

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To inform Executive of the proposal for Warwick District Council to enter into an Armed Forces Community Covenant (attached at Appendix One) for the wider Warwickshire area.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Executive is recommended to become a partner with Warwickshire County Council and others by entering into an Armed Forces Community Covenant (Appendix One) for the benefit of the wider sub region (Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire).

3 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 In mid-2011, the Secretary of State for Defence issued the Armed Forces Covenant; an expression of the moral obligation the Government and the nation owe to those who serve or have served in our Armed Forces and their families.
- 3.2 In tandem with the Government's Armed Force Covenant, the Ministry of Defence have proposed that on a local level, local authorities and the local Armed Forces Communities enter into an Armed Forces Community Covenant; a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. The Community Covenant is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant on a local level and encourage local communities to support the Service community in their area and promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community. It is a little recognised fact that these communities extend across various parts of the West Midlands and consist not only of our Armed Forces Personnel but also include their wider families.
- 3.3 In support of the Community Covenant scheme, the Ministry of Defence has established the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, to deliver financial support to local projects that strengthen ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. Entering into a Community Covenant is a pre-requisite for accessing the Community Covenant Grant Scheme.
- 3.4 To date, only a few local authorities, have entered into Community Covenants and the Council would like to join those authorities at the forefront by joining in a Community Covenant arrangement led by Warwickshire County Council.
- 3.5 Established arrangements exist in the wider Warwickshire area which benefits from the Warwickshire Veterans Partnership; administered by Warwickshire Probation and representing a range of local public services, voluntary and charitable bodies and individuals providing support or representation to the Service community and their families.

- 3.6 Working together with the Warwickshire Veterans Partnership and other local authorities in the wider-Warwickshire area, the Council would be able to partner with Warwickshire County Council who are in a prime position to lead on the agreement of a Community Covenant for the area. This will also enable the Warwickshire Veterans Partnership, and other local authorities and community groups in the wider area, to access funding under the Community Covenant Grant Scheme.
- 3.7 Under the Grant Scheme, £30 million will be made available over the next four years. Grant applications are invited for sums between £100 to £250,000 per project (although bids for larger amounts may be considered in exceptional circumstances).
- 3.8 Gaining access to the Grant Scheme will provide a real opportunity for bodies noted above to bid for funding to support complementary projects. It is intended that Warwick District Council will form part of the wider Warwickshire bid.
- 3.9 It is proposed that the Law and Governance Business Unit at Warwickshire County Council will lead and support the Warwickshire Veterans Partnership in agreeing and entering into a Community Covenant for the wider sub region.
- 3.10 It is envisaged that the Community Covenant would engage the following as parties to it: the three military services, the local District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire, Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, veterans associations, voluntary and charitable bodies and individuals, local health authorities and the private sector.
- 3.11 Initially it is not anticipated that the covenant will have a direct impact on services. However, this may change as the partnership evolves. The objectives of the partnership's work will be to identify service needs for members of the armed forces on a sub regional basis and raise awareness amongst the armed services community of existing service provision. The existing Customer Services, including the One Stop Shops, is believed to meet the current needs of the armed forces community in Warwick District.
- 3.12 Warwick District Council (WDC) policies may have a positive indirect impact on the covenant. For example, within WDCs current Housing Allocations Policy, there exist mechanisms in which to afford a higher level of priority to those leaving the armed forces that have a housing need than would otherwise have been the case. Any further enhancements to the existing provisions will be considered as part of the imminent review of the allocations policy and this will include observance of the principles set out in this covenant.
- 3.13 Subject to approval a signing ceremony will be arranged on 30th June 2012 to coincide with National Armed Forces Day.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 A decision not to enter into the Community Covenant could infer that that Council was not supportive of the Armed Forces Community working and residing in the sub-region. It could suggest that Warwick District Council was not proactively recognising the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community in contravention of the Government's first duty to defend the realm.

5 BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications at this stage.