

## Council

27 February 2020

### Report of the Armed Forces Community Covenant Member Officer Group

Report by the Director of Public Health, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

#### Purpose

To provide the annual progress report on delivery of the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Kingston.

#### Recommendations to Council:

To note the progress made, including that of the Working Group set out in the report at **Annex 1**, and agree that:

- (a) a Councillor is appointed at Annual Council as an Armed Forces Champion along with an Assistant Armed Forces Champion (from different political groups);
- (b) staff and elected Members are made aware of the Armed Forces Community Covenant for Kingston as part of their induction;
- (c) the Council and its partners continue to develop an understanding of the needs of the local armed forces and families, including the G (Guards) Company of the London Regiment, and of veterans, and respond in accordance with the Covenant.
- (d) in future, the annual report is submitted to the relevant committee (currently, Children's and Adults' Care and Education Committee) to allow for more detailed Member discussion and public participation on this item prior to consideration by Council.

#### Key Points

- A. The current Mayor, who is also the Armed Forces Champion, has attended a number of armed forces events including memorial services, meeting veterans, reservists and cadets, Remembrance Day events, parades and services at places of worship locally and London wide.
- B. Progress continues to be made to deliver the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Kingston since it was signed in June 2013. This has been championed by the Armed Forces Community Covenant Member Officer Group (MOG) led by Councillor Margaret Thompson with support from Councillor Maria Netley.
- C. The summary report in **Annex 1** summarises the work of the MOG over the past six and a half years, intelligence about what is available to current and ex-armed forces personnel and their families in Kingston, and progress made to date.
- D. The development of an e-learning package (Armed Forces Covenant Awareness) for staff which will be made accessible to councillors.
- E. Progress has been made in a number of areas, and in particular in housing, where a commitment to allocate up to two flats each year to single veterans has been made under the Housing Allocations Scheme.
- F. The active commitment to the Covenant is led by the Director of Public Health, and in accordance with the resolution of Council on 17 April 2018 a summary report on progress is submitted to full Council annually.

## Context

1. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly.
2. The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Council signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2013 and again in November 2018. The covenant pledges civic support for service personnel in the borough in areas such as work and training, housing, schools for service children and welfare, and pledges to promote public understanding and awareness of issues affecting the Armed Forces while, for the Armed Forces, the covenant encourages personnel and their families to do as much as they can to support the community and promote activities which integrate service and civilian life.

## The Member Officer Working Group

3. The Armed Forces Community Covenant Member Officer Working Group (MOG) was established by Policy and Resources Committee on 5 December 2013 with a remit *'to examine means by which the Council could recognise the contribution of the armed forces community and give tangible effect to its commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant. Recommendations arising from the Group would be submitted to the relevant Strategic and/or Neighbourhoods Committee dependent upon the nature of the proposal.'* This will be reviewed in light of the changes within the Council.
4. The membership currently includes representatives of the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Group. The Director of Public Health will be the lead officer responsible for ensuring the commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant continues, and will produce an annual report of activities to Council with support from the Strategy and Performance - Equalities Officer.
5. The following lists areas which have been explored and issues which have been discussed at meetings of the Working Group - more detail about progress on these areas is set out in the report from the MOG attached at **Annex 1** to this report:
  - local demographics and census information
  - as part of the covenant, ongoing conversations have been held with officers from Council departments including: Human Resources, Community Housing, Children's Services, Commissioning, Leisure, Social Care and Health
  - discussions have also taken place with:
    - Kingston Clinical Commissioning Group
    - Citizens' Advice Bureau
  - ongoing relationships have been developed with organisations that support the Armed Forces e.g. Royal Star and Garter
  - the need for local coordination of help, assistance and responsiveness has been identified, particularly for veterans who have a high level of need or who are discharged from specialist centres such as Stanford Hall, Leicestershire, which is the new rehabilitation centre taking over from Headley Court, Surrey.
6. There are no financial, legal, environmental, equality or other implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

**Background papers** - held by the author of the report, Francis Arokiasamy, Strategy and Performance Team tel 020 8547 4714 email:francis.arokiasamy@kingston.gov.uk

### Summary Report of the Armed Forces Community Covenant Member Officer Group

1. This report explains the purpose of the Community Covenant, the formation of the Member Officer Group (MOG), its discussions and recommendations.
2. The MOG was appointed by the Policy and Resources Committee on 5 December 2013. This followed the borough's development of a local Armed Forces Community Covenant and the signing ceremony held on 24 June 2013.
3. Policy and Resources agreed the following terms of reference for the MOG:  
"The purpose of the Group is to examine means by which the Council can recognise the contribution of the armed forces community and give tangible effect to its commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).  
  
