

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 24 October 2017
Report Subject	Armed Forces Annual Report
Report Author	Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the first Annual Report of Flintshire County Council's Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. The Covenant is a national responsibility involving government, businesses, local authorities, charities and the public, encouraging local communities to support the Armed Forces in their area and to promote understanding and awareness.

The Council is committed to supporting the Armed Forces Community by working with a range of partners who have signed our Covenant, including Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and the Royal British Legion. The North Wales Fire and Rescue Service will also be joining the Armed Forces Covenant and will sign the Flintshire Covenant on 24th October 2017. The purpose of the Flintshire Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community who work and/or live in Flintshire and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Endorse the positive progress made in meeting the Armed Forces Covenant and supporting the commitments for further improvement.
2	Approve the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report prior publication on the Council's website.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT
1.01	<p>The Armed Forces Covenant aims to recognise the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces community within the County and help provide support for them and their families ensuring they do not face disadvantage because of military service. The Armed Forces Community includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel, families and widow(er)s. The Covenant is a two-way arrangement and the Armed Forces Community is encouraged to do as much as they can to support their community.</p> <p>The Council proudly hosted the North Wales Armed Forces Day in June 2013 and signed the Covenant in July 2013.</p>
1.02	<p>The Covenant covers issues affecting the Armed Forces Community such as housing, education and welfare support after military service has ended.</p>
1.03	<p>A multi-agency steering group has been established with members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flintshire County Council employees who are veterans• Representatives of key Council services, including Benefits, Education, Housing, Social Services,• Soldiers , Sailors, Airmen and their families Association (SSAFA)• Royal British Legion (RBL)• A representative of the Armed Forces• Flintshire Local Voluntary Council. <p>Councillor Andrew Dunbobbin is the Council's Armed Forces Champion and is the chair of this group.</p>
1.04	<p>The Steering Group has completed a self-assessment against the Covenant and developed an action plan to progress its work. Key achievements are set out in the Annual report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• updated webpages on the Council website providing information and support for the Armed Forces Community and links to key agencies such as Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board;• a commitment to the Covenant in the Council Plan 2017/18;• the implementation of a Reservist Policy providing additional two weeks leave for employees who are Reservists enabling them to attend their annual training camp and provide support for those mobilised for duty to assist them transition back to the workplace and retain continuous service status;• offer guaranteed interviews for veterans who meet the essential criteria of the job role;• receiving the Bronze award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme for the Council's Veteran friendly employment policies and practices;• demonstrating commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant by promoting Reserves Day and Armed Forces Day;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support from County Council to the Royal British Legion “Count Them In” campaign which is requesting that questions are included to identify those serving in the Armed Forces within the next Census; • supported Accommodation Schemes for veterans are available in Flintshire in partnership with First Choice Housing; • implemented the Welsh Government’s Housing Pathway for Ex Service Personnel to which recognises the specific issues faced by veterans and aims to ensure they receive the right support; • promotion of the Welsh Government’s free swimming initiative for veterans and armed forces personnel, available at four swimming pools in the County; • included veterans within the population needs assessment as required by the Social Services and Well-being Act (2014); and • promoted our commitment to the Covenant in different ways including participating in the North Wales Armed Forces Transition Fair raising the profile of Council services and employment opportunities.
1.05	<p>Also included in the report are areas for improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for Council services to start capturing the profile of their customers to identify members of the Armed Forces Community. This will enable services to better understand the make-up of the Armed Forces community in Flintshire and their needs; • for schools to start capturing whether any pupils/students are children of serving members of the Armed Forces; • to develop a training programme for employees in public facing services to ensure they are aware and understand specific issues and needs of the families and individuals affected by the Covenant; • publication of a sign posting leaflet to services, specifically for the Armed Forces Community; • supporting and developing projects suitable for MoD Covenant grant applications; • continue to celebrate and commemorate key events recognising the contribution of the Armed Forces, such as Armed Forces Day, Reservists Day; and • develop specialist hubs for the Armed Forces Community across the county to enable them to access specialist services and support.
1.06	<p>North Wales Fire and Rescue Service will be joining the Flintshire Covenant and will formally sign the Covenant on 24th October 2017.</p>
1.07	<p>The Council is also an active member of the Regional North Wales Regional Armed Forces Forum which includes all six North Wales local authorities and BCUHB. A successful North Wales local authorities’ bid for two year Ministry of Defence (MOD) funding has led to the temporary appointment of two North Wales Armed Forces Liaison officers. One post for North West Wales and the other post for North East Wales. These posts will support local authorities implement the Covenant and work with services to meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no financial resource implications arising directly from this report. Covenant Funds are available from the MoD which will be pursued to support projects and activities across Flintshire to support the Covenant.
2.02	Employees in public facing services will complete basic awareness training to develop a better understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	The Armed Forces Steering Group has been involved in the activities and improvements identified in the Annual Report.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Adhering to the commitments of the Covenant would ensure that Armed Forces, their families and veterans are treated fairly when accessing Council services.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016/17

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Armed Forces Covenant</p> <p>Contact Officer: Fiona Mocko, Strategic Policy Advisor Telephone: 01352 702122 E-mail: fiona.mocko@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Armed Forces Community: includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel, their families and widow(er)s.</p> <p>Armed Forces Covenant: is a promise of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community.</p>