ARMED FORCES COVENANT UPDATE

Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Communities & Housing Scrutiny Committee on the support offered to current and former members of the armed forces, reservists and their families as part of our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

2. CORPORATE OVERVIEW

2.1 The Stockport Armed Forces Community Covenant was jointly drafted and approved by the Council and Borough’s Armed Forces Liaison Officer and Regional Headquarters in April 2013. The document has since been revised earlier this year following approval from CLT, Scrutiny and Cabinet. The current Covenant, approved by Cabinet earlier in the year, is available on the Council’s Internet. An extract of our key commitments is attached at Appendix One for information.

2.2 The Armed Forces Covenant is supported by both: the community covenant and the corporate covenant. The community covenant encourages local communities to support the armed forces community in their area and promote public understanding and awareness. The corporate covenant is a public pledge from businesses and other organisations who wish to demonstrate their support for the armed forces community.

2.3 The Covenant does not intend to replace current work by public service providers, charities and individuals, but rather formalise a commitment and build on existing sources of support.

2.4 A local Armed Forces Community Covenant Group was established in August 2013 to oversee the implementation and on-going development of the Community Covenant. The Group comprises of the North West Armed Forces Liaison Officer, Elected Members from all political parties and representatives from a range of associations including Royal British Legion, Stockport Territorial Army, Royal Air Force Association, Defence Medical Welfare Service, Soldiers’ and Sailor’s Families Association (SSAFA), Disability Stockport, Stockport Homes, Stockport’s Breakfast Veterans Club Department of Work and Pensions, NHS etc. This group have been instrumental in the development of our revised strategy and are in process of agreeing an associated action plan.

2.5 Stockport Council is also a member of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) Armed Forces Group which take place every 6 weeks. By attending this group, Stockport Council is able to learn from best practice and discuss ideas with each of the other Local Authorities. The AGMA group have collectively secured a Greater Manchester bid (£232,000) to strengthen local government delivery of the armed forces covenant. The bid will be used to raise awareness, engagement and understanding through a unique approach to digital functions such as, film animation, e-learning and a dedicated website and portal.
2.6 The AGMA group also put together a report to go to the Wider Leadership Team meeting on the 30th June 2017. The report provided specific updates on the work to support the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) since it was signed in June 2014. It invited the GMCA to consider further priority actions to ensure the needs of service personnel and their families are being met in GM. It also proposed the re-signing and refreshing of the Armed Forces Covenant by the GMCA alongside the Ministry of Defence on 30th June 2017 and other public sector agencies within Greater Manchester including Greater Manchester Police, the National Health Service and Greater Manchester Fire and Transport for Greater Manchester.

2.7 The Council’s website has an online resource for former and serving Armed Forces personnel. Whilst this website is in the process of being redesigned it already provides a wealth of information to current and former Armed Forces personnel. The current webpage can be found here: [https://www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/armed-forces-covenant](https://www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/armed-forces-covenant)

2.8 The Covenant group has a network of designated champions across both the Council and Stockport Homes who represent areas such as housing, education, adult social care and advice and guidance. These champions are invited to our Quarterly Armed Forces Covenant Group on a regular basis to provide updates and are our first point of contact if a member of the Armed Forces or their family require additional support. The current Armed Forces Champions are attached at Appendix Two. Armed Forces Champions, members of the Armed Forces Covenant Group and our workforce can also email armedforces@stockport.gov.uk as and when they identify someone associated with the Armed Forces who may require additional assistance. We have reviewed our employment Policies to ensure that they support Reservists and former Armed Forces personnel. Our Reservists Policy has been communicated to Managers and has been included in internal communications activity.

3. DEMOGRAPHICS

3.1 On the 30th June 2016, Stockport Council agreed the following motion: “To support and promote the Royal British Legion’s call for Parliament to include a new topic in the 2021 census that concerns military service and membership of the Armed Forces Community when they approve the final census questionnaire through the legislative process in 2019.”

3.2 Given the lack of census information there are no definitive figures for the total number of serving personnel, veterans and armed forces families living in Stockport at the present time. Since Stockport does not have any military bases or garrisons, there are substantially fewer Armed Forces families living in the Borough compared to areas such as Hampshire, North Yorkshire and Oxfordshire. However estimates suggest that there is a significant armed forces presence in the North West and a representative proportion of these are likely to live in the Stockport area. We know about 20% of the Army is recruited from the North West and it is believed that their families usually remain in the region during service.

