

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**17 DECEMBER 2015**

Agenda Item	17
Report No	HC/62/15

**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](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 As previously reported, the Partners reviewed the key outcomes in February 2015 to test their ongoing relevance. While content that they remained relevant, the actions to deliver them were enhanced as follows:

## 2.2 **Economy**

We will work with the Armed Forces community in Highland to improve potential employment for the Armed Forces and their families to optimise the balance of opportunities and resources.

We will work with the Armed Forces community in Highland to promote with partners the role of the cadets as a means of preparing for future employment.

We will work with the employment sector to support the Armed Forces, both Regular and Reserve Forces.

## 2.3 **Children and Young People**

We will work with the Armed Forces and their families and support access to universal service provision and improve outcomes for children and young people of Armed Forces families and veterans.

We will support and engage with specialist staff in the Armed Forces, to assist any children and families with additional needs.

We will continue to develop our understanding of the laydown of young people with Armed Forces links to set up a robust network to help children achieve their potential.

We will promote and support the Cadets across the Highland area.

## 2.4 **Caring Communities**

We will work with the Armed Forces community to ensure they have appropriate advice and information to facilitate the uptake of support where available and appropriate.

We will support and engage with the Armed Forces community to promote and maintain the health and wellbeing of those communities.

## 2.5 **Housing**

We will work with the Armed Forces community to provide information and advice on housing options.

We will explore and deliver new resources in support of the provision of accommodation.

## 2.6 **Empowering Communities**

We will encourage and support the Armed Forces community to ensure they have the opportunity to contribute to and be part of their wider community.

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

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

2.8 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.

## 2.9 **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 has completed building of 5 adapted properties for disabled veterans in Inverness. These have been transferred to Homes for Heroes who will allocate and manage the properties
- b) The Council and other landlords who are part of the Highland Housing Register continue to subscribe to 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) Information is now being collected on housing applications from forces personnel, which will help assess specific housing needs.

- f) Veterans First Point (V1P) Highland - since January 2014 Poppyscotland Inverness and NHS Highland have been engaged in a dialogue and planning process for a V1P Highland service which will be based with Poppyscotland Inverness. The total length of the service will be 15 month including the phased recruitment and a phased exit strategy for the Highland workforce. The Project Lead post is now scheduled for recruitment in December 2015, after which further recruitment in January and February 2016 will complete the team. V1P Highland will comprise a team of psychologically trained health professional and peer support worker specialists, the Peer Support Workers being co-located with Poppyscotland Inverness. As well as integrating with Poppyscotland Inverness staff, this team will work closely with NHS Highland psychological services, improving access to and complementing mainstream services through psychological support in the form of set clinics, drop-in services and psychosocial activities. V1PH sustainability remains firmly on the agenda for both Veterans First Point Scotland (V1PS) and the V1PH Implementation Group who will continue to meet on a monthly basis. Some local exploration into potential future veteran funding bids has already taken place with areas of consideration including inter- generational activities, vocational rehabilitation and enhanced connection though technology.

## 2.10 **Education and Employment**

The focus this year has been on continuing to develop 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.

## 3.0 **Other Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity**

- 3.1 Two full Partners' meetings have been held and continue to be very well attended with an increasing representation particularly from the third sector.
- 3.2 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 help 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.
- 3.3 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 including an event held in Inverness to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of Loos, in which five Battalions of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and five Battalions of the Seaforth Highlanders were involved.

- 3.4 The work of the Highland Military Tattoo in carrying out valuable work to promote and support the Highland Community Covenant also needs to be acknowledged.
- 3.5 Finally, the Freedom of the Highlands was bestowed on the Royal Regiment of Scotland and a number of communities enjoyed the sight of Royal Regiment of Scotland troops exercising their right to March through the city and towns with bayonets fixed and colours flying.
- 3.6 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. Further partnership working to include Aberdeenshire Council is also underway in respect of educational provision.
- 3.7 This recognition has recently been further underlined by the presentation of a Silver Award to Highland Council, which recognises the significant support given by the Authority to employees who are members of the Reserve Forces.

