

Select Committee Review

Monday 7 November 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor Penberthy, in the Chair.
Councillor Hulme, Vice Chair.
Councillors Luggier, Murphy and Poyser.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Finn.

Also in attendance: Councillor Shayer (Cabinet Member for Finance and Economy), Andy Ralphs (Strategic Director of Customer and Corporate Services), Kim Brown (Service Director for HR and Organisational Development), Matt Garrett (Service Director for Community Connections), Gary Walbridge (Head of Adult Social Care and Retained Functions), Alan Knott (Policy and Intelligence Advisor), Michael House (HWB in Education Officer), Emma Hewitt (Skills Lead, Education, Participation and Skills), Sian Timms (Naval Families Federation), Becky Ormrod (Improving Lives Plymouth), Chris Thorpe (Alabare), Basil Downing-Waite (Chair, The Federation of Plymouth and District Ex-Services Associations), Claire Elliott (Armed Forces Family) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 1.00 pm and finished at 5pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Penberthy as Chair, and Councillor Hulme as Vice Chair for the Armed Forces Covenant Select Committee Review.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members in accordance with the code of conduct.

3. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

4. Armed Forces Covenant Review

The Chair, Councillor Penberthy, introduced the Armed Forces Covenant Select Committee Review and advised that scrutiny was taking the opportunity, for what was considered to be the first time in the 10 years since its implementation, of the Armed Forces Covenant in order to discuss what work had taken place, what had

worked well and what could be done better in the future with the aim of creating an exceptional model of work and delivery. The review itself would allow Members an opportunity to engage with the Executive Member Councillor Shayer, as well as a variety of external witnesses and internal officers and consider witness statements supplied as part of the agenda pack as well as considering first-hand accounts; learning lessons from the past was highlighted as being an important factor in developing the covenant moving forward.

The Chair clarified the definition of the Armed Forces Community as including not only serving members of the armed forces, but all volunteer and regular reservists, veterans, families of those in the armed forces, as well as cadets, to ensure that they were treated so as not to be victims to discrimination because of their service, and where appropriate to receive additional support via a variety of means.

Councillor Penberthy invited Councillor Shayer (Cabinet Member for Finance and Economy) to speak to the Committee in his role as Cabinet Member who highlighted the following:

- (a) he was the Council's Champion for the Armed Forces Covenant in Plymouth, he was himself a veteran, had been a service child, had three children who were service children themselves and grew up in the West Country therefore this was an important issue for him;
- (b) he was passionate about his role connected to the Armed Forces Covenant and introduced a short video from the Lieutenant General James Swift, the Chief of Defence People, who was responsible for the Armed Forces Covenant:
 - the video itself highlighted the benefits of having a career in the forces, including serving one's country, travelling the world, learning new skills, however also referred to difficulties experienced by serving personnel and their family including regularly moving themselves around the country/ world with their families at short notice and with little or no say as to where they were sent, or being deployed on overseas operations being forced to be apart from their families for many months at a time. The stresses and the impact of the job were considered to be immense at times and the impact long term in some cases after leaving the armed forces and returning to civilian life. The stress was also felt by service families, especially service children whose parent was away often for long periods and often out of contact and potentially in danger. Because of this, it was considered that members of the armed forces and their families rarely led a normal life meaning they would often have different experiences when accessing and using day-to-day public and private services; for example being harder to access services consistently because of frequent moves around the UK. The Armed Forces Covenant was a promise by the nation for those who serve or had served in the armed forces along with their families, should be treated fairly. It's a promise that they should not be disadvantaged because of their service in the armed forces and a recognition of the

sacrifices the armed forces make on the nations behalf and the responsibilities owed to them in return.

