

From: Leyland Ridings, KCC's Armed Forces Champion
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To: Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee 24 May 2016

Decision No: n/a

Subject: Annual Report on the Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an update on Armed Forces Covenant activity since the last report to the Committee in April 2015.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the progress made on the Covenant activities to date and COMMENT on the 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, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at a local level. 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. The Kent & Medway Civilian Military Partnership Board oversees the implementation of the Covenant and meets twice a year, with work being undertaken by sub-groups across the key 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

1.2 The last year has seen significant contextual changes to the Covenant's operating environment. Nationally, the £10m Community Covenant Grant Scheme and particularly the way in which bids are evaluated has changed, the Army has

continued implementation of its rebasing plans apace, and the recruitment drive for reservists and engagement with employers has been augmented. Locally, work has continued in earnest on ensuring the principles of the Covenant are consistent with everything Kent County Council and its Local Government partners do. To enable this to happen effectively, a significant piece of primary research has been undertaken by Kent County Council with partners, to understand the needs and experiences of Kent's serving and ex-armed forces personnel, launched at the recent Kent Armed Forces Covenant Conference, gaining national recognition. Kent has continued to work closely with neighbouring authorities, particularly Surrey County Council, on maximising shared learning, resources and strategic interaction with 11 Brigade. An event on the 'Voice of the Service Child' will be held in June.

2. Update on the Impact of National Changes in Kent

2.1 As Members are aware, 11 Infantry Brigade's footprint covers a large swathe of South East England. The Brigadier, aware of the risks of Aldershot HQ appearing remote and distant, has appointed Task Force Commanders - senior Army officers - to directly engage with key local partners and provide direct routes into the Brigade. The Brigadier's office will still continue to engage directly at County level. Each district has a designated Task Force Commander to provide a two way local link between the Military and the local authority, and there are four across Kent. The key priorities for the Army to engage with local authorities currently are youth engagement, community engagement and employer engagement.

2.2 The Task Force Commanders are currently organising sub-county community engagement events. The Kent Thameside area (Medway, Dartford, Gravesham and Swale) has been identified as one of three Brigade 'inkspots' for 2016, along with Reading/Slough and the Solent – an inkspot being an area of overt focus around community and youth engagement, using the Army's intervention as a tool to improve outcomes in a defined locale. The challenge for Kent County Council, and indeed Medway Council, is to ensure that the most is made of this opportunity and the right links are identified into our existing services.

2.3 Changes have been made to the MoD's Community Covenant Grant Scheme, which was superseded by the 'Covenant Fund' in the Autumn of 2015; a new fund of £10m per annum, open to bids from statutory organisations, charities, voluntary sector, and community groups, for small bids £1k-£20k, and large bids £20k-£500k. Guidance, eligibility, timescales and priorities have all changed, with the fund now having four formal priorities for 2016/17: Veterans' Gateway, families in stress, improving local covenant delivery, and community integration/delivery of local services. Changes have also been made to the way in which bids are evaluated, no longer at local panels but at MoD, albeit with input from regions. There have been concerns that the new system can lack clarity in how it reaches decisions, has on occasions made decisions without local insight or contrary to local/regional advice,

and is not as robust as the previous system, and Kent along with colleagues from neighbouring counties are working closely with MoD to resolve these inconsistencies.

2.4 The Government launched its 'National Security Strategy' and 'The Strategic Defence and Security Review' on 23 November 2015, setting out its approach to national security in a rapidly changing global context, proposing significant changes to the configuration of the British Armed Forces at home and abroad, and how it will respond to emerging threats. This includes a continued reduction of regular troops and a greater emphasis on recruitment and retention of reservists, with a target of 30,000 by 2020, and greater integration of regulars and reservists. Kent Councils have supported recruitment workshops, as well as engaging with employers around responsibilities and indeed opportunities employing reservists brings. Surrey County Council has gone further, encouraging its staff to consider becoming reservists, identifying all existing reservists within its workforce and that of strategic partners including District Councils, and holding celebration/networking events, not only recognising its responsibilities as an employer but praising their wider contribution to the county and country. The Board is keen to learn from this good practice and replicate it in Kent, providing a good opportunity for KCC as a major employer and strategic role model to lead by example, considering what we currently do for reservists, what more we could do, and potential for employing a greater number.

