

**Report to:** CABINET

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> JANUARY 2009

**Subject:** HONOUR THE COVENANT

**Report of:** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: HEALTH AND WELL BEING

**Contact officer:** BERNARD WALKER 01942 827780 x2780

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**Purpose / summary:** This report outlines details of the cross Government Strategy on how the Service Community should be supported. It also includes proposals as to how the Council could support Veterans' Day 2009.

**Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended:**

**Recommendation / decision:** That Cabinet reports back to Council on the details of Honour the Covenant.  
That Cabinet supports the proposals for Veterans' Day 2009.

This report does not involve a key decision. The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed, i.e. before 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2009

**Risks / Implications:**

Financial:	Will need to be contained within existing budgets.
Staffing:	None
Policy:	Community Leadership
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	No
Wards affected:	All

**Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?**

No

**If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?**

**Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?**

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

**Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?**

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution? **Yes / ~~No~~ \***

Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget? **Yes / ~~No~~ \***

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **~~Yes~~ / No \***

\* delete which applicable

**For Cabinet reports only :**

Categorisation of the report:	<b>x</b>
Discussion leading to a decision	
Monitoring	
Sharing for corporate understanding	

	<b>x</b>
Discussion	<b>x</b>
Decision	
Information	

**Tracking/Process:**

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
		22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2009	

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer Bernard Walker

Date 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008

## 1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 At the meeting of Council on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2008 Councillor R M Bleakley submitted the following motion:

“This Council believes that when people sign up to join the Armed Services they show that they are prepared to put their life on the line for their country. In return they should be certain that they and their family will be looked after appropriately both in relation to services provided by the Government and the Council.

It further believes that the recognition in medals and commendations does not meet the needs and care of many of our servicemen and women past and present and, accordingly, it supports the ‘Honour the Covenant’ campaign of the Royal British Legion.

This Council therefore calls upon her Majesty’s Government to honour its lifelong duty of care to those soldiers (both from Wigan Borough and beyond) making a unique commitment to their country by realising in full the demands laid out by the Royal British Legion in their ‘Honour the Covenant’ Campaign.

In accordance with Rule of Procedure 20.1, Councillor PRC Smith moved suspension of Council procedure rules, to enable him to move a motion without notice, which was seconded.”

- 1.2 Council resolved to receive a report on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009. Cabinet considered this motion and sought further information from the Minister for the Armed Forces in respect of the ‘Honour the Covenant’ campaign.

### 1.3 **Honour the Covenant**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2007 the Government announced the first ever cross-Government strategy into how the service community will be supported. This built on the Service Personnel Command Paper (‘The Nation’s Commitment: Cross-Government Support to Our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans’) which was presented to Parliament on the 17<sup>th</sup> July.

The strategy is the product of extensive consultation and close involvement with Other Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations. One of the key strands of the strategy is that the Armed Forces should not be disadvantaged by their military lifestyle, while also making provision for special treatment for those who make exceptional sacrifices in the course of duty. The Command Paper has been welcomed by the RBL.

The strategy includes 40 new measures many of which were particular areas of concern raised by the RBL. Key changes include:

- The Ministry of Defence doubling Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments for the most serious injuries from £285,000 to £570,000;
- The Department of Health improving access to NHS dentists for Service families;
- The Department of Transport offering free bus travel for seriously injured Service Personnel and veterans.

#### 1.4 Improved Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)

The upfront lump sum payment for injury under the AFCS will be doubled for the most serious injuries. All future recipients, according to severity of injury, will have an uplift of between 10 and 100% in their upfront lump sum payments. MOD also intends to confer additional benefits to extend this effect to those who have already made claims under the Scheme. The Guaranteed Income Payment (GIP) will continue to apply on discharge, in addition to the upfront lump sum compensation payment. The GIP will continue to provide the most seriously injured with a monthly, tax-free income once they leave Service. For example, a 25-year old seriously injured soldier may receive a £570,000 lump sum payment plus a GIP of £19,000 per year tax free for life. If he lives to average life expectancy, this is a further million pounds, tax free, on top of the lump sum payment. These changes will be implemented following a short consultation period.

#### 1.5 Improved access to NHS dentists for Service families

Service mobility and the frequent need to find an NHS dentist in the new location can make access to dentistry difficult for Service families. The Department of Health (DH) and other UK health departments will trial various new ways such as making use of facilities in military bases, or provide mobile services, or making use of spare capacity elsewhere. Trials will begin by December this year and complete by December 2009. DH and other health departments will work with the NHS to ensure that health areas with large Service personnel populations plan with the military communities in their areas to ensure Service families get the dental care they need.

#### 1.6 National Health Service (NHS) Waiting List – Retention of Place

Service mobility can cause repeated loss of place on NHS waiting lists. DH and other UK health departments will ensure that when patients move across the UK, previous waiting time will be taken into account with the expectation that treatment will be within national waiting time standards.

#### 1.7 Concessionary Bus Travel

The statutory bus concession in England will be extended by 1 April 2011 to include seriously injured Service personnel and veterans under the age of 60.

#### 1.8 Automatic entitlement for Blue Badges to severely injured veterans

The Blue Badge Scheme provides a range of parking concessions across the UK for people with severe mobility problems. We will now introduce a scheme so that severely disabled veterans in England will receive automatic entitlement to a Blue Badge without further assessment. Scottish Ministers will also implement this change. The Welsh Assembly Government is consulting on plans for a Reform Strategy for the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales, with this proposal considered as part of the review.

1.9 High priority for injured troops in applying for adapted social housing

Seriously injured Service personnel can face delays in obtaining suitable adapted social housing where they are not given sufficient priority. The Department for Communities in Local Government (DCLG) will give seriously injured personnel in England and Wales high priority for social housing. Statutory guidance will be issued to reinforce this message. Scottish Ministers will remind landlords of the existing high priority that seriously injured personnel in Scotland receive for adapted social housing.

