

**Committee: Council**

**Date: 10 July 2013**

Agenda item: 15

**Subject: Developing an Armed Forces Community Covenant for the London Borough of Merton**

Lead officer: Ged Curran, Chief Executive

Lead member: Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Equalities and Engagement

Forward Plan reference number: 1275

Contact officer: Evereth Willis, Equality and Community Cohesion Officer  
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**Recommendations:** That Council

1. Approves the draft Community Covenant and associated action plan set out in Appendix 1 and 2.

## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report sets out the process for developing an Armed Forces Community Covenant for Merton between the Council, key partners and the Armed Forces. It sets out a draft Community Covenant and Action Plan setting out the support that the Council and partners will offer to the Armed Forces, including recognising the contribution and sacrifices made by the Armed Forces and their families. It also sets out the contribution that the Armed Forces will make to community life in Merton.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Community Covenant scheme was launched by the Government in May 2011 as part of the wider Armed Forces Covenant package. Local Community Covenants are designed to complement the national Covenant by:
  - encouraging local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their area;
  - nurture public understanding and awareness of the issues affecting of the Armed Forces community;
  - recognise and remember the sacrifices made;
  - encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life; and
  - encourage the Armed Forces community to help and support the wider community.
- 2.2 A Community Covenant is a document that is signed by the Armed Forces, council, other local public bodies and the voluntary and community sector. It comprises a set of principles and objectives (appendix I). Normally an action plan sits behind the covenant.
- 2.3 Although the serving personnel have access to services provided by the Ministry of Defence, their families often experience poorer service outcomes. For example families frequently move around the country and in doing so

children may miss school admission date. Also for some health matters, moving to a different health authority may mean that particular treatments are no longer accessible. Additionally veterans may experience homelessness, unemployment and mental illness for which the support from local agencies may be needed.

- 2.4 The formal army presence in Merton comprises the Territorial Army (TA) barracks and army cadets in lower Morden. The national headquarters of Haig Homes is also located in Morden. Haig Homes provides affordable housing to ex-service people and their dependents and the largest stock of their housing is located in Morden.
- 2.5 Councillor Maxi Martin is already the council's champion for the Community Covenant and leads the planning of the Armed Forces Day parade in the borough.
- 2.6 The Armed Forces recently held an engagement event at St Mark's Academy to promote awareness and understanding of the work of the Armed Forces. This event was well attended by civic leaders, senior officers and representatives from the voluntary and community sector.

#### **The development of a Community Covenant for Merton**

- 2.7 Officers from the Council have been discussing the development of a Community Covenant with representatives from the Armed Forces Engagement Team. The Merton Partnership has endorsed the development of a Community Covenant and key partners are willing to be signatories to it. A draft Community Covenant has been developed in liaison with the Armed Forces and this is set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.8 As well as discussions with the Armed Forces consultation has taken place with a number of voluntary sector organisations and advice giving agencies to identify the key issues and concerns for Armed Forces personnel and their families living in Merton. An action plan has been developed to underpin the Community Covenant and to demonstrate the Merton's commitment to supporting the Armed Forces. Importantly the action plan sets out how the Armed Forces will contribute to civic life and support community cohesion in Merton. It should be noted that the centenary of the start of World War One takes place in 2014. A draft action plan is set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.9 It is proposed that signatories to the covenant will include; the Leader of the Council, Merton Partnership, Haig Homes and Armed Forces representatives for London.

#### **The issues affecting Armed Forces personnel in Merton**

- 2.10 From discussions with Haig Homes, Stonecott Hill Barracks and other armed forces voluntary groups a number of common areas of concern have emerged that could be the focus of the action plan.
- 2.11 Haig Homes provide housing for a sizeable Gurkha community and have identified the need for ESOL classes to support residents such as some members of the Nepalese community to get support in learning to speak English. Also fifty per cent of new residents have a medical issue (including

mental illness). Generally, the need for housing was highlighted as a major concern for veterans and their families.

- 2.12 The Council has already amended the Allocations Scheme to give more priority to veterans. A special quota has been created that recognises the contribution of former armed forces personnel and accordingly gives them higher priority for rehousing.
- 2.13 Discussions with SSAFA<sup>1</sup> also highlighted the issue of homelessness affecting some veterans, particularly those who are about to leave prison, and the need to do preventative work.
- 2.14 Stonecot Hill TA raised the issue of recruitment to the Armed Forces and in particular attracting younger people. Also some reservists have difficulty getting their employers to release them to participate in activities. Therefore the action plan includes activity to support employers and improving information about the support available to them to fill the gap left by staff that are deployed in active service. Stonecott Hill's Captain is keen to participate in community cohesion events and open days and recently the TA had a presence at the Mitcham Carnival and will also be part of the Armed Forces Day parade.
- 2.15 Employment was also raised and suggestions made to hold recruitment fayres aimed at veterans. Additionally, the spouses of armed forces personnel face disadvantage in the employment market. They may not have sufficient skills and experience to be competitive in the job market because regularly moving around the country limits their training opportunities. Another concern was the growing number of veterans from Commonwealth countries and the need to provide them with immigration advice and support to secure residency rights.
- 2.16 Due to the mobility of military careers, the children of serving armed forces personnel sometimes face difficulty in accessing schools. Merton has already signed up to the Admissions Code to cover the children of military personnel and support them to gain a place and settle into school.
- 2.17 To address the local needs an action plan (appendix 2) has been developed to include the following areas:
  - Employment – support for veterans to find jobs
  - Housing for veterans
  - Education – transition arrangements and access to admissions for the children of serving armed forces personnel
  - Access to advice for veterans
  - ESOL classes for spouses of veterans
  - Access to health pathways for veterans and families of serving armed forces personnel
  - Civic recognition of the work, contribution and sacrifices of the Armed Forces including recognising the centenary of the start of World War One.

