

# **Somerset Armed Forces Covenant - Overview of Progress 2016**

*Executive Portfolio Holder:* Carol Goodall, Area West Committee Chair & SAFC Champion  
*Strategic Director:* Rina Singh, Strategic Director (Place and Performance)  
*Assistant Director:* Helen Rutter, Assistant Director (Communities)  
*Service Manager:* Helen Rutter, Assistant Director (Communities)  
*Lead Officer:* David Crisfield, Third Sector & Partnerships Coordinator  
*Contact Details:* david.crisfield@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462240

## **Purpose of the Report**

1. This report updates the Council on progress with the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.

## **Forward Plan**

2. This report appeared in the Executive Forward Plan with an expected presentation date of October 2016.

## **Public Interest**

3. This report updates the Council on progress with the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership. Community Covenants are a Government initiative designed to ensure that the Armed Forces' community (including serving and their families, veterans and reservists) are not disadvantaged compared to the community as a whole by the activities of local authorities and partners in the public and private sector.

## **Recommendation**

4. That the District Executive discuss and note the report.

## **Background**

5. The Somerset Armed Forces Covenant is an agreement between the armed forces community, the nation and the government. It encapsulates the moral obligation to those who serve, have served, their families and the bereaved. It is a pledge that together the country acknowledges and understands that those who serve, or who have served in the armed forces, and their families should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives.
6. The covenant's twin underlying principles are that members of the Armed Forces community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured or the bereaved. To this end the covenant focuses on helping members of the Armed Forces' community have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen.

7. The covenant for communities supports the Armed Forces covenant. It is a voluntary, non-binding commitment by local councils to support members of the Armed Forces' community in their area.
8. The aim is to embed and sustain activity, to ensure that members of the Armed Forces' community receive the support they need in their local communities in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice; nurture public understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces' community; and encourage activities, which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life.
9. The Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership was established in summer 2011 and signed at the Fleet Air Arm in February 2012 by the Leader and CEO. Members include all Local Authorities, Armed Forces, NHS, businesses, education, voluntary sector and other groups representing serving and former members of the Armed Forces in Somerset.
10. A report was taken to SSDC District Executive in December 2011 to confirm our commitment and to confirm the appointment of Cllr Ian Martin as the SAFC Champion for SSDC.
11. The role of SAFC champion is now held by Cllr Carol Goodall.

### **Structure**

- The **Full Partnership** is coordinated by SCC and meets once a year as part of an annual conference, which is held in June, to coincide with Armed Forces Week. The Partnership is Chaired by SCC Cllr Christopher Le Hardy and is coordinated by the SCC Service Manager – Community Development, Customers and Communities.
  - The **Partnership Executive** meets twice a year and includes SCC, SSDC, RNAS Yeovilton and some military charities. It has responsibility for taking forward the Action Plan and supporting bids to the MoD. Since September 2015, the Partnership produces a regular update which is sent to a wide range of partners.
  - The **Community Fund Advisory Group** considers applications for MoD funding, assesses against the criteria and makes recommendations to the Partnership Executive as to whether or not they should be supported, for submission to the MoD Panel. The CFAG comprises SSDC, SCC and a number of other organisations.
12. Further information about the partnership can be found at:  
[www.somerset.gov.uk/forcescovenant](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/forcescovenant)

### **Update on Progress**

#### **Partnership**

13. The Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership held its annual meeting on the 23 June 2016. SSDC Member Champion, Cllr Carol Goodall, gave a presentation about Local Authorities 'thinking Armed Forces' in all aspects of service delivery.
14. We are still waiting for the full report of the event to be published. A brief summary of the main issues that arose is as follows:

### **The purpose of the event was to:**

- Raise awareness of the role of the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Air Force, Reservists, veterans, cadets and the wider Armed Forces family in society.
- Improve understanding of the challenges faced by the Armed Forces community, understanding the offer of Armed Forces and other voluntary sector charities and exploring how we can all work better together.
- Explore opportunities to work better together to support military and civilian integration.

### **Key issues/challenges raised were:**

- Housing, employment, school places, communication, the need to engage with front-line services to raise awareness about the covenant.
- Armed Forces in Somerset need to activate a closer relationship with both SCC and Districts in order to understand Local Authorities' responsibilities for all aspects of future planning.

