

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY MANAGING DIRECTOR

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	18 JULY 2016	AGENDA ITEM:	16
TITLE:	READING'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT AND ACTION PLAN - MONITORING REPORT		
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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community.
- 1.2 Reading's Community Covenant was launched on 7th July 2012 at the Afghanistan Homecoming Parade at Brock Barracks.
- 1.3 This report presents a six monthly update on progress against the actions outlined in the action plan, and on the general development of the Community Covenant.

2.0 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the progress against the actions set out in the Armed Forces Community Covenant action plan.
- 2.2 To agree to future reporting on an annual basis, rather than six monthly.

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2011, the Government published a new Armed Forces Covenant, as a tri-Service document which expresses the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community.
- 3.2 The Community Covenant complements the Armed Forces Covenant but enables service providers to go beyond the national commitments. It allows for measures to be put in place at a local level to support the Armed Forces and encourages local communities to develop a relationship with the Service community in their area.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

Background

- 4.1 A 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.
- 4.2 The aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant are to:
- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas
 - nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the armed forces community
 - recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the armed forces community
 - encourage activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life
 - to encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement
- 4.3 The Reading Armed Forces Community Covenant was launched at the Afghanistan Homecoming Parade at Brock Barracks on 7th July 2012.
- 4.4 In addition to the Council, the covenant has been signed by 7 Rifles on behalf of the Armed Forces, and a range of other key partners.
- 4.5 Reading doesn't have a large military 'footprint', with no regular forces stationed in the town. However, Brock Barracks is the headquarters for the Territorial Army unit 7th Battalion The Rifles, and Reading is home to a large ex-Gurkha community. Reading's Community Covenant therefore focuses on Veterans and Reservists and aims to be proportionate in its scope to the size of the Armed Forces community in Reading.

Further development of the Community Covenant and action plan

- 4.6 The Community Covenant working group with key stakeholders meets on a six monthly basis, the most recent held on 16th March 2016.
- 4.7 Progress to date against the actions in the action plan is shown in Appendix A. Several of the actions in action plan have now been completed. Successes to date include:
- Reading was awarded £21,730 from the Community Covenant grant scheme for an integration project for Veterans, aimed at raising awareness of health and social care services amongst the ex-Gurkha community in particular; health weeks have been delivered in August and December 2013 (both attended by at least 90 people), and February 2014 (attended by 60), including workshops and health checks.

- The Museum service was awarded £10,000 from the Community Covenant grant scheme to support their exhibition, 'Reading at War', to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War in 2014, along with a leaflet on Reading's military heritage and the commissioning of a poet to deliver workshops in primary schools.
- Reading Ex-British Gurkha Association was awarded £14,500 under the new Covenant Fund for two Nepalese community development workers.
- Armed Forces personnel can now be given extra priority when applying for social housing on the Housing Register, as part of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme.
- A domestic violence protocol is in place between the Service and the Police, to recognise military needs and ensure equitable service.
- A leaflet on accessing health services has been translated into Nepalese and is being used by SSAFA to run classes.
- Reading Borough Council now has a protocol in place for employment of Reserve Forces personnel.
- 'Operation Reflect' activities to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War included 7 Rifles visits to 5 primary schools.
- Job Centre Plus staff now receive regular briefings from 7 Rifles.

New Community Covenant fund

- 4.8 A new Community Covenant fund has recently been launched, with £10 million available every year.
- 4.9 The following four priorities have been set for the financial years 2016/17 and 2017/18:
1. Veterans' Gateway
 2. Families in Stress
 3. Improving Local Covenant Delivery (clusters of LAs only)
 4. Community Integration / Local Service Delivery
- 4.10 Under priority 4, the MOD will fund projects of up to £20,000 that respond to the local needs of the Armed Forces Community and improve recognition of the Armed Forces Covenant, and that:
- help integrate Armed Forces and civilian communities across the UK
 - deliver valuable local services to the armed forces community.
- 4.11 There are two application rounds this year for priority 4, with deadline dates of 22 June and 2 November 2016. The next working group meeting in Sept 2016 will discuss any potential bids for November submission.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The development of an Armed Forces Community Covenant for Reading contributes in particular to the Council's strategic aim to 'promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all' by working to ensure that both serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel can access appropriate support and are able to integrate well into the community.

5.2 This work also relates particularly well to the Sustainable Community Strategy's 'people' theme where 'we look after each other' and the 'prosperity' theme by aiming to ensure that veterans and reservists are not excluded from the economy.

