

REPORT TO: Environment & Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 25th June 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Leader

SUBJECT: Armed Forces & Veteran Support

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update the Policy and Performance Board on the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces and Veteran support.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) the report be noted;

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Policy and Performance Boards received a report on the Armed Forces Covenant in Autumn 2013 outlining Halton's position in meeting the pledges to support the Armed Forces and Veteran community.

4.0 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

4.1 It is very difficult to identify accurate data for both the armed forces and veteran community in Halton. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) works with the Office of National Statistics and provides a quarterly release of statistical data, the data details forces personnel by stationed location local authority area.

4.1.1 On a national level, in January 2014 the data detailed 224,000 total UK personnel, 160,650 of which are military and 63,350 civilian posts. In the Northwest the total is 3,490, 1,740 of which are military posts and 1,750 are civilian.

4.1.2 The breakdown by Local Authority area presents a dash for Halton, a dash is applied to represent zero or a number so small it is rounded to a zero. A query was raised with Defence Statistics whom advised there is no further information available for Halton regarding forces personnel. This data doesn't provide any indication of numbers

recruited to the forces from Halton, merely where those in service are stationed hence, the dash against Halton is unsurprising.

4.1.3 The census collects data on “residents classed as working in the armed forces”. In 2001 Halton had 171 residents, in the 2011 census the figure increased to 189, this is the only robust data available currently.

4.1.4 The Army is continuing its programme of remodelling, the next phase will be tranche four. The statistics for the forthcoming redundancies are circa 1400 personnel in this tranche. Personnel will leave either December 2014 or June 2015. If we recruit 15% of the army from the North West and presuppose a similar number will return, this may equate to 200 personnel returning to the North West region.

4.1.5 Figures related to those currently in their resettlement period are as detailed:- (this does not include those who may leave under Tranche 4 redundancy above)

- Current Army Service Leavers over next 12 months, April 2014 to April 2015 is estimated around 8000.
- Those undecided as to where they will resettle to is approximately 3,700. It is assumed that between 15% of these will return to the North West as around 15% of personnel of this cohort to the army are recruited from the North West. That will equate to 555 service leavers.
- Undeclared resettlement area but either working in the North West or they have a home address in the North West is 117.
- April 2014/15 Declared Resettling to the North West is 388:
 - 46 Returning to the North West (but not stated a specific area)
 - Cheshire - 65
 - Cumbria 24
 - Greater Manchester – 76
 - Isle of Man - 1
 - Merseyside – 52
 - Lancashire – 124

If these figures are correct, then around 13.6% of Service Leavers will be returning to the North West.

4.2 Capturing accurate data for veterans is equally challenging, there is no single data set and variations in membership numbers to veteran support organisations. Added to that, Veterans may join more than one support organisation hence, total membership numbers may contain duplicate figures.

4.2.1 Data from the MOD for those in receipt of Armed Forces Pension and Compensation is available, the most recent is from 2011/12 which detailed total Halton numbers of 465, 310 from WA7 postcode, (Runcorn) and 155 from WA8 (Widnes). The MOD is working with Office for National Statistics and has included a veteran indicator flag on a household survey which is underway in 2014. It is intended the results will enable local estimates of the veteran population which is expected to be published in summer 2015.

5.0 **ARMED FORCES COVENANT**

5.1 Halton is part of a pan Cheshire Covenant covering the Local Authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Cheshire, Warrington and Halton. In addition to local authorities, health, probation, Chambers of Commerce and job centre plus are involved in supporting the covenant.

5.2 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between the civilian community and its local armed forces community. It aims to provide awareness of the role of the armed forces, the sacrifices that in service and ex service personnel and their families make, encourage activities that integrate armed forces and local communities together and continue to foster civic pride in our armed forces.

5.3 The Armed Forces Community Covenant sets out pledges, twenty in total around five key themes:-

- Housing
- Employment & Benefit
- Education
- Health
- Wellbeing

The intention of the pledges is not to provide advantage for the armed forces community, it is to ensure any disadvantages are removed.