### **How can stakeholders help?**

- Review existing policies and consider whether there is any unintentional disadvantage for Armed Forces families.
- Help to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant, and the issues affecting Armed Forces families, with front line staff.
- Consider having Armed Forces Champions within organisations.
- Raise awareness of the range of support services that already exist to help Armed Forces families and encourage organisations to register on Somerset Choices.
- Promote the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme.

### **SSDC Working Group**

15. At the end of April an initial meeting of officers and the member champion was convened to look at our current levels of understanding of the military community (incorporating the needs of serving personnel and their families, reservists and veterans) and how effective we, as a Council, are in meeting these.
16. The main outcome was to undertake a simple audit of SSDC services to ascertain our current levels of knowledge about the Armed Forces' community; do we collect any data or target service provision? This has shown that, with 3 notable exceptions (Area Development East & South, Housing Options and Countryside) this is a community about which we know very little.

### **Effectiveness of the Covenant**

17. Further to research commissioned by the Local Government Association and the Forces in Mind Trust, and undertaken by Shared Intelligence, the report (***Our Community, Our Covenant - Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges***) was published on the 30 August. As well as identifying weaknesses and good practice, the report provides a toolkit to assist Councils improve their effectiveness in the delivery of the Covenant.
18. The principal recommendations for Councils and their partners are:
  - A core infrastructure is adopted by Councils seeking to successfully implement the Covenant at a local level.
  - To have an effective a Covenant coordinating group (that is effective) by:
    - Meeting at least twice a year

- Regularly reviews how it works, including frequency of meetings and any sub-groups
  - Evolves in term of its membership to reflect energy and interest
  - Councils identify people on their staff and Council who have a personal link with the Armed Forces and use their understanding and commitment to help galvanise the delivery of the Covenant.
19. The Executive Summary and Full reports can be downloaded from the Forces in Mind Trust website:

<http://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Our-Community-Our-Covenant-Executive-Summary-2.pdf>

<http://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Our-Community-Our-Covenant-Report-2.pdf>

20. The report, and particularly the toolkit, is being considered by the internal SSDC Working Group and any proposals for improving our commitment to our delivery of the Covenant will be reported to District Executive as appropriate.

## Covenant Fund

### 2015/16

21. In the period since the last District Executive update report in March 2015, no Somerset projects were successful in receiving a grant from the Covenant Fund. The reasons for this lack of success are not clear, but it is believed that this was, in part, due to the MOD removing the local partnership endorsement of bids (this part of the process has now been reinstated for 2016/17).

### 2016/17 and 2017/18

22. Four new funding priorities for 2016/17 and 2017/18 have been introduced. These are as follows:
1. **Veterans' Gateway** – a pilot project to set up a single 24/7 multi-media point of contact for veterans seeking assistance
  2. **Families in Stress** – funding projects that support families of serving personnel who are experiencing a significant stressful life event and would benefit from an intervention from a provider who can offer specialised, localised (or easily accessible) and immediate support
  3. **Improving Local Covenant Delivery** – improving the experience of local Armed Forces communities (serving personnel, families and veterans) and ensuring that they are not disadvantaged. **Open to Local Authorities only** with bids coming from clusters of Local Authorities (working at least at County or regional level)
  4. **Community Integration/Delivery of local services** – funding projects 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 and/or
    - deliver valuable local services to the Armed Forces community

23. Details of the Priorities and how to apply can be found at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covenant-fund-guidance-on-how-to-apply>
24. The latest Covenant Fund window closed on 22 June. The next window for small grants (Priority 4 – Community Integration) is due to re-open on 23 September, with a closing date of 2 November 2016.
25. As applications for small grants are again required to have the endorsement of the local partnership (carried out on behalf of the partnership by a Community Fund Advisory Group (CFAG) on which SSDC's Third Sector and Partnerships Coordinator sits), potential applicants are required to complete an Expression of Interest (available on both the Covenant Fund website and the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant webpage) in advance of any submission. This is to give the local Partnership plenty of time to comment on and support bids as appropriate.
26. In the first round of 2016/17 4 bids were considered by the CFAG and submitted to the MOD.
27. A summary of the bids, along with the CFAG's Assessment (Red/Amber/Green) is in the following table.

| <b>Applicant</b>                                       | <b>Project</b>                                                            | <b>Area Covered</b>                    | <b>Amount Requested</b> | <b>RAG Assessment</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Calvert Trust Exmoor                                   | Calvert Trust Activity Breaks for WIS Service Personnel & Families        | Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth and Somerset | £61,880                 | AMBER Potential       |
| Royal Navy and Royal Marine Welfare (RNRMW)            | RNRMW Community Volunteer Project                                         | Somerset & Plymouth                    | £289,000                | AMBER Satisfactory    |
| 4-40 Volunteers                                        | Military Parenting Skills Development Project                             | Somerset                               | £9,060                  | AMBER Potential       |
| Somerset & Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support (SARSAS) | Training & resources for welfare and military staff about sexual violence | Somerset                               | £20,000                 | GREEN Excellent       |