Recommendations arising from the Group will be submitted to the relevant Strategic and/ or Neighbourhood committees dependent upon the nature of the proposal."  
  
The purpose of the MOG is to provide views on the future direction with regard to the Covenant in Kingston.
4. The Armed Forces Community Covenant "complements, at a local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the nation, the Government and the armed forces. The aim of the community covenant is to encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their area and promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the armed forces community". (Source: Gov.uk)

### Aims of the community covenant

5. "Local authorities and the armed forces community are encouraged to work together to establish a community covenant in their area in order to:
  - encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas and to nurture public understanding and awareness among 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 local life
  - encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement"
6. A Best Practice Guide for Community Covenants provides further information and a link to this is given at the end of this report.

### Progress made by the MOG

7. The current Councillor representatives for the MOG at Cllrs Margaret Thompson and Maria Netley. They are supported by council officers.
8. The MOG has held discussions with senior representatives of Adult Social Care, Kingston Clinical Commissioning Group (mental health commissioning), RBK Commissioning, Children's Services, Leisure and Culture, Human Resources), Housing and the Citizens Advice Bureau, Kingston.

## Definition of a Veteran

9. The Government's definition of a veteran is "any person who has served a day or longer in HM forces or reservist forces". The MOG was particularly conscious of those leaving the armed forces, but recognised the needs of serving armed forces staff.

## Local Demographics

10. The school census from Autumn 2013 identified 44 service children in community primary schools and 10 in secondary schools and the highest numbers in Canbury Ward. The 2011 census identified 204 Kingston residents who were working in the armed forces.

The current information from Government sources on Kingston borough identifies 195 claimants of the Armed Forces Pension scheme, 87 on the War Pension Scheme and 13 claimants of the armed forces compensation scheme.

## Count Them In Campaign

11. Following a request from the Royal British Legion Malden and Coombe Branch, at the meeting of full Council on 17 October 2017 the Council unanimously agreed to support the British Legion 'Count Them In' campaign, calling for additional questions on the Armed Forces community to be included in the next (2021) census.
12. In late October, the 2021 Census Director announced that, in response to the outcome of its consultations, a question to capture information about veterans will now be included in the 2021 next census. This information will assist central and local government to fulfil their commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant (see footnote for further information).

## MOD personnel information

13. The MOG discussed the possible impact that armed forces (AF) redundancies may have in Kingston and subsequent to MOG meeting Ministry of Defence (MOD) information has been reviewed, including a Government briefing for MPs. This showed that there have been redundancies across the entire AF ranging from front line personnel to medical support staff. The MOG acknowledged that the numbers locally were likely to be fairly limited, compared to other areas of the country such as in Hampshire and Wiltshire where Services are based in large numbers.
14. Details of the national change in total armed forces, those who are full time and trained reservists are set out below (Source: MOD Quarterly Personnel Reports):

	1 April 2016	1 April 2017	1 Oct 2017	July 2018	1 April 2019
Total Armed Forces	197,190	197,040	195,730	192,410	191,600
Full Time Trained Strength*	140,430	138,840	137,280	135,750	133,460
Reservists	27,270	31,360	32,080	32,090	32,490

\* (Note the FTTS definition changed in October 2016)

15. The MOG has noted the increasing role of Reservists and the needs of this group requires consideration under the Community Covenant arrangements. Reservist veterans do not have the same level of support from the MOD unless they are medically retired.

