

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION, LIBRARIES AND LOCALISM CABINET PANEL**

**THURSDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2017 AT 10.00AM**

**HERTFORDSHIRE ARMED FORCES COVENANT – UPDATE REPORT**

*Report of the Assistant Director of Customer Engagement and Libraries*

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**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. To provide the Education, Libraries and Localism Cabinet Panel with an update on the progress with the Hertfordshire's Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. Hertfordshire launched one of the first covenants in the country in July 2012.

- 2.2 The aims of the Covenant are:

- to ensure that veterans and those in the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged in accessing services;
- that the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community are recognised and remembered; and
- to encourage the integration of service life into civilian life.

- 2.3 The Armed Forces Covenant Board is responsible for delivering the aims of the Covenant and meets bi-annually. Membership of the AFC Board comprises of representatives from the:

- Armed Forces Tri-Services;
- The Commanding Officer of the Northwood Headquarters;
- Representatives of 254 Medical Regiment;
- Families Federations of the Army, Navy and Air Force;
- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA);
- Royal British Legion (RBL);
- Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee (VAPC);

- The County Council and all of the County's District and Borough Councils; and
- Third sector bodies.

### **3 Recommendation**

3.1 The Panel is invited to note the contents of this report.

### **4 Background**

4.1 Hertfordshire is not a garrisoned county but is home to the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters in Northwood and 254 Medical Regiment reserves base in Hitchin. The Commanding Officers of both sit on the Covenant Board.

4.2 Northwood has some 2,000 active personnel, often on 2-3 year postings from the UK and overseas with approximately 500 civil servants working there too. Other regular forces may be resident in the county but currently posted elsewhere.

4.3 Estimated number of veterans living in Hertfordshire is approximately 39,000 based on the 2015 Defence Statistics Annual Survey. There are currently 231 children of military families attending Hertfordshire schools.

### **5 Progress Update**

5.1 The Covenant Board's work is structured under three themes:

- Fair Access to Services
- Community Engagement
- Celebrating and Honouring

5.2 This report outlines progress made on each of these thematic headings.

### **6 Fair Access to services**

6.1 As part of the Hertfordshire Year of Mental Health, the Board worked with the Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, to develop knowledge and raise awareness on the mental health issues affecting veterans. The Trust offered training to staff to ensure that national best practice is taken into account when delivering services.

6.2 In partnership with the three Clinical Commissioning Groups covering the county, and the Royal British Legion, a countywide poster campaign (at **Appendix A** to this report) was launched on Remembrance Day in November 2015 to encourage veterans to register their status as such with their local GP surgery. This aims to ensure that veterans receive appropriate signposting to priority NHS care services for conditions related to their military service. The information recorded will help to inform future planning of services for veterans.

- 6.3 Following on from this work, a Covenant project group was established at the Mount Prison in Bovingdon to ensure that veterans serving as prisoners can gain access (whilst in prison and on their release), to specialist support and services in relation to their military service.
- 6.4 The Board continuously seeks opportunities to raise awareness of the health and wellbeing of veterans, this has been demonstrated by stating the needs of veterans in the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Joint Strategic Needs assessments.
- 6.5 The Board recognises the need for a consistent approach to accessing housing advice across Hertfordshire for all veterans, reservists and armed forces personnel and their families. All district and borough councils now recognise this group in their housing allocation policies and award relative priority and make explicit their commitment to the armed forces in any communication.
- 6.6 A training programme was developed and delivered in May 2017 to housing and customer service advisors of county and district councils. The programme is designed to heighten awareness of the Covenant principles and the type of support available to veterans, armed forces personnel and their families when settling into civilian life.
- 6.7 A uniform approach to the disregard of War Disablement Pensions when calculating entitlement to Housing and Council Tax Benefit has also been adopted by all district councils. Streamlining the application process for Disabled Facilities Grants across the county is being explored in response to feedback from veteran charities. The aim is to achieve a more efficient and effective service.
- 6.8 From a Hertfordshire County Council perspective, in January 2016 Cabinet approved a policy change to Hertfordshire's care charging policy to allow war veterans from pre-2005 conflicts to retain all of their War Disablement Pensions, and not take into account War Disablement Pensions when calculating their contribution towards the cost of their social care.

