

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

18 DECEMBER 2014

Agenda Item	14
Report No	HC/39/14

HIGHLAND ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT UPDATE

Report by the Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

This report outlines the work carried out by the partners to the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant in the last twelve months 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 at http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4566/armed_forces_community_covenant_for_highland

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

2.0 Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity

2.1 In the past twelve months, considerable activity has been undertaken by the joint working group which encapsulates:

- *Health and Housing*
- *Education and Employment*

To ensure effective cross sector cooperation and partnership working, representation on the working groups is taken from a wide variety of agencies and includes:

- HC - representatives from Community Services and Care and Learning
- NHS
- HIE
- DWP/Job Centre Plus
- Service Personnel and Veterans Agency
- Police and Fire Services
- Services representatives from the Army (Regular and Reserve forces), RAF and Cadets.
- Service Charities: Veterans Scotland, RBLS, Combat Stress, SSAFA, Poppyscotland, Royal Caledonian Educational Trust, etc.
- Other third sector organisations including: Men's Shed, Street Pastors, etc.

2.2 **Health and Housing**

Work this year has focussed on improving access to services by forces personnel and veterans. Specific areas of activity are as follows:

- a) The Council is building 5 adapted properties for disabled veterans in Inverness. These will be transferred to Homes for Heroes on completion - currently estimated as being April 2015.
- b) The Council and other landlords who are part of the Highland Housing Register have joined the MOD Referral Scheme, which helps people leaving the forces find social rented housing.
- c) Partners are continuing to work with colleagues in the Armed Forces to ensure provision of targeted housing information and advice to service personnel to help them consider and plan for their future housing needs as early as possible.
- d) The Council already ensures that armed forces personnel are treated on an equal basis to other housing applicants under our Housing Allocation Policy. This means that forces personnel or veterans receive the same priority for housing as other applicants with the same housing needs. Armed forces personnel are not subject to an assessment of need to reside or local connection in housing allocations and homelessness policies.
- e) The housing application form has been amended to collect information on applicants from forces personnel. This should help with future service planning.
- f) Access to mental health services is also a priority. A liaison visit to Veterans First Point in Edinburgh was made by local representatives from NHS and Poppyscotland to establish best practice and investigate how a similar

approach might be taken in Highland.

Work is still on-going on this led by NHS Highland and will involve joint working with veterans and the third sector.

- g) A two day Scottish Mental Health First Aid training course was funded by Choose Life and was hosted by Poppyscotland. This training brought together Legion Scotland, veterans and Allied Health Professionals and was delivered by 'Minds Matter'. Initial plans were to repeat and cascade further mental health first aid training but Poppyscotland has since sourced Mental Health First Aid training that is designed specifically for veterans
- h) The Psychological Trauma Development Group is planning a stakeholders' event early in 2015. This event will be open to partners working with veterans; the aim is to review access to psychological therapies and ensure that there are appropriately trained staff meeting the needs of veterans. In addition to this a review of the current health pathway for people who have experienced trauma will be undertaken to establish links between third sector organisations and health to provide support where required. The stakeholder event will be held to raise awareness and to agree next steps.
- i) Staff awareness of the issues facing veterans is also important in making sure services are delivered sensitively and potential issues identified. The Council and NHS are working with Combat Stress to deliver staff training and awareness raising sessions.

2.3

Education and Employment

The focus this year has been on improving communications between agencies and making best use of good practice with an emphasis on joint working. On the education side, the HC Military Actions Group (MAG) is providing a regular forum for improved links between education, welfare agencies and social work. On the employment side the focus has been on better joint working with Moray Council who have significant expertise in liaison with adjacent Military Bases at Kinloss and Lossiemouth. Specific areas of activity include:

- a) The opening of the Nairnshire Schools Nurture facility in October - a community support facility for the Nairn Associated School Group – providing a hub for families supporting children with emotional literacy issues. This project is building on the work already started for interrupted learners. This important project is a pilot for Scotland and is already being recognised as a model for good practice. Additional work with families from other areas is also on-going and it is planned to form an action group to share the experience with other teachers.
- b) College entrants – the need for clearer guidelines regarding college applications and how long applicants have been in the area was identified and action taken to resolve

- c) Children's welfare - teachers are being left to deal with the effects when fathers are posted.
- d) It was felt that sharing of experience and knowledge would be helpful here to action a joint approach to support teachers in both Moray and Highland
- e) Veterans are to be made aware of employment opportunities in both private and public sectors. A Speed Networking event was held with a good turn out from organisations including - Poppyscotland; RFEA/ Career Transition Partnership ; Armed Forces Advice Project; Veterans Welfare Service; SSAFA
- f) Looking ahead to 2015, Moray Council is to be included in all meetings with a representative from both Councils in place to attend meetings within Moray and Highland. There will be a focus on the Ministry Of Defence – Education Support Scheme, a fund available to schools which support the educational needs of children, not just those from a Military background. Communication with schools is essential to ensure they are aware that there is additional funding available.
- g) Work to identify military families in schools will continue to ensure that they can prepare for situations where these children may require additional assistance. This will include use of a new system called SEEMIS which will automatically flag pupils from families with military backgrounds. It is planned for this system to be used throughout the country.

