



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance)

Report to Executive Board

Date: 11 April 2012

Subject: Armed Forces Community Covenant

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. To seek approval to implement the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Leeds. This local Community Covenant complements the national Armed Forces Covenant and is a statement of mutual support between the civilian and any members of any local Armed Forces community. The Covenant encourages local authorities to support current or retired Armed Forces personnel residing within their local authority boundary.
2. The Covenant places commitments on the council to support service personnel, ensuring they are not disadvantaged by virtue of what they do and using the principle of social justice as its starting point. It allows authorities to pledge their support but meet their obligations in their own way rather than imposition by central government and should not impose significant costs or burdens on local authorities.
3. It is, therefore, proposed to approve and pledge support for the Covenant as well as allocating the role of liaison officer to the Chief Officer (Customer Access) who will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the Covenant, ensuring access to council services is provided and that no one in the Armed Forces community is particularly disadvantaged as a consequence of our processes or policies.
4. To seek approval to implement a new direct let category for former service personnel in assessed housing need, to enable a direct offer of Leeds City Council housing to be made to them where they are unable to secure rehousing through the council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The majority of available council properties are advertised through the 'Leeds Homes' choice based lettings scheme. A direct let enables a property to be allocated as a direct offer to the customer, without being advertised.

Recommendations

5. Approve and pledge support for an Armed Forces Community Covenant in Leeds as detailed at Appendix 3.
6. Approve the allocation of the role of Armed Forces liaison officer to the Chief Officer (Customer Access). Approve and pledge support for an Armed Forces Community Covenant in Leeds as detailed at Appendix 3.
7. Approve the implementation of the new direct let category in the council's lettings policy for former service personnel seeking housing in Leeds.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval to implement the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Leeds.
- 1.2 This local Community Covenant complements the national Armed Forces Covenant and is a statement of mutual support between the civilian and members of the local Armed Forces community.

2 Background information

- 2.1 In September 2010, a Task Force was elected to report on the national Military Covenant and identify, assess and recommend innovative ways in which the government and society as a whole could fulfil its obligation to rebuild the Military Covenant. One of the recommendations of the Task Force was for local authorities, private companies and individuals to pledge support to a Community Covenant.
- 2.2 A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its members of local Armed Forces community. A more detailed explanation of the Community Covenant Scheme – how it works and what it means – is provided in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3 The aim of the Community Covenant is to:
 - encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their area;
 - nurture understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community;
 - recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces community;
 - encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life;
 - to encourage the Armed Forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.

Area Committees and Area Leaders are well placed to play a key role in delivering these aims at a local level.

- 2.4 The Covenant places commitments on the council and its partners, to support service personnel, ensuring they are not disadvantaged by virtue of what they do and using the principle of social justice as its starting point.
- 2.5 It allows authorities to pledge their support but meet their obligations in their own way rather than imposition by central government and should not impose significant costs or burdens on local government.
- 2.6 On 16th November 2011 a white paper was presented to Members of Full Council requesting that Leeds city council commit to a Community Covenant to strengthen the partnership between the council and the Armed Forces.
- 2.7 It was Resolved that:
- “This Council recognises and remembers the sacrifices made by the Armed Services Community.
- Leeds City Council believes that the Armed Forces community, including serving personnel, veterans and their families, should not be disadvantaged, by virtue of what they do, when accessing public services.
- This Council therefore commits to a Community Covenant which will strengthen the partnership between Leeds City Council and the Armed Forces, encourage the integration of military and civilian communities, explore options for giving members of the Armed Forces higher priority for housing, and promote a wider understanding of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.”
- 2.8 Under the council’s lettings policy members of the Armed Forces leaving the services who apply for council housing are assessed according to their housing need. Although this generally results in an award of Band A as homeless or threatened with homelessness, customers are expected to bid for properties advertised through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- 2.9 Not all leavers will be rehoused into an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) or Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation (BITMO) property by the time of their discharge. While a direct let will not guarantee a property will be available, the option to make a direct offer will increase the chances of being rehoused before discharge.
- 2.10 The government is currently consulting on new powers and duties to former Armed services personnel and expect housing authorities to review their lettings policies accordingly. Pending these changes, the creation of a ‘new corporate objective’ direct let category award to former Armed Services personnel will assist in rehousing leavers.
- 2.9 Full Council resolved that a report be produced and brought back to Executive Board after full consultation with local military representatives.

