

Subject:	An Armed Forces Community Covenant for Brighton & Hove City		
Date of Meeting:	13 October 2011		
Report of:	Strategic Director, Communities		
Lead Member:	Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities & Public Protection		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Mary Evans	Tel: 29-1577
	Email:	mary.evans@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Key Decision:	No		
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

Note: The special circumstances for non-compliance with Council Procedure Rule 3, Access to Information Procedure Rule 5 and Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (items not considered unless the agenda is open to inspection at least five days in advance of the meeting) were the sensitive nature of the issue and the relatively short time between meetings.

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 At Council on 21 July 2011 a Notice of Motion was submitted by the Mayor that proposed recognising the contribution of the UK's armed forces by supporting the development of a Brighton & Hove Armed Forces Community Covenant.
- 1.2 The council noted the recent commitment by Central Government to enshrine the national Armed Forces Covenant into law. One particular aspect of this initiative is to develop, support and fund a Community Covenant Scheme. The aim of this would be to bring about tangible benefits to the Armed Forces Community by supporting local councils, the private sector and the community, faith and voluntary sectors to work with local Armed Forces communities.
- 1.3 The council also noted a range of recent initiatives across Brighton and Hove which have sought to recognise the unique contribution of the armed forces, including, for example, awarding of Freedom of the City to Henry Allingham and Flight Lieutenant Marc Heal.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That a programme of activity be developed in consultation with the local armed forces community to form the Brighton & Hove Community Covenant, to enable publicity of existing initiatives as well as the development of new plans as appropriate.
- 2.2 That Brighton and Hove apply for funds to support the Community Covenant by March 2012.

2.3 That the plans for a Community Covenant and the engagement process be publicised on Remembrance Day 2011.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 The Government has published a new Tri-Service Armed Forces Covenant which sets out a new relationship between the Government, voluntary and charitable bodies, civil society, local government, and those serving in the armed forces and their families.

3.2 The Covenant covers a wide range of services and issues, including issues such as healthcare, education and housing. A summary is attached at Appendix A (The Armed Forces Covenant).

3.3 In parallel to this, the Government has produced, via the Ministry of Defence, its own response. One particular aspect of this document concerns a new Community Covenant Scheme. On this initiative the Government's document states:

“Government is launching an Armed Forces Community Covenant Scheme which will encourage public service providers at Local and Unitary Authority level, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors to volunteer targeted support for their local Armed Forces community. This could take the form of, for example, additional support in accessing local service delivery such as local housing or free access to leisure facilities, discounts in shops and restaurants. The Community Covenant is intended to be a two way arrangement so we will actively encourage the local Service population to provide support to their local community.”

3.4 Associated with this, the Government has also launched a Community Covenant Grant. The Ministry of Defence will allocate up to £30million over four years. The general premise of this fund is that:

“The Grant will be to support projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. The Scheme will consider applications from local groups for practical projects which deliver rapid results in support of the Armed Forces Community.”

3.5 Further details of this scheme, plus the specific criteria, are attached at Appendix B. Applications are invited for sums from £100 to £250,000 (although bids for amounts greater than this may also be considered in exceptional circumstances). It is envisaged that many of the requests will be for smaller amounts of funding to support local projects and some examples offered by the Ministry of Defence include:

- one-off activities such as an activity camp involving the Armed Forces and young people;

- a community outreach project that brings together veterans with their non-Service equivalents to highlight what support is available to them in their local community.

One key factor to note is that bids may only be submitted from areas which have already established a Community Covenant in their area.

4. CURRENT ACTIVITY

- 4.1 Across the city, there are a number of communities that are disadvantaged or face serious challenge. The council's State of the City report notes that, for example, 28,000 people across the city are estimated to have some form of common mental disorder such as anxiety or depression that limits their potential. 22% of the children and young people up to the age of 19 live in poverty, with the figure reaching 47% in East Brighton. And 12% of the city's areas live within the 10% most deprived areas in England.
- 4.2 In the same way that the council, with its partners in both the statutory and community, faith and voluntary sectors, work together to tackle the impacts of these issues, the new Community Covenant offers the chance for partners across the city to do the same for the Armed Forces.
- 4.3 Nationally, officers of the Armed Services and their families face a number of issues:
- 4.3.1 The current size of the UK ex-Service community (both veterans and their dependants, including dependent children), is over 10.5 million people, and with a more elderly profile than the general population.
- 4.3.2 A minority (6%) of the adult ex-Service community are currently experiencing difficulties and not receiving the help, advice or support they need. This is equivalent to around half a million people with unmet welfare needs.
- 4.3.3 In the general population, women are more at risk of mental health problems than men, whereas in the ex-Service community mental health problems afflict men as much as women.
- 4.3.4 Unemployment among 25-49 year olds in the ex-Service community is higher than the rate nationally.
- 4.3.5 More than half (52%) of the adult ex-Service community have a long-term illness, disability or infirmity, which is higher than in the adult population (35).
- 4.3.6 In the ex-Service community, the unemployment rate among adults of working age is 6%; hardly different from the 5% in the general working age population. However, this hides an unemployment rate among younger members of the ex-Service community (aged 18-49), which is as much as twice that of their peers nationally.
- 4.3.7 Whilst they may not necessarily wish to ask for charitable welfare assistance, over half of the adult ex-Service community (around 4.6 million people) have experienced at least one significant personal difficulty in the last year.

