CABINET – 7th FEBRUARY 2012
ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

Report by:  Councillor Sachin Gupta, Lead Member for Communities

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The Cabinet approves the formation of a CMPB for Hounslow, under the Chairmanship of Leader of the Council, and with the proposed membership set out in Appendix 3.

The overarching terms of reference of the Civilian Military Partnership Board will be
1) To identify measures from within all Council services that currently do, or could, support service personnel in Hounslow, including existing local support.
2) Consider what else could be done within existing available resources; and
3) Developing proposals for funding applications to the national community grants scheme.
4) To report to Cabinet and Hounslow Together on the agreed objectives of the Board and recommended actions with costed options.

1.2 That the AFCC be supported by all Directorates within the Council and arrangements be made for it to be formally signed between Council, Hounslow Together, and relevant partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report informs Cabinet of the national introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC), and their outline and purposes. It seeks support for Hounslow to establish an AFCC, and a linked Civilian Military Partnership Board (CMPB), which would identify and undertake practical steps to support the aims of the AFCC.

2. POLICY BACKGROUND

2.1 In 2011 the Secretary of State published the AFC\(^1\), the moral obligation between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. The key principle is that no member of the Armed Forces, or their families, shall be disadvantaged by reason of being in the Armed Forces.

2.2 The Leader of the Council received a letter from the Government and the Chairman of the Local Government Group asking all local authorities to support the AFCC initiative.

\(^1\) www.mod.uk/armedforcescovenant
2.3 The Armed Forces and Hounslow Council have a long history of joint working, supporting residents and military personnel and their families. This work has never been formalised into a partnership, or embedded in strategic planning on either side. This paper puts forward the potential of formalising the partnership, and for the London Borough of Hounslow to commit to a local AFCC

3. THE COMMUNITY COVENANT

3.1 A key initiative within the AFC is the AFCC, a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. Appendix 1 attached.

3.2 The AFCC aims to; encourage all parties within an area to support the local Armed Forces community; ensure Service personnel, families and veterans to have clear access to help and support available from the MOD, statutory providers, and the Third Sector; and to promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting this community.

3.3 The scheme is a two-way arrangement, and the Armed Forces community are encouraged to support their community and promote activity which integrates the Service community into civilian life

4. THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT GRANT SCHEME

4.1 In 2011 a 4 year, £30 million grant fund was launched supporting the AFCC scheme. The aim is for local voluntary and community groups/charities, the Local Authority, businesses, and communities to work together with the military to develop local projects for Service personnel & families, Reservists and Veterans.

5. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

5.1 Currently a small number of Local Authorities have established local partnerships, and signed a AFCC. Each has a bespoke action plan for the Armed Forces personnel and families in the area. Appendix 2 attached sets out best practice examples.

6. LONDON BOROUGH OF HOUNSLOW

6.1 Hounslow Council recognises the social and economic benefits of the Cavalry Barracks and has built a good, individual relationship with the regiments based at the barracks, as well as the local Ghurkha & Nepalese communities. We support organisations such as the Royal British Legion and Cadet Units, running joint high profile, award winning projects.

6.2 The Barracks places unique demands on schools, health facilities and housing, as well as positively impacting the local economy, providing some local jobs and a valuable community resource. The barracks hosts 600 single personnel behind the wire; and has accommodation for approximately 100 families in the locality.
6.3 For Hounslow Together, the AFCC presents an opportunity to bring partners knowledge and expertise to bear on the provision of support to members of the Armed Forces Community. It also presents an opportunity to build upon existing integration initiatives carried out by the Community Partnerships Unit, and by local voluntary organisations such as TW4 Community Development Trust and Sure Start Hounslow, and to apply to the Community Grant fund.

6.4 The establishment of a CMPB would bring Hounslow Together, businesses and the voluntary & community sector together, to redesign services to better target resources, and maximise the opportunities a Armed Forces presence in the borough brings, for example shared facilities or co-location of workers. The project would be high profile, with strong community engagement dimensions that could enhance the reputation of Hounslow Together and its partners.

6.5 The establishment of a Civilian Military Partnership (CMP) is key to establishing an appropriate action plan that will compliment the strategic direction of the Council.

