

Meeting: COUNCIL

Agenda Item:

Date: 7 DECEMBER 2011

**4**

## **HERTFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY COVENANT WITH THE ARMED FORCES**

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### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide information regarding Armed Forces Community Covenants and affirm the Council's support for a County-wide Community Covenant.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That this Council signs the Hertfordshire Community Covenant with the Armed Forces.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement, at local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.
- 3.2 The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Service community in their area and promote understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community. It is envisaged that local authorities signing up to the Covenant will work with local charities and voluntary groups, business and private individuals to consider what support they can pledge to Service People in their area.
- 3.3 This initiative is supported by the Community Covenant Grant Scheme which has been established to financially support projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live.
- 3.4 The Leaders of all District Councils in Hertfordshire have recently been requested to support a Hertfordshire-wide Covenant with involvement of as many key partners from across the county as possible. The County Council, acting in a brokering role has undertaken some initial work to explore the

potential scope of this work and a steering group has been established, including representatives from district councils, to deliver the Covenant and lead on the development of specific themes. Councillor John Lloyd, CC will be serving on this steering group.

- 3.5 A template for a Community Covenant published by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is shown at Appendix A.

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Work so far undertaken on the County-wide Covenant has identified six practical areas in which activity could be focused:

- providing help with housing, schooling and family support
- enabling access to health services
- access to leisure facilities
- providing access to skills training, mentoring and job opportunities
- access to public transport
- celebrating and honouring the contribution of the armed forces by raising their profile in our communities

- 4.2 The Covenant will also bring together and build upon existing good work that is already being done.

- 4.3 An example of this good practice may be taken from the Council's own Housing Policies. For several years this Council has provided enhanced support to former members of the armed services returning to the Town. Service men and women who lived in Stevenage before enlisting and who join the Council's Housing Register are given additional priority under the Allocations Scheme. When the Council reviewed its Allocation Scheme in 2009 this priority was increased to reflect the Council's commitment to supporting service personnel.

- 4.4 Additionally the Council backdates housing applications from armed forces personnel or their widowed partners to the date they joined up and the housing advice and homelessness teams help returning service personnel to explore all the housing options open to them and their entitlement to welfare benefits.

- 4.5 Whilst details of the Armed Forces 'footprint' in Stevenage are not known, work carried out by the health service in preparing a physical and mental health needs assessment for military veterans in Hertfordshire suggests that approximately 80,000 live in the County. Further work will be required to establish numbers of serving personnel, reservists and cadets who may also be living in the area.

- 4.6 The County Council have arranged a Community Covenant pledge signing event on Tuesday 13 December 2011, at which it is proposed the County

Council and other partners would demonstrate their commitment to act and work together to take this work forward.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

At this stage there are no measurable financial implications from committing the Council to the County-wide Community Covenant.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendation in this report

### **5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

5.3.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, promote equality of opportunity for and foster good relations with individuals with protected characteristics. The protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010 are: race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious belief and pregnancy & maternity.

5.3.2 As the Covenant will be targeted only towards the Armed Forces there will be equalities implications that will need to be considered as the Covenant is developed.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Relevant pages of MOD website
- Report to HCC Cabinet – 28.11.11

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix A - MOD Template – Community Covenant