

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD

13 December 2011

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

To consider adoption of a Community Covenant Pledge to establish the most appropriate way of supporting the Services community in the local area.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a Government initiative designed to support current and former members of the Armed Forces, and to strengthen communities. The Covenant was launched in June to provide a way of linking the Armed Forces community with the wider community in which they live and work. By signing the Community Covenant, Local Authorities have been invited to strengthen their contacts with members of the Armed Forces based in their local area.
- 1.1.2 The aim is to work in partnership with local charities and voluntary groups, business and private individuals and consider what steps can be pledged to support Service people in the area both in active service and the veteran community. In conjunction with this, the Ministry of Defence will be encouraging Service units to renew their own efforts to see how they can help communities. Attached as **Annex 1** to this report is the Armed Forces Community Covenant Guidance Notes which provide further information on the scheme.
- 1.1.3 There will also be a Community Covenant grant scheme worth up to £30M over the next four years. Grants will be made for joint projects which bring together the Armed Forces and wider communities in a way which builds links and promotes understanding. This is a UK wide scheme, administered by the Ministry of Defence. Attached as **Annex 2** to this report is the Funding Application Criteria for the Community Covenant Grant, designed to help bidders understand what projects may be supported, the criteria used to judge the most suitable projects for funding and the terms and conditions.

1.2 Local links with Armed Forces

- 1.2.1 There is no community in the UK which does not have an Armed Forces community presence, but clearly this will vary greatly across the country. The Community Covenant and any associated pledges would need to be developed in different ways to meet local need. Within Tonbridge and Malling the obvious starting point would be to link to the community based at the Royal British Legion Village in Aylesford.
- 1.2.2 Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) is an independent charity based in Aylesford offering a range of services to Armed Forces personnel and their families. The Royal British Legion Village was founded after the First World War to help gassed and injured soldiers on their discharge from the Preston Hall hospital. Over the years a thriving community has grown up helping all disabled veterans who either come from the hospital or moved into the area. They provide healthcare in a 50 bed high dependency nursing home and Queen Elizabeth Court – the assisted living scheme comprising of 40 self contained flats. In addition to this they are also actively involved in working with current serving forces and assisting with the rehabilitation of injured soldiers from Afghanistan. Operating as a Social Enterprise they also employ ex Servicemen who may have sustained a disability through injury or illness, some of whom are also housed within family houses and bungalows.
- 1.2.3 RBLI has been involved in the Army Recovery Capability, an MOD initiative to provide assessment and employability training to wounded, injured and sick soldiers who are currently being transitioned out of the Armed Forces into civilian life and employment. They deliver a range of assessment and training courses to Armed Forces personnel from all services who are seeking work. In addition they offer these services to those who may have left the Armed Forces some time ago but have been unable to make a successful transition and need support to understand their career options, access training and ultimately find sustainable work.
- 1.2.4 Initial contact has been made with RBLI to discuss the Community Covenant and establish the level of interest on their behalf. They have indicated that they are keen to work in partnership with Local Authorities and would support development of a local covenant.

1.3 Next Steps

- 1.3.1 Subject to Member approval to take this initiative forward, it would be appropriate to contact the RBLI again and as a starting point, sign the Community Covenant Pledge. In most cases the lead signatories will be a senior representative from the Local Authority and Service community who will be signing on behalf of the Armed Forces Community. Within the Covenant Guidelines, it is recognised that Local Authority budgets are stretched and reduced and suggests that the

establishment of Civil/Military partnerships are an excellent low cost way of demonstrating support for the Armed Forces community. This would help to build an understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces and ensure that they are considered in planning local services. This could possibly be achieved by inviting an RBLI representative to become a member of the Tonbridge and Malling Local Strategic Partnership.

- 1.3.2 With regard to the potential to receive a Community Covenant Grant award, this would need to be considered in partnership with the RBLI and would be dependant on the capacity for local projects to be identified which would strengthen and add benefit to the Service and local community.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is entirely voluntary and it is expected that Community Covenants will be led at Local Authority level.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 It is recognised within the Covenant that Local Authority budgets are stretched and support can be low-cost. Initiatives or resulting pledges will need to be developed to suit local need and capacity. There is also the possibility of grant funding for any potential project work.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 N/A

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 That, subject to further discussions with the Royal British Legion Village at Aylesford and other relevant partners, an Armed Forces Community Covenant **BE DEVELOPED** to pledge support for service personnel in the Borough.

The Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Gill Fox

Nil

David Hughes
Chief Executive

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The recommendations are in place to positively contribute towards promoting community cohesion.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	See above
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		N/A

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.