7. THE CIVILIAN AND MILITARY PARTNERSHIP BOARD

7.1 Until recently liaison with the Armed Forces has been maintained through a series of informal arrangements. A Civilian and Military Partnership Board (CMPB) is proposed to replace the current liaison arrangements. Membership of the CMPB would include senior members and chief officers of the Local Authority and Armed Forces. Appendix 3 attached provides draft Terms of Reference & Appendix 2 examples of best practice.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 The Council has had due regard to its Equalities Duties and in particular with respect to its duties arising pursuant to the Equality Act 2010, section 149. A relevance test has been carried out and it is considered that there will be no adverse impacts in respect of protected characteristics. As such, the Council considers that there is no need for an Equalities Impact Assessment to be carried out at this stage, and that in approving this proposal the Council will be acting in compliance with its duties.

8.2 Hounslow is aware of its Equalities responsibilities and all opportunities arising through this process with be undertaken using an open and transparent process and advertised widely throughout the borough.

9. COMMENTS OF CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

9.1 The proposed Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community, including the Council and its local Armed Forces Community. Membership of the Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) does not in itself commit the Council to additional expenditure.
9.2 The Defence Secretary has however announced that £30M of central Government funding is to be allocated over the next four years to support the Community Covenant. It is likely that the scheme’s aims will be defined in terms of supporting local projects, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. Applications will have to be submitted jointly by at least two parties to the local Community Covenant: one from the Armed Forces Community and one from the wider community (such as a Local Authority or service provider, a commercial organisation, or a private individual). The AFCC will have no direct effect on the General Fund.

10. COMMENTS OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

10.1 The Assistant Director Corporate Governance has been consulted and his comments have been included within the body of the report.

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What is a Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC)?

An Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level.

The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Service community in their area and nurture understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.

Many people have become involved in supporting the Service community, through Service charities or by participating in Armed Forces Day. They have shown support in a variety of ways including fundraising, military celebrations and open days, and family fun days. Even simple demonstrations of support, such as displaying the Armed Forces Day window sticker in cars and businesses have had a positive effect and boosted the morale of our Armed Forces community. The Community Covenant scheme aims to build upon this support.

Armed Forces Day is a positive expression of support and the Community Covenant does not replicate it. It does, however, aim to encourage the civilian community to extend their support beyond Armed Forces day throughout the year and on longer term projects that benefit their local community. Armed Forces Day is very much about celebrating the hard work of our Armed Forces, the Community Covenant is about supporting them.

Are any Community Covenants already up and running?
The Community Covenant was launched in four locations in England – Hampshire, Portsmouth, North Yorkshire and Oxfordshire. In addition Vale of Glamorgan in Wales launched the first Community Covenant in Wales. Local Authorities in these areas have established effective relationships with the military community in their area. Further detail of what these areas are doing is provided at the end of this guide, and is intended to present some examples of best practice of the Community Covenant in action.

These initial launches are a ‘first wave’ and we hope that other parts of the UK will be keen to establish and improve relationships between the local Armed Forces Community and the wider community, and get involved. It is important to remember that almost every community will have members of the Armed Forces Community living within it, be it Serving members, family members or veterans. We hope, therefore, that areas that do not have a large Serving presence will still be keen to embrace this scheme.

What about the good work already being done in some areas?
The Community Covenant does not seek to replace existing good work already established by public service providers, charities, etc but to build upon it. It also provides a mechanism to ensure the Armed Forces community are aware of the support available to them. We hope that those already offering support to the Armed Forces, even if not as a result of the Community Covenant, will be keen to promote this support through the Community Covenant and in particular on the MOD website. The Community Covenant not only aims to encourage new support it provides an opportunity to highlight existing best practice.

How is a Community Covenant different from the Armed Forces Covenant?

Last year the Government recognised the need to do more to ensure that our Armed Forces, veterans and their families have the support they need and are treated with the dignity they deserve. This is why the Government has published a new Covenant as a tri-Service document, the Armed Forces Covenant.
The Armed Forces Covenant expresses the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community. It is supported by 'The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow' which sets out the actions currently being taken by central government to support the Armed Forces community as well as future measures, many of which have been set at a national level and are being applied by public service providers across the country and within the Devolved Administrations such as the introduction of a Service children’s’ Pupil Premium, a scholarship scheme for bereaved Service children, and extra assistance for veterans’ mental health needs.

