



Resident Experience Board
19 May 2016

Supporting the Armed Forces Community in Surrey

Purpose of the report:

To highlight the issues facing the armed forces community (including serving personnel and their families, reservists, cadets and veterans) in Surrey, and to provide an update on progress made on implementing actions under the Armed Forces Covenant to help ensure that the armed forces community is not disadvantaged by their service.

Introduction:

1. Surrey County Council (SCC), signed the Armed Forces Covenant on 13 March 2012. The Covenant seeks to ensure that all those who serve, or have served in the Armed Forces and their families are treated fairly.
2. To support the aims of the Covenant, the 'Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board' (SCMPB) was established at a strategic level with a high level remit to ensure that the military community (serving personnel and their families, reservists, cadets, veterans, service charities and welfare organisations) are given appropriate recognition and status within the county, and to maintain good relationships with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the military command structure within the county so that potential problems can be averted and issues resolved in an amicable and timely manner and at the right level. The SCMPB is chaired by Mrs Sally Marks, Chairman of SCC.
3. Two task groups have been created at a tactical level to support delivery of the work of the Board, the 'Recognise and Remember' and the 'Community Integration' task groups. These task groups report to the SCMPB.
4. The military in Surrey are fully engaged with the work of the SCMPB. At a countywide level this support is provided by 11 Infantry Brigade, and at a district and borough level the support is provided by one of four Commanding Officers from an operational army base covering Surrey (these are known as Task Force Commanders). Task Force Commanders provide a two way link between the military and the district/borough council through the Armed Forces Champion.

Issues Facing the Armed Forces Community

5. The SCMPB focuses its actions to ensure the military community can play a full part in the wider Surrey community. There are a number of issues which the Armed Forces Community may face in their lives as a result of their service. The SCMPB is working hard to address these issues to help ensure that all members of the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly and can actively participate as Surrey residents and easily access all the services required for families.
6. Some of the work of the Board has been recognised nationally as best practice. The Board has been active in engaging in cross border partnerships to share best practise widely. The SCMPB has also enabled a shared dialogue and understanding of the issues across all sectors.
7. Listed below are the key areas which can be an issue for the Armed Forces Community in Surrey. Underneath each issue there are examples of actions that have been taken by either SCC or one of the partners on the SCMPB to support the armed forces community. A fuller list of examples of success achieved by the SCMPB over the past year are set out in Annex 1.

- 7.1 **Education** - The MoD are aware of the difficulties around service children moving schools during the school year and try to ensure, where possible, these moves are not made during the school year. However, this is not always possible.

In Surrey:

- a) Excellent links have been made between 11 Infantry Brigade and SCC Schools Commissioning and Admissions Team to try and ensure that service children are not disadvantaged by their parents' service in terms of accessing school places. Surrey staff are aware of the Covenant and work hard with schools and families to place children at appropriate schools.
- b) Close links between the Army Families Federation and SCC Admissions and Transport Team have been made. This has resulted in a new FAQ for army families around the admission process covering issues such as eligibility for free school transport and how to make an application for a school place if you don't yet have an address. A further outcome has been the offer of concessionary travel seats on school transport to three additional families from RLC Deepcut.
- c) The Service Pupil Premium, which is currently £300 per annum, is allocated to schools for every service child for their emotional and social wellbeing. Work is ongoing with Surrey education officers to ensure that this is spent in accordance with the guidelines as it is monitored by OFSTED.
- d) A termly newsletter sharing best practice is sent to all Surrey schools with service children.

- 7.2 **Employment/Business** - Both service personnel and employers are often unaware of the business skills and expertise gained though serving with the Armed Forces. These include leadership,

management, problem solving, delegation etc. The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) is the official MoD provider of Armed Forces resettlement and provides a dedicated employment/recruitment website for those leaving the Military.

In Surrey:

- a) SCC has been awarded the Silver Employer Recognition award for supporting the Reservists working for the authority – this is an example that other authorities are looking to follow.
- b) Officers in HR have been working with soldiers being treated at Headley Court to help them identify key transferable skills and support them back into employment. Attached as Annex 2 is a success story from this work.
- c) The Board has been promoting the benefits of supporting the Armed Forces Covenant and employing Reservists/ex-service personnel to Surrey organisations and businesses through attendance at local Business Breakfasts often arranged by local authorities.
- d) Links have been made between the CTP and Surrey HR to establish the best way of marketing appropriate SCC vacancies to service leavers.

