

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

26 SEPTEMBER 2019

ARMED FORCES COVENANT UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Policy & Finance Committee about Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) working at Newark & Sherwood District Council (NSDC).
- 1.2 To demonstrate the additional ways in which the Council will support the AFC.
- 1.3 To seek approval for the sharing of AFC information via Full Council in order to raise further awareness of the Armed Forces community in Newark & Sherwood, and about AFC working.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The [AFC](#) is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. It is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives. The AFC website also includes dedicated information for [Local Authorities](#) to support the Covenant. [GOV.UK](#) outlines how the UK Government will support the AFC.
- 2.2 NSDC first signed the AFC in 2013 and re-signed in 2018. The [signed document](#) is available on our [website](#) along with the accompanying [action plan](#). The NSDC website also provides [support](#) information for the Armed Forces community. The action plan includes sign-posting to NSDC policies that support the Armed Forces such as the [homeless ex-Armed Forces](#) advice.
- 2.3 The Armed Forces Champion is Councillor Bruce Laughton. The named officer lead is the Policy & Projects Officer (Kate Marshall). In addition, (District) Councillor Keith Girling is also the Armed Forces Champion for Nottinghamshire County Council. The NSDC officer lead attends Nottinghamshire's Civil and Military Partnership Board (CMPB) meetings to share information and as part of NSDC's commitment to the AFC.
- 2.4 NSDC has been awarded silver status in the [Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme](#) (ERS). The scheme acknowledges employers who support defence personnel, including reservists, veterans, families and cadets. This award is referenced on the AFC pages of NSDC's [website](#).
- 2.5 Mrs Heather Wheeler MP, Minister for Housing & Homelessness (at time of letter) and The Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Defence People & Veterans, wrote to all Local Authority Leaders on 17 June 2019, following local elections, to promote Champion appointments and to encourage further active support of the AFC (all Local Authorities are signatories of the AFC).

2.6 The [partnership](#) between [Charnwood](#), [Melton](#) and [Rushcliffe](#) Councils (with some additional support from the Covenant Fund and from Forces in Mind), that was established to work with the Armed Forces community in those districts, provided a training day offered to all regional officer leads for the AFC on 4 April 2019 – a representative from NSDC attended. This training looked at the transition from military to civilian life, alongside employer considerations to include: data, raising awareness, training, Human Resources and equalities. Some immediate actions following the training included changes made to NSDC's own website and a number of recommendations for future consideration. This paper is a continuation of those recommendations, supplemented by information received at a further Army Engagement event at Chetwynd Barracks on 15 June 2019 and an Open Day at the Barracks on 27 June intended for employers and prospective employers.

3.0 **Proposals**

3.1 Data

There is a current lack of data about locations of the Armed Forces communities once they have returned to civilian life. The document [Annual Population Survey: UK Armed Forces Veterans residing in Great Britain, 2017](#) (published 31 January 2019, Ministry of Defence) suggests that 6-8% of the population of the East Midlands comprises residing veterans. 6-8% of Newark and Sherwood's 120,965 residents (2018) would be 7,258-9,677 residents. The 2021 census will include a [question](#) about Armed Forces veterans for the first time. NSDC Organisational Development (OD) will maintain a watching brief on census information to ensure an understanding of demographic changes.

3.2 Armed Forces Friendly Appearances - HR

Following a discussion paper presented to the Equalities & Diversity Working Group on 14 August 2019 a number of immediate actions were agreed, to be completed by NSDC HR:

- The jobs [pages](#) of the NSDC website will be updated to include reference to the Silver ERS – this is a symbol of NSDC operating as a forces-friendly employer
- Advertisements on [jobsgopublic](#) will also include reference to the Silver ERS
- Reference to NSDC's Reservist Policy will be referenced on the same pages
- At external recruitment events, such as careers fairs, NSDC promotional material might include imagery or reference to the Armed Forces (perhaps an image of employees in reservist uniform or similar). This will be considered alongside reference to many other community representations
- In addition, in June 2019, following direction from the Chief Executive, NSDC has signed up to the "Forces Families Jobs" [platform](#) (due to go live later in 2019) to advertise all NSDC positions. The Army Families Federation, in conjunction with the Naval and RAF Families' Federations, is creating the platform, 'Forces Families Jobs', to enable spouses and family members of UK Armed Forces military personnel to have a 'one stop shop' where they can apply for jobs directly with employers who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

3.3 Buddy Scheme - Support For Staff who are Veterans, Reservists and Family Members of the Armed Forces Community

NSDC already employs a number of veterans or reservists – this is a condition of our silver ERS. We propose an organisation-wide communication to establish additional veterans, reservists and Armed Forces family members who may have an interest in participating in a new Buddy Scheme. It is envisaged that this would take the form of casual (no agendas, no facilitation) monthly sessions, over lunch or at 4.30pm to allow staff from other sites to attend, in a Castle House breakout area simply to chat, to meet up and to share experiences. This will be particularly beneficial to those who have recently served and join the Council community.

What might a buddy do?

Support for reserve force colleagues

- Making sure all know about the Reservist Policy
- Introducing Reserve colleagues to each other
- Sharing your email address/telephone number with the families of reservists during mobilisation to chat, as required

Support for new staff members who are veterans, reservists and family members

- Explaining/talking about your experiences of Local Authority working
- Reminders about the importance of customer focus, data protection and safeguarding in the Local Authority – and how this might differ to the military
- Sharing information about wider support
- Helping new staff to understand the formal and informal culture of NSDC

Buddies are not:

- Advisors or counsellors
- New best friends
- Confidantes
- Your line manager.

