

Title of meeting: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 22nd March 2022

Subject: Renewal of Armed Forces Covenant

Report by: Caroline Hopper, Lead Officer Armed Forces Covenant, on behalf of Strategy, The Executive

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to request Cabinet approval for the renewal of the Armed Forces Covenant by Portsmouth City Council.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet approves the signing of the Armed Forces covenant and that the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to effect the signing

3. Background

3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation to those who serve or have served in the British military, and their families. 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. It recognises the unique and selfless sacrifice associated with service and encourages local communities to support the service community in their area by:

- Nurturing public understanding and awareness of issues affecting the armed forces community
- Recognising and remembering the sacrifices faced by the armed forces community
- Encouraging the integration of the armed forces and resident local communities through a range of activities and joint projects

The Armed Forces Covenant applies to those currently serving, those who have served and are now veterans, reservists and their families.

- 3.2 Portsmouth is a city of considerable military history. As the home of the Royal Navy, we have a special and reciprocal relationship with those who serve and have served. Portsmouth has been at the centre of our nation's defence for nearly 500 years, through two World wars, and more recently The Falkland's conflict in 1982. We have shared in triumph and sacrifice together.
- 3.3 Today Portsmouth is home to the largest warships ever built for the Royal Navy: HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. There are currently 13,000 people employed at Portsmouth Naval Base, and it contributes an estimated £450M to Portsmouth economy. At last estimate nearly 25,000 people living in Portsmouth were members of the Armed Forces Community (either currently serving, veteran, reservist, or immediate family's members of)¹.
- 3.4 Portsmouth City Council originally signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant on 22nd March 2012, along with representatives of the Armed Forces, and representatives from Military Charities.
- 3.5 In 2018 Portsmouth City Council was presented with the prestigious Defence Employers Recognition scheme Gold award, in recognition of the authority's work to support the Armed Forces Covenant. The Council will need to renew its Gold award in March 2023. To do this it will need to demonstrate as an organisation it has maintained and further developed its commitment in relation to advocacy of defence and employment of members of the Armed Forces community.
- 3.6 Historically the Armed Forces Covenant Team at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have managed the process for Community Covenant. This process and the responsibility for management of Covenant signings has been transferred to Defence Relationship Management (DRM). Within the new system, to ensure transparency, there is a requirement for signed Covenants to be uploaded to the Gov.uk website. It is not possible to upload Community Covenants like Portsmouth's 2012 commitment because they are signed by multiple organisations. Therefore, organisations like Portsmouth City Council must now choose to refresh their commitment or lose it.

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 The Armed Forces Covenant no longer exists in this original form and renewal of our commitment will refresh and re-emphasise the council's commitment, not only to serving members of the armed forces, but to their families, reservists, veterans and adult volunteer cadet instructors also.

¹ The Armed Forces Community within the Solent: A needs assessment prepared on behalf of the Solent Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (2018). Accessed 17th March 2022, from: <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-armed-forces-community-within-sub-solent.pdf>

- 4.2 The Armed Forces Act 2021 places a duty on public bodies to show due regard for members of the Armed Forces community. Renewing our commitment will provide Portsmouth City Council with an opportunity to choose pledges from all Covenant areas (employment, education, health, housing and welfare) that accord with the new duty, reflect our local offer and are aligned to the needs of our Armed Forces community.
- 4.3 The need to renew our commitment directly aligns with respect and recognition activities that we are undertaking for Falkland's 40th and Armed Forces Day in 2022, alongside other work being undertaken to prepare for new duties under the Armed Forces Act 2021. To remain consistent, it is appropriate that we seek to renew our Covenant commitment to align with these forthcoming and significant events.
- 4.4 It is an expectation that all Defence Employers Recognition Scheme Gold award holders have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

5. Integrated impact assessment

A preliminary Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed. This has identified that renewal of Covenant commitments will help promote members of the Armed Forces Community to live safely and independently, and reduce vulnerabilities associated with poverty. Recognising the unique sacrifices of the Armed Forces community will have a positive impact on protected characteristics, by helping to address prejudice and acting to address inequalities such as lower levels of spousal employment. As a military city, with a strongly associated visitor economy it will promote and protect our cultural heritage and encourage defence business to continue to invest in our city.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The Armed Forces Bill 2021, which passed Royal Assent 15 December 2021 places a new statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 6.2 The legislation will not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes or advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces Community. It is designed to ensure that the relevant decision-makers consider the issues facing the Armed Forces Community in these key areas that impact upon their day-to-day lives. Under the new duty, those public bodies in scope will be required to have 'due regard' to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when formulating policy and taking decisions in specified areas of Housing, Education and Health.
- 6.3 The requirement will be like other duties to have due regard already in operation, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 6.4 As with those existing duties, the legislation will not be defining exactly how the requirement to have due regard can be met. Accompanying statutory guidance,

which public bodies will be required to consider; this will provide advice and examples of best practice to indicate how bodies might comply with the duty.

- 6.5 All relevant strategic governance agreements and documents should be updated in line with the 2021 Act as required, in liaison with the other councils in the Solent Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board.

7. Director of Finance's comments

- 7.1 A post supporting the Council to strengthen delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant has been funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust since 2017. This is envisaged as an ongoing requirement, bearing in mind the links that city has with Defence and members of the Armed Forces Community, and our ambition to retain Gold through the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme. Funding for this post is included within the current revenue budget.

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Signed by:
Paddy May
Corporate Strategy Manager

Appendices:

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
What is the Armed Forces Covenant?	https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/about/
The Armed Forces Community within the Solent: A Needs Assessment prepared on Behalf of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership	https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-armed-forces-community-within-sub-solent.pdf
Employment Committee, Tuesday 25 th September 2018: Armed Forces Covenant: Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold award sustainability plan	Armed Forces Report.pdf (portsmouth.gov.uk)

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/
rejected by on

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Signed by: