



The Community Covenant e-Newsletter

Issue #2, Jan. 2013



Welcome!

Welcome to the second Community Covenant e-Newsletter! A lot has happened since the last edition, with the Community Covenant Conference, new councils signing the Covenant, a new £35M fund separate from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme and more and more work being jointly undertaken by local authorities and the Armed Forces Community to reduce disadvantage. In this edition we have reports from the Community Covenant Conference, news from Milton Keynes Council about their signing and an update on a number of successful grant scheme projects. As you may have noticed the [Covenant website](#) recently moved across to the cross government 'gov.uk' platform. This means some of the information normally accessible is unavailable, but we are working hard to get this sorted out soon.

We welcome your thoughts – information on how to provide feedback or join our mailing list is located at the end of this e-Newsletter.

Community Covenant Conference

We had a wonderful day on 6th November when we, in the MOD, and the Local Government Association hosted an event for over 150 delegates from local authorities, charities and Armed Forces to discuss the issues surrounding the Community Covenant and to share best practice from around the UK. A summary of the day will be covered in this newsletter, with a full account and many additional resources available through our website soon.

The day's speakers included representatives from charities, the military, local government and from those organisations that have benefitted from grants to deliver successful projects through the Community Covenant Grant Scheme – more later in newsletter! The day allowed delegates the opportunity to split into smaller groups to discuss Education, Housing and Health issues, offering an invaluable opportunity to talk informally and make new contacts with those facing similar challenges.



Defence Minister Rt Hon. Mark Francois

In addition to presentations on key issues surrounding the Community Covenant, we were fortunate enough to have three keynote speakers: **Sir Merrick Cockell, Chairman of the Local Government Association, Mark Francois, the Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, and Lieutenant General Sir Bill Rollo, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Personnel & Training).** All three spoke of the deep gratitude owed to Service personnel, and highlighted the way in which

For Your Diary

28 February 2013

Community Covenant Grants March Deadline

The next panel to consider applications to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme will be held centrally on 13 March 2013 with a closing date for bids on 28 February.

Remember we cannot consider your bid centrally until it has received the support of your local Community Covenant Partnership who may have their own deadlines for the assessment of applications so please check with your local team.

Community Covenants Update

196 local authorities in England have now signed up to the Community Covenant, with 27 in Scotland and seven in Wales – a total of 230 which represents over half of all local authority areas in Britain. With your help we are aiming to have all local authority areas at County and Unitary level in England, Scotland and Wales – at least – (although we welcome support for the community covenant initiative at all levels) signed by Remembrance Day 2013.

"IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT SERVICE PERSONNEL GET THE SUPPORT THEY DESERVE"

Sir Merrick Cockell,
Chairman of the Local Government
Association

military units are the backbone of the community. They praised the work of councils in implementing the Community Covenants, and emphasised the real impact these partnerships can have.

We were also given four different perspectives on the challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community. Speaker **Catherine Spencer, Chief Executive at the Army Families Federation**, described the unique problems shared by Service personnel, whilst **Brigadier Mark Van der Lande, Head of Reserve Forces and Cadets**, spoke of the importance of

“I’M PROUD OF THE PROGRESS WE’VE ALREADY MADE BUT I THINK IN PARTNERSHIP WE CAN DO BETTER. ALL OF US OWE THESE PEOPLE A DEBT SO LET’S ROLL UP OUR SLEEVE AND GET ON WITH IT.”

Mark Francois,
Minister of State for Defence Personnel,
Welfare and Veterans

Future Reserves 2020 and **Commodore Martin Atherton, Naval Regional Commander for Eastern England**, discussed the issue of home ownership among military personnel.

For any council leaders keen to explore what a Community Covenant entails, **Chris Simpkins, Director General of the Royal British Legion**, has produced a [guide of best practice](#), packed with tips, and Wiltshire County Council has launched a [Veterans Charter](#).