7.3 Health - Healthcare is provided by the Military for all service personnel. Families are routinely covered by the NHS unless they are registered at a special DMS (Defence Medical Services) medical centre, which can offer provision for families. Some of their care will still be covered by the NHS even if they are registered at a DMS centre. Naval and RAF families are all served by the NHS. This is also the case for dentists and orthodontists. Often there will be issues getting onto waiting lists (can be due to lack of postcode on Bases) for these services and they may need assistance. Mental Health, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is handled by mental health providers including First Steps and Combat Stress as well as service charities.

In Surrey:

- a) Closer links have been developed between Adult Social Care following a briefing to 116 Adult Social Care Managers by the key service charities operating in Surrey. From January to April 2016 there have been over 25 referrals to SSAFA the Armed Forces Charity for additional support.
- b) Funding has been successfully applied for to carry out a pilot project with Surrey Young Carers to assess the number and needs of service children who are also young carers.
- c) A main point of contact for military issues within each of the six Surrey Clinical Commissioning Groups has been identified. This role will be developed over the next few months.

7.4 Housing - Service personnel on leaving the Armed Forces can be faced with no accommodation and high housing costs locally makes it difficult for people to stay in Surrey. The Military are becoming more stable and encouraging people to reside near their place of work to enable more stability for the whole family.

In Surrey:

- a) Local connection criteria can now be found by virtue of the location and length of service on the Military base, which will now enable service/ex-service personnel to be placed on a local authority housing waiting list.
- b) The Surrey Housing Officers Group is working to ensure that all members of the armed forces community have the same access to housing options, advice and support as any other citizen across the county.

7.5 Family Life including Benefits, Debt and Divorce – Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to all services and benefits as any UK citizen, except where tailored alternative schemes are in place. As with the civilian community, divorce and debt can be an issue.

In Surrey:

- a) Welfare help and advice is available from the Citizens Advice Bureaux and service charities.
- b) Training is being provided to Surrey County Council Contact Centre staff on the role that service charities play both in financial support and counselling for both serving and ex-service personnel and their partners.

8. Cadets and Volunteering

Supporting young people in Surrey within the Cadet units from all three services is a priority for both 11 Infantry Brigade and the SCMPB. There is currently a shortage of adult volunteers within the Cadets, which Surrey County Council is helping to address via its volunteering campaign. Attached as Annex 3 are two case studies which show in more depth how we have been helping to promote the role of adult volunteers in the Cadets. Further work is being done through the work with the Covenant to encourage employers to support Cadet Units.

Armed Forces Champions and Activity at a Borough and District Level

9. Each district and borough Council (DC/BC) in Surrey has appointed an Armed Forces Champion to give the Armed Forces Covenant support at a political level. The objective of the role is to raise the profile and needs of the Armed Forces community, including serving personnel, both regular and reserve, their families, veterans and Cadets, within the Council and the wider borough/district area. To assist councillors who may be considering taking on this key role, a Job Description for Armed Forces Champions was produced and disseminated by the SCMPB; this had been recognised at a national level by MoD Officials and adopted widely.
10. Annex 4 sets out an article written by the Runnymede Armed Forces Champion on her role, which was published in the January 2016 edition of First the magazine for local government.

11. All Surrey district and boroughs are making good progress with this role. SCC facilitates the BC/DC Armed Forces Champions getting together along with the four Task Force Commanders and representatives from 11 Infantry Brigade on a six monthly basis to share best practice and to discuss priorities locally. The last meeting of this group took place on 3 March 2016. Set out below are some examples of actions which have been taken at a district and borough level in support of the Armed Forces Covenant locally:

11.1 Promotion of the Covenant within the Council

Written and adopted a Covenant Action Plan and taken an annual report through the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Executive and/or the local/joint committee on achievements.

