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To: Corporate Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 12 November 2010

Subject: The Ministry of Defence Welfare Pathway Pilot in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Recommendations

1. Members are asked to **NOTE** the progress with the National Pilot to date and **SUPPORT** the proposed actions to take the initiative forward in Kent

2. Introduction

1) In 2009, the Government asked what more could be done to demonstrate the nation's commitment to the armed forces and its gratitude for their service and sacrifice. The Command Paper "The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans" was the result of that process and provided a comprehensive framework to address these issues.

2) Two principles underpin the Command Paper:

- Firstly, it is designed to end any disadvantage that armed service imposes on the nation's forces, their families and veterans. It specifically seeks to counter the difficulties that follow from being required to move around the country or the world, and identifies those areas where special treatment is needed to achieve this.
- Secondly, the Paper also set out how as a nation we can better support and recognise those who have been wounded in the service of their country.

3) The Armed Forces Community Welfare Pathway is not a physical but a conceptual pathway, which provides the Armed Forces Community (all service personnel, their families and veterans with a means of more easily and effectively accessing the help and advice they may need. The Pathway does not replace existing signposting mechanisms but is intended to reinforce them by ensuring that people do not slip through the net.

3. Background

1) The Coalition Government has stated that the Armed Forces Covenant is one of their highest priorities. It will be the foundation of how the Government treats the Armed Forces community. The current Covenant was developed for the Army but will be revised to cover all of the Armed Forces.

2) The work includes taking forward the specific commitments made in the Coalition Programme as well as defining the Covenant itself. This work will build on the Service Personnel Command Paper. The Covenant refers to the contract that is assumed to exist between servicemen and women and the civilians on whose behalf they serve. It represents the nation's moral commitment to its Armed Forces. It is an informal understanding, based on convention, custom, and contemporary application, rather than a legally enforceable arrangement but it is nevertheless treated very seriously in the Services. In June it was reported that the Prime Minister had announced plans to enshrine the Covenant in law.

3) The Coalition Government is currently considering how best to fulfil the Covenant in terms of resource allocation, policies and legislation. The Covenant will be taken forward in four key ways:

- The Strategic Defence and Security Review considering the Covenant as a specific workstream.
- Producing the new Armed Forces Covenant
- Developing and delivering the Coalition commitments
- Continuing to develop, deliver and monitor the Service Personnel Command Paper commitments and the Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce measures.

3) A Covenant Taskforce has been established by the Prime Minister to identify, assess and recommend innovative ways in which the Government can rebuild the Covenant. It includes representatives from the MOD, Cabinet Office and academic institutions and is expected to report its findings in the autumn.

4) Since the General Election earlier this year, the Armed Forces Minister has indicated continuing support for the Welfare Pathway initiative as part of delivering this commitment. The Welfare Pathway Work is currently being conducted both within the MOD and by the Prime Minister's Task Force on the Armed Forces Covenant. The title 'Welfare Pathway' may change in due course, in line with other developments on the Armed Forces Covenant.

5) The Welfare Pathway is being undertaken at present by 3 pilot areas – Hampshire, Wigan and Kent. Kent was chosen as the MoD had heard about the Gateway Programme and approached us to discuss the opportunities. Following a presentation to a MoD conference in 2009 on Gateway by the Director of Strategic Development and Public Access, Kent was selected as a pilot.

6) Representatives of the three initial pilots met with the lead officers at the MoD in September and agreed that the trial period for the pilot schemes should be extended to run from October 2010 to October 2011. This will allow more information to be collected and provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the initiative.

nationally. In addition to the three councils above, further pilots have been established in the North Yorkshire, Fife and Vale of Glamorgan Council areas.

4. Progress To Date

1) One important feature of the Welfare Pathway is a national point of contact telephone number (08000 223366), established by the MoD, which is intended to increase the chances of people getting the help they need - particularly those people who do not know where to turn for advice. Callers following this route would in the first instance be directed either to the dedicated helplines for the Army, Royal Navy or Royal Airforce (if currently serving) or to Veterans UK (for ex-service personnel) who in turn would refer to the pilot area if appropriate.

2) Veterans UK was created by the MOD in 2007 as a new brand for services to veterans. It is part of the Service Personnel & Veterans Agency (SPVA) and is intended to be the first stop for veterans seeking help and advice. Among its many services, it offers advice and help on Pensions & Compensation, works on Armed Forces Day, deals with veterans' discounts, tracing comrades and specialised programmes (for example for those veterans who may experience mental health issues). It also helps with tracing service records and eligibility to medals and badges. Importantly for the Welfare Pathway it offers the Veterans Welfare Service via free helpline and online advice.