The Cheshire Armed Forces Champion Network has agreed each partner agrees a lead role on behalf of the Cheshire authorities. Halton has a lead role for Housing, Warrington for Health & Wellbeing, Cheshire West & Chester for Education, Job Centre Plus for Employment & Benefits and an additional theme of Veteran Support led by Cheshire East & Warrington Clinical Commissioning Group is included in the Cheshire partnership.

5.3.1 **Housing**

There is evidence that securing accommodation can be difficult, in particular for those leaving the forces. The pledges request priority is given to armed forces personnel with high priority for veterans injured

or disabled or their spouse and dependants for widow (ers). Halton's Housing Policy awards priority for those leaving the forces. Halton's Housing Solution team provide targeted housing advice for armed forces and veterans with a dedicated weekly housing advice surgery available. During the last financial year the housing solution team has provided advice and housing assistance for 9 armed forces personnel who were either due to be discharged or had left the armed forces. The designated officer works closely with the advocacy groups and will continue to support and offer guidance to the armed forces to ensure that the relevant housing issues are fully addressed and resolved.

5.3.2 **Employment & Benefits**

These pledges identify it can be difficult for service leavers to secure employment and for those with spouses in service, it can be difficult to seek employment as they often have sole responsibility for childcare. Organisations and services that provide employment and benefit support need to identify service leavers and veterans and ensure additional support is offered.

From April 2014 Jobcentre Plus have introduced an Armed Forces Marker to the Jobcentre Plus IT system, this is a national initiative. The system will log:-

- HM Forces Service Leaver – Those who have served for more than 4 years in HM Armed Forces, whether as a Regular or as a Reservist. Also known as a veteran. This covers anyone who has ever been in the Armed Forces, regardless of how long ago that may have been, except for the Early Service Leavers (see below).
- Early Service Leaver – those who have served more than one day but less than 4 years.
- Spouse/Partner-HMF person – the spouse or partner of a currently serving member of the Armed Forces, or the spouse/partner of a Service Leaver.
- Reservist – Volunteer and Regular Reservists, who form the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marine Reserve, the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, the Royal Fleet Reserve, Army Reserve and Royal Air Force Reserve.
- Prefer not to say – this should be used where claimants do not wish to answer the question, or have it recorded on our systems.
- Not applicable – this should be used for anyone who does not fit into one of the above categories.

The Council is in dialogue with the North West Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champion to establish how the data capture will be shared made available to appropriate organisations.

5.3.3 Education

Accessing education provision for service families can be outside of routine school admission timetables, sometimes this is linked to whole regiments moving about or could be individual families. Policies should ensure service families are not disadvantaged in accessing schools of their choice by being resident elsewhere. Halton's position is no applications for school admissions have been received in the current academic year or for admission in September 2014.

5.3.4 Health

Access and engaging in health support services for veterans is a priority. There are five pledges which set out; access to services will be made easier for armed forces and their families to support good physical health, positive mental health and wellbeing. Health records should indicate if a patient is a current or former service member, places on waiting lists for clinical procedures should be maintained where relocation occurs and the provision of prosthetic limbs will match the standard provided by the Defence Medical Services.

Halton's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) actively supports the armed forces and veteran's agenda. The CCG commissioned a Veterans Health Needs Assessment in recent months to better understand the local veteran community and their needs. The report is attached (appendix one), it provides a number of recommendations for Halton's agencies to better promote targeted services for veteran support and strengthen links and engagement with veteran support organisations; understanding their offer and specialisms and further developing collaborative approaches that supports the offer to veterans.

Mental Health services is a key area of focus for veteran support. Strategically, Bury CCG have responsibility for the commissioning of physiological therapies for veterans, referred to as the Military Veterans IAPT service. Halton is represented by the CCG on the Armed Forces Network hosted by Bury to design, commission and monitor these services.

