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| <b>MEETING:</b>         | <b>CABINET</b>                                       |
| <b>DATE:</b>            | <b>16 APRIL 2012</b>                                 |
| <b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b> | <b>HEREFORDSHIRE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT</b> |
| <b>PORTFOLIO AREA:</b>  | <b>ENTERPRISE AND CULTURE</b>                        |

**CLASSIFICATION:** Open

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide

### **Purpose**

To approve the attached Herefordshire Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) Pledge, Action Plan and delivery arrangements.

### **Key Decision**

This is a not a Key Decision.

### **Recommendation**

**THAT: the Herefordshire Armed Forces Community Covenant, which incorporates an Action Plan and delivery arrangements (as at Appendix 1 to the report) be approved.**

### **Key Points Summary**

- In consultation with Members, partners, the armed services, veterans associations and charities, officers have developed an AFCC for Herefordshire.
- To ensure that the Covenant is a live document an action plan has been drawn up and delivery and monitoring arrangements proposed.
- If agreed, the next step will be to organise a formal signing of the Covenant Pledge document and an official launch.

### **Alternative Options**

1. The Cabinet could choose not to progress an AFCC for the county however, this could mean that the Armed Services Community in Herefordshire were left less well supported than other parts of the United Kingdom.

## Reasons for Recommendations

2. Herefordshire is home to the prestigious and world renowned Special Air Service and Council has recently agreed to adopt The Rifles as the county regiment. The Council and its partners already provide varying degrees of support for the Armed Forces Communities but this has not always been in a coordinated or proactive manner. Additionally there is no joined up approach to understanding, integrating or recognising the sacrifices of the county's Armed Forces Community. The AFCC proposes a structured civilian and military partnership approach to addressing these issues.

## Introduction and Background

3. In May 2011 the Secretary of State for Defence announced the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC), a moral obligation which binds the People of the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Government and all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and their families. The AFC defines principles of removing disadvantage and allowing special provision in some circumstances in the access to public and commercial services. This set a framework for policy making and delivery across Government and will improve the support available to the Armed Forces community. The Secretary of State also announced a range of additional measure of support including the Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC).
4. In June 2011 the Ministry of Defence announced the formation of AFCC's and published Guidance Notes for their establishment.
5. An AFCC is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community. The Covenant is signed by various members of the local community including representatives of the Armed Forces and the Local/Unitary Authorities. It may also be signed by charities, volunteer groups and other parties keen to support the principles of the covenant.
6. The aims of the Covenant are to:
  - Encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces Community in their areas;
  - Nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community;
  - Recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces Community;
  - Encourage Activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life; and,
  - Encourage Armed Forces Community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement

## Key Considerations

7. Local Authorities and the Armed Forces Community are encouraged to work together to establish a Community Covenant in their area and it is expected that Covenants will be led at local authority level. Oxfordshire, Hampshire, North Yorkshire and the Vale of Glamorgan led the way in launching the initiative in their respective areas.
8. The Community Covenant Pledge sets out what a Covenant seeks to achieve in a particular area, and where possible, will be signed by representatives from all parts of the community. In most cases the lead signatory will be a senior representative from the Local Authority and one from the Services who will sign on behalf of Armed Forces Community although, it may also be signed by those representing veterans' or families groups particularly in areas without

a large service presence.

