

Report of: Leader of the Council

Meeting of	Date	Ward(s)
Council	15 September 2016	All

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Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant: annual update

1 Synopsis

- 1.1 Islington has a strong history of recognising and celebrating the valuable role played by our Armed Forces. In June 2013, the Council signed the Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant, pledging to recognise and support Armed Forces organisations, serving personnel and veterans in Islington. The Council also committed to reporting annually on progress in delivering the Community Covenant. This report summarises activity over the past year.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note progress and events over the past year
- 2.2 To note that frontline staff have been trained to recognise and refer residents with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and on the wider package of support for veterans

3 Background

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a national agreement which sets out the relationship between the nation, the state and the Armed Forces. It recognises that the whole nation has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces and their families and establishes how they should expect to be treated. It applies to both serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families with a view to redressing the disadvantages that the Armed Forces community faces in comparison to other citizens, and to recognising the sacrifices that they have made.
- 3.2 In addition to the national Covenant, the government encouraged local authorities, their partners, and military organisations to develop their own Armed Forces Community Covenant to set out how they will work together to celebrate and support the Armed Forces community in their areas.

- 3.3 The government also established a Community Covenant Grants Scheme, providing around £10 million a year for projects across the country which would support the Armed Forces community and help deliver the ambitions set out in local Community Covenants. The scheme has recently been reviewed and renamed the Covenant Fund.

4 The Armed Forces population in Islington

- 4.1 There is limited data available to assess the numbers of current and ex-forces personnel living in Islington. However, what we do know is as follows:

Overall population

- 4.2 Census data from 2011 indicated that there were 75 residents who were currently employed in the Armed Forces, 73 of whom were living in a household, 2 in a communal establishment.
- 4.3 The latest annual School Census (January 2016) indicates that there are currently only 2 children of Forces personnel in Islington schools. Children of service personnel are eligible for pupil premium payments to the school so all schools are required to capture this data as part of the annual school census as it is used by the Department for Education to determine the pupil premium allocations for schools.
- 4.4 There is no data on ex-forces personnel who have settled in Islington

Street population

- 4.5 The Greater London Authority (GLA) publishes an annual report on rough sleepers in each borough. Information is derived from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN, which is funded by the GLA and managed by St Mungo's, represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping.
- 4.6 In the period April 2015 to March 2016, 158 people were seen rough sleeping in Islington by outreach teams. Of these, 7 (5%) had experience of serving in the armed forces (3 were UK nationals). These will all have been offered support by our Street Outreach team.

Prison population

- 4.7 Research by SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, found that ex-servicemen were the largest occupational group in British jails – yet the government, charities or prison staff knew little about them as data was simply not collected.
- 4.8 Data for 2014 indicated that 3.5% (3,000) of all prisoners in British jails were ex-forces personnel. The majority of ex-forces inmates were male, over 45 and ex-Army.

NB: it is important to note that the proportion of ex-servicemen who offend is small in proportion to the total of those discharged from service.

- 4.9 In January 2015, to improve knowledge of the ex-forces prison population, it became a requirement for all prisons to record data on whether inmates have served in the Armed Forces. There are two prisons in Islington – HMP Pentonville and HMP Holloway. We have contacted both to request data on the number of inmates who are ex-forces and are awaiting a response.

5 The Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant

- 5.1 On 29 June 2013 the Council, together with representatives from other public sector bodies, local businesses and the voluntary sector, signed the Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant.

- 5.2 As part of this, the Council agreed a package of measures to recognise and celebrate the contribution of the Armed Forces in Islington and to provide practical support for ex-forces personnel and their families to tackle the challenges they face in moving into and integrating within a new community.
- 5.3 A copy of the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces is attached at Appendix A. This can also be found on the Council's website at <http://www.islington.gov.uk/advice/armed-forces-support/Pages/Armed-Forces-Community-Covenant.aspx>
- 5.4 The remainder of this report summarises activity over the past year in delivering the Council's commitments under the Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant.

