

**ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL**



Council Offices,  
Urban Road,  
Kirkby in Ashfield  
Nottingham  
NG17 8DA

## Agenda

### Scrutiny Panel A

Date: **Thursday, 19th November, 2020**

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Time: **7.00 pm**

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Venue: **[Ashfield District Council's YouTube Channel](#)**

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For any further information please contact:

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# **SCRUTINY PANEL A**

## **Membership**

<b>Chairman:</b>	Councillor Dave Shaw
<b>Vice-Chairman:</b>	Councillor John Smallridge
<b>Councillors:</b>	
Jim Blagden	Trevor Locke
Lauren Mitchell	Warren Nuttall
David Walters	

## **FILMING/AUDIO RECORDING NOTICE**

This meeting may be subject to filming or audio recording. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact Members' Services on 01623 457317.

## **SUMMONS**

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel A to be held at the time and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.



**Carol Cooper-Smith**  
**Chief Executive**

## **AGENDA**

## **Page**

1. To receive apologies for absence, if any.
2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests.
3. To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 22 September 2020. 5 - 10
4. Scrutiny Review: Veterans and Service Personnel. 11 - 16

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## **SCRUTINY PANEL A**

**Meeting held on Tuesday, 22nd September, 2020 at 7.00 pm**

**Present:** Councillor Dave Shaw in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden, Trevor Locke,  
Lauren Mitchell, Warren Nuttall, John Smallridge  
and David Walters.

**Officers Present:** Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

**In Attendance:** Councillor Dale Grounds.  
Mark Leek (Operations Manager for Forces  
within the Community Charity).

### **SA.17 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests**

Councillors Jim Blagden and David Walters declared Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests due to their former service within the Armed Forces.

### **SA.18 Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12 March 2020, be received and approved as a correct record.

Councillor Warren Nuttall took the opportunity to ask if the 'Bus Provision in Ashfield' review had been concluded and was advised that the review was currently pending due to the Covid-19 lockdown and the restrictions this had imposed on local transport providers over the past six months.

The review would be recommenced once local transport service had been fully resumed and an assessment could be made as to any developing gaps in local services following the lockdown.

### **SA.19 Scrutiny Review: Veterans and Service Personnel**

The Chairman introduced the item and extended a warm welcome to Mark Leek who was in attendance at the meeting. Mark had founded the Kirkby in Ashfield Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club and was currently working as Operations Manager for the local 'Forces in the Community' Charity.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services presented the introductory report which provided Members with some background information regarding current Council services accessed by veterans and ex-service personnel, national context regarding the topic, the Armed Forces Covenant and discussion points for the review's terms of reference.

Originally the review was set to take place as a separate scrutiny commission as announced at a Council meeting in July 2019 by the Leader of the Council. Due to several challenging circumstances experienced over the past year, work on the commission had unfortunately been delayed.

At the July 2020 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members agreed the most appropriate course of action would be to incorporate the planned Veterans and Service Personnel Scrutiny Commission into the annual Scrutiny Workplan for 2020/21 to ensure the review could be undertaken with findings and recommendations being submitted to Cabinet.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members agreed some primary objectives for the review as follows:

- *To examine all relevant Council policies and strategies and ensure all information for veterans and service personnel is clear and easily accessible;*
- *To consider the Council's relationship with local veterans and service personnel charitable organisations;*
- *The development of a policy document to support the armed forces community, including information on:*
  - *General support*
  - *Benefits and finance*
  - *Jobs and employment*
  - *Housing*
  - *Health and wellbeing.*

Aside from the review, the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer, Gillian Welch, had been working with the local veterans' community for some years and had been at the forefront of enabling the Council to sign an Armed Forces Covenant.

The Covenant offered the Council a unique and low-cost way to do their bit to honour the Armed Forces locally whilst also offering groups, organisations and individuals within the area access to Government funding and the Armed Forces Covenant Grant Scheme.

The Senior Community Engagement Officer had also enabled the Council to achieve the bronze and silver awards (2018 and 2019 respectively), obtainable through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) which encouraged employers to support defence and offer inspiration to others.

Mark Leek had been actively engaged with the Council in their efforts to achieve the bronze and silver ERS awards and the Armed Forces Covenant and had worked tirelessly in the local area to support veterans and former members of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces. It was for that reason Members were keen to invite Mark to the Panel meetings to access his experience and knowledge and to encourage informed debate and conversation.

At this point in the meeting, Mark Leek took the opportunity to address the Panel and gave Members some background in relation to his upbringing and his forces service in the Territorial Army, 1 Wessex and the Queens Regiment before undertaking civilian work for the Army in Germany.

Returning to Kirkby in Ashfield in 2010, it became apparent that many veterans and ex-service personnel were battling loneliness and isolation and were struggling to access the local services they required. To endeavour to address the problem, the Kirkby in Ashfield Armed Force and Veterans Breakfast Club was founded in January 2019 with 300 plus members now online with an average of 40-55 members attending the breakfasts on the third Saturday of each month.

