

Agenda item:

Decision maker: Employment Committee
Subject: Corporate Covenant and MoD Employer Recognition Awards
Date of decision: 15th March 2016
Report by: Jon Bell - Director of HR, Legal and Procurement
Wards affected: n/a
Key decision (over £250k): n/a
Full Council Decision: No

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to appraise members of work being undertaken, by the Council as an employer, to support the Armed Forces community and seek members' approval to apply for the MoD Employer Recognition "Silver Award" and then "Gold Award" as set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

2. Recommendations

Members are **recommended** to:

- (i) Note the support already provided to the Armed Forces through the Council's employment policies and practices
- (ii) Commit to the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant (attached at Appendix 1), and request the Leader of the Council to sign the covenant on the Council's behalf
- (iii) Instruct officers to apply for the MoD Employer Recognition Silver and Gold awards, and implement any changes necessary to meet the criteria for receiving those awards, subject to such changes not having financial implications that are not contained within existing agreed portfolio budgets
- (iv) Instruct officers to explore, in conjunction with other councils in the region, opportunities to bid for funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, as detailed in paragraph 3.6 of this report

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2012 The Council signed an **Armed Forces Community Covenant**, which was a commitment by the Council, working with other service providers, to support existing and past service personnel and their families. A working group was established and has been taking forward a range of actions to support the Covenant.
- 3.2 Subsequently, an **Armed Forces Corporate Covenant** has been introduced (see Appendix 1) which is a commitment by employers to support the armed services. In particular, it relates to an employer's support for reservists, and for providing employment opportunities for people leaving the armed forces. The Council has not yet formally signed the Corporate Covenant.
- 3.3 Alongside the Corporate Covenant is an Employer Recognition Award scheme (see Appendix 2). Currently, only one local authority (Gateshead MBC) has received a Gold Award, and a brief description of the activities carried out by Gateshead MBC is included at Appendix 3.
- 3.4 The Council does already provide considerable support to the Armed Forces through its employment policies:

- (i) The flexible working policy ensures that the Council's legal responsibilities to reservists are fulfilled.
- (ii) An additional 2 weeks paid leave are allowed to reservists in order to attend training for their military duties
- (iii) Although not explicitly targeted at service families, the Council's flexible working and family-friendly policies generally support people in managing circumstances that service families are likely to face
- (iv) Job vacancies that may be suitable for people leaving the armed forces are advertised on armed forces websites
- (v) The Council has adopted a Volunteering Strategy, which embraces volunteering activity associated with military cadet organisations
- (vi) The Council has applied for the "bronze award" of the MoD Employer Recognition Scheme

3.5 In order to successfully apply for the Employer Recognition Gold Award, the Council will need to increase its activities to support the Armed Forces. Whilst not strictly prescribed, these activities may include:

- (i) Using the Council's internal communications media to encourage staff and their families to consider becoming reservists
- (ii) Publicising through recruitment materials (advertisements, job packs) that the Council supports reservists and welcomes applications from people who already are reservists
- (iii) Holding events to celebrate the contribution of reservists
- (iv) Providing advice to veterans and those about to leave the Armed Forces about working for the Council
- (v) Asking Council staff through employee opinion surveys whether they feel the Council does enough to support reservists, veterans and the families of serving Armed Forces personnel
- (vi) Demonstrating and publicising the Council's commitment, both locally and nationally, to supporting the Armed Forces as an employer

3.6 The Armed Forces Covenant Fund has recently announced the availability of funding for clusters of councils (working at least at county or regional level) to submit bids of between £20,000 and £500,000 to "share best practice and implement practical support for the local armed force community through the training of frontline staff and improved website information and presence, and to embed those improvements into their main stream services". At the time of writing, the funding had only just been announced and bidding criteria are still unclear, as are the intentions of other councils within the region. However, it is likely that the Council could lead or participate in a bid for funding to support its work on improving support for the Armed Forces community.

4. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Equality impacts have been considered and no negative impacts on any groups are anticipated as a result of the the recommendations in this report

5. Legal Comments

There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

6. Finance Comments

There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

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Signed by: Jon Bell - Director of HR, Legal & Procurement

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Armed Forces Corporate Covenant

Appendix 2 - MoD Employee Recognition Award Scheme

Appendix 3 - Gateshead MBC work in support of Gold Award

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Armed Forces Community Covenant	Integrated Commissioning Service
Volunteering Strategy	Integrated Commissioning Service
HR Policies	Human Resources

APPENDIX 1

**Company XYZ**

We, the undersigned, commit to honour the Armed Forces Covenant and support the Armed Forces Community. We recognise the value Serving Personnel, both Regular and Reservists, Veterans and military families contribute to our business and our country.