Halton's generic Mental Health services provide veteran support. The Like Minds campaign which hi-lighted experiences of local residents facing mental health difficulties featured a local gentleman who was ex-forces. The service has been directly supporting Runcorn Veterans Association (RVA) whose volunteers have benefited from training in mental health awareness to support effective sign-posting

and suicide prevention. Currently, they are jointly developing a training package for health professionals called “In the mind of a soldier” which covers awareness raising of issues for a returning soldier. The “Living Life Well” website supported by Mental Health Services provides information and support for veterans, for information the link is <http://www.live-lifewell.net/exarmedforces/>

5.4 **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing cuts across the other four themes however the pledges here are about supporting access to services in communities and support for those who become involved in the criminal justice system. Areas are urged to consider discounts to leisure facilities and other services if possible for the armed forces community. These pledges reinforce the need for partners to work together to ensure signposting and referrals arrangements with appropriate priorities are in place.

Some focus is required to understand the numbers of ex-forces involved in the criminal justice system in Halton either in custody, in the Court system or with probation.

Live At Ease has been receiving referrals from the Custody Suite in the last six months. The Live at Ease contract expired in March 2014, a redesigned service has been re-commissioned by NHS England with the Through The Gates fund for Cheshire, Lancashire & Greater Merseyside. The service will extend to Halton clients for those entering the Custody Suites and released from Prisons who resettle back to the area, it is hoped the service will commence in May 2014.

5.5 **Cheshire Community Covenant Partnership**

The partnership consists of the Armed Forces Champions from the four authorities, the Lieutenant Colonel of 75 Engineer Regiment, Cheshire Probation Service and Job Centre Plus. The group is required to undertake annual reviews of the covenant, the next review is due in October 2014.

There is a national pot of money to support initiatives endorsed through the Community Covenant Partnership. A pot of £30 million was initially allocated with £10 million being available in 2013/14. There is an application process and criteria to be met which supports integration between the armed forces/ex-forces and wider community. Applications have to be supported by the relevant local authority endorsed by the Covenant Partnership before progressing to the Ministry of Defence for the second stage of decision making. Projects that have been successful vary from small scale community based projects to replacing a scout hut with a community building, the underpinning theme is integration between the forces and civilian communities. The Cheshire partnership has had one successful bid in Cheshire East which was awarded £44,000.

5.6 **Corporate Covenants**

The corporate covenant has been designed to complement the armed forces covenant and sit alongside the community covenant. The armed forces covenant sets out the moral obligation of society towards members of the armed forces community and the community covenant provides a mechanism for local authorities and communities to express support for members of the armed forces community. The corporate covenant is designed to allow businesses and charitable organisations to express their support, and commit to ways in which they can provide that support.

Corporate covenants include a core statement of commitment that those adopting the scheme sign up to. This covers the two key principles of the armed forces covenant, which are:

- no member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen.
- in some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate, especially for the injured or bereaved

Each organisation is also encouraged to offer support in a way most appropriate to their situation and capacity, the pledge document includes a 'menu' of options for them to sign up to. This menu covers employment support for veterans, reservists, service spouses and partners, as well as support for cadet units, Armed Forces Day and discounts for the armed forces community. There is also an opportunity for companies and charitable organisations to add their own commitments based on local circumstances. Local Authorities are encouraged to collaborate with their local Chamber of Commerce to promote the Corporate Covenant. Cheshire West & Chester recently held an event for employers in their business district to promote this supported by the Cheshire Covenant Partnership. It is hoped further events will be held in the other Cheshire authority areas.

5.7 **Armed Forces Directory**

There are a number of support organisations that exist to support veterans, some have a presence established in Halton and others deliver services in the area. A web based directory was developed by the NHS and launched in December 2012. However, the major structural changes in NHS provision left this project a drift. The Veterans Council have recently been commissioned to update and manage the directory to provide a comprehensive list of organisations and what support they can offer. Halton's organisations and services will be encouraged to register their details on the directory.