2.5 One of the barriers to successful transition from the Armed Forces to 'Civvy Street' has been financial security, particularly in regards to lower ranked officers securing sustainable housing. The Government has set aside £200 million to fund a 'Forces Help to Buy' scheme that assists personnel to get on the property ladder whilst still serving, enabling servicemen and servicewomen to borrow up to 50% of their salary (up to a maximum of £25k) interest free, to obtain a mortgage and buy their first home, move to another property if due to reassignment, or as their families need change. This property can then be rented out if personnel are posted elsewhere. Specific work in Kent with BPHA is ongoing around publicising the Forces Help to Buy scheme, providing information and encouraging take-up.

3. Activities in Kent Over the Last Year

3.1 Over the last year, Kent County Council, on behalf of the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Covenant Board, has led one of the most significant pieces of research undertaken in the UK since implementation of the Covenant, analysing the needs of serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel in the county, as well as their families and dependants.

3.2 704 members of the Kent & Medway Armed Forces community contributed their time to this research, either through the online survey, focus groups or one-to-one interviews. They often selflessly shared sensitive and emotional information and experiences for which the Board is hugely grateful. Overall, the picture is a positive one, with the majority of Kent's Armed Forces community enjoying life, and most

service leavers transitioning to 'Civvy Street' life with relative ease. Awareness of the Covenant and what it means was still mixed, highlighting the need for further work around promotion with our partners and the Armed Forces.

3.3 Specific findings included a third of veterans having health conditions linked to their time in the forces and generic health and rehabilitation services not always being appropriate to the individual's condition or physical make-up. Isolation and the struggle to integrate within the civilian community was a constant theme, as was access to certain public services. Transience due to reassignments can have a significant impact on the attainment of service children, particularly if frequent, replicating the impact movements have on the attainment of Looked After Children, and this is compounded by increasing variations in syllabuses as a result of academisation. The transferability of Armed Forces qualifications has improved considerably in recent years, and for many current service leavers recognition of these qualifications in the private sector is reasonably easy, however for those ex-personnel who left earlier, this is still proving to be an issue. Housing, as with broader society, is still very difficult for some service leavers, and despite amendments to Kent District Councils' social housing eligibility criteria to eliminate the local connection requirement for the Armed Forces community, the lack of availability of both social housing, affordable housing to rent or buy, highlights the importance of both the Forces Help to Buy scheme and the wider work of the Joint Policy & Planning Board for Housing's Armed Forces Personnel Sub-Group.

3.4 Kent's research has received national plaudits and ministerial recognition, and has been featured on the radio, with interviews from Julian Brazier MP (Minister for Reserves), veterans, charities and Debra Exall. The Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP (Secretary of State for Defence) has now expressed an interest in visiting Kent to see Kent's Covenant work in practice. (Further information about the research can be found at www.kentcouncilleaders.org.uk/military/research).

3.5 The research was launched at The 3rd Annual Kent & Medway Civilian Military Covenant Conference, opened by Mark Lancaster MP (Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans) on 02 March 2016 at the Woodville Theatre, Gravesend. It was the biggest, most ambitious and successful yet, with 146 key players representing all three of the Armed Forces, Local Authorities, statutory agencies, Armed Forces charities, business, and speakers from Ministry of Defence, Department for Education, Department for Work & Pensions, Schools, Public Health and best practice from elsewhere in the country. The conference this year focused on the main themes emerging from the research, and with all the key players who can influence this agenda, considered how collectively we can resolve the issues identified, the outcomes of which directly influence the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Covenant Board's Action Plan and priorities for the year ahead. It is also still a very new area of partnership working, and the opportunity to facilitate networking and learning is invaluable, and we were delighted to host sixteen marketplace stalls from a wide variety of organisations on the day. Special thanks must go to Gravesham Borough Council and Woodville Halls for being excellent hosts and not

charging us for the event. (Further information along with radio interviews can be found at: www.kentcouncilleaders.org.uk/military)