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<sup>1</sup> SSAFA is a British based charitable organisation set up to help former and serving members of the United Kingdom British Armed Forces and their families or dependants

- Opportunity for the armed forces community to support community cohesion activity.
- Volunteering opportunities for veterans to work with the wider community

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Council could choose not to sign up to a Community Covenant with the Armed Forces.

### **4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1 See section 2.

### **5. TIMETABLE**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>
Signing Ceremony with Armed Forces personnel and key partners	10 September 2013

### **6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The commitments in the action plan will be delivered within existing resources.
- 6.2 Having a Covenant in place gives the borough the opportunity to work in partnership with other agencies to bid for grants from the Covenant Grant Scheme to fund projects that will benefit the local community.

### **7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There is no statutory requirement to have an Armed Forces Community Covenant but local authorities are encouraged to do so by DCLG and the Local Government Association.

### **8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The proposals in this report address some of the disadvantages experienced by Armed Forces personnel and their families. They will also promote greater community cohesion by helping to integrate the Armed Forces within the wider community in Merton.

### **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 None

### **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 None

### **11 APPENDICES – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report**

- Appendix 1: Draft Armed Forces Community Covenant
- Appendix 2: Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan

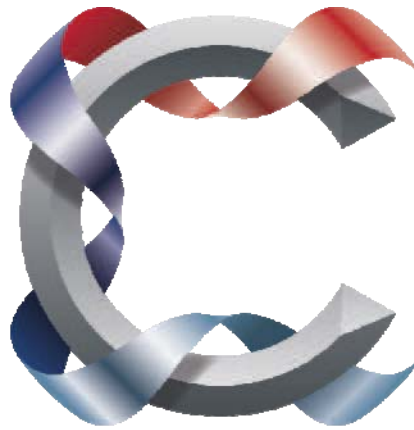
## 12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Best practice guide to community covenants - British Legion/Local Government Association

[http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/2388963/communitycovenant\\_bestpracticeguide.pdf](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/2388963/communitycovenant_bestpracticeguide.pdf)

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Draft



# **Community Covenant**

**AN ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT**

**BETWEEN**

**LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
CHARITABLE AND VOLUNTARY SECTORS,  
THE CIVILIAN COMMUNITY OF MERTON**

**AND**

**THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY OF LONDON**

## **SECTION 1: PARTICIPANTS**

1.1 This Armed Forces Community Covenant is made between:

The serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families working and residing in Merton

And

Merton Council

And

The Charitable and Voluntary Sector

And

Other members of the civilian community

## **SECTION 2: PRINCIPLES OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT**

2.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level.

2.2 The purpose of this Community Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in London and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community, particularly those who have given the most. This includes Pre-Service, Serving and ex-Service personnel their families and widow(er)s in London.

2.3 For Merton Council and partner organisations, the Community Covenant presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. It also presents an opportunity to build upon existing good work on other initiatives such as the Welfare Pathway.

2.4 For the Armed Forces community, the Community Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life and encourages members of the Armed Forces community to help their local community.

## **SECTION 3: OBJECTIVES AND GENERAL INTENTIONS**

### **Aims of the Community Covenant**

3.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant complements the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant which defines the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community.



3.2 It aims to encourage all parties within a community to offer support to the local Armed Forces community and make it easier for Service personnel, families and veterans to access the help and support available from the MOD, from statutory providers and from the Charitable and Voluntary Sector. These organisations already work together in partnership at local level.

3.3 The scheme is intended to be a two-way arrangement and the Armed Forces community are encouraged to do as much as they can to support their community and promote activity which integrates the Service community into civilian life.

#### **SECTION 4: Measures**

4.1 The London Armed Forces Community Covenant seeks civic support in the following broad areas: adult support to cadet forces; enabling recruitment; allowing work and training; housing; school transition for service children; medical and welfare pathways; veterans; local security; post operational home-coming parades and support to reservists.

4.2 The London Armed Forces Community Covenant suggests military support in the following areas: aid in civil emergencies as permitted by legislation; periodic access to our estate and its facilities; representation at celebrations, commemorations and parades; single Service Presentation teams; and sharing with partner organisations such as uniformed youth, veterans and the third sector.