## **7 Community Engagement**

- 7.1 The Covenant Board have been honouring and supporting troops serving abroad, by running an annual Schools Christmas Competition. This was run for the fourth year in 2016. The competition allows pupils from Hertfordshire primary schools to produce pictures on a certain theme. The 2016 pictures were judged by officers on board HMS St. Albans. Previously, pictures were sent to troops in Sierra Leone (2015) and Afghanistan (2014).
- 7.2 The 2016 competition saw over 1,000 entries. At a special assembly in January 2017 the winning school, Garden Fields JMI in St Albans

received £400 in vouchers, courtesy of the County Council's corporate partner, Ringway. The school also received a plaque from a representative of HMS St. Albans and trophies for the two winning pupils (the winning picture is attached to **Appendix B** to this report). Due to the success of the competition in having a wide impact on local communities, the Board has decided to re-run the competition this year. RAF Henlow in view of the approaching RAF centenary has come forward as a sponsor and will also judge the top 20 entries.

- 7.3 For the third year running, the Covenant Board exhibited the achievements of the Community Covenant partnership at the Hertfordshire County Show. The show welcomed over 33,000 visitors proving an ideal platform to raise awareness of the partnership's commitment to the armed forces. The exhibition was hosted at a stand within the Military Tent.
- 7.4 The Covenant partnership has been successful in bidding for funding from the national Covenant Grant Fund; the Board has supported the following bids:
- Hartsbourne School in Bushey to acquire a further £20,000 to complete the project to build a community space for military families and other local families.
  - £50,000 for the St Albans Sea Cadets to hard surface their outside space to create a parade ground and memorial to HMS St Albans and other ships associated with the City and District of St Albans. Groundwork was completed during autumn 2015 and a service of celebration marking its long association with HMS St Albans took place in March this year.
- 7.5 The Ministry of Defence (MOD) through their re-branding of the national Covenant in January 2016 launched the Employer Recognition Scheme. The scheme acknowledges employers through a three tier approach of bronze, silver and gold awards recognising organisations who have provided exceptional support to the armed forces community. The County Council currently holds a silver award. The Covenant Board as part of its community engagement initiatives encourages organisations commercial and voluntary to apply to the scheme.
- 7.6 Following on from the re-branding of the national covenant, the dedicated Hertfordshire Heroes website was reviewed and information has been aligned with the updated national covenant messages. A Hertfordshire Heroes Communications toolkit was added to assist partners to deliver a unified message about the Covenant in any armed forces related event.

## **8 Celebrating and Honouring**

- 8.1 The Covenant Board has a role to play in overseeing the laying of commemorative paving stones marking the centenary of World War

One. Information relating to this has been shared across the county coordinating the relevant partners. From 2015 and to date; Private Edward Warner VC was honoured in St Albans, Corporal Alfred Burt VC was honoured in Hertford and Private Christopher Cox was honoured in Kings Langley. Plans are underway to honour Major George Pearkes in Watford in October 2017

- 8.2 The Chairman of Hertfordshire County Council raised the Armed Forces Flag over County Hall on Monday 26 June 2017 to mark national Armed Forces Day. District and Borough Councils held similar events across the county.
- 8.3 The County Council proactively demonstrated its support to Reserves Day in June by posting a case study of a reservist employee through internal communications and also tweeted messages externally about the County Council's commitment to the armed forces.
- 8.4 Commemorating the centenary of the Battle of St Julien on 30 July, a special evensong took place at All Saints Church in Hertford and on 31 July, the only memorial to the Hertford Regiment was unveiled in Belgium. On the same day and time there was a local short service at the Town Memorial for the last post and wreath laying. The Battle of St Julien has been recorded as one of Hertford Regiment's bloodiest battles, where 479 of its 620 soldiers were killed.