- (c) in Plymouth there was a vibrant armed forces community with veterans, serving personnel, their families and other associations. The covenant had, over the last 10 years, been a key advocator for all members of the armed forces community ensuring they were recognised and remembered for the sacrifices they had made, and that they were treated fairly and did not face a disadvantage. Going forward, new legislation passed earlier in the year, would be a great catalyst to raise the profile nationally and locally of the covenant;
- (d) nationally over the past 10 years, the armed forces covenant had provided a framework for charities, policy makers, businesses and the armed forces themselves to deliver improvements and address the needs of the armed forces community. Whilst there was always more that could be done researchers found that near universal recognition, that the provision of health services to veterans in the NHS had improved substantially since 2011 as a result of the covenant;
- (e) in Plymouth great progress was identified in supporting those of the armed forces including the opening of the Plymouth veterans and families hub who worked with partner organisations across the city to shape better pathways to employment, mental wellbeing, welfare, housing advice and financial information. The creation of the armed forces community, social prescribing demonstrator in Plymouth, the production of a military kids club, ambassador's film which was a training tool for schools explaining the impact of being a child in a service family. In terms of housing for veterans, the Stirling Project had 25 self-contained affordable homes for rent still being built, and 12 of which were being built by former serving personnel in need of housing. Military Tuesday was launched in 2021, a brilliant collaboration which for the first time brought together all the support and impartial information advice and guidance for skills and employment in one place with the career transition partnership team, the regular forces employment agency and Plymouth City Council engaging positively. 77 Plymouth business had signed up their commitment to the armed forces covenant. A new e-learning package had been introduced, the partnership membership had been increased, a new website had been developed to focus on the social media for better communications; the Department for Work and Pensions had offered a designated armed forces champion. Finally, the promotion of the RBL schools programme for remembrance;
- (f) Plymouth's challenges over the next few years were in line with the armed forces covenant partnership priorities for 2022 – 2024 with a focus on removing disadvantages from the armed forces community, raise awareness through celebration and commemoration, increase business community engagement with the armed forces covenant, improving healthcare provision for the armed forces community, supporting service childrens' education, help to tackle housing issues and better connecting the armed forces community with new opportunities for skills, training, education, careers and jobs.

The Chair advised the Committee that due to this being such a broad subject, the review would be structured so as to look at the three statutory areas (healthcare, education and housing) and to focus on what had been done well, what might not be going well and where changes could be made. Written submissions published as part of the pack, information from presenting officers, input from external witnesses and group discussion would be considered during the consideration of each statutory area.

Healthcare:

Members of the Committee, external witnesses and officers discussed the following:

- (g) in terms of social care provision for those linked to the armed forces, it was important that the specific need was identified in order to enable the Council to direct individuals towards specific offers of help;
- (h) the Veterans Hub received funding from the NHS for social prescribing for the Armed Forces Community and part of that included approaching GP practices across Plymouth to get them signed up to the armed forces GP friendly practices initiative; it was considered that this was going well with 11 surgeries currently signed up. There were a lot of GP surgeries that wanted to sign up and be recognised as a veteran friendly practice however it was a big piece of work. The success of this also depended on speaking to the right people within the surgery and to signpost what support was available. The accessing of dental surgeries was considered an issue, particularly for service personnel that had relocated;
- (i) a letter had recently been sent out to Plymouth GPs encouraging them to engage with the armed forces covenant and identify themselves as covenant friendly practices. A list of GP surgeries that had signed up was coordinated by the Veterans Hub;
- (j) it was considered that mental health appeared to be missing from the city's commitments to the armed forces covenant in terms of healthcare, and specifically for childrens mental health. It was responded that the Council had a role in communicating the opportunities and services available for schools and the partnerships that helped schools every day. With mental health since the return to school following the pandemic there had been a wealth of varying different interventions regarding emotional and mental health and wellbeing services in schools – the Return to Education Project included commissioned services providing support to schools via in school sessions and support for teachers. Specific support for service children would align with that for other children at the school however would be enhanced with therapeutic activities. The challenge was identifying those children that needed specific support; the transition of pupils' in-year led to a slight delay in the assessment of additional needs. That challenge was met through the school through their SENCOs and the council worked with them and helped schools to identify issues and how to use the pupil premium service. All secondary schools had a mental health lead;