4.3.8 The problems encountered by younger and older members of the ex-Service community differ. Older members are more likely to encounter difficulties with mobility and house and garden maintenance. Younger members are more likely to experience financial, employment or psychological difficulties.

4.3.9 Members of the ex-Service community aged 65 and over, when compared to their peers in the general population, are:

- less likely to be 'very happy'
- less likely to experience complete social isolation
- in better or equivalent health
- more likely to experience mental health and hearing problems

Younger ex-Service community

Members of the ex-Service community aged 16 – 64, when compared to their peers in the general population, are:

- more likely to be 'very happy'
- more likely to experience major health problems

Relative to their peers nationally:

- 16-44 year olds are more prone to mental health problems
- 16-44 year old veterans have higher prevalence of muscular-skeletal complaints
- 45-64 year olds are more prone to cardio-vascular or respiratory conditions.

4.4 Locally in the city, people already support the services' community by:-

- fundraising
- taking part in a number of events and celebrations such as the Freedom Parade and through particular initiatives such as awarding the freedom of the City to Veteran Service men/Women, most recently to Flight Lieutenant Marc Heal (at the same time as Aung San Suu Kyi).

4.5 At Brighton & Hove City Council, the following services already provide support to the Armed Forces Community:-

- The **Housing Benefits Team** provides a liaison service for Armed Service men and women in conjunction with the Royal British Legion.
- There is a National Disregard for War pensions and War widow pensions from £10.00 onwards which affects the amount of Housing Benefit that can be awarded. Currently Brighton & Hove City Council are one of only "5" councils in the country that disregards any full war pension and war widow pensions received when assessing housing benefits claims.

4.6 As an employer the council has publicly supported SaBRE since May 2008, an organisation which supports Reservists. The council is listed on their website as a supporting employer and supports employees who are members of the Territorial Army by granting them one week paid leave, in addition to their other leave entitlement, to attend reserve forces annual training camps. Any additional

commitments would be covered by annual or unpaid leave and, as far as possible, we would facilitate the release of reservists for mobilisation.

4.7 In working towards the development of the Community Covenant and other support activities in Brighton and Hove, there are a number of proposals in train:-

- A Sussex-wide veterans' health needs assessment to be completed by March 2012.
- Consultation and engagement with the armed forces community and their representative organisations in Brighton and Hove to identify their priorities for action from September until December 2011.
- Bench marking across the country for best practice of setting up a range of activities to support the Covenant.
- Full launch pre-Christmas of the Heroes Welcome Campaign – which encourages local businesses to provide discounts for Armed Services officers.

4.8 One key aspect of this work is the need to engage the Armed Services to make sure any local Covenant delivers meaningful outcomes for those directly affected as well as the wider city.

4.9 In line with the Community Engagement Framework a period of three months is required for effective engagement with the armed forces community and their representatives. A questionnaire has been sent to currently serving service personnel from the city to elicit their initial views and more detailed follow up consultation activity is planned for the Autumn. This gives the council the opportunity to understand, with partners, what might form the basis of a productive, deliverable workplan.

4.10 The basis of this could then feed into the detailed creation of a Brighton & Hove Community Covenant and any applications to the new Community Covenant Grant scheme.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 In line with the Community Engagement Framework a period of three months is required for effective engagement with the armed forces community and their representatives. A questionnaire has been sent to currently servicing service personnel from the city to elicit their initial views and more detailed follow up consultation activity is planned for the Autumn.

6. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

6.1 Any costs involved in the development and supporting of the Community Covenant scheme will be met from existing resources or by accessing the grant funding highlighted in section 3.4.

Finance Officer Consulted: Neil Smith

Date: 12/10/11

Legal Implications:

- 6.2 The power to take the measures recommended in paragraph 2 above derives from the council's power under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 to do anything it considers likely to improve or promote the social or economic well-being of its area. The power may be exercised for the benefit of all or any persons resident in the council's area. Additionally, exercise of the power must be consistent with the Sustainable Community Strategy for Brighton & Hove. In this instance, two priorities identified by the Strategy (improving health & wellbeing, and strengthening communities & involving people) render the exercise of the council's well-being powers relevant in relation to the Brighton & Hove Armed Forces Community Covenant.

Lawyer Consulted:

Oliver Dixon

Date: 12/10/11

Equalities Implications:

- 6.3 The equalities implications are as detailed in the body of the report.

Sustainability Implications:

- 6.4 There are no direct sustainability implications from this report.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 6.5 There are no direct crime and disorder implications from this report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 6.6 There is a clear opportunity for additional funding as detailed in the body of the report.

Public Health Implications:

- 6.7 The health implications for veterans to be addressed by the health needs assessment referred to in paragraph 4.7 of the report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 6.8 The citywide implications are as detailed in paragraph 6.2 above.

7. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 7.1 Evaluations of options for activity will be explored through the consultation process.

8. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 To respond to the Community Covenant Notice of Motion referred to Cabinet on 22 September 2011.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

- A. The Armed Forces Covenant Summary
- B. Community Covenant Grant Criteria

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None