6 Grants for Armed Forces related activities

Local Initiatives Fund

- 6.1 Each year, the Council sets aside a Local Initiatives Fund to support community projects and improvements in each ward. In 2015-16, LIF was used to fund:
- An Old-time Music Hall Show for the 70th anniversary of World War II (£1,000)
 - World War II Veterans Lunch in the Assembly Hall (£540)
 - Running costs for the Islington Sea Scouts minibus (£1,500)
 - Cleaning and repairing the World War 1 memorials in St Silas Church garden (£1,067) and Thornhill Road Gardens (£624)

Covenant Fund (formerly Community Covenant Grants Scheme)

- 6.2 The Armed Forces Community Covenant Grants Scheme was set up by the government to support the Armed Forces and help local areas to deliver the commitments set out in their Community Covenants. In 2015, the scheme was replaced by the Covenant Fund, with £10 million available per annum. Priorities for 2016-17 are:
- Veterans' Gateway
 - Families in Stress
 - Improving Local Covenant Delivery
 - Community Integration / Delivery of local services
- 6.3 The process for submitting applications has also changed. Previously, applications had to be sent to the local authority to be approved by a local panel before they were submitted. Under the new process, applicants apply direct to the central Covenant team, who will pass the application to the region where project will be delivered (London applications come to MOD London Region). Whilst there is no longer a requirement for the applications to go via the local authority, applicants are asked to obtain local partnership endorsement. MOD is in the process of setting up local partnership boards.
- 6.4 In the past year, there has been only one application to the Covenant Fund by an Islington organisation: the Islington Sea Cadets have applied for £20,000 to secure and renegotiate the lease on their building. The Sea Scouts currently hold the building on a peppercorn rent but this is dependent upon keeping the building in good repair. The building needs significant works to retain the lease. Funding will enable it to not only undertake these works, but to secure the lease and extend use to other partner organisations including the Islington Veteran's Association and the Scouts. The application has been endorsed by the Islington Panel and forwarded to the MOD, who will announce their decision in September 2016.
- 6.5 Further details on the Covenant Fund and how to apply can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund>

7 Celebrating contribution and demonstrating support

- 7.1 The Armed Forces flag is flown annually on the roof of the Town Hall on St George's Day and on Armed Forces Day. The Leader of the Council and the Mayor both attended the flag raising ceremony at the Town Hall on Armed Forces Day (20 June 2016) and a subsequent Armed Forces Day event on Islington Green on 25 June.
- 7.2 The Mayor attended the Honorary Artillery Company (HAC) Open Day on 10 May 2016 and the HAC Regimental dinner on 26 May.
- 7.3 The Leader and the Mayor will be taking part in the annual Remembrance Day events at Islington and St Pancras Cemetery on 10 November and at the Town Hall and other local memorials on 13 November.
- 7.4 Each year, the Council nominates an elected councillor as its Armed Forces Champion. The current champion is Cllr Gary Poole. Cllr Poole attends meetings of the Youth Organisations in Uniform (YOU) forum.
- 7.5 The Council produced press releases and headlines on its website to publicise events related to the Armed forces. There is also a dedicated Armed Forces Community Covenant page on its website which sets out the Council's commitments under the Covenant, including the support available for veterans. The Council is increasingly using Twitter to keep residents informed. On Armed Forces Day we sent out three Tweets which were collectively retweeted 25 times, 'liked' 23 times and had a reach of 125,900 people on Twitter.

8 Supporting veterans and their families

- 8.1 Through the Community Covenant, the Council has committed to prioritise support to ex-forces personnel and their families who are in need, including financial support, access to council housing, help with getting a job and support with health and care needs.

Financial support

- 8.2 Veterans are a priority group for Housing and Council Tax support. We currently have 14 war pensioners in receipt of Housing and/or Council Tax support. Of these, 7 are in council housing, 4 are in housing association properties, and 3 are in private sector properties. Four are of working age.
- 8.3 The Resident Support Scheme (RSS), delivered in partnership with Cripplegate Foundation, provides crisis grants to help with housing costs, purchase of essential household items, and community care. The RSS application form does not ask applicants whether they have served in the Armed Forces. However, SSAFA is a referring partner to the scheme. To date, there have been no applications from SSAFA on behalf of ex-forces personnel. SSAFA have advised us that this is because they have access to other funding to support their members in times of crisis so, to date, have not had the need to apply to RSS.
- 8.4 The Council's Income Maximisation Team (IMAX) supports residents on low incomes to access all the support to which they are entitled, including benefits and discounts. In the past year there have been no requests for support from ex-forces personnel.

Housing support

- 8.5 There are various housing options for ex-forces personnel, including specialist housing providers and support. Our housing allocation scheme gives specific priority for veterans.