Signed on behalf of:

Company XYZ

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

**[COMPANY XYZ
LOGO HERE]**

The Armed Forces Covenant

An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom

Her Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown

And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

Section 1: Principles Of The Armed Forces Covenant

1.1 We **Company XYZ** will endeavour in our business dealings to uphold the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, which are:

- *no member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen*
- *in some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved.*

Section 2: Demonstrating our Commitment

2.1 **Company XYZ** recognises the value serving personnel, reservists, veterans and military families bring to our business. We will seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, by:

- *promoting the fact that we are an armed forces-friendly organisation;*
- *seeking to support the employment of veterans young and old and working with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), in order to establish a tailored employment pathway for Service Leavers;*
- *striving to support the employment of Service spouses and partners;*
- *endeavouring to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment;*
- *seeking to support our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, including by accommodating their training and deployment where possible;*
- *offering support to our local cadet units, either in our local community or in local schools, where possible;*
- *aiming to actively participate in Armed Forces Day;*
- *offering a discount to members of the Armed Forces Community;*
- *any additional commitments **XYZ** could make (based on local circumstances).*

*[We would encourage you to sign up to as many of the above as appropriate to your business.
Please amend to provide details of how you intend to meet each commitment.]*

2.2 We will publicise these commitments through our literature and/or on our website, setting out how we will seek to honour them and inviting feedback from the Service community and our customers on how we are doing. *[Amended as appropriate for your business.]*

APPENDIX 2

MOD Employer Recognition Awards (source <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>)

Bronze award

Bronze award holders:

- are self nominated by employers who pledge to support the armed forces, including existing or prospective employees who are members of the community
- promote being armed forces-friendly and are open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners
- receive an electronic certificate and logos to display on their website, stationery and other collateral

Silver award

Silver award holders:

- demonstrate support for service personnel issues and employ at least one member of the armed forces community
- actively communicate and uphold a positive stance to their employees via established HR policies and procedures
- show flexibility towards annual training commitments and mobilisation of reservist employees and support the employment of cadet instructors, armed forces veterans (including wounded, injured and sick) and military spouses/partners
- collect their certificate at a regional silver awards ceremony, receive silver logos to display and are themselves displayed on the list of Employer Recognition Scheme award winners
- must be nominated for a silver award by a third party using the online nomination form
- are required to sign the [armed forces covenant](#) and employ at least one individual from the covenant category that the nomination emphasises

Gold award

Gold award holders:

- proactively advocate and support defence, communicating their commitment both internally to employees and externally to the wider community through established policies and examples of support
- are positive to all service personnel during recruitment

- enable reservists to fulfil their annual training and mobilisation commitments and demonstrate significant support for cadet instructors, armed forces veterans (including wounded, injured and sick) and military spouses/ partners
- must be nominated for a gold award by a third party using the online nomination form
- collect their award at a prestigious national event, receive gold logos to display and are themselves displayed on the list of Employer Recognition Scheme award winners
- are required to sign the [armed forces covenant](#) and employ at least one individual from the covenant category that the nomination emphasises

Nomination and award process

Employers can sign up themselves for the bronze award. A wide range of individuals may nominate an organisation for either a gold or silver award, including that organisation's employees who are reservists, armed forces veterans, spouses/partners or cadet instructors.

External nominations may also be made from a variety of sources, including an account manager within the Defence Relationship Management (DRM) organisation, a Regional Employer Engagement Director or the military unit of a reservist employed within an organisation. The nomination process requires nominees to state their relationship with the employer they are proposing.

Nominations will be validated to determine the level of defence personnel employment within the nominated organisation and to check that the organisation has signed the [armed forces covenant](#).

Once the nomination has been validated it will be considered by a selection board at national level for gold awards and regional level for silver awards. The selection boards will be a panel chaired by a senior military officer and they will consider each nomination against the award criteria. Organisations selected for gold and silver awards will be formally notified in writing and invited to the relevant award event.

APPENDIX 3

Gateshead Council is now recognised as one of the most forward leaning Armed Forces authorities within the North East, if not the country, proactively supporting the Armed Forces Community.

In October 2014 they hosted two Reserve awareness events - the first for staff and young people 18+ within the Borough and the second for local businesses.

It has an inclusive HR policy offering reservists up to two weeks additional paid holiday for training and employs many ex-service personnel

It has links with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and Catterick's Early Leavers Project and has provided front line staff with information outlining employment and support services for veterans.

Since October 2012 the council has employed a dedicated Armed Forces Outreach worker and took the lead in launching the Tyneside Armed Forces Outreach Service in 2014 which it currently manages.

Gateshead Council showcased this 'good practice' at the MoD Regional Community Covenant Conference held in Manchester in 2014, provided the Outreach Service as a case study for Local Government publications and assisted in the Reserves 2020 Green paper consultation, facilitated employer focus groups and assessed online tool kits for the MOD.