

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

9 MARCH 2017

Agenda Item	15
Report No	HC/9/17

HIGHLAND ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT UPDATE

Report by the Depute Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Development

Summary

This report outlines the work carried out by the partners to the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant in the last twelve months and sets out future priorities.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 In October 2012 The Highland Council signed the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant along with twelve other partners – the Armed Forces Community; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (*Scottish Fire and Rescue Service*); Highland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association; Highland Third Sector Interface; Job Centre Plus; NHS Highland; Northern Constabulary (*Police Scotland*); Royal British Legion Scotland; Scottish Natural Heritage; SSAFA (Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association) Forces Help; and the University of the Highlands and Islands.

1.2 The Covenant is a statement of support between the armed forces and the civilian community. The aim is to encourage support for the service community in a local area and raise awareness of issues affecting service personnel. A copy of the Highland Council Covenant is at

http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4566/armed_forces_community_covenant_for_highland

1.3 Highland Council has demonstrated its support to the Armed Forces Covenant with the appointment of an Armed Forces and Veterans' Champion. This role was originally held by Cllr Carolyn Caddick and is currently held by Cllr Roddy Balfour. The Highland Community Covenant Partnership (HCCP) has benefited significantly from the leadership and enthusiasm shown by the Champions particularly in their role as Chair of the HCCP.

1.4 The HCCP has agreed five key outcomes in order to support the Armed Forces Community as follows:

- The Economy
- Children and Young People
- Caring Communities
- Housing
- Empowering Communities

2.0 Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity

As previously reported, the Partners reviewed the key outcomes in February 2015 to test their ongoing relevance. While content that they remained relevant, the actions to deliver them were enhanced as follows:

2.1 Economy

We will work with the Armed Forces community in Highland to improve potential employment for the Armed Forces and their families to optimise the balance of opportunities and resources.

We will work with the Armed Forces community in Highland to promote with partners the role of the cadets as a means of preparing for future employment.

We will work with the employment sector to support the Armed Forces, both Regular and Reserve Forces.

2.2 Children and Young People

We will work with the Armed Forces and their families and support access to universal service provision and improve outcomes for children and young people of Armed Forces families and veterans.

We will support and engage with specialist staff in the Armed Forces, to assist any children and families with additional needs.

We will continue to develop our understanding of the laydown of young people with Armed Forces links to set up a robust network to help children achieve their potential.

We will promote and support the Cadets across the Highland area.

2.3 Caring Communities

We will work with the Armed Forces community to ensure they have appropriate advice and information to facilitate the uptake of support where available and appropriate.

We will support and engage with the Armed Forces community to promote and maintain the health and wellbeing of those communities.

2.4 Housing

We will work with the Armed Forces community to provide information and advice on housing options.

We will explore and deliver new resources in support of the provision of accommodation.

2.5 Empowering Communities

We will encourage and support the Armed Forces community to ensure they have the opportunity to contribute to and be part of their wider community.

2.6 To ensure effective cross sector cooperation and partnership working, representation on the working groups is taken from a wide variety of agencies and includes:

- HC - representatives from Community Services and Care and Learning
- NHS
- HIE
- DWP/Job Centre Plus
- Service Personnel and Veterans Agency
- Police and Fire Services
- Services representatives from the Army (Regular and Reserve forces), RAF and Cadets.
- Service Charities: Veterans Scotland, RBLS, Combat Stress, SSAFA, Poppyscotland, Royal Caledonian Educational Trust, Armed Services Advice Project etc.
- Other third sector organisations including: Men's Shed, Street Pastors, etc.

3.0 Housing

3.1 Work this year has focussed on continuing to work with partners to improve information and advice on housing options to forces personnel and veterans. Specific areas of activity are as follows:

- a) The Council and other landlords who are part of the Highland Housing Register continue to subscribe to the MOD Referral Scheme, which helps people leaving the forces find social rented housing.
- b) Partners are continuing to work with colleagues in the Armed Forces to ensure provision of targeted housing information and advice to service personnel to help them consider and plan for their future housing needs as early as possible.
- c) The Council already ensures that armed forces personnel are treated on an equal basis to other housing applicants under our Housing Allocation Policy. This means that forces personnel or veterans receive the same priority for housing as other applicants with the same housing needs. Armed forces personnel automatically receive 'need to reside' or 'local connection' points in housing allocations and homelessness policies.
- d) Information is now being collected on housing applications from forces personnel, which will help assess specific housing needs.
- e) The Homes for Heroes specialist housing development in Inverness has been successfully concluded. The Council and partners are continuing to liaise with Homes for Heroes on potential future housing models.
- f) Within the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, £3 million has been

allocated to assist in the delivery of innovative assisted living projects using the latest healthcare technologies to enable elderly people to live in their communities and reduce the need for admission to hospitals and/or care homes. It is intended that this project will include a cluster of homes in Inverness to suit the needs of veterans. A multi-agency team has been established to take the project forward.