### **Priority 3 – Improving Local Covenant Delivery**

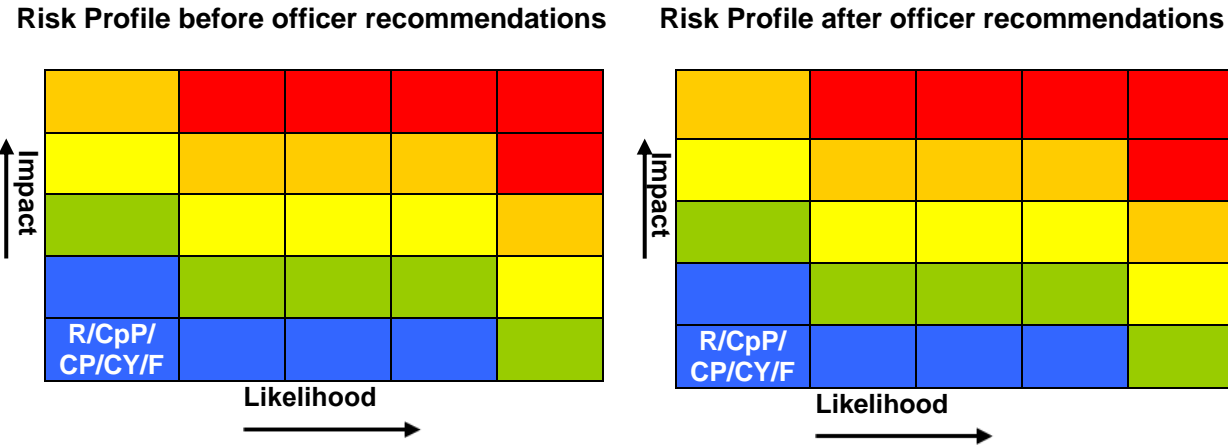
28. There is interest in submitting a regional bid under Priority 3, 'Improving Local Covenant Delivery' involving, at the current time, SSDC, Somerset County Council, Wiltshire Council, Cornwall Council, Devon CC, Plymouth City Council and North Somerset Council.

- 29. Following a meeting on the 16 September 2016, hosted by Wiltshire Council, it has been agreed to proceed with an application comprising e-learning for front-line staff, both within our councils and partner agencies, a bespoke regional web portal for the armed forces community based on the Devon Forces Family website, <https://www.devonforcesfamily.org.uk/about/> and the development and training up of 'Forces Friends' along the lines of Dementia Friends.
- 30. Wiltshire Council will act as the lead authority and will undertake the initial work in drafting the bid. The closing date for applications is October 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Financial Implications**

31. None

**Risk Matrix**



**Key**

| Categories                      | Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| R = Reputation                  | Red = High impact and high probability                                |
| CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities | Orange = Major impact and major probability                           |
| CP = Community Priorities       | Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability                     |
| CY = Capacity                   | Green = Minor impact and minor probability                            |
| F = Financial                   | Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability             |

**Council Plan Implications**

32. Our Values: Supporting people and communities, enabling them to help themselves.

**Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

33. There are no specific effects on carbon emissions either from the Council's operations or in the wider community arising from actions described in this report.

**Equality and Diversity Implications**

34. The broad aims of the Covenant will be to ensure people in the Armed Forces have improved access to public services and are not disadvantaged as a result of their particular circumstances. A key issue is making Forces' personnel aware of the diverse

range of support available, especially as they make the transition from Forces into civilian life.

35. The Equality Objectives (2012 - 2016) are required as a specific statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010. They set out how SSDC will deliver and achieve our equality aims through key tasks in our Equality Objectives action plan.
36. Equality Objective 1 – Equality is at the heart of our decision making process. SSDC have committed to undertake Equality Analysis when we make decisions that are likely to affect people or to support the assessment of local needs and priorities and this includes the Armed Forces.

### **Privacy Impact Assessment**

37. No implications at the current time.

### **Background Papers**

38. District Executive report December 2011
  39. Armed Forces Community Covenant - Overview of Progress, DX Report March 2015
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