

# **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE – 7 JULY 2015**

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**Title:**

**COMMUNITY COVENANT**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Robert Knowles]**

**[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

In November 2014, the Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board held a conference to understand the current pressures affecting current and ex-service personnel living or working in Surrey. The conference also looked at what is currently being done and what more could be done.

Following the conference, Waverley's Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee asked for an update on the Community Covenant, which was signed by Waverley on 31 October 2012, and considered issues arising from a Surrey wide conference examining the effectiveness of the Covenant. The Committee considered the proposed actions and now recommends their approval, in part or in their entirety, to the Executive.

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

The Community Covenant relates to the corporate priority of 'Understand Our Residents' Needs' as it seeks to recognise and understand the needs of the Armed Services community within Waverley.

**Equality and Diversity Implications:**

The Covenant recognises the particular needs of current and ex-service personnel and in particular their needs relating to housing, access to leisure and employment.

**Financial implications:**

There are no financial implications arising from the Covenant.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

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**Introduction**

1. In November 2014, the Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board held a Surrey-wide conference to explore the pressures affecting current and ex-service personnel living or working in Surrey and review the effectiveness of the Community Covenant. The conference looked at what is currently being done and what more could be done by lead Surrey agencies to assist the armed forces community.

2. Following the conference, Waverley's Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee asked for an update on the Community Covenant, which was signed by Waverley on 31 October 2012, and further information on the actions suggested at the conference.

### **Background**

3. The Community Covenant for Waverley, signed on 31 October 2012, is a voluntary statement of mutual support between the Council, serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families as well as the charitable, faith and voluntary sector and other members of the civilian community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and Armed Forces at the local level.
4. Signatories of the Covenant are committed to:
  - the welfare needs of the Armed Forces and their families and the recuperation of sick and injured personnel
  - considering the future needs of the Armed Forces community as part of the wider community in future service and infrastructure planning
  - acknowledging the valued role Reservists play within our Community
  - providing and publicising effective customer services to all communities within Waverley inclusive of the Armed Forces Community
  - the commemoration of Remembrance Day and support for Armed Forces Day
5. Lead Surrey agencies and military partners have established a Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board (CMPB). The CMPB aims to foster closer working relationships with all strategic partners to identify changes in need at the earliest possible moment and to seek opportunities for partner initiatives, which will benefit communities. Up until 7 May 2015, Councillor Richard Gates was one of three Borough representatives on the Surrey CMPB, the others being Councillor Mansbridge from Guildford and Councillor Kingsbury from Woking. Councillor Maurice Byham has been nominated by Waverley to replace Councillor Gates as a Borough representative on the Surrey CMPB.
6. Whilst nearly all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales have signed the Covenant, the MOD are keen to ensure that local authorities have embedded the principles of the Covenant within their organisations and that help and support is available when required. The landscape for military service and ex-service personnel has changed dramatically over the past two years. There has been the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, the rebasing of troops from Germany and increasing number of Reservists in society. In the light of these changes the CMPB held a conference in November 2014 to understand the current pressures affecting current and ex-service personnel living or working in Surrey. The conference also looked at what is currently being done and what more could be done.

### **Situation in Waverley**

7. On the civic side of the Council, Members will be aware that Waverley has given the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment the Freedom of the Borough and two parades have been held in Farnham and Godalming. These were major civic and public events and it is anticipated that similar events will be held in Waverley's other major centres.

8. Table 1 below sets out those initiatives which Waverley has already introduced to assist access to services for the Armed Forces Community.

Table1.

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Details</b>
Council Tax and Housing Benefits	Waverley disregards all war pensions and armed forces pensions for ex-service personnel in the calculation of council tax and housing benefits which is over and above the Government requirement. Applications for Discretionary Housing Payment from ex-service personnel are also treated favourably where circumstances allow.
Housing Allocation Policy	Amendments were made to the Housing Allocations Scheme to include, as one of the priority groups, former members of the Armed Forces who have left the forces through no fault of their own in the last 5 years with an urgent need for housing. An exception was also made under the local connection criteria for those serving in the Armed Forces or who have served in the Armed Forces within 5 years of the date of their application. Exceptions may also be made for bereaved spouses/partners of Armed Forces personnel who are required to leave accommodation provided by the Armed Forces. Eligible MOD personnel are also given high priority in shared ownership applications.
Disabled Adaptations to Council property.	Waverley will undertake necessary disabled adaptations to a Council property for any disabled armed forces applicant whose service to the Country has resulted in disability.
Leisure	Members of the Armed Forces are eligible for an Access to Leisure card which gives discounts on many leisure centre activities throughout the Borough.

9. Set out in Table 2 below are a number of suggestions arising from the Conference and an initial response from officers as to the practicality of these proposals. O&S Members were asked to consider these suggestions and to recommend the implementation of those actions which they felt would be appropriate to the Executive.

Table2.

