



<u>Committee and date</u>
Council
3 May 2012

<u>Item</u>
13
<u>Public</u>

Shropshire Council – Community Covenant with the Armed Forces in Shropshire

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1. Summary

The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It complements the national Covenant outlining the moral obligations between the nation, Government and Armed Forces at local level.

Shropshire has a strong military presence, playing a key role in the life of the County with bases at:

- RAF Shawbury (housing the Central Air Traffic Control School, the Defence Helicopter Flying School, the Central Flying School (Helicopters) and the Aircraft Maintenance and Storage Unit),
- RAF Cosford (housing the HQ Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering, No1 School of Technical Training and No 1 Radio School, Defence School of Photography and RAF School of Physical Training),
- 1st Battalion - Royal Irish Regiment based at Tern Hill,
- Copthorne Barracks and Nesscliffe training area.
- In addition the Territorial Army is based at Sundorne Barracks and various cadet groups provide further links with communities.

This report explains the Covenant in more detail as well as the Community Grant scheme available to areas signing up to this initiative.

2. Recommendations

- a) That Shropshire Council formally signs the Community Covenant as a basis for further strengthening links between the Armed Forces and the community of Shropshire
- b) That the Council Leader is identified as the lead member for the Community Covenant
- c) That following formal signing of the Covenant, the council and Armed Forces, through a working level group, examine and develop proposals for how best to enact the Covenant with all prospective Stakeholders.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

The Covenant provides an opportunity to consider, in a structured way, the impact of Council services on the Armed Forces community and families

4. Financial Implications

By signing up to the Covenant, Shropshire communities with strong links to the local Armed Forces bases become eligible to bid for a national Community Covenant Grant Scheme, administered by the Ministry of Defence. It's suggested that Community Action Team officers lead on this from the Council's perspective.

5. Background

What is the Covenant?

- 5.1 The national Armed Forces Covenant was launched by Government as formal recognition of the need to build strong, enduring relationships between society and the Armed Forces. Recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have significantly refocused interest in these concerns and, in particular, how society treats current and former members of the Armed Forces and their families.
- 5.2 Complementing this national initiative, the Community Covenant scheme is voluntary and is being applied at local authority level, encouraging local communities to support the service community in their area and nurture understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community.
- 5.3 The aims of the Shropshire Covenant will be to:
 - encourage communities in Shropshire to support the Armed Forces community in their area
 - 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 Shropshire life
 - encourage the Armed Forces community to help and support the wider Shropshire community, whether through participation in events and joint projects or other forms of engagement
- 5.3 In Shropshire, the Station Commander at RAF Shawbury, Group Captain Chris Luck is leading on negotiations from the Armed Forces side, with his RAF Cosford counterpart leading with Telford and Wrekin Council.
- 5.4 The starting point is signing the pledge setting out what the Covenant seeks to achieve in a particular area. This is attached as appendix 1. This is a high level statement of support and will be the basis for further discussion with other organisations through the Shropshire Partnership. It's suggested therefore that

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an early action will be for Shropshire Council, the Partnership and Armed Forces representatives to determine key issues, priorities and opportunities for meaningful action to deliver on the Community Covenant.

- 5.5 Once Shropshire has signed the covenant, local community organisations become eligible to bid for £30m central Government funding allocated for local projects which strengthen ties or better understanding between the military and wider community. Community Action Teams will lead on this work for Shropshire Council and it will provide a good opportunity to strengthen relationships at a local level.
- 5.6 Other parts of the country which have already signed up and are demonstrating good practice include:

Hampshire and Oxfordshire - where work with a very large Armed Forces presence has included improving support for people leaving the military and seeking employment

North Yorkshire - where early work has focused on housing, health, economic, children's, transport, safety and security issues

6. Key issues in Shropshire

- 6.1 Shropshire Council already works well with many aspects of Armed Forces life in the county. A snapshot of work to date includes:
- We are working with key schools – Buntingsdale and Shawbury in particular, to fairly reflect the needs of service families, including the pastoral element of support through difficult times
 - In housing we want to better acknowledge the needs and special circumstances relating to housing for Armed Forces personnel.
 - An officer from RAF Shawbury is seconded onto the Local Joint Committee and has discussed potential projects around safe routes to school, play equipment, local events and environmental projects. Students passing through the Helicopter training programme have been involved in community projects locally
 - RAF Cosford is working with our business support team to look at shop front display schemes in temporarily Albrighton
 - Tern Hill Barracks makes available a community centre for local organisations and work started with them on funding for a children's play area for families.
 - A number of communities in Shropshire have recognised the contribution made by the Armed Forces in recent conflicts – including the civic reception in Shrewsbury, held for the Royal Irish Regiment on its return from deployment Afghanistan last year and Market Drayton Town Council's award for the Regiment of freedom of the town

6.2 Clearly though there are lots of opportunities for closer working:

- To best understand the changing nature of the Armed Forces presence in Shropshire, its impact on communities and on Shropshire Council and other public services
- Identifying ways of consulting and engaging with Armed Forces families as part of our wider work on citizen engagement, helping shape what we do
- To consider, in light of our emerging economic growth strategy, the economic impact of the Armed Forces on Shropshire – particularly on host communities, and how best this can be maximised
- To take full account of the stress facing the families of service personnel on active service overseas, and what role the council and partners can best play in supporting them, as well as the increasing numbers of Reservists deployed to combat areas and the support needs of their families
- To consider the issues facing service people with serious physical and or psychological injuries requiring long-term support in-service and after leaving the Armed Forces

6.3 Through initial discussions at Shropshire Partnership, it's clear that a number of other public service organisations, together with the Voluntary Sector Assembly and Business Board are also keen to join in the local Covenant, helping significantly strengthen its impact.

7. Conclusions

7.1 By signing up to the Community Covenant, Shropshire Council will be demonstrating our intent to work closely with the Armed Forces, families, reservists and veterans in the future.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
Appendix A: Draft Community Covenant for Shropshire
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
Keith Barrow – Leader of the Council
Local Member
All members could have Armed Forces personnel living in their Divisions
Appendices
Appendix A – Covenant Document