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(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Meeting
Subject:	Support for Armed Forces Families
Date of meeting:	21 March 2023
Report by:	Caroline Hopper, Lead Officer Armed Forces Covenant, on behalf of Strategy, The Executive
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Leader of the Council and Elected Armed Forces Champion

2. Purpose: To update the Cabinet on work to renew Portsmouth City Council's affiliation with His Majesty's Naval Base, Portsmouth and provide a summary of on-going priorities for providing support to support serving families.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Background: Portsmouth is the home of the Royal Navy, and the armed forces are a significant part of the fabric of the city. The City Council takes its responsibility to the Royal Navy very seriously and has been working closely with the Naval Base Commander, Captain of the Base, Naval Families Federation (NFF) and Royal Navy, Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) to understand how it can further support serving personnel and their families.

3.2 His Majesty's Naval Base, Portsmouth (HMNB Portsmouth) is one of three operating bases in the United Kingdom. It is the oldest base in the Royal Navy and headquarters to a significant proportion of the Royal Navy's surface fleet (including two aircraft carriers, type 45 destroyers, and type 23 Frigates).

3.3 In 2022 the Council transferred the honorary grant of Freedom of the City to Portsmouth Naval Base and Portsmouth Ships. The honour was awarded to pay tribute to the Royal Navy for its many centuries of gallant and distinguished service, and for its contribution to the development of Portsmouth. Following this honour personnel from HMNB Portsmouth paraded through the city, exercising their right to

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do so with fixed bayonets and colours flying as they celebrated the Freedom of the City.

3.4 The Council was previously affiliated to HMS Endurance; however, this ceased upon its decommissioning. It is noted that the Council will soon have a new affiliation to HMNB Portsmouth as a Home Port, connecting it to the base and its flotilla. This affiliation will not be purely ceremonial. It is intended to focus on tangible support to service personnel and their families.

3.5 There are 7,600 regular serving personnel are based in Portsmouth. Additionally, it is estimated that Portsmouth is also home to 5,472 partners of serving personnel and 3,724 service children. 943 service children are registered for Service Pupil premium within Portsmouth schools¹.

4. Priorities moving forward

4.1 There has been discussion about where initial support should focus. From these discussions the Council is exploring several ideas to improve communication, better coordinate support for, and increase opportunities for service families to participate in events and activities hosted within the city.

4.2 In addition to established methods of communication it has been suggested that a regular physical touch point, would provide families with a chance to find out more about what the Council has to offer and feedback about their experience. The Captain of the Base holds regular community surgeries which could form the platform for additional communication channel with the Council. It is noted that the Council will work with Ward Councillors to consider how best to enable the council to be represented at these surgeries and will also discuss the opportunity with Hampshire Constabulary, as a relevant stakeholder, who may also wish to be involved in the venture.

4.3 There are several markers annually that provide an opportunity to acknowledge, engage, raise awareness, and thank, military personnel and their families for their service. These include April as the month of the Military Child, Armed Forces Week in June, and Military Family Month in November. For some years now the Council has observed Armed Forces Week, raising the Armed Forces Day flag at a dedicated ceremony, and hosting well attended Armed Forces Day events. It is

¹ The Armed Forces Community within the Solent Needs Assessment (2022) available from: [The Armed Forces Community Within The Solent \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk)

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noted that the Council will now reflect upon how best to observe other opportunities, in a way that responds to needs identified by military children and families. This will complement other activities already underway within the Council, such as the work in partnership with Portsmouth's parent and carer board to create a tool kit for schools with service pupils.

4.4 Annually the Navy host a Base day for service families, however not all families are able to attend this, and improving service family's access to other events and activities within the city has been identified as an area for development. Within this there are several avenues to be explored and it is noted the Council will work with local organisations to consider how they can support naval/military families' participation in their events and services. This could be by way of targeted advertising to ensure families know what is available to them, offering discounts, dedicated performances/shows, and/or providing a more tailored service such as offering a specific military family welfare area within larger events.

4.5 Ensuring that services work together to support Armed Forces families has also been highlighted as an area for consideration. At a strategic level Portsmouth City Council continues to be the leading member of the Solent Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board (SAFCPB). The SAFCPB brings together Portsmouth, Southampton, Gosport, and Isle of Wight Councils, alongside the local military, health services, and voluntary and community sector to understand and meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community across the region. The SAFCPB has developed a strong positive reputation, locally and nationally, over the past five years and is seen by many in the military community as an exemplar. In other Royal Naval base areas, such as Plymouth, alternative models have developed. These include the use of an 'Armed Forces Forum' to bring together stakeholders at an operational level. As a city Portsmouth has a good record of services working together to support the Armed Forces Community with examples such as Veterans Outreach Support (VOS) bringing together services as part of their monthly drop-in. It is noted that the Council will explore the need for an Armed Forces Forum, aligned to the SAFCPB for services working with serving personnel and their families, to help with ensuring those working with Armed Forces Families are more connected and co-ordinated in their responses.

4.6 Service Accommodation is an area that some service families have reported as having a negative impact on their experience of military life. The Council is keen to assist with this issue and has had some discussions over the last few years about the possibility of Portsmouth City Council's Housing and Building Services providing property and building services for the MOD housing stock in Portsmouth and Havant.

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The Council currently manage and maintain council owned housing stock of approximately 15,000 units of accommodation and considers that it has the infrastructure and expertise to make a positive difference to serving personnel and their families experience of service accommodation. It is noted that the Council would like to offer to look after the naval housing in the Portsmouth area as a trial, to see if a local solution might work better for naval families, rather than being part of a national contract.

5. Conclusion: Portsmouth is a Naval City, and the Council takes its responsibilities to the Royal Navy very seriously. It is noted that the Council intends to enter a new affiliation with HMNB Portsmouth, and that the Council is committed to ensuring its engagement with the local Armed Forces Community transcends ceremonial appreciation. Council Leaders are working with local military leaders, and key stakeholders, including the NFF, to identify areas for tangible action. It is noted that as a result several areas for action will be explored which include improving communication, collaboration, and participation. Some of the areas of action identified will require work with a wider group of stakeholders such as Defence Infrastructure Organisation and businesses within the City. It is noted that the Council is committed to undertaking this work to support members of the armed forces community to have parity of access to services, and a positive experience of their time living, working, and learning in the city aligned with the commitment that it has made to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant.

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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
The Armed Forces Community within the Solent Needs Assessment	The Armed Forces Community Within The Solent (portsmouth.gov.uk)
Renewal of Armed Forces Covenant	Strategy
Armed Forces Champion Annual Report	Strategy