

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide an update for members regarding the Armed Forces Covenant and activity 2019 to present.

### **Introduction**

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly

The purpose of this Covenant is to encourage support and raise awareness for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Gloucestershire and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community, particularly those who have given the most. This includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel their families and widow(er)s in Gloucestershire.

In 2012 Stroud District Council, along with partner organisations, signed up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant. (AFC). The last update from the Covenant County group was its annual report in 2015.

In June 2019, Kevin Topping (Head of Housing Services), was appointed as the Council's AFC Champion at S&R and full Council approved Gary King and Steve Robinson as Councillor Champions in July 2019.

A meeting was arranged with the County Council Commissioning Officer shortly after (as they are responsible for holding the Covenant) and it was sought that the AFC was refreshed and brought up to date with current organisations members. This was initially planned to take place in April 2020, however, the Covid-19 pandemic halted that event (this will be rescheduled when some normality returns to daily life)

A new webpage was designed for Stroud District Council (SDC) with useful links to other supporting agencies, veterans groups and NHS information including fast tracking veterans: <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/community-and-living/armed-forces-community-covenant>

Meetings have taken place with several groups including Ssafa, Help for Heroes, Royal British Legion to name but a few and has involved SDC officers in Veterans breakfast clubs. A short piece for the Aden veterans group newsletter was drafted at their request and also partnerships with our near neighbours at Herefordshire to gain some learning from how they have developed the Covenant in that County.

Arrangements were made for Help for Heroes to attend SDC offices to provide support for veterans in our district, this was delayed due to the designated officer moving on to another role, we then agreed that the Royal British Legion (RBL) would supply a support worker to attend Ebley Mill reception on a monthly basis which began in January 2020. The results were initially positive with a number of veterans being signposted for assistance and support in the district, but again with lockdown this has been put on hold.

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SDC agreed to support veterans group the last rendezvous (LRV) by cleaning and minor structural renovation of the Cenotaph in Stroud in time for the VE day celebrations in May as it had fallen into disrepair; unfortunately, this was another impact of lockdown and works were suspended in March.

LRV have been signposted to grant funding in line with the Covenants aims, as this progresses we will supply further updates.

It had been intended that community parties would be encouraged for the VE day celebrations but lockdown and social distancing curtailed this, however, one event that was published on the Council's Hub were the celebrations at Moreton Valance on the A38. A great community day with lots of residents coming together in the spirit of the day.

Tenant Services have begun capturing and recording information on its Housing system (Northgate) of veterans in the districts (with consent, of course) and this has been useful in building a picture of veterans in our communities and ensure they have access to the support that they may need whatever form that takes. Simon Killen (Revs & Bens Manager) has agreed to ask the question of other colleagues in Gloucestershire if they record this data and the feedback has been positive that they don't but would look to do so in the future.

### **Summary**

Despite lockdown, many positive actions and activities were completed, however, as a result of the renewed drive to raise awareness of the commitment SDC has to the covenant, it is pleasing to note that five veterans were directly supported in benefit claims and seven others were assisted by SDC for other support, eleven referrals were made via the RBL. Local groups and veterans' clubs have been advertised more widely through the Council's website and social media and signposting has become clearer for the various sources of support. As lockdown eases we will look to reinstate the items mentioned as soon as it is practical and safe to do so.