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# Draft Armed Forces Covenant Strategy

## 1. Context and Purpose

West Sussex County Council has been a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant since 2012 and is committed to uphold the key principles of the Covenant:

- That no member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of services compared with any other citizen.
- That, in some circumstances, special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved.

The County Council has developed its relationship with the armed forces community and achieved a Gold Award from South East Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association (SERFCA) in August 2020, showing its commitment. That should be demonstrated through a set of corporate aims and actions to provide assurance that it is able to deliver on that commitment.

The Council has appointed an elected member (Cllr Pete Bradbury since January 2020) to be its Armed Forces Champion. He was given a task by the Leader of the Council to develop an Armed Forces Strategy for the Council.

## 2. Aims and Vision

The County Council recognises the value service personnel, reservists, veterans and military families (together the Armed Forces Community) bring to the life of the county and its communities. The Council will, through this Strategy, seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by:

- recognising the sacrifices made by the armed forces community
- encouraging support for the armed forces community
- promoting understanding and awareness amongst the public
- encouraging activities to help the community integrate into local life.
- supporting veterans and service families in employment at the Council

The Council acts in partnership with local representatives of armed forces organisations, major charities and other local authorities within West Sussex. It supports the Civilian Military Partnership Board, chaired by the Armed Forces Champion, which includes local stakeholders – district and borough councils, the NHS, the armed forces community and armed forces charities.

We will work in partnership with the Armed Forces Community to understand the unique challenges they face and provide guidance and support so they can easily access services that are available.

**Our aim is to support the armed forces community by ensuring that the commitments in the covenant are integral to our systems, processes and policies and that staff and Members understand this commitment and apply it in all they do within the Council and their communities.**

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### **3. Commitments and actions**

#### **The County Council has taken these actions as an employer:**

- Offer a guaranteed interview scheme for former service personnel and veterans to ensure that they get an interview if they meet the essential requirements of the role.
- Promote career tasters across the AF community, for example through continuous training period job fairs.
- Offer volunteering opportunities for cadet force adult volunteers through the Volunteering Policy
- Offer reservists up to 10 additional days paid leave per year (pro-rata for part time employees) for the continuous training period.
- Offer support to military spouses and partners so that they know how to access the flexible working policy, staff special circumstances support policy and bereavement policy.
- Ensure that all new members of staff are told about the Covenant and understand its meaning.
- Provide Armed Forces Covenant training to the Customer Service Centre staff using a dedicated trainer for new starters.
- Schools are asked annually to remind parents to inform them if they are entitled to claim the Service Pupil Premium.

Internally the County Council offers training to its staff about the Covenant via an eLearning module which explains the challenges that members of the armed forces community face and how the County Council can help. A training programme for the Customer Service Centre means around 40 staff are able to help customers through signposting to appropriate services.

Around 30 members of staff from across the Council have undertaken more detailed Covenant training and are able to act as staff champions. Most champions are veterans or are from an armed forces family.

#### **The County Council has taken these actions as a service provider:**

- Work and engage with partners to promote the support that is available for service and ex-services people including social care, healthcare education and housing.
- Promoting the Armed Forces during the year, including flag flying on Armed Forces Day and holding an act of Remembrance each year.
- The County Chairman attends a number of community events that celebrate the Armed Forces.
- The County Council encourages local councils to help local communities to celebrate the Armed Forces.
- The County Council's Record Office maintains archives relating to the armed forces in Sussex.

### **4. Plans and Ambitions**

The County Council aims to provide a more joined-up and effective service in future. This will be delivered through a series of goals.

#### **The County Council will take these actions as an employer:**

- Maintain a dedicated network of named staff to discuss best practice and additional

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- actions. The network will have a named lead officer.
- Offer mentoring to ex-services personnel upon employment to help their transition into a civilian job using the officer network.
  - Keep records of service and ex-service people working at the Council to be held by HR and accessible to the officer network.
  - The senior management team will promote the Armed Forces Covenant and its aims and will identify volunteers to act as champions in each frontline service. These champions will work with the Officer Network lead to ensure consistent practice in meeting these aims.
  - Each champion will have a role profile to ensure the role is clear.

### **The County Council will take these actions as a service provider:**

- Ask service users 'have you or a member of your close family served?' in all appropriate circumstances using a corporate communications model.
- Collect data on service users who have declared a service background, to ensure a joined-up approach helps them access services.
- Have a clear webpage message that signposts people to information about support and services for serving and ex-services people and their families.

### **Preparing for proposed legislation**

The Government intends to place a duty on public bodies to have due regard for the needs of the armed forces community in its decision-making in three areas: health, housing and education. The County Council will plan to ensure it is able to meet this duty and is contributing to the Ministry of Defence working groups to consider what this would mean in practice and to help identify action needed.

## **5. Resources**

The County Council has a number of officers who help to deliver the covenant. They fall into four areas of activity:

- **Service champions** based in directorates who can provide front line support for people from the armed forces community.
- **Veterans and reservist group** to provide support and advice.
- **Human Resources champions**, to help ensure that the Council follows best practice as an employer.
- **Communications and Insight champions** to help communicate the Council's Covenant messages and to understand and use data to best effect.