The Community Covenant complements the Armed Forces Covenant but enables service providers to go beyond the national commitments. It allows for measures to be put in place at a local level to support the Armed Forces. The Community Covenant encourages local communities to develop a relationship with the Service community in their area, this enables support to be tailored according to need. Many Local Authorities already extend support to the Armed Forces beyond the national commitments, for instance some councils offer free access to swimming pools for Serving personnel.

In return there is much the Armed Forces Community can do to support their local communities. The Community Covenant scheme encourages the Armed Forces Community to do their bit to nurture this two-way relationship.

**Who can participate in the Community Covenant?**
The Community Covenant represents a relationship between the Armed Forces community and any or all of the following:
- public service providers (this can include Local Authorities, health service providers, etc)
- private industry (such as shops, restaurants, non-public service providers)
- charities / community groups
- individual members of the public

**How can a Community Covenant be established?**
All Local Authorities in England are being provided with this guidance and encouraged to establish a Community Covenant in their area. If a Local Authority has not yet established a Community Covenant then other members of the community can encourage them to do so. Not every Local Authority will be able to extend the support they already give to the Armed Forces community whilst budgets are being stretched and reduced, however the establishment of Civil/Military partnerships is an excellent low-cost way to demonstrate support for the Armed Forces community and helps build an understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces. This would ensure that the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered in planning services, such as changes to public transport routes.

Community Covenants may look quite different from one location to another. This is a scheme where one size does not fit all and the nature of the support offered will be determined by both need and capacity. It is expected that most Community Covenants will be led at Local Authority level however Unitary Authorities and individual towns may also wish to have a Community Covenant and this will be supported.

**What is the Community Covenant pledge?**
The starting point for any Community Covenant is signing the Community Covenant pledge. This document sets out what a Community Covenant seeks to achieve in a particular area and where this will be signed by representatives from all parts of the Community.

In most cases the lead signatories will be a senior representative from the Local Authority and one from the Services who will sign on behalf of the Armed Forces Community (although the pledge may also be signed by those representing veterans’ or families’ groups, especially in areas without a large Serving presence). A template can be downloaded from the Community Covenant webpage [www.mod.uk/covenant](http://www.mod.uk/covenant)
The standard document is a high level statement of support and we encourage Local Authorities to make a copy available on their website once signed. If communities wish to add more detail to their Community Covenant pledge, for instance information relating to the measures of support being implemented, they can do so and this is encouraged.

How can Public Service providers demonstrate support?
Public Service providers are already delivering a number of tailored services for the Service community, set at a national level across Whitehall, intended to ensure members of the Service community do not face disadvantage in accessing school places, healthcare, social housing and so on. Additional support can take a variety of forms and will be determined by the capacity of the Local Authority.

Examples of best practice include:
- Establishment of Civil/Military Partnership Boards
- Providing opportunities for the Armed Forces to talk about their experiences on operations
- Support to employment of Service leavers and Service families by drawing together local employers for recruitment fairs (see Hampshire best practice)
- Free/discounted access to leisure facilities and discounts in shops and restaurants
- Armed Forces Involvement within Community Projects

How can businesses demonstrate support?
Support can take a variety of forms and will be determined by the capacity of the business. A number of organisations, large and small, already offer discounts through the Forces Discount scheme (www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk) and businesses may choose to join this existing scheme or create their own. Additional support might take the form of support to employment for the families of Service personnel who can at times find themselves faced with difficulty securing employment when moving to a new location.

How can members of the community demonstrate support?
By promoting activity that integrates the Service community into local life, this will help to make the Service community feel part of the community instead of it simply being somewhere they live for the term of a posting. This might include running youth groups or sports clubs that include Service children, establishing support networks for Service families who often find themselves isolated when Serving partners are on operations, particularly on the more remote bases where public transport is limited. Individuals or community groups can also reach out to the Service community veterans, to encourage inclusion in local activities.

How can the local Armed Forces get involved?
Again, by promoting activity that integrates the Service community into civilian life and by helping the civilian community to develop a better understanding of the Armed Forces. The Community Covenant is intended to be a two-way arrangement and we hope that there will also be opportunities for the Armed Forces to support their local communities in a variety of ways. This might include getting involved in community regeneration projects or taking part in educational and sporting events.

