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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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