

TITLE	Armed Forces Covenant
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 22 July 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Communities, Insight and Change - Keeley Clements

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The purpose of the Covenant is that local authorities and the armed forces community are encouraged to work together to:

- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas and to nurture public understanding and awareness among 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.
- 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.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1) restate Wokingham Borough Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant;
- 2) commit to achieving Armed Forces Bronze Award employer status;
- 3) agree to updates to Council on an annual basis.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Armed Forces Community Covenant programme was launched in May 2011 as a nationwide initiative to encourage local communities to support Armed Forces personnel living in their area. In July 2013, the Council committed to signing the covenant.

In spring of 2021 Berkshire Unitary Leaders agreed the setting up of the Royal Berkshire Civilian Military Partnership Board. The Council is represented at this board at both officer and member levels.

This partnership is an opportunity to share best practice in how the Council will work with our Armed Forces Community and provided the potential for shared bids for related funding.

This report highlights work done to date to support the covenant, the benefits of reaffirming the Councils support for the covenant, and how to pursue Bronze Award status as an armed forces friendly employer.

Background

Armed Forces Community: Within the borough we have approximately 1,000 serving personnel or veterans in the borough. This data comes from two sources, one is based upon those receiving some form of military pension or compensation payment, the other from residents who have stated their military connection when registering with their GP. A fuller picture will be available once the 2021 census data has been compiled and published. At present from the GP data, we know the age group and gender, and the geographical spread of those concerned. This is as follows:

Age	Male	Female	Total
20-29	22	<5	22
30-39	61	11	72
40-49	49	6	55
50-59	93	6	99
60-69	83	13	96
70-79	142	22	164
80-89	351	13	364
90-99	82	10	92
100+	<5	0	0
Total	883	81	964

Arborfield	54
Barkham	37
Bulmershe and Whitegates	58
Charvil	20
Coronation	32
Emmbrook	44
Evendons	35
Finchampstead North	21
Finchampstead South	35
Hawkedon	7
Hillside	17
Hurst	8
Loddon	41
Maiden Erlegh	18
Norreys	37
Remenham, Wargrave, and Ruscombe	100
Shinfield North	6
Shinfield South	123
Sonning	25
Southlake	34
Swallowfield	67
Twyford	35
Wescott	25
Winnersh	33
Wokingham Without	57

Analysis of Issues

Armed Forces Community Covenant - Progress since 2013

The Council signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2013. The purpose of the Covenant is that Local authorities and the armed forces community are encouraged to work together to:-

- encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas and to nurture public understanding and awareness among 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.
- 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.

In most cases there is no increased cost other than officer times required to deliver on commitments under the Covenant.

Some examples of work the Council has undertaken across the Borough as part of its commitment under the Covenant are as follows:-

- Working with Arborfield and Newland Parish Council, Arborfield Garrison and has agreed to open the Garrison Youth Club to the wider Arborfield Parish Community.
- Community 'Homefront Meetings' were held approximately every 3 months with representation from Arborfield and Newland Parish Council, Wokingham Borough Council and Thames Valley Police along with various representatives from the military community.
- Adult Community Learning courses were delivered in Arborfield including courses for army wives from Nepal that combined cultural and English language learning.
- Extensive community engagement work coordinated by Thames Valley Police and Wokingham Borough Council took place following the tragic murder of the wife of a Ghurkha soldier, in June 2013.
- Wokingham Borough Council supported the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Business Networking Event in January 2014 which aimed to promote the benefits of employing former service men and women in local businesses.
- World War One centenary commemoration events were held through the Borough with Wokingham Town Council leading and coordinating activities including a 'Wokingham Remembers' Heritage Trail linking the memorials within the Borough and providing pop-up mobile exhibition stands that tell the stories of some of the local men who fought in the war.
- The Arborfield Garrison planning application was accompanied by a Heritage Statement to explain how the proposals take account of the significant military heritage of the site.
- Worked with partners and Royal Observer Corps memorialisation on new Arborfield By-pass
- Support for Armed Forces community embedded in Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Housing Allocation Policy
- Became members of the newly formed Royal Berkshire Civilian Military Partnership Board (RBCMPB) in spring 2021.

Re-affirming Support for the covenant

In spring 2021 Berkshire Leaders agreed the formation of the Royal Berkshire Civilian Military Partnership Board.

The Partnership Board was established to foster closer working between all six Unitary Councils plus Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, agencies, and the military in

order to support the armed forces community in Berkshire. The Partnership board aims to act as a platform to address countywide issues pertaining to the Armed Forces Covenant and give strategic direction and advice to further strengthen links between civilian and military communities.

Moving forward the Partnership Board is liable to provide opportunities to share best practice in how we work with our armed forces communities and provide a vehicle for joint funding bids to support additional work. Wokingham Council is represented at the Partnership Board at officer and member level. Other than the time spent at quarterly meetings there is no financial commitment. The formation of the Partnership Board is an opportunity to kickstart the work supporting the Covenant, reaffirming support of the covenant would reinforce this.

Bronze Award

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support the armed forces community and inspire others to do the same. The scheme 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. Organisations can self-nominate to achieve bronze level. In order to self-nominate organisations should:

- Pledge to support the armed forces, including existing or prospective employees who are members of the armed forces community.
- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- promote being armed forces-friendly and be open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners

In signing the covenant in 2013 the council has already achieved the first two requirements above. The council’s inclusive recruitment policies mean that the Council fulfils the requirements regarding employing members of the armed forces community. There is no cost attached to the council nominating itself.

Upon successfully nominating the council will receive an electronic certificate and logos to display on the website, stationery, and other collateral.

There is no direct budgetary cost involved in acquiring Bronze Award.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	N/A	N/A

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	N/A	N/A
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Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications
None

Public Sector Equality Duty
<p>This is a re-affirmation of existing policy, therefore there is no change in policy which could affect those with protected characteristics.</p> <p>The Armed Forces Covenant increases accessibility to services for the armed forces community, some of whom will have protected characteristics as a result of their service – this therefore has a positive impact.</p>

List of Background Papers
None

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