

From: Leyland Ridings, KCC's Armed Forces Champion
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To: Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee 17 January 2014

Subject: Civilian Military Covenant

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report outlines the role of the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Partnership Board in overseeing the Covenant that KCC has signed with the armed forces. It sets out the implications for Kent of the Government's strategic changes to the armed forces and provides examples of initiatives undertaken to date.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Committee is asked to provide its views on priorities for future activity.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant (see Annex 1), which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level.
- 1.2 Kent County Council was one of the first authorities to sign a Community Covenant, back in September 2011. The purpose of the Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Kent and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community. For KCC, this presents an opportunity to bring its knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. For the Armed Forces Community, the Community Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life and for Service personnel to help their local community.
- 1.3 KCC established a Board (see Annex 2) to oversee the implementation of the Covenant, and this has evolved over time. Recent changes have been made to the membership of the Board, and it now meets twice a year, with work being undertaken by sub-groups across the key Covenant themes of:
 - Health and wellbeing

- Integration (this includes support for service children, and promoting stronger, safer communities)
 - Housing
 - Employment, Economy and skills, and
 - Recognise and Remember
- 1.4 The Government is making major changes to the armed forces nationally which have significant implications that we need to plan for in Kent, such as ensuring that redundant service personnel are supported in getting employment and housing, and identifying the implications for businesses, families and communities of having greater numbers of reservists in the working population.
- 1.5 This report sets out the context in which the Covenant operates, including the government's plans to re-base the armed forces, and then takes each of the Covenant themes in turn, outlining some of the successes achieved to date and the priorities for the future.

2. National changes, and the implications for Kent

- 2.1 In October 2010, the Government published its *Strategic Defence and Security Review* setting out plans for a reduction of 7,000 personnel in the Army, the redeployment of British forces personnel from Germany to the UK and a reconfiguration of the Army into regionally-based, multi-role Brigades.
- 2.2 *Transforming the British Army*, published in July 2012, expanded upon this, shaping a vision for 'Army 2020' – a transformed Army equipped to deal with the challenges of the 2020s and beyond. It laid plans for a new reconfiguration around the creation of 'Reaction Forces' and 'Adaptable Forces', supported by Force Troop Brigades. It placed an increased emphasis on reserve forces, reversing the trend of the previous decade, targeting an increase of 50% in reservists, and better integration within the military as part of one seamless force, foreseeing reserves not only being used sporadically for national emergencies, but to be used more frequently and predictably. This would require significant and ambitious recruitment, training and public relations work, placing a greater stress on individuals, their families and their employers.
- 2.3 The *Regular Army Basing Plan*, released in March 2013, added more detail. The Army would be consolidated around seven main centres around the UK with the closure of a number of bases, a speedier withdrawal from Germany and the end to the culture of routine rotation in the UK. A further basing plan for the Reserves was published in July 2013. The Government committed £1.8bn to the Basing Plan; £1bn for new accommodation and the remaining £800k for technical infrastructure.

- 2.4 Within the greater South-East region, 145 (South) Brigade (based at Aldershot and covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) and 2 (South-East) Brigade (based at Shorncliffe and covering Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Brunei) are to be merged to form 11 Infantry Brigade, based in Aldershot. From 1 September 2014, the newly formed 11 Infantry Brigade will come into fruition, the rest of the calendar year becoming a transition period, before it officially takes over operations on 1 January 2015.
- 2.5 The 5 Scots Regiment will become a ceremonial company based in Scotland and the Howe Barracks in Canterbury will close.
- 2.6 Outcomes of the review into Reserve Units locations have left most units largely unchanged in Kent, with a slight reduction in personnel in Tunbridge Wells but a significant increase in Canterbury.

3. Health and Wellbeing Sub-Group

- 3.1 A group that focussed on the health and wellbeing of veterans and their families was established in 2011 in response to:
 - The Murrison report (that looked at the mental health of veterans, prosthetic limbs, and the rehabilitation back into the community of seriously injured veterans).
 - David Cameron's initiative to prioritise veteran health – if there are two people with the same level of risk, the veteran should have priority.
 - An excellent health needs assessment in Kent and Medway for veterans and serving personnel which was completed in 2010
- 3.2 The South East Coastal Armed Forces Group, as it was initially known, joined the Kent Civilian Military Partnership Board at its meeting in November 2012 for a discussion about how to promote wellbeing and good mental health amongst veterans and their families and it was agreed that the group would become the formal "Health and Wellbeing" Sub-Group for the Kent Civilian Military Partnership Board.
- 3.3 The Sub-Group is chaired by Steve Howe, who is non-executive Director of the Kent Community Health Trust, and includes a number of representatives from the NHS, KCC, Medway UA, the Army and the voluntary sector (including RBLI and British Legion). Jess Mookherjee, a KCC Public Health Consultant, is the link between the Board and the Sub-Group.
- 3.4 Major successes achieved in the last year include the launch in April 2013 of the Armed Forces Network (see the website at <http://armedforcesnetwork.co.uk>) which provides information about free mental health services for ex-military personnel across Kent and Medway. The network brings together volunteers

