

**REPORT TO:** Environment and Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

**DATE:** 25 November 2015

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Community & Resources

**PORTFOLIO:** Leader

**SUBJECT:** Annual Update on Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces & Veteran Support

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To provide an annual update to the Policy and Performance Board on the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces & Veteran support.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The Policy and Performance Board received a report on the Armed Forces Covenant in Spring 2014 outlining the Council's position in meeting the pledges to support the Armed Forces and Veteran community set out in the Armed Forces Community Covenant. This report provides a further annual update.

## **4.0 ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY**

4.1 The Royal British Legion commissioned a significant piece of research in 2014 to identify the size, profile and needs of the ex-service community and was to provide forecasts on the future profile. A similar piece of work was published in 2005 which led to a strategic review of services and an opportunity for services to be tailored to meet the needs of the ex-service community.

4.2 The research was carried out by Compass Partnership and gathered a wealth of data and desktop research into the hidden population living in communal establishments and conducting face-to-face interviews; 20,700 adults were screened and a final survey sample of 2,121 members of the ex-service community participated. The project was funded by The Royal British Legion and Forces in Mind Trust. The key findings were:-

4.2.1 The estimate of ex-service community living in the UK was between 6.1 and 6.2 million. Of that, 2.8 million are veterans, 2.1 million were dependant

adults (including spouses and widows) and 1 million were dependent children. The remaining amount represents the hidden community living in communal establishments such as care homes and prisons. These figures show a significant reduction since the last report. The estimate in 2005 of 10.5 million.

- 4.2.2 The report estimated that the ex-service community will continue to shrink, predicting it to be 5.45 million in 2020, 4.7 million in 2025 and 3.94 million by 2030.
- 4.2.3 The report identifies the size of the serving community (at the date of publishing) is estimated to be 469,773 made up of 198,810 service personnel including reservists, 101,393 dependant adults and 169,570 dependent children. Around 11% of service personnel are stationed overseas.
- 4.2.4 The total of the armed forces community living in the UK in 2014 is estimated to be between 6.5 & 6.7 million.
- 4.2.5 46% of the ex-service community are now aged 75+, in 2005 it was 28% and the average size of the 75+ cohort in the general population is 10%.
- 4.2.6 The report identified the problems faced by the increasingly elderly ex-service population are similar to those faced by the UK's elderly as a whole; isolation, physical health problems and difficulties with mobility and care.
- 4.2.7 35 to 44 year old ex-service personnel report difficulties with fuel poverty, long term illness, employment problems and depression. The middle age cohort appears particularly vulnerable to a range of problems. Two out of every ten have arrears, problems with depression, isolation and relationship issues. As a comparator this age group of ex-service personnel are more likely to report a range of long term health problems compared with adults of the same age in the general population.
- 4.2.8 The younger veteran cohort, age 16-34 represents 6% of the ex-service community. They are more likely to have a caring responsibility than the UK general population of the same age. Finance and employment are significant problems for this group with one in twenty having taken out a payday loan and over half of working age veterans stating they make little or no use of their skills and experience in their current job. In the age group 16-44 year olds, one in four reports difficulty with employment; fear of unemployment or being forced to take a job for which they are underpaid and over qualified. One in ten reports difficulty integrating into society.
- 4.2.9 The report tackles some myths around veterans. It details media attention portraying veterans are more likely to take their own lives however, research by the Manchester University found that suicide was less common amongst veterans than with the general population except for young early service leavers. Overall, rates of (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) PTSD are around 4% although some groups are higher risk. Heavy drinking is

identified for serving personnel and recent service leavers. The ex-service population in prisons is estimated to be between 3.5% and 7%, a similar picture to the percentage of veterans in the UK population as a whole. Veterans sleeping rough in London is detailed in the report, previous statistics in the 1990's suggested 20% of rough sleepers were ex-service. A 2008 study identified 6% and a recent estimate in 2013/14 identified 127 ex-service rough sleepers which represents 3%.

