agencies:

- (a) Children and Family
- (b) Education
- (c) Housing
- (d) Public Health
- (e) Human Resources
- (f) Other Services as necessary
- (g) BOB ICS
- (h) Local Military Units
- (i) Service Charities - as necessary to represent veterans groups.

5.17 This T&F Group will provide an annual progress report to the Executive.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1 This Council has a lot to offer and be proud of in relation to support to the military in the area by way of Military Champions, policies for Reservists and support to events such as Remembrance Day, Armed Forces Day, SERFCA engagement events and visits to military establishments.
- 6.2 In order to progress further and more effectively it is therefore recommended that the Executive:
- (a) Note this report and the ambition of this Council in relation to the planned actions relating to the Armed Forces Covenant and compliance with the Armed Forces Act 2021.
 - (b) Approve the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant.

7 Other options considered

- 7.1 Do nothing – this is not considered an option due to the legislative requirements.
- 7.2 Limit the action plan, however this may expose the Council by way of actively supporting the military community but would be less impactful on staff time.

8 Appendices

Appendix A Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix B Armed Forces Overview

Appendix C Armed Forces Act 2021 Duties and Compliance April 2024

Appendix D Armed Forces Action Plan

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only
-

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Appendix A Equity Impact Assessment

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Place, Development & Regulation
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Proposed signing of Armed Forces Covenant and formation of an Armed Forces Partnership.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	New
<p>Summary of assessment</p> <p>Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).</p>	<p>By signing the AFC and forming an Armed Forces Partnership it is aimed to ensure that the Council complies with the Armed Forces Act 2021 the principles of which are to aim to ensure:</p> <p>(a) Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.</p> <p>(b) Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.</p>
Completed By	Carolyn Richardson, Service Manager
Authorised By	
Date of Assessment	15/4/2024

Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p>Context / Background</p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>Proposed signing of Armed Forces Covenant and formation of an Armed Forces Partnership</p>
<p>Proposals</p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>As detailed in the report this is to ensure compliance with the Armed Forces Act 2021.</p>
<p>Evidence / Intelligence</p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<p>Consultation has taken place across services and other Councils in relation to the potential impact.</p>
<p>Alternatives considered / rejected</p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an</p>	<p>As per the report.</p>

option.

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	X		<input type="checkbox"/>				
Disability	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Gender Reassignment	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Pregnancy & Maternity	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Race	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Religion or Belief	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Areas of deprivation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Displaced communities	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Care experienced people	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Armed Forces Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensuing compliance with the AFC21		Council	

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	N/A
Person Responsible for Review	N/A
Authorised By	N/A

Please now forward this completed form to Pamela Voss, Equality and Diversity Officer (pamela.voss@westberks.gov.uk), for publication on the WBC website