The Community Covenant Grant scheme
The Defence Secretary has announced that £30M of central Government funding to be allocated over the next four years to support the Community Covenant. It is likely that the scheme’s aims will defined in terms of supporting local projects, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. It will be administered by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of HMG.

The scheme is likely to favour applications for funding from local groups for practical projects which deliver rapid results and meet the aims of the scheme. Applications will have to be submitted jointly by at least two parties to the local Community Covenant: one from the Armed Forces Community (such as a Service unit, a veterans’ group, or a families organisation), and
one from the wider community (such as a Local Authority or service provider, a commercial organisation, or a private individual). Details on how to bid, including the criteria to be used in assessing bids, will be developed in the weeks following the launch. It should be noted that the fund will only be open to communities which have adopted a Community Covenant, but that this will not be sufficient in itself – the nature of the project itself will be the key consideration.

Next steps
The Ministry of Defence is encouraging the Armed Forces Community to get involved with the scheme and take a proactive approach to forge links with the Local Authority in their area. Initiating a Community Covenant may result from an approach from the Local Authority to a local Service unit or station; equally the Local Authority may be approached by the Armed Forces community in their area. Many Local Authorities will be aware of the Service establishments in their area which can, in most cases, act as a first point of contact to initiate this work. However Local Authorities who wish to establish a Community Covenant and are unsure of who to contact should send an e-mail to: covenant-mailbox@mod.uk.
APPENDIX 2
EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

The 145 (South) Brigade Civilian Military Partnership (CMP) is a programme of closer working with a broad range of local authorities across both Hampshire and Oxfordshire. The processes of governance implemented in each of these counties vary a little from each other, however there are strong and enduring links with the relevant county council management structures and other bodies such as the NHS. The aim of the programme is to share information, co-ordinate strategy and to work in partnership in areas where there is mutual benefit. Five broad themes have been agreed: Education, Children and Young People; Economy and Skills; Health and Wellbeing; Environment and Infrastructure; Safer and Stronger Communities. Activities are then focused on projects which address need in each of these areas.

All the participants in the CMP recognise the unique needs of the Armed Forces, their families and dependents, Reservists and Veterans; and work to address these. The CMP draws together a range of groups including the private sector, the third sector, Service charities, the MOD and the public sector; the partnership work is also conducted across all of the Services. By working together across a range of projects for example the Welfare Pathway pilot in Hampshire and improved links with the NHS in Oxfordshire, it is possible to share knowledge, skills and potentially resources for the betterment of the military and civilian populations. Hampshire County Council are also engaged in the well-established Hampshire Economic Partnership with the local business community, which provides an existing route to engage commercial organisations in support of the Community Covenant. Oxfordshire County Council have implemented a number of specific measures including the establishment of a dedicated web page for the Armed Forces and for publishing local articles provided by the military; an embedded Military Liaison Officer at the County Council Offices; and work to scope employment needs of those leaving the Services in terms of numbers and qualifications. Commander 145 Bde is a member of the Oxfordshire Partnership.

Portsmouth is an example of a Unitary Authority establishing their own Community Covenant within an area where there will also be a county-led Community Covenant. The city is home to a large Service presence, mainly from the Royal Navy. The Council is responsible for a number of services and can therefore influence changes to public service delivery within the city. The City Council is establishing a Civil/Military partnership group which will draw together representatives from key areas within the council, such as health, housing and education, and the group will also include representatives from the Navy and the Naval Families Federation.

The North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration (MCI) Project in 15 (NE) Brigade area is a programme of closer working with local authorities and other service providers across the North Yorkshire area, similar to the 145 (South) Brigade CMP. The focus for the MCI Project is a Governance Board for senior stakeholders from around 30 military and civilian agencies in North Yorkshire which meets to share information and co-ordinate strategies in areas of mutual benefit. It seeks to present a more united front in dealings with central government. The Board agreed to work in six broad areas that cover many of the strategic issues featured in the Service Personnel Command Paper (SPCP), published in 2008: Housing, Planning & Sustainable Development; Health; Economic Impact; Children & Young People; Transport; Safety and Security. As a result activity can be focused on areas which have needs to be addressed. The Board has embraced the transition towards the Armed Forces Covenant and contributed to consultation on the SPCP.

