

Title: Armed Forces Community Covenant
Lead Officer: Bernadette Allen
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jim Sinnott
Wards of the District directly affected: All

| Approvals required | Date | Name |
|---|--|------------------|
| Portfolio Holder | 23/09/24 | Cllr Jim Sinnott |
| Finance | 16/09/24 | Andrew Rollins |
| Legal Services | | N/A |
| Chief Executive | 16/09/24 | Chris Elliott |
| Director of Climate Change | 16/09/24 | Dave Barber |
| Head of Service(s) | 12/09/24 | Lisa Barker |
| Section 151 Officer | 16/09/24 | Andrew Rollins |
| Monitoring Officer | 16/09/24 | Graham Leach |
| Leadership Co-ordination Group | 30/09/24 | LCG |
| Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council? | Yes/ No Recommendation to: Cabinet Committee | |
| Contrary to Policy / Budget framework? | No/Yes | |
| Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)? | No/Yes, Paragraphs: | |
| Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)? | No/Yes, Forward Plan item 1.052 | |
| Accessibility Checked? | Yes/No | |

Summary

The report is seeking approval from Cabinet to re-sign the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That Cabinet re-commits the Council to the principles and spirit of the Armed Forces Community Covenant and joins Warwickshire County Council and other partners in the Armed Forces signing event (see appendix 1 for detail on the principles)
 - (2) That Cabinet approves £24000 from the Community Projects Reserve to support events relating to the remembering of conflict and the Armed Services to cover the years 2025-6, 2026-7 and 2027-8. A budget of £8000 will be allocated to each of these years
-

1 Reasons for the Recommendation

- 1.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives. Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether a 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 or commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially those who have given the most such as the injured and the bereaved.
 - 1.2 The Covenant was established in its current form in 2011 and since then thousands of different organisations including businesses, local authorities, universities, and charities have chosen to sign a pledge to honor the Covenant and support their Armed Forces Community. In 2012 Local Authorities across Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant Pledge to their support for the Armed Forces Community. As a result of the Council signing the Covenant an Elected Member Armed Forces Champion was appointed and an Armed Covenant Strategic Partnership and a co-ordination was formed to oversee activity on work to support the Covenant and share good practice.
 - 1.3 Building on the good progress of the Covenant, the Armed Forces Act 2021 amended the Armed Forces Act 2006 to create the following legal obligation on specified bodies in all four nations of the UK. This is the Armed Forces Duty which states:

'When a specified body exercises a relevant function, it must have due regard to: (a) the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces; (b) the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces, and (c) the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.'
- This legal obligation applies to specified bodies whether or not they have signed the Covenant Pledge.

- 1.4 By signing the Pledge, it provides public recognition of the Council's commitment to its Armed Forces Community and activity to ensure they face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public or commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially those who have given the most such as the injured and the bereaved.
- 1.5 The Council has participated in the National Armed Forces Day for a few years. The Council have worked with local military units to plan and deliver a Community Fun Day. Armed Forces is an opportunity to build awareness of the unique sacrifice that our Armed Forces continue to make or have made to the nation. Also due to issue of pride, many in the Armed Forces Community do not ask for help and struggle in silence. However, it has been proved that not only does Armed Forces Day provide an opportunity to say thank you, but it also builds awareness of the support made available locally for example services that RBL, SSAFA, Help the Heroes, the Veterans Contact Point and other local voluntary and community services aimed at providing support. The 2024-Armed Forces Day was one of the biggest and best in the region where over 2500 people attended, and the Council should build on this success. By the Council agreeing to on-going financial support, this effectively demonstrates commitment to the remembering those that are serving/ have serviced in the Armed Forces.
- 1.6 The signing event, for the Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant, will take place on Wednesday 6th November at 11.30 and is being held at Shire Hall.

