

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

19 DECEMBER 2013

Agenda Item	18
Report No	HC/45/13

HIGHLAND ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT UPDATE

Report by the Corporate Manager

Summary

This report outlines the work carried out by the partners to the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant in the twelve months since it was established and sets out future priorities.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2012 The Highland Council signed the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant along with twelve other partners – the Armed Forces Community; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service; Highland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association; Highland Third Sector Interface; Job Centre Plus; NHS Highland; Northern Constabulary; Royal British Legion Scotland; Scottish Natural Heritage; SSAFA (Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association) Forces Help; and the University of the Highlands and Islands
- 1.2 The Covenant is a statement of support between the armed forces and the civilian community. The aim is to encourage support for the service community in a local area and raise awareness of issues affecting service personnel. A copy of the Highland Council Covenant is attached at **Appendix A**
- 1.3 The Highland Community Covenant Partnership (HCCP) agreed five key outcomes in order to support the Armed Forces Community as follows:
- The Economy
 - Children and Young People
 - Caring Communities
 - Housing
 - Empowering Communities

These are expanded on within Appendix A.

2.0 Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity

In the past twelve months, considerable activity has been undertaken by the HCCP. Two full Partners' meetings have been held (chaired by Cllr Carolyn Caddick, the Council's Armed Forces and Veterans' Champion). As a result of these discussions, two working groups have been established which reflect the priority partners give these issues:

- *Health and Housing* (jointly chaired by NHS and HC)
- *Education and Employment* (jointly chaired by HIE and HC)

Partners' meetings have welcomed additional representation from groups such as the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, Poppy Scotland etc which deliver essential support to veterans.

Key actions identified to date include:

2.1 Health and Housing Workgroup

- 2.1.1 The group has considered access to mental health services for ex-forces personnel, and agreed to include a representative from the Community Psychiatric Service in future meetings; as well as considering ways in which to increase awareness amongst GPs of the issues faced by ex-forces staff in the transition to civilian life.
- 2.1.2 Peer support is particularly important for ex-forces personnel, particularly in remote rural areas where isolation can be a problem. The Group has agreed to explore options for a shared space with appropriate facilities to provide peer support, based on the "Men's Shed" model.
- 2.1.3 Representatives from the group are to visit Veteran's 1st Point, a model service for providing support to veterans and their families, to consider ways in which this type of service could be provided in Highland.
- 2.1.4 Access to housing and to housing adaptations is critical for many forces personnel as they move to civilian life. The group has considered the need for improved joint planning and the importance of information and advice on housing options at an early stage of this process. Work is taking place to map this process and consider the points at which information, advice and consideration of housing options should be provided.
- 2.1.5 The group has also considered the option of awarding additional priority to forces personnel through the Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy, and considered examples from other Councils' policies. This is to be explored in more detail at a Member seminar on allocation policy early in 2014.

The group has noted and welcomed the proposed "Homes for Heroes" housing currently planned in Inverness.

2.2 Education and Employment Workgroup

- 2.2.1 A small working group has been established to formulate a communication detailing support for Children's welfare that can be circulated to Service families. The letter will be 'user friendly', welcoming and with useful information that families would use.

- 2.2.2 The Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers (SABRE) group based in Dundee are to be invited to join with the Working Group, to link the work being done as part of the HCCP with the work being done with the national SABRE employer's strategy.
- 2.2.3 Moray Council are to be invited to present to the next meeting to give an overview of what partners in Moray have achieved and the general plans for on-going dealings with RAF Lossiemouth, and in respect of all the changes to the Kinloss Army Base. Also, included will be the initiatives of the Moray Task Force.
- 2.2.4 Links between Partners locally are being improved with the work that is being undertaken. Direct links to Rosyth (the central support location for the Services within Scotland) is also being considered through Careers Scotland.