1.10 Support for bereaved families

In terms of support for bereaved families the MOD is also providing additional logistical support for bereaved families and coroners. For example a new booklet for families explaining the Board of inquiry and inquest process; increasing the number of family members who can, at public expense attend repatriation ceremonies, pre-inquest hearings and inquests; establishing a dedicated team for Army deaths; and improving the selection of and training for visiting officers. The Ministry of Justice and the MOD are also looking at what else can be done to speed up the inquest processes and MOD is reviewing Board of Inquiry procedures.

**2. VETERANS' DAY 2009**

2.1 Over the past 12 months officers from the Council have been working with Veterans' organisations to establish a Veterans' Council in the Borough. One of the focal points of this initiative is supporting Veterans' Day events, so the Council needs to consider the level this support should take.

2.2 What is Veterans' Day?

Veterans' Day is both a celebration of the contribution made by all those who have served in the Armed Forces, and a means of raising public awareness of veteran's issues.

Plans for a Veterans' Day were originally announced in February 2006 by the Prime Minister, who said the aim was to ensure that the contribution of veterans was never forgotten. Veterans Day is intended to provide a focus for the nation to recognise the part played by veterans of all ages in conflicts both past and present. On the day itself, and in the weeks leading up to it, events take place across the country, ranging from the national and major regional events, to dozens of local events organised

by ex-Service organisations, councils, community groups and schools.

2.3 The focus of Veterans' Day is on celebrating both the past and the continuing contributions of veterans living in our communities today. The intention is that Veterans Day will become as familiar and respected as Remembrance Sunday, which remembers and honours those who died serving their country.

2.4 A veteran is anyone who has served in HM Armed Forces at any time (including National Servicemen and Reservists Merchant Navy), irrespective of length of service.

2.5 The local context

Last year's event took place on 27<sup>th</sup> June, centred on the Springview Sports Association premises. The Council had provided a good level of assistance from a small group of officers. Local evaluation suggested the event was well received but it also prompted requests for further investment and development for future years.

2.6 A small officer team from Adult Services with local Township Manager and supported the plans for the event and the emerging Veterans Council group. In practice it meant that Council officers contributed significant amounts of time over a period of 2–3 months.

2.7 Last year the Council's financial support to the event and the Veteran's Council included just over £2,200 in direct costs and approximately £7,000 in staff time and other support. This included a substantial amount of staff time from Adult Services and other departments – including the Township team.

2.8 Given the aspirations of the organisation it is likely that the costs for next year's event would exceed this year. An important part of any future support to the organisation and event must be to help build capacity and enable them to secure funding and sponsorship from other sources.

2.9 A small core group of Veterans have been in contact with Council officers since last year's event – and are very keen to build on its success. Indeed, they would like to develop this into a wider celebration and programme of awareness.

The local MPs have already indicated strong support to this group and appear keen to assist in giving next year's event a high profile, with the possibility of some high profile visitors.

### **3. ISSUES TO CONSIDER**

3.1 An officer from Adult Services conducted a piece of structured research with local Veterans last year. This identified that local Veterans feel they have issues in relation to:

- Housing
- Employment
- Health and social care
- Advice and information

There is some specific support for Veterans which is delivered by organisations such as SSAFA and the British Legion – as well as other service specific charities and welfare officers. However the local perception seemed to be that access to these is not always straightforward and that there was a need to provide a more explicit service to support local Veterans. In that context the creation of a high profile Veterans' Day was seen as a critical part in raising public and political awareness of the needs of Veterans.

- 3.2 It needs to be considered that the event is something which the Council should take an active role in leading, perhaps in the same way as Remembrance Sunday? Or is it an independent activity that we should support simply in the way that we work with other community / voluntary groups? There may be an assumption that the Council has a duty to provide a civic leadership role for this event, even if the Council itself is not formally responsible.
- 3.3 Recent conversations suggest that local MPs are very concerned that this event is given a high level of support and that it achieves a high public profile. It is not clear what level of support is expected to be provided by the Armed Services themselves or the various welfare organisations with which many veterans are associated.
- 3.4 There is a case for assuming that this activity should be led by Adult Services given the age and needs of many veterans. There are however obvious parallels with Remembrance Sunday events where a more corporate approach has been taken. It would seem important that if the Council is to support this event and the longer term development of the Veteran's Council then we agree clear designations and agreements about our approach.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The Executive Director of Health and Well Being takes a lead role to establish a clear corporate approach to the planned Veteran's Day event with support from all services. This role should also help to establish a long term view on the support needs of veterans as described in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of this report.
- 4.2 Agree a package of staff support from all service areas to be led by Executive Director. This should include technical, professional and funding advice. Some support may also be requested from CVS and related 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector bodies. Support should recognise the Veteran's Council's aspiration to employ its own development worker at some future date.
- 4.3 Liaison with MPs to be undertaken as soon as possible and clear lines of communication maintained with respective offices.

**Diversity Impact Assessment form**

Section:
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Policy/Service Area:
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Person Completing Form:	Date:
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Do any of the below groups suffer specific disadvantage (please indicate)

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Race			Disability		
Ethnicity			Gender		
Age			Religion		
Class			Sexual Orientation		

Is there evidence of disadvantage or associated problems?

How was the information collected and/or who have you consulted with?

Action Plan – <i>What specific actions are planned to tackle any disadvantage identified?</i>

Is the policy in line with current equality legislation and relevant codes of practice?

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Timescale	
Responsibility	
Comments	

**Are the actions specified included in any other documents/plans?**

Departmental Service Plan	
Section/Team Plan	
Other (Specify)	

Date for further review
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