
ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Veronica Copeland,
Adult Social Care and Housing Portfolio**

Responsible Director – Murray Rose, Director of People Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present a draft Community Covenant between the armed forces, Darlington Borough Council, representatives of the voluntary community sectors and the civilian community of Darlington for endorsement, the agreement of signatories and proposals for a signing ceremony.

Summary

2. Darlington has an important relationship with serving members and veterans of the armed forces. As well as the dozens of families of serving army personnel who call Darlington home, we know that many more members and veterans of the armed forces (particularly those serving in the army and based at Catterick Garrison) make a significant contribution to the life and the economy of the borough. We are proud to recognise that contribution.
3. A Community Covenant agreement has been drafted and proposed signatories include: Darlington Borough Council, the voluntary and community sectors, the civilian community and the armed forces and veteran community in Darlington. The draft Covenant is attached as **Appendix 1**.
4. The Council wishes to honour this Covenant in order to ensure that those who serve in the armed forces, whether regular or reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services,
5. The Association of North East Councils is co-ordinating the development of local covenants in all local authority areas in the region, with all covenants to be signed during summer 2012.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that:

- (a) The draft Community Covenant attached at **Appendix 1** be endorsed
- (b) Senior management responsibility for the covenant be allocated to the Chief Executive.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To provide appropriate support to armed forces members and veterans in Darlington
- (b) To support the regional programme of adoption of local covenants in all local authority areas during the summer of 2012.

Murray Rose
Director of People Services

Background Papers

No other papers were used in preparing this report

Mary Hall: Extension 2676

S17 Crime and Disorder	No specific impact
Health and Well Being	No specific impact although outcome will improve access to services affecting health and well-being
Carbon Impact	No impact
Diversity	No specific impact but again will improve access to support for residents in the armed forces and veterans
Wards Affected	All wards within the Borough will be affected
Groups Affected	This report will impact specifically on residents in the armed forces and veterans
Budget and Policy Framework	No direct impact on these but will improve access to services
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Will support activity to improve health and well-being and acknowledge the values of the armed services within Darlington
Efficiency	

MAIN REPORT

Background

8. During 2010/11 a major scrutiny review was carried out involving all twelve councils in the North East to look at the health and social care needs of ex-service people and their families.
9. Catterick Garrison is only 14 miles from Darlington. It is the largest British Army Garrison with a current population of 12,000 personnel, many of whom have roots in Darlington. The Garrison is also home to a large temporary population of soldiers in training at any one time and is due to expand further in size by 2020. Armed Forces personnel and families are housed in Darlington, and the Garrison is a significant driver in the local economy, in terms of retail, leisure and transport spending.
10. For the purpose of this report a veteran is any individual who has been a member of the armed services for any length of time including those who have left during basic training. This includes veterans of all ages and from all of the forces those who have seen active service and those who have not.
11. The Covenant will be an agreement amongst key partners focused on ensuring that, in Darlington, veterans do not face barriers in accessing the support that they require after coming out of the armed forces.
12. Each local council in the North East will have a local covenant that is based upon an understanding of the needs of veterans in the locality and giving a commitment to work in partnership to address the needs. The response at a regional level is being co-ordinated through the Association of North East Councils.
13. The aim is to have all covenants in the region in place over the summer. Agreeing and signing a covenant in July would enable Darlington to meet this timescale.
14. The North East NHS Armed Forces Forum and the North East Veterans Network have formally linked-up to help bring together stakeholders around this agenda.

Progress to date in Darlington

15. The covenant is attached at Appendix 1 and this is a high level statement of support for the armed forces and veterans. In addition to the development of the covenant some activity has already taken place in Darlington as follows:
 - (a) Councillor Copeland has been appointed as the Member Armed Forces Veterans Champion.
 - (b) The North East Primary Care Support Agency has written to all GP practices in Darlington and County Durham to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities in relation to access to health services and priority treatment for military veterans.

- (c) Several service charities, including the Royal British Legion and Combat Stress have agreed to fund a veterans' progression pathway that was previously funded by the NHS as a pilot.
- (d) The Council's choice-based lettings system asks for details of UK Armed Forces leavers.
- (e) Veterans' health is reflected in our Single Needs Assessment for 2010/11.
- (f) An agreement has been reached to hold an awareness-raising event using existing resources for voluntary and community sector providers, key public sector services and the armed forces to learn about the specific support and services available for veterans.
- (g) The Director of Public Health has provided a link between Darlington Borough Council and the North East Veterans' Health Network. From 2011 training has been commissioned to raise awareness of veterans' health issues.

Challenges for the future

16. The Director of Public Health is currently lead officer for armed forces veterans' health but we will also identify links in Darlington's Clinical Commissioning Group in order to sustain the best outcomes for members and veterans of the armed forces.

Outcome of Consultation

17. This report is the result of extensive consultation and discussion between the various partners involved in the Covenant, including armed forces representatives, health agencies and voluntary and community sector representatives, as referenced in the report. There has been no formal public consultation.