

<b>Decision maker:</b>	<b>Director for economy, communities and corporate</b>
<b>Decision date:</b>	<b>Friday, 23 March 2018</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>MOD Armed Forces Grant - Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Delegated grants and programmes manager</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

To accept the offer of grant on behalf of Herefordshire Council and local authority partners in Shropshire, Worcestershire and Telford & Wrekin.

Herefordshire Council has secured an Armed Forces Covenant Grant from the Ministry of Defence to fund the development of pilot veteran hubs in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Telford & Wrekin and the employment of staff to support the respective covenant partnerships in the four council areas.

The bid was a 'cluster bid' led by Herefordshire Council on behalf of, and in consultation with, Herefordshire's Civilian Military Task Group and the other councils' covenant partnerships. Herefordshire Council would act as accountable body for the funds.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- (a) **it be agreed that Herefordshire Council act as accountable body for the £246,820 Ministry of Defence (MoD) funded programme to enhance local government support provided through the armed forces covenant in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire council areas; and**
- (b) **the programme director housing and growth be authorised to take all operational decisions necessary to deliver the project in accordance with the terms of the grant.**

## **Alternative options**

1. Do Nothing - To date, all councils have nominated members of staff who, without exception, support their covenant partnerships in addition to their specific roles. This means that there has been no sole dedicated resource to the partnerships since they signed their covenants. Should this offer of funding not be accepted the delivery of the covenant will remain at the current level and the improved outcomes identified within the funding bid would not be realised which could be to the detriment of the armed forces communities in each of the counties
2. This funding has been bid for in two tranches. The original application was submitted in November with further funding being offered in January to specifically develop pilot veterans' hubs. We have been successful in acquiring an offer for both elements so if the funding is not accepted then the opportunity to develop these hubs will also be lost to deliver those pilots. For Herefordshire specifically, a small working group was developed to discuss the concept and agree what could be offered as part of the bid submission and whilst it was agreed that if the grant was not successful there was a will to develop a hub but it would need some significant funding and also need staff in place to support the development and co-ordinating of any funding.
3. An alternative could be that another authority could be the accountable body, however, this council has been the driving force behind the cluster bid having identified a need for this support in the county and we would want to ensure that this opportunity for the funding that this can bring is maximised. Herefordshire council will utilise the existing Grants & Programmes Team that has previously overseen the covenant funding on behalf of the MoD so can draw on that expertise.

## **Key considerations**

4. In 2012, along with key partners in the county, Herefordshire Council signed up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant. The key aims of the covenant are:
  - Encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces communities in their areas;
  - Nurture public understanding and public awareness amongst the public of the issues affecting the Armed Forces Community;
  - Recognise and remember the sacrifices faces by the Armed Forces Community;
  - Encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life;
  - Encourage the Armed Forces Community to help and support the wider community.

5. An action plan was developed based on issues known in order to address these aims and a cross sector partnership – the Civilian Military Task Group (CMTG) was set up in order to drive through the actions in the plan. The group is currently working to develop an Armed Forces Needs document that draws together statistical information relating to serving personnel and veterans to inform and drive the action plan further.
6. To date, the CMTG has had a good track record in developing and delivering projects and initiatives to support the armed forces community in Herefordshire however, more could be achieved if there was a dedicated staff resource in place. Additionally we have a number of initiatives in place to support veterans e.g. Military Charities Helpdesk, Veterans Support Group, Veterans Breakfast club, all of which operate out of different locations and at varying times. From a logistical perspective and to simplify matters for the veterans it would make sense for all of these support systems to be under one roof.
7. The ‘Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant’ priority of the Armed Forces Covenant Grant was developed after a review and report was produced by Forces in Mind Trust called “Our Community- Our Covenant – Improving the delivery of Local Government pledges”. <http://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Covenant-Report-2nd-Ed.pdf> The document recommends that further work could be done to integrate the covenant pledges by councils.
8. There is a checklist within the document that allows councils to check how they are performing in delivering their respective covenant pledges which enabled the partnerships operating in the four partner council areas to confirm and/or highlight where gaps were in delivery. There were similar issues identified across all of the partnerships. The main issues to be resolved were:
  - communication of the covenant and integration into policy consideration via robust communication strategies;
  - training of staff across council front line services and other statutory services;
  - sharing best practice between partnerships;
  - identification of the armed forces needs within each region including stakeholder engagement and mapping supporting the delivery of the covenant action plans; and
  - support and encourage more business engagement.
9. The funding had to be applied for as a ‘cluster’ bid and through existing cross border partnership working we were able to identify our key partners. Herefordshire Council already works with the partner councils on a number of other grant funded programmes and has partnership agreements in order to deliver those programmes. The key elements of the programme are:
  - the development of veteran hubs in each of the Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin council areas;
  - a shared staff resource for the four areas to support the implementation of covenant projects/work.

Should the grant be accepted then a partnership agreement with the other council areas will be entered into. A draft of the partnership agreement is attached at Appendix B which is based on the offer letter terms and conditions.

