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To: Corporate Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee 8 April 2010

Subject: Welfare Pathway

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To update Members on the Welfare Pathway & Next Steps

For Information

1. Introduction

1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) was approached by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) regarding the welfare pathway in summer 2009. This is about increased coherence of access to public services to members of the Armed Forces community and is part of a cross government initiative led by the Minister of Veterans, Kevin James. Following a presentation on the Gateway initiative to a MoD conference, Kent was selected as a pilot for this initiative.

1.2 The aspiration of the Welfare Pathway is to bring together services to support the Armed Forces community and to ensure they are aware of the services available to them. The MoD model essentially fits the Gateway model as Gateway already operates along the principle of joined-up access, so it is mainly business as usual as it will touch on a range of services from education and special needs to occupational therapy, social services and other rehabilitation services across KCC, Health, district and boroughs, central government and the voluntary sector, much of which is already accessed by Kent residents through the Gateway model. This is about providing coherence across the public sector for the Armed Forces community rather than generating increased referrals.

1.3 As part of this initiative, the MoD launched a national telephone number to provide one sign-posting service to individuals and families from the Armed Forces Community. Kent also has a dedicated telephone line for the Armed Forces Community, operated through Contact Kent.

1.4 The pilot was launched by the Minister on 4 November to raise the profile of this national initiative and the MoD have expressed a real commitment to working with Kent partners.

1.5 A further aim of the pilot is to capture information on best practice and issues and challenges this community face in order to inform local and national policy discussions and decisions. Data will be captured from the Armed Forces Community accessing services to facilitate this.

2. Progress to Date

2.1 An Armed Forces Champion has been created offering a similar role to that of the Children's Champion and Older Person's Champion within KCC. Leyland Ridings was selected for this position as approved by the Selection & Member Services Committee and the Terms of Reference for this role are attached as appendix one.

2.2 Customer Service Advisors in Gateways have begun to develop a fuller understanding of the range of services available to the Armed Forces Community (particularly those within the voluntary sector) and the national number is displayed in Gateways. Customer Services Advisors in Gateway and in Contact Kent signpost the number appropriately to Kent residents.

2.3 KCC has been working with other public sector agencies and voluntary sector organisations to develop the pathway in practice with the MoD. This began with a seminar in

January 2010 that agreed a number of actions. It is still early days however and there is more work to be done here.

2.4 Frequently Asked Questions have been developed and staff trained within Contact Kent to manage enquiries as they come in by telephone and mystery shopping takes place to ensure these skills are retained.

2.3 A successful launch was undertaken with the Veterans' Minister and local representatives at the Tunbridge Wells Gateway.

3. Next Steps

3.1 Finalise protocols between MoD and local public and voluntary sector organisations, particularly in devising a referral flow chart and capturing information (the MoD are leading on this). Develop a Welfare Pathway Champion role within each Gateway to have more detailed specialised knowledge on the services available. This would be a specific remit of one or more individuals rather than a new position.

3.2 A local Armed Forces Community group is being established (as agreed at the seminar) that will include representation from the following organisations: KCC, SPVA, RBL, War Pensions, district and borough councils, Mental Health Trust, NHS, Kent Adult Social Services, KDAAT, Housing, HIVE, Schools, Citizens' Advice and Prisons/Probation. There may be other organisations that need to be involved as we move forward. This group will be chaired by Leyland Ridings as the Armed Forces Champion.

3.3 Awareness of this initiative within the Armed Forces Community needs to be improved, therefore a communications plan will be developed and implemented. It is important to ensure the operational elements are embedded before the service is widely promoted and therefore it is more sensible to focus on a publicity campaign once the protocols are more established between organisations. We would hope this will take place by the summer.

3.4 The MoD lead officer for this initiative has recently changed and with a new representative comes an opportunity to refocus and raise the profile of this important service.

4. Summary

The Welfare Pathway is an extension of the existing Gateway model focused on the Armed Forces Community. There was a significant drive to launch the Kent pilot by November and since then, work has focused on establishing the operational framework to deliver a coherent service. The next few weeks will see a significant drive to finalise these arrangements and ensure the service is then promoted more widely to the Armed Forces Community and that the feedback from the pilot informs local and national policy discussions.

5. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report

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