

## STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2011

### **Partnership Working - our work with the Military and the Community Covenant**

This report sets out the partnership working with the military that the County Council has been leading on. Building on the success of a number of projects Oxfordshire was one of the first authorities in the country to launch its commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

#### **Introduction:**

1. Oxfordshire has a large military presence; the total number of services personnel based in the County will be in the order of 11,000 with the expansion of RAF Brize Norton. The County Council has long recognised the economic and social impact of the armed forces and has built strong collaborative links with its garrisons, stations and RAF bases, the Regional Brigade and veteran, cadet and reserve units. We are immensely proud of the relationship our armed forces have with the local authorities throughout Oxfordshire, the work we have done and will continue to undertake.

2. Oxfordshire County Council and 145 (South) Brigade have been working together since 2009 through the Civilian Military Partnership; this group has tri service representation along with members of the County Council Management team. It is jointly chaired by the Chief Executive of the County Council and the Commander of the Regional Brigade. It drives strategic direction; monitors progress and create a cohort of civil/military liaison delivering a dynamic outcome focused partnership.

3. The County Council has supported the Armed Forces in a number of ways, for example:

- Our work looking at children of Service personnel was praised by Ofsted
- It has been made easier for Service children to secure school places by using base addresses prior to postings rather than waiting for families to have identified home addresses.
- Work is taking place with all of the District Councils and the City Council to develop a greater understanding of the housing needs of the serving personnel and service leavers.

4. Cllr Keith Mitchell has been appointed as the Council's Armed Forces Champion and senior officer time has been given to enhance the support for the Armed Forces community and develop the partnership with the three services.

5. In order to help strengthen our links with the bases we have also appointed elected members as "military champions". These are:

1. Bicester Garrison : Cllr Kieron Mallon
2. RAF Brize Norton: Cllr Donald Robert Seale
3. Abingdon Station: Cllr Sandy Lovatt
4. Vauxhall Barracks: Cllr Tony Harbour
5. RAF Benson: Cllr Roger Belson

6. Our Commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant is attached at **Annex A** which sets out the areas of work we have been concentrating on and specific actions that will help meet the key aims of the Community Covenant.

### **The Armed Forces Community Covenant:**

7. Oxfordshire County Council was the first local authority in the Country to launch its commitment to the Covenant on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2011. A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It aims to encourage charities, local authorities, businesses, communities and individuals to work together with the military to offer support that is appropriate to Service personnel, Service families, reservists and veterans in their area.

8. Oxfordshire was chosen because of its existing good practice supporting the Armed Forces including setting up the military/civilian partnership, a health liaison group, financial support and the excellent support offered to children of service personnel in the county's schools.

9. All 3 military services were party to the covenant which currently embraces the County Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxford City Council, veterans associations, the Health Authority as well as the private sector through the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise partnership. Further pledges continue to join the Oxfordshire Community Covenant and there will be individual pledges outside of the County initiative. We have established an armed forces webpage on our website which is encouraging support to the Community Covenant [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/armedforces](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/armedforces)

10. The MOD have now launched the **Community Covenant grant scheme** where £30 million is available over the next 4 years. Bids may only be submitted from areas which have already established a Community Covenant in their area, and applications are invited for sums from £100 to £250,000 (although bids for amounts greater than this may also be considered in exceptional circumstances). As we have been the first to pledge support to the Covenant then this is a real opportunity to bid for some money to support our planned work.

Examples of projects could include (but are in no way restricted to):

- local infrastructure, such as a children's playground which might be used by children from both Service accommodation and the wider community;
- projects that increase the integration of Service personnel, veterans and their families with the wider community;
- projects that improve the health, welfare or financial literacy of Service personnel, veterans and their families;

The MOD panel will meet to consider bids in October and December - the deadline for bids for consideration in October is the 30th September.

**An example of best practice:**

11. Oxfordshire County Council is being held up as an example of best practice and a number of local authorities have been in touch to ask for further information on our approach. Oxfordshire County Council will also be the keynote speaker at a LGA (Local Government Association) Armed Forces Conference in November.

12. We are extremely proud of our work to date but this is just the start and we will continue to demonstrate our support and act as a champion to encourage partners and other organisations to offer their support to the Covenant.

**Recommendation:**

13. Scrutiny is asked to consider how the County Council can continue to support those in the Armed Forces community. Some possible areas for consideration are suggested below:

- Service families can sometimes have complex needs and may reside in a community for a short period of time, it is important that these needs are addressed on the ground as well as within policy.
  - If members would like to understand further the issues faced by the armed forces in Oxfordshire then the base commanders would be more than happy to attend a scrutiny meeting to give their perspective.
  - Alternatively a visit could be arranged to one of the bases to meet with the base commanders and other key personnel such as the welfare officers and the HIVE which provides information support to all members of the Service Community.
  - A session could also be arranged with partners to hear about the work we have been involved in to date – e.g. Oxfordshire NHS
- As Armed Forces personnel resettle into the county they will have certain specific needs for services provided by local authorities. This is particularly true for housing requirements and it is hoped that the local authorities will be able to work together to create a standard provision for Service personnel across the county. There is a role here in terms of developing a greater understanding and helping to address the housing needs of service personnel amongst the housing providers in the county.
- How do we support service leavers to resettle in Oxfordshire, focusing particularly on enabling those with physical or mental health issues to gain relevant skills and employment?
- Could we provide opportunities for the Armed Forces to talk about their experiences on operations?
- Could we encourage businesses to offer discounts to serving personnel and their families?
- How do we ensure that a wide range of partners are engaged in the Community Covenant?

## SYP8

- To ensure that we continue our support to the Civilian Military Partnership Board and ensure that there is representation from the Armed Forces on our key strategic partnerships

**Claire Moore, Strategic Partnership Manager**

**September 2011**

**Attached:**

- Oxfordshire's Commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant 2011-16  
A joint publication by Oxfordshire County Council and 145 (South) Brigade