



## **EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE – 26 MAY 2022**

### **ARMED FORCES COVENANT & ARMED FORCES BILL 2021/22**

#### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

##### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Employment Committee of the implications of the new Armed Forces Bill 2021/22 (the Bill), and the delivery of the wider Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) pledge by the Council.

##### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Council's Reserve Forces Policy was reviewed in July 2021 and was confirmed to be compliant with the Bill and therefore continues to be fit for purpose with no amendments needed at this time.

##### **Background**

3. The AFC is a promise by the nation to those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, that they are treated fairly and with respect, and that they "should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. In June 2018 the Council voluntarily agreed to extend the scope of the AFC pledge by including a commitment to be a "forces family friendly" service provider and employer.
4. The Bill requires specified public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the AFC in the areas of housing, education, and healthcare. The expectation is that this will operate in the same manner as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) so requires evidence-based policy making. Additional areas will be introduced in due course through secondary legislation, and these are expected to be social care related (adult and children).
5. The Bill also specifically refers to enabling flexible working for Reserve personnel.
6. The Bill gained Royal Assent in December 2021 with the new duty expected to come into force in June 2022. The actual implementation date is still to be released, and guidance is still being produced by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).
7. The wider AFC pledge remains in addition to specific areas specified in the Bill.

8. In 2020 the Council was awarded the MOD Employee Recognition Gold Award in recognition of the support provided to the Armed Forces (AF) communities and employees. The Council is one of only 58 councils in the UK and 25 organisations in the East Midlands to hold the award. The current status will stand for 5 years after which time the Council will need to submit new evidence of our AF support activities to the MOD for assessment. The Council seeks to maintain this gold level of award through continued commitment and advocacy.
9. The Government also published:
  - a. In 2018, a new strategy for veterans “Valued. Contributing. Supported” and,
  - b. In May 2021, Reserve Forces Review 2030 “Unlocking the reserves’ potential to strengthen a resilient and global Britain”.
10. The implications for the Council of the above policy developments are that there is:
  - a. increased scrutiny on work of public bodies on the support provided to AF communities.
  - b. an increased AF population accessing council services as military personnel and families move into communities rather than on bases.
  - c. an expected growth in Reserve Forces as the percentage of full-time AF personnel reduces.

### **Progress**

11. A cross Council officer task and finish group has been established, with relevant representatives from across the Authority, to oversee the work necessary to implement the Bill.
12. A baseline assessment against the requirements of the Bill has been undertaken and an implementation plan has been developed. The plan includes:
  - a. Checking current policies and procedures for compliance.
  - b. Reviewing current software to enable data to be captured and recorded on the AF community (e.g., First contact plus, social care, Oracle).
  - c. Exploring pathways of service users across the Authority.
  - d. Assessing training requirements for front line service providers and managers on supporting forces families as service users and employees.
13. A number of actions have already been undertaken and completed, such as:
  - Relevant Policies relating to flexibility for reservists have been checked and deemed to be compliant.
  - The Council’s Oracle HR system has been amended to enable an employees reservist status to be recorded under their employee details.

- The MOD Employee Recognition Gold Award logo has been added to relevant recruitment pages and the Council's websites to show Forces Friendly status to potential employees.
- The relationship with MOD Career Transition Service has been maintained.

14. A Business Partner in the Communities Team, Chief Executives Department, acts as Covenant Officer as part of their role. They continue to be part of regional and national groups helping to develop guidance and working together to ensure consistency of implementation of the Bill.

### **Resource Implications**

15. The MOD assess the Bill as placing no additional burdens therefore no additional funding has been provided for implementation. Any assessed commitments will be met through existing resources.

### **Recommendations**

16. It is recommended that the Committee:
- (a) Note the possible implications of new Bill on the Council as an employer and service provider, and,
  - (b) Note progress towards compliance with the Bill.

### **Background Papers**

17. None.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

18. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

### **Equality and Human Rights Implications/Other Impact Assessments**

19. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from this report.

### **Officer to Contact**

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