6.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 Two of the key aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant are to:

- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas
- encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement

7.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 The covenant is intended as a vehicle for partners across Reading to help enable Veterans or Reservists to access health services, particularly mental health services, training and employment opportunities.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The general power of competence, introduced as part of the Localism Act 2011, replaces the well-being power from February 2012. The Act gives local authorities the power to do anything which an individual generally may do, which they consider is likely to be of benefit (directly or indirectly) to the whole or any part of their area. It therefore gives local authorities the power to do anything they want, so long as it is not prohibited by other legislation.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 £30m of central government funding was allocated over four years to 2014/15 to financially support Community Covenant 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. Reading has submitted bids in three bidding rounds. £10m per annum has now been made available in perpetuity from 2015/16 onwards through the new Armed Forces Covenant fund.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Armed Forces Community Covenant guidance notes, July 2012, www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-covenant-pledge

10.11 Armed Forces Covenant Fund www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund

**READING ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT
ACTION PLAN, JUNE 16**

The Armed Forces Community Covenant's key objectives:

Recognise, Remember, Integrate and Support

Armed Forces community comprises serving personnel (regular and reserves) and their dependants; and veterans and their dependants.

HQ 11 Infantry Brigade Workstrands:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Economy and Skills
- Education, Children and Young People
- Environment and Infrastructure
- Safer & Stronger Communities

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
HEALTH AND WELLBEING - <i>To ensure that the wellbeing of the Armed Forces community is not undermined by the nature of service life</i>				
Recognise: <i>Map and identify veterans status and represent special requirements of Armed Forces community in order to allow NHS to meet needs</i>				
1	Feedback and input to Health and Wellbeing Board	ROSO 7 Rifles	ongoing	ROSO 7 Rifles attended meeting in Oct 2015; Regimental Medical Officer to attend future meeting
3	Devise protocol for GPs to register Veteran status	Clinical Commissioning Groups	ongoing	GPs currently being encouraged to record status and a number of measures have been designed by the CCGs, and introduced in the run-up to Armed Forces Day in June 2016: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCGs have developed guidance for practices on registering patients from the armed forces community • A new armed forces page of the CCGs' websites sets out why

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
				<p>Veterans should register themselves as such with their GP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A simple form is available on websites that veterans can take to their practice to ensure they are recorded as a Veteran • Veterans will also be encouraged to register via the information screens in practice waiting rooms
4	Raise awareness of and signpost to Veteran's mental health service for the South Central region	Covenant partnership/ Armed Forces charities/other partners	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JCP, SSAFA, RBL promote the service • SSAFA and RBL working with South Central Veterans mental Health Service within current casework • Veterans Mental Health Service to attend next 7 Rifles 'health fair' • CCGs have been raising awareness at council of practice meetings, on CCG websites, and on social media.
5	Development of a leaflet on accessing health services to be translated into Nepalese	Clinical Commissioning Groups/SSAFA/RBC	Spring 2014	<p>ACHIEVED</p> <p>SSAFA running classes using leaflet</p>
6	Develop and promote a discount scheme for serving personnel (both full time and reservists) for arts and leisure facilities in Reading	RBC/ ROSO 7 Rifles	Promotion summer 2013	<p>ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme developed and in place for leisure centres • Delivery via the Defence Discount Scheme being considered for leisure centres • Use of 'tickets for troops' by Hexagon
7	Consolidation of appropriate contact/ support lists in order to provide better signposting	ROSO 7 Rifles/ RBC	2014	<p>ACHIEVED</p> <p>Reading Borough Council website includes key support contacts at: http://www.reading.gov.uk/article/7300/Reading-Armed-Forces-Community-Covenant</p>

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
ECONOMY AND SKILLS - Enhance the economic prosperity of Service personnel (including reservists), their families, and Veterans whilst benefitting the local economy wherever possible				
Integrate: Ensure Armed Forces benefit from ongoing economic development in county				
Support: Facilitate a sustainable pathway for Service leavers into civilian employment				
8	Keep local authorities and business updated on re-structuring of Defence	ROSO 7 Rifles	ongoing half yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing provided at March 2016 working group meeting; 7 Rifles actively recruiting
9	Work with local businesses to encourage employment of Service leavers and Reservists	Reading UK CIC/ Jobcentre Plus/	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tesco Distribution and Veolia Environmental Services are keen to employ ex-forces personnel; Tesco have recently launched the Armed Forces Network JCP promoting Veterans Interview Programme to employers; promoting relevant employer events; circulating requests from employers for Service leavers Reading UK CIC collaborating with other local authorities on business lunch at Sandhurst in Feb 2015 MOD employer engagement strategy to promote to employers the value of employing Reservists 7 Rifles work with Gravity Personnel to promote the benefits of recruiting Reservists UK CIC and Business Improvement District newsletters have promoted benefits of employing Reservists 7 Rifles to attend First Friday Club on 1st July Contact made with Oracle shopping centre and recruitment presence planned for 2016 7 Rifles briefed JCP staff in March and planned again for June 2016
10	Encourage Jobcentre Plus to register Veterans	Jobcentre Plus	ongoing	Jobcentre Plus systems allow recording of Veteran status, though for JSA claimants only, but advisors are finding that interview times are