“THE COMMUNITY COVENANT IS ONLY WORTH THE PAPER IT’S WRITTEN ON IF IT’S TURNED INTO PRACTICE”

Lieutenant General Sir Bill Rollo,
Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff
(Personnel & Training)

The Community Covenant

The Covenant Team outlined their vision for community covenants. Looking beyond the 'big signing ceremony', a true partnership between a local authority and military units evolves and strengthens over time, with mutual benefits for all. Anyone can sign up to show their support for Service personnel and Veterans and increasingly councils are appointing Armed Forces Champions to help raise awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces Community. The MOD cannot directly control Community Covenant pledges as it is not a case of “one size fits all” and that local communities have to reach arrangements which worked for them. Even in areas where there would appear to be little Armed Forces presence, a Local Authority could still usefully sign a Community Covenant to help the Veterans



Signing a Community Covenant

Annual Report 2012

The [Covenant Annual Report](#) was published on 6th December. It paints a relatively upbeat picture of achievements UK-wide, including the 230 Local Authorities who have Community Covenants. However, importantly, the report also identifies where there is more to be done. This includes work in areas such as housing, spousal employment and Reserves mental health.

and Armed Forces Families in their area - get in touch if you think this applies to you.

To emphasise this point, Marion Clayton and Chris Williams from Buckinghamshire County Council told the conference of the benefits emerging from their Community Covenant. The Council set up a Covenant in Buckinghamshire with RAF Halton, HQ Air Command, the Language School in Beaconsfield and the local cadets. The relationship ensures that Service children can thrive both educationally and emotionally by making it easier to access help, and identifying issues to come up with practical steps that improve health and well-being. In addition, Buckinghamshire Council recognised the military contribution by hosting two receptions every year to thank troops returning from deployment on behalf of the county and the nation. Mr Williams spoke with pride that the Buckinghamshire Armed Forces Day in 2011 was the best attended in the country outside the host city. Wing Commander Michelle Tinworth from RAF Halton offered a military perspective, speaking about how they had turned a barren patch of MOD land into a play park for Service and local children and won a £40,000 grant for a First Responder vehicle to support the local ambulance service that has saved lives.

New £35M Fund

The importance of the Covenant to the Government was highlighted by the decision of the Chancellor to transfer £35 million from fines levied on the banks for attempting to manipulate the LIBOR interest rate to the MOD for use in supporting the Armed Forces Community. The new fund, which is separate to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, will consider bids for projects which support the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The first project to benefit is Fisher House at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Fisher House, which is linked to Help for Heroes, will use the funding to build houses for families so that they can be close to loved ones who are receiving treatment.

Further information on future bid rounds will be available on our website in the coming weeks.

The Community Covenant Grant Scheme

There are a number of easy steps that applicants to the Community Covenant Grant scheme can take to help ease the passage of their bid through the decision panel.

Firstly ensure that your project has at least one of the aims of the Community Covenant at its heart.

All applications must be signed by Local Authority and Armed Forces partners – without these signatures bids won't go forward.

Please keep it simple - if anything is unclear or vague at best the Panel will ask further questions (which delays the whole process) but at worst they will simply say no.

Make it clear - while the overall aims of your project can be valuable to panel members you should also take care to exactly describe the steps you plan to achieve them.

Please provide a breakdown of costs – this not only helps to establish value for money (a vital factor in bids that are approved) but also gives panel enough information at least to provide partial funding if they have some reservations rather than an out-and-out rejection.

The Panel members have a lot of applications to read through so please stick to the word count - the risk is that vital points may begin to be lost if too much information is provided.

The application template was designed so all the information the Panel need to reach a decision should be there – lengthy annexes or additional pages will not generally be read. Some additional information can be useful but by exception, for example, pictures, maps or schematics.

Please ensure that the contact details of Local Authority representative and Project Leader are clear and complete to help us avoid unnecessary delays – please include telephone numbers and e-mail addresses (where possible).

Milton Keynes Signs Community Covenant

By Milton Keynes Council

The Milton Keynes Community Covenant was recently signed by representatives from the 7th Battalion The Rifles (Volunteers), 38 Signal Regiment (Volunteers), the Royal British Legion, SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) and the Mayor of Milton Keynes Council.

The Milton Keynes Armed Forces Liaison Group was immediately established and meets three times a year; it shares information and considers issues raised by their Armed Forces Community. In addition, the Council has created a single point of contact to assist their Armed Forces Community with a full range of subjects, including employment and housing.