3) **Hampshire:** Hampshire County Council (HCC) already had a strong relationship with the Army and the RAF. They recognise that further work is still required to build the same level of relationship with the Royal Navy. Most of their work so far appears to have been focused on serving personnel and their families, given that they have a greater range of armed forces than any other county in the UK with large Army units in Aldershot, Bordon, Middle Wallop, Minley and Winchester; the headquarters of United Kingdom Land Forces in Andover; and the dedicated Army UK at Marchwood. The Royal Navy has its headquarters at Portsmouth, which is also home to two-thirds of the surface fleet, and RAF Odiham is a front line support helicopter station. Altogether there are about 22,000 serving personnel stationed in Hampshire

4) A number of improvements to services had already been made linked to their involvement with the South East Super Garrison Partnership. They had responded to the aims of improving support for all aspects of military life as set out in 'The Nation's Commitment' with a series of initiatives including:

- Improving schools admissions, tracking attainment levels and special educational needs for military families
- Issuing concessionary leisure cards for serving personnel and their families living in Hampshire, and
- Creating an economic board with the Armed Forces in the north-east of the County aimed at assisting training, investment and employment opportunities for people leaving the Forces.

These initiatives and the scale of the military presence in the county led to their invitation to become one of the Government's 'Welfare Pathway' Pilots.

5) As a first step to improving its evidence base, HCC commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out a survey of Army personnel in Hampshire to inform future policy decisions. Questionnaires were sent to 4,000 Army families seeking their opinions on a range of services available locally. The responses provide assessments of the perceived importance of the services, together with opinions on their quality. The results of the survey have been used to amend some of the County Council services

6) However to date they report that there have only been a few specific Armed Forces Community enquiries for welfare support through the pathway and in most cases, the concerns were the same as the civilian population.

7) **Wigan:** Wigan is a very different area and does not have a serving military presence. They are working with an organisation set up by and for veterans, the Wigan Borough Veterans Council (WBVC). WBVC have established a website - www.wbvc.co.uk – and provide information, advice and guidance, and signposting. WBVC is based in council-funded office accommodation, staffed by volunteers working 5 days a week. They also staff desks in Wigan Borough's Service Centres (their one-stop-shop arrangement) on a weekly basis to help deal with specific veterans-related issues.

8) The Council has enacted the recent legislative changes to allow service personnel to establish a local connection when applying for housing. They are also building links with the charity Combat Stress in order to ensure that service-related mental health issues receive appropriate attention. Similarly, WBVC is engaged with the local NHS LINK, to provide advocacy on behalf of the Armed Forces Community.

9) **Kent:** Gateway operates on the principle of joined-up access, providing coherence across the public sector for the Armed Forces community.

10) Building on the Gateway approach, a dedicated telephone line for the Armed Forces Community In Kent, operated through Contact Kent has been set up – the Armed Forces Community Helpline (08458 247601) and Contact Kent staff are able to direct callers to appropriate services whether they are serving personnel or veterans. This includes advice on national sources of support, as well as local services provided by statutory authorities, armed forces charities and voluntary sector organisations. Similarly, Gateway staff have been briefed to respond to members of the armed forces community and Gateways already incorporate a range of statutory and voluntary partners offering advice and support services, including a Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) presence in each Gateway

11) A survey has been carried out in Gateways, to establish how people feel about being asked if they are a member of the Armed Forces Community, whether they are happy for this information to be used on an anonymous, aggregate basis to aid the development of services. The survey also aimed to establish the most common types of enquiry.

12) Like the national helpline number there have to date been very few calls to the dedicated helpline. The number of members of the Armed Forces Community captured in the Gateway survey has also been relatively small but

suggests that enquiries tend to relate to housing, benefits, and employment and skills.

13) A Kent Armed Forces Community Group has been established and held its first meeting in July, chaired by Leyland Ridings as the Armed Forces Champion. A further meeting is being arranged for late November or early December. The purpose of the group is to provide a forum for discussion between representatives of the Armed Forces Community (in-service, ex-service, their families and widow(er)s), the Third Sector and the local authority to raise and resolve issues of significant impact or where consistent trends give cause for concern. The terms of reference (attached as Appendix 1) were agreed with some additions to widen the membership including Citizens Advice Bureau, (who actually attended the first meeting) and the Police. Since then we have learned that Job Centre Plus have an Armed Forces Champion for Kent who will be added to the membership along with RBLI based on their frontline experience.

14) A key issue identified at the meeting was in relation to the experiences of Gurkhas. Kent is home to the largest concentration of Gurkhas in the country, with two battalions (1st and 2nd Battalions, Royal Gurkha Rifles) stationed at Shorncliffe Barracks, in Folkestone, and a contingent of the Queen's Gurkha Engineers stationed with 36 Engineer Regiment at Invicta Park Barracks in Maidstone. There are communities of ex-Gurkhas in Maidstone, Ashford, Folkestone and Dover.

