
ANNUAL REPORT VETERANS AND ARMED FORCES COVENANT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Members on the activity undertaken in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant including work at a local and Tees Valley level.

Summary

2. Darlington Borough Council has made a commitment to support work that takes place in partnership to support the Armed Forces and the delivery of the Community Covenant.
3. This work takes place at a local, regional and Tees Valley level and is led by the Member Champion supported by key Officers.
4. The Member Champion is key to engagement of partners in the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant in Darlington. They work across all Departments of the Authority as well as encouraging other agencies, including the voluntary and community sector to ensure there is targeted work to support veterans in Darlington.
5. Through the work of the Member Champion Darlington Borough Council enjoys a close and productive relationships with the Armed Forces Community including our local reserve forces.
6. In the current financial climate there is no extra funding available and much of the activity is to publicise the important role of our armed forces and reserve forces and promote and sign post individuals to help that is available at local, Tees Valley and regional level. We ensure that the provision of statutory services provided by the Authority and other agencies can accommodate the needs of armed forces personnel and veterans.
7. The Authority has committed to provide an annual report on the activity that is being undertaken by the Authority and other partners to promote and support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant in Darlington. Each year the local authority has agreed to provide an annual report on the activity.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that :-

- (a) The Health and Partnership Scrutiny Committee acknowledge the positive contribution the Armed Forces Community, including those currently serving, reserve forces and veterans, and make to wider community and Borough of Darlington.
- (b) Members acknowledge the work that has been undertaken over the last year that continues to successfully deliver and improve the local offer as part of the commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Ken Ross Extension 6200
Public Health Principal

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no direct benefits for crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	Provision of support to the Armed Forces and Veterans will help facilitate prevention activity with this group
Carbon Impact	No impact on Carbon Emissions
Diversity	This encourages inclusion and acceptance of a specific group into the wider community and will also assist organisations that work with diverse communities.
Wards Affected	All wards in the Borough
Groups Affected	The key group affected by the detail in this report are the Armed Forces Community and their families who live in Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no budget or policy issues
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Organisations accessing support are amongst a number of vulnerable people in Darlington and will help to reduce inequalities by ensuring access to services for this community
Efficiency	This report aims to deliver this agenda within current budgets.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. Darlington Borough Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in August 2012 and since then has worked with a range of organisations to ensure delivery of this commitment.
10. Darlington Borough Council continues to work with other Tees Valley Authorities to understand the issues faced by veterans. The Armed Forces Forum which comprises of the representatives from the five Local Authorities within the Tees Valley, representatives from agencies representing housing, health and employment, representation from a military charity, representation from the Veteran Support Agency and representation from the Army.
11. The group has been very effective as a forum for understanding the issues faced by both serving armed forces representatives and veterans and explores mutual areas of concern where cooperation or a common approach across a larger geography would be beneficial in supporting members of the Armed Forces Community. This includes issues involving learning and skills, housing, education, NHS, Job Centre Plus, military charities and Veterans Welfare Services.
12. Councillor Copeland as the Armed Forces Members Champion attends these meetings regularly and represents the Borough.
13. A stocktake of our performance in Darlington has been completed and submitted to Colonel Black, the Armed Forces Covenant Military lead. The local authority is meeting the necessary obligations and ensuring that Armed Forces personnel can access services and do not face any barriers to this. The stocktake covers the following areas of activity:
 - (a) Healthcare;
 - (b) Housing;
 - (c) Benefits and tax;
 - (d) Family Life;
 - (e) Transition;
 - (f) Recognition of the value of the Armed Forces; Veterans and Armed Forces;
 - (g) Participation as Citizens; and
 - (h) Recourse procedures.
14. Since the last report there has been progress and developments across nearly all areas of activity in Darlington. This has included the development and implementation of a specific HR policy for the employment of reservists by Darlington Borough Council. This includes a commitment to provision of up to ten days paid holiday to assist meeting their reserve training commitment. The HR policy has been recognised nationally with a Silver Award from the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, and provides an example of best practice for other employers both in Darlington and nationally.

15. The authority also maintains an online bespoke Veteran's Information Directory on the Darlington Borough Council website. This includes specific signposting and information about access to employment support providers. Darlington Borough Council has established a Service Directory called the *Livingwell Darlington* (formerly the *People's Information Point*) which provides information and signposting to the provision of a range of services including Early Years, Education and adult learning and development. This is a developing resource and services and continually refreshed and updated with resources specific to armed forces personnel and veterans.
16. The authority actively promotes and raises the profile of the Armed Services and those who currently and previously serve through participation in a programme of parades and commemoration events held in Darlington throughout the year. This includes promoting Armed Forces Week focused around the Raising of the Flag ceremony in June. In 2018 arrangements are being made to remember Michael Murphy VC the only Darlington resident to have been awarded the Victoria Cross.
17. These events are supported and promoted by the Member Champion Councillor Veronica Copeland and the Mayor. Many of these events were attended both formally and informally by elected members and officers of the council. This has included Councillor Copeland representing Darlington in attending the birthday celebrations for Her Majesty the Queen in York including the 21 gun salute. There has also been the annual Remembrance Sunday service and the Garden of Remembrance which the Mayor attended and the presentation of medals including the Legion D'Honneur.
18. The Authority has worked directly to promote the contribution of local reserve forces with Councillor Copeland attending a Chief Officers Board and a meeting of Darlington Partnership with Colonel Black, the Engagement Officer for the North East, to enable him to meet the Chief Officers and senior representatives from key partners and discuss the role and needs of reservists. The nomination of local reservists was sought for the Best of Darlington Awards last year.
19. The Veterans Champion has ensured the continued support by the authority for the Royal British Poppy Appeal with both the Mayor and fellow Councillors actively supporting and promoting the Appeal in the Borough.
20. Councillor Copeland was also successful in having a motion unanimously passed by full Council to formally support the Royal British Legion 'Count Them In' campaign. Subsequently the Office of National Statistics announced that they are recommending the inclusion of a question on the Armed Forces community in the next census in England and Wales.
21. Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group (DCCG) has recognised that armed forces personnel and veterans and their families may require enhanced mental health support. These needs have been included in the CCGs commissioning intentions particularly to ensure early identification and support to access care is in place. Within local Mental Health hospitals NHS England and Darlington CCG provide 'Inpatient services as part of a national consortium and community based

services to military veterans'.

22. Darlington's 'No Health without Mental Health 2014-2017' multi-agency implementation document has an action point to work to ensure that military veterans and their families with physical or mental health issues receive the correct support.

Conclusion

23. The Authority continues with its role in facilitating and supporting partners to work together to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Darlington for serving Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans.
24. The annual Stocktake has been compiled and submitted which shows significant progress and an action plan for the coming financial year.
25. The Authority, through the Members Champion, continues to actively promote the role and contribution of those serving in the armed forces, reservists and veterans.