

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities) (Introduced by the Armed Forces Champion)	Council	27 September 2022

## Armed Forces Covenant Overview

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Not applicable
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### Purpose of the Report

1. For Council to consider that Chorley Council continues with its commitment and support to the Armed Forces Community, via its Armed Forces Covenant work.

### Recommendations

2. Council are requested to reaffirm Chorley Council's continued commitment and support to the Armed Forces Community via its Armed Forces Covenant work.
3. For Council to agree that Chorley Council should continue its pursuit of The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), Gold Award in 2023.

### Reasons for recommendations

4. The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge from the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served, and their families, are treated fairly; and it recognises the sacrifices they make on behalf of the country. Chief Executive, Gary Hall, recently signed the 'Armed Forces Covenant' at The Flag Raising Celebration Event during Armed Forces Week in June 2022.
5. Chorley Council provides excellent support to the Armed Forces Community and should capitalise on the current momentum by engaging with further opportunities to enhance the support.

### Other options considered and rejected

6. It was considered not to go for the ERS Gold Award Scheme, but this was rejected because, if we didn't carry on this process, this could have an adverse impact for the Armed Forces Community, the Armed Forces Covenant Process and the upcoming statutory 'Armed Forces Covenant Duty'. For example, it would lessen the opportunities to enhance services and support if we did not escalate from Silver to Gold. Furthermore, this would have a negative effect on Chorley Council's ability to demonstrate their role as a community leader and its ongoing support to the Armed Forces Community.

## Corporate priorities

7. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	A strong local economy
Clean, safe and healthy communities	<b>An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area</b>

## Background to the report

8. This report is a request for Chorley Council to reaffirm its commitment and support to the Armed Forces Community, via its Armed Forces Covenant work.
9. As previously mentioned, the Covenant is a pledge to the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served, and their families, are treated fairly. Furthermore, the Covenant is not designed to give the armed forces, veterans and their families preferential treatment, but it should ensure that they are not placed at a disadvantage as a result of their service.
10. The Armed Forces Covenant work and in particular, the ERS Awards, demonstrate to the wider community our excellent work in support of the Covenant and to that of the Armed Forces Community at large. More information about the ERS is in the following link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>
11. Chorley Council already hold the ERS Bronze and Silver Awards, so it is important and achievable to gain the Gold Award in 2023, as is demonstrated in Appendices A and B, which highlight the criteria for the ERS Awards and also shows how Chorley Council achieved them. It also sets out what is needed to achieve the Gold Award in 2023.

## Overview of Armed Forces Covenant Activity

12. Lancashire has its own Armed Forces Covenant Hub, which aims to improve the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and does this by working with all the local authorities within Lancashire, ensuring the covenant is both understood and honoured. The Hub and its partners take on a coordination role, working closely with local authority armed forces champions and lead officers, as well as key stakeholders from the public and charity sectors.
13. Furthermore, the Hub delivers outputs across the following themes; education, employment, health, housing, wellbeing, and welfare support; and working to improve the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across Lancashire by the local authorities. The Hub aims to help improve the services provided to the armed forces community by charities and Community Interest Companies (CIC's) helping them to access funding streams and improving their sustainability and governance structures. More information about the Hub can be found on the link <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/armed-forces/the-lancashire-hub/>
14. Chorley Council maintain a consistent and influential presence at the Lancashire Hub, to update about Chorley matters and to help shape the decision-making process concerning the Covenant. Councillor Aaron Beaver, Chorley Council's Armed Forces Champion and his

supporting officer from the Communities Team, both regularly attend and actively contribute at these meetings.