15) The Kent Wide Strategic Network on Migration has worked with the United Kingdom Border Agency, the MOD, members of the Gurkha community and others to look at how best to meet the needs of those ex-Gurkhas who may decide to settle permanently in the UK. This work established that the Gurkha Community had little understanding of services available in the UK. A typical case study showed ex-Gurkhas seeking settlement in the UK arriving with no money, nowhere to live, no National Insurance number and therefore no access to health or social care benefits. It is anticipated that this may be a growing problem

16) Two information days targeted at this community have been held in Ashford and Cheriton libraries respectively. A variety of agencies attended, including Education, Adult Education, the Gurkha Welfare Association, Health, District Councils and the DWP and the events were very well attended by approximately 170 Nepalese people. There are plans in place to run more information days and it is also hoped that community volunteers may come forward to act as conduits to services. In addition, the Kent Fire and Rescue Service are going to employ a Nepalese speaking home advocate to advise on home safety issues.

17) The Gurkha Settlement Office in Kathmandu, established a year ago, has produced guidance and a pathway for ex-Gurkhas in conjunction with the Gurkha Welfare Centre in Salisbury. This is intended to ensure that ex-Gurkhas and their families have the information and documentation they need before they leave Nepal. A presentation prepared by the Gurkha Settlement Office is attached as Appendix 2.

5. Next Steps

1) Representatives from the pilots attended a conference hosted by Hampshire County Council in September. The conference was attended by a wide range of participants drawn from, among others, the MOD, the Armed Forces, armed forces charities and veterans' organisations, Health, Probation, Department for Work & Pensions Jobcentre Plus, and Housing.

2) The conference provided a very good opportunity for learning and discussion of how to take the Welfare Pathway initiative forward and included presentations by the MOD, the Commander of South Brigade (Army), Hampshire's Director of Public Health, Hampshire County Council, and the Confederation of British Service and Ex-service Organisations (COBSEO). It also included by way of context a Commander's perspective on Operation Herrick by a Brigadier recently returned from Afghanistan.

3) Based on the experiences to date, there are a number of actions proposed to take the Pathway forward in Kent. These include:

- Updating the briefing for Contact Kent and Gateway staff and re-launching the 08458 247601 helpline number and developing armed forces "champions" in frontline customer service points, to ensure that knowledge and awareness is kept up to date. To publicise the support available and how to get in touch we will investigate setting up an armed forces specific page on the KCC website. We will also be looking for opportunities to for respect/recognition of the armed forces and veterans and using such opportunities to highlight available support.
- Using the links we are developing with the armed forces to gain a better understanding of where there may be issues with public services Health Care, Education, Transport, and Housing; and also to understand the implications of temporary training placements at Kent bases.
- Establishing more information about the health needs of the Armed Forces Community; whether there are substantial differences in Kent and whether as a result healthcare should differ from main stream provision. We are in touch with the Strategic Health Authority, South East Coast, who are currently undertaking some mapping on Veterans and Health work especially in relation to Mental Health. It may be possible to include some specific work on the Armed Forces Community in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and this will be investigated further.
- Gaining a better understanding of the contribution that the armed forces make to the local economy in Kent, both in direct spending and through civilian employment and use of local contractors, and to what extent communities rely on direct and indirect employment.
- Ensuring schools admission policies take account of the needs of the children of serving personnel and that schools continue to be aware of needs of children before, during and after deployments, and in the event of bereavement or serious injury.

- Ensuring, in conjunction with District Council colleagues and through Supporting People, that members of the Armed Forces Community have appropriate access to suitable housing.
- Exploring the role of the DWP Job Centre Plus champion and understanding how we can best work together
- Exploring the possibility of developing a strategic partnership with an armed forces based organisation, to increase knowledge, provide mutual training opportunities, and access specialised support.
- Continuing work to ensure that Gurkhas and ex-Gurkhas, and their families, have access to the information they need to make important and informed decisions about their future.

6. Conclusion

1) Service men and women and veterans are a very important part of the wider Kent community and KCC is at the forefront of developing the Welfare Pathway on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and the Government, building on the initiatives we already have in place to provide support and ensure people have access to the right information and services. The Pathway will further strengthen the links between the Armed Forces and public services in Kent and the lessons learned here will inform the intended national rollout of the Welfare pathway from October 2011.

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Previous Council/Cabinet/Committee References:

Report to the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 8 April 2010
 – Item B5, Ministry of Defence Welfare Pathway Pilot in Kent