

London Borough of Bromley

Part 1 – PUBLIC

Decision Maker: Executive

Date: Wednesday 17 May 2023

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

TITLE: RENEWAL OF THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Chief Officer: Sara Bowrey, Director of Housing, Planning, Property and Regeneration

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Ward: Borough Wide

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report summarises a recent review of the Council's work under the Armed Forces Covenant and planned future work to support Bromley's Armed Forces Community as part of the renewal of the Covenant.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The Executive is asked to:
1. Note the review of the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Bromley.
 2. Note the ongoing work being done to meet the aspirations outlined in the Armed Forces Covenant for Bromley signed on 24 April 2013.
 3. Note Sara Bowrey, Director of Housing, Planning, Property and Regeneration as Council Officer Armed Forces Champion and Councillor Mike Botting as Council Member Armed Forces Champion.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact:

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy.
2. MBEB Priority:
 1. For children and young people to grow up, thrive and have the best life changes in families who flourish and are happy to call Bromley home.
 2. For adults and older people to enjoy fulfilled and successful lives in Bromley, ageing well, retaining independence, and making choices.

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated No Cost.
2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable.
3. Budget head/ performance centre: Nil.
4. Total current budget for this head: Nil.
5. Source of funding:

Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): Nil.
2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:

Legal

1. Legal Requirement:
2. Call-in:

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not Applicable.

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/ beneficiaries (current and projected): To support serving and former service personnel and their families.

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors Comments:

3. COMMENTARY

Background

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant was published in 2011 by the Government as part of its approach to ensure that the Armed Forces are valued and supported, and its core principles were enshrined in law for the first time in the Armed Forces Act 2021.
- 3.2 The Covenant is designed to set out the relationship between the Nation and the State and the Armed Forces and seeks to formalise the moral obligation that has historically existed between the Nation and members of the Armed Forces and their families.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 Bromley's Executive signed up to the Community Covenant on 24 April 2013.

Evaluating the Covenant

- 3.5 It is now ten years since the Covenant was signed. The following summarises some of the work and events delivered as part of the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant in the London Borough of Bromley.

Civic Events and Promoting the Armed Forces to the Community

- Each November Bromley holds Remembrance Day Services throughout the borough that are attended by Elected Members and the Mayor of the Council.
- Since the creation of Armed Forces Day, Members of the Council and representatives of the Armed Forces including the Sea Cadets, RAF Flying Cadets, Royal Naval Association, Armed Forces Standard List and the Royal British Legion have marked the occasion by flag raising ceremonies at the Old Palace Gardens at the Civic Centre.

A Forces Friendly Employer

- The Council positively supports staff who are reservists. Our offer to reservist employees includes:
 - 10 days additional paid leave each year to carry out operational training.
 - A flexible working policy to assist with military commitments.
 - Management support in preparation for, during and after mobilisation.
 - Access to Occupational Health Service.
 - Eligibility for sickness absence pay in line with terms and conditions.

- Eligibility for maternity, paternity and adoption leave in line with terms and conditions.
- The new HR Payroll System that went live in April this year will enable us to monitor the number of reservists employed at Bromley.
- Following the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council will apply to be accredited with the 'Bronze Award' under the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

Housing

- Bromley's Housing Allocations Scheme incorporates The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, giving additional preference priority for housing to members of the Armed Forces and their family.
- Additional preference is also given to the following persons if they fall within one or more of the statutory reasonable preference categories and are in urgent housing need:
 - Serving members of the regular forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.
 - Former members of the regular forces.
 - Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where:
 - (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and
 - (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
 - existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- Returning members of the Armed Forces who have a housing need in accordance with either the Local or Reasonable Preference categories may be subject to further consideration or exemption from the local connection rule.

Health and Wellbeing

- Several key partnership policies, including the Bromley Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Learning Disability Strategy and the borough's Suicide Prevention Plan are in the process of being refreshed, and will include the Armed Forces community as a unique group.
- As part of raising awareness of the Armed Forces community with General Practitioners (GPs), colleagues in Public Health have carried out a piece of work to identify the offer from GPs in the borough to the Armed Forces community and if practices are signed up the Veteran

Friendly Scheme. A report to the Health and Wellbeing Board will be shared this Summer, and a focused chapter on the Armed Forces will be included in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) in March 2024.

- The Council's dedicated Loneliness Champion is in contact with Voluntary and Community Sector Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, including Biggin Hill Memorial Museum and the Royal British Legion to identify information about local community groups, activities, and support services for loneliness that members of the Armed Forces community can be signposted to.

School Admissions

- Serving Armed Forces personnel who are not living in the area but have a confirmed local posting, are allocated a place in advance of arriving in the borough. The admission authority holds a school offer open until they move to the area.
- The School Admissions Code allows service children to be considered as an exemption to the Infant Class Size Limit, where the service child is first on the waiting list for a school place.