## **9. Next steps**

- 9.1 The 2016 Local Government Association (LGA) report, Our Community, Our Covenant describes a core infrastructure toolkit recommended to councils to implement the Covenant successfully. The Covenant Board has utilised the toolkit to self-assess its effectiveness and to determine continuing priorities.
- 9.2 In view of the self-assessment against the LGA core infrastructure toolkit, the Board will focus on communicating the Covenant as parts of its work under the community engagement and celebrating and honouring themes. The organisations who form the Covenant partnership will continue to celebrate and honour our Armed Forces individually and collectively through commemorative and annual events such as; Armed Forces Day in June 2017, Reserves Day, Remembrance Day and World War One and Two commemorations. The Schools Christmas competition for 2017 has been launched incorporating the RAF centenary as this year's theme.
- 9.3 As part of the strengthening the delivery of the Covenant commitment, the Board is seeking to run a rolling programme to train front line staff across Hertfordshire local authorities and further promote the Covenant at public events.
- 9.4 The Hertfordshire Heroes website acts as a dedicated central resource for partners and service users and will continue to be updated with key information.

9.5 The Covenant Board will continue to support future bids to the Covenant Fund.

## **10. Equalities**

10.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

10.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

10.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.

10.4 An EqIA has not been completed in relation to this report.

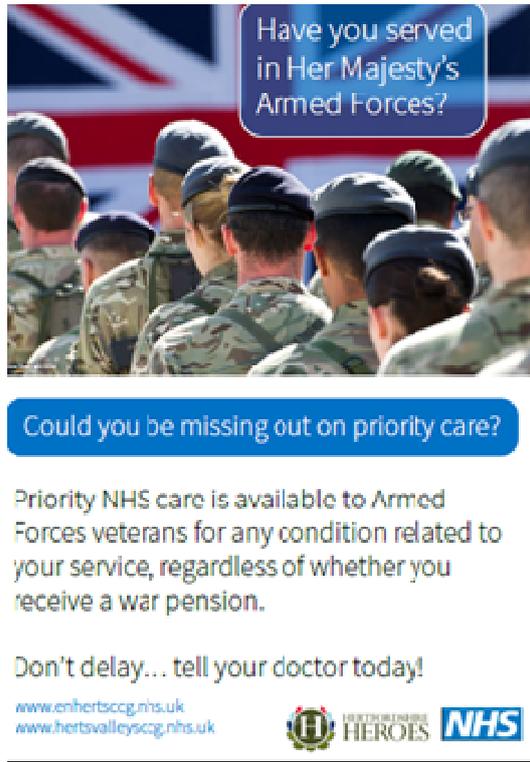
### *Background Information*

*Appendix A - Veteran Registration Campaign At GP Surgeries*

*Appendix B - Christmas 2016 Competition - Winning Entry*

## APPENDIX A

### VETERAN REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN AT GP SURGERIES



Have you served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces?

Could you be missing out on priority care?

Priority NHS care is available to Armed Forces veterans for any condition related to your service, regardless of whether you receive a war pension.

Don't delay... tell your doctor today!

[www.enherbscgp.nhs.uk](http://www.enherbscgp.nhs.uk)  
[www.hertsvalleyscgp.nhs.uk](http://www.hertsvalleyscgp.nhs.uk)

The advertisement features a photograph of soldiers in camouflage uniforms standing in a line, viewed from behind. A blue speech bubble with white text asks, 'Have you served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces?'. Below the photo, another blue speech bubble asks, 'Could you be missing out on priority care?'. The main text explains that priority NHS care is available to veterans for service-related conditions, regardless of war pension status. It encourages veterans to contact their doctor immediately. At the bottom, two website URLs are provided: www.enherbscgp.nhs.uk and www.hertsvalleyscgp.nhs.uk. To the right of the URLs are the 'HEROES' logo (a stylized 'H' in a circle) and the NHS logo.

## APPENDIX B

### CHRISTMAS 2016 COMPETITION - WINNING ENTRY