6.0 VETERAN'S SUPPORT

- 6.1 The Council actively engages with local Veteran Support groups recognising their valued role in supporting veterans and their families and organising commemorative events. Runcorn Veterans Association has a high profile in the Borough; they are actively supported linking with many Council and Health services to ensure appropriate sign posting in accessing services for Veterans and their families, they have quarterly liaison meetings with the Armed Forces Champion. The Council has established links with the British Legion, Sanctuary for Veterans and is a key partner in the Todger Jones Memorial group. An e-network for veteran organisations is established with regular communication to share information in place.
- 6.2 The Council's Area Forum for Grange, Heath, Mersey & Halton Brook hosted a themed event on Armed Forces in September 2013. The event was supported by local veterans groups, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Combat Stress and 75 Engineer Regiment. It provided an opportunity for local groups to showcase their services and support on offer for local veterans.

7.0 WWI COMMEMORATIONS

- 7.1 The 4th August 2014 will mark 100 years since the start of the First World War. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has announced plans to build a commemoration fitting of this significant milestone in world history, working alongside partners including Imperial War Museums (IWM's), Heritage Lottery Fund and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The focus for events is one of commemoration and remembrance rather than celebratory and is intended to cover the four year period of the war.
- 7.2 The Government has contributed over £50 million of funding to support commemoration activities. The plans announced so far include a national series of commemorative events, starting on 4 August 2014 with:
- A service for Commonwealth leaders at Glasgow Cathedral
 - An event at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, St Symphorien Military Cemetery in Mons, Belgium;
 - A candlelit vigil at Westminster Abbey.
 - Commemorative paving stones to be laid in communities where Victoria Cross recipients of the First World War were born. The first paving stone will be laid on 23 August 2014 marking the exact date that the first Victoria Crosses were won.
 - A £5.3 million educational programme providing the opportunity for 2 students and a teacher from every state school in the country to visit First World War battlefields and undertake research on people local to their school who fought in the war.

- A Christmas Day 'Truce' football match on the battlefields of Flanders to commemorate the anniversary of British and German soldiers ceasing fighting to play football in no man's land.
- 2,500 local war memorials to be given the opportunity to win listed building status, reflecting their historical special interest, and Liverpool War Memorial to be upgraded to a Grade I listed building.
- £34 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, including a new £6 million community project fund to enable young people working in their communities to conserve, explore and share local heritage of the First World War.

7.3 Local Events

7.3.1 A number of local authorities are taking the lead locally and engaging residents to establish a programme of commemoration events over a four year period. Many local authorities are developing commemoration programmes and are involving residents in planning local commemorations that bring communities together to commemorate the local impact of the First World War. Examples include:-

- Involving the community in local exhibitions
- The restoration of war memorials and an online Roll of Honour
- Exhibitions across local Museums showing the impact of the war locally
- Events based around war poetry, art and music in libraries
- Online resources that enable people to learn about the lives of local men, women and children who were affected by the First World War in different ways and information about local regiments and battalions
- Working with communities to plan activities and events to commemorate those who were affected by the First World War in their own towns and villages
- Work with the media – reproduction of archive news reports relating to key local items from each week of the war over the period of The Great War and coverage of local commemorative events over the period.
- An interactive blog to share memories from families affected by The Great War – this could be through combat or the wider impact of living at this time.
- Memorial parade involving members of the Armed Forces, local cadets and veterans.
- Church Services.
- The laying of ceremonial paving slabs to commemorate residents awarded the VC (Halton will be provided with two commemorative paving slabs to commemorate its VC residents).
- Schools competition/research of the local impact of the First World War.

- Lights Out Initiative on 4th August 2014.

7.3.2 There are a number of funding sources available to support local commemorations, in particular, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is offering grants from £3,000 to £100,000 upwards, and Councils are able to join the IWM's First World War Centenary Partnership to access a range of digital resources. The HLF are awarding for community projects that focus on the First World War with a focus on any heritage related to the First World War and are encouraging new perspectives and stories not previously told.

The Government has also announced a scheme to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I and give thousands of schoolchildren the opportunity to visit the Great War battlefields. Pupils and teachers from every maintained secondary school in England will have the chance to go on a tour of the great battlefields and take part in remembrance ceremonies on the western front.

7.4 **Regional Event**

7.4.1 Liverpool City Council in consultation with local regiments are planning a First World War Commemoration Event to place in Liverpool 12th/14th September 2014. The event is themed around an educational schools day, display day and a day of commemoration via church services and parades.