- 8.6 Since amending the housing allocations policy in 2013 to prioritise ex-forces personnel, there has been only one tenant who has moved into a council property.
- 8.7 As part of the offer, the tenant was offered support from IMAX and from the Credit Union (both of which were declined). Advice was also provided in regards to debt and welfare advice services, and a welfare appointment was arranged.
- 8.8 Staff in the Council's Housing Needs team regularly deal with clients with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including veterans, people seeking asylum, and others. When we presented the annual Armed Forces Community Covenant update to Council in 2015, members asked us to ensure that all staff were trained to recognise and support veterans with PTSD and other support needs.
- 8.9 We can now confirm that all staff who deal with housing applications have been trained on dealing with PTSD, the specialist support available to veterans and the special provisions the council has made in its allocations policy. Anyone with suspected or diagnosed PTSD who applies for housing will be assessed by the medical adviser.

Employment support

- 8.10 Under the Covenant, the Council's Learning and Skills service prioritises ex-forces personnel and their families for employment and skills support.
- 8.11 In the past year, there has been no request for Employment support by ex-forces personnel. The database currently used by iWork and other council services for recording employment support does not capture details of whether a client has served in the Armed Forces. However, anecdotal evidence from iWork is that none of their clients are ex-forces personnel. A new database has been commissioned and this will include field to identify ex-forces personnel to assist with future reporting.
- 8.12 Similarly, the Adult & Community Learning service is not aware of any learners who are veterans. Again, this information is not captured in the database or enrolment forms used by ACL. However, anecdotal evidence is that there are few, if any, ex forces personnel accessing ACL courses.
- 8.13 We approached City and Islington College (CANDI) to find out whether there was much demand for college courses from ex-forces personnel for skills and training. Again, their enrolment systems do not capture this data but the feeling was that numbers were very low. They were, however, able to cite a case study from 3 years ago, where an ex-armed forces adult retrained at their Centre for Applied Sciences, and gained a place at medical school as a result to achieve the ambition of becoming a GP.

Health and social care support

- 8.14 Whilst there is no local data on the health of veterans, national research found that:
- In general, the majority of veterans are in good health. 74% of working age veterans said they had very good or good general health, similar to the general population (78%). There was also no statistical difference between the working age veterans and non-veterans who reported a long-term health condition (40% and 35% respectively)
 - However, observational research carried out after the First Gulf War in 1990–91 found that Service personnel after the conflict reported a variety of symptoms (irritability, chronic fatigue, headaches and various other non-specific symptoms)
 - The 'Counting the Cost' report found that, of 757,805 people who had served as regulars in the military between 1991 and 2014, an estimated 66,090 would need health support for service related physical or mental health issues. In 2015/16 alone, 3.2% of UK Armed Forces personnel were assessed with a mental disorder within specialised psychiatric services. (However, this is lower than the rate of 3.5% within the UK general population).

Adjustment Disorders were the most prevalent mental disorder listed, accounting for around 35% of all mental disorders

- Veterans may have substance misuse issues. Whilst there are no UK-based statistics, in the USA 60% of veterans were found to have a substance abuse problem, partly attributed to the difficulties associated with moving back into civilian life

- 8.15 In 2008, the War Pensioners' entitlement to priority treatment in the NHS was extended to all veterans with health conditions related to their military service to be given priority treatment.
- 8.16 There are various services focusing on supporting veterans regaining their health. However the offer is quite dispersed with a number of small charities offering niche or small scale services. The London Veteran's Service provides [a directory](#) of the services available.
- 8.17 This includes a London-wide mental health service for veterans provided by Islington's local Mental Health Trust based in St Pancras hospital. They accept self-referrals direct from veterans or via any professional working with them from any organisation.
- 8.18 The Council, in conjunction with the Islington Clinical Commissioning Group, provides or commissions a range of Social Care support and Public Health programmes, including support for mental health issues and for substance misuse. However, services do not specifically capture data on whether clients have serviced in the Armed Forces. Therefore, it is not possible to assess demand or take up of support from veterans. We do know, however, that, in 2015-16, there were seven rough sleepers who had serviced in the Armed forces and who were supported by our Street Outreach team.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Council continues to actively recognise and celebrate the valuable contribution made by the Armed Forces, and to maintain strong relationships with military related organisations in Islington.
- 9.2 Whilst the number of current and ex-forces personnel living in Islington appears to be low, with little demand to date for support from council services, the comprehensive package of measured offered by the Council as part of the Community Covenant provides reassurance that veterans will receive the support they deserve as and when they need it.