Councillor Alan Richards, a former Mayor of Milton Keynes, has been appointed by the Council as the Armed Forces Champion for the borough. One issue already identified by Alan is that some Reservists in Milton Keynes

Knowledge Hub

The aim of this e-newsletter is to get local authorities and others voicing concerns and swapping solutions, but it's only published quarterly. So to keep up-to-date and to get help when you need it, try using the Local Government Authority's [Knowledge Hub](#). We've set up a Community Covenant page on there and put in a few blog entries, but now it's over to you!

experience difficulties being released by their employers for military training. He believes a national campaign to target employers and guidance or legislation would be supportive and highlighted his concerns at the Community Covenant Conference in September. Another identified concern is the lack of provision of information to key agencies about Service leavers who decide to settle in Milton Keynes. The Community Covenant sets out to share



The signing of the Milton Keynes Community Covenant

information about the issues facing serving and retired Armed Forces personnel and to build an understanding of how agencies can provide continued support. The Council is therefore hopeful that, in addition to the several hundreds of known individuals in their Armed Forces Community, others will be identified so that support can be offered as they transition from Service to civilian life and then continued in the longer term.

Can you help?

We had an 'ideas wall' at the conference and decided that it could be a great way of sharing best practice in the newsletter. Feel free to send us any comments, questions or solutions for inclusion in the next edition.

Make sure to let us know if you would like to share your contact details for others to get in touch.

Successful Grant Scheme Projects

Offering an insight into the variety of projects funded by the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, three beneficiaries spoke to the conference about the positive effect their projects are having on the lives of troops, their families and the local communities. They demonstrated how short term projects could encourage long term partnerships, to the mutual benefit of both communities.

Martin Gillett, from the Oxfordshire Play Association, spoke about his award winning activity play days run across military units in Oxfordshire, whilst **Alex Grant** gave the conference an account of his '*Anything but plain, Darling!*' art project in which women living in isolated areas around Salisbury Plain created Batik flags drawing on their experiences of Salisbury and military life. **Fiona Macbeth** from Exeter University explained to the conference how they had set up a drama workshop to create a radio play based on the experiences of veterans. These three projects demonstrate the tangible benefits the Community Covenants offer local communities, both civilian and military. Alex spoke of the valuable contribution of the art project saying "We help give many Army women a real sense of freedom and achievement." Likewise, Fiona discussed the way in



'Anything but plain, Darling!'

which pupils in the drama workshop typically expressed surprise when they learnt about the challenges facing veterans, whilst one elderly Veteran touchingly summed up the experience by saying, "I really feel like I've been heard." Promisingly, Martin talked about how the benefits of the play days were wider than original plans anticipated. As a result of the event Welfare Staff are now involved in local steering groups and partnerships, and the play days offered an opportunity to fundraise for charities including, Help For Heroes, the Forces Children's Trust and the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Recent Covenant Achievements

We have introduced the [Defence Discount Scheme](#) will offer members of the Armed Forces Community a privilege card providing a range of discounts on goods and services.

We have twice doubled Council Tax Relief in the last 12 months to £600.

We have secured £131M to purchase new Service Family Accommodation.

Community Covenant Conference – Housing Workshop

One of the hot topics whenever we speak to local authorities or the Forces is housing. It's a bigger issue than ever as more Service personnel are making the transition to Civvy Street. Therefore we ran a housing workshop during the conference, offering an opportunity to share concerns and pass on ideas.

Whilst the MOD is trying to encourage home ownership and is working to educate Service leavers about the private rental market, we recognise that for a few the allocation of social housing remains a key concern.

With demand exceeding housing stock, local authority and military reps discussed how Service people and their families could be looked after. Local authorities questioned how well people making the transition to civilian life are briefed by their units on how social housing works. All sides agreed on how important it is to make sure Service people and their families are aware of the economic situation outside the wire and the impact it is having on social housing. The discussion centred around what a shock it could be on leaving the military.

In June 2012 the [Department for Communities and Local Government](#) published new guidance on social housing allocation which specifically references the Armed Forces. Check out the box alongside to see some of the commitments made by the DCLG and the Devolved Administrations.

Housing Commitments for Service Personnel

Where an application for social housing is made within five years of discharge, local authorities in England must not disqualify Service leavers on the grounds that they do not have a local connection. Wales and Scotland have established similar provisions to enable Serving personnel to establish a local connection in an area in which they have served/are serving.

Councils in England are required to give additional preference to former Service personnel who have urgent housing needs. This extends to the families of those killed in the line of duty, and those members of the Reserve Forces injured in action, if they have an urgent need for social housing. Seriously injured personnel in Scotland and Wales are also entitled to high priority allocation of social housing.

To be added to the distribution list or to submit feedback or article proposals, please contact us at COVENANT-MAILBOX@MOD.UK