



Cabinet report

Date **10 MARCH 2022**

Title **ARMED FORCES COVENANT**

Report of **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1 The purpose of this report is to request Cabinet approval for the renewal of the Armed Forces Covenant by Isle of Wight Council.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge made by the nation, to those who proudly protect the nation, and is the nation's commitment to them. It is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, will be treated fairly and by signing the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) an organisation demonstrates its intention to support the Armed Forces community.

- 2 The Isle of Wight Council originally signed the Armed Forces Covenant on 23 June 2013, along with the IW NHS Trust, representatives of the Armed Forces and representatives from both civilian and military charities. The AFC no longer exists in this original form and renewal of our commitment will refresh and re-emphasise the council's commitment, not only to serving members of the armed forces, but to their families, reservists, veterans and adult volunteer cadet instructors also. The focus will be to demonstrate how the Isle of Wight Council will become a forces-friendly employer.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3 Cabinet approves the signing of the Armed Forces covenant and that the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to effect the signing.

- 4 BACKGROUND

In 2012 the signing of the Armed Forces Community Covenant agreed by Full Council at its meeting on Wednesday 17 October 2012 and the council went onto sign the AFC on 23 June 2013.

- 5 Renewal of the council's commitment affords the council the opportunity to select specific pledges to sign up to and the pledges suggested are set out below:

Flexible working policy

- Advertising employment vacancies through the Forces Family website
- 10 days special leave for Reservists and Adult Cadet Instructors
- Guaranteed Interview Scheme – subject to having the required qualifications
- To encourage and support staff considering joining the Reserves and maintain links with the local reserve unit.

It should be noted that the above pledge activities are already in place and are business as usual processes.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Responding to climate change and enhancing the biosphere

- 6 One of the key purposes of the IW Biosphere is to use the interaction between areas of the highest environmental protection, areas of less constrained environmental protections and areas of human population and infrastructure to **enhance sustainable social, economic, environmental, and cultural development**. The sustainable development of these areas must support ecology, wildlife and for the people who live and visit these areas.
- 7 The Armed Forces Covenant directly supports the societal elements of shaping a more sustainable Island life through supporting the principles of gender equality, reduced inequalities and decent work and economic growth for persons living and working within the IW Biosphere.

Economic Recovery and Reducing Poverty

- 8 The Council has now put in place a recruitment framework that will assist serving members of the Armed Forces, their spouses or partners, and veterans, supportive pathways to employment, which may have the effect of reducing poverty within these family units. In turn the Isle of Wight Council will benefit from the added value of employing former members of the Armed Forces.

Impact on Young People and Future Generations

- 9 Dependents of Armed Forces Personnel may benefit from the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant, as positive changes have already been made to council recruitment processes in advance of the Armed Forces Covenant being signed.

Corporate Aims

- 10 The Armed Forces Lead Engagement Officer has been working with senior members of the council's HR team to ensure that the council's recruitment offer is an equitable offer for those leaving the Armed Forces or spouses and partners of serving members of the Armed Forces.

People and Organisational Development Strategy V5 references the Armed Forces Covenant in the Recruitment and Retention section, to reflect that potential future

employees from this area are supported to find ways into employment with the Council.

CONSULTATION

- 11 Signing the Armed Forces Covenant would be a voluntary activity for the council. It is not a statutory requirement. Internal consultation has taken place with members of the Corporate Management team, the Armed Forces Champion, senior staff of the HR team and some staff members who are either reservists or veterans.
- 12 External consultation undertaken with members of the South East Reserves and Cadet Association, Lead engagement officers from Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and Gosport Borough Council.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

- 13 There are minimal financial implications – no members of staff are employed to support Armed Forces personnel, their families, or veterans.
The Civil Military Partnership is run by a member of staff with numerous other duties, running the Civil Military Partnership is a small part of their workload.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14 The Armed Forces Bill 2021, which passed Royal Assent 15 December 2021 places a new statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 15 The legislation will not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes or advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces Community. It is designed to ensure that the relevant decision-makers consider the issues facing the Armed Forces Community in these key areas that impact upon their day-to-day lives
Under the new duty, those public bodies in scope will be required to have 'due regard' to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when formulating policy and taking decisions in specified areas of Housing, Education and Health.
- 16 The requirement will be like other duties to have due regard already in operation, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 17 As with those existing duties, the legislation will not be defining exactly how the requirement to have due regard can be met. Accompanying statutory guidance, which public bodies will be required to consider, will provide advice and examples of best practice to indicate how bodies might comply with the duty.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 18 The overall aim of the Covenant is to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly, and will not be disadvantaged in accessing public services by their military service. The covenant should impact positively in terms of working age and disability. There is insufficient evidence of differential impact on other protected groups and this will be monitored and assessed as the Armed Forces Bill becomes law. The Covenant recognises the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces and that in some circumstances special consideration may

be appropriate, especially for the injured or bereaved.

- 19 The council, as a public body, is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. There are not negative impacts on any of the protected group as a result of the recommendations of this paper.

SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

- 20 A member of Hampshire Constabulary sits on the on the Civil Military Partnership Board and will be able to offer advice on members of the Armed Forces, their spouses or Partners or Veterans within the Criminal Justice System.

OPTIONS

- 21 Cabinet approves the signing of the Armed Forces covenant and that the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to effect the signing.
- 22 Cabinet does not give approval to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- 23 There are only 15 signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant on the Island. Hampshire County Council is already a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant, together with a number of unitary authorities and Borough Councils including:
- Gosport Borough Council
Havant Borough Council
Portsmouth City Council
Rushmoor Borough Council
Southampton City Council
- 24 There is a reputational risk in terms of the Armed Forces Covenant not being signed and being out of step with other local authorities in the Hampshire and Solent area.
- 25 By signing the Armed Forces Covenant the Isle of Wight Council has an opportunity to be the leading exemplar employer demonstrating support and commitment to defence matters on the Island.
- 26 Effectively there are two options available, for Cabinet to approve the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant or not to approve the signing of it. If the decision is made not to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, the position would be that the status-quo would be maintained, although potentially adding some reputational risk to the council. There are no risks to signing the Armed Forces Covenant, which can only be seen as a beneficial and positive step for the council.

EVALUATION

- 27 The options are limited but appear above. Signing the Armed Forces Covenant will provide an opportunity to be considered an exemplar employer on the Island also strengthen our Gold Award application this year.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

Appendix 1 - Armed Forces Community Covenant (2013)

Appendix 2 - Armed Forces Covenant : Blank Template

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 28 [Full Council Agenda and Papers 17th October 2012](#)
[Full Council 17 10 2012 Minutes](#)
- 29 Background information on the Armed Forces Covenant can be found on the Armed Forces Covenant website [Home - Armed Forces Covenant](#)
- 30 Background information on the Armed Forces Bill can be found on the Gov.UK website [Armed Forces Bill 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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