<b>No</b>	<b>Suggested Action</b>	<b>Officer Response/Recommendation</b>
1.	Advertise all vacancies on the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) website (ctp.org.uk).	The CTP are the MoD's official provider of resettlement services to those leaving the Armed Forces and have a 'RightJob' website to assist Service leavers find jobs. It would be possible to advertise relevant jobs on the CTP website at no cost. <b>Recommendation: To advertise all relevant vacancies on the CTP website.</b>
2.	Join the 'guaranteed interview scheme' for current and ex-armed forces personnel.	Waverley already runs the 'Two Ticks Positive about disabled people' scheme which guarantees an interview for all disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria for the job. Further investigation would need to be undertaken into how a similar model might work for Armed Forces applicants. <b>Recommendation: To investigate the possibility of a</b>

		<b>'guaranteed interview scheme' for armed forces personnel.</b>
3.	To support and encourage Reservists among our employees.	By implementing actions 1 and 2 above Waverley would be demonstrating a clear commitment that the Council encourages applications from Armed Forces personnel. For current members of staff the Council already has policies on special leave that allow for training with HM Forces and other emergency organisations. Members of the volunteer reserve forces will normally be granted two weeks' leave additional to their normal annual entitlement for attendance at camp to facilitate the continuous period of training required each year.
4.	Exhibit at the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) event for service leavers.	The Council is actively seeking new opportunities to market Waverley as an 'Employer of Choice'. Attendance at the CTP event will be considered and piloted as part of this overall project. <b>Recommendation: To explore the value of exhibiting at the CTP event.</b>
5.	Promote the Covenant through the supply chain by encouraging our contractors to exhibit at the annual Career Transition Partnership event for service leavers and to advertise their job vacancies through the CTP.	The Council could encourage our contractors to attend such events as well as advertising relevant vacancies through the CTP. <b>Recommendation: To encourage contractors to exhibit at the CTP event and to advertise their job vacancies through the CTP.</b>
6.	Establish links between Waverley's Family Support Team and the Army's Family Federation Regional Co-ordinators.	The Housing Options Team have established links with SSAFA who assist their clients financially to secure private rented accommodation. Further links with the Army's Family Federation Regional Co-ordinators can be explored. <b>Recommendation: To facilitate links with the Army's Family Federation Regional Co-ordinators when relevant.</b>
7.	Consider needs of ex-service personnel in our forthcoming review of support services in Housing	There is an opportunity to include the needs of ex-service personnel in a forthcoming review of support services in Housing. <b>Recommendation: To note that the review of support services in Housing will consider the needs of ex-service personnel.</b>
8.	Promote the Corporate Covenant and encourage increased sign up by local businesses in Waverley, either directly or through the Chamber of	This could be achieved through the Economic Development Team's contacts with local businesses. <b>Recommendation: To promote the Corporate Covenant through the Council's links with local businesses.</b>

	Commerce or Small Business Federation.	
9.	Join the Heroes Welcome campaign to encourage local businesses to offer discounts to Armed Forces personnel.	Waverley joined the Heroes Welcome campaign in 2010. <b>Recommendation: To note that Waverley has already joined the Heroes Welcome campaign.</b>
10.	Appoint a champion	The British Legion Best Practice Guide to Community Covenants suggests each authority should have both a Councillor champion and an officer coordinator. Councillor Richard Gates was put forward by Surrey Leaders as one of two Borough representatives on the CMPB. However, he feels it would be a positive affirmation of the Council's commitment to have an officially recognised 'Waverley Champion'. Louise Norie, Corporate Policy Manager is currently fulfilling the officer coordinator's role. <b>Recommendation: To appoint a Waverley Champion at the start of the new Council year.</b>
11.	Ensure our website has clear signposts to support services etc. that help military personnel	The Community Covenant Coordinator can ensure this is done. <b>Recommendation: To ensure the Council website has clear signposts to services that can support military personnel.</b>
12.	Use The Royal British Legion household survey (launched 17 November 2014) to inform services	This survey could fulfil a useful purpose in informing services of the needs of our current and ex-service personnel in the Waverley community. <b>Recommendation: To use The Royal British Legion Household Survey to inform service delivery regarding the needs of Armed Forces personnel and ex-service personnel</b>

### **Observations from Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

10. Corporate O&S Committee was pleased to see what Waverley was already doing to support the Armed Forces Community. The Committee gave careful consideration to the suggested actions raised at the Conference, the Officer responses and recommended actions.
11. The Committee had some reservations around the guaranteed interview scheme; there was no consensus on how this should be implemented, and the Committee agreed with the recommendation that this needed to be explored further.
12. Some members of the Committee felt the leadership skills staff would develop through the training offered to Reservists could be beneficial for the Council, but recognised the sensitivities around actively promoting the scheme. Committee noted that employees who were members of the reserve forces were able to take special leave to enable them to attend training camps.

13. The Committee endorsed the appointment of a 'Waverley Champion' to lead in engaging with the Armed Forces community and promoting the Community Covenant locally. Cllr Gates advised that the Borough representatives on the Surrey CMPB planned to draft a 'job description' for the role of Champion, and he hoped that the new Council would agree to appoint one of the Members to this role. Cllr Gates felt that it was important that the Committee received an annual update on the Community Covenant to ensure there was regular scrutiny of what the Council was doing in support of the commitment it had made. The Committee encouraged officers to make use of those Members who have personal experience in the armed forces if opportunities arose, and to maintain links with the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment by inviting them to support the Mayor's activities.
14. Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommended actions to the Executive, and asked to receive an annual update on the Community Covenant to ensure there is regular scrutiny of what the Council is doing in support of the commitment it has made.

### **Recommendation**

That the Executive:

- i) notes the observations and endorsements of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- ii) appoints a Member as 'Waverley Champion' for the Armed Forces;
- iii) asks the Corporate Policy Manager to pursue the actions recommended in Table 2, and to report back to the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 12 months.

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### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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