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
				<p>becoming shorter with less opportunity to ask additional questions, therefore monitoring is incomplete</p> <p>7 Rifles briefed JCP staff in March and planned again for June 2016</p>
11	Promote the Armed Forces (Regular and Reserve) as a career for the residents of Reading, particularly young people Not in Education, Training or Employment	Reading UK CIC/ 7 Rifles/ Jobcentre Plus	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost daily recruiting activities in Oxon, Bucks and Berks in support of Operation Fortify recruiting initiative • JCP advisors kept up to date with Armed Forces vacancies, and promote Army Reserve generally • MOD employer engagement strategy • Armed Forces exhibited at successful job fair in Broad St Mall in June 2015 • Annual Reading jobs fair in Hexagon • 7 Rifles briefed JCP staff in March and planned again for June 2016
12	Support Service leavers, former Armed Forces personnel and reservists to access careers guidance, CV support and interview preparation courses	Jobcentre Plus / New Directions/ other partners	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading University involved in Troops to Teachers programme to train ex-forces personnel as teachers once they leave the Services • SERFCA have set up jobs4reservists website, promoted via Reading UK CIC e-news • New Directions offer employability course in partnership with JCP, covering employability and essential IT skills -for Universal Jobmatch/ CV creation • Royal British Legion's CivvyStreet (online resettlement, learning and work service at https://www.civvystreet.org) • National Careers Service promoted via RBC Armed Forces Covenant web page
13	Defence discount service/ card	Reading UK CIC	2014/15	Article in Sept 15 Business Improvement District newsletter to raise awareness amongst businesses
14	Promotion of relevant events to businesses/ employers	Reading UK CIC/ROSO 7 Rifles/Jobcentre Plus	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JCP and Reading UK CIC general promotion of relevant events e.g. Sandhurst business lunch in Feb 2015 • Pop up 2 week 'start your own business' school, Feb 2016 and ongoing (Reading UK CIC)

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
15a	Development of Reading Borough Council protocol for employment of Reserve Forces personnel	RBC	March 2014	ACHIEVED Agreed at Personnel Committee March 2014
15b	Promotion of Corporate Covenant scheme	RBC/ Reading UK CIC/ Covenant partnership	ongoing	Article in Feb 2015 edition of Reading UK CIC e-News
<p>EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE - <i>Develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Service children; remove and negate disadvantage which results from the mobility of Service life. Develop youth opportunities across the community, supporting the Cadet Forces.</i></p>				
<p>Integrate: <i>Promote an understanding of the needs of Service children so that they are not disadvantaged in the state education system</i></p>				
<p>Support: <i>Enable optimal educational opportunity for Service children within the context of the state education system</i></p>				
16	Survey schools to determine numbers of Service family pupils and ensure schools maximise the value of the Service Pupil Premium by encouraging registration and promoting best practice in utilisation of	RBC/ Schools in Reading Borough area/ 7 Rifles	annual survey (next due Jan 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest figures (Jan 16) - 12 service children in Reading schools • Reminder to encourage parents to inform school of Armed Forces status sent to schools in first term of academic year 15-16 • 7 Rifles promotion

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
	funding			
17	Being sensitive and supportive to the possible emotional and psychological needs of some Service children	RBC/ Schools in Reading Borough area/ 7 Rifles	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reminder to encourage parents to inform school of Armed Forces status sent to schools in first term of academic year 15-16
<p>ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE - <i>Ensure that the wider Armed Forces' infrastructure requirements (inc Housing) are met in synchronisation with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and cognisant of the requirements of the local community. Where possible, create efficiencies with the local community</i></p>				
<p>Support: <i>Develop a common understanding of infrastructure needs of the Armed Forces community, in order to inform Local Authority planners to optimise provision. This incorporates a common, equitable housing protocol for Veterans within the local area.</i></p>				
18	Develop and implement a plan for the identification of Veterans locating to the Reading area in order to ensure that they are informed and included in relevant initiatives	ROSO 7 Rifles / RBC/ charities	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some Veterans claiming JSA can now be identified and support offered Support, initiatives and opportunities disseminated via charities' existing mechanisms (SSAFA, RBL, Reading Ex-British Gurkha Association, Forgotten British Gurkhas)
19	Ensure Veterans receive equitable treatment in allocation of social	RBC	ongoing	<p>ACHIEVED Incorporated into Reading Borough Council's Housing Allocations Scheme</p>