In addition to the MCI, North Yorkshire County Council and partners have well-established forums engaging the voluntary sector and business community which provide a readymade forum for developing the Community Covenant. All the participants in the MCI Project recognise the unique needs of the Armed Forces community and the economic benefit they bring to the area.
1. MEMBERSHIP OF PARTNERSHIP
The membership of the Steering Group will include:

(i) Not more than 2 Councillors, including the Leader of the Council as Chair and the Lead Member for Communities

(ii) Representatives from Regiment(s) based at Hounslow Barracks (2)

(iii) Heads of Service, no more than 5; including Children & Young People, Health & Well Being, Environment Services, Housing and Adult Services (5)

(iv) Hounslow Together representatives (4)
   To include;
   • 1 Housing representative
   • 1 PCT /GWCC representative
   • 1 Chamber of Commerce representative

(v) One Hounslow business representative, potentially from Vista Business Centre (1)

(vi) Not more than 6 representative members of community groups; (6) To include;
   • Beavers Community Primary School
   • Royal British Legion Hounslow
   • Ghurkha community representative
   • TW4 Community Development Trust
   • Sure Start Hounslow

(vii) Barracks Welfare Team representative (1)

(viii) Hounslow Skills, Training & Employment Partnership representative (1)

(ix) Hounslow Stronger United Communities Board representative (1)

The Steering Group will not exceed a total membership of 25 members

• It is anticipated that relevant MoD representatives such as Defence Estates officials will be invited to attend meetings, where appropriate.
• Supported by: Community Partnerships Unit

2. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Civilian Military Partnership Board will need to work through the governance aspects of the partnership including authorisation sign offs & roles as well as risk & insurance indemnities that may be required. All these issues will be discussed at the first meeting of the partnership.

3. APPOINTMENT OF STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

Appointment of Members to the Partnership, in accordance with Paragraph 3 above, will normally be agreed by a full meeting of the Steering Group. Membership of the Steering Group may, however, be varied, with the agreement of the Chairperson (Leader of the Council), subject to approval at the next full meeting.
3. SPECIFIC DRAFT TASKS FOR THE CIVILIAN MILITARY PARTNERSHIP (CMP)

The Hounslow CMP will:

(i) Bring together community and economy related groups affected by the Barracks to provide a ‘voice’ for their particular concerns, needs and priorities.

(ii) Offer a means to improve communication flows to ensure that all communications are timely, clear and consistent. Better sharing of information, and forthcoming policy decisions to enable improved service planning, such as the funding/provision of transport infrastructure and educational facilities.

(iii) Identify, assess and recommend innovative ways in which the Local Authority, and local society, can fulfil its obligations to the AFCC, including utilising existing support services.

(iv) Drawing on examples of national best practice, explore a range of ideas for addressing identified gaps, including unconventional options. These ideas should involve looking beyond Government for sources of funding and encouraging actions and contributions from society itself.

(v) Prepare an action plan, reflecting local concerns and priorities, including timescales, costs (and where they would be borne), benefits and risks; outlining joint projects to improve support facilities and services for the Armed Forces and the wider community, which could be funded through the Community Grant scheme.

(vi) Produce appropriate reports on a periodic basis to Hounslow Together on its activities and any recommendations arising from its work and to report on any significant matters during the course of the year, as appropriate.

Areas of focus may include: *(taken from the themes of the national Armed Forces Covenant)*

- Ensuring fair access to public services for Service personnel and their families, including NHS services, housing and schools;

- Ensuring spouses and other family members of Service personnel receive adequate support (including provision of good quality housing and access to childcare) are not disadvantaged in education or employment due to frequent moves of home;

- Support for Service leavers and former Service personnel, including help finding employment, readjustment to civilian life, and mental health support;

- Ensuring good quality treatment and long-term support for those injured in conflict;

- Support for bereaved families, including short term and longer-term support for spouses and dependants;

- Building greater respect for and understanding of the military within society more widely.

4. MEETINGS and REPORTS

- The frequency of meetings will depend on the issues and actions of concern to the local community at any one time.
- All reports of the CMPB will also be reports to Hounslow Together
- Reports will be public documents and made publicly available in accordance with Hounslow Council policy.