

Communities Committee

Report title:	Norfolk Armed Forces Community Covenant Strategy and Action Plan
Date of meeting:	6 March 2019
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact	
<p>The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary commitment by a local authority to support members of their local armed forces community. Its aim is to ensure that members of the armed forces community receive the support they need in their local communities in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice.</p>	
Executive summary	
<p>This paper provides Communities Committee with the year-end progress report on Norfolk's independent Armed Forces Covenant Board's Strategy and Action Plan 2017/2019. It also sets out the Board's forward strategy for 2019/2022.</p> <p>In summary, progress to date has been good. In 2018, Norfolk's armed forces community announced to the press that Norfolk was the UK's most armed forces-friendly county. The majority of actions within the Board's action plan are being delivered to timescale and the Board is pleased with progress.</p>	
Recommendations:	
<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Endorse the scope of the Board's forward strategy for 2019/22 (Section 4).	

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) launched the National Armed Forces Military Covenant in June 2011 in recognition of the contribution and sacrifice service personnel make for their country.
- 1.2. The Government's expectations of local authorities were summarised in its policy paper published in 2015 to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community "have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen":
- 1.3. The MOD published its Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report in December 2018, demonstrating its on-going support to the armed forces community. A summary is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant

- 2.1 Set up in 2012, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant (NAFC) is a well-established part of the national Covenant programme. It is overseen by the independent Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board. Details of membership and an overview of the armed forces community in Norfolk are attached at Appendix 2.

3. Progress on the Board's current action plan for 2017/2019

- 3.1 The Board agreed its current strategy and action plan for 2017/2019 in March 2017. Communities Committee received a mid-year update in November 2018.
- 3.2 In summary, progress to date has been good. In 2018, Norfolk's armed forces community announced to the press that Norfolk was the UK's most armed forces-friendly county.
- 3.3 Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Board is pleased with current progress to achieve the Board's action plan, which has included some important developments in understanding gaps in dental provision in West Norfolk. It is hoped that this work will benefit not just the armed forces community in the area, but also the settled community.
- 3.4 The majority of actions within the action plan are being delivered to timescale. Some minor delays will be addressed in 2019/22. The delays are not significant.
- 3.5 Norfolk County Council, as part of the authority's commitment to the Covenant, is making good progress preparing to submit its application for a Silver Level Award under the MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (due by 1 May). The portfolio of evidence will demonstrate the Council is supporting the armed forces community in a variety of ways through its Guaranteed Interview Policy, advertising jobs on MOD recognised web sites, and conducting a staff survey to find out more about its own armed forces community. Staff are shaping how the Council will mark Armed Forces Week in June 2019.
- 3.6 Additional information on the workstreams, projects and initiatives supported by the Covenant Board in 2018/2019 are attached at Appendix 3.

4. The Board's draft strategy and action plan for 2019/22

- 4.1 The Board is seeking to create a stronger, more ambitious strategy and action plan for 2019/22, to position it to meet the expectations of Government and respond to changes in the UK Armed Forces. To do this, the Board has used the output from the Armed Forces Covenant Conference in June 2018.
- 4.2 The Board's proposed forward strategy and action plan for 2019/2022 falls under four objectives:
- **Building Communities:** Promote understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant among the serving community, local authorities and the civilian community, and develop the local offer.
 - **Health, Welfare and Housing:** Improve understanding and promote the health and welfare support available to the armed forces community.
 - **Employment and Skills:** Work with businesses in Norfolk to develop employment opportunities for the armed forces community and promote the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge.

- **Education:** Ensure children and young people from service families in Norfolk are supported to achieve a good education and build resilience and aspiration to achieve what they want to in life.

4.3 Work is underway by the Board to finalise the action plan for 2019/22 and scope projects to enable the Board to successfully deliver its revised forward strategy.

4.4 The Board will agree the draft action plan on 20 March 2019.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Norfolk County Council currently makes available £20k of funding annually and 1 FTE officer to directly support the work of the Board.

5.2 Breckland District Council has agreed to contribute an additional £5k per annum towards the work of the Covenant, for a period of four years.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- **endorse the scope of the Board's forward strategy for 2019/22 (Section 4).**

Officer Contact

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Update on the national legal and policy context

- 1.1. The MOD published its seventh Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report in December 2018. In it, the MOD announced significantly improved support to those serving, but also for their families and for veterans.
- 1.2. For those in active service, the MOD has launched the Combat Stress 24-hour Mental Health Helpline and the relocation of the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre to a purpose-built facility at Stanford Hall, Nottinghamshire.
- 1.3. For serving personnel and their families transitioning out of military life, the MOD has created a new Tri-Service Defence Holistic Transition Policy. This is a significant change in policy recognising the disruption caused to families and their careers. The Spousal Employment Scheme facilitates access to vocational training and development opportunities.
- 1.4. The MOD has acknowledged the strain experienced by local education authorities across the UK caused by the ongoing draw-down from Germany and the rapid redeployment rate at some military bases. In response, it has made an additional £5M available through the Education Support Grant. The Department for Education's Common Transfer File has also been expanded to improve the information available on service children when they move between schools.
- 1.5. During 2018, the MOD launched the Veterans' Trauma Network and NHS Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service for those experiencing military-attributable complex mental health problems.
- 1.6. The MOD is currently consulting on "A Strategy for our Veterans", a long-awaited strategy discussion document focused on twenty outcomes it would like to achieve by 2028. Norfolk's Board is represented in these discussions.
- 1.7. Work on the Future Accommodation Model continues and as part of this, the MOD is considering sub-letting its property to 'screened' civilians. The MOD is also consulting local authorities on new statutory guidance for social housing allocations and the armed forces, which NCC will respond to in March.
- 1.8. The MOD also reported the 3,000th signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant. A report on an independent review of the Covenant in Business is awaited.
- 1.9. These issues are reflected in the Norfolk Covenant Board's ambitions to address: support for those transitioning out of military life; assistance for the local education authority and schools to support service children; and improved signposting to mental health services for serving personnel, veterans and their families. The Board will also be interested to consider the MOD's Community Action Group self-assessment tool and e-learning package to help local authorities embed the Covenant in their organisation.

Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Board

1. Norfolk's Covenant Board is an independent multi-agency partnership chaired by Norfolk's Armed Forces Commissioner. The Board meets twice a year to oversee delivery of agreed priorities and actions. The Board membership includes Cllr Kiddie as the NCC Armed Forces Member Champion.
2. The Board reports annually on progress to Communities Committee each March.
3. The membership of the Board is made up of:
 - Armed Forces Commissioner (Chairman).
 - Norfolk County Council; Councillor Keith Kiddie.
 - District Council representatives (x2);
 - Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen (Breckland Council),
 - Councillor Elizabeth Nockolds (Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk).
 - Representatives from the Armed Forces (x4);
 - Major Jerome Tyson (British Army).
 - Major Gavin Rushmere (British Army Reservists).
 - Wing Commander Stewart Geary (RAF).
 - Commodore David Elford, OBE, ADC (Royal Navy).
 - Representatives from national Armed Forces charities and family federations (x3);
 - Hugh King, Royal British Legion,
 - Kevin Pellatt, The Armed Forces Charity SSAFA;
 - Lisa Thipthrop, RAF Families Federation.
 - Representative for Reservist Forces and Cadets; Jamie Athill.
 - Job Centre Plus armed forces lead; Mark Goldsmith.
 - NHS representative in Norfolk; Derek Holesworth, Commissioning Manager.
 - NHS England (Midlands and East); Ann Berry, Senior Armed Forces Commissioning Manager.
 - Representative for skills & employment; Jan Feeney, Norfolk County Council.
 - Housing representative; Chris Haystead (Norwich City Council).
 - MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme; Ivor Bartrum.
 - Education representative: Kevin Blogg, Norfolk County Council.
 - Adult Social Services representative: Craig Chalmers, Norfolk County Council.

Norfolk's Armed Forces Community

4. Norfolk has a large armed forces community, consisting of those currently serving and their families, reservists, those who have served and military charities. Norfolk is home to operational bases at RAF Marham and Robertson Barracks at Swanton Morley, as well as the Stanford Training Area.
5. There are around 2,300 serving personnel and their families based in Norfolk plus an additional 380 civilian workers (MOD statistics April 2018). An additional 80,000 serving personnel use the Stanford Training Area (STANTA) each year. There are over 1,000 children from armed forces families. Norfolk has an active cadet force of over 2,000 young people.

6. MOD statistics show 41,000 veterans living in Norfolk, and as of 31 October 2017 figures show that 8,843 residents in Norfolk were in receipt of pensions / compensation under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), War Pension Scheme (WPS) and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS).
7. Specific to Norfolk, it was previously reported to this Committee that an expansion programme is underway at RAF Marham to enable it to operate the new F-35 Lightning fighter jet. The Station has received nine jets to date and an increase in both RAF and Royal Navy personnel for the Lightning Force. The Station is seeing a marked reduction in the Tornado Force as the jets are taken out of use by 31 March 2019.
8. Under its Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, the MOD announced Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Trust has been awarded a Gold Level Award in recognition of its employment support to those who have served. This is the first Gold Level Award received in Norfolk. A Silver Level Award was given to The College of East Anglia.

Progress on the Board's current action plan for 2017/2019

1. The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant comprises of three strategic priorities supported by an action plan, agreed annually and monitored by the Covenant Board.
2. The following paragraphs provide a brief update on the three main workstreams, within the current action plan:
 - Dental Services in West Norfolk - The Board continues to support RAF Marham with its request for improved access to dental services for serving families. Research carried out by HealthWatch Norfolk into the effectiveness of dental service provision for all communities in West Norfolk showed that both the civilian and serving family populations struggle to find dentists and receive timely treatment.
 - At the Board's suggestion and with Communities Committee's agreement, the issue of poor access to dental services was taken up by the Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) in April and May respectively. Having confirmed at HOSC there is under-provision in the West, the NHS, RAF Marham and the Covenant Board are working together to explore opportunities for addressing the issues raised.
 - World War 1 Fund - 2018 marks the conclusion of events to commemorate the centenary of the end of World War 1 across the country. In 2014 the Covenant Board established a fund to assist communities with this commemoration. This year was the final year of the grant being available and many communities had the chance to benefit. Eighty-four grants were made for a range of community events, local history research projects, educational activities, new memorials, and the refurbishment of existing memorials. A review of the impact of the Fund will be undertaken later this year once all the projects have been completed.
3. Other initiatives supported by the Board include:
 - 2018 was the 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force and Norfolk marked it with many community and local business events and RAF Marham's own Families' and Friends' Day.
 - The expansion and investment programme underway at RAF Marham persists at phenomenal pace to enable it to operate the new F-35b Lightning fighter jet. The Station has received 9 jets to date and an increase in both RAF and Royal Navy personnel for the Lightning Force. The Station is seeing a steep reduction in the Tornado Force as the jets are taken out of use by 31 March 2019.
 - The 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards based at Robertson Barracks, Swanton Morley continue to sustain six-monthly deployments to Poland. The Council helped support the base's Welfare Office apply successfully for MOD Covenant Trust funding to refurbish the play area of Noah's Ark Pre-School. The QDGs will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the regiment in Cardiff in the summer of 2019.