- (k) the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership received a presentation from the NHS on childrens mental health on 28 January 2021 setting out a plan of action and how mental health for children would be dealt with. This was being continually assessed and mental health was a priority for the partnership going forwards. The plan set the priorities for the next few years;
- (l) concerns were raised that there was no explicit mention of childrens mental health or a trauma informed approach in the armed forces covenant in the city; bullet point six of the covenant highlighted mental health, but not in as much as it's specific to children. It said that the covenant would seek to strengthen the military covenant with the armed forces by looking at veterans ongoing needs, especially around medical support and mental health provision in order to be recognised as the Centre of Excellence for veterans support;
- (m) the parent of a child who was a MKC (Military Kids Club) ambassador considered that the local authority had let them and other MKC families down as they had received no contact, other than that by the Royal British Legion. It was responded that the Armed Forces Covenant incorporated the family strategy – during the pandemic engagement was limited however partnership meetings were held on a regular basis and everyone was welcome to attend;
- (n) the impact of the problems experienced with accessing dental health provision was not just a physical issue, it also affected someone's mental health and emotional wellbeing. It could affect confidence therefore having an impact upon looking for work, employment, social skills. This impact also had an effect upon the spouses of serving personnel as when they move into an area there were waiting lists for NHS dentists sometimes up to two years; work had started in approaching dentists and asking them to be covenant friendly however more work was required. A motion on notice was discussed at full council in 2021 whereby it was agreed that the Chief Executive would write a letter to the Secretary of State regarding dental healthcare provision in Plymouth;
- (o) in terms of the criteria for covenant friendly surgeries, anyone was able to sign up to the accreditation service unless they were in special measures; a member of staff at the surgery was required to be the lead in the application however it did not take long to complete – information was then sent through to the surgery on a regular basis. Staff through the Veterans Hub would approach GP surgeries and explain the accreditation; through this service waiting times for mental health services for veterans reduced from two years to two weeks;
- (p) in terms of the legislation around health care, the covenant duty was a duty on all public bodies; through the covenant work has been undertaken to encourage other public bodies to attend the covenant partnership meetings. The partnership already had a good relationships with the NHS however

further work was to be undertaken to develop this further. As a covenant partnership, work was being done to encourage and foster partnership working with other public bodies to achieve the health care legislation, and the covenant duty.

Education and Skills

Members of the committee, external witnesses and officers discussed the following:

- (q) the covenant theme group for education had evolved over the past 12 months to becoming more strategic in its conversations and collective work. A sub group had been introduced focusing upon the new young carers and families service hub;
- (r) the families strategy, a priority contained within the legislation was discussed at the covenant theme group for education and children and young people; as part of the action plan discussed focused upon communication strategies within schools, school provision and the way that could be scrutinised through the thriving lives toolkit, coordination of the school workforce, and how to utilise the voice of the children and young people themselves. To support the provision set against the priorities of the family strategy work also focused upon the wider educational context, admissions, transport, attendance, additional needs, educational attainment and curriculum, student well-being and the use of the Service Pupil Premium;
- (s) the theme had a development which was aimed to help the service in the city and that was the production of an inclusion scorecard – it was a way that Plymouth City Council would be able to look at the range of schools and apportion help in different areas. It was a way of identifying what support was needed. From that particular process it was now known how many service children families there were in the city, what percentage that was in each school. Previously national data was relied upon. This would also indicate the amount of money that came into the city for the Service Pupil Premium, which was approximately £672,000 a year;
- (t) it was agreed that those figures would be provided to Members in terms of the number of schools and number of children in order to establish how much of the Service Pupil Premium was specifically used to support the needs of Armed Forces children as opposed to supporting generic school budgets;
- (u) the Service Pupil Premium service was payable to veteran children as well – it was highlighted that there may be different needs. The Government published on its website useful ways to spend Pupil Premium;
- (v) within Plymouth, young carers were numbered around approximately 800 to 900. However, it was considered that this was vastly under reported for service family children. There were 2169 in the city with 9 in alternative complementary education, 27 in special schools, 1229 in primary school and 904 in secondary school. There was there is a higher percentage of people

that were service family children that then went on to become young carers as well – that was important to note because it was an extra vulnerability or challenge;