16. The London Regiment is based in Kingston at the Kingston Army Reserve Centre. This is home to the G (Guards) Company. There are also 4 Cadet Units in the borough:
- 156 Cadet Detachment ACF, Army Reserve Centre Kingston
  - 328 Squadron Air Cadets, Army Reserve Centre Kingston
  - 1034 Squadron Air Cadets, Surbiton
  - Kingston and District Sea Cadets

### **Health and Social Care**

17. There are two main organisations which assist with recovery and rehabilitation following front line duty:
- Combat Stress – provides mental health rehabilitation and outcomes for service people that are generally better than from the general mental health services. This provision is being reviewed by NHS England, with a view to ensuring more equal access to specialist mental health provision for service and ex-service personnel.
  - Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, relocated in September 2018 to Stanford Hall, Leicestershire from Headley Court in Surrey. Details of people who have received care and then been discharged locally are not shared, but information can be obtained from Horseguards Personnel Recovery Unit.
18. The Defence Medical Services provide primary care services for people serving in the forces. However, the new GP contract agreed in 2015/16 introduced specific changes for armed forces personnel who can now register with a GP practice for longer than three months and up to a maximum of two years.
19. Defence Medical Services retain responsibility for meeting occupational health needs, but an individual's primary care needs can now be accessed by registering with a GP practice for NHS primary medical care services. These patients need to have received the explicit authorisation of Defence Primary Health Care in order to register. A summary of the patient's medical records should be to be shared with the GP practice.
20. Healthcare - veterans are entitled to priority access to NHS hospital care for conditions which are related to their service, however, this is subject to the clinical priority needs of all patients and so a veteran's care will not be placed ahead of others who have greater clinical priority. Veterans need to ensure that their GP knows they are former forces personnel and GPs should include details in any referral unless the patient requests that this information is not passed on. Veterans should be given a summary record of their health on discharge from service which should be passed to the GP along with details about how the GP can obtain the full record. The new GP contractual arrangements strengthen the responsibility of GPs towards AF personnel.

### **Information about services and support**

21. The MOD and organisations specifically for veterans and service personnel provide a good range of information which is useful to those leaving services and those who have specific needs. Links to details of MOD support, welfare and wellbeing are provided on the NHS Choices webpages for Armed Forces Healthcare. NHS Choices makes the point that information and support is available for the armed forces community, including serving personnel, reservists, families and veterans. More recent developments are given at paragraphs 60 and 61 about new national services.

### **Local coordination of help and assistance for members of the armed forces**

22. The MOG identified the benefits of prompt and appropriately responsive help for veterans, and for staff to recognise the special status of veterans, particularly those with high level of needs, and as these needs change with time.
23. The MOG recognised the invaluable support that organisations such as the British Legion can provide with practical repairs and redecoration of homes for veterans and war widows.

### **Citizens Advice Kingston**

24. The MOG understands that Citizens Advice Kingston provides advice and information to all. There are two approaches:
  - self-help at the centre – this has been particularly successful in dealing with increasing numbers of clients
  - volunteer case worker assisting in more complex cases or where clients are unable to use the self-help facilities successfully.
- 25.. The CAB also undertakes preventative work around budgeting skills, loan sharks and advice on food and fuel poverty through the Money Talks Project. CAB provides comprehensive information on line and in person could be particularly helpful to new arrivals to the borough.

### **RBK Human Resources and Employment**

26. HR, in conjunction with the Renewing the Covenant in the Capital Project have developed an e-learning package (Armed Forces Covenant Awareness) for staff which will be made accessible to councillors.
- 27.. HR is reviewing the current recruitment process with HR to see how best appropriate information on armed forces personnel can be captured.
- 28.. RBK guarantees interviews for people who are disabled if minimum criteria for interview is met and this applies to AF.
29. It was also confirmed that the Council provides support for members of staff who are also members of the Territorial Army and there was allowance for time off work for training and service.

