

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 16 March 2023

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: East Sussex County Council Armed Forces Report

Purpose: The Committee has asked for a report on the work that has been taking place on the Armed Forces Covenant. This report provides an update on progress made in 2022-2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the content of the update report.

1 Background

- 1.1 In January 2022, Children's Services took on the role of providing support for the discharge of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) public sector duty to the Armed Forces Community from Adult Social Care. Oversight of this work is held by Cllr Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families and Armed Forces Champion for East Sussex and supported by the Director of Children's Services. The shift took place following the change of responsibility of Armed Forces Champion from Cllr Bill Bentley to Cllr Bob Bowdler.
- 1.2 The Armed Forces Act enshrined into law a legal obligation for Local Authorities to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. The three core principles of the Covenant are to have due regard for:
- The unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces.
 - The principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership of the armed forces; and
 - The principle that special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.
- 1.3 On this basis, the scope of the Armed Forces works for 2022-2023 was agreed and defined as follows:
- To administer and organise the meetings of the East Sussex Civil Military Partnership Board, facilitating joint working between the civilian public sector and the local Armed Forces Community.
 - To establish regular Armed Forces District and Borough Champions meetings, with the aim to support District and Boroughs in their statutory duties under the Armed Forces Act in the areas of housing, healthcare and education.
 - To work towards submitting an application for Gold Accreditation under the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme for ESCC, demonstrating the Council's continuing commitment to the Armed Forces Community, and the fair and equal treatment of those that have served in the Armed Forces.
- 1.4 The Armed Forces presence in East Sussex
- The Armed Forces Covenant states that the Armed Forces Community includes Regular Personnel, Reservists, Veterans, UK Merchant Seafaring Veterans, families of Regular personnel, Reservists and Veterans, and the immediate family of Service Personnel and veterans who have died, whether or not that death had any connection with the Service.

- 1.5 Regular and Reserve Forces: There are no active Regular Military Bases, and there is one Reservist Base in East Sussex.
- 1.6 Veterans: The Office of National Statistics asked questions on Veteran's status for the first time in the 2021 Census. At the time of the Census, East Sussex was home to 21,173 Veterans / ex-Service personnel (4.6% of usual residents aged 16 or over). This is a higher figure in comparison usual residents in the South East (4.2%), and in England (3.8%). The district with the highest proportion of veterans is Rother (5.3% of the population aged 16 years and over, 4,226). Hastings has the smallest proportion of veterans (3.9% of the population aged 16 years and over, 2,914).
- 1.7 Armed Forces Families: The NHS Armed Forces Network Use Veterans figures for East Sussex to estimate the amount of Immediate family members. In this case, we can expect that there are approximately 42,000 immediate family members of Regular, Reservist and Veterans residing East Sussex. This is likely to be an underestimate. According to the Service Children's Progression Alliance, 67 Schools in East Sussex have at least one Child in attendance. whose parent/ carer is currently serving as a Regular member of the Armed Forces. Further information on Service Children can be found on the SciPy Alliance Website [The SciP Alliance | SCiP Alliance](#)

2 Summary of Progress

Representing East Sussex County Council in External Armed Forces Events / Meetings

- 2.1 As the Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Bowdler has represented East Sussex County Council's commitment to the Armed Forces by engaging in the following events between 2022-2023
- Forces Connect Conference
 - Opening of the Blue Van Veteran's Drop in and RAFA Club
 - Veteran's Lunches
 - Visits to East Sussex Veteran's Hub (ESVH)
 - Sussex Armed Forces Briefing with SE RFCA
 - Forces Connect Member Oversight Group
 - Lord Lieutenant's Award for East Sussex
 - The Veteran's Game
 - Veteran's Breakfasts in Eastbourne
 - The Sovereign's Pass Out Parade, Sandhurst
 - 'Bula Festival: Celebrating the contribution of Fiji to the British Army', Aldershot
 - SE RFCA Annual General Meetings, Crawley and Brighton
 - Visits to Veteran's Hub, Hastings