- 11.2 Promoted best practice nationally. For example the Armed Forces Champion in Woking presented the work being carried out locally to the Diocesan Champions across the country at Lambeth Palace.

- 11.3 Nominated the authority for either the silver or bronze Employer Recognition Award. Woking BC has been nominated for a Silver Award and Mole Valley DC have been awarded the Bronze Award.

- 11.4 Woking BC has started to record links that new employers have with the armed forces through their initial application for to the Council.

- 11.5 A number of authorities have incorporated Reservist Leave (extra two weeks) into Council Leave Policy

- 11.6 Attendance of staff from SCC, Mole Valley DC and Woking BC at the Sandhurst Leadership Challenge. The Leadership Training Day offers a unique opportunity to develop the leadership and teamwork skills of executives and managers under the expert guidance of the Reserve Forces at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

11.7 Information and Signposting

Council websites have been updated with information about the Covenant and links provided to key service charities etc.

- 11.8 Customer Service staff have been made aware of the Covenant and how to help signpost veterans to relevant service charities. Tandridge DC now asks callers/visitors whether they have a military connection in order to provide the most appropriate support.

- 11.9 Guildford BC has developed a leaflet which is available throughout the borough to give veterans key points of contact for various services, and is attached as Annex 5.

- 11.10 An event was held at Reigate Town Hall for the armed forces community to raise awareness of support that is supported locally.

- 11.11 An article on the Covenant has been included within the Borough Bulletin in Spelthorne to help raise awareness.

11.12 Support to the Local Armed Forces Community

District and borough councils in Surrey support the exemption to the Local Connection criteria in the Council Housing Allocation Scheme for armed forces personnel.

- 11.13 To help easily identify Armed Forces families, a tick box has been added to the housing register online application form for military families in Runnymede.

- 11.14 Guildford Borough Council supports the Ministry of Defence Tenancy Deposit Loan Scheme which allows defence personnel to apply for a loan to meet the cost of a deposit for a rental property.
- 11.15 Vacancies within a number of local authorities in Surrey are promoted to those leaving the forces through the Career Transition Partnership.
- 11.16 Concessionary rates for armed forces and ex-armed forces personnel have been added at some council run facilities including Leatherhead Leisure Centre and Dorking Halls.
- 11.17 Promotion of Covenant to Local Businesses**
A number of district and borough council have arranged for the SCMPB to be represented at local Business Breakfast meetings to promote the benefits of signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant for Business and employing Reservists.
- 11.18 Heroes Welcome and/or the Defence Discount Scheme have been widely promoted to local businesses in a number of areas.
- 11.19 Commemoration and Remembrance Events**
All councils have facilitated successful Remembrance Sunday and other commemorative events throughout the year. Guildford hosted the very successful National Armed Forces Day in 2015.
- 11.20 Funding Opportunities**
The Armed Forces Covenant Fund has been widely promoted in all district and borough council areas.
- 11.21 Some areas have successfully delivered local projects part funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, including the Beech Grove Play area in Pirbright for the use of both service families and the local civilian community.
- 11.22 Local Links to the Military and Cadets**
Good links have been made with the local Military units in the different district and borough areas through the Task Force Commanders responsible for each of the district/borough council areas.
- 11.23 Links have also been enhanced with local Cadet Units through attendance at inspections of the Units with the relevant Task Force Commander for the area.

<p>Next Steps for 2016/17</p>

12. The Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board will continue to drive forward the priorities for the local armed forces community and to address the issues set out above. In addition there will be additional areas of work that the Board will oversee. Some of these priorities are set out below.
13. **Best Practice**
The SCMPB has developed a number of areas of work which are seen as best practice. These include a briefing paper for all Surrey MPs and their case workers, a Job Description for district and borough Armed Forces Champions, and links between Adult Social Care and service

charities. This work will be promoted nationally as a way of sharing best practice.

