

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL A	Date:	22 SEPTEMBER 2020
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW: VETERANS AND SERVICE PERSONNEL		
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to introduce the Veterans and Service Personnel review topic to Scrutiny Panel A Members. This topic was formally added to the Scrutiny Workplan 2020/21 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2020, after originally being set up as a scrutiny commission.

This introductory report will provide Members with some background information regarding Council services and veterans and service personnel, national context regarding this topic, the Armed Forces Covenant, and discussion points for review terms of reference.

Recommendation(s)

Members of Scrutiny Panel A are recommended to:

- a. Review the terms of reference, including; objectives, methodology, involvement, and information required.
- b. Consider the current support provided to veterans and service personnel, both nationally and locally.
- c. Consider the Council's commitment and progress in supporting service personnel and veterans.

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

INTRODUCTION

Originally this review was set to take place as a separate scrutiny commission as announced at a July 2019 meeting of the Council by the Leader of the Council. Due to several circumstances over the past year, work on the commission was 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 2020/21 to ensure the review can be undertaken and any findings and recommendations can be submitted to Cabinet.

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

- Examine all relevant Council policies and strategies and ensure all information for veterans and service personnel is clear and easily accessible
- 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

NATIONAL PICTURE

Veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations (Office for Veterans Affairs, 2020).

Based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey results, the Ministry of Defence estimated that there were 2.4 million veterans residing in households across Great Britain in 2017. It is estimated that around 60% of veterans were aged 65 and over, making up 5% of household residents aged 16 and over. Based on Ministry of Defence statistics, around 15,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces every year.

Jobs and Employment

In preparation for a career after service in the Armed Forces, the MOD directly funds employment support through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). The CTP offers a high quality, no cost recruitment service and supports those leaving the Armed Forces for two years after their discharge date. It connects veterans with employers who recognise the benefits of bringing their talent, skills and experience into their organisations.

It is estimated that 79% of working age veterans are employed and are as likely to be employed as non-veterans, and 92% have a qualification and are as likely to have a qualification as non-veterans, according to the Annual Population Survey 2017.

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) rewards those employers who support the Armed Forces and inspires others to do the same. The scheme encompasses Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

General Support

There are a variety of national support networks available to veterans. These are detailed below;

Veterans UK is the MOD's support organisation for Service Personnel, the majority of veterans and their families. Veterans UK delivers the Armed Forces Pension Schemes (AFPS), War Pension Scheme (WPS) and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS), making payments to those injured or disabled due to service in the Armed Forces, and to the widows, widowers and civil partners of those who die as a result of service in the Armed Forces.

Veterans UK also provides a welfare support package through the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) and a Freephone Helpline facility.

Defence Transition Services (DTS), launched by the MOD to assist those facing the greatest challenges to making a successful transition to civilian life on their discharge from the Armed Forces. DTS support is available to all Service leavers exiting the Armed Forces and is based on the need of the individual.

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust receives £10 million a year to run grant programmes across the UK which support the Armed Forces community. This year, they will receive an extra £10 million to support veterans' mental health.

The Veterans' Gateway launched in 2017 and awarded £2 million from the Covenant Fund Trust provides information and support both online and over the phone (0808 802 1212). They help veterans and their families find sources of support or information for any challenges that they might be facing, from healthcare and housing to employability and finances.

The Veterans UK Helpline, provides specific advice on compensation scheme claims and getting help with benefits, pensions, loans and grants, emergency accommodation, finding a job, re-training, health issues, welfare concerns, service records and medals.

Housing

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has introduced various measures to improve access to social housing for the Service community and veterans. This includes changing the law to ensure seriously injured Service personnel and veterans with urgent housing needs are always given high priority for social housing by local authorities.

Regulations have also been introduced which ensure that within the first five years, those who have left the Armed Forces cannot be disqualified from social housing because of a local connection or residency requirement.

Health

The provision of veterans' health care, including mental health care, is primarily the responsibility of the local NHS across the UK. Veterans can access all the mental health services available to the general population. On top of that, the NHS provides a wide range of specialist services for veterans. Veterans in England, Scotland and Wales receive priority access to NHS secondary care for Service-related conditions, subject to clinical need of all patients.

There are a variety of estimates regarding the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in UK Service Personnel and veterans. The longitudinal studies conducted by the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) estimated the overall rate of probable PTSD among a sample of current and ex-serving regular military personnel was 6% in the 2014/16 cohort; compared to 4% in the 2004/06 and 2007/09 cohorts. This compares to a rate of 4.4% within the civilian population.

The NHS provides two dedicated veteran specific mental health services. The Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), that provides a range of treatment from recognising early signs of mental health problems and access to support to providing therapeutic treatment for complex mental health difficulties.

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL – CURRENT INFORMATION

As part of this review, the Panel will consider what information the Council has produced for informational purposes regarding veterans and service personnel. Members may also wish to examine the policies and strategies of other local authorities.

Currently, the following information is included on the Council's website relating to veterans and service personnel.