3.3 It is estimated that 1 in 5 servicemen will return to live in the North West after service and over 500,000 veterans currently live in the region. This number is likely to increase over the next few years as a result of the Armed Forces redundancy programme.
3.4 Additionally, there are approximately 5,000 servicemen, regular and active reserve, stationed in the North West. Though there are no regular units in Greater Manchester, there are Territorial Army Units in Stockport, Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Salford, Tameside and Wigan which together with their families make up a total population of approximately 3,000 people.

3.5 There is also a strong Army Cadet presence across Greater Manchester, with 1400 cadets in 47 detachments.

3.6 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Royal British Legion (RBL) attempted to disaggregate the veteran population by metropolitan borough in 2007. The data suggests that approximately 22,524 veterans were living in Stockport.

4. OUR COMMITMENT TO THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY IN HOUSING

4.1 The housing needs of current and former members of the armed forces range from finding themselves street homeless through to seeking affordable home ownership options for themselves and their families when leaving the services. The Council and Stockport Homes apply the principles of the Covenant to try and ensure their needs and aspirations are met, working closely with specialist partner agencies.

4.2 At the highest end of housing need, are those who find themselves homeless - which can often be accompanied by a range of factors including mental ill health and substance abuse. The Rehousing Services Manager at Stockport Homes acts as the operational housing link for the covenant group, and ensures a co-ordinated and holistic approach towards assisting those in this situation. This means that legal duties are exceeded in the provision of temporary accommodation, there is additional flexibility around what constitutes a local connection to the Borough, and services are individually tailored to meet sometimes complex needs.

4.3 While numbers of homeless ex-service personnel are not high in Stockport, adopting a person centred approach and engaging with specialist services where relevant has seen some very positive outcomes. For example, a homeless former soldier who had seen service in Northern Ireland was accommodated, helped to address alcohol related issues that were linked to post traumatic stress disorder, and eventually supported to access a university course.

4.4 The Council's allocation policy was also revised in 2012 to offer additional priority to those who have been in the armed forces and are in urgent housing need. Again numbers applying are not large, at present only 8 people out of 7000 on the housing register fall into this category, but it means that where someone has been in the forces they will be prioritised over someone in the same situation who has not. As a result, someone who is leaving the forces will usually have enough priority to be rehoused into a Council property as long as they are able to be flexible with property types and choice of areas.

4.5 With house prices in the Borough well ahead of the regional average, those having served in the armed forces are also given the highest priority for shared ownership and affordable home ownership schemes to help them ‘get on the housing ladder’. Two families have recently completed purchases for properties built by Stockport Homes as a result, and with a range of developments being built across the Borough and
advertised directly to those in the armed forces, this number is likely to increase significantly.

4.6 From a strategic perspective, the Council, and the Stockport Housing Partnership are also working closely with Step Forward, which is a specialist armed forces housing provider (pending application for Registered Provider Status) to increase the provision and availability of housing options in the Borough. This includes discussion with developers regarding the possibility of procuring properties through s106 agreements for former armed forces personnel with a Stockport link.

5 NEXT STEPS

5.1 Stockport Council remains committed to our Armed Forces community. All of our Scrutiny Committees have received similar updates during this committee cycle and these will be amalgamated into a single report and submitted to Cabinet in October 2017 in order to raise awareness of this commitment.

5.2 This amalgamated report will also be distributed to the Chairs of Area Committees following Cabinet with a request that they consider what local activity is being undertaken in their area. In particular, members of the Armed Forces Covenant Group have expressed a desire to participate in Area Committee discussions in order to raise awareness of the available support at a local level. We are also in the process of developing a directory of supporting groups as part of our Digital by Design activity and this will also be distributed to Councillors upon completion. A digital newsletter is scheduled to be published in September 2017 and this will also be distributed for information.

5.3 The Council will also continue to produce our Annual Report for Cabinet; the next report is scheduled to be presented in April 2018. The Armed Forces Covenant Group will continue to meet on a quarterly basis and will continue to develop our shared approach.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Communities & Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and our future plans to support the armed forces community in Stockport.

Background Papers

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Andy Kippax on telephone number Tel: 0161-474 4319 or alternatively email andy.kippax@stockport.gov.uk

Appendix One Extract from the current Armed Forces Covenant
Appendix Two Armed Forces Champions
APPENDIX 1 – Extract from the Armed Forces Covenant

SECTION 5: LOCAL PRIORITIES AND MEASURES

5.1 Whilst the Armed Forces have an important role in preparing serving personnel and veterans for civilian life, the local authority and community also have an important role in supporting the successful transition and providing support for Armed Forces families.