9. In January 2012 Brigadier Banham of 143 Brigade who is leading the initiative on behalf of the military community in the West Midlands met with the Chief Executive and the Director of Places and Communities to encourage Herefordshire Council to implement this important initiative.
10. It is anticipated that Covenants will vary from one location to another, and the nature of support offered will be determined by both need and capacity.
11. To that end officers have communicated with a wide range of organisations and individuals to understand local issues affecting serving and ex armed forces personnel, reservists and their families and to gauge interest in the Covenant.
12. On 5 March 2012 the Chairman of the Council, Councillor Olwyn Barnett, hosted an AFCC meeting and workshop event at Brockington. The meeting was attended by representatives from a wide range of organisations including, 143 Brigade, the armed service, armed service charities, reservists, the voluntary sector, representatives of the Councils political groups town and city councils, HALC, Hereford Futures, 2gether, the Lord Lieutenants office, Hoople, third sector board, Herefordshire Partnership, public health, and HPS officers.
13. In the workshops, attendees considered the 5 aims of the Covenant, identified issues and opportunities, suggested appropriate actions and potential owners of those actions.
14. The workshop feedback provided the basis for the AFCC Action Plan. The plan is intended to be a live document that will change over time to respond to current issues.
15. Reports from the first counties to be involved (listed above) speak of the value of meeting regularly with partners to the pledge to discuss current and anticipated issues, agree potential solutions and to plan for the future. It is therefore proposed that the plan be driven by a small Civilian Military Task Group (CMTG) comprising representation from serving armed forces personnel, reservists, armed forces charities, armed forces family support, Herefordshire Council and the PCT. It is proposed that this group be chaired by Councillor Sinclair Knipe, the AFCC Champion. The CMTG will meet as regularly as is necessary to drive the action plan
16. The progress of the plan will be regularly monitored by the Herefordshire Partnership Executive Group (HPEG) and an annual meeting will be held between the signatories of the Covenant and HPEG to ensure that the action plan is being implemented and relevant revisions and/or updates for the coming year are introduced.

## **Community Impact**

17. It is anticipated that the Covenant and activities arising from it will strengthen the ties between the Armed Forces and the local community.

## **Equality and Human Rights**

18. There is no requirement for an Equality Analysis to be conducted on the proposal. An Equality analysis is a way of considering the effect on different groups protected from discrimination by the Equality Act, such as people of different ages. There are two reasons for this:
  - to consider if there are any unintended consequences for some groups
  - to consider if the policy will be fully effective for all target groups.

19. Members of the Armed forces, retired members of the Armed forces and their families, do not as a 'community' fall under the remit of the Equality Act 2010. However as individuals they may be covered by the General Duty of the Equality Act due to a Protected Characteristic. The 9 Protected Characteristics as identified by the Act are Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.
20. This initiative is a Positive Action initiative. Positive action applies to all these protected characteristics. Positive action provisions mean that it is not unlawful discrimination to take special measures aimed at alleviating disadvantage or under-representation experienced by those with any of these characteristics.
21. We contend that members of the Armed Forces may experience disadvantage in many ways simply as result of serving in the Armed Forces and this Covenant works to alleviate this disadvantage where it occurs.

## **Financial Implications**

22. There is no requirement from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) for the Council to pledge funding as part of the Covenant however; the MOD Community Covenant Grant Scheme funding could be applied for to support appropriate projects if the County has a Covenant in place.
23. The MOD launched the Community Covenant Grant Scheme in August 2011. Up to £30million over four financial years has been set aside to help communities undertake projects that promote a greater understanding between military populations. Should any activities identified in the plan require financial input it is proposed that an application be made to this fund.

## **Legal Implications**

24. None identified.

## **Risk Management**

25. No risks identified other than a minor reputational risk in the event Herefordshire determines not to support the Covenant.

## **Consultees**

26. In addition to those named on the cover sheet to this report the following people/organisations have been consulted: reports taken to Herefordshire Partnership Executive Group, Herefordshire Public Services Leadership Team, Leaders Briefing, the Senior Management Team, and Market Towns Forum. Individual meetings have also been held with representatives from Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA), the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes, the Garrison, Job Centre Plus, Cadets and Reserves, 143 Brigade, Armed Forces Recruitment, Senior Management Team Welfare Officer, the Councils AFCC champion and Oxfordshire, Hampshire and North Yorkshire Councils. In addition Air Vice Marshall Smart (of SSAFA) called a meeting of local Armed forces Charities to identify issues and then fed them back into the Action Plan.

## **Appendices**

27. Herefordshire Armed Forces Community Covenant pledge document and action plan.

## **Background Papers**

- Community Covenant Guidance