

Report To:	CABINET	Date:	19 JULY 2021
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 present Cabinet with the final recommendations following the conclusion of the Scrutiny Review: Veterans and Service Personnel carried out by Scrutiny Panel A.

Recommendation(s)

- a. Further explore the possibility of expanding the e-training modules regarding the Armed Forces Covenant, Housing and Homelessness for frontline staff, across all sections of the Council.
- b. Commend the work undertaken by the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer in supporting the Ashfield Armed Forces community.
- c. Explore the potential to designate an Armed Forces representative in each section of the Council.
- d. Support and continue to commit to achieving the MoD Gold Employer Recognition Award through the Defence Employee Recognition Scheme.
- e. Continue to develop a robust and purposeful Reservist Policy to assist and support employees as required.
- f. Commit to increasing awareness across the Council and embedding ongoing support for the local Armed Forces Community within the Council's Corporate Plan.
- g. Develop an Armed Forces Welcome Pack designed to support the Armed Forces Community with the transition to civilian life in Ashfield.

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. Scrutiny Panel A conducted a review of the topic concluding in February 2021, with a set of final recommendations formulated to be presented to Cabinet.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered.

Detailed Information

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet be recommended to:

- a. *Further explore the possibility of expanding the e-training modules regarding the Armed Forces Covenant, Housing and Homelessness for frontline staff, across all sections of the Council.*

Members were made aware of several e-learning opportunities that could be made available to relevant Council Staff and agreed that further training is vital to ensure staff can help support the Armed Forces Community.

The currently available training modules include:

- Module 1: The Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff
- Module 2: Housing, Homelessness, and the Armed Forces Covenant

Members have also stated that similar e-learning/training opportunities will be valuable for Elected Members to undertake. Perhaps this could be discussed as part of the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee work regarding member training and development.

- b. *Commend the work undertaken so far by the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer in supporting the Ashfield Armed Forces community.*

Following discussions held with the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer as part of the review process, Members came to understand the breadth of work undertaken so far to support the Armed Forces Community and to achieve the Silver Employer Recognition Award. Panel Members recommend that this work be commended.

- c. *Explore the potential to designate an Armed Forces representative in each section of the Council.*

The Panel recommends that each service area has an armed forces representative to ensure that the Council has sufficiently trained officers to support service delivery regarding the Armed Forces Community. This includes staff training, advice and ensuring that each area remains informed on all relevant social data. Providing a network of representatives also ensures that the Council has a unified approach to sharing relevant information within different service delivery points to improve the lives of armed forces veterans and ensure that they receive the appropriate support.

- d. *Support and continue to commit to achieving the MoD Gold Employer Recognition Award through the Defence Employee Recognition Scheme.*

The Defence Employment Recognition Scheme recognises the commitment and support from UK employers for Defence Personnel. The scheme comprises bronze, silver and gold awards for employers who support those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and their families.

The Council is currently working towards achieving the Gold award and it is hoped that a nomination might be forthcoming in 2021. To achieve the Gold award the Council must demonstrate the following:

- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.
 - employers must have an existing relationship with their National Account Manager/REED/appropriate defence representative.
 - the employer should already be demonstrating support by receiving an ERS Silver Award.
 - the employer must proactively demonstrate their forces-friendly credentials as part of their recruiting and selection processes. Where possible, they should be engaged with Career Transition Partnership (CTP) in the recruitment of service leavers and have registered for the Forces Families Job (FFJ) portal.
 - employers must employ at least one individual from the armed forces community category that the nomination emphasises. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must employ at least one Reservist.
 - the employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must have an internally publicised and positive human resources policy on Reserves.
 - the employer must be an exemplar within their market sector, advocating support to defence people issues to partner organisations, suppliers, and customers with tangible positive results.
 - within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. They must provide at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid, to the Reservist employee.
 - the employer must not have been the subject of any negative public relations or media activity'.
- e. *Continue to develop a robust and purposeful Reservist Policy to assist and support employees as required.*

Scrutiny Panel A Members are aware that since this recommendation was agreed upon, a Reservist Policy has been formally approved by Cabinet.

During the review, Members were made aware that work was being undertaken on the development of a robust and purposeful Reservist Policy. Members agreed that the implementation of such policy would be essential for supporting employees and to further meet one of the criteria set out within the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme as the Council continues to work towards the Gold Award.

- f. *Commit to increasing awareness across the Council and embedding ongoing support for the local Armed Forces Community within the Council's Corporate Plan.*

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's key ambitions and priorities for the period 2019 – 2023 as approved by Cabinet and endorsed by Council. Scrutiny Panel A Members recommend that the Corporate Plan should include reference to supporting the local Armed Forces Community as a commitment to increasing awareness across the Council and embedding support for the Armed Forces Community into the Council's priorities and objectives.

g. Develop an Armed Forces Welcome Pack designed to support the Armed Forces Community with the transition to civilian life in Ashfield.

Throughout the review, 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, following examining several examples of similar packs produced by neighbouring authorities.

Members have agreed that the pack should include the following key information:

- Introduction (who the document is for)
- 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 management advice
- Community Safety
- Leisure and Tourism
- Service charities – details of charities that can offer advice, support, or practical help

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Scrutiny Panel A review of Veterans and Service Personnel has aligned 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 working with others to bring about sustainable improvements in people's lives

Legal:

There are no significant legal issues identified in the report.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.

General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

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

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Environmental/Sustainability:

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Equalities:

Scrutiny Panel A Members have ensured the needs of the Armed Forces Community have been at the forefront of the review process through ongoing work and interaction with members of the Armed Forces Community.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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