

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

12 APRIL 2012

SUBJECT:	<i>ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>CHIEF EXECUTIVE</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>CLLR JEFF GREEN, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</i>
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Wirral Council recognises the enormous contribution which our Armed Forces have made and continue to make to the safety and security of the Nation. The purpose of this report is to further demonstrate that recognition by seeking Cabinet approval for the 'signing up' to a Wirral Armed Forces Community Covenant.
- 1.2 This report also seeks Cabinet approval for the nominations of Armed Forces Champions at both Elected Member and Officer levels.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 An Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level. The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Armed Services community in their area and nurture understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces.
- 2.2 Wirral Council has a proud history of honouring the Armed Forces with some recent examples being the funding a Wirral Veterans Contact Centre. This is a unique service staffed three days a week by volunteering veterans and offer other returning service personnel, veterans or their families to come in and discuss any relevant matters with people who have undergone similar experiences and signpost the to the relevant agency or service provider. To date the Contact Centre has assisted over 150 veterans. In addition to the Contact Centre and in recognition of their recent tours to Afghanistan the Council has also agreed to bestow the Freedom of the Borough to 2 local Squadrons (234 (Wirral) Transport Squadron, Royal Logistics Corps and 107 (Lancashire and Chester) Field Squadron, Royal Engineers (Volunteers). This Honour will be celebrated with a march through the Borough on Saturday 21st April. A further example of the recognition the Council holds all our veterans and service personnel is the significant budget allocation for the recent extensive restoration of the war memorials across the Borough. It is vitally important that even in these austere times

we continue to remember and honour those that have given their lives for our freedom.

- 2.3 In October 2011 a letter was received from Brigadier Nick Fitzgerald, Commander of 42 (NW) BDE offering support to Local Authorities in the North West wishing to develop a Covenant. It was recommended in the letter from the Brigadier that an Armed Forces Champion be appointed. Mark Camborne the Health, Safety & Resilience Manager was appointed as officer Champion on an interim basis as he works regularly with the Armed Forces through his Resilience work and he has been leading on the development of the Wirral Veterans Contact Centre.
- 2.4 Upon receipt of the letter Mark met with Major Mark Austin from 156 (NW) Tpt Regt RLC (V) and discussed what should be included in a Community Covenant and the document at Appendix 1 was provided as a good example. Whilst this draft Covenant is clearly in its initial stages, it is very much based upon others that are in development across the North West. The Covenant is very much a statement of intent. The model is based upon a brief description of mutual support with a commitment to develop detailed initiatives and outcomes at a later date as mutually agreed by all partners.
- 2.5 Many people have become involved in supporting the Service community through Service Charities, or participating in Armed Forces Day, Remembrance Day and other military events. They have shown their support through fundraising and open days, attending homecoming parades and repatriation ceremonies and offering commercial discounts. Even simple demonstrations of support, such as displaying the Armed Forces Day window sticker in cars and businesses have had a positive effect and boosted the morale of our Armed Forces community.
- 2.6 The Community Covenant seeks to build on this local level of support, and its main aims are to:
 - Encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas;
 - Nurture understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community;
 - Recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces community;
 - Encourage activities which help integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life; and
 - To encourage the Armed Forces Community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.
- 2.7 As part of the commitment to the Covenant the Armed Forces would also like to see the establishment of an Armed Forces Steering Group (or Forum) to coordinate and implement the support between the Armed Forces and the community within Wirral. Following discussions with the military and also with other Councils who have already established similar groups, it is generally accepted that the Local Authority are best placed to coordinate these forums. On average these forums meet three or four times

a year and progress reports are delivered via the Chief Executive and the Brigade Commander on an annual basis.

- 2.8 The Armed Forces would like to see the Covenant signed by April 2012, however there is some degree of flexibility in the timescales providing it is demonstrated that the Council and its partners are working towards the Covenant being developed and signed.
- 2.9 Clearly there is more work to be done around the development of the Covenant. If support is given for establishing an Armed Forces Community Forum here on Wirral, then some initial questions that to be addressed are (not exhaustive):
- The principles, objectives and actions arising from the Covenant – are they the right ones and how can themes be delivered in practice?
 - Which organisations / individuals should be the signatories of the Covenant?
 - How should the (numerous) Veterans Organisations be represented?
 - To what extent the Council and its Partners would want to promote particular services or coordinate activities targeted at ex service personnel to deliver the principles and objectives above?
 - Determine the terms of reference and the membership of the Wirral Armed Forces Community Forum
- 2.10 At present this report is only seeking Cabinet endorsement for the signing of the Draft Covenant. An official, public signing will take place as close as possible to Armed Forces Day on the 30th June 2012. This will allow the initial Forum to have met and give suitable time for Partners to consider whether they wish to also sign up on that date.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 Community covenants have already attracted significant interest and this is likely to increase with the recent announcement of the Armed Forces redundancies which is likely to result in an increased number of ex-service personnel resettling back in the North west.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no other options as a result of this report.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There is no need for consultation as a result of this report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 Voluntary, community and faith groups, and also relevant charities will be invited to participate in the drafting of the Covenant.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

7.1 It is anticipated that any costs associated with delivering the Covenant will be contained within our existing resources. If this position should change this would be reflected in a future report to Cabinet.

7.2 In order to support the Armed Forces Covenant the MOD have established a Community Covenant Grant Fund. If Council were minded to support the Covenant this would enable applications to the fund to be made.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review is attached – <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/technical-services-0>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no carbon reduction implications as a result of this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no planning and community safety implications as a result of this report.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 That Cabinet note the report and:

- Endorse the intention to sign up to the Draft Armed Forces Community Covenant on Armed Forces Day the 30th June 2012 and provide any comments on the draft appended to this report;
- Consider nominating an Elected Member Armed Forces Champion;
- Endorse the recommendation that the Health, Safety & Resilience Manager continue as the Armed Forces Champion; and
- Request that the Armed Forces Champion establish a Wirral Armed Forces & Veterans Forum;
- Agree to progress being reported via an annual report as detailed in paragraph 2.7.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 To support the integration within the location and the community of all members of the Armed Forces and veterans.

13.2 To demonstrate continuing support within Wirral for our Armed Forces and Veterans.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Wirral Armed Forces Community Covenant (Draft)

REFERENCE MATERIAL

'Honouring the Armed Service Community' LgiU. Available from following link:
<https://member.lgiu.org.uk/whatwedo/Publications/Pages/armedservicecommunity.aspx>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
None	