3.6 The Board is now working closely with counterparts in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire and collaboration is going from strength to strength. Together it is possible to tackle the key issues on a regional basis, share expertise and resource more smartly, learn from each other's best practice and learning, and interact with 11 Brigade and the Ministry of Defence more strategically. We are currently looking at replicating Sussex's hugely successful Pathways programme, Surrey's work around reservists and interacting with the private sector, and there is great interest from our counterparts in learning from Kent's Armed Forces research, our work around housing, and the Kent Sheds programme. The Surrey County Council Chairwoman, also their Armed Forces Champion, recently convened a meeting of all the Armed Forces Champions and support officers across the south-east which was hugely beneficial and will be repeated.

3.7 Kent Sheds, a programme that was initially half-funded by MoD and targeted veterans, has continued to grow and prosper across Kent – there are now 27 Sheds - with additional development work in priority communities. A 'Kent Shed' is a network of relationships between 'Shedders', coming together to work alongside each other, sharing skills and developing friendships. Sheds bring with them opportunities for men and women to participate in practical group activities such as woodworking, boat repair or gardening by working together 'shoulder to shoulder' to support one another and their communities, whilst at the same time improving morale and wider public health outcomes. Whilst predominantly targeted at the ex-armed forces community, Sheds are very much open to all. Appendix 1 provides more information about the programme.

4. Priorities for the Future

4.1 With Service Children emerging as such a strong theme from the research, particularly where there are only a small number within a school, the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Covenant Board, after obtaining a grant from the MoD Education Support fund, are holding a 'Voice of the Service Child' conference on 23 June 2016. The aim of the conference is to gather the views of Key Stage 2/3 service pupils from across Kent & Medway to find out how schools support them and celebrate their experiences. The day will be facilitated by Mr Matt Blyton who is a Lead Improvement Advisor from North Yorkshire and has significant expertise in working with Armed Forces families. There will also be the opportunity for teaching and support staff to share experience and learning. The outcomes of the day will be compiled into a report which will be shared with Kent schools and feed back into the Board.

4.2 Early next year the Gurkha regiments once again switch between Shorncliffe and Brunei, and the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Covenant Board is committed to working with partners and the Armed Forces to ensure a smooth transition, learning

from previous experiences, and providing a warm and welcoming homecoming back to the county.

4.3 As mentioned above, replicating the excellent 'Pathways' project developed in Sussex with Brighton & Hove City Council and NHS Sussex Armed Forces Network, consolidating in one place, pathways and contacts for services offered by public, private and voluntary organisations on areas including employment; social care; rough sleeping; physical health; mental health and housing, and establishing a similar Pathways facility in Kent to make it easier for ex-service personnel to navigate how, where, and from which organisation it is possible get necessary support on a whole range of issues is a priority for the Board. (Sussex Pathways can be viewed at: <http://www.sussexarmedforcesnetwork.nhs.uk/pathways/>)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 This report has provided an overview of how the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Partnership Board is continuing to implement the Community Covenant, putting this into the context of the significant changes taking place in how the Armed Forces will operate in Kent and nationally. It has set out for Members the direction of travel and the key areas of priority for future action.

5.2 One of the challenges of this area of work is that it is so broad, linking in with such a wide variety of different services and activities. Resourcing and prioritising this work can be difficult, with no dedicated resource, it is very much dependant on the commitment and dedication of staff to this cause above and beyond 'the day-job'. We continue to make full use of technology – using websites to make connections for individuals and service users, and now we are also liaising with colleagues in Hampshire, Sussex and Surrey to share experiences and good practice across the region. The bottom line, though, is that by having a Civilian Military Partnership Board, we have a first point of contact for the military or veterans who are not sure where to go for help, support or advice.