- (w) the school admission code changed in 2021 no longer including service children under the fair access policy therefore they were no longer considered as a disadvantaged group according to that paper. It was considered that this contradicted itself in the Government's commitment to remove disadvantage from service children. Plymouth City Council's school's admission policy didn't put service children as a priority - this was raised with the Director of Children's Services previously who was to contact the Department for Education to assess if a local solution could be made. It was highlighted that other local authorities that had encountered this had actually put in their own local solutions as a remedy to change government policy;
- (x) the submission in the pack from Heather Ogburn was referred to – Heather helped to establish the first community covenant in the city, and received an OBE for the establishment of MKC Heroes and the whole work of ambassadors. In terms of MKC Heroes, this was a Royal British Legion activity and was not the responsibility of the Council. On the British Legion website
MKC heroes, the Military Kids Club heroes network, was referred to as a unique pupil voice for the children and young people of service personnel and veterans that was supported and facilitated by the Royal British Legion;
- (y) page 59 of the agenda pack referred to an LGA publication, talking about the role that councils have; Plymouth was highlighted because of the work that Plymouth did on MKC heroes and the kids choir and the roots that had in to both the covenant and the Plymouth Youth Council. The Chair highlighted the disparity in the agenda report in comparison to evidence provided by a teacher in a written submission and what was said at the meeting that this was the responsibility of the RBL and not the Council. It was highlighted that in the past the Council was very involved with MKC, and the Children's Choir, etc via Heather Ogburn who took it upon herself to really actively involve herself within that an organisation. It was confirmed that the paper in the agenda was a snapshot in time, and the situation had changed since then;
- (z) it was queried how the covenant heard directly from children and young people given that children and young people weren't on the children and young people's group, and that MKC heroes weren't engaged because the British Legion weren't engaged on that area. There was concern that children and young people didn't have a voice. In response and with regards to the voice of the child, national and local surveys and research were considered, much of which has gone into the production of the annual action plan. Forty schools were also represented at hub meetings and they talked collectively to support young carers and service children. That sub group fed into the young people and families group;
- (aa) there was concern that the RBL response submitted as part of the agenda paperwork did not mention MKC Heroes – it was considered that whilst it

might be something the Royal British Legion was responsible for, they didn't appear to mention children and young people in their response therefore it was something they had taken on but may not be doing. There were concerns that service children were therefore falling through a gap, because of an assumption made on another organisation.

Housing –

Members of the Committee, external witnesses and officers discussed the following:

- (bb) the Council worked with Devon Homes Choice to support armed forces personnel and ex-personnel including giving additional priority on the housing register; the Council also worked on projects with partners such as the Nelson Project in Stonehouse and the Stirling Project providing housing specifically for services personnel;
- (cc) the national landscape for housing was currently very poor; officers were working in a climate where work was being done to improve local housing provision however the housing market was particularly strained at this point;
- (dd) there were approximately 434 households that had deemed themselves to be in the armed forces or ex-armed forces personnel currently on the housing register in Plymouth amounting to 4% of the register however it was highlighted that several people may be on the register and not having specified that they are or were in the forces;
- (ee) Alabare was a charity supporting vulnerable, homeless and marginalised people to help transform their lives by providing accommodation and help to gain skills to live a fulfilled life – they provided support to armed forces personnel and veterans. It was highlighted that the banding for a veteran in Plymouth had been increased. Usually if veterans were in a supported accommodation project such as Alabare they would be given a banding of a 'd', making it difficult for them to gain access to social housing, however this had now changed to a 'c' banding;
- (ff) the average stay for someone receiving support at Alabare in the housing unit had increased from 9 – 12 months, to 18 – 24 months because of the difficulty in accessing the social housing register; some housing associations were also considered to be more stringent around finances and previous drug and alcohol history affecting their ability to receive social housing support;
- (gg) all of the veterans projects linked with Alabare were at 100% capacity and referrals were continuing to be received with a waiting list in place – it was considered difficult for those receiving support to be moved into private rented accommodation. It was acknowledged that if someone stayed in a supported housing project for too long it might become detrimental upon their ability to move forward independently due to a factor of heavy reliance on others;

