

## **Midlothian Armed Forces Covenant**

### **Report by Director Communities and Wellbeing**

#### **1 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of the armed forces covenant report is to outline the background to the initiative to introduce armed forces covenants across the United Kingdom. The report also explains the content of the proposed Midlothian Armed Forces Covenant and seeks agreement for Midlothian Council to sign the covenant along with seven key partner organisations/agencies. The Covenant outlines the partners' agencies commitment to work with armed forces serving personnel, their families and veterans. Once the Covenant is signed it also enables partners to apply for grants to the Covenant Community Fund which totals £30 million for the United Kingdom over four years. The onus is on the local authority to lead the formation of the covenant.

#### **2 Background**

##### **2.1 Overview**

Over the past year or so the Government has made much of the need, particularly in times where the Armed Forces are involved in wars, for a reinforced Armed Forces Covenant. This is the basis of the moral obligation between the country, the Government and the Armed Forces. A new Covenant was published in May 2011.

To complement this Covenant the Ministry of Defence has, in August 2011, launched a parallel Community Covenant, which reciprocates the relationship between the nation and the Armed Forces by building a code of understanding and support between the Armed Forces and the communities in which they are based.

For Midlothian Council, NHS Lothian and partner organisations, the Community Covenant presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of support services, help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. It also presents an opportunity to build on upon existing good work on other initiatives such as the Welfare Pathway.

For the Armed Forces community the Community Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life and encourages members of the Armed Forces community to help their local community. It also encourages formed units to support activity and provide sustainable representation within their local communities, within their capabilities and availability.

To underpin the Armed Forces Community Covenant the MOD has allocated up to £30 million over the next four years to a Community Covenant Grant scheme. Local communities where formal Covenants

exist will be able to apply for funding to run projects that strengthen the bonds between the Armed Forces and the local population including service personnel, their families and veterans.

Grants of between £100 and £250,000 will be available in a series of application rounds. Projects, which must have one-off financial commitments, might take a variety of forms but will need to promote closer ties with, or a greater understanding of, the military in the local community. Examples might include:

- A public exhibition showing recent activity of the local Armed Forces unit;
- One-off activities such as an activity camp involving the Armed Forces and young people;
- A community outreach project that brings together veterans with their non-Service equivalents to highlight what support is available to them in their local community.

Applications can be made by any part of the community: voluntary organisations; groups of volunteers; charities; schools; public bodies etc.

## 2.2 The Development of Midlothian's Armed Forces Covenant

A Midlothian Armed Forces Covenant has been drafted utilising the formal template provided. Two meetings have been held where key partners attended such as NHS Lothian, Veterans Charities, Midlothian's local voluntary sector, and representatives from the council and other bodies representing the community of Midlothian including the Federation of Community Councils and Midlothian Chamber of Commerce. The meetings have been co facilitated by the Provost as the Veterans Champion and the Commander of Edinburgh Garrison.

The Midlothian Covenant describes the principles of understanding locally between the Armed Forces and partners. It highlights the need to support the Armed Forces, their families and veterans. It sets out the broad outcomes the partners will sign up to these are:

<b>01</b>	<b>Children, Young People and their Families</b>
	Work in partnership to build and develop further work and relationships to improve outcomes for children and young people of serving families/ veterans in the communities of Midlothian.

<b>02</b>	<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>
	Work in partnership to build and develop further work, services and relationships focused on health and wellbeing, including access to health services, focus on mental health and wellbeing and building a sense of belonging for families locally.

<b>03</b>	<b>Housing</b>
	Develop clear direction and guidance within the Local Authority and the Armed Forces as to what levels of service provision can be expected from Local Authority Providers and what is required of the military community to enable them.

<b>04</b>	<b>Community Partnerships - Working in Partnership</b>
	Create opportunities for Armed Forces representatives to become part of the Local Authority and the Community Planning Partners and Structures - including emergency planning, neighbourhood planning, and developing local services.

<b>05</b>	<b>Support to Veterans and their Families</b>
	Consider and support the needs of Service personnel during and after their transition to becoming a veteran.

<b>06</b>	<b>Employability</b>
	Identify measures to support ex and transiting Service personnel and their families to achieve positive employability outcomes.

The partners who have agreed to sign the covenant are: The Commander of Edinburgh Garrison, NHS Lothian, Veterans Scotland, Midlothian Voluntary Action, Federation of Community Councils, Job Centre Plus and Midlothian Chamber of Commerce.

In addition a future action plan will be developed by the partnership group to take forward the commitments and outcomes outlined in the covenant through agreed outcomes and measures.

### **3 Report Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource**

Council staff time will be required to attend meetings to formalise and implement the associated action plan and monitor the implementation of the Covenant. Any resources for actions contained in the action plan would require to be negotiated during the formation of the plan.

Staff time would also be required to service the local Midlothian Joint Covenant Funding Panel which would require to approve bids for submission to the MOD. This group would meet four times per year.

Additional resources could be attracted to Midlothian by signing the Midlothian Armed Forces Covenant as it enables organisations and

agencies to submit projects for funding from the, 30 million Community Covenant Grant Scheme, over four years. However access to the fund would require Midlothian Council to act as a broker which would include receiving funds from the Ministry of Defence (MOD), issuing funding to successful bidders, monitor successful projects, including financial information. The MOD would audit 5% sample per quarter. This could be accommodated in the work of the Communities and Wellbeing Division. These arrangements would be reviewed as part of the Armed Forces Covenant.

### **3.2 Risk**

No risks identified

### **3.3 Policy**

#### **Strategy**

The principles of the Covenant are in line with partnership working in the context of Community Planning.

The Covenant and associated funding supports a number of the Community Planning areas of work: - Community Engagement Strategy, Mental Health Strategy, Children's Services Plan, Adult Health and Community Care Plan, Improving Opportunities Action Plan. The Community Planning Partnership has agreed to include the Commander of Edinburgh Garrison in the Chief Officers Steering Committee. This recognises the significance of the Armed Services Community in Midlothian due to the location of Glencorse Barracks and other facilities.

Putting customer first and meeting the emerging needs of our communities is at the heart of Midlothian Council's Vision and the Covenant is a mechanism to assist in meeting the needs of armed forces personnel, their families and veterans.

#### **Consultation**

There has been consultation with key partner agencies and they have been given the opportunity to contribute to the content of Midlothian's Armed Forces Covenant.

#### **Equalities**

The principles of the Covenant will assist in supporting equality groups linked to Service personnel, their families and veterans.

#### **Sustainability**

Organisations applying for funding from the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme will require to build sustainability into their application as funding is for one year only.

The Midlothian Armed Forces Covenant will be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect emerging needs.

### **3.4 IT Issues**

None

## **4 Summary**

The Covenant sets out a commitment by Midlothian Council and its partners to promote understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces, their families and veterans; and in doing so provide support to meet their needs where feasible.

## **5 Recommendations**

Midlothian Council agrees to the Provost signing the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of Midlothian Council and the future development of the Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan.

**Date 5th November 2011**

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**Background Papers: Copy of Midlothian Armed Forces Covenant and .action plan**