and professions to ensure ex-military personnel who are suffering from anxiety and depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can access and receive appropriate help. It was set up as a direct result of the veterans' needs assessment referred to earlier.

- 3.5 We have also successfully secured funding from the MoD's LIBOR fund to set up three 'Men's Sheds' in Kent aimed at veterans. 'Men's Sheds' is an established movement with a national network (see www.menssheds.org.uk) but is new to Kent and has not been applied specifically to veterans. In Kent, a Men's Shed is a place where men (and women if they are interested) can go to socialise, be creative, share ideas, share skills and spend time with other men while working on practical projects. Research has shown that men, particularly from a veteran background, prefer to be supported 'shoulder to shoulder' with other men, rather than more formal learning sessions in adult education environments or face to face with a therapist. Through the Kent Sheds programme, participants will be trained to use a 'community toolkit' of physical tools to create community nature or crafts projects and an 'inner toolkit' of resilience and leadership. Public Health money has also been found to roll out a larger number of 'Sheds' aimed at a wider population, but some of which will also have veterans participating. Sheds thus increase the mental and physical health and wellbeing of participants, and will also benefit the local community in a number of ways. The Thanet Shed, which is being provided by Futures for Heroes and is focused on veterans, is already up and running. We are aiming to open veterans sheds in Dartford and Shepway in February.

4. Employment, Economy and Skills Sub-Group

- 4.1 The main priority for this sub-group has been to identify what needs to be done to tackle the peak of the June 2013 redundancies on top of the steady state transitions from the armed forces into civilian life. Amongst other things, the Sub-group is organising transition events and engagement groups as well as working with local businesses.
- 4.2 Working with the Centre for Micro-Business (CMB), we have successfully secured almost £66k of funding from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, to assist those in the military and broader communities seeking to start their own business with a tailored programme of individual business support. CMB will first establish a dedicated training programme for mentors drawn from business, education and the military to deliver comprehensive, appropriate and pragmatic support on a 'one to one' and 'one to many' basis, face to face and online, to those who would not otherwise benefit from this high level of individual coaching. CMB will work with 2 and 145 Brigades to especially target those who suffer from a lack of self-esteem, mobility issues, English as a second language (ESOL), transport difficulties, or financial

constraints, working with Canterbury College to create a business “hub” model, using suitable students to create a self-help group combining students and entrepreneurs, providing IT/web, creative solutions for business issues. This will provide experiential learning opportunities for both students and learners.

- 4.3 Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) have been awarded £250k from the LIBOR Fund to enable personnel families to find and secure sustainable employment. The funding will be utilised to expand RBLI’s successful piloting of ‘LifeWorks’ courses to spouses and partners of armed forces personnel to target 500 spouses in 2 years, trialling a mixture of methods to help them overcome the difficulties posed when their partners are (often frequently and at short notice) redeployed or relocated. The MOD were so enthused about the bid that they encouraged RBLI to bid for further funding to cover childcare costs.

5. Integration Sub-Group

- 5.1 The purpose of this sub group is:

- *Develop and promote a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Service children and the means to address those needs so as to overcome the disadvantages they face*
- *Promote common understanding and closer integration between military and civilian communities, with a particular focus on achieving strong and safe communities*

- 5.2 It has only recently been established, so is meeting for the first time later in January. Examples of possible areas of focus include:

- Support agencies in their dealings with the Armed Forces, seeking to make best use of ever-diminishing resources, and achieve common outcomes and goals.
- Develop and promote community projects that further the “integration” aims of the Covenant, seeking funding from the Community Covenant Grant scheme as appropriate.
- Develop youth opportunities across Kent & Medway, supporting the Army Cadet Force and the Combined Cadet Forces, and using Service Personnel as role models and mentors for young people who could most benefit from this
- Ensure schools understand and address the specific needs of Service children. As part of this, share good practice (from within and outside Kent).
- Enable strategic planning of schools places through timely information-sharing, but also ensure those Service children moved into Kent do get school places quickly.