- 2.10 On 15th December 2011, a meeting was held between the council, a representative for the Armed Forces and a representative for the British Legion to discuss and agree next steps. At this meeting it was confirmed that a further paper would be prepared and presented to the Executive Board identifying what Leeds would propose to do in partnership with the Armed Forces / British Legion to support the Covenant.
- 2.11 At the meeting it was also requested that a bi-annual invite be issued to the senior representative of the Armed Forces to meet with senior officers to update officers on strategic developments within the Armed Forces that may impact on local government.
- 2.12 Work has been undertaken to provide clarity as to what services/benefits would be available to current or veteran service personnel over and above those given to all citizens of Leeds. This information can be found in **Appendix 2**.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The Armed Forces community includes those in-service personnel including reservists, veterans and those who care for, depend on, or are close family members of these groups of people.
- 3.2 It is estimated that one person in six in the UK is currently serving or is a member of the ex-service community, being either a veteran of the Armed Forces or a carer, dependant or close family member of a veteran.
- 3.3 People as young as 17 / 18 years can be sent on active service, so veterans can often be much younger than most people would think. Nearly a quarter of people seeking help from organisations such as the Royal British Legion are below the age of 44.
- 3.4 We know that there have been around 331 new entrants (information correct as at 25/8/11) to the Armed Forces from Leeds in the last 5 years, the majority of which were aged between 17 – 24 years old at the time of enlisting. There are currently around 395 individuals in Leeds receiving either a War Disablement or War Widows Pension or Compensation from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (information correct as at 31/3/11) from the Ministry of Defence (all figures quoted provided by MOD).
- 3.5 There is however a programme of voluntary and compulsory redundancies in place over the coming year which could see a number of ex-personnel moving to or returning to the Leeds area.
- 3.6 The first tranche of redundancy will be those that have volunteered and will commence early 2012. They will have received 6 months notice and been entitled to a full Career Transition Partnership (CTP) resettlement programme from the Armed Forces. However the next tranche will contain those who have been subject to compulsory redundancy. They will have had 12 months notice and again will be given access to the CTP resettlement programme.

