

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	11 <sup>th</sup> October 2017
REPORT TITLE	Local Authority Community Covenant
REPORT NUMBER	OCE/17/023
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive
REPORT AUTHOR	Head of Service, Office of Chief Executive

---

## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report provides an update to the Council on Aberdeen's Local Authority Community Covenant with the Armed Forces Community.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Council resolves:-

- i. To note the content of the report; and
- ii. To instruct the Chief Executive to work with relevant groups representative of the armed forces community and its interests, the business community and Community Planning Partners to develop a refreshed Armed Forces Covenant for the City, delegating authority to the Chief Executive to sign the Covenant along with the Lord Provost on behalf of the Council.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012 the Council approved a motion by the then Lord Provost in the following terms:-

That this Council works with the armed forces, veterans' groups, health and social care providers, the business community and other local bodies to develop a Community Covenant for Aberdeen.

- 3.2 The then Lord Provost and the then Chief Executive signed the resulting Community Covenant on behalf of the Council on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2013. The other signatories to the Covenant are Aberdeen's Armed Forces Community, the Highland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, Veterans Scotland, Royal British Legion Scotland, Combat Stress, SaBRE Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers, NHS Grampian and Jobcentre Plus.

3.2 At its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2014 the Council had before it a notice of motion by former Councillor Ross Thomson in the following terms:-

That this Council:-

- i. Restates its commitment to the Local Authority Community Covenant which ensures that Aberdeen City Council supports the local armed forces community;
- ii. recognises the enormous contribution that the armed forces and their families make and the sacrifices that the armed forces and their families make every day for the safety and security of our country;
- iii. to recognise the contribution made by our armed forces, agrees to request a report examining what more Aberdeen City Council can do to support our armed forces and veteran community across the services it provides;
- iv. instructs officers to engage with neighbouring authorities on their allocation of housing to members of the armed forces;
- v. instructs officers to meet with Legion Scotland and to establish a protocol for an ongoing relationship between the Council, Legion Scotland and other pertinent organisations; and
- vi. congratulates and welcomes the Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) provided by the Scottish Citizens Advice Bureau which is the focal point for the City's armed forces community for access to advice, information and support.

3.3 With reference to point iv) above, the meeting of the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014 received a report from the Director of Communities, Housing and Infrastructure (CHI/14/033) that provided members with information on the Council's housing policy in relation to armed forces personnel.

3.4 At its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015, the Council considered a report by the Chief Executive (OCE/15/023) that provided members with an update on a meeting convened by the then Lord Provost in his role as the Council's Veterans Champion with former Councillor Thomson, Major Bill Austin of Aberdeen Universities' Officer Training Corps and Kate Dean of the Armed Services Advice Project.

3.5 The discussion focussed on three main areas where support to those leaving the armed forces might be of assistance – jobs, housing and wellbeing. In addition it was recognised that a key prerequisite ahead of identifying what support might be offered would be an accurate assessment of the numbers of individuals and their families likely to be looking to settle in Aberdeen in any given period.

3.6 Improved signposting and marshalling of information regarding sources of potential assistance within and outwith the Council was also agreed to be likely to be helpful.

3.7 At the time of the meeting Scottish Government officials had embarked on a programme of activity to refresh the 2012 policy document *Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland*.

It was agreed that a further report be brought to Council once the Scottish Government's position was known.

- 3.8 The Scottish Government published *Renewing Our Commitments* in 2016 which both reviewed progress made since 2012 and set out a range of priorities to be addressed in i) jobs, skills and employability; ii) cohesion and integration; and iii) ensuring no disadvantage in particular in relation to mental and physical healthcare provision and housing.
- 3.9 Earlier this year Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association published a second edition of the report *Our Community – Our Covenant: Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges* which includes a number of recommendations to the LGA, COSLA, Government and Councils. In addition it offers a toolkit to support councils in reviewing and refreshing their Covenant.
- 3.10 The Ministry of Defence published updated guidance for local authorities on the Armed Forces Covenant during the summer this year incorporating points from the above report. All local authorities in Great Britain have an Armed Forces Covenant in place.
- 3.11 In addition, since the signing of Aberdeen City's Local Authority Community Covenant, Scotland's Veterans Commissioner has published three reports on topics of relevance to the veterans community i) *Transition in Scotland*; ii) *Housing Information* and iii) *Employability, Skills and Learning*.
- 3.12 Given all of the above and given that it is some five years since the development of the Council's Local Authority Community Covenant, it would seem to be appropriate to take the opportunity to work with partners to produce a refreshed Armed Forces Covenant. The renewed Covenant would be developed in the context both of the City's Local Outcome Improvement Plan and the Council's Target Operating Model.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Financial implications flowing from any commitment made within a refreshed Armed Forces Covenant would be addressed in reports relevant to that commitment.
- 4.2 The Covenant Fund, administered by the Ministry of Defence, has an annual budget of £10 million available through application to support the delivery of projects addressing specific priorities relevant to the armed forces community.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## **6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK**

- 6.1 The report recommends the renewal of the existing Aberdeen City Local Authority Community Covenant, in refreshing the commitments set out in the Covenant officers and representatives of partners and stakeholders will be mindful of the financial constraints within which they must operate and will so mitigate any financial risk arising for the Council.
- 6.2 In relation to customer/citizen risks it will be necessary in revising the Covenant to be clear that the principles that underlie it are i) that the Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services and ii) that special consideration is appropriate in some cases for those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved. The Covenant should not mean that others are disadvantaged.
- 6.3 As noted above, all local authorities in Great Britain have an Armed Forces Covenant in place. In taking a decision to refresh the Aberdeen City Local Authority Community Covenant after some five years there is an opportunity to mitigate any reputational risk from the Covenant becoming outdated or irrelevant.

## **7. IMPACT SECTION**

### **7.1 Economy**

Members of the armed forces community have a valuable contribution to make to the economy of the City and the refreshed Armed Forces Covenant will address how best to ensure they have the opportunity to make that contribution.

### **7.2 People**

The Armed Forces Covenant is based on the premise that those who serve or have served and their families deserve respect, support and fair treatment. They should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. The refreshed Covenant will seek to continue the application of this ethos in Aberdeen.

### **7.3 Place**

There are unlikely to be any direct environmental implications from the refreshed Covenant.

### **7.4 Technology**

As mentioned earlier in the report, the renewal of the Covenant will be undertaken within the context not only of the City's Local Outcome Improvement Plan and the delivery of its priorities but also in the context of the Council's Target Operating Model. As a result, wherever possible a digital

means of delivery will be identified in relation to the commitments set out in the Covenant.

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland](#)

[Renewing Our Commitments](#)

[Our Community - Our Covenant](#)

[Armed Forces Covenant: A Guide for Local Authorities](#)

**9. APPENDICES**

None.

**10. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS**

Ciaran Monaghan  
Head of Service, Office of Chief Executive  
[cmonaghan@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:cmonaghan@aberdeencity.gov.uk)  
01224 522293