5.2 Stockport Council and its partners already provide a range of services which serving personnel and veterans can access for support in relation to housing, education, employment and welfare rights. The key services include;

5.1 Housing

Stockport Council’s new Allocation Policy (approved in February 2012) includes ‘additional preference’ for ex-forces personnel with urgent housing needs as well as priority status for those in the process of leaving the military.

Information and advice is also available for new Stockport Homes’ tenants, including advice about housing options and resettlement support for new tenants who require help accessing employment, training and benefits.

Stockport Homes work closely with the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) and the British Legion to help prevent homelessness. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, Stockport Homes complies fully with legislation and guidance around people leaving the Armed Forces.

5.2 Education

Children of serving UK personnel are treated as a ‘permitted exception’ for admission into reception to place them in school and get them settled quickly.

Support packages are in available to support children’s learning, social and psychological development if necessary and wider support is available for the family through CAMHS if there are any issues.

The Government’s Pupil Premium also provides schools with additional funding to support children of service personnel.

5.3 Engagement with Schools

Encourage and promote youth engagement in the Armed Forces community. This includes supporting the four youth Cadet organisations, all of which offer a wide range of activities for young people. The Armed Forces sees its Cadets as a vital part of preparing our young people for their role in the community while developing valuable life skills. Local schools will be encouraged to similarly support and promote the youth initiatives.

Engage the Armed Forces in local public events and work with the Armed Forces to support local events such as the annual Armed Forces day to acknowledge the work of currently serving troops, to service families, veterans and cadets.
5.4 Employment

The National Careers Service provides the first port of call for individuals wanting Advice and Guidance on how to develop their career aspirations, improve their skills and prepare for work. The service includes face-to-face adviser support, telephone support and online support, with more intensive personalised support available to individuals in priority groups (out of work benefit claimants, people with low skills).

Jobcentre Plus provides support in dealing with out of work benefit claims and payments, as well as providing a further source of back-to-work support for the shorter term unemployed. Meanwhile support for longer term unemployed is provided through the DWP Work Programme.

Stockport Council’s Employment and Skills Advisers also provide information, advice and guidance to people living in the Borough’s ‘Priority Neighbourhoods’.

5.5 Information and Advice Services

The Council’s Advice Service provides a free, confidential service accessible to all.

The service includes a network of 11 local centres providing one-stop shops for face-to-face advice covering a wide range of issues, including benefits, debt, employment and consumer issues. Information and access to Council and other public services are available at all libraries.

5.6 Health and Wellbeing

The Council’s Adult Social Care team provides a range of support to those presenting with more complex needs, including case work with individuals with mental health needs and / or physical injuries.

5.7 Defence Medical Welfare Service

Through a partnership between the Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS), Greater Manchester Local Authorities, local health service providers and the voluntary sector, armed forces families in Stockport can receive support as they enter the hospital services.

5.8 Communities Leadership

Encourage local businesses and employers to adopt the principles of Armed Forces Corporate Covenant and show their support to Armed Forces personnel and their families. This includes increasing awareness of how employing reservists and veterans can benefit the workplace through making the most of the leadership and skills they have learnt through their service. To do this, we will encourage businesses to sign up to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), that 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.
5.9 Understanding our Armed Forces Demographics

Take steps to better understand the needs of both the Armed Forces community and our internal workforce, by making a commitment to collecting data on veterans, their dependants, Reservists and those currently service to ensure services are tailored accordingly. This includes support for the inclusion of questions concerning membership of the Armed Forces Community in the census.
## APPENDIX TWO – Armed Forces Champions

### Officer Champions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service area</th>
<th>Contact (tbc)</th>
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| Corporate                                | Laureen Donnan (Armed Forces Champion)  
Sue Williams  
Nayuri Patel                                                                                 |
| Housing                                  | Andy Kippax, Head of Strategic Housing, Stockport Council, Tel 0161 474 4319  
Geoff Binns, Rehousing Services Manager, Stockport Homes, Tel: 0161 474 3721              |
| Education                                | Phil Beswick, Director of Education, Stockport Council, Tel 01614743832                                                                  |
| Employment and Skills                    | Sharon Mayo  
Senior Growth Manager, Stockport Council, Tel: 0161 474 3733                                                                        |
| Information and Advice Services          | Alison Blount, Head of Service, Stockport Council, Tel: 0161 218 5107                                                                    |
| Adult Social Care / Supporting People    | Sarah Statham  
Service Development Manager, Stockport Council, Tel 0161 474 4308                                                                    |