Each group will keep the network lead officer informed and the lead officer will update the Member Champion and the Partnership Board with representatives from these groups meeting together as a panel to share information and to consider action to assist service operational decisions about covenant matters.

Service champions can help adapt services to meet the aims of the Covenant:

- In Adults' Services to access help through in-house or specialist services, mental health, caseworkers and support from armed forces charities.
- The same access support will apply for Children and Family Services.
- In Education, children of service families attract a pupil premium for their school. School admission arrangements and access to SEN or school transport can be complex for service families.
- In library services, providing flexibility in library loans for reservists.

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- In Communities, supporting the establishment of community projects aimed at veterans and armed forces families.
  - The Record Office will maintain archives relating to the armed forces in West Sussex.

Internally, the County Council's champions have also helped to make the Council an attractive place for people from armed forces families to work, including:

- Reservists Policy
- Guaranteed interview scheme
- Induction for veterans and reservists
- Advice to managers on the Covenant

Service Champions will be identified and supported in their role within:

Adults' Services - Children's Services - Education and Skills  
Customer Services Contact Centre - Community Services  
Libraries and Record Office and the Fire and Rescue Service

Each champion will be given time to support delivery of the Covenant as part of their role, including taking part in training and networking. As public facing services they can also assist in gathering data about service users.

The Covenant support officer in Democratic Services will support the Partnership Board and the lead member champion.

The County Council's website will highlight its commitment to the Covenant and will include the following content, accessed from a high-level page:

- Macro/tiles for easy navigation around the page
- Armed Forces Calendar of Events.
- Remembrance events
- Breakfast Clubs
- Testimonials
- Case studies and engagement event stories
- Links to resources/support
- Employment and welfare
- Charities
- Archival material

The County Council's internal website will provide support to champions, veterans and reservists who work for the County Council, providing information on:

- Mentoring
- Current staff offering support to new staff (AF Community)
- Publishing of the Covenant Strategy
- Roles and responsibilities of champions
- Contact details
- Link to external Armed Forces Community website

## **6. Assessing Delivery and Outcomes**

The Strategy is intended to show the real benefits and impact of its aims. The network of champions will use the data from their activities to provide an evidence base to show how and how well the aims of this Strategy are being realised. This can

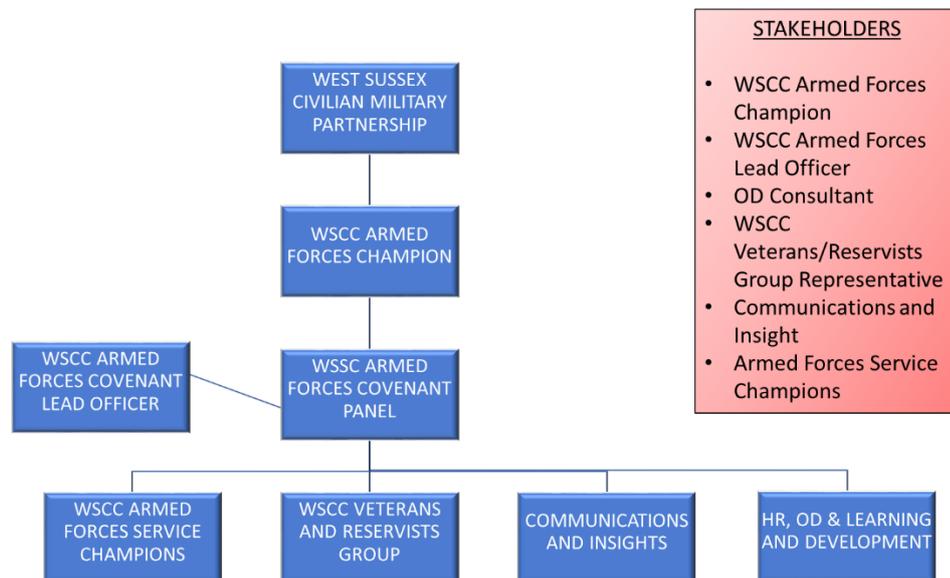
be covered in reports to the Partnership Board, to the Cabinet and to the County Council. It should measure:

- Changes to the website presence and amount of use
- The number of services maintaining champions
- The amount of training delivered
- Levels of useful service user data captured
- Use of the guaranteed interview arrangements
- Changes to service policies and procedures

## 7. Governance

- The Strategy and the delivery of its aims will be overseen by the Armed Forces champion lead member.
- The Champion will present an Annual report to Council.
- The Champion will chair the Civilian Military Partnership Board which will be supported administratively by an officer of the County Council.
- The minutes and actions arising from the Partnership Board will be published by the County Council.
- The Champion will report to the Cabinet on the achievement of the Strategy’s aims and may call upon members of the Cabinet to account for the contributions the services in their portfolio make to the achievement of the aims of the Strategy.
- The internal arrangement of the responsibilities in this strategy is as shown below:

**Figure 1**



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