

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Executive

19th September 2023

Armed Forces Covenant

Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke
Armed Forces Champion:	Cllr Leanne MacIntyre
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Sally Kipping (HR, Performance and Communications)
Report Author:	Renee France (Community Development Manager)
Key Decision:	No
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and purpose

Statutory Guidance relating to the application of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty which applies to Local Authorities can be seen here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-duty-statutory-guidance>

This creates a statutory duty for the Council (whether the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge has been signed or not):

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 report sets out proposals for the Council to formalise and expand upon this statutory duty by signing the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge. This will provide greater detail showing how the Council discharges the duty above and considers additional voluntary pledges to be made by the Council in support of the Armed Forces Community.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE that

- (i) The Covenant pledges be agreed and adopted as set out in paragraph 3.1 of this report; and
- (ii) a formal signing ceremony be arranged to take place by the end of the financial year at an appropriate and agreed date with members of the council and Armed Forces representatives in attendance.

Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 In 2011 the Armed Forces Community Covenant was published and its core principles became law through the Armed Forces Act 2011.
- 1.2 Surrey Heath Borough Council signed the Community Covenant in 2013. In 2021 there was a change to the Community Covenant which then became known as the Armed Forces Covenant. This change has meant that the original pledge is no longer applicable.
- 1.3 Further information, history and resources including examples of good practice can be found here: <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>
- 1.4 In the development of the proposed Armed Forces Covenant pledges, council officers undertook a number of focus groups involving members of the Armed Forces Community and Council officers involved in the delivery of services to members of the Armed Forces Community including veterans, their families and dependents. The Council also identified and appointed an Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Leanne MacIntyre, who has overseen the development of the pledges.
- 1.5 The proposed pledges reflect input from all of these groups, and detail support already given by the council to members of the Armed Forces Community alongside pledges for future support and areas of development in the Council's work with members of the Armed Forces Community.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 The recommendation supports the Council's key priorities in the areas of Health and Wellbeing, including taking a positive approach to supporting those who are most vulnerable. It recognises the borough's historic links with the Armed Forces and a commitment to ensuring that our statutory duty is met.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The key pledges outlined in the proposed Armed Forces Covenant are set out below. The Council may choose to accept these as they are, to accept none of the proposed pledges, or to make amendments to the pledges.

Section 1: Principles of The Armed Forces Covenant

1.1 **Surrey Heath Borough Council** will uphold the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant:

- *Members of the Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantages arising from their service in the provision of public and commercial services.*
- *In some circumstances special provision may be justified, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved.*

Section 2: Demonstrating our Commitment

2.1 We recognise the contribution that Service personnel, reservists, veterans, the cadet movement and military families make. We seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by developing and implementing an action plan that:

- Provides appropriate employment support to members of the Armed Forces Community and their families or immediate dependents
- Includes clear and accessible communications demonstrating our support which includes:
 - Information about benefits and financial support available
 - Signposts health and wellbeing information, discounts and services
 - Promotes awareness of housing and homeless services and supports veterans and their families access appropriate housing
 - Recognises the importance of taking part in civic activities and responsibilities
 - Provides training, information and support to frontline staff who support veterans and their families
 - Provides appropriate family support to help dependents access services and ensure the wellbeing of military families

2.2 We will publicise these commitments through our literature and website. We will set out timescales for the action plan supporting the pledges, inviting feedback from the Armed Forces Community to evaluate our initiatives reporting back to the Community Engagement Working Group on progress.

4. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

4.1 Signing the Covenant and making a public commitment to supporting members of the Armed Forces Community will contribute to the aim to nurture

the strong sense of community across the whole borough, and to taking a positive approach to supporting those who are most vulnerable (Health & Quality of Life).

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 The Community Development team have worked with Council officers to understand the potential resource implications for each area and are satisfied that there will be limited impact on resources and that a number of the pledges are already taking place, and that additional pledges can be managed within current resourcing.

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 6.1 No matters arising

7. Legal and Governance Issues

- 7.1 The Council has a legal duty to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising certain statutory functions in the fields of healthcare, education and housing. The commitments outlined in this report ensure the Council meets this duty and provides special provision in accordance with Statutory Guidance.

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 8.1 No matters arising.

9. Other Considerations and Impacts

Environment and Climate Change

- 9.1 No matters arising

Equalities and Human Rights

- 9.2 This will support the Council's commitment to Equality and supporting those who are most vulnerable.

Risk Management

- 9.3 No matters arising

Community Engagement

- 9.4 This initiative will support and improve community engagement.

Annexes - None