- 3.7 To put this into perspective, there were over 27,000 service leavers between April 2010 and March 2011. Of these only 20 declared Leeds as a destination, 30 had Leeds as a home address but did not state it as a destination.
- 3.8 Armed Forces personnel who approach Leeds City Council for assistance with rehousing have their needs assessed in line with the lettings policy. In cases where the individual has nowhere to move to on discharge and have a local connection to Leeds, they will generally be awarded a homeless or additional needs Band A priority, backdated to the date their 'cessation of the right to occupy' certificate was issued. Any medical housing issues would also be assessed and the relevant priority awarded.
- 3.9 The direct let would apply to members of the 'regular forces', as defined in section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006(b). This includes members of Her Majesty's military forces in the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular army or the Royal Air Force, but not (a) the Army Reserve; (b) the Territorial Army; and (c) forces raised under the law of a British overseas territory.
- 3.10 The direct let would only be awarded where the customer could demonstrate a local connection to Leeds, through residence, family association, employment or other special reason.
- 3.11 Not all customers leaving the Armed Forces manage to obtain rehousing through the choice based lettings scheme before their discharge date, nor are they always eligible for a homeless duty discharge direct let. However they may still require urgent rehousing. Other housing options are also offered, including advice about renting a private property.
- 3.12 The establishment of a Community Covenant in Leeds aims to ensure that the local Armed Forces or veteran community is not disadvantaged in any way in accessing council services offered in Leeds. The outcome is a pledge agreed by the city council and the local Armed Forces community, which commits to supporting the transition from service life into civilian life.
- 3.13 The Community Covenant does not seek to replace the existing good work already in place from public service providers, charities, etc but to build upon it. It also provides a mechanism to ensure the Armed Forces community is made aware of the support available to them.
- 3.14 To support this, it is proposed to allocate the role of liaison officer within the council to the Chief Officer (Customer Access) to monitor the effectiveness of the Covenant and ensure access to council services is given to serving and veteran personnel and that no one in the armed forces community is particularly disadvantaged as a consequence of our processes or policies.
- 3.15 Once the Community Covenant pledge is signed the people of Leeds would also be able to access a national grant scheme of £30 million. The grant is open to organisations, groups and individuals who can demonstrate that their proposal will strengthen the aims of the Covenant. Bids must first be agreed by the local partnership before final decisions are made by the Ministry of Defence. Bids can be for amounts from £100 to £250,000. This is a 4 year grant scheme and we are currently in year 2 of the scheme. We are currently working closely with Touchstone to develop a bid.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation took place with representatives from the Armed Forces and the British Legion to ascertain the need for and benefits of a community covenant in Leeds.
- 4.1.2 The government is currently consulting on draft regulations on rehousing members leaving the Armed Forces, so when the council's lettings policy is next reviewed, full consultation will be undertaken on any further changes.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 By pledging support to the Covenant the council will be agreeing to ensure full access to council services to serving and veteran personnel and that no one in the armed forces community is disadvantaged as a consequence of our processes or policies.
- 4.2.2 Forging closer relationships between the Council and the Armed Forces will ensure service personnel returning to Leeds are more readily integrated into local communities.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 There is an expectation that there will be a change in national policy guidelines to ensure service personnel are treated equitably. The current Leeds policy is already very supportive but will require a review.
- 4.3.2 The Council proposes to provide former service personnel with enhanced opportunities under the council's lettings policy by introducing a new direct let category specifically for former service personnel seeking housing in Leeds.
- 4.3.3 The government has issued a consultation paper on the social housing allocations, to which the Council is currently responding. Government proposals will allow councils to build into their priority rankings former service personnel seeking housing. The Council proposes to review its policy during 2012/13 in line with the government's proposals to ensure that it is fit for purpose. In the meantime it is hoped that the new direct let category will offer a quicker solution to those former service personnel seeking housing in Leeds.
- 4.3.4 The Covenant supports delivery of our ambition to be Best City and Best City Council in the UK.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 As a council we already implement a local scheme where we disregard in full certain war related benefits, over and above the national disregards of just £10 (for full details see **Appendix 2**). We are not looking to implement any further

changes/enhancements to the services we provide, just provide a council point of contact for issues who can signpost to the relevant service specialists.

- 4.4.2 The implication on the city of the future tranches of compulsory redundancies could see an increase in the number of ex-personnel requesting our support.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no specific legal implications.
- 4.5.2 The new corporate objective category was incorporated into the council's lettings policy from 4 June 2007. This is the first time the corporate objective direct let has been used. Its purpose is to allow a new direct let category to be created in response to any unforeseen corporate objective which arises outside of the lettings policy review process. The new category should relate to a corporate objective which is approved by Leeds City Council's Executive Board or delegated decision powers.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 There are no risks to implementing an Armed Forces Community Covenant in Leeds as it allows the council to pledge support but meet our obligations in our own way.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The adoption of the Community Covenant places a commitment on the council to support service personnel, ensuring they are not disadvantaged by virtue of what they do. It allows Leeds to pledge its support but meet its obligations in its own way rather than imposition by central government and should not impose significant costs or burdens on Leeds City Council.
- 5.2 Leeds wishes to support the Covenant by allocating the role of Armed Forces liaison officer to the Chief Officer (Customer Access) as the co-ordination role for identifying and accessing relevant services within the council for serving or veteran personnel.
- 5.3 The Council considers amendments to our arrangements to enable former service personnel to secure housing in Leeds would be appropriate and would further demonstrate our support for this community.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Approve and pledge support for an Armed Forces Community Covenant in Leeds as detailed at Appendix 3.
- 6.2 Approve the allocation of the role of Armed Forces liaison officer to the Chief Officer (Customer Access).
- 6.3 Approve the implementation of the new direct let category for former service personnel seeking housing in Leeds.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.