5.3 The Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the progress made on the Covenant activities to date and COMMENT on the priorities for future activity.

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Background Papers: None

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Update on Kent Sheds

A Shed can be defined as: “a community-based, non-profit, non-commercial organisation that is accessible to all men and whose primary activity is the provision of a safe and friendly environment where men are able to work on meaningful projects at their own pace, in their own time, in the company of other men. A major objective is to advance the wellbeing and health of their male members” (Australian Men’s Sheds Association).

In Kent we have co-developed the Kent Shed concept with the help of Activmobs (a community insights organisation), Groundwork South, KCC representatives, and most importantly local men. We started with two main objectives: to support ex-service personnel to reintegrate and to provide accessible opportunities to combat social isolation for men of all ages. Although predominantly aimed at men, Kent Sheds are open to all and roughly 20% of Shedders are women. Kent Sheds particularly welcome ex-service personnel and most of the sheds have ex-service personnel in their membership, but experience has showed the value of having Sheds that are open to all, rather than some that are exclusive to the armed forces.

Christopher’s story

After 10 years of unemployment Christopher now manages and runs his own café. Chris joined the Dover Community Shed as a founder member in August 2014. He described himself as lacking social skills and isolated, spending most of his time alone in his bedroom. His involvement with the Dover Community Shed enabled him to share some of his life experiences with other shedders. Chris was ex-forces and had trained as a chef, he had experienced and participated in sky fall with a free fall display team and had been a County standard, cross-country runner. From being very overweight and inactive, Chris attended every Dover Shed meeting and became an active promoter of the group attending various events including the Dover Regatta to inform the community and recruit members. Chris went on to recruit his dad to the Shed, who is now a Trustee of the group and plays an active role in considering what activities the group could undertake going forward.

Today, Chris has lost 9 stone in weight, winning the ‘Biggest Losers’ title with weight watchers. The café continues to be successful and provides a living and purpose for Chris. He remains active with the Dover Community Shed, giving support where he can to others and acting as the conduit to connect members. He has plans to deliver seminars such as ‘Cooking on a Budget’ to members in the very near future.

As Christopher’s story demonstrates, Kent Sheds can improve both the physical health and mental wellbeing of participants; benefit local communities and support men in developing skills for employment. A Shed is commonly a community based location (though some have been ‘virtual’ sheds where people meet in different places) that offers:

- A safe and welcoming environment where individuals can feel comfortable discussing their problems with other people and then be signposted to further support
- Sustainable activities and a social environment for these individuals to improve their self-esteem, knowledge, confidence, skills and social network

Many factors attract men and women to community-based Sheds including friendship, doing practical and worthwhile projects ‘shoulder to shoulder’, opportunities for mentoring, lack of compulsion, and sociability. There is real value in Sheds tackling isolation - men consistently report a strong sense of belonging, improved health and wellbeing. Men can also enjoy the opportunity to ‘get out of the house’ – men with partners consistently talked about the need to avoid being ‘underfoot’ at home and to establish and develop new friendships and networks with other men.

There are currently 27 Kent Sheds which are inclusive to adults of all ages and represent one of the highest densities of Sheds in the UK and at least one in each district. There is huge diversity in the Kent Sheds funded and many are themed around sustainable activities such as gardening, woodwork, boats or arts, whilst others are focused on supporting the local community.

Membership has continued to rise and is now not far off 400 with attendances totalling some 7,000. The feedback from shedders has been very positive. It has had a much wider affect than just the men themselves - as the men are feeling more positive it naturally impacts and improves their relationships with others. Also, the wider community benefits from the projects that some sheds take on as their shared interest. Based on initial analyses of Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Score taken over the first 2 years of the programme, 87% of Shedders improved their wellbeing score. A number of Shedders have also gone on to gain paid employment as a result of their work in Sheds.