### **RBK Community Housing**

30. Demand for social housing in Kingston remains high and there is a lack of supply of affordable social rented homes to meet demand. The Council's Housing Register has 3663 active applications as of 30 September 2019.
32. The MOG noted that the housing needs of Armed Services personnel are met by the MoD. This is lost on leaving the forces and generally Armed Services personnel receive just one month's notice to quit their accommodation. Provisions under homelessness legislation would apply to any household, including veterans, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
33. RBK's Housing Allocations Scheme has made available two social housing allocations per year to veterans who have been nominated by Armed Services personnel and their families Charitable Support Organisations. Since 2017 this access to social housing has been extended, from that originally provided to the Stoll veterans' charity only, to include other support agencies offering services to veterans and their families under the 'veterans' gateway.  
<https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

34. The Housing Options Service is the Council's 'single point of access' for housing and provides advice to Armed Services personnel on their housing options.
35. The Housing Allocations Scheme has regard to the Armed Forces Covenant in making two single person flats for veterans nominated a veterans association participating in the 'veterans' gateway.
36. The Housing Allocations Scheme includes provisions for certain armed forces personnel and their surviving spouse/civil partner and veterans.

"Priority if you have served in the armed forces - The Council must give you additional preference on the Housing Register if you are already in one of the reasonable preference priority groups and you are:

- a former member of the regular armed forces
- a member of the regular or reserve forces who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability related to your service
- a bereaved spouse or civil partner who has to leave forces accommodation following your partner's death in service."

### **Children's Services**

37. The Government provides a Pupil Premium of £300 per pupil per year to schools attended by armed forces children to mitigate the effect of AF relocation.
38. In accordance with the School Admissions Code 2014 and the Department of Education's subsequent guidance entitled "Admission of Children of Crown Servants" issued in September 2015, Kingston Council accepts applications for service children and allocates a school place up to four months in advance of the family arriving in the area, provided their application is accompanied by an official letter declaring a relocation date and an address in the area. Families applying to start Reception year at a primary school or to transfer to secondary school in the following September can apply more than four months in advance of the statutory closing dates, provided the relocation date and address conditions are met.

This information is published in Kingston's admissions brochures for secondary and primary admissions which can be found on the Council's website.

The numbers of new applications received centrally by Kingston School Admissions for service children for the academic year 2019/20 to date is 17 in total and the breakdown is:

- Secondary: 7 (of which 5 live at The Keep).
- Primary: 10 (of which 7 live at The Keep).

The majority of secondary applicants are admitted to either The Kingston Academy or Grey Court School in Richmond. The majority of primary applicants are admitted to Latchmere, St Agatha's or Fern Hill Primary Schools.

Overall, based on the relatively low numbers of service families that arrive into Kingston, finding school places is not a significant issue, though for families it can appear so when they cannot get a place at their most preferred school which is likely to be heavily oversubscribed.

### **AFCC Grant applications**

30. The Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) has been able to provide grants to support projects and initiatives for the armed forces and grant applications need to be supported by the local authority. The MOG considered and supported a grant application for £7880 for the “Working together to support families” project submitted by the North Kingston Centre to provide additional play equipment at The Keep and to support friendship networking between service families with young children.

### **Contractual Arrangements**

40. A contract management guide for Council officers with contract management responsibility had been drawn up, plus a draft social value toolkit, which includes the use of social value aspects when awarding contracts.
41. Members made the following suggestions which have been forwarded to Commissioning officers to consider:
  - to include references to the Armed Forces under Theme 2: “Prosper and Inclusive” e.g. to encourage contractors to consider the Armed forces community when offering apprenticeships and other job opportunities, and
  - to include the Armed Forces Community Covenant within the list of policies, frameworks and documents that underpin the Social Value toolkit.

### **Commemorative landmarks in Kingston**

42. Additional signage has been added to explain local location names such as “Barton Green”, “Bazalgette Close” and “Firman Close” in Maldens and Coombe. These local street names relate to people who had been awarded the Victoria Cross.
43. Local authorities have laid commemorative stones on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the award of the Victoria Cross. A ceremony at the Surbiton War Memorial took place in May 2015 to mark Douglas Belcher’s award at Ypres on 15 May 1915.
44. Suggestions were made for future road naming to commemorate other awards to local residents e.g. the George Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and Distinguished Service Order (DSO).
45. The question of how to identify past Kingston residents who had died in WW1 was discussed and records may be obtainable from the Staffordshire memorial. There has been no new commemorative landmarks identified for signage in past year

### **Commemorative events in Kingston**

46. During the period 2014 - 2018 commemorative services and events were held across the borough as part of the nationwide marking of the centenary of World War One and of the Armistice, for example, an event was held on 4 August 2014 and a commemorative plaque was added to the New Malden War Memorial. Lottery funding was obtained to support the WW1 Exhibition at Kingston Museum and the Rose Theatre.