14. Surrey has developed close working relationships with neighbouring County Councils and is looking at ways to enhance cross border working for the benefit of our armed forces community.
15. Within the County Council, steps will be taken to look at the impact of all key decisions made by the authority on the Armed Forces Community.
16. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has funded the innovative Respect and Remember Project, which is a partnership between the PCC, Surrey and Sussex Probation Trust, Surrey County Council Youth Services and Surrey Police for offenders serving community sentences and in other restorative programmes to help restore Surrey's war memorials. A case study has been produced which is being promoted to other areas.
17. **Employer Engagement and Reservists**
The Board is proactively working with 11 Brigade on employer engagement and in 2015 SCC was successful in being awarded the Silver Employer Recognition Award for supportive behaviour towards the Armed Forces within the County Council. In 2016, SCC will be taking this further and applying for the Gold Award.
18. Increasing the number of Reservists is a key priority of the Army and by 2020 one third of the Army will be made up of Reservists. The Chairman of SCC is planning to bring together all the Reservists that work for the County Council to formally acknowledge their service to the Nation. This will take place around Armed Forces Week in June, with a view to developing an ongoing peer support network.
19. **Maximising Funding**
During 2015/16 Surrey was successful in obtaining £100,000 of grants from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund for six local projects. After Scotland, the South East got the second largest share of the Armed Forces Covenant in the country, with Surrey and Hampshire each having the highest number of successful bids.
 - **Officer of the Police and Crime Commissioner - Vulnerable Veterans - Halting the Revolving Door:** a six month project to:
 - Identify the number of ex-service personnel imprisoned or on license in Surrey.
 - Benchmark the support available to veterans, reserves and their families so that service users can be signposted to the appropriate support for them.
 - Create and train a team of mentors to support ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system.
 - Prevent service personnel and their families from becoming victims.

The programme is progressing well and links have been made to a number of projects and partners including the Transforming Justice programme, SSAFA The Armed Forces Charity, Royal British Legion, 11 Brigade and many others - £20,000.

- **Brookwood and Pirbright Children's Centre** - extended early intervention and support for service and civilian families with children aged 0-5 years - £17,515
 - **The Surrey Care Trust** - Learning Together: a programme of adult learning aimed at spouses of servicemen and women and the civilian community in the Deepcut and Pirbright areas - £19,805
 - **Blackdown Pre-School, Deepcut** - IT resources and play equipment- £1,462
 - **The Trench Experience** - to purchase a multi-purpose exhibition vehicle with items to re-create typical WWI and subsequent conflict experiences - £17,600
 - **Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum** - Gurkha Veteran's Integration Drive: a project to help integrate the local Gurkha community in the Woking area with the local civilian community through joint learning and social activities at local churches - £19,724
20. Officers will work to maximise the amount of grant funding brought into the County during the coming year which will also help reduce demand on mainstream budgets.
21. **Increasing Awareness**
On 15 November 2016 the third annual Surrey Armed Forces Covenant Conference will be held at RLC Deepcut, with Ministerial support. This will focus on health, service children, youth and businesses.

Conclusions:

22. Surrey is recognised as being a military county. Through the work of the Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board, work has been progressed to ensure that no member of the Armed Forces Community in Surrey is disadvantaged by their service. Much of the work that is being carried out is seen as best practice nationally, and the Board will continue to market the work to share the benefits.
23. Surrey was very successful in being awarded a large number of grants through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, and work will continue to build on this success in 2016/17.

Recommendations:

24. The Resident Experience Board is asked to:
 - a) Review and comment on the progress made with implementing the Armed Forces Covenant in Surrey.
 - b) Comment on additional areas that the Board would like the SCMPB and/or Surrey County Council to explore to further address the needs of the Armed Forces Community in Surrey.
 - c) Promote the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant through your role as councillors.
 - d) Support the sharing of best practice developed by the SCMPB at both a local and national level.

Next steps:

25. The SCMPB and the two Task Groups will continue to meet to further the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant and support the integration of the military and civilian communities in Surrey.
26. The SCMPB will continue to work in a collaborative manner and to share information on its work at a regional and national level.
27. SCMPB will continue to encourage and support bids to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund.
28. SCC will continue to act as an exemplar employer in relation to its employment of reservists.
29. The Annual Conference will provide a basis for monitoring the impact of the work of the Board, and an annual report on achievements will be produced at the end of each financial year. This will be published on the website (www.surreycc.gov.uk/armedforces) as well as being widely circulated.

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Sources/background papers: [None]

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