Financial Support

- When the Council Tax Benefit was abolished in April 2013 and replaced by Council Tax Support, Bromley Council decided that it would continue to disregard income from War Widow's, Widower's Pensions and War Disablement Pensions in full. In taking this approach recipients continue to receive the maximum available support to assist with Council Tax payments.
- The principle described above is also applied to recipients of Housing Benefit.

Advice and Support Services

- The Council has a dedicated page for 'Ex-Service Organisations' which features links to other Voluntary and Community Sector Enterprise organisations such as Blind Veterans UK for dedicated advice and support.
- A dedicated 'Armed Forces Covenant' webpage on the Council's website is currently in development, with an expected 'go live' date of June 2023.

Extending the Covenant

- 3.6 The Council has been liaising closely with the Head of Community Engagement at the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust in preparation for the extension of Bromley's Armed Forces Covenant.

- 3.7 In line with good practice and following the recommendations of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust bespoke project 'Renewing the Covenant in the Capital' the Council has refreshed its pledges (Section Four) as follows:

SECTION FOUR: OUR COMMITMENT

5.1 Demonstrating we are an Armed Forces-friendly organisation by:

- Publicising our Armed Forces Covenant and displaying the Armed Forces Covenant logo on our Corporate website.
- Promoting a greater understanding and awareness of the needs and contributions of the Armed Forces Community within the borough using all our communication channels.
- Encouraging our supply companies, community and local strategic partnership organisations to sign up to the Covenant.
- Engaging with our partners in the private, public and voluntary sectors to identify opportunities to fulfil the objectives of the Covenant.
- Raising public awareness of the Armed Forces through our website and newsletter in a culturally and politically sensitive manner.

5.2 Strengthening our links with the Armed Forces Community by:

- Appointing an Armed Forces Member Champion and Senior Officer point of contact within the Council to ensure our commitments are implemented and maintained.
- Ensuring staff and elected Members are made aware of the Armed Forces Covenant for Bromley.
- Offering support to our local cadet units.
- Working closely with the South East London Clinical Commissioning Group (SEL CCG) and attend Covenant Stakeholder meetings.
- Ensuring that Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) by Council/ Public Health and wellbeing departments will try to take consideration of the Armed Forces community.
- Making information about support available to the Armed Forces community easily accessible to all.
- Considering the needs of the Armed Forces Community as part of the wider Bromley community in future service and infrastructure planning.

5.3 Seeking to support the employment of veterans and service leavers:

- Recognising that the Armed Forces community bring a variety of transferable skills and qualities developed through their military careers when interviewing for positions.
- Ensuring our recruitment process is inclusive and accessible.
- Anticipating and providing reasonable adjustments as required.
- Promoting employment opportunities available to members of the Armed Forces Community.
- Enrol on the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

5.4 Striving to support the families of the Armed Forces Community by:

- Ensuring the Armed Forces Community has fair access to our services and is not put at a disadvantage by their service.
- Ensuring information and signposting to appropriate support services for the Armed Forces Community is freely available and easy to access.
- Connecting with GP practices to encourage staff to ask patients about service background.
- Ensuring school admission policies recognise the needs of children of the Armed Forces community.

5.5 Seeking to support out employees who choose to be members of the Reserve Forces or Cadet Force Adult Volunteers.

- Providing the necessary support for our employees within the Armed Forces Community, including additional paid leave as appropriate and flexible working opportunities.
- We will, wherever possible, accommodate the mobilisation of our reservists if they are required to deploy.
- Ensuring employees are able to easily disclose whether they are members of the Armed Forces Community.
- We will encourage any reservists in our organisation to participate in Reserves Day.

5.6 Ensuring support is given to members of the Armed Forces Community with urgent housing needs.

- Ensuring our Housing Allocation Scheme recognises the needs of the Armed Forces Community, providing additional preference for the Armed Forces as part the Housing Act 1996.

5.7 Recognising and remembering the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces Community by:

- Flying the Armed Forces Day Flag.
- Supporting and promoting other Armed Forces events in the local community.
- Mindfully recognising and remembering the contribution and sacrifices made by British and Commonwealth military and civilian service men and women who have been affected by armed conflict by supporting Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day.

3.8 The Council's refreshed Armed Forces Covenant is appended in full to this report for information (Appendix One).

Next Steps

- 3.9 The Council has developed an action plan to sit beneath the Armed Forces Covenant, which the Council's new Armed Forces Partnership will meet formally on an annual basis to review activity from the previous year, any arising issues, and plans for the following year.
- 3.10 The Mayor, alongside the Leader, the Chief Executive and Ministry of Defence representative will sign Bromley's refreshed Armed Forces Covenant at the Council's Armed Forces Day event on Wednesday 21 June 2023.