Following the inaugural breakfast meeting, it became obvious that many veterans and ex-service personnel were struggling with a host of issues that included some frustrations with the support being offered by the Council. It was acknowledged that staff were always courteous and helpful but it was their lack of expertise in dealing with veterans, who were often struggling with mental health issues, that was the obstacle.

Many veterans and ex-service personnel needed additional support and understanding to help them acclimatise back into civilian life and it was suggested that a 'Welcome Pack', offered by the Council, might be an option to commence the process and assist them in accessing the services they require.

A discussion ensued and Members considered the following:

- the plethora of Armed Forces charities seemingly available and an acknowledgement that many were well-meaning but did not always offer the dedicated support required;
- the availability of financial support for former members and veterans of the Armed Forces, for training and educational programmes;
- the importance of local Councillors being trained to assist veterans and ex-service personnel in the first instance to ensure accurate signposting is achieved;
- concerns that the Council should not accept full responsibility for supporting veterans and ex-service personnel but should undertake their role in tandem with the local and national charities already available;

- the benefits of the Council producing a 'Welcome Pack' and to ensure all staff are knowledgeable as to the support and signposting currently offered by the Council;
- acknowledgement of the great work carried out by the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer and a suggestion to invite her to the next meeting of the Panel to assist Members with the review;
- the importance of continuing with the efforts to achieve the Gold Award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) to cement the Council's continued commitment to the Armed Forces and its personnel;
- a suggestion to display posters in the Council's main reception advising any former members or veterans of the Armed Forces to introduce themselves and request the 'Welcome Pack' from customer advisers at the commencement of any initial conversation, consultation or interview;
- a suggestion that the Council could encourage all large employers within the District to guarantee a job interview for any positions applied for by veterans and ex-service personnel, to offer interview experience and assist with their transition back into civilian life;
- services offered by the Council to assist veterans and ex-service personnel could be advertised in the Council's publication 'Ashfield Matters' on a quarterly basis;
- the possibility of Members encouraging local businesses within their wards to display any promotional literature and endorse the support offered to Armed Forces ex-service personnel by the Council.

RESOLVED that  
the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to undertake the following in readiness for the October 2020 meeting of the Panel:

- a) to commence work on the development of an Armed Forces Welcome Pack with a view to presenting a draft to the Panel for consideration at the next meeting;
- b) to further explore the possibility of producing an information poster, to be displayed in the Council's main reception, to encourage veterans and ex-service personnel to introduce themselves to customer advisers at the commencement of any initial consultation or interview to ensure targeted support and assistance is provided;
- c) to extend an invite to the following, to attend the October 2020 meeting of the Panel:-
  - Gillian Welch, the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer, to clarify the work undertaken thus far to promote the Council's commitment towards the Armed Forces Covenant and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS);



- a representative from the local Forces in the Community Charity to allow Members some insight into the ongoing challenges being faced by veterans and former members of the Armed Forces, to reintegrate back into civilian life.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman.

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<b>Report To:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY PANEL A</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>19 NOVEMBER 2020</b>
<b>Heading:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY REVIEW: VETERANS AND SERVICE PERSONNEL</b>		
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>		
<b>Ward/s:</b>	<b>ALL</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>NO</b>		
<b>Subject to Call-In:</b>	<b>NO</b>		

## **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to enable Scrutiny Panel A Members to consider the contents of a Council produced Veterans and Service Personnel Welcome Pack as discussed at the previous meeting of the Panel. Further information is also provided on the Armed Forces Covenant, including case study examples of other authorities signed up to the Covenant.

## **Recommendation(s)**

Scrutiny Panel A Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained within this report.
- b. Consider the contents of the proposed Veterans and Service Personnel Welcome Pack.
- c. Consider how the Council can continue to work towards the outcomes set out within the Armed Forces Covenant.

## **Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

Veterans and Service Personnel was added to the Scrutiny Workplan 2020/21 at the July 2020 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Alternative Options Considered**

No alternative options have been considered.

## **Detailed Information**

### **BACKGROUND**

Members have held one previous meeting considering an introductory report to the Scrutiny Review: Veterans and Service Personnel. Within the introductory report, Members were presented with information regarding the national picture for veteran and service personnel support, current support information provided by Ashfield District Council, and details of the Armed Forces Covenant/Employers Recognition Scheme.

### **VETERANS AND SERVICE PERSONNEL WELCOME PACK**

At the previous meeting of the Panel discussing this topic, Members discussed the benefits of the Council producing a 'Welcome Pack' designed for those who have served in the armed forces or family members of someone who has served in the armed forces.

Members should consider the most appropriate contents for the Veterans and Service Personnel Welcome Pack.

This could include the following sections:

- Introduction (featuring the intent of the document, who it is for, etc.)
- Foreword from the Council's Armed Forces Champion
- Housing – buying a home, renting a home, homelessness, electoral registration
- Employment – signposting, starting your own business, volunteering
- Health – signposting, domestic abuse
- Benefits & Taxes – general money advice
- Community Safety
- Leisure & Tourism
- Service charities – details of charities that can offer advice, support or practical help to serving personnel, veterans, and their families.