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
	housing			
20	Explore options for facility sharing in line with local needs and Defense Infrastructure Organisation plans	PSAO HQ Coy 7 Rifles/ RBC	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of Brock Barracks for community purposes agreed and promoted via alternativevenues.org • Promoted to community groups via Reading Voluntary Action newsletter and Reading Borough Council website
<p>SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES - <i>Develop a stable and robust Armed Forces community which integrates into the wider society, whilst retaining a sense of itself</i></p>				
<p>Integrate: <i>Promote common understanding and closer integration between military and civil communities</i></p>				
21	Ensure that appropriate links are in place between the Local Authority and Armed Forces in order to allow the effective activation of Military Aid to the Civil Community (MACC) in the event of a civil emergency (e.g. severe weather event) and/ or community projects where manpower is required	RBC/ TM or TM(V) 7 Rifles	ongoing	Civil emergency liaison in place; Armed Forces assistance during flooding events in 2014
<p>Support: <i>Support civil agencies in their dealings with members of the Armed Forces community, in order to optimise outcomes and use resource more efficiently</i></p>				
22	Establish and implement domestic violence protocol between Service and Civil Police, agencies and charities to recognise	ROSO 7 Rifles	ROSO to advise	ACHIEVED Protocol in place

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
	military needs and ensure equitable service			
23	Identify key areas for application of Community Covenant grant funding which will benefit both the civil and Armed Forces communities	RBC/Covenant partnership/ ROSO 7 Rifles	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant fund promoted on RBC website and via Reading Voluntary Action • Successful bid for £21,730 for 'health weeks' project aimed at raising awareness of health and social care services amongst the ex-Gurkha community, December 2012 • Successful bid for £10,000 for museum centenary project, December 2013 • Meeting with ex-Gurkha groups and organisations working with the Nepali community to discuss issues and needs in Feb 15 • New Covenant grant fund launched Aug 2015 • Successful bid from REBGA for two Nepalese community development workers (£14,500)
24	Encourage organisations and communities to sign up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant	RBC/ Covenant partnership/ ROSO 7 Rifles	Ongoing	Latest signatories include Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Reading College and University of Reading
<p>RECOGNISE AND REMEMBER - <i>Encourage recognition and remembrance of the unique sacrifices made by Armed Forces personnel in defence of society</i></p>				
<p>Recognise: <i>Support civil events that allow the community to recognise the Armed Forces</i></p>				
25	Support the annual Armed Forces Day	PSOA HQ Coy 7 Rifles/RBC	Annual (June)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of Reading March May 8th 2016 • Armed Forces Day planned for 22nd June 2016 in Broad St and Forbury Gardens, including concert from Waterloo Band
26	Armed forces participation in public events as appropriate	RBC/ PSAO HQ Coy 7 Rifles (PSOA HQ Coy)	ongoing	<p>Numerous recruiting and other community events throughout the year including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 01 May – Tilehurst Festival

Ref	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress/ key actions
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 08 May – Freedom of Reading parade and recruiting stand in Broad St • 10 June – Tesco's Queens birthday tea party (7 Rifles providing tables and chairs) • 22 June - Reserves Day • 2 June – 2 July - Reserve Officers Campaign Week • 28 June – Open evening at Brock Barracks
Remember: Commemorate those members of the Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice				
27	Plan and conduct remembrance event at Brock Barracks as focal point for annual armistice event in Reading	PSAO HQ Coy 7 Rifles	ongoing	Event planned for Nov 2016 in Forbury Gardens
28	Plan and conduct appropriate event(s) in support of the centenary anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War	RBC/ Adj 7 Rifles/ communities	Aug 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful bid submitted to Community Covenant Grant Fund by Museum service for funding to support their forthcoming exhibition, 'Reading at War', to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War • As part of this work, a poet was commissioned to work with 7 Rifles • Royal British Legion commemoration services on 6th July and 4th Aug 2014 at Reading Minster • Operation Reflect activities including 7 Rifles visits to 5 primary schools • Commemorative paving slabs for home towns of Victoria Cross winners, placed with Trooper Potts VC Memorial • Trooper Potts VC Memorial unveiled in October 2015 outside the Crown Courts in Reading

List of abbreviations

SSAFA – Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association
SERFCA – South East Reserve Forces and Cadets Association
ROSO – Regimental Operations Support Officer

RBC – Reading borough Council
NHS – National Health Service
GPs – General practitioners
JCP – Jobcentre Plus
CCGs – Clinical Commissioning Groups
MOD – Ministry of Defence
JSA – Job Seekers Allowance
TBC – to be confirmed
AF – Armed Forces
BID – Business Improvement District
PSAO HQ Coy – Permanent Staff Admin Office HQ Company
TM or TM(V) – Training Major
CCRF- Civil Contingency Reaction Force
CIMIC – Civil Military Corporation
Adjt - Adjutant