- Maximise the value of the Pupil Premium by encouraging registration of Service children and promoting best practice in utilisation of funding.
- Promote opportunities so that Service children (0-5 Years) are 'school ready'

5.3 Likely activities include

- 1) Gurkha Settlement Fund, delivery of the core projects will help aid settlement and community integration.
- 2) Forces training programme for frontline public sector staff, to raise awareness of issues relating to settlement and referral pathways into support networks
- 3) Social and Economic impacts of armed forces and reserve forces settlement (research is about to be conducted on this)
- 4) Community engagement events – could link to cadets but looking at the wider community to demonstrate positive outcomes.

5.4 In addition, the Group is likely to raise awareness of the case studies available on the Department for Education's website on how some schools across the country have used the pupil premium in relation to service families. We have already written to all the schools in Kent with service children to highlight HMS Heroes – a specific initiative of the Royal British Legion to support schools with service children. Generally speaking the academic achievement of service children is the same as their peers (unlike the economically disadvantaged students receiving pupil premium) but schools generally have to deal with changes in the students emotions and behaviour when a parent is sent on deployment or they are being moved around schools. Schools can seek support (as they can for all students) for students' emotional wellbeing and behaviour management from the authority's specialist advice and support services (such as Education Psychology, Attendance and Behaviour Service) available through EduKent.

6. Housing Sub-Group

6.1 The Joint Policy & Planning Board for Housing (JPPB) has established a Service Personnel Housing Sub-Group, to lead on implementing the priorities relating to serving and ex-serving military personnel identified for response in the Kent & Medway Housing Strategy. The Sub-Group has representatives from a wide range of organisations including public, private and third sector that support the ambition to level the playing field on housing issues for serving and ex-serving military personnel. In effect, this Sub-Group has been commissioned to be a direct Sub-Group of the Board.

6.2 The Kent and Medway Housing Strategy has three recommendations relating specifically to housing issues experienced by current and former service personnel:

Identify a pathway for the resettlement of ex-service personnel who have offended

Explore how to increase knowledge of housing options amongst members of the armed forces and their families

Explore options to assist vulnerable ex-service personnel who have become or are at risk of becoming homeless

- 6.3 A number of housing-based events have now been held across Kent to help service personnel understand their housing options once they have left the service and raising awareness of housing issues with local military barracks. Work and discussions have also taken place around preventing homelessness amongst ex-service personnel, including the possibility of providing some transitional housing in Kent. The Kent Homechoice website now has useful links and direct sign posting for service personnel. Moat (a Kent-based housing association) have developed partnerships with the MoD and have worked with the joint service housing office to raise awareness of the affordable products available to those serving personnel leaving the service imminently, and those looking to leave in the near future. This has obviously been a high priority given the service redundancies that have already happened, and those that will take place in 2014 and 2015. Housing options are a key aspect of the transition fairs that have been organised, with further such fairs planned in 2014.

7. Recognise & Remember Sub-Group

- 7.1 The purpose of this Sub-Group, which is chaired by Leyland Ridings, is to have an overview of the many ways in which people in Kent recognise the work of the armed forces and commemorate significant events, and to drive and co-ordinate activity. Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Sunday are annual events, but in 2014 and 2015 there are many very significant anniversaries, notably to do with World War 1 and World War 2. Annex 3 gives some notable examples of planned activity that KCC is aware of, but there will be many more. In addition, there is a small co-ordinating group within KCC, also chaired by Leyland Ridings, to develop a communications plan for KCC activity and provide a point of reference for bodies outside KCC wishing to engage with us.

8. Community Covenant Workshop

- 8.1 On 22 January the Board is holding a workshop for all armed forces champions and officers involved in developing and promoting community covenants across the district councils. The purpose is to celebrate the successes so far, share good practice, and identify the priorities for action

over the next year. Any Members wishing to attend this event would be very welcome.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1 This report has provided an overview of how the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Board is implementing the Community Covenant, putting this into the context of the significant changes to how the armed forces will operate in Kent and nationally. Priorities for the future will need to include an emphasis on ensuring smooth transition to civilian life for those leaving the armed forces, and taking action to support the increase in reservists (and commensurate increase in families and employers of reservists). The Committee is asked to NOTE the range of activity underway, and to COMMENT on what the priorities for future activity should be.

Background Papers: None

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Annexes:

1. The National Community Covenant
2. Membership of the Civilian Military Partnership Board
3. Key events/activities in 2014 to commemorate the First World War.

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

An Enduring Covenant Between
The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government

– and –
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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.