

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

26 October 2021

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters For Decision

1 **ARMED FORCES COVENANT**

To reconsider the Councils existing Armed Forces Covenant and nominate Armed Forces Champions for the Council

1.1 **Background**

1.1.1 The Council signed an Armed Forces Covenant in 2013, in partnership with RBLI Aylesford and 220 Medical Squadron (attached at Annex 1). The principles of this Covenant aim to ensure that the Armed Forces Community should:

- Not suffer disadvantage compared to other citizens as a result of their service;
- Receive equality of outcomes;
- Receive special treatment where appropriate

1.1.2 The Covenant aims to integrate Service life with civilian life. It encourages all parties within a community to offer support to the local Armed Forces, making it easier for Service personnel, families, and veterans to access help and support services available from the MOD, from statutory providers and from the voluntary sector.

1.2 **National Armed Forces Covenant Principles**

1.2.1 The following core principles apply:

- Recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces.
- That it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.
- That special provision for service people may be justified by the effect on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.

1.2.2 The Armed Forces Bill is currently going through Parliament. This will re-invigorate the Covenant and improve the way the Covenant is delivered locally

across the UK. It will introduce a new statutory duty to have **due regard** to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. This will apply to a specified list of public bodies when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education.

- 1.2.3 The Bill will require those who are subject to it to consciously consider the Armed Forces Community and the principles of the Covenant, when developing policy and making decisions in specified policy areas. Statutory guidance will be issued to aid understanding and the Council will be required to have regard to this guidance.

1.3 Armed Forces Champions

- 1.3.1 It is recommended that Local Authorities annually appoint an Armed Forces Champion (AFC). The AFC will raise the profile and needs of the Armed Forces community. The guidance suggests that some Armed Forces experience would be an advantage for this role.
- 1.3.2 Both Cllr Dave Davis and Cllr Steve Hammond have a background of many years military experience and have indicated that they would be willing to share the role of AFC. The Council will benefit from their combined experience which will be fundamental in supporting the Armed Forces community in Tonbridge and Malling. To support this role the Council's Policy, Scrutiny and Communities Manager is the nominated Armed Forces Covenant Lead Officer.

1.4 Next Steps

- 1.4.1 As there have been several changes since the Council last signed the Covenant, it is suggested that an updated version of the Covenant is signed, once again in partnership with local military organisations.
- 1.4.2 The Council should also undertake the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. This scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 The Armed Forces Bill, as mentioned in section 1.2.2. and 1.2.3. Final statutory guidance will be available in early 2022 and by mid-2022 the new Covenant Duty enters into force. The Government is due to review the impact of the new duty on local authorities in 2023.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 N/A

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 N/A

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 Signing the Armed Forces Covenant aims to ensure that those who serve in the Armed Forces (regular or Reserve), those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage.

1.9 Policy Considerations

1.9.1 Community

1.9.2 Customer Contact

1.9.3 Equalities/Diversity

1.9.4 Human Resources

1.10 Recommendations

1.10.1 That Members AGREE:

- 1) To sign an updated version of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 2) To appoint Cllr Dave Davis and Cllr Steve Hammond into the shared role of Armed Forces Champion for Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.
- 3) That the Council should take steps to progress through the Defence Employer recognition Scheme.

Background papers:

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Nil

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