

| Report of: | To: | Date |
|--|------------|-----------------|
| Councillor Peter Le-Marinel Armed Forces Champion | Council | 28 October 2021 |

| |
|--|
| Periodic report - Armed Forces Champion |
|--|

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1** To inform the Council of the current position on various issues relating to the Armed Forces Covenant and Community.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Council has been a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant since 25 June 2012.
- 2.2** The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation that those who serve and have served, and their families, should be treated fairly. The Covenant was enshrined in law in the 2011 Armed Forces Act and ensures that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged as a result of their service when accessing Government and commercial services. Special consideration is also appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most, such as the injured and bereaved. The Government, local authorities, the wider public sector, charities, commercial organisations and civil society all have a role in supporting the Armed Forces community. This includes in areas such as employment, healthcare, housing, education, and financial advice.
- 2.3** The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) is a Ministerial unit in the Cabinet Office with responsibility for championing veterans' interests at the heart of government – highlighting the outstanding contribution veterans from all walks of life are already making to our economy and society and ensuring no individual who needs help is left behind after they leave service.
- 2.4** The Strategy for our Veterans was jointly published by the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments in November 2018. The strategy set the principles and aims needed to continue to meet the needs of older veterans as well as the wider veteran community over the next ten years, and set the right conditions for society to empower and support them for the next 100 years.

3. Armed Forces Covenant and Community Activity in Wyre

- 3.1** During January 2020, Wyre Council established an Armed Forces Covenant Network Group to help deliver the Armed Forces Covenant agenda and to engage with the Armed Forces community in Wyre. The initial meetings confirmed the group's terms of reference and agree an action plan. Unfortunately the pandemic curtailed the work of the group although plans remain in place to re-establish the Network.
- 3.2** In August 2020 Wyre Council achieved the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Employer Recognition Scheme silver award after achieving bronze in 2019. The award is recognition for Wyre Council's commitment to ensuring that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged by their service when employing veterans and the partners of service personnel. This includes supporting Reservist employees to meet their training commitments and by continuing to help service leavers as they make their transition back into civilian life.
- 3.3** In order for the council to work towards achieving the gold award, there is a requirement to maintain the recognised silver standard and continue to meet the required criteria expected prior to applying for the gold award.
- 3.4** Currently there are Armed Forces engagement projects being run by Fleetwood, Blackpool and Fylde football clubs. These are funded by the AF Covenant Trust Fund and provide activities for the AF community including regular walk and talk events in Fleetwood, canoeing taster sessions, virtual coffee meetings and Veterans breakfast clubs. The coordinators offer a referral/signposting service to Veterans in need. Plans are underway to further develop the successful Veterans football activities across the Fylde Coast. It is also encouraging to note that a number of Fylde Coast military associations embraced and temporarily adopted the use of virtual meetings during lockdown, to facilitate communications and ensure that any of their cohort in need were supported.
- 3.5** Wyre benefits from a Veterans outreach project worker funded by Lancashire County Council Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Alf Clempson. Dave Whitworth the project lead is available to act as an advocate and support worker for Veterans in need across the Fylde Coast.
- 3.6** Since 2018, LCC and UCLAN have jointly run an Armed Forces Covenant team to coordinate strategy and work with practitioners and projects across Lancashire. Wyre's Armed Forces Champion and support officer have regularly attended virtual meetings during lockdown to ensure Wyre maintains representation and focus around the Armed Forces Agenda.
- 3.7** Wyre Council's Armed Forces support officer is the point of contact for individuals and organisation seeking information and advice. During lockdown a number of enquiries have been received including support and advice regarding, safeguarding, dentistry provision, housing and homelessness advice, council tax, loneliness and involvement with a serious case review. The council also has a dedicated housing officer to give advice to Veterans and service personnel.

4. Future National Strategy and Legislation

- 4.1** The following section contains excerpts taken from a guide to the new Armed Forces Covenant legislation released in March 2021 by the MOD Covenant Team. It is intended to inform members of impending legislation, further information regarding the new legislation and duties delegated to Local Authorities will be included in future reports.
- 4.2** The Armed Forces Covenant is being further incorporated into law, as part of the Armed Forces Bill 2021, to help prevent disadvantages faced by the Armed Forces Community owing to the unique nature of service in the Armed Forces. It is anticipated that the new Covenant legislation will come into force in 2022.
- 4.3** The focus of the legislation is on local and regional service provision, covering those aspects of public housing, education and healthcare that are most likely to affect serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families.
- 4.4** The legislation will introduce a new duty on relevant public bodies, when exercising certain aspects of their public functions, to have due regard to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. These are:
1. Recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces.
 2. That it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.
 3. That special provision for Service People may be justified by the effect on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.
- 4.5** The new Duty will require those who are subject to it to consciously consider the Armed Forces Community when developing policy and making decisions in the specified policy areas, taking the three principles set out above into consideration.
- 4.6** The legislation will also give the Secretary of State for Defence powers to broaden the scope of the Duty to include other bodies and functions in the future, following consultation with stakeholders. This will be kept under review as the new Duty is implemented.
- 4.7** Under the new Duty, those public bodies in scope will be required to have 'due regard' to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when formulating policy and taking decisions in specified areas.
- 4.8** The requirement will be similar to other duties to have due regard already in operation, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty.

| Financial and legal implications | |
|---|---|
| Finance | No financial implications arising from this report. |
| Legal | No legal implications arising from this report. |

Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report for those issues marked with an X.

| risks/implications | ✓ / x |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| community safety | x |
| equality and diversity | ✓ |
| sustainability | x |
| health and safety | x |

| risks/implications | ✓ / x |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| asset management | x |
| climate change | x |
| ICT | x |
| data protection | x |

Processing Personal Data

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a 3rd party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

| report author | telephone no. | email | date |
|---------------|---------------|--|------------|
| Paul Deacon | 01253 887475 | Paul.deacon@wyre.gov.uk | 28/10/2021 |

| List of background papers: | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|
| name of document | date | where available for inspection |
| None | | |

List of appendices

dem/cou/cr/21/2810pd1