The Kent Sheds Programme aims to deliver some of the following outcomes.

1 Improved physical and mental health	2 Reduced suicide risk	3 Community resilience
Individual lifestyle choices and behaviours are critically important in contributing toward better health outcomes for the people of Kent including longer healthy life expectancy and reduced health inequalities.	For men aged 40 to 60 who may be less likely to access conventional approaches to improving mental wellbeing	The sheds can help mobilise the individual assets within communities, to build skills and knowledge, social networks and community organisations, to grow resilience and improve health.

Overview of Sheds

Park Wood Shed – Maidstone - Parkwood Shed was already a men’s group that met weekly for support within that group. Morale was low within the group as they had previously been let down with promises that amounted to nothing. The development grant was used as

a team building exercise to bring the group back together and be able to focus on where to go next as a group. The group worked together on their application and were successful in being awarded £5k. In the meantime they have been given a piece of land at a local church, where they have made raised beds as a small community allotment. They have a waiting list of residents that would like a plot. This has been a great morale boost for the group and they are seeking other projects within the community to take on. They are fortunate in being able to use Fusion HLC free of charge to meet. They are in Park Wood Maidstone and are keen to encourage more members.



Boat Buoys – Gravesend – They undertake boat restoration for the regatta. They are a small group but have regular high attendances. They are very welcoming to new members and are keen to share their skills with others.



Dartford Men's shed

This shed support each other well. They have publicised their name in the town and surrounding area, and have created a lot of interest. They are always keen to help in the community and are currently working on a community allotment in Swanscombe. Membership is irregular with people coming and going, but they are proactive in all they are doing.

The Shed – Hub - Northfleet

The Shed is proving to be an inspiring and uplifting experience for everyone that takes part. Our Sheddors have taken ownership of the Shed's ideals and it has become an inclusive and welcoming community. We are firm believers in the power of people to effect meaningful change, and initiatives such as this, which give hope and opportunities to the isolated, the outsiders, and the marginalised, can be a powerful force for good.

Kenward Trust - Yalding

This shed offers a creative space for residents of the Kenward Trust and men from the local community. Shedders have the chance to develop skills around woodworking and gardening within the plant nursery. The shed enhances the surroundings that are already in place and offers a place for reflection and creativity.

Abbey Physic Community Garden – Faversham

This shed is situated within Abbey Physic Garden and is led by Stewart who has had mental health issues and is very aware of the needs of others. The shed is open every day and shedders use it as a drop in and creative with woodworking.



Folkestone Hub

Opened in October 2014, this has a woodworking area, social area, and sewing group for Ghurkha ladies. One shedder has jewellery making skills and will be sharing this with others. They are doing high-end woodworking with a view to selling to generate income which will help ensure the shed's future sustainability. This shed has grown in numbers considerably since its conception. They now have a large group meeting on Mondays that are producing woodworking pieces and have orders for bird tables. They have many ex-service personnel and have engaged well with the Ghurkha community.

The Victory Shed - RBLI Aylesford

This shed is very well supported by its members concentrating on gardening a piece of land that has been donated by RBLI within the Village at Aylesford. The group is currently made up of ex-service personnel with one civilian member and they welcome members from the wider community.



The Ashford Shed

A community shed that offers support to men and skill sharing. The Shed, Ashford is a place that welcomes anybody who wants to learn new skills, explore their creativity, connect with old friends as well as make new ones and to give something back to the local community. This shed is slow getting of the ground but are committed to making it work.

Dover Community Shed

This group were so set on the idea of a shed, they launched before funding had been agreed. They are a community-based shed and will be taking on projects in the local area. A mixed age and gender group of shedders that currently meet twice weekly. They regularly hold events and are widely known in the community. They are a very supportive group that look out for each other.



Dover Boat Shed

Dover Boat shed meets regularly on a boat in Dover marina and welcomes groups of men, women and ex-service personnel to discover the “Six Ways to Wellbeing” through shared activities, socializing, friendship, skill sharing and a supportive environment. As a “Hub Shed” it welcomes visits from other Kent Sheds.

