

**North East Derbyshire District Council**

**Council**

**9 September 2019**

**NEDDC Contribution to the Armed Forces Covenant**

**Report of Councillor M E Thacker MBE JP, Leader of the Council**

This report is public

**Purpose of the Report**

- To inform Members of the Council's contributions towards the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant for Derbyshire.

**1 Report Details**

1.1 Since 2012, when it first signed the "Charter of Respect for our Armed Forces," the Council has been committed to working with partners to support the Armed Forces Community residing in the District. The Armed Forces Community are those currently in service, reservists, people of working age who have left the Armed Forces, those who have performed National Service, veterans beyond retirement age and the dependents of these individuals. The Armed Forces Covenant is based upon two key principles:-

- no member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen;
- in some circumstances, special treatment may be appropriate for the injured or bereaved.

1.2 The Council is member of the Derbyshire Covenant Partnership, meeting regularly with other local authorities, statutory agencies, and Armed Forces charities and representative groups. Originally established to consider applications to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, the partnership now focuses on sharing best practice, identifying services, barriers to engagement and developing initiatives which benefit the Armed Forces Community within the county. The Partnership is currently commissioning a research project into Armed Forces Community needs in Derbyshire and developing a countywide action plan which will identify the activities planned to meet these needs.

1.3 To address issues raised by residents from the Armed Forces Community the approach taken by the Council is that officers and teams from the appropriate services use their respective specialisms and experience. This ensures that experts in their field work to resolve issues rather than employing specific Armed Forces Community caseworkers, which is a greater challenge to current resources.

- 1.4 The Council's Partnership Strategy Team undertakes a co-ordination and external partnership representative role for the Covenant work, working with other agencies to map the needs within the Armed Forces Community to help inform how services are shaped and delivered. To inform this the Team has worked closely with the Communications Team to develop a web page, newsletters, flyers and articles in The News to publicise the support of the Council and other service providers.
- 1.5 It is nationally recognised that identifying and engaging with the Armed Forces Community can be very difficult, which has been the Council's experience despite working with the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Forces in the Community and the Departments of Work and Pensions. With support from the Revenues Team in 2017 and 2019 the Council distributed flyers with Council Tax correspondence to every household within the District, encouraging the Armed Forces Community to register for support and information from local agencies and charities and explain their specific needs. To date over 70 individuals have registered.
- 1.6 The Council's Home Improvement Co-ordinator has visited many of these households, recognising that through discussion there may be other opportunities for providing support. Historically support has included working with SSAFA (the Soldier, Sailor, Air Force Association) to use their funds to help a Holmewood tenant get a mobility scooter and a private tenant in Clay Cross to install mobility adaptations in an upstairs flat. Since spring 2019, as well as undertaking an energy audit for each household visited, examples of support to date includes:-
- One new boiler via the Warm Homes Fund
  - One person signposted to bereavement support
  - One household given a fire safety check and fire alarms installed by Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service
  - Two referrals to Citizen's Advice
  - Three Trusted Trader Advice sessions
  - Three households supported on addressing damp and mould
  - Four referrals for Disabled Facilities Grants via the occupational therapists.
- 1.7 Those registered for information also receive periodic newsletters or information which may be of interest (electronically unless requested otherwise), such as dates for the quarterly Armed Forces Community Hub which is facilitated by the DWP and usually held at Chesterfield Town Hall or the Proact Stadium in Chesterfield. The Hub offers information and support on employment, volunteering, housing, health and wellbeing, funding and includes representation from forces welfare charities.
- 1.8 Another area of support developed by the Partnerships and Customer Services Team is the establishment of a dedicated e-mail address and telephone number, the latter linking directly to a script for Contact Centre Staff to allow them to signpost the caller to the most appropriate department or service provider to address their needs. Training was supplemented by the Armed Forces Covenant for Front Line Workers online training system developed by Warwickshire County Council.
- 1.9 An example of where the Council's approach of providing support by specialist officers who understand their procedures in detail is in Housing Options, where a Housing Options Officer (Homelessness Prevention) worked with the Regimental Casualty Officer for the Grenadier Guards to help an ex-serviceman suffering with

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to find a house after he was threatened with homelessness. Due to the urgency of the case temporary accommodation was offered until a permanent council house was found shortly afterwards.