The full report has further detail on the summary points above and can be accessed via the link:-

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/2275/2014householdsurveyreport.pdf>

#### **4.3 HALTON'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY**

It remains a challenge to robustly identify accurate data about Halton's armed forces community. The last annual report presented the overall statistics for the armed forces and gave indicative figures from the 2011 census "residents classed as working in the armed forces" being 189 in Halton and the Veteran's Pension & Compensation Service identified 465 from WA7 & WA8 postcodes in 2011/12 giving a total indicative figure of 654. Further data on those in receipt of pension and compensation has been released which identifies 765 from Halton (425 from WA7 and 335 from WA8). This gives a combined figure of 954 (along with the census date), an increase of 300 from the previous figures. There will be veterans that may not be in receipt of either pension or compensation hence, the challenge in accurately providing data. Added to this, the armed forces community can include spouse and dependants.

#### **5.0 ARMED FORCES COVENANT**

5.1 Halton is part of a pan Cheshire Covenant covering the Local Authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Warrington and Halton. In addition to local authorities, Health, Probation, Chambers of Commerce and Job Centre Plus/DWP 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 twenty pledges, 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; but to ensure any disadvantages are removed.

Within the Cheshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership each partner has a lead role on a thematic area. Halton has a lead role for Housing, Warrington for Health & Wellbeing, Cheshire West & Chester for Education, Job Centre Plus/DWP 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 in Halton**

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. The Housing Solutions team has provided support and advice for six ex-forces clients who presented as homeless during 2014/15 and assisted in securing housing accommodation for four.

Halton Housing Trust manage the housing waiting list which allows clients to apply direct and secure social housing. The allocations policy identifies the priority status of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces personnel. All Armed Forces and Reserve Forces personnel or members of their household that meet the allocations criteria are placed in high priority band A, are granted additional preference and have their effective date enhanced by three months. During 2014/15 four veterans registered direct on the housing waiting list and three were permanently accommodated.

#### **5.3.2 Employment & Benefits in Halton**

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 to ensure that additional support is offered.

In April 2014 Jobcentre Plus introduced an Armed Forces Marker to the Jobcentre Plus IT system, this is a national initiative. The system logs:-

- 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 Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champion and has requested the data capture for Halton.

### **5.3.3 Education in Halton**

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. No applications were received for school admissions in Halton in September 2015, similarly to the previous year.

### **5.3.4 Health in Halton**

Access and engaging in health support services for veterans is a priority. There are five pledges which set out that 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 Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) actively supports the armed forces and veteran's agenda. Following a review, which considered the key results of the national pilot veterans' programme, the national Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) specification along with feedback from consultations with CCG's and other stakeholders in the North West of England, all Cheshire and Merseyside CCGs have

collaboratively commissioned a community based Military Veterans Specialist Mental Health Service. Over a period of three months, Halton CCG supported the lead commissioning body, Bury CCG in the mobilisation of the service which is now provided by Greater Manchester West (GMW) Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust. Mobilisation has now been completed and the service commenced in its new form on 1 July 2015.

The primary aim of the Military Veteran service is to improve the mental health and well-being of veterans. The secondary aim is to achieve this through the development of sustainable, accessible and effective services that meet the needs of veterans with mental health and wellbeing difficulties who live in the North West. The service will be one part of the care pathway for military veterans and adopts a stepped care approach to ensure veteran's needs are addressed by the most appropriate agency. Moving forward GMW will be reviewing local venues across Cheshire and Merseyside and work has already taken place to identify locations that ensure patient choice and accessibility as per the service specification.

Halton CCG is also a member of the Northwest Armed Forces Network whose purpose is to enable dialogue across organisations in order to provide better health care for the Armed Forces Community including families, veterans and reservists. It advises Commissioners on the implications of legislation affecting the Armed Forces Community and the effect of clinical advances e.g. in prosthetics or improved treatments for mental health problems. The Armed Forces Network has bi-monthly meetings and also holds a bi-annual stakeholder meeting to engage with the third sector and other relevant bodies.