4.3 It is acknowledged that support in all directions will have periodic resource constraints.

## CONTACT PERSONNEL AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

### MOD DCDS (Pers&Trg) Covenant Team

Contact Name: John Shivas  
Title: DCDS (Pers) Sec Covenant 1  
Telephone: 020 7218 9110  
Address: DCDS (Pers) Covenant Team  
Zone D, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ministry of Defence  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2HB

### In-Service representative(s)

Contact Name: Martin French  
Title: London District Civil Engagement Manager  
Telephone: 020 7414 2437  
Address: HQ London District  
Horse Guards  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AX

## THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

An Enduring Covenant Between:

1. The People of the United Kingdom;
2. Her Majesty's Government;
3. All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown;
4. Their Families.

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

Dated:

## Signatories

Signed:

Name: Colonel Mike Kelly

Deputy Commander London District

**Signed on behalf of the Army  
Community of London**

Signed:

Name: Colonel Hugh Purcell

Chief Executive RFCA

**Signed on behalf of the Reserve Forces  
and Cadet Community**

Signed:

Name:

RAF

**Signed on behalf of the Royal Air Force  
Community of London**

Signed:

Name:

(Position Held:)

**Signed on behalf of the Armed Forces  
Charities Community**

Signed:

Name: Commodore Martin Atherton  
Naval Regional Commander (SE England)

Name: Councillor Stephen Alambritis

Leader of the Council

**Signed on behalf of The Borough of  
Merton**

Name:

Chief Executive

Signed on behalf of Haig Homes

**Other signatories:  
Merton Partnership**

**Signed on behalf of the Royal Navy  
Community**

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Appendix 2  
Armed Forces Community Covenant action plan

Issue	Activity	Target date	Lead Agencies
<b>Improving awareness and promoting publicity about the Armed Forces</b>	Develop a dedicated web site providing information on the covenant and to sign post to services.  Periodically publish articles in My Merton to raise awareness of the work of the armed forces.	August 2013  On going	Merton Council – Evereth Willis  Merton Council – Evereth Willis
<b>Volunteering</b>	Work with the voluntary sector and armed forces charities to identify volunteering opportunities for veterans to work with the wider community.	December 2013	Armed forces Charities/Voluntary and community sector/Merton Council – John Dimmer
<b>Civic recognition of the work, contribution and sacrifices of the Armed Forces</b>	Participate in Armed Forces Day Parade.  Arrange a series of civic events to commemorate the centenary of World War One.	June 2013  December 2013	Stonecot Hill TA Barracks, local cadet forces,  Merton Council – Christine Parsloe
<b>Armed Forces support of community cohesion events</b>	Participate in and support community cohesion events such as Mitcham Carnival.	On going	Stonecot Hill TA Barracks, local cadet forces

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Issue	Activity	Target date	Lead Agencies
<b>ESOL classes for spouses of veteran</b>	Work with statutory and voluntary agencies to support families of veterans to access ESOL provision in the borough.	On going	Voluntary and Community sector/Merton Council – Yvonne Tomlin
<b>Education - provide transition arrangements and access to admissions for the children of serving armed forces personnel</b>	Continue to comply with the School Admissions Code as it stands to cover military personnel.	On going	Merton Council – Paul Stemp
<b>Support veterans to find suitable housing locally.</b>	Maintain the current Housing Allocation quota for the provision of housing to ex-armed forces personnel and their families providing tenancy sustainment and referrals to floating support services where required. Review on an annual basis.	On going	Merton Council – Steve Langley, Registered Providers
<b>Employment – support veterans and spouses to gain work</b>	Work in partnership to prevent veterans leaving prison facing homelessness.	March 2014	Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen's Family Association (SSAFA), Probation service,
	Work in partnership to provide individual and tailor made specialist support for veterans	December 2013	Job Centre Plus, Chamber of Commerce, Employment Charities



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Issue	Activity	Target date	Lead Agencies
	<p>seeking employment.</p> <p>Actively promote Merton Priory Home's employment and skills programme to veterans, particularly the Start Your Own Business Course and the programmes offered through Merton Training and Employment Centre.</p>	<p>On going</p>	<p>Merton Priory Homes, Merton Training and Employment Centre</p>
	<p>Support employers with Reservist Staff to access Ministry of Defence information about the support available to them to fill the gap left by staff that are deployed in active service.</p>	<p>March 2014</p>	<p>Stonecot Hill TA Barracks, Chamber of Commerce</p>
<p><b>Access to advice for veterans</b></p>	<p>Support unemployed people to become reservists with the Territorial Army.</p> <p>Work with SSAFA to identify gaps in advice and assistance to armed forces personnel.</p>	<p>TBC</p>	<p>Stonecot Hill TA Barracks, Job Centre Plus</p> <p>Haig Homes/SSAFA</p>
<p><b>Improving health outcomes</b></p>	<p>Promote access to health pathways for veterans and families of serving armed</p>	<p>On going</p>	<p>Health and Well Being Board</p>

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Issue	Activity	Target date	Lead Agencies
	forces personnel.		