### **The Armed Forces Covenant Duty 2023**

15. Soon, an extension of the Covenant will be introduced to the nation, called 'The Covenant Duty' which is currently going through parliament for ratification. This will be a statutory duty for specific bodies and organisations, specific to the areas of healthcare, housing and education.
16. The 'Duty' will also pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant and stipulates that bodies and organisations subject to the 'Duty', are expected to **consciously consider** the Covenant, especially when developing, delivering and reviewing policies, corporate strategies, and when making decisions which may impact the Armed Forces Community. Information concerning 'Organisations in Scope' can be seen in the link [The New Armed Forces Covenant Duty: What organisations in scope will need to know - Armed Forces Covenant](#)
17. Aspects of new 'Duty' work, such as Education and Housing can be achieved through the Lancashire Armed Forces Hub and also through a more local hub, which we hope to set up in the coming months, in partnership with South Ribble Borough Council. When established, this new local hub will have a similar remit to the wider Lancashire Hub; and it will replace old 'Civil and Military Partnership' which last convened in 2017 and was chaired by Sir Lindsay Hoyle.

### **Practical Examples of How Chorley Council Has Supported the Armed Forces Community (Including Veterans)**

18. Below are some examples of how Chorley Council has supported the above:
  - We employ three veterans and our Armed Forces Champion is also a veteran
  - We also employ one Reservist and one Cadet Force Adult Volunteer (CFAV) and both are covered under our Reserve Forces Policy, which is based on the MOD template. This template supports mobilisation and demobilisation and means that we grant up to an additional two weeks leave with pay per year (**a maximum of 10 days pro rata**), to attend training sessions *over an annual two- week summer camp*. Both the Reservist and the CFAV, have benefitted from attending various training camps, whilst being employed at Chorley Council
  - Every year we organise the Chorley Remembrance Sunday Commemoration on behalf of the Royal British Legion and we also participate as a Council in Remembrance events and hold a company-wide two-minute silence on Armistice Day. Furthermore, we also support Merchant Navy Day and whenever required, hold service men and women celebration award events at the Town Hall services. On Armed Forces Day we raise the Union Flag above the Town Hall and have organised other types of military parades in the past
  - We support the Royal British Legion (RBL) and have worked collaboratively with them for several years, principally on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) cases. This included joint home visits to disabled ex-servicemen living in Chorley who required adaptations at their homes. As a result, the council were successful in receiving the RBL's 'Support to The Armed Forces Community Award 2019

19. Taking into consideration all of the above, the Armed Forces Covenant aligns well with Chorley Council's Corporate Strategy, and momentum should be maintained in this area of work. Capacity for furtherance of this work can be realised through the Communities Team, via the current Lead Officer for the Armed Forces Covenant Work, included within the locality Mental Health Thematic Action Plan.
20. Currently there should be no additional resource or cost implications to continue the Armed Forces Covenant Work. This may change as the scope of the Armed Forces Covenant work evolves and further information is released relating to implications of the Covenant Duty. Once this is known, decisions can be made on what actions need to be taken and where responsibility concerning this work sits within the Council.

### **Equality and Diversity**

21. The Armed Forces Community could be construed as a diverse isolated / disadvantaged group, consisting people with different genders, race and religions; also vulnerable individuals including serving officers and or their partner / spouses, children, or veterans; who have or suffer with various types of physical and mental characteristics / illnesses and disabilities, caused by their work. Furthermore, they are a group, that have generally struggled to access services relating to housing, healthcare, education and employment.
22. The council needs to recognise and address all of the above, especially when developing, delivering and reviewing future policies, corporate strategies, and when making decisions which may impact the Armed Forces Community. Policy may even have to change in the future, to the include Armed Force Covenant's and the Armed Forces Covenant Duty's values in them.
23. This ongoing work and any future changes in policy, will go a long way to opening up job and housing opportunities for the Armed Forces Community. It will also make services more accessible to them and could also help to improve the health and wellbeing and the quality of life for the Armed Forces Community; and also recognise the sacrifices that they make for this nation.

### **Risk**

24. The key risks **could be related to reputation for the Council and possible** issues to consider are;
  - Proving to local residents that we provide value for money
  - Informing and engaging with local residents
  - Building trust and confidence in Chorley Council
  - Improving customer satisfaction with council services
  - Chorley Council's role as a community leader

### **Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer**

25. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Specific support, as described above, is within the current Council budget.

## Comments of the Monitoring Officer

26. No comments.

## Background documents

27. There are no background papers to this report

## Appendices

### Appendix A – ERS Criteria

### Appendix B - What Chorley Council Has Achieved In Support of The Armed Forces Community and Future Aims & Objectives

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