

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM

14 JULY 2014

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT (AFCC)

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Town and Community Council Forum on the AFCC and the support for our Armed Forces Community.

2. Connection to Corporate Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 The report relates to the corporate priority of working together to make the best use of our resources by improving the way we communicate and engage with our Armed Forces Community.

3. Background.

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a local level agreement with the Armed Forces, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.
- 3.2 On 13 April 2013 Councillor MEJ Nott OBE was appointed as the Bridgend's Armed Forces Champion with Bridgend County Borough Council establishing its Armed Forces Community Covenant on 22 November 2013. The Bridgend Covenant was signed by 32 supporting individuals organisations including South Wales Police, ABMU, local Assembly Members and Members of Parliament and veterans organisations.
- 3.3 The signing of the covenant also provided access to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme. This fund supports local projects that bring together the civilian and Armed Forces communities, strengthening ties and mutual understanding. Local authorities (and any part of the local community, e.g. volunteer groups, charities, schools) can bid for grant funding for projects that deliver tangible results and meet the overall aims of the scheme. Applications are invited for sums from £100 - £250,000 (although larger bids may also be considered in exceptional circumstances).
- 3.4 An AFCC steering group known as the Bridgehead Group, has been set up which is working to develop the action plan and meets to consider applications for the AFCC grant funding prior to their submission to the MoD.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 Achievements

- 4.1.1 BCBC has been involved in developing the AFCC within the County Borough. Achievements have included:

- The establishment of an Armed Forces Webpage on the BCBC website
- Council tax reduction war disabled pension and war widows pensions are disregarded when calculating income.
- Working with Registered Social Landlords regarding the housing needs of the armed forces community. Ensure that BCBC and RSLs meet the Government requirements for prioritising current and former members of the armed forces for re-housing
- Encourage the recognition of the Armed Forces through such activities as Freedom of the Borough, Homecoming, Remembrance Parades, Armed Forces Day

4.1.2 The Authority has worked in partnership with Bridgend Town Council and the Bridgend Veterans Association to deliver an enhanced Armed Forces Day event which was held on 28 June 2014. The event consisted of:

- The signing of the Armed Forces Community Covenant by the Mayors and Chairs of the Town and Community Councils within the Borough. The public were also invited to sign the covenant to show their support.
- A Parade through Bridgend Town Centre and a ceremony to celebrate the commitment of our Armed Forces
- Static Military Displays and information stands from a range of organisations providing support services to our Armed Forces Community
- A concert held in the Bowls Hall for veterans, service personnel and dignitaries

4.1.3 The event was a great success with:

- the average footfall in the Town Centre on the day of the event being increased by 2500 people.
- the majority of Town and Community Councils signed the Covenant with the remainder making arrangements to sign up in the near future.
- approximately 200 members of the public signing the covenant to show their support for the Armed Forces.

4.1.4 Participating organisations have been circulated a questionnaire to identify other outcomes that they have achieved from the event. These will be collated into a post event report which will be made available in due course.

4.2 Challenges

4.2.1 The main challenge faced by the Borough to develop the support and services needed to meet the requirements of the covenant and of the veterans themselves is to identify the veterans and the specific needs they have.

4.2.2 Being proud and independent veterans or ex-servicemen or women often prevents these individuals from asking for help and support. The MoD due to the constraints of the Data Protection Act cannot identify to the Authority those service personnel who are leaving the Armed Forces and relocating to the area.

4.2.3 During the Armed Forces Day event an Information Request questionnaire was developed which invited veterans and ex-service personnel and their families to identify themselves and their support needs. The request also provided an opportunity for the individual to permit their personal details to be shared with the support organisations. There were a total of 42 completed forms returned. A

number of forms were taken to be distributed in the Maesteg and Porthcawl areas for subsequent completion.

4.2.4 The data collected from these forms will be added to the BCBC database and the email addresses will be passed to the support organisations identified on the form for follow up.

4.2.5 Other key issues that have been identified include:

- Health and wellbeing
- Education - consideration of non-standard school holidays for the children of serving personnel.
- Housing and homelessness
- Re-training and employment

4.3 Opportunities

4.3.1 With the possibility of grant funding available from the AFCC grant scheme, local organisations and community groups have the opportunity to identify projects which will support veterans and the communities within the borough.

4.3.2 Examples of successful bids include:

- a. A Hampshire based community interest company and social enterprise, 'seen2help', was able to obtain £135,000 from the Grant Scheme to fund their virtual employment agency.
- b. using a combination of funding an Outreach Officer has been employed by Gateshead Council since October 2012 as a single point of contact for queries and requests from the Armed Forces Community.

4.3.3 Further details on the criteria for grant bids and the bidding process can be found on the Armed Forces Community Covenant Page on the BCBC website.

(<http://www1.bridgend.gov.uk/democracy/community-covenant-grant-scheme.aspx>)

4.4 The Way Forward

4.4.1 With the current high profile of the Armed Forces and the commitment of the signatories of the Armed Forces Community Covenant it is hoped that the momentum of the covenant that has been generated recently can built upon to:

- Continue to identify the veterans and ex-service personnel within the county Borough
- improve the understanding of the support and services needed by them
- identify suitable projects which can be developed and grant bids submitted from organisations across the Borough to support.
- develop or adapt services to ensure the needs of the veterans can be met.
- ensure that we work together to provide support for our Armed Forces Community.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

5.1 There is no direct effect on the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules, as a result of the provisions and recommendations of this report

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications attached to this report.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report

8. Recommendation:

8.1 The Town and Community Council Forum are requested to note the content of the report and how the Armed Forces Community Covenant can be progressed within the County Borough

Mr P A Jolley

Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services and Monitoring Officer

8 July 2014

Contact Officer: Mr Gary Jones
Head of Democratic Services

Postal Address Democratic Services, Civic Offices, Angel St, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

Telephone: (01656) **643385**

E-mail: Gary.Jones@Bridgend.gov.uk

Background documents: None