All mental health services commissioned by Halton CCG are accessible by armed forces and their families. They all have a requirement to fast track vulnerable groups when they are identified to ensure that they receive the care they need as soon as possible. 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/>. Local veteran support and information & advice organisations have benefited from mental health awareness training and networking with mental health service providers. This supports effective sign posting, suicide prevention and effective referral pathways and links into the appropriate services.

The data set available from GP practices in Halton has seven reader codes to record patients who are:-

1. Military Veteran
2. History Relating to Military Service
3. History Relating to Armed Services
4. History Relating to Royal Navy Services
5. History Relating to Royal Airforce Services
6. Served in the Armed Forces

## 7. Member of the Armed Forces

As at August 2015, the total number of patients registered across the reader codes in Halton's seventeen GP practices is 220.

### 5.3.5 Wellbeing in Halton

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 in place.

Live At Ease receives referrals from Cheshire Custody Suite and for those released from prison re-settling back into the area to provide support to individuals.

A future area of focus is to gather a data capture from drug and alcohol services and partners in criminal justice organisations such as probation and courts to provide data on the size of the cohort involved in these services whom are ex-service personnel.

## 5.4 Cheshire Community Covenant Partnership

- 5.4.1 The partnership consists of the Armed Forces Champions from the four authorities, representatives from Health, Job Centre Plus/DWP, 75<sup>th</sup> Engineers & 42<sup>nd</sup> regiments. The group meets quarterly and invites other organisations and service charities for input as appropriate. The partnership rotates Chair and Secretariat, Halton had this role between July 2014 and July 2015. Annually the partnership is required to undertake a review; Halton hosted this on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014, the review event commenced with the Mercian regiment conducting a Freedom of the Borough parade. Halton residents lined the streets, dignitaries from across Cheshire were in attendance and the event was covered by national media.
- 5.4.2 Following the parade, presentations were received from the partner organisations on the key deliverables of the partnership and case study examples from across the Cheshire area.
- 5.4.3 The partnership identified it would be prudent to conduct a health check to reflect on progress and identify future priorities and key areas of focus. Halton's Community Development and Customer Intelligence Teams have supported this work. The Health Check will be completed by the end of the calendar year; the process will be completed online and Halton will provide a summary report which will inform planning future SMART objectives in the short, medium and long-term.

## 5.5 ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUNDS

5.5.1 A national grants scheme has been in place since 2012. In 2015 the arrangements for this fund have been reviewed and revised. New guidance was issued in August 2015 setting out the new framework for the fund.

The national pot is £10million and there are now two routes of applications; small grants up to £20,000 or large grants between £20,001 to £500,000. There are three key priorities for the fund:-

1. Community integration
2. The co-ordination and delivery of support to the Armed Forces community
3. Former service personnel in the criminal justice system

Statutory bodies, registered charities or armed forces units are eligible to apply.

Under small grants, the guidance advises they can consider up to a year's funding for most things however, it won't fund:-

- Topping up existing grants and aids from another Government Department
- Where money only benefits one person
- Repeat or regular projects that require a source of uncommitted funding
- Investments
- Paying for ongoing costs of existing partnership activity
- Organisational fundraising activities
- Endowments (to provide a source of income)
- Projects, activities or services that the state has a legal obligation to provide
- Retrospective funding for projects that have already taken place
- Excessive contingency costs; management or professional fees

The deadline for the first round of small grants was mid-September. The Council is aware that one bid from Halton has been submitted. The decision on the bid will be known on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The second round deadline is 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015. No further dates for future rounds are published as yet.