4.0 Health

- 4.1** V1P Highland was officially launched on 20 May 2016. Working in partnership with Poppyscotland it has been processing registrations since June 2016 and for the period Jun'16 – Dec'16 a total of 53 Veterans were jointly registered and in receipt of welfare, self-management and psychosocial support with 19 of these engaged in evidenced based psychological therapy. A further 29 Veterans were in the process of completing registration. The service's principle access point is the Poppyscotland Welfare Centre, Strothers Lane in Inverness. V1P Highland remote and rural access is also currently active in Sutherland (Helmsdale) and under development in Lochaber (Fort William).
- 4.2** In terms of staffing, phased recruitment during 2016 resulted in the appointment of a Project Lead, Clinical Psychologist and two Veterans Peer Support Workers (all part-time) based at the centre. The team have successfully integrated with Poppyscotland Inverness staff and are working with NHS Highland to improve and complement access to mainstream services through psychological support in the form of set clinics, drop-in services and psychosocial activities.
- 4.3** V1P Highland has initial funding until September 2017 and sustainability remains firmly on the agenda. Another Scottish Government Bid to secure permanent funding for all of the Veterans First Point centres is currently in the process of being submitted and other opportunities for extending the service are also being explored both locally and nationally.
- 4.4** Combat Stress has continued to provide mental health treatment and support for its clients in the Inverness and Highland area. Clinical staff have travelled regularly to Inverness to conduct periodic clinics based in the Poppyscotland Centre in Inverness to assess newly referred clients and link them where appropriate to its residential treatment centre at Hollybush House, Ayr, for periods of residential therapy. Conditions treated include depression, anxiety and PTSD. This level of service was enhanced in December when the charity employed a locally based CPN to conduct more frequent and regular weekly clinics in Inverness for its clients.
- 4.5** Combat Stress continued to reach out to the Reserve Forces community in the Highlands to make them aware of its services, and in June conducted a very successful two day Mental Health First Aid for the Armed Forces Community course at the 7 Scots Army Reserve Centre in Inverness. 16 individuals attended from the serving regular and reservist communities along with staff who support veterans from DMWS, V1P Highland, CAB ASAP and Poppyscotland. The charity has now conducted two such courses in Inverness.

Following a period of consultation it was decided to withdraw the Regional Welfare Officer service for its clients across the UK, in part due to a perception that this

service had been duplicating that already provided by other agencies and charities.

5.0 Education Support Fund with Service Children

- 5.1 Work is continuing to be carried out by the Council's Promoting Positive Relationship's Team with a Lead specifically for Armed Forces Families within the Team. The following activities are of note:
 - 5.2 After much thought the decision was taken to cancel the planned Conferences. This model is not on reflection the best approach. It is planned to have one big conference under an Emotional Literacy Heading which will target lots of different populations in Highland including MOD Families. This will allow a bigger attendance as it is usually the same member of staff who has responsibility to support all the various groups. This is happening in the summer term.
 - 5.3 The Council is rolling out Nurturing Approaches and Nurture Bases throughout the Highlands. The bases set up (supported by European Social Fund - ESF) monies are continuing and their impact monitored. Additional Nurture bases are developing and the needs of Forces Families are included in planning to assist with embedding their needs into the core work.
 - 5.4 Highland Council has been given clearance by the National SEEMIS (Education Management Information System) group to be the pathfinder authority for using the Armed Forces Tab on the schools database. This allows numbers to be tracked enabling comparison of outcomes for Forces Families with Highland's general schools population. This information is being used to target support to where it is needed.
 - 5.5 Identifying children from military families has allowed the Council to target training and to consider additional supports for those schools where the numbers are higher. The Council has been successful in securing a further grant from the ESF fund. The monies will be used to continue embedding work with Forces Families into core work to enable sustainability when the funding runs out. One day a week of Primary Mental Health Worker time is being used to assist with developing and supporting health and wellbeing work targeting MOD families. The Primary Mental Health Worker's time will be used to help support the Children and Families of the soldiers involved in the Forces planned deployment.
 - 5.6 The Council continues to work in partnership with The Royal Caledonian Trust. In addition work is being carried out with the Highland Boxing Academy and other partner agencies providing a diversionary project looking at leadership and self-confidence building. ESF monies have been targeted to schools with Forces Children to enable them to take part. The research project is still on-going and the findings being used to influence thinking and the planning of service delivery.
- ## **6.0 Other Highland Community Covenant Partnership Activity**
- 6.1 Two full Partners' meetings have been held and continue to be very well attended with an increasing representation particularly from the third sector.
 - 6.2 These meetings present an opportunity for all partners to share information and