- (hh) the Council allocated a proportion of housing stock through local lettings to armed forces personnel – this was specifically self build projects as part of the Nelson and Stirling Projects; it was confirmed that another development was in the pipeline;
- (ii) Alabare had a project called Boots on the Ground which was funded through the Armed Forces Covenant Positive Pathways Programme with the aim of improving veterans’ mental health through outdoor activities to support resilience moving forward. It was also hoped that this holistic approach would enable accommodation to get accommodation and sustain it – the work provided by Alabare was the first and had led to some national developments;
- (jj) it was questioned if it would be possible to have an armed forces champion within the housing department at the Council – it was highlighted that professionals that worked with veterans often contacted the Council to follow up cases for people that were about to transition onto the housing register, or ask questions however they were often required to be on a call for approximately an hour waiting which wasn’t considered an effective use of time. It was demonstrated that it would be helpful to have a direct contact who would understand the specific issues to help move cases forward easier; it was responded that this would need to be discussed within the team however it wasn’t expected to be a problem;
- (kk) it was suggested that champions were specified at the council for all three areas affecting veterans and armed forces personnel and their families – housing, education and healthcare;
- (ll) in terms of homelessness and temporary accommodation, the council wasn’t able to track if anyone identified as a veteran within this cohort – information received from Devon Homes Choice was the only way the Council could assess who had declared themselves as linked to the armed forces;
- (mm) the Council collaborated with partners in order to find housing solutions however hadn’t recently contacted the MOD in terms of empty properties and the option to lease;
- (nn) it was considered that it would be very difficult to receive an accurate figure for veterans in the city and those that were homeless or in temporary accommodation as many didn’t present themselves in that way through embarrassment or circumstance;
- (oo) it was estimated that the number of people on the housing waiting list was more than 4% of the waiting list in terms of veterans and armed forces families given the size of the Armed Forces community in the city. It was expected that those with complex needs should be considered, especially in terms of a trauma informed approach and the requirement of specialist service and additional support to meet some of those needs appropriately;

- (pp) it was considered a useful consideration to approach the MOD regarding potential long term vacant properties, even if only for a short term lease to the Council in order to move some people out of B&B accommodation back into temporary accommodation or to allow movement out of intensely supported housing charities freeing up room for the next cohort of people in need;
- (qq) it was highlighted that Alabare only had seven beds available in Plymouth therefore the transitional pathway of support needed to be addressed,. However had 102 homes across the South West and Wales;
- (rr) a list of local businesses that had signed up to the covenant was available however this had not been cross referenced with the social landlords that had signed up however this information would be made available.

Employment/ Training/ Business Engagement

Members of the committee, external witnesses and officers discussed the following:

- (ss) the Council's skills lead highlighted that the Council had a Skills for Plymouth Strategic Plan; a five year roadmap in terms of the demand picture from local employers and sectors, and the sort of skills element in terms of the working population, the skills training provision and the future pipeline of our young people and those going through the education system;
- (tt) the aim was to ensure that local employers and sectors had the right skilled workforce to fill jobs vacancies, and to ensure local people and those coming through in the pipeline gain and had access to the skills that they needed to fill those job vacancies that we have in the city;
- (uu) it was important to ensure that service leavers and veterans were able to express what skills they had; it was recognised that some ex forces personnel had an amazing skill set and qualification base however couldn't communicate that effectively in CVs. The Skills Launchpad was able to help with this piece of work;
- (vv) work was being undertaken as part of the skills agenda to create a one stop shop for local employers presenting a cohort of individuals with the correct skillset to perform roles; it was important that employers knew how to access recruitment pools, including the armed forces family. Nearly 100 local employers were signed up to endorse the agenda – it was the role of officers to understand employers entry level qualification requirements ensuring that those going through the system were upskilled where required;
- (ww) the Council was working with contacts in the armed forces to be involved in discussions around the exit planning process of service leavers to ensure they were fully aware of opportunities within the city;

- (xx) through the Skills Launchpad, which was a citywide partnership, there was several training providers including further education and higher education. The idea was that training could be brought together collectively and those seeking advice and guidance would also be kept abreast of opportunities and what pathways to take. City College Plymouth were very much a key partner in the skills offer. There were regular Military Tuesday events, which was a pop up activity with different partners involved including the University, recruiting agents and colleges;
- (yy) the Forces Employment Charity and the Poppy Factory Transition Service were represented at Military Tuesdays along with other partners and organisations to work together in a multi-agency response to support individuals;
- (zz) it was highlighted that Plymouth should be specifically referred to in terms of local opportunities for those leaving Plymouth forces, highlighting potential skills and matching to employers; this was something that was currently lacking. Exit planning should be properly managed so that opportunities and pathways and skills were undertaken;
- (aaa) in terms of support for the partners, wives and husbands of service personnel, the Military Tuesday's events embraced families so their needs could be catered here however it was acknowledged that there was potentially a whole cohort of individuals within this category that could be a part of the economic delivery within the city. There was also a dedicated youth hub as part of the skills Launchpad for 16 – 24 year olds as well as a focus on young carers;
- (bbb) the Family Federation had forces families jobs – it was a job site for all people that were linked to forces families. Everyone involved had to be signed up to the Armed Forces covenant to advertise a job on it. There were normally about 10,000 live at any one stage however this was particularly aimed at spouses and other family members;
- (ccc) every forces leaver received a resettlement package and this was run by CTP – they were paid by the MOD to handle the transition. The transition period would start two years before the individual was due to leave the forces;

