BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

Cabinet Member: Cllr Miss K S Wood

Ward(s) Affected: All

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PROPOSED DECISION

That Cabinet further recognises the contributions made by the Armed Forces to the County by agreeing to participate in the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Community Covenant, which can then be formally signed on 5 July 2012.

Reason for Decision

The Council signed a bilateral Community Covenant in March with RAF High Wycombe in recognition of our close working relationship with our local base and also to publicly signal our support for the contribution RAF serving personnel have made to the country and area. The Bucks wide Covenant brings in other branches of the armed forces as well as veterans, cadets and families of all three services. It has additional benefits in bringing in wider partner services as these are known to sometimes cause concern to serving personnel, e.g. school admissions, primary care and mental and physical health care.

Corporate Implications

1. Approval of the Community Covenant contains no immediate financial implications for the Council.

2. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 authorises the Council to do anything it considers will promote the economic or social well-being of the District.

Executive Summary

3. Wycombe District Council already has a bilateral Community Covenant with RAF High Wycombe, the main armed forces presence in the District. The intention of that Covenant was to build on the bonds between the local civic and RAF communities so that the RAF could continue to contribute positively to both the local community and the surrounding environment.

4. Wycombe’s Covenant also recognises the specific needs of RAF serving personnel and families and seeks to ensure that their service does not disadvantage them in any way when making use of local services. To coincide with the signing ceremony Parkwood launched a leisure discount scheme for service people and their families. The agreement also enables the District and RAF to bid into a Ministry of Defense grant scheme for areas with signed Covenants.
5. The Bucks Covenant brings in Army and Navy personnel within the County and has additional benefits in bringing in the County Council, which is the main provider of some services that armed services personnel, their families and veterans regularly use, such as schools, early years provision and, imminently, primary health care.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

6. People – signing the Covenant demonstrates the Council’s commitment to engaging with local service personnel, who are a significant presence within the District.

Background and Issues

Principles of Armed Forces Community Covenants

7. The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level.

8. The purpose of this Community Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Buckinghamshire and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community, particularly those who have given the most. This includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel their families and widow(er)s in Buckinghamshire.

9. For Buckinghamshire County Council and partner organisations including WDC, the Community Covenant presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. It also presents an opportunity to build upon existing good work of other initiatives.

10. For the Armed Forces community, the Community Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life and encourages members of the Armed Forces to help their local community.

Aims of the Community Covenant

11. It aims to encourage all parties within a community to offer support to the local Armed Forces community and make it easier for Service personnel, families and veterans to access the help and support available from the MOD, from statutory providers and from the Charitable and Voluntary Sector. These organisations already work together in partnership at local level.

12. The scheme is intended to be a two-way arrangement and the Armed Forces community are encouraged to do as much as they can to support their community and promote activity which integrates the Service community into civilian life.
Armed Forces Community In Buckinghamshire

13. Buckinghamshire has enduring links with the RAF with RAF High Wycombe and RAF Halton. It is also the home of the Defence School of Languages in Beaconsfield (DSL) and a significant reserve, primarily 7 Rifles as well as the Army Cadet Force, Air Training Corps and Sea Cadet Corps. There are also a number of veterans living throughout the County.

Measures

14. The Community Covenant provides the opportunity to work more strategically and collaboratively with the armed forces community. This work will be driven through the Community Covenant action plan (draft attached as Appendix A) and monitored through the Civil Military Partnership.

15. The action plan has been crafted around the six strategic themes of the Community Covenant and delivers measurable outcomes. The signatories of this covenant and their representatives agree to take a joint and collaborative approach to achieve the general aims identified in the Community Covenant action plan, as it changes to meet new priorities.

Consultation

16. A workshop took place on 28 May 2012. This involved all councils in Bucks, as well as other statutory agencies and partners and representatives of a range of organisations that represent the interests of armed services personnel and veterans.

17. Its purpose was to refine a draft action plan, which will undergo further revision before the signing ceremony on 5 July, which will take place at the Oculus in Aylesbury.

Options

18. To sign the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Community Covenant as this will benefit armed forces personnel, their families and veterans, by bringing more agencies together to address identified needs. This is the recommended option.

19. Not to sign the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Community Covenant. The District’s own Covenant would still exist. However the Council would probably be the only authority in Bucks declining to sign which may mistakenly be seen as demonstrating a lack of support for the Armed Forces. For this reason this option is not recommended.

Conclusions

20. Given the good relationship the District has with RAF High Wycombe and the additional benefits a partnership approach that involved the County Council could have in meeting armed services’ needs agreeing to support the Covenant and formally signing it is recommended.
Next Steps

21. That the Chairman of the Council signs the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Community Covenant on 5 July 2012.

Background Papers

All papers are held in Community Services