



REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE ON 29 AUGUST 2023

SUBJECT: ARMED FORCES COVENANT UPDATE

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The report provides an update to Committee on the progress made in supporting the armed forces community in Moray through the Armed Forces Covenant
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (B) 41 of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to formulation and review Council wide policy, strategies, priorities and objectives in relation to cross cutting issues.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Note the progress being made in delivering on the Armed Forces Covenant; and**
- (ii) Acknowledge the significant achievement in Moray Council receiving the Ministry of Defence Gold Employer Recognition status.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Moray Council is a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant which is 'a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly.' Moray Council reaffirmed its support for the Armed Forces at Full Council on 29 June 2022 ([Paragraph 8 of the minute refers](#)) and requested an update on how the Council can '*support our serving and veteran community across the full range of services we provide and strengthen partnerships with the Armed Forces community*'.

- 3.2 [The Armed Forces Act 2021](#) introduced a new requirement for some public bodies, including the NHS and local authorities, to pay due regard to the principles of the Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of **education, housing and healthcare**. In Scotland these duties sit with the local authority for housing and education and the Integration Joint Board (IJB)/Health Board in relation to healthcare.
- 3.3 Moray Council has an elected member Armed Forces Champion who chairs the Armed Forces Covenant Group which reconvened in October 2021. The group meets twice yearly and brings together council and partner services along with representatives from 39 Engineer Regiment, Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth. The group updated their Terms of Reference in November 2022 to take account of the 2021 Act.
- 3.4 There are currently two focussed working groups one for Education, and one for Childcare – with a regular update on Health from the NHS Armed Forces Champion. NHS Education Scotland have committed to supporting the [Military Access Programme](#) which aims to recruit individuals from the armed forces community to the NHS. Communications will be going out to public sector armed forces champions to make them aware of this.
- 3.5 It is anticipated that Housing will be represented on future groups and will be able to share information around how they are responding to the Covenant – for instance in the refreshed Allocations Policy which is under development.
- 3.6 An Education sub-group has been brought together for head teachers from schools with a high level of military pupils. These schools have been working to share good practice and have submitted collective funding bids to draw down Armed Forces Covenant funds. Most recently, the schools were awarded £90k for a new project which will largely pay for Pupil Support Workers for the academic year 23-24 in five schools.
- 3.7 Education colleagues have made progress with the Dandelion Project which will offer support to military families relocating to Moray. The Education Children's and Leisure Services Committee approved the approach which will see a new support officer in place in Education to offer direct support to families as they relocate to Moray ([Paragraph 18 of the minute refers](#)). Military partners noted how timely this was with the projected increase in families coming to Moray. The approach will be to focus on Forres and Lossiemouth Associated School Group (ASG) areas first before looking to roll out across Moray
- 3.8 Childcare is an issue which has been consistently highlighted by military partners – with the RAF citing the lack of wraparound childcare provision as an operational risk in terms of staff relocation and availability. There is no statutory expectation to provide wraparound childcare which falls outwith the statutory requirements upon the Council for Early Learning Childcare (ELC) and for school education. There are particular challenges for dual serving families and single serving parents, often due to the lack of a familial support network. 39 Squadron also noted the younger demographic profile of their personnel and associated wraparound childcare needs.

- 3.9 The childcare challenges in Moray are significant – and a recent survey of around 1400 parents confirmed that insufficient wraparound childcare provision was preventing many parents, from both military households and the wider community, from fulfilling their economic potential. Moray Economic Partnership (MEP) have formed a Strategic Working Group to explore the issue, which includes direct input from military stakeholders to continue to address this and it will remain as a standing item for the Covenant Group.
- 3.10 The Covenant Group have also had strategic input from human resources (HR) colleagues. The Council has been delivering on an Improvement Plan (as part of the process of achieving Gold Employer Recognition Status) which included military service leavers and veterans Recruitment events in autumn 2022 and spring 2023 There have also been site visits to RAF Lossiemouth with elected members and staff to continue discussions on how we can work effectively together.
- 3.11 All the work undertaken in support of the Armed Forces Covenant commitment along with specific work and focus from Human Resource and Organisational Development colleagues has contributed to Moray Council receiving Gold Level status in the [Defence Employer Recognition Scheme](#) which acknowledges the embedded good practice in the organisation in relation to armed forces support. The move to Gold status award demonstrates that Moray Council recognises the value of service personnel and the Ministry of Defence Regional Employer Engagement Director, noted: “I am absolutely delighted that Moray Council have been awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold award. Their commitment to support local Regular and Reserve forces and their families is at the centre of the Armed Forces Covenant, and I look forward to continuing to work with this wonderful organisation to make Morayshire a desired destination for our Regular forces, Reserve Forces and Veterans in the future.
- 3.12 The council continues to be proactive in promoting information to our colleagues who are part of the local Armed Forces community, having a dedicated intranet page on our staff communication platform. This page hosts content and monthly updates from Army Headquarters (Scotland), Age Scotland and the Veterans Project providing information on finance, careers & training, deployment and community initiatives. A recent addition to this page was a new section created for MOD Sponsored Cadet Forces.
- 3.13 HR Policies already support the needs of Armed Forces Reservists. The Special Leave policy accommodates requests for time off for attending training camps, mobilisation and/or time to support family due to emergent needs. The Flexible Working policy accommodates adjustments to the working environment to balance life and work demands. The provision of these policies provides support for both the Armed Forces community and our wider workforce

- 3.14 The Council is a major employer within Moray and welcomes the opportunity to demonstrate support publicly to the Armed Forces community. We do this in supporting Armed Service days and through activities such as flag raising and attendance at HR events which demonstrates publicly our support to the wider forces community. In February 2023, awareness raising amongst service managers was enhanced by a presentation on the RAF Benevolent Fund to a key operational manager meeting, which will be repeated on at least an annual basis.
- 3.15 Moray and Highland Council have worked together to develop learning materials to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant amongst front line staff. These materials are hosted on CLIVE, the Council's in house Learning Management System – and are also available to other Community Planning partners to use. All new staff will be encouraged to undertake the Introduction to the Armed Forces training on CLIVE as part of their induction.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The report is consistent with Corporate Plan intention to create '...opportunity for all where people can thrive in vibrant communities and we work together to enrich our future' and recognition of 'the influence of the MOD on the population and job market'.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council is meeting the requirements of the Armed Forces Act 2021 through the facilitation of the Armed Forces Covenant Group and associated working groups.

(c) Financial implications

None

(d) Risk Implications

None

(e) Staffing Implications

None other than officer involvement in Covenant Group

(f) Property

None

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

None

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

No climate change or biodiversity implications have been determined in relation to the council support to the Armed Forces Covenant.

(i) Consultations

The Head of Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance; the Chief Financial Officer; the Head of HR, ICT & OD; the HR Manager; the Acting Head of Education Resources and Communities; the Head of Education (Chief Education Officer); the Business Support Team Manager; Lindsey Robinson, Committee Services Officer and the Equal Opportunities Officer have all been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report as regards their respective responsibilities

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Committee is to note the progress being made in Moray to meet our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant the significant achievement in Moray Council receiving the Ministry of Defence Gold Employer Recognition status.

5.2 The Armed forces Covenant Group, chaired by the elected member Champion has been successfully re-established and will continue to be the main forum where council services and partners can interact with the Armed Forces in Moray.

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Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-9425411-266