Bodger’s Hut - Whitstable

This shed is situated in the Stream Walk Community Garden Whitstable; it is woodwork based with a range of activities and hopes to be an inspiration to others in setting up a shed. The community garden offers support to the shedders in additional activities.

Cobtree Shed – Aylesford

Cobtree is a larger Shed project. It aims to provide a practical workshop and a social space for retired older people and ex-service personnel living in the area including those from recognised areas of deprivation and isolation. The Shedders have ambitions to support the set-up of smaller sheds in other areas of need, run by community volunteers by offering skill sharing and support to other community members.

Take Off Shed – Canterbury

This shed enables people in the local community to come together, form new and positive social relationships and undertake meaningful activities which are engaging and productive.

Mongeham over 50's – Mongeham Deal

This shed is a group of people who volunteer to do gardens for older people that are unable to do so for themselves; this gets people active and gives back to the local community.

Riverside Active Lives – Gravesend

This shed focusses on giving people with physical and sensory disabilities meaningful activity which will assist them therapeutically and also increase self-esteem as individuals as well as part of a team. They have a garden that they maintain and enjoy and plant and sell to help bring funds back into the shed.

Maidstone Mind

This shed focuses on woodworking but more importantly offers tea, company and support for those that need it. It is open to the wider public and welcomes all; they advertise locally and encourage others to come along.

Sherwood Shed

The Sherwood shed is a natural complement to the TN2 Community Centre. This shed provides a safe and welcoming environment for men to connect, socialise, share skills and ideas, participate in practical projects and make new friends.



Communigrow

This shed became associated with Kent Sheds through just a development grant. An established group that wanted to be part of a bigger network, they are a growing project that have an acre of land donated by East Malling Research

Involve Shed

Recently established, they are currently building a workbench to equip their shed in Maidstone, they are meeting regularly and are a very supportive group to each other. The shed is welcoming shedders from the wider community to get involved.

Dunton Green Shed – planning stage

A hub for men in the Dunton Green and north Sevenoaks area based in the Abacus Furniture Project workshop in Bat and Ball. The shed also has a satellite site in Dunton Green for those who like gardening. Both sites will enable them to create simple structures, which they can sell in their local community those making the shed project sustainable

Gravesend Town Shed – planning stage

The Gravesend Town Shed will focus on bringing men together in a positive and effective way to address issues surrounding social isolation by facilitating friendship and companionship. It will help provide a sense of purpose in life by enabling shedders to decide how the shed is run and managed and what projects are undertaken.

Sheppey Shed at Eastchurch – planning stage

The Sheppey Shed at Eastchurch will offer a range of services and activities for shedders from one to one support with health and wellbeing issues through to activities and a drop in space for shedders to keep active, socialise, connect with each other and participate in a range of in shed projects.

Beshedders – planning stage

The Be-Shedders Project will be a place for people from the local community to come together to share and learn new skills, meet likeminded people, improve physical and mental wellbeing and encourage people to get connect with the surrounding environment.

Overall Impact

The levels of support and friendship we have seen develop, and the team camaraderie that has grown organically has been amazing. It is wonderful to see such a wide range of characters form a united network. People have found their own roles, their specialities, given each other nicknames, and formed their own social circles. Shedders display respect, modesty, and courtesy for their other shedders that has enriched all of their lives. The impact that the sheds have had on the lives of not only the shedders but much wider family relationships is apparent when you speak with shedders themselves. People are feeling much better connected with each other and those around them. Self esteem, confidence and a sense of belonging has improved and this naturally makes connecting with others easier than it once was. Communities are benefiting from those sheds that are focussed on 'doing' within their community. Actual number of beneficiaries are unknown but are far more than just shed members. There has been a raised awareness of the Six Ways to Wellbeing amongst the shedders and this is another factor in naturally taking care of ones wellbeing.