

Decision Maker: EXECUTIVE, RESOURCES AND CONTRACTS POLICY
DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 20th May 2024

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: ARMED FORCES COVENANT UPDATE

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

Ward: (All Wards);

1. Reason for decision/report and options

This report summarises the progress on the work that has taken place to date under the Armed Forces Covenant since it's renewal and the ongoing work underway to further support Bromley's Armed Forces Community.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1. The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management, and Members of the ERC PDS are asked to:

- a. Note the progress and work underway to meet the pledges set out in the renewal of the Armed Forces Covenant which was re-affirmed in June 2023.
- b. Note the award of the Bronze Employer Certificate in national recognition of the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Community.
- c. Adopt the refreshed Action Plan which sets out how the Council will deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Bromley and measure progress

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: This adoption of the action plan will improve the outcomes of Vulnerable Adults and Children in Bromley
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Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority
 - (1) For children and young people to grow up, thrive and have the best life chances 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.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: 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: None
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (*current and additional*): N/A
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None
 2. Call-in: Not applicable
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not applicable
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Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: None
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Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: None
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Impact on the Local Economy

1. Summary of Local Economy Implications: None
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Impact on Health and Wellbeing

1. Summary of Health and Wellbeing Implications: The renewed Armed Forces Covenant will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces community in Bromley
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (*current and projected*): Census data shows that Bromley has the largest percentage of military veterans of all the London Boroughs, with 2.5% of residents having served in the forces.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) was published in 2011 by the Government as part of its approach to ensure that the Armed Forces are valued and supported. The Armed Forces Act 2021 enshrines the Covenant into law for the first time, to help prevent serving armed forces personnel, military veterans and their families from being disadvantaged when accessing commercial and public services.
- 3.2 A key feature of the Act is a new statutory duty to specified persons or bodies, including councils, to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant, when exercising certain housing, education, or healthcare functions (excluding social care).
- 3.3 The Covenant is designed to set out the relationship between the Nation, 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.
- 3.4 The Covenant focuses on helping members of the Armed Forces community to have the same access to Government and Commercial Services and products as any other citizen. Bromley's Executive initially signed up to the Community Covenant on 24th April 2013.

Re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant

- 3.4 As part of our ongoing commitment to support veterans and other members of the armed forces community the Armed Forces Covenant was re-affirmed in Bromley in June 2023 ten years after the initial signing. The re-signing, which renews the commitment originally made by the borough ten years ago, took place during a special ceremony held as part of Bromley Council's Armed Forces Day activities.
- 3.5 Following the re-signing the development of the AFC was assigned to the Culture Team by Sara Bowrey, Director of Housing Planning and Regeneration, in her capacity as Council Officer Armed Forces Champion. The team have been working in partnership with the Member Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Mike Botting to raise awareness amongst staff and residents of the work underway to co-ordinate the Bromley offer to the armed forces community in the borough.
- 3.6 The Culture Team were invited to deliver a presentation to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) on February 29th, 2024, to update on the progress that has been made to date since the covenant was re-affirmed which included a presentation. A representative from the Ministry of Defence also attended the meeting.
- 3.7 Since the re-signing of the covenant, progress has been made which is outlined in paragraphs 3.11 -3.21. The Armed Forces Action Plan has been refreshed with an internal AFC working group established with agreed terms of reference. The first meeting of the group took place on 2nd April 2024. Dedicated AFC webpages and directory of local support and information are now available on the Council's website which we will continue to develop. We have now achieved bronze accreditation in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) and are working towards silver. We are working alongside key partners including Bromley FC to reach larger numbers of the Armed Forces community.

Armed Forces Footprint in Bromley

- 3.8 Armed Forces veterans Census Data released in November 2022, shows that there were 1,853,112 people who had previously served in the UK armed forces in England and Wales in 2021 representing 3.8% of the population aged 16 and over.
- 3.9 Although there are no military units in the Borough, there is a large veteran population including 453-armed forces pension claimants. March 2021 data shows that there were 6,673 Bromley residents who had previously served in the armed forces. This was 2.5% of the Bromley population ages 16+, the highest percentage in London, made up of 1.7% regular armed forces and 0.7% armed forces reservists.
- 3.10 There are approximately 50 children from service families at local schools. There are a number of family accommodation and married quarters within the Borough. The Borough also has Army Cadet, Air Training and Sea Cadet Corps providing life skills, training, and friendship for younger members of the community. Therefore, exploring ways to develop services and assistance to military personal, veterans, reservists and their families is a key priority.

Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

- 3.11 As part of our commitment to the to supporting the employment of veterans and service leavers a key action was to enrol on the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Defence Employment recognition scheme. In February 2024 in national recognition of our work to deliver the priorities of the Armed Forces Covenants (AFC) Bromley Council received the Bronze Award from the MOD Employer Recognition scheme. MOD data shows Bromley to be one of only twelve London Councils to receive the bronze award. The Bronze logos are now displayed prominently on the Council's website along with information pages signposting towards support and advice .
- 3.12 We have begun the process to work towards silver status. The 2024 expression of interest for silver and gold awards closed in March 2024 - just after we achieved our Bronze award. This is an annual process with the next expression of interest stage opening in December 2024 closing in March 2025. The Culture Team is working with the MOD who support the authority to help them reach the required level to ensure that we are ready to submit our silver expression of interest as soon as it re-opens
- 3.13 When the Employer Recognition Scheme silver standard has been achieved the next step is to start the application for the gold award in March 2026. The MOD provides further support for organisations as they begin the gold award application process. The criteria for Bronze, Silver and Gold and are set out in Appendix 1.

Delivering our commitments

- 3.14 The AFC provides civic support for service personnel in the borough in key areas such as jobs and employment, housing services, education, health and wellbeing, benefits and financial support. Lead officers from these key areas identified along with others including the Public Affairs Team are working to promote public understanding and awareness of issues affecting the Armed Forces

3.15 Following the recommendations of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust bespoke project 'Renewing the Covenant in the Capital', Bromley Council refreshed its pledges and agreed seven commitments which form the focus of our new action plan (Appendix 2) which are set out below.

- Demonstrating that we are an Armed Forces-friendly organisation.
- Strengthening our links with the Armed Forces Community
- Seeking to support the employment of veterans and service leavers.
- Striving to support the families of the Armed Forces Community
- Seeking to support out employees who choose to be members of the Reserve Forces or Cadet Force Adult Volunteers
- Ensuring support is given to members of the Armed Forces Community with urgent housing needs.
- Recognising and remembering the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces Community

3.16 Members are asked to support the adoption of the refreshed action plan which sets out the key workstreams supporting the commitments set out above and records progress using an RAG system. The plan identifies the teams and lead officers responsible for implementing and monitoring progress for each key area. The plan will be updated and refreshed on a quarterly basis with a progress report prepared for the Armed Forces Champions identified in para 3.5.

3.17 To further support this process an LBB working group has been established to prioritise the seven AFC commitment priorities and ensure their delivery. Each key team within the Council has provided a representative. We will continue to deliver information and briefings on the AFC priorities for all LBB staff including attending Managers briefings.

Community Development

3.18 Since the Armed Forces Covenant was re-affirmed Officers have been working with our AFC partners to promote and raise awareness of the services available to the Armed Forces community in Bromley and to widen the reach. Bromley Football Club has also achieved Bronze Employer Recognition status and like Bromley Council is working towards silver award. Bromley FC Community Sports Trust have set up a community hub for veterans by way of a monthly drop-in session. The sessions focus on networking, reducing loneliness and isolation amongst veterans by providing support. Veterans from all areas are welcome to attend these free sessions which provide refreshments hot food and beverages.

3.19 As Bromley is the largest and greenest London Borough, we intend to maximise opportunities for veterans to connect with Friends Groups within parks and open spaces. Working outside in the environment will have a positive impact on health and well-being and this initiative will be explored and developed through the working group.

3.20 As part of the working group Officers will be exploring ways to work with our suppliers and contractors to enable them to contribute to the work that we are doing to support the Armed Forces Communities. There are a number of ways that they can contribute ranging from committing to signing the covenant for their organisation as Bromley FC have done to

organising community events or offering discounts and services tailored to the Armed Forces communities.