2 Alternative Options

- 2.1 The Cabinet could decide not to sign the pledge and not commit to the spirit of the pledge. However regardless the Council has a legal obligation under the Armed Forces Duty whether or not they have signed the Covenant Pledge.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Act 2021 introduced a new statutory requirement for some public sector services include NHS (Health provision) and Local Authorities (Housing and Education), to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. The new legislation aims to prevent service personnel, veterans and their families from being disadvantaged when accessing essential services.
- 3.2 The Armed Forces Covenant Duty has the following legal obligation. When a specified body exercises a relevant function, it must have due regard to:
 - a. the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces.
 - b. the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces and,
 - c. the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.
- 3.3 Sub-paragraphs (a) to (c) are a summary of the Armed Forces Covenant. The Duty builds on – but is distinct from – the pre-existing voluntary Covenant pledge. This legal obligation applies to all specified bodies, when exercising relevant functions, whether or not that body has signed the Covenant pledge.

In relation to the Council, it is linked to the Housing function.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 In 2024-25 an allocation of £8,000 was made in the budget to support Armed Forces activity.
- 4.2 This report is seeking to approval for £24000 from the Community Projects Reserve to support events relating to the remembering of conflict and the Armed Services to cover the years 2025-6, 2026-7 and 2027-8. A budget of £8000 will be allocated to each of these years This is to align with other annual events that the Council deliver such as ECO Fest.
- 4.3 There is currently an unallocated balance of £62,000 within the Community Projects Reserve.

5 Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy which sets three strategic aims for the organisation. Each proposed decision should set out how the report contributes to the delivery of these strategic aims. If it does not contribute to these aims or has a negative effect on them the report should explain why that is the case.
- 5.2 Delivering valued, sustainable services – the commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant can help to ensure that the Armed Forces Day are aware of the services provided by the Council and ensure that they have access to much needed support services. It will help to ensure the sustainability of resources aimed at supporting the health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces Community.
- 5.3 Low cost, low carbon energy across the district – through the work with the Armed Forces Community, especially for those leaving service. We can work with the community to build awareness of the importance of being able to contribute to the ambition of the Council to become a low cost, low carbon energy district. .
- 5.4 Creating vibrant, safe and healthy communities of the future – the whole ethos of the work with the Armed Forces Community is to ensure that those who are serving, have served and their families, have equal access to services. Due to the unique nature of their service often the Armed Forces Community do not get equal access to services. By committing to work around the Armed Forces Covenant the Council can demonstrate its commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces Community,

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no implications for environmental or climate change.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and the analysis identified a number of equality implications for the Armed Forces Community which include; more likely that older people will be impacted, veterans who have a disability as a result of their service and a number of veterans identified their religion as being other.
- 7.2 In addition, there is evidence that due to unique nature of the Armed Forces that that they are often disadvantaged in accessing both public and commercial services.

8 Data Protection

8.1 There are no data protection implications.

9 Health and Wellbeing

9.1 The rationale for the Council signing the Armed Forces Covenant is to improve the quality of life of those that are serving, have served and their families. By signposting and linking the Armed Forces Community to financial inclusion services can improve the capacity and resilience of that community and helps to reduce the pressure on other public services provided by the Council and its partners. The investment also helps expand the capacity of VCS organisations and improve the wellbeing and self-reliance of individuals

9.2 By providing access to support will also help expand the capacity of this community to improve the wellbeing and self-reliance of individuals

10 Risk Assessment

10.1 There is a risk that the Armed Forces Community continue to have unequal access to services and that their needs are not addressed by the service provision.

10.2 There is a risk that the reduced support for the Armed Forces Community at this current time would be perceived unfavourably and detrimentally affect the Council's reputation. Care has been taken to ensure that the investment in the voluntary and community sector grants/ service level agreements focus resources where they are most needed, including addressing issues that were increasing in importance.

10.3 Service providers, as part of the grants/ service provide evidence of the positive impact they achieve for the Armed Forces Community and as with the review of outcomes the council can be reassured of evidenced positive impacts. If the proposal was not agreed the Council will be unable to impose this requirement on the voluntary and community sector grant/ service level agreements.

11 Consultation

11.1 The Warwick District Council Armed Forces Champion (Councillor Redford) has been consulted and is keen that the District Council re-signs the Covenant and commits to the work with the Armed Forces Community.

Background papers: None

Supporting documents: None