

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	20 th August 2012
Report of:	Head of Performance, Customer Services & Capacity
Subject/Title:	Notice of Motion: Armed Forces Community Covenant
Portfolio Holder:	Strategic Communities

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report invites the Cabinet to consider the following Motion, proposed by Councillor Baxendale, which has been referred by Council to the Cabinet for consideration:

“The Council’s formal signing of the Community Covenant scheme which clearly demonstrates its commitment and support to the Armed Services is to be welcomed. However, this Motion seeks to ask the Cabinet to take responsibility for the development of a detailed Action Plan, based on the Scheme, which will outline, by Service area, the practical support that the Council can provide to those currently serving in the Armed Services, their families and those that have served in the past”

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet consider the Motion and offer its advice to Council.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To enable Council to consider the Cabinets views on the matter.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 None

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All Members are affected by this matter.

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 None identified.

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Director of Finance and Business Services)

- 7.1 None identified.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

8.1 None identified.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 None identified.

10.0 Background and Options

10.1 A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces community. The Covenant is signed by various members of the community including representatives of the Armed Forces and the local authority. It may also be signed by other agencies keen to support the principles of the Community Covenant. It is intended to complement, at a local level, the national Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.

10.2 On 30th June, and on behalf of the Council, the Mayor signed the Cheshire Community Covenant which was also signed by the following organisations:

- Cheshire East Borough Council
- Halton Borough Council
- NHS
- Job Centre Plus
- Cheshire Army Benevolent Fund
- SSAFA
- Cheshire Constabulary
- Veterans UK
- Cheshire West & Chester Council
- Warrington Borough Council
- Cheshire Chamber of Commerce
- Combat Stress
- Royal British Legion
- Probation Service

A copy of the Covenant is appended for information.

10.3 Councillor Gordon Baxendale, as the Council's armed forces champion oversaw an initial audit of services currently in place for service personnel or veterans was undertaken across the Authority. The following measures have been identified, albeit that it is possible that there may be others:

Services provided by:	Description of the Service
Leisure	Everyone Options Card – this enables serving members of the Armed Forces to access a range of activities at leisure facilities across Cheshire East free of charge. (There is also a list of qualifying benefits which includes War Disablement Pension).
Adult Services	Cheshire East residents who are disabled (includes ex-service personnel) have access to:

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Smart Team 2. Supported employment 3. Access to community equipment and Independent Living Centres 4. Assistive Technology and telecare/telehealth 5. Carers support and access to carers assessment 6. Reablement services
Strategic Housing	<p>For the purposes of assessing housing needs priority a person will be considered for ex-armed forces personnel priority if they are leaving the armed forces having received their notice of discharge date or have left in the last 5 years, having been medically discharged or served the required minimum level of service, usually at least four years (does not include Discharge As Of Right -DAOR).</p> <p>Those who will not be in housing need or are already adequately housed will be placed in Band D. Where they have any additional housing need they will be placed in Band B. (draft - policy currently out for consultation)</p> <p>Disabled residents can apply for help to adapt their homes to enable them to live independently</p> <p>A money advice service is available</p>
Children & Families	<p>Admission to Schools –children of service personnel moving into the area would be given priority for admission to a reception or secondary transfer application. For in-year admission, applications would be looked at sympathetically (though schools that are their own admission authorities could refuse). The admission of children from the armed forces is now a permitted exception where infant class size regulations are involved so would allow the 30 limit to be exceeded in these circumstances.</p> <p>Attendance at School – it is Ministry of Defence practice for service personnel returning from active deployment to get a 2 week period of rest. For service personnel with young people this usually means them wanting to take their children out of school for all or part of this. While the Pupil Registration Regulations constrain a school's ability to allow term-time holidays, DfE guidance on the regulations makes specific reference to service personnel as one of the special cases that would warrant the school allowing up to 10 days holiday in term time.</p>

Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit	<p>There is a local agreement whereby War Disablement Pension and War Widows Pensions is disregarded in full from income.</p> <p>(For information, Armed Forces personnel who are deployed to a relevant location e.g. Afghanistan, do receive a contribution from MoD in lieu of Council Tax for the period of the deployment. The payment is made direct to them through their Unit HR administrator)</p>
Electoral Registration	<p>Service declarations by members of HM Forces and their spouse or civil partner may be made at any time throughout the year. The declaration will request certain information from the applicant and providing it is submitted and accepted by the Electoral Registration Officer as valid, it is then valid for 5 years.</p>
Customer Services – Blue Badges	<p>There is a national policy issued by the Department for Transport which takes account of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who receive War Pensioners Mobility Supplement • People who have been awarded a benefit under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and have been assessed and certified by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency as having a permanent and substantial disability which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking
Cheshire East Family Service	<p>Information and advice is available to families via First Contact Service, which offers advice and information on services available locally as well as pathways into support for those children and young people with additional needs.</p>
Family Information Service (FIS)	<p>Supports families at all levels of need, from giving information and advice about services available locally through to linking families in with the right professional to undertake a common assessment and co-ordinate a multi-agency package of support if needed. This would include where appropriate the direct provision of services from Cheshire East Family Service locality teams, eg parenting courses, children's centres and input from family service workers</p>

10.4 To help promote the services available, a webpage has been set up on the Council's internet site which provides some links and general information. This page will be developed as more information becomes available. A

contact officer has been nominated to deal with housing issues, as this is the major issue.

- 10.5 Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee considered a report on this issue on 26th July and had a lengthy discussion and, as a result of which, appropriate Scrutiny Committees have been asked to look at the provisions for housing allocations and schools admission.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer. There are no specific background documents.

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