5.5.2 The large grants process requires an expression of interest to be submitted. The process is two stages. In stage one applicants need to demonstrate:-

- how well the project addresses one of the three priorities
- how it will meet the specific requirements of that priority
- engagement, partnership working and collaboration
- how well targeted the project is



At stage two - the full application - the main assessment criteria are:

- how well the project is likely to be delivered
- to what extent the project represents value for money
- to what extent we can have confidence that the project will have lasting impact, delivering changes that last beyond the funding period

The first deadline was 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015. If invited to stage two applicants will receive notification by 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015. With second stage submission due by 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and decisions notified 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016. The Council isn't aware of any bids submitted from Halton. No further dates for future rounds are published as yet.

## **6.0 ARMED FORCES DIRECTORY**

The last annual report to PPB detailed progress on the Armed Forces Directory being hosted and developed by the Veterans Council funded by a LIBOR grant. This piece of work involved updating and managing the directory to provide a comprehensive list of organisations and the support they can offer to enable effective self-referrals and signposting. The Veteran's Council was also developing a set of professional standards for non-regulated organisations. This piece of work was intended to have both a regional and national benefit.

The Veteran's Council has ceased to operate, this occurred at very short notice in July 2015. Enquiries have been raised from Cheshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership regarding the circumstances and the future of the Armed Forces Directory.

The development of the directory has been very welcome across the sector, in particular, the work on professional standards. The directory was intended to provide a reliable and robust information service ensuring individuals self-referring and colleagues sign-posting could be assured organisations were credible. It will be detrimental to the armed forces and veteran support sector in this region if the development of the directory and professional standards is discontinued. On a national level, COBSEO (Confederation of Service Charities) has a directory of service charities and is working with the National Council for Voluntary Services (NCVO) to develop accreditation for service charities; how this piece of work evolves may address gaps in the future.

## **7.0 VETERAN'S SUPPORT**

- 7.1 Lord Ashcroft published a report in February 2014 "The Veterans Transition Review" which has recently been reviewed. Lord Ashcroft is the government's special representative on veteran's transition. The original report examined the transition journey of veterans considering the areas of training, employment, health, housing, welfare and finance. The report made recommendations on how to better support transition with key recommendations:-

- Ministry Of Defence and the armed forces should be more proactive in changing perceptions of service leavers
- A new work placement scheme should be created in partnership with industry
- Early service leavers should get the same transition support as longer serving personnel
- A new veterans' card should be given to all service leavers with the number and web address of a single 24/7 contact centre for forces charities
- All personnel should complete an online personal development plan
- A Directory of Armed Forces Charities should be created, including organisations which meet quality criteria

The review statement advises of collaborative work and hi-lights areas that still require significant focus:-

- Information - an abundance of information is available to Service leavers, too much of it is hard to find, poorly presented, confusing and even misleading and it is hard for those who need help to find it quickly. The statement encourages further collaborative work to streamline information for ease of access across the sector.
- Equal access and timely support during transition out of the armed forces in particular through the Career Transition Partnership support with individual service leavers. The statement acknowledges there is progress to date.
- Veterans Research – a project is has commenced, jointly funded by Lord Ashcroft and the Forces in Mind Trust hosted by Anglia Ruskin University. Lord Ashcroft states, “an important part of the solution to the information problem is for policy makers, the media and others to have a single, reliable source of the best available research concerning veterans and Service leavers. In particular, research on Early Service Leavers would be useful. It’s acknowledged this group is the most vulnerable of all Service leavers more likely to experience financial problems, be unemployed, homeless, or involved in substance abuse”.
  - Joint working within the third sector
  - Tackling public misconceptions of service life

The full initial report and review document can be viewed via the following links:-

<http://www.veteranstransition.co.uk/vtrreport.pdf>

<http://www.lordashcroft.com/2015/07/veterans-transition-review-follow-up-report-july-2015/>

7.2 Armed Forces and Veterans Charities are a significant section of the charity sector with 134 charities, regimental associations and benevolence organisations registered as members of the Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) (source Royal British Legion UK household survey of the ex-service community report 2014). In addition, many support

organisations exist which operate without registration to sector bodies.