7.4.2 Liverpool has announced the "Giants" will be returning to the city between the 23rd and 27th July 2014 with a commemorative WW1 theme. The event is being hailed as the flagship event to commence the commemorations.

7.5 **Halton Events**

7.5.1 The Council has been liaising with local organisations to develop a programme of events over the four year period to 2018. There are a wide variety of events scheduled and tailored services for the WW1 theme such as:-

- Libraries Service – launched in February an initiative gathering local history and stories of WW1 experiences. The service is working with the Imperial War Museum, Salford whom will be providing mobile digital kiosks on Halton two Victoria Cross residents. There will be themed Children's Book Week, a WW1 Tea Dance at Kingsway Learning Centre and exhibitions at the Libraries and the Brindley
- Todger Jones Statue – the Appeal Committee will unveil the statue for Todger Jones on 3rd August 2014. Todger Jones received a Victoria Cross in 1916, the statue will be sited at the communal garden opposite the Cenotaph in Runcorn.
- Railway Station Event – Runcorn East, 10th September 2014. This

event will be a musical performance titled “Over by Christmas” to reflect the spirit of the British nation as soldiers departed by rail to the frontline in autumn 2014.

- Widnes Market will be hosting Widnes On Sea 23rd to 26th July 2014, it focuses on the weeks before war is declared and the sunny town of Widnes is aware that something is happening, but not quite sure what. There will be themed rides and activities to a typical Edwardian entertaining day at the market. There will be strong men, escapologists, policeman and a recruiting sergeant set up in the market to entertain shoppers.
- The actors and performers will re-enact scenes from yesteryear to show visitors what the times were like just before the outbreak of World War 1, to compliment the entertainment, this year, all the funfair rides will be hand turned, no electrical supply, as they would have been in the day. Swing boats, chair-o-planes and more will keep the little ones amused. Widnes On Sea Donkeys will be back and to top it all, all the entertainment and rides are free! All parents or carers need to do is make purchases within the market to collect vouchers for the rides, all the other entertainment is free for all to watch and enjoy. In addition, following the Widnes On Sea event, during the commemoration week of 4th August the Library Service will be providing exhibits of the time and there will be a stall showing how sled dogs were used during the 1st World War.
- Open Spaces are undertaking an audit of memorials in the Borough to identify any in need or refurbishment
- Poppy planting in parts of the Borough over the four year period
- Two commemorative paving stones to be received in the Borough for the two Victoria Cross residents from WW1, Todger Jones, Runcorn, 1916 and Thomas Mottershead, Widnes, 1917.
- School meals from the WW1 era
- Remembrance Sunday & Civic Services
- Themed Vintage Rally

A co-ordinated programme is being developed and will be shared in the coming months.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

8.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Ensuring the school admissions process allocates the appropriate priority for serving families and additional support for special needs children in armed forces families is provided in a reasonable timescale.

8.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Approximately 5000 early service leavers depart the forces each year with 61% being employed at six months following discharge. Over a third of service leavers are unemployed and require additional support when entering the job market.

8.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Priority for the health & wellbeing of armed forces and veterans is present in health services in Halton. Traditionally, access to mental health support has been low across the forces however a bespoke service “Live At Ease” has been commissioned to provide additional services to clients and is available to Halton residents.

8.4 **A Safer Halton**

Some service leavers and veterans find it difficult to adjust to civilian life and become involved in the criminal justice system. Additional support from custody staff and the probation service are pledges identified in the Community Covenant.

8.5 **Halton’s Urban Renewal**

None identified.

9.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

9.1 The covenant is a voluntary statement of pledges to support armed forces personnel, veterans & their families at this stage however, there are indications this will become a statutory requirement in the near future. As the makeup of the armed forces changes from heavy reliance on full-time serving officers to reservists there will be greater impact on regular communities and proactively considering their needs and priorities will enable us to plan effectively.

10.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

10.1 It is incumbent on the authority to ensure Armed Forces Families and Veterans are not disadvantaged and appropriate priorities are awarded in accessing services.

11.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.