Internal Support from the Council

Members of the committee, external witnesses and officers discussed the following:

- (ddd) Plymouth City Council had a very diverse workforce made up ex-serving personnel, serving officers and veterans. The Council had reviewed its recruitment policy, and also updated the recruitment statement so that individuals that were able to demonstrate they met the criteria, were guaranteed an interview. The Core HR service platform that was used for recording staff personal details, etc now included a field indicating if they

were reservists/ in a military family etc;

- (eee) as part of the data update, the Council was to write to the workforce to gain intelligence in relation to how many members of staff were veterans, serving personnel or part of a military family;
- (fff) the Council's People Strategy was to include a reservists policy that had been reviewed, but was yet to be agreed; it referred to 10 days for reservists for training;
- (ggg) it was not known how many veterans, reservists, military family members or serving personnel were employed by the Council however it was hoped that this would be captured as part of the data capture exercise;
- (hhh) it was discussed if cadets should also be referred to in the Council's policy as several cadets were known to work for the Council yet were using their annual leave for training.

The Covenant/ Partnership Working

Members of the committee, external witnesses and officers discussed the following:

- (iii) in terms of communication of the covenant, a new website went live within the last four to six weeks. An e-learning package was included for anyone in any organisation who wanted to know a little bit about the about the covenant; this was also included in the e-learning hub within the Council. The Twitter and Facebook pages had been reinvigorated and were used as the main forms of communication however it was recognised that traditional formats such as within a printed local newspaper might be used in the future for those that didn't access digital social media;
- (jii) it was acknowledged that the website was relatively new and that the Twitter and Facebook pages had just gone up, however it was considered that there were not enough social media postings. There were fantastic provisions for the armed forces community within the city however this was considered not to be showcased; a more active social media presence would be able to regularly update on what was happening in the city, what support was available and how people could get involved;
- (kkk) it was considered that the Council might have a role in supporting the partnership in effectively communicating the work of the covenant and take an overall lead; rolling poster boards could be used, electronic boards or boards for posters in car parks;
- (lll) Plymouth City Bus had signed up to the armed forces covenant therefore it might be beneficial to try and work with them to communicate the work of the armed forces covenant; they had buses that went across the city seven days a week so could effectively get the message out in the

city as they had message boards inside buses as well as exterior advertising space;

- (mmm) it was considered that a communication strategy was required for the armed forces covenant so that all the organisations could work to it together and then disseminate messages from a central point otherwise there was a risk of confused messaging;
- (nnn) there was a Plymouth City Council ceremony for signing the covenant that happened in August; this was developed by the business theme group who worked closely with the Wessex reserves to promote this to the business community in Plymouth;
- (ooo) the theme groups were established 8 years ago, it was questioned if it was time for the groups to change or be updated to reflect the growth of the covenant; several partners and people worked cross cutting themes therefore the approach currently taken was to work collaboratively other than in silos;
- (ppp) it was highlighted that covenant meetings were working well and theme groups worked cohesively together however change was always welcome to promote development and growth;
- (qqq) a good thing to have come out of the pandemic was the collaborative working what went on between organisations working with the Armed Forces community, for example the veterans and families set up six weekly service update meetings, where we could really get an idea of what was happening, who was being furloughed, and what support we were offering people; approximately 25 people attended those sessions and worked well due to collaboration;
- (rrr) Outreach Hubs were due to start in November 2022; they demonstrated a collaboration of services coming together and going out in the community to offer support to the armed forces community. Help for Heroes, DWP, the veterans, South West Water, Plymouth Community Homes and other partner organisations, would all be in attendance at these events. They were run by organisations that had come together having recognised a need and were doing something about it. There was no funding to run these sessions however it was hoped that they would continue;
- (sss) in terms of the armed forces covenant themes it was discussed if future themes might include employment training and business engagement areas, health care, education and housing – they could have in them people that covered all areas of inclusion such as veterans, families, children, serving personnel;
- (ttt) sexual abuse, violence and rape within the services and disclosures coming out after people had left the service was another area that needed more consideration – it was considered that this should form

part of the armed forces covenant;