2.4

Other Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity

2.5

Two full Partners' meetings have been held and have welcomed additional representation from groups such as the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, Poppyscotland, Combat Stress etc which deliver essential support to veterans. The partners' meeting in November was also attended by the newly appointed Scottish Government Veterans' Commissioner who introduced himself and outlined his new role.

2.6

These meetings present an opportunity for all partners to share information and updates and to identify opportunities for joint working. Regular updates from the Armed Forces, helps agencies and partners to identify issues which may develop over the next 1-2 years and beyond, allowing preparation time for relevant actions to be put in place. For example, in order to satisfy the requirement for the increasing number of Reservists being sought, it is necessary for the Armed Forces and partners to work with the public and private sectors to ensure employers understand any requirements which staff may have if they enlist.

2.7

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, Scottish Cadet Forces Piping Competition, marshalling at the Inverness Half Marathon, the Hector Macdonald Memorial Service and other events across the Highlands. In addition, they have been strongly represented at a range of WW1 commemoration days throughout Highland.

2.8 Availability of project funding is also a key area for information sharing between partners. Funds such as the Veterans' Accommodation Fund etc can play a major role in opening up opportunities for appropriate development.

2.9 Recognising the quality of projects in Highland, representatives were asked to speak at the National AFCC Conference in Glasgow on 9 December as examples of good partnering practice. Presentations are being given on the Nairn Nurture Facility Project and the Lochaber Archaeology Society study on the interpretation of the training grounds at Achnacarry.

2.10 The Highland Council area is viewed by the military in Scotland as one of the leading Local Authorities in the implementation of the Armed Forces Community Covenant and its close linkages and collaboration with Moray Council is particularly noted.

3.0

Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme

3.1

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.

3.2

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.

3.3

To date there have been 11 Highland applications for funding to the AFCCGS – 8 have been successful with 3 declined by the Scottish panel. Further detail on these applications is given at **Appendix A**. Another 4 applications are expected to be submitted for the January 2015 round.

3.4

Support Fund for Schools with Service Children

Successful bids have been made to the MOD Education Support Fund 2014 and further detail is also at **Appendix A**.

4.0

Future Priorities

4.1

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 and any necessary support instigated through the two working groups

4.2

The Partnership is also mindful of the ongoing World War 1 commemorations and will continue to encourage and help communities to deliver appropriate events.

4.3

When the Covenant was signed in 2012, the following key outcomes were agreed:

- The Economy
- Children and Young People
- Caring Communities
- Housing
- Empowering Communities

Partners have agreed that it is appropriate to review progress against each of these outcomes and test for their ongoing relevance over the next 2-3 years. This review will be considered at the next full Partners' meeting being held in February 2015.

4.4

From December 2014, Cllr Allan Duffy will take the lead as the Highland Council Armed Forces and Veterans' Champion.

5.0

Legal, Climate Change, Carbon Clever, Equalities, Rural, Gaelic, and Resource Implications

5.1

There are no known implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

The Council is invited to:

- (i) welcome the work of the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership undertaken to date; and
- (ii) endorse the future priorities outlined at section 4

Designation: Head of Policy and Reform

Date: 5 December 2014

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

APPENDIX A

YEAR	APPLICANT	PROJECT	PROJECT COST	GRANT AWARDED
2013	Highland Council	Getting it Right for Forces Families – Building Bridges project	£8,788	£4,234
2013	HIFRS	Hi-Fires Course aimed at Forces children	£2,500	£ 678
2013	Highlanders' Museum	Enhancement of WW1 display / education workshops	£2,600	£ 500
2013	Royal British Legion	Care Bed Project	£14,000	£14,000
2013	Kinlochleven Community Trust / Council	Renovation of War Memorial and creation of garden	£20,435	Declined
2014	CALA	Early Years Project, Wimberley Way	£4,200	£2,100
2014	Raigmore Primary School	Outdoor classroom and adventure area	£40,138	£34,758
	Lochaber Archaeology Society	Archaeological study and interpretation of training grounds at Achnacarry	£30,231	£25,660
2014	Highlanders' Museum	Upgraded website	£9,500	£4,000
2014	Eden Court Theatre	History dance and drama project to schools / communities	£51,604	Declined (but later funded by Creative Scotland)
2014	Men's Shed	Provision of Men's Shed activities in Inverness	£31,500	Declined (being resubmitted in Jan 2015)
MOD EDUCATION SUPPORT FUND 2014				
2014	Raigmore Primary – 8 schools	Staff and resources to support transition and impact of deployment.		£21,500
2014	Highland Council - 37 schools	Additional pupil support assistants, staff training, furnishing for 2 nurture bases and equipment for 2 outdoor classrooms.		£58,614