#### 4.0 **Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme**

- 4.1 There has been a material change to the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme. Now called the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, the fund has 4 broad funding themes as follows:
- Removing barriers to family life
  - Extra support after service for those that need help
  - Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the armed forces community to participate as citizens
  - Non-core healthcare services for veterans

These themes shape the fund, but differing annual priorities ensures that it stays focussed and current. For 2015/16 these priorities will be projects that support:

- Local armed forces community integration projects
- The coordination and delivery of support to the armed forces community
- Veterans in the criminal justice system

Unfortunately there is no longer any opportunity for comment by the Highland Covenant Partnership on applications and as all applications are submitted on line, there is no way of capturing who has applied to the Fund.

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

- 5.1 Work being carried out by the Council's Development Officer for Armed Forces Families is being well received and recognised across and beyond Highland. The following activities are of note:
- 5.2 In May 2015 a Covenant Networking Conference was held in Smithton Church attended by around 100 people. Representatives from schools, family teams, third sector partners, Military, voluntary sector and Councillors were present. The work of the Covenant was raised as was the role the Authority as the third line of Welfare in the changing policy of regulars and reservists. From the conference 24 volunteers have come forward to be Covenant Networkers within the 29 Associated School Groups, with training starting in January 2016. Three further conferences are planned throughout Highland.
- 5.3 Nurturing bases – The Haven has been very successful within the Nairn ASG, with children who were not attending previously now engaged. The facility is now used by various groups within the area after school and during the holidays. This facility is now being sustained within the Highland framework. Charleston Academy has now converted 3 rooms as a nurturing base. Invergordon Academy, Ben Wyvis Primary and Wick South are in discussions to set up nurturing bases.
- 5.4 Highland Council has been given clearance by the National SEEMIS group to be the pathfinder authority for using the Armed Forces Tab on the schools database. We are the only authority to actively working to ensure more have accurate numbers of children from of our Armed Forces Community are identified in each school. The Care and Learning Service and are taking a strategically approach to raising awareness of the reasons why we need this.
- 5.5 Identifying children from military families has allowed the Council to target training and to consider additional supports for those schools where the numbers are higher. For children and young people identified with additional support needs, it is also helpful to be able to consider the implications of living in a military family as part of the holistic assessment within the Highland Practice Model (Getting it Right for Every Child), and to include in the child's plan any appropriate advice or interventions that will take account of the child's specific context.
- 5.6 At The Royal Caledonian Education Conference, Highland Council was asked to present the partnership working between Highland, Military and third sector partners which was endorsed by the Military as demonstrating best practice. Work in Highland Council was also noted as best practice at the Alamein Dinner at Perth Barracks with other authorities being encouraged to follow how the strategic and sustainable work was being rolled out across Highland.
- 5.7 Extra monies have been given by the MOD to research the work of the Care and Learning Service in Highland in Education, this will be fed back to the Covenant, with a view to developing a strategic approach across Scotland.
- 5.8 A proposed joint bid from Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire is being discussed. This would be based on the same standards created in Highland being replicated across the three authorities.

5.9 Discussions are being planned to develop the children's voices through the Cadets and starting a Highland HMS Heroes Group.

## 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 and any necessary support instigated through the two working groups

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

6.3 It is also considered that there may be an opportunity for closer engagement with the private sector who could be invited to send a representative to Partnership meetings. This would help to develop further areas of work around eg employability, work placements etc

6.4 Within the Council (and potentially other partners) a more formal process of informing and training key staff about sign-posting opportunities specifically for veterans would be beneficial.

6.5 In order to facilitate delivery of these further priorities it is considered that an application to the Covenant Fund for an Armed Forces Covenant support officer may be appropriate. This will be the subject of discussion at the next Partners' meeting in February.

## 7.0 **Resource Implications**

If bids are made for further funding for projects or officer time this would be subject to the normal approval processes..

## 7.1 **Legal, Climate Change, Carbon Clever, Equalities, Rural, Gaelic, and**

There are no known implications arising from this report at this time.

### **Recommendation**

The Council is invited to:

- (i) welcome the work of the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership undertaken to date;
- (ii) support the ongoing work outlined at Para 5.8 to further develop partnership working with other local authorities and
- (iii) endorse the future priorities outlined at section 6

Designation: Head of Policy and Reform

Date: 4 December 2015

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