The Council actively engages with service charities and local veteran support groups recognising their valued role in supporting veterans and their families. In December 2014, Halton BC hosted a Veteran's Networking Event, it was a showcasing event with organisations represented having an opportunity to present informing on their role and delivery in Halton. Organisations in attendance were:-

- British Legion
- SSAFA (Seaman, Soldiers, Airman & Families Association)
- Remploy
- Runcorn Veterans Association
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Job Centre Plus
- Halton Clinical Commissioning Group
- Halton Housing Solutions Team
- Halton Housing Trust
- Halton Borough Council Welfare Rights
- Veteran's Council

The session provided a valuable networking opportunity, contact information for signposting around the five theme's of the covenant were gathered and shared with delegates.

Following the event, British Legion and Veteran's Council commenced drop in surgeries in Community Centres. The Veteran's Council service has been withdrawn due to circumstances described in **6.0** however, the British Legion continue to offer monthly surgeries.

7.3 The Armed Forces Champion has regular liaison with local veteran support groups and appropriate services. A key role is supporting referral mechanisms and establishing pathways to ensure veterans in need of support are accessing the appropriate services in a timely manner.

7.4 The Council's Community Development and External Funding Teams continue to provide support to local veterans groups to work towards applying for charitable funds. Capacity building and governance are key aspects of this work.

## **8.0 WIDER HALTON ACTIVITY**

8.1 Since the last annual report, WW1 commemorations have commenced The 4<sup>th</sup> August 2014 marked the start of those commemorations and naturally much of the focus was around this period. Town centre events took place in both Runcorn and Widnes, the Lights Out initiative was promoted and Civic Buildings participated. The Todger Jones statue was unveiled on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014 and was a high profile civic event. The Chair of the Appeal Committee was selected for a High Sheriff award and also attended a reception at Downing Street having been nominated by Weaver Vale MP.

The Libraries service delivered a programme of activities including an on-going project gathering of local history and experiences of WW1, tea dance at Kingsway Learning Centre, exhibitions hosted at Library buildings and the Brindley Theatre and a joint project with Imperial War Museum North providing two digital kiosks on Halton's two WW1 Victoria Cross residents. Runcorn East hosted a musical performance which local primary schools attended titled "Over by Christmas" to reflect the spirit of the British nation as soldiers departed by rail to the frontline. Widnes Market hosted Widnes on Sea focussing on the weeks before the war was declared. Halton received a beacon to mark VE Day. The beacon was lit in the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 by Halton's Mayor and local veteran support organisations and residents attended the event.

## **9.0 MOVING FORWARD**

### **9.1 Corporate Covenants**

The corporate covenant has been designed to complement the armed forces covenant and sit alongside the community covenant. 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. The Chamber of Commerce, Business in the Community and Halton BC will be hosting a business event with military colleagues in December to raise awareness with the business sector of Corporate Covenants and supporting the role of Reservists.

### **9.2 Reservists**

Reservists are part of the armed forces community under the umbrella of the covenant arrangements. Employees who are reservists can be mobilised and return to regular places of work hence additional support may be required for individuals to support adjustment. As an employer, Halton BC doesn't currently capture details on reservists in the workforce. Every three years a workforce profile is completed, unfortunately the next one isn't due until 2018 however, details on being ex-forces and reservists will be included.

### **9.3 Mystery Shopping**

Colleagues from across Council departments will be conducting an exercise to assess advice and guidance at the point of use for armed forces matters in the coming months. The outcomes and any actions identified will be detailed in a future report.

## **10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **10.1 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.

### **10.2 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.

**10.3 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 an improved access to psychological therapy (IAPT) service has been commissioned (as described in item 5.3.4).

**A Safer Halton**

**10.4** 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.

**Halton's Urban Renewal**

**10.5** None to report at this stage.

**11.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

**11.1** 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.

**12.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

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

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

None under the meaning of the Act.