Leaving the Armed Forces

Ashfield District Council prioritises serving and former members of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces when applying for a council home through Homefinder as follows:

An applicant who has been assessed as having a Band 2 or Band 3 housing need and who meets one of the following criteria will be placed into Band 1:

1. 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
2. Former members of the regular forces. Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) 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 (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service
3. Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service

Housing advice is also available from the Veterans Gateway website and helpline. Forces in the Community and SSAFA both have offices in Nottinghamshire that can offer housing advice as well as help with other issues such as employment and counselling.

Homeless and Housing Options Service

No Homeless Veterans is a campaign led by Cobseo Housing Cluster. This Campaign is to ensure that ex-Armed Forces and their families are quickly and efficiently being signposted to support services available to help them.

National and Local Government, along with numerous charities and over 3000 businesses have come together and committed to working together to support ex-service personnel and their families.

The Veterans Gateway should be the first point of call for veterans and their families. They support people to get in touch with the correct organisations who can provide the advice and support they need. This support will be tailored to the persons needs including housing, employability, finances and well as personal relationships.

This Gateway can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Over the past year housing has remained one of the top three reasons that people have contacted the Veterans Gateway.

Ashfield District Council have committed to

- “Ask the question” this is so we can identify veterans as early as possible.
- Write Personalised Housing Plans that include details of the veteran’s status or a family members connections so that we can make sure additional expertise is provided.
- We have appointed a dedicated “Armed Forces Champion” who provides quick effective support to members of the Armed Forces community.
- Verify an applicant’s past service by contacting Veterans UK

Elections – Registering to Vote

Members of the armed forces, or the spouse of a service person, can register either as an ordinary elector at their home address or register as a service voter. This can be done online.

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge to acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

The Armed Forces Covenant focusses on helping members of the armed forces community have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen.

The support is provided in several areas including:

- Education and family well-being
- Having a home
- Starting a new career
- Access to healthcare
- Financial assistance
- Discounted services

The Covenant supports serving personnel, service leavers, veterans, and their families. Many different groups have committed to working towards the goals of the Covenant, including:

- Central government
- Single services (Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force)
- Businesses of all sizes
- Local government
- Charities
- Communities
- Cadet forces and adult volunteers

The Armed Forces Covenant scheme was launched by the Government in 2011 following a high-profile Legion campaign on Armed Forces Covenant issues. The scheme was announced by the Prime Minister as part of a wider Armed Forces Covenant package in May 2011: this followed concerted cross-party campaigning in Parliament and a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Legion's Director General, Dr Chris Simpkins, at which it was agreed that the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant would be written into law.

The principles:

- Recognising the unique nature of Service,
- Ensuring that there is no disadvantage, e.g. in accessing public services, as a result of service in the Armed Forces
- Allowing special treatment where justified, e.g. in the case of injured personnel enshrined in the Armed Forces Act 2011.

A key test of those principles is the extent to which they are applied in practice on the ground, which is why Armed Forces Covenants are so important. Armed Forces Covenants are voluntary statements of mutual support between civilian communities and their local Armed Forces community. Outlining the mutual obligations between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.

Armed Forces Covenants aim to:

- Encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas;
- Nurture public understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces community;
- Recognise and remember the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces community;
- Encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life; and
- Encourage the Armed Forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.

Signing an Armed Forces Covenant not only offers a unique and low-cost way for local authorities to do their bit to honour the Armed Forces Covenant locally; it also offers groups, organisations and individuals within their area access Government funding and the Armed Forces Covenant Grant Scheme.

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT/EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME (ERS)

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for

employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

The ERS is designed primarily to recognise private sector support although public sector organisations such as the emergency services, local authorities, NHS trusts and executive agencies are also eligible to be recognised. The scheme enables organisations to pledge support via the bronze, silver and gold awards.

Ashfield District Council achieved the silver award in 2019, replacing the bronze award previously held by the Council. To achieve the silver award, the Council demonstrated the following:

- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- must have already stated their intent to be supportive by using the ERS website to register at the Bronze level
- must proactively demonstrate that service personnel/armed forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes
- must employ at least one individual from the armed forces community category that the nomination emphasises
- must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues
- within the context of Reserves, the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. They must demonstrate support to training by providing at least 5 days' additional unpaid/paid leave must not have been the subject of any relevant negative PR or media activity

Panel Members may wish to explore the criteria that must be met by the Council to achieve the gold award.

Work has already been undertaken to consider the Council's contact with service personnel and veterans. A questionnaire was carried out across the Council's services to consider the following;

- type and frequency of contact
- organisational process
- staff training
- signposting

Details of this questionnaire will be supplied at the meeting.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of reference are a simple set of criteria to be considered and discussed at the outset of a review. Establishing terms of reference is a useful tool for structuring a review and ensuring tangible outcomes.

The following sections should be considered when setting terms of reference:

- Review objectives
- Methodology
- Information required
- Key witnesses
- Indicators of success

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 at this stage of the review.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
None at this stage of the review.	None at this stage of the review.

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 equality implications resulting from this report. Any equality 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.

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