47. Events held during 2018 included:

- the unveiling of five 'tommy ' silhouette sculptures around the borough
- the Study School in New Malden planted 25 trees in a commemorative event on 22 February 2018.
- Kingston participated in the national lighting of beacons on Remembrance Sunday 2018.
- other events are recorded on the Council's website at this link:  
[https://www.kingston.gov.uk/homepage/270/kingston\\_remembers\\_hundred\\_years\\_after\\_world\\_war\\_i](https://www.kingston.gov.uk/homepage/270/kingston_remembers_hundred_years_after_world_war_i).

50 During the last year, the Mayor has attended a number of engagements to support the armed forces locally and London wide, including:

- Chile Navy Day Wreath Laying Ceremony, Westminster Abbey trooping the Colour, Horse Guards
- Cyril Barton VC Memorial Service, Kingston
- Armed Forces Day Flag Raising Ceremony, GH
- Visit to C Det - 256 CoL Field Hospital & G Company - The London Regiment plus meeting Cadets, Surbiton
- Armed Forces Day Fete, Royal Star & Garter Home, Surbiton
- South West London Army Cadet Force's Duke of Edinburgh Awards evening, SE19
- Surrey RBL Poppy Launch, Woking
- East Surrey Poppy Launch, Morden
- Mayor of London's Annual Service of Remembrance
- Remembrance Sunday Services & Parades across the Borough
- Remembrance Sabbath Service, Kingston, Surbiton & District Synagogue

## **Further information:**

**Armed Forces Covenant website** <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>  
<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/localauthorities/>

## **Community Covenant Guide:**

[https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/1381/communitycovenant\\_bestpracticeguide.pdf](https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/1381/communitycovenant_bestpracticeguide.pdf)

## **Census Questions for 2021:**

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/the2021censusinitialviewoncontentforenglandandwales/updateonmeetinginformationneedsonthearmedforcescommunityveterans>

## **Community Covenant Grant applications**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covenant-fund-guidance-on-how-to-apply>

## **Support for UK Veterans, House of Commons Library 2 September 2016**

<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7693>

## **Armed Forces Commissioning Intentions, 2017/18 to 2018/19, NHS England, 17/10/16**

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2016/10/armed-forces-comms-intent-1617-1819.pdf>

## **Veterans' Health Care, NHS Choices webpage**

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/Pages/Militaryhealthcare.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/serving/Pages/Rehabilitation.aspx>

## **Combat Stress (mental health and post traumatic stress disorder)**

<https://www.combatstress.org.uk/veterans?gclid=COL-t7W82MgCFRcUGwodxeYE0A>

**Looking after our armed forces, December 2012** <https://www.gov.uk/looking-after-our-armed-forces>

## **Guidance on the referral of veterans, NHS Gateway advice to PCTs, Feb 2010**

[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/d\\_h\\_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_111886.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/d_h_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_111886.pdf)

## **UK Armed Forces Personnel Monthly Report October 2017**

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/659404/20171001\\_-\\_SPS.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659404/20171001_-_SPS.pdf)

## **SDSR 2015, Defence Key Facts, Ministry of Defence**

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/494895/SDSR\\_2015\\_Booklet\\_vers\\_15.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/494895/SDSR_2015_Booklet_vers_15.pdf)

**Veterans Gateway** [www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)

**See Potential** [www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)

## **Armed Forces Covenant support and advice**

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/support-and-advice/families/>

**The Guards come to Kingston** <https://glrfca.org/news/detail/377>

## **AF Pensions and compensation recipient Data:**

[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/location-of-armed-forces-pension-and-compensation-recipients-2018](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/location-of-armed-forces-pension-and-compensation-recipients-2018)