3.4 Asking the Question of all Applicants – Guaranteed Interview for Veterans who meet the Essential Criteria

Choosing to ask applicants if they are or have ever been a member of the Armed Forces community will provide a valuable means of offering support via a guaranteed interview scheme to veterans. Some Local Authorities already ask this question as part of their equalities monitoring: [Brighton & Hove](#) and [Sheffield City Council](#) are examples. The Council already provides a guaranteed interview for candidates who meet the essential criteria and have a disability. A more recent comparison relates to the guaranteed interview for all care leavers who meet the essential criteria for a role (please refer to the report submitted to [P&F](#), 21 February 2019). A similar guaranteed interview for those veterans who meet the minimum criteria is not guarantee of employment. Both the proposed veterans guaranteed interview scheme and the care leaver offer will be further highlighted on NSDC vacancy platforms. The guaranteed interview scheme for veterans will be further highlighted with the Ministry of Defence's Regional Employer Engagement Director for the East Midlands.

3.5 Asking the Question as Part of Initial Offer – Buddy Scheme

Asking the question (“are you or have you ever been a member of the Armed Forces community?”) again at initial offer letter stage, ensures all new joiners also have access to the Buddy Scheme and support in place from the commencement of their employment.

3.6 Application Guidance

Guidance or guidelines for completing applications to illustrate how a candidate should evidence that they meet the essential criteria contained within the person specification will be prepared. These will be useful to members of the Armed Forces community whose military training might have emphasised brevity (in antithesis to the Local Authority environment where evidential elaboration is required), but also to all applicants. The guidelines would be available on all job sites utilised by NSDC, including the new “Forces Families Jobs” site. Liaison with the [Career Transition Partnership](#) would be advantageous in creating these, and other, documents.

3.7 Interview Guidance

Closely linked to equalities and diversity working more widely, a number of [videos](#) have been created about what to expect at Castle House – interviews form a part of this. The information contained within is also relevant for members of the Armed Forces community. If access to these videos is available to all potential applicants, the videos can also, of course, be viewed by those who come from the Armed Forces community. The potential for short tutorial sessions provided by NSDC HR representatives could also be explored alongside templated application forms. Synergy with DWP Job Centre practice could also be explored. Marketing such guidance via Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs or similar would reach out to the Armed Forces community specifically.

3.8 Policy

All NSDC policies (homeless support mentioned above, the Reservist Policy is another example) relating to the Armed Forces community will be reviewed.

3.9 Awareness Raising and Training

Awareness of the AFC will form part of induction training for officers at NSDC, perhaps for inclusion within the equalities training module or elsewhere. In addition, reference to the AFC at future staff roadshows and via internal communications will also help to raise awareness of the AFC across the organisation. Furthermore, AFC awareness could also form part of training for Members – this could be raised via the Member Training and Development Task and Finish Group. Also, bringing the AFC update to Full Council will also raise awareness of the AFC with all elected Members. Other possibilities, subject to existing policy, include making the AFC or ERS logos available in email signatures (perhaps of the HR team specifically). A launch event for the Buddy Scheme will incorporate further awareness raising for staff and Members – and might also be extended to partners more widely.

3.10 Advocacy

To advocate (via meetings with the lead officer and/or Champion) for the AFC and for the ERS via:

- o partners in the building
- o existing partnerships
- o Newark Business Club, subject to invitation
- o suppliers
- o any other suitable forums.

To work with other AFC signatories in Newark and Sherwood to promote the AFC and ERS more widely across the District.

To attend CTP careers fairs (30 April 2020 in [Newark](#)) to advocate for NSDC as a forces friendly employer.

3.11 VE Day 75

AFC working to “recognise and remember the sacrifices and challenges faced by the Armed Forces community” is demonstrated by promoting participation in, and supporting, events and functions to celebrate and remember the sacrifices of Armed Forces personnel, both past and present (as outlined in the [action plan](#)). The Council will consider how the 75th Anniversary of VE Day in 2020 (noting the Government’s change to the bank holiday - now Friday 8 May 2020) might be commemorated in Newark and Sherwood and will also communicate with neighbouring Local Authorities. [National](#) events will comprise:

- o The Nation’s Toast
- o A Cry for Peace Around the World
- o Ringing Out for Peace
- o Parties and celebrations
- o Church services.

4.0 Equalities Implications

4.1 The content of this paper has also been considered by NSDC’s Equalities & Diversity Working Group. There are no direct equalities implications.

5.0 Financial Implications (FIN19-20/9463)

5.1 Any costs incurred in relation to a launch event for the Buddy Scheme can be maintained within existing budgets.

6.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

6.1 The AFC is not specifically referenced in the Community Plan but fits particularly within the objective to “increase participation with the Council and within local communities”.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) the enhanced AFC working outlined in proposals 3.1-3.8 above be noted;**
- (b) raising awareness of AFC working be supported through:**
 - i. induction training for Members**
 - ii. a review of AFC working at Full Council in 2019**
 - iii. a launch event for the Buddy Scheme; and**
- (c) advocacy for the AFC and ERS outside NSDC as required, be supported.**

Reason for Recommendations

To guarantee that members of the Armed Forces community in Newark and Sherwood experience no disadvantage and to enhance Newark and Sherwood District Council's Armed Forces Covenant working.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Kate Marshall, Policy & Projects Officer on Ext. 5302 or Tracey Piper, Business Manager - Human Resources & Organisational Development on Ext. 5219.

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