3.0 **Other Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity**

- 3.1 The HCCP hosted an Information Evening on 26 June 2013 to which all Lord-Lieutenants, Elected Members and Ward Managers were invited to share knowledge of the Covenant and to encourage community bids to the Grant Scheme. This was a very successful event which offered an excellent networking opportunity between the Armed Forces and community representatives.
- 3.2 The HCCP supported a Veterans Scotland (the Scottish Government's umbrella organisation for veterans) Presentation and Networking event in Inverness in September. This event was attended by over 90 representatives from across the Highlands including schools, church organisations, the Scottish Prison Service and a wide range of third sector organisations
- 3.3 The Council hosted the Getting it Right for the Armed Forces: 'Building Bridges' Conference in November last year. The event was aimed at strengthening the links between the Armed Forces and the local Community and focused on the planning and management of support services for service/ex-service personnel and/or their families. The event was a great success and a similar event is running again in Nov 2013.
- 3.4 The Armed Forces in Highland are also extremely active in supporting and engaging in local events. In addition to Remembrance Day and Armed Forces Day events throughout Highland, armed forces representatives have been involved in the Kirking of the Council, Homecoming parades for the Royal Regiment of Scotland, the Highland Gunners and the Scots Guards, Scottish Cadet Forces Piping Concentration, Russian Arctic Convoy commemorations at Cove/Poolwe, the Hector Macdonald Memorial Service and other events across the Highlands.
- 3.5 The work of the HCCP has already been recognised and cited within the Royal British Legion's UK Best Practice Guide to Community Covenants for its Funders' Fair held in March this year. This event brought together advisers from a variety of disciplines to advise potential applicants to the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme.

3.6 The HCCP have been fully supportive of the establishment of the first Poppy Scotland Office in the Highlands, which acts as a focal point for veterans and serving personnel and their families. The new office provides essential signposting and advice on access to a range of services from across the public and third sector organisations

4.0 **Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme**

4.1 The Grant Scheme aims 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 community in which they live.

4.2 A wide range of organisations in Highland are eligible to apply to the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme (AFCCGS) for projects. Applications are submitted to the HCCP and assessed initially by a representative from the MOD (Lt Col Pete Little, 7 Scots) and Highland Council (Dot Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager). If the assessment is positive, applications are then submitted to the Scottish panel for consideration.

4.3 To date there have been 8 Highland applications for funding to the AFCCGS – 3 have been successful and one was declined but asked to resubmit to the LIBOR fund, another strand of AFCC grant funding. Four have not yet been determined but an outcome is expected before Christmas. Applications have been wide-ranging from an application from Fire Scotland for delivery of a Hi-Fires course to an enhanced educational display within the Highlanders' Museum - **see Appendix B for details**

5.0 **Support Fund for Schools with Service Children**

5.1 In addition, Raigmore Primary and Milburn Academy have been successful in a £24,000 funding bid for continuation funding for additional staffing, deployment support and emotional literacy training.

6.0 **Future Priorities**

6.1 The Highland Community Covenant Partnership will continue to monitor the changing situations with regard to its Armed Forces Community. Actions to mitigate any negative change will be identified through the two working groups and any necessary support instigated.

6.2 The Partnership is also mindful of the World War 1 commemorations which will take place between 2014 and 2018 and will encourage and help communities to deliver appropriate events.

7.0 **Legal, Climate Change, Equalities Carbon Clever and Resource Implications**

7.1 There are no known implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

The Council is invited to:

- (i) welcome the work of the Highland Community Covenant Partnership undertaken to date; and
- (ii) endorse the actions outlined at paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2

Signature:

Designation: Corporate Manager

Date: 9 October 2013

Author: Dot Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Ross, Skye and Lochaber

APPENDIX B

APPLICANT	PROJECT	PROJECT COST	GRANT AWARDED
Highland Council	Getting it Right for Forces Families – Building Bridges project	£8,788	£4,234
HIFRS	Hi-Fires Course aimed at Forces children	£2,500	£ 678
Highlanders' Museum	Enhancement of education display	£2,600	£ 500
Royal British Legion	Care Bed Project	£9,500	Re-submitted for Libor funding - tbc
Kinlochleven Community Trust / Council	Renovation of War Memorial and creation of garden	£20,435	£19,435 applied for - tbc
CALA	Early Years Project, Wimberley Way	£4,200	£4,200 - tbc
Raigmore Primary School	Outdoor classroom and adventure area	£40,138	£34,758 - tbc
Lochaber Archaeology Society	Archaeological study and interpretation of training grounds at Achnacarry	£30,231	£28,731 - tbc