

Report

Report to:	South Lanarkshire Council
Date of Meeting:	31 January 2024
Report by:	Chief Executive

Subject:	The Armed Forces Community Covenant Duty
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to: -

- ◆ advise members of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (the Covenant Duty), a legal duty introduced by the Armed Forces Act 2021 which came into effect on 22 November 2022.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Council is asked to approve the following recommendation(s): -

- (1) that the Armed Forces Community Covenant Duty be noted;
- (2) that the Lanarkshire Firm Base Group has been renamed Lanarkshire Armed Forces Community and Veterans Covenant Group be noted;
- (3) that the content of the South Lanarkshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Duty Report 2023, attached at Appendix 1, be noted, and
- (4) that the updated Armed Forces Champion Role Profile, attached at Appendix 2 be, approved

3. Background

3.1. On 5 March 2012, the Council together with a range of partners from NHS, the Military, the voluntary and charity sectors signed up to the terms of an Armed Forces Community Covenant for South Lanarkshire. The Leader and the Chief Executive signed the document on the Council's behalf.

3.2. The original Covenant document was set up as a statement of mutual support between the civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. The Covenant was intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant which outlined the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government, and the Armed Forces at a local level.

3.3. In summary, the specific aims of the Armed Forces Community Covenant were to:-

- ◆ encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas
- ◆ nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the armed forces community
- ◆ recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the armed forces community
- ◆ encourage activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life

- ◆ encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement

- 3.4 To take the principles of the original covenant forward, a local group was set up under the co-ordination of the Army entitled the Lanarkshire Firm Base which aimed to bring a range of organisations including North and South Lanarkshire Councils, the NHS, the Military, voluntary sector groups, appropriate charitable organisations and other Community Planning partners to work together to improve services and support to local veterans and their families by progressing the terms of the Covenant.
- 3.5 In 2018, the Armed Forces Covenant was updated and a multi -agency approach, led by both North and South Lanarkshire Councils, was adopted to bring together a reformed Lanarkshire Firm Base Group with the overarching aim to improve the quality of support for veterans in Lanarkshire. Lanarkshire Firm Base was subsequently relaunched to provide an updated focus and ensure a coordinated approach to issues facing veterans and their families in Lanarkshire.
- 3.6 To underline and raise awareness of the Covenant, the Council recommitted to the Armed Forces Community Covenant by signing an updated version of the Covenant document at the Council's Armed Forces Day Flag Raising Event on 23 June 2018.

4. The Armed Forces Covenant Duty

- 4.1 The Armed Forces Act 2021 further enshrines the Covenant into law and it is intended to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing public services. It does not mandate what organisations must do, only that they must consider the Armed Forces community alongside other legal requirements. It means that decisions about the development and delivery of certain services must be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community.
- 4.2 The new Covenant duty, requires organisations delivering local services to pay 'due regard' to the Covenant principles when exercising functions in the areas of housing, education, and healthcare. 'Due regard' means informed decision making and means that the council should think about and place appropriate weight on the principles of the Covenant when they consider factors relevant to how they conduct functions which fall within the scope of the Covenant. The Council, will need to consciously consider:
- (a) the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces;
 - (b) the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service personnel from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces; and
 - (c) the principle that special provision for service personnel may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.
- 4.3 The Duty does not mean that the Armed Forces community will be placed at the 'front of the queue;' but it does mean that their circumstances should receive a fair assessment when their cases are considered.

In particular, the following Council services areas are covered by the Act:

- 4.3.1 Housing and Technical Resources:
- ◆ Allocations policy for social housing
 - ◆ Homelessness
 - ◆ Disabled Facilities Grants

4.3.2 Education Resources

- ◆ Admissions
- ◆ Educational attainment and curriculum
- ◆ Child wellbeing
- ◆ Transport
- ◆ Attendance
- ◆ Additional needs support

4.3.4 Health and Social Care

- ◆ Local authority delivered health and social care services, including sexual health services and drug and alcohol misuse services
- ◆ Co-operation between bodies and professionals

- 4.4 The Council is already working hard to recognise and address the circumstances of veterans and members of the Armed Forces.
- 4.5 An update on the Council's progress in each of the above service areas as well as on employment of veterans is included in the annual report attached at Appendix 1 of the Report.
- 4.5 Statutory Guidance to the new Act has been published, which will assist officers to identify any gaps and areas for improvement.
- 4.6 As stated above, it has been identified that there is a real need for more joined up support for veterans in Lanarkshire. This requirement has been raised by voluntary and charity organisation who collaborate with veterans and their families locally.
- 4.7 A Role Profile for Local Government Armed Forces Champions has been drafted to reflect the terms of the legislation, associated guidance and accompanying toolkit. The draft Role Profile is attached at Appendix 2 for consideration for adoption within South Lanarkshire Council
- 4.8 The Lanarkshire Firmbase Group has renamed itself the Lanarkshire Armed Forces Community and Veterans Covenant Group and updated its Terms of Reference to reflect the terms of the Act and associated guidance.

5 Employee Implications

- 5.1. There are no employee implications in terms of this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 7.1 There are no Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications arising from the information presented in this report.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. There are no significant issues in terms of risk.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. There was no requirement to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. Some initial discussion has taken place with the membership of the Firm Base Group.

Paul Manning
Chief Executive

19 January 2024

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient, and transparent
- ◆ Fair, open, and sustainable
- ◆ Improve life and prospects for everyone
- ◆ Focussed on people and their needs.

Previous References

- ◆ 26 June 2019

List of Background Papers

- ◆ Armed Forces Covenant Duty.
- ◆ Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact: -

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