East Sussex Civil Military Partnership Board

- 2.2 The East Sussex Civil Military Partnership Board (CMPB) meet twice yearly. The CMPB was formed to address countywide issues facing the Armed Forces Community in East Sussex, and to ensure those who are part of the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly. Representation on the board includes members from The British Army, Local Reservist units, Cadet Forces, partners from larger Military Organisations (Reserves Forces and Cadets Association – RFCA, SSAFA: The Armed Forces Charity, The Royal British Legion), the Ministry of Defence, District, Borough and Parish Councils, the Lord Lieutenant's Office and the NHS.
- 2.3 The following meetings have taken place 2022-2023:
- 11 July 2022

- 16 December 2022

2.4 The next meeting is scheduled to take place in June 2023 (date to be confirmed)

Armed Forces District and Borough Council Champions Group

2.5 The implications of the Armed Forces Act (2021) directly impact the work of District and Borough Councils. As such, the Armed Forces District and Borough Champions Group was established by Cllr Bob Bowdler with the support of the Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex. The aim of this group is to create space for discussion and collaboration in the duty to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant.

2.6 Meetings of the Champions group have highlighted key areas where additional support is required:

- Training and development opportunities for District and Borough Colleagues
- The creation of an 'Officer's group' to strengthen current Armed Forces work.

2.7 The following meetings have taken place 2022-2023:

- 13 June 2022
- 28 September 2022

2.8 The next meeting is scheduled to take place on the 24 March 2023.

Training and Development

2.9 To enhance understanding and appreciation of the issues facing the Armed Forces Community, a bespoke training offer was designed and delivered. Staff at ESCC have been provided the opportunity to engage in three different levels of training:

- A department specific Armed Forces Awareness training, delivered by colleagues from the NHS Armed Forces Network
- The 'Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff' e-learning module, designed by Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership
- Service Champions Training, delivered by colleagues from the NHS Armed Forces Network

2.10 The training offer was launched in October 2022, and so far over 50 members of staff have engaged in training.

2.11 Elected Members were invited to attend 'Armed Forces Covenant Training for Members and Covenant Leads' in October 2022. This session was attended by 12 Elected Members.

'Going for Gold': Defence Employers Recognition Scheme

2.12 In June 2022, the Corporate Management Team agreed to submit an application for Gold Accreditation under the Defence Employment Recognition Scheme, following on from receiving Silver Accreditation in 2018. ESCC will be submitting its nomination in March 2023. To support with this work, ESCC is receiving mentorship from the South East Regional Employment Engagement Manager (Ministry of Defence) and from the Director for NHS Armed Forces Network for Sussex.

2.13 ESCC's application for Gold Accreditation will focus on the following areas:

2.14 HR: Employment, recruitment, retention of AFC

- ESCC offer a guaranteed interview scheme for members of the Armed Forces Community who meet the essential criteria.
- ESCC have connected with the Career Transition Partnership and Forces Families Jobs to support the Armed Forces Community in careers outside of the military.

- ESCC support Veterans / ex-service people through the employment process through 1-1 coaching, CV and application support, job matching in the council and interview preparations.

2.15 Supporting our Clients, Customers and Service Users

- ESCC have included questions asking about whether a person is part of the Armed Forces Community as part of their Equality Monitoring forms – so that services can ensure that the Armed Forces community don't face disadvantage when accessing services.
- ESCC offer three levels of training for staff to understand and support members of the Armed Forces Community in their work, including training specific Armed Forces Service Champions.

2.16 Advocacy and Peer Support

- ESCC are supporting District and Boroughs through the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme system, hosting Armed Forces D&B Champions groups.
- ESCC have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and will be engaging with the East Sussex Strategic Partnership to encourage partners to write their own bespoke pledges.

2.17 Supporting our Armed Forces Community at ESCC

- ESCC have policies that support Reservists, with up to 18 days paid leave available for training and development.
- Flexible working arrangements are available for Armed Forces spouses, partners and families to support changes in their working lives due to their military link, as well as Adult Cadet Volunteers to support their voluntary roles.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the content of the update report.

Alison Jeffery
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Abigail Funnell
Tel. No. 07821636103
Email: Abigail.funnell@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

ALL

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None