- 1.10 Whilst the Council focuses much of its work on consistently quality service for all residents, there are some areas where policy frameworks make additional provision for the Armed Forces Community. For example, the Council's Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy gives reasonable prioritisation to Armed Forces personnel, such as waiving the "district connection," enabling Armed Forces families (which includes widowed families) to automatically go to band 2 ("urgent need"), whilst adult children in Armed Forces families are allocated a bedroom each (rather than the expectation of sharing). Additionally, NEDDC provides an extra week's paid leave for Armed Forces Community employees for military training as well as the potential for additional unpaid leave for Armed Forces duties subject to the needs of the service.
- 1.11 To inform opportunities for policy developments, the Council engages wherever possible with the Ministry of Defence and Service support charities, whether responding to ministerial consultations or attendance at national and regional policy development networks such as East Midlands Armed Forces Symposium.
- 1.12 The Council has also taken a lead in honouring decorated service personnel and the wider remembrance of the sacrifices made by local residents. In October 2017 a commemorative stone was laid at Killamarsh war memorial to observe the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Killamarsh-born Fred Greaves' award of the Victoria Cross in World War One for 'most conspicuous bravery, initiative and leadership.' Working closely with the Parish Council, Killamarsh Heritage Society, local traders and the local branch of the Royal British Legion, a public service and reception was organised, where the Victoria Cross was displayed and commemorative beer shared.
- 1.13 More recently, in December 2018 the Democratic Services Team arranged a civic ceremony at the Council offices to celebrate the award of France's highest honour – the Legion d'Honneur – to Grassmoor resident Jack Parrott, in recognition of his efforts during the Normandy invasion on D-Day. The Council also commemorated the centenary of the end of the Great War by displaying four life sized "Tommy" silhouettes at the Council offices and leisure facilities, in remembrance of the men and women from North East Derbyshire who have fallen whilst serving their country.
- 1.14 Since May 2019 the Council has achieved a number of actions which will be recorded as part of the District's contribution to the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan for Derbyshire that is currently in development and will be overseen by the countywide Covenant Partnership. These actions include:-
  - Corresponding with the Minister for Housing and Homelessness and Minister for Defence People and Veterans, to identify opportunities for further assistance to the Armed Forces Community and their support organisations;
  - Council Chair and Leader representation at local events including the Buxton Military Tattoo and Staveley Armed Forces Weekend in July 2019 and officer attendance at the Derbyshire SSAFA Annual General Meeting;

- Achieving the Bronze Award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS). This awards organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant;
- Registering dedicated pages on the Forces Families Jobs website, a dedicated site for training and employment opportunities for family members of currently serving UK military personnel  
(<http://forcesfamiliesjobs.jobboard.com/recruiter-directory/north-east-derbyshire-district-council/103/>);
- Commencing discussions with the Clay Cross Army Cadet detachment regarding the establishment of an annual Civic Cadet role, who will accompany the Council Chair to various events throughout the civic calendar.

1.15 With long-standing personal connections to local Armed Forces organisations and charities, Cllr Martin Thacker MBE has been appointed as the Council's Armed Forces Champion. As Council Leader he is in the position to provide Authority-wide leadership to service and policy development which will meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community within North East Derbyshire wherever possible.

1.16 As stated in the 2019-23 Council Plan, the Council has pledged to review its contribution to the Armed Forces Covenant for Derbyshire within the District. Re-signing the document at the meeting will re-emphasise the Council's commitment to the Covenant and the local Armed Forces Community.

1.17 Within the resources available officers will continue to develop the Council's offer to the Armed Forces Community in terms of services offered, communication of support to residents and harnessing funding and partnership opportunities within the resources available.

## **2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation**

2.1 The Council is committed to the Armed Forces Covenant for Derbyshire and the actions and services identified emphasise this commitment to the local community.

## **3 Consultation and Equality Impact**

3.1 Mechanisms for consulting with the Armed Forces Community have been established which allow for the development of appropriate support.

## **4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

4.1 By not developing its promotion and access to the services, the Council would miss the opportunity to clearly show how it is meeting its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant for Derbyshire.

## 5 **Implications**

### 5.1 **Finance and Risk Implications**

- 5.1.1 Financial support towards the Council's Armed Forces Covenant support is currently met from existing resources.

### 5.2 **Legal Implications including Data Protection**

- 5.2.1 Records of individuals registered for Armed Forces Community updates and support are compliant with all data protection legislation.

### 5.3 **Human Resources Implications**

- 5.3.1 Staff support is met from existing resources.

## 6 **Recommendations**

- 6.1 That Council notes the activities undertaken to date to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant for Derbyshire and the planned activities for the future.
- 6.2 That Council approves the re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant for Derbyshire, to highlight its commitment to the Armed Forces Community within the District.

## 7 **Decision Information**

<b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b> A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: <i>BDC: Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/></i> <i>Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/></i> <i>NEDDC: Revenue - £100,000 <input type="checkbox"/></i> <i>Capital - £250,000 <input type="checkbox"/></i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i>	No
<b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b> (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	No
<b>Has the relevant Portfolio Holder been informed</b>	No
<b>District Wards Affected</b>	All
<b>Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework</b>	All

## 8 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
NA	NA
<b>Background Papers</b> (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
NA	
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