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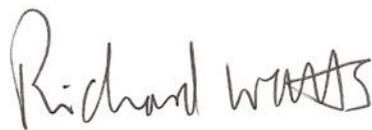
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Final Report Clearance

Signed by



5 September 2016

Leader of the Council

Date

Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant: Council's Commitment

On 29 June 2013 – Armed Forces Day – the Council signed up to the Islington Armed Forces Community Covenant. In doing so it recognised and pledged to promote the valuable contribution of and sacrifices made by the Armed Forces and to provide practical support to help serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families living in Islington.

The Council already has in place a range of support services for residents, particularly for families on low incomes, disabled people, those with long term health conditions and vulnerable adults and children. Current and ex-serving personnel living in Islington will have access to the same services and support as other residents. This document sets out the commitments the Council has made, over and above the core offer, to support Armed Forces personnel and their families and recognise the contribution they make. We will honour our pledges in the community covenant through:

Financial support

The income of war widows and war disablement will be disregarded when calculating entitlement to:

- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Support
- Access to financial support through the Resident Support Scheme

Access to council housing

Our housing allocations policy has been amended to support Armed Forces personnel and their families applying for council housing in the following circumstances:

- Service personnel will not be affected by residency restrictions if they have to live outside Islington as part of their service
- Welfare Category B is an award of 80 points and may be awarded in to bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service
- Welfare Category C is an award of 40 points and may be awarded to applicants whose welfare needs are comparable to former members of the regular forces
- Medical Category A gives the maximum 150 points and will be awarded to serving members of the regular forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service

Employment and skills support

Ex-forces personnel who are facing challenges in securing employment will be eligible for support through council employment programmes. This could include support in developing new skills and in accessing local vacancies. The discipline, resilience and team spirit of armed forces personnel could be a considerable incentive to employers.

The Council provides employment and skills support to vulnerable groups and / or those facing significant barriers as part of its commitment to tackle poverty and inequality in Islington.

Support for health needs

The Council will provide:

- Mental Health First Aid training to Armed Forces organisations / charities enabling them to recognise mental health issues and refer on to relevant support
- Alcohol awareness training to representatives of Armed Forces organisations / charities

- Support (both financial and practical) with housing adaptations – for those moving to private as well as council housing, and refer those with disabilities / longer term health conditions onto relevant support services

Appointment of an Armed Forces Champion

Each year the Council will formally nominate a councillor to be the Armed Forces Champion, ensuring good relationships with Armed Forces organisations in the borough and promoting engagement activities and support. The current Armed Forces Champion is Cllr Gary Poole.

Formally recognising the contribution of the Armed Forces

- The Armed Forces Flag will be flown on the roof of the Town Hall each year on Armed Forces Day
- A Veteran or Cadet of the Year Award will be launched during Armed Forces Week 2014 to highlight the contribution of individuals
- Freedom of the Borough has been awarded to:
 - The Honorary Artillery Company in 2009
 - Colonel Brian Kay, the former Deputy Lieutenant in 2010

Supporting ‘Youth Organisations in Uniform’

Islington has a number of Air Training Corps, Army Cadets and Sea Cadets in the borough and the Islington Academy has just set up a Combined Cadet Force. The Council will support these positive activities for young people through:

- Active involvement of the Mayor in visiting and supporting the activities of the various cadet forces in Islington
- Access to funding for running costs and activities through the Council’s two small grants schemes – the Local Initiatives Fund and Islington Community Chest
- Chiring meetings of Youth Organisations in Uniform (YOU) which brings together various organisations - the Cubs, Scouts, Boys Brigade etc. – to identify opportunities for sharing help and resources

Promote the Community Covenants Grants Scheme

The government has established a Community Covenants Grant Scheme, with £10m available per year for projects across the country which support the priorities of local Armed Forces Community Covenants and bring together the civilian and Armed Forces communities to promote integration and raise awareness of the contribution and sacrifices made by Forces personnel.

The scheme is administered on a regional basis but bids must be signed off at local level before being submitted to the regional panel. Applications can be submitted by any part of the community, including voluntary and community sector organisations / charities, public sector bodies, schools, etc. Projects should deliver tangible results and meet the overall aims of the community covenant scheme.

The Council will:

- Promote the Community Covenants Grants Scheme through its links with local voluntary and community sector organisations, statutory sector partners, schools and local businesses
- Convene a local panel, comprising senior Armed Forces / Council, to endorse local bids
- Administer the grants process, from receiving bids through the making payments for those which are successful, and publish on its website details of how to apply, and of successful local bids

Islington Council will work closely with Armed Forces organisations to increase understanding of, and address issues faced by, serving and ex-personnel and to maximise awareness and take up of the commitments made through this covenant