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY CASE STUDIES**

The Armed Forces Covenant have several local authority case studies featured on their website demonstrating how local authorities and councils have used the Covenant to benefit the armed forces community.

#### **Wrexham Borough Council**

Once Wrexham Borough Council signed the Covenant, they identified that a proactive, planned approach to support offered to veterans and their families was needed. Similarly, to Ashfield, Wrexham appointed an Armed Forces Champion and began with a networking event with the aim of understanding the key issues veterans face.

Wrexham aimed to share the good work happening locally and to understand how the Covenant could assist in supporting existing work and embarking on new areas of work. They established a local armed forces working group that meets quarterly and is chaired by the Armed Forces Champion.

Wrexham identified homes for veterans as a key issue and began working in partnership with local housing associations to provide accommodation. Wrexham also worked with local universities to

research to understand veterans decision making as a civilian, offering a better insight into challenges that ex-service people face and the resources they use when attempting to navigate that are sometimes taken for granted by an 'ordinary' civilian. Furthermore, Wrexham also supported the Royal British Legion in opening a pop up shop in the town centre and provided training for council contact centre staff to ensure they can positively support veterans and their families.

Further work of Wrexham Borough Council's Armed Forces Working Group includes:

- Helping veterans volunteer to clean war graves/memorials
- Reviewing housing allocation to ensure veterans are not disadvantaged
- Organising civic events
- Safeguarding local veteran standards
- Collaborative working

### City of York

The City of York Council developed an action plan to ensure effective integration of the Armed Forces Covenant and the associated outcomes. Within this action plan, the following framework was considered:

- Strategic – ensuring new strategies consider and implement an impact assessment to identify potential positive and negative outcomes, highlighting any gaps in access to services.
- Policies – reviewing relevant policies relating to the armed forces community, ensuring equality of access to delivery of service.
- Service Delivery – ensuring policies reflect delivery of actual services and that all staff and partners are aware of the requirements within the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Size of the Armed Forces Community – identifying the size of the local armed forces community through ensuring the question is asked through customer service and team contact points. This can provide valuable live data improving service delivery and enabling improved strategic planning.
- City of York Council also developed a series of questionnaires directed at key services within the Council to ensure adherence to the outcomes specified in the Armed Forces Covenant.

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY E-LEARNING**

Members have previously discussed the potential value to be had in the Council facilitating training aimed at front-line staff who engage with individuals and families on a regular basis. The Coventry, Solihull, and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership have developed a programme of e-learning modules focused on particular audiences and needs. The two modules applicable to local authorities are:

- The Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff
- Housing, Homelessness, and the Armed Forces Covenant

These training modules provide an overview of the unique challenges of service life and how front-line staff can help support the Armed Forces Community. The training is designed to help staff understand the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant at a local level.

The training includes sections on:

- What the Armed Forces Covenant is
- Who the Armed Forces Community are and what challenges they face
- How the Armed Forces Covenant is applied in real life scenarios

The Coventry, Solihull, and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership have also produced an e-learning package focused on housing and homelessness. This package explains, through case studies, the specific needs of, and issues experienced by, current and former service personnel and their families, and how they can be supported. The Housing, Homelessness, and the Armed Forces Covenant module also provides detailed information on legislation, sources of support and housing agencies who work with those who are ex-armed forces.

## **NEXT STEPS**

To progress the Scrutiny Review: Veterans and Service Personnel, Panel Members could consider the following:

- Explore the feasibility of e-learning and other training for Council employees
- Expand working with local charities and armed forces organisations
- Continue work to develop an armed forces information pack
- Understand the purpose of the Armed Forces Covenant and the steps necessary to achieve gold status

## **Implications**

### **Corporate Plan:**

This review topic aligns with the Council's key priorities set out within the Corporate Plan 2019-2023:

- The Council exists to serve the communities and residents of Ashfield
- The Council will provide good quality, value for money services
- The Council will act strategically and plan for the future working with others to bring about sustainable improvements in people's lives

### **Legal:**

There are no direct legal implications resulting from this report. Any legal implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

### **Finance:**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. Any financial implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

### **Risk:**

There are no direct risks resulting from this report. Any risks identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

Risk	Mitigation
None at this stage.	None at this stage.

### **Human Resources:**

There are no direct HR implications resulting from this report. Any HR implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

### **Environmental/Sustainability:**

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from this report. Any environmental or sustainability implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

### **Equalities:**

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from this report. Any equalities implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

### **Other Implications:**

There are no other implications resulting from this report. Any other implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed appropriately.

### **Reason(s) for Urgency**

None.

### **Reason(s) for Exemption**

None.

### **Background Papers**

None.

## **Report Author and Contact Officer**

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