updates and to identify opportunities for joint working. Regular updates from the Armed Forces help agencies and partners to identify issues which may develop over the next 1-2 years and beyond, allowing preparation time for relevant actions to be put in place. For example, in order to satisfy the requirement for the increasing number of Reservists being sought, it is necessary for the Armed Forces and partners to work with the public and private sectors to ensure employers understand any requirements which staff may have if they enlist.

7.0 Events

7.1 The Armed Forces in Highland are extremely active in supporting and engaging in local events.

7.2 In addition to Remembrance Day and Armed Forces Day events throughout Highland, armed forces representatives have been involved in the Kirking of the Council, Scottish Cadet Forces Piping Competition, marshalling at the Inverness Half Marathon, the Hector Macdonald Memorial Service and other events across the Highlands. In addition, they have been strongly represented at a range of WW1 commemoration days throughout Highland.

7.3 In 2017 WW1 Commemorations will include –

- The Battle of Arras, being commemorated in April with a Service at the War Memorial in Cavell Gardens, Inverness
- The Battle of Ypres which will be the major event for the Highlands with a Service at the War Memorial at Cavell Gardens, Inverness at the end of August
- The Battle of Cambrai being the largest Tank Battle in WW1 will be commemorated at the annual Remembrance Service held at Cavell Gardens in November

The Royal British Legion Inverness will play a key role in managing each event with support from the City Area Manager's office at the Inverness Town House.

Armed Forces Day – this will be a Flag Raising ceremony held at Council HQ on Tuesday 20 June

7.4 The Highland Military Tattoo continues to carry out valuable work to promote and support the Highland Community Covenant. This year's event takes place at Fort George from 7th to 10th September 2017. The theme this year will be the RAF with the 100th anniversary of the RFC and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the RAF Regiment. It is also the year of Heritage, History and Archaeology and the Gaelic Welcome.

8.0 Armed Forces Covenant Fund

8.1 In 2016 the funding themes for the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, were

- Veterans' Gateway
- Families in stress
- Strengthening local government delivery of the covenant
- Community integration / delivery of local services

New priorities for 2017/18 are:

- Families in stress
- Strengthening local government delivery of the covenant
- Armed Forces Covenant: local grants
- A single grant to produce a map of need for the Covenant Fund
- A single grant to produce an outcomes framework for the Covenant Fund

9.0 Future Priorities

- 9.1** The Highland Council area continues to be viewed by the military in Scotland as one of the leading Local Authorities in the implementation of the Armed Forces Community Covenant and its close linkages and collaboration with Moray Council is particularly noted.
- 9.2** The Highland Community Covenant Partnership will continue to monitor the changing situations with regard to its Armed Forces Community. Actions to mitigate any negative change will be identified and any necessary support instigated through the two working groups
- 9.3** The Partnership is also mindful of the ongoing World War 1 commemorations and will continue to encourage and help communities to deliver appropriate events.
- 9.4** It is also considered that there may be an opportunity for closer engagement with the private sector who could be invited to send a representative to Partnership meetings. This would help to develop further areas of work around eg employability, work placements etc.
- 9.5** The Military Family are very important to the Inverness community with many families living in the City and Area having past and or present links to the Armed Forces. The Inverness Partnership is focussed on preparing Children's and Adult Plans and in doing so will engage with local Armed Forces representatives to discuss how best to represent the needs of the Military Family which could involve representation on the Inverness Community Partnership.
- 9.6** Within the Council (and potentially other partners) a more formal process of informing and training key staff about sign-posting opportunities specifically for veterans would be beneficial. In order to facilitate delivery of these further priorities an application was made to the Inverness Common Good Fund and to the Covenant Fund for an Armed Forces Covenant Development Officer. The Common Good Fund bid was successful and the outcome from the Covenant Fund is not yet known. If funding is secured the position will work jointly for the Moray and Highland Armed Forces Covenant Partnerships.

10.0 Resource Implications

- 10.1** If bids are made for further funding for projects or officer time this would be subject to the normal approval processes.

10.2 Legal, equality, climate change/Carbon Clever and risk implications

There are no known implications arising from this report at this time.

Recommendation

The Council is invited to:

- (i) welcome the continued work of the Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership undertaken to date;
- (ii) endorse the future priorities outlined at section 9.

Designation: Depute Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Development

Date: 22 February 2017

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