## Community impact

10. Herefordshire Council has a good working relationship with the armed forces community and it is recognised that there is a long standing history with the military within Herefordshire with service personnel, veterans and their families embedded within the community. The Civilian Military Task Group is well supported by certain military representative bodies however, attendance by some of the statutory agencies is inconsistent and this is believed to largely be due to workloads and/or the value associated with the meetings. The extra staff resource and introduction of veteran hubs will enable policy and strategy development and delivery of services to be better targeted and a more integrated service offered to the military community.
11. The council is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for all individuals impacted by the council's funded activities. As such the council endeavours to ensure that the work they and their partners undertake, does not adversely affect the health, safety and welfare of staff or members of the public. Therefore council partners and contracted workers are expected to work to the same health and safety standards and codes of practice as the council, as far as is reasonably practicable. This requirement will be included in the final contracted terms and conditions
12. Worcestershire has no serving barracks and its armed forces community is widely dispersed across the county. This makes it more complicated and challenging for Worcestershire Council to ensure that there is a cohesive relationship with the armed forces community. Additional resources will support addressing that challenge.
13. Shropshire Council has a very strong working relationship with the armed forces community. There are a wide range of organisations that are represented on their Covenant partnership group and they have an operational group that meets once a month which discusses specific cases about veterans, serving personnel and families. In Shropshire there are 4 military units, RAF Shawbury, RAF Cosford, Tern Hill and MOD Donnington. Additional resources would enable Shropshire to improve the support and guidance that they offer them.
14. Telford & Wrekin Council has a strong relationship with the armed forces community in the Borough and support the Covenant Partnership to achieve its objectives. All agencies represented at the Partnership meetings have a good understanding of their role in ensuring the armed forces community is not disadvantaged; however, further work to spread this understanding to all aspects of public sector work, and into the community itself is required.

## Equality duty

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
15. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes. This grant offer will allow the Council to demonstrate their commitment to the Equality duty by providing a bespoke service for service personnel many of whom will share a protected characteristic. It will address the 3 key aims of the duty directly by the services that it offers.

## Resource implications

- 16.
- i. The external funding offered is currently profiled as £246,820. This is made up as follows:-
- £93,693 –towards 2 part time staff (4 days each pw) 1 member of staff to share between Worcestershire & Herefordshire and another to share between Telford & Wrekin & Shropshire over two years;
  - £149,077 – towards setting up pilot veterans hubs or bespoke hub within the four counties; Each county will be responsible for setting up their own hub solution and will be adhering to their respective contract procedure rules which Herefordshire Council as the accountable body will be overseeing to ensure that it is compliant with the terms and conditions of the grant offer. The hub costs will generally be towards rental of premises, equipment and furniture and some staff costs to oversee the running of the facility.
  - £4,050 – specifically for Telford & Wrekin for 3 staff to undertake Digital Development training.
17. The grant funding will not continue beyond 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. During the life of the project, the respective partnerships will be able to assess whether there is any merit to continue either collectively or individually beyond that date and also what funding would be required.
18. It should be understood that the support to the partnerships already exists by staff employed within the council and that this funding will enhance that support. There will be HR implications by the council employing the member of staff on behalf of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Shropshire Council is proposing to employ the member of staff that is to be shared between themselves and Telford & Wrekin. Both posts come with funding to pay for any IT equipment and travel costs with any redundancy implications being taken into consideration. Currently in Herefordshire two members of staff spend a minimum of 25-35% of their time working on supporting the armed forces covenant work so this new member of staff will reduce that level of commitment that is currently being placed.

## Legal implications

19. The council's general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011 enables it to provide support services to armed forces veterans and to act as the accountable body for a grant to this effect which will benefit four local authority areas. The provision of these services is also compatible with the council's public health and social care functions, particularly in view of the fact that a number of veterans may access physical and mental health support services. The Report identifies that the council, as accountable body, will be responsible for ensuring there is adherence to the grant terms set by central government. In order to manage this risk, the council will enter into legally binding grant funding agreements with each of the other local authority partners identified in the Report.

## Risk management

20. The project will have some risk associated with its delivery but these have been outlined below with the associated mitigation. All risks would be managed initially at service level, however, as this project is about increasing the awareness of local authority delivery of the covenant then it is a council responsibility to ensure that this project is successful. Any issues would therefore be escalated accordingly.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
By not accepting the grant offer Herefordshire Council will be at risk of some reputational damage as it is on behalf of 3 other authorities which would mean that they would also lose the opportunity of the funding.	If Herefordshire Council felt that it was unable to take forward the offer of the grant then we would have to investigate the opportunity to novate the offer to another council within the cluster.
Partners fail to support the delivery of the project.	Partnership agreements will be entered into to ensure that partners know and agree to their responsibilities.
The project costs more than the profiled funding package.	Herefordshire Council will oversee the budgets for the scheme and will ensure that all partners work within that budget. All partners have committed to underwrite any unforeseen overspends on their part of the project and this commitment is contained within the partnership agreement. No funding will be released without evidence of spend in any case but only to the maximum grant within their budget..
That there is an expectation that this level of service will continue beyond the grant lifetime.	Partners will explore alternative sources of funding during the life of the project if evidence of need suggests that the service is still required.

## Consultees

21. The Civilian Military Task Group in Herefordshire is an armed forces specific group developed to deliver the armed forces covenant within Herefordshire. This group was consulted on the merit of submitting a bid for Herefordshire. This group is made up of councillors (identified Armed Forces Champions), representatives of the armed services, reserves, armed forces charities, service providers and the voluntary sector.
22. The partners in this project also undertook the same approach of consulting with their armed forces partnerships in regard to the scope and approach for their respective areas.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Offer letter

Appendix B – draft Partnership Agreement

## **Background papers**

None