Next Steps

- 3.21 To proactively fulfil the Council’s obligations and commitment to the Armed Forces Community by knowing, understanding, and taking action on the issues and barriers they face, and to measure and publicly report our progress.
- 3.22 Working towards Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver and Gold awards as set out in paragraphs 3.12-3.13 by evidencing the good practice and work that has been done to date to improve services and balance outcomes for the Armed Forces Community
- 3.23 To continue to raise awareness through the Council’s Armed forces webpages which will be regularly updated to provide a clear statement to what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the Bromley in terms of support.
- 3.24 The working group will develop a consistent approach to identify staff, residents and Council service users who have a military connection to raise awareness of the benefits that the Armed Forces Covenant brings them

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

The re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant has a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable adults and children within the Borough.

5. CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 5.1 Although there are no military units in the Borough, there is a large veteran population. Data shows that Bromley has the largest percentage of military veterans of all the London Borough -See paras 3.8-3.10. There were 6,673 Bromley residents who had previously served in the armed forces. Of these 4,589 had served in the UK armed forces 1809 had previously served in the UK reserves, 275 people had previously served in both regular and reserve UK forces.

Non-Applicable Headings	Transformation/Policy Implications Financial Implications Personnel Implications Legal Implications, Procurement Implications Property Implicationscarbon Reduction/Social Value Implications, Impact on The Local Economy Ward Councillor Views
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	RENEWAL OF THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT 17th June 2023

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

Bronze award

Bronze award holders:

- are self-nominated by employers who pledge to support the armed forces, including existing or prospective employees who are members of the community.
- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- promote being armed forces-friendly and are open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners.
- receive an electronic certificate and logos to display on their website, stationery and other collateral.

Silver award

Silver award holders:

- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant .
- the employer must already be accredited as a holder of ERS Bronze Award and held it with sufficient time to develop suitable plans and policies and evidence to support the ERS Silver application. The employer must proactively demonstrate that service personnel and the armed forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes.
- the employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must have an internally publicised and positive HR policy on Reserves.
- within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. They must demonstrate support to training by providing at least 5 days' additional unpaid/paid leave (wherever possible not to Reservist employees' financial disadvantage)
- the employer must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity.
- the employer should demonstrate support to the Cadet movement as a whole by providing proactive support to individual cadets and/or to local cadet units.

Gold award

Gold award holders:

- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- employers must have an existing relationship with their National Account Manager/Regional Employer Engagement Director/appropriate defence representative.
- the employer must already be accredited as a holder of ERS Silver Award and held it with sufficient time to develop suitable plans and policies and evidence to support the ERS Gold application.
- the employer must proactively demonstrate their forces-friendly credentials as part of their recruiting and selection processes. Where possible, they should be engaged with [Career Transition Partnership](#) (CTP) in the recruitment of service leavers and have registered for the [Forces Families Jobs](#) (FFJ) portal.
- the employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must have an internally publicised and positive human resources policy on Reserves.
- the employer must be an exemplar within their market sector, advocating support to defence people issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers with tangible positive results
- within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. They must provide at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid, to the Reservist employee
- the employer must actively encourage a positive environment for Reservists by ensuring that positive policies in support of Reservists within the workforce are communicated to line managers
- the employer must not have been the subject of any negative public relations or media activity
- the employer should be an exemplar in demonstrating support to the Cadet movement. This could, for example, be through mentoring cadets in key employment skills, by providing guaranteed interviews for cadets, by direct investment in equipment and infrastructure for a local cadet unit, or by funding and sponsoring competitions, events, and specific activities for cadets such as overseas expeditions.
- the employer promotes volunteering with the cadet forces from their workforce, by providing additional leave for employees who are Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAVs)

Nomination and award process

Employers can sign up themselves for each award.

Nominations will be validated to determine the level of defence personnel employment within the nominated organisation and to check that the organisation has signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

Once the nomination has been validated it will be considered by a selection board at national level for gold awards and regional level for silver awards. The selection boards will be a panel chaired by a senior military officer and they will consider each nomination against the award criteria. Organisations selected for gold and silver awards will be formally notified in writing and invited to the relevant award event.