- (uuu) it was discussed that no longer having a formal city covenant, and having lots of organisational covenants, could mean there were areas of support for our Armed Forces community that didn't have that natural lead in the city anymore;
- (vvv) Armed Forces Day was still seen as an important thing for the Council to support; Falmouth was hosting the national armed forces day celebrations however Plymouth was still going to celebrate armed forces day;
- (www) the importance of partnership working was discussed, as well as the extra importance of a partnership lead; the council no longer had a responsibility to bring everything together;
- (xxx) the fact that the city had ten years of successful covenant delivery was celebrated; partners were working together to move from ticking national boxes to a city that had an exemplary community covenant, led by a council showing its commitment to all parts of our Armed Forces family.

The Chair, Councillor Penberthy, thanked everyone that had participated in the meeting through written evidence, at the meeting itself, and to everyone in the city that worked to support the Armed Forces Covenant and the Armed Forces family.

The Committee agreed:

1. to recommend to the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to include Armed Forces Friendly GPs and Dental Surgeries to their work programme specifically with regards to the number of surgeries that have signed up to the initiative, the impact of long waiting list timescales upon serving personnel and their families when frequently moving to a new area, and the importance of prioritising those affected by the armed forces covenant so as not to be disadvantaged;
2. to write to NHS England highlighting issues identified in Plymouth with regards to access to healthcare provision (including dental access) in the city for armed forces personnel and their families and highlighting NHS England's duty, as supporters of the covenant, to provide appropriate services for the armed forces;
3. to recommend to Cabinet that the wording of the current Armed Forces Covenant is reviewed to stress the importance of a trauma informed approach across all areas of the covenant in line with city policy, and specifically that due regard is given by the Council to the mental health of children and young people of service families, is appropriately considered in line with the Council's covenant duties;
4. to recommend to the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and

Scrutiny Committee to add the Armed Forces Covenant to their work programme, specifically with regards to the Council's legal requirement under the covenant to provide education to service children, and that information on the pupil premium affecting service children, and how many service children were also young carers was also to be provided so that support could be managed;

5. to recommend to the Cabinet Member responsible for the Armed Forces Covenant, and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People that the feasibility of amending Plymouth's School Admission Code is considered so that service children applying for a school place in the city were given priority status;
6. that Councillor Penberthy, as Chair of the Select Review Committee, would write to the Royal British Legion (RBL) highlighting the panel's extreme disappointment that the RBL written submission made no reference to MKC Heroes resulting in the voice of children and young people in the covenant being absent, and that work surrounding MKC Heroes should be appropriately led by RBL as was their responsibility;
7. to recommend to the Cabinet Member responsible for the Armed Forces Covenant and the Cabinet Member responsible for housing that:
 - an Armed Forces Champion is created in the housing team as a single point of contact and support for armed forces queries;
 - a greater understanding of the veterans cohort in the complex needs assessment in terms of the impact of drug and alcohol rehabilitation upon homelessness is sought so that appropriate support is provided;
 - social landlords are encouraged to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and work in partnership with the Council in housing veterans and ex-services personnel;
 - the links between the Council and Alabare are strengthened in terms of support provided to ex-services personnel in their transition out of supported accommodation;
 - an approach is made to the Ministry of Defence regarding their surplus housing stock in Plymouth in order to explore the feasibility of using it specifically to support veterans and ex-forces personnel;
8. to recommend to the Cabinet Member responsible for the Armed Forces Covenant and the Cabinet Member responsible for HR to:
 - promote the Armed Forces Community Covenant to employers in the city;
 - request that a data mapping exercise of the Council's staff is undertaken to establish the numbers of veterans, reservists, cadets and families of

serving military personnel so appropriate support is given;

- establish a network within the Council to specifically advise on issues affecting the Armed Forces Community and inform the work of the covenant within the Council;
9. to recommend to the Cabinet Member responsible for the Armed Forces Covenant and the Cabinet Member responsible for employment, skills and training:
- that work is undertaken by the Council specifically with regards to the skills of ex services personnel and how they could be interpreted and translated into employable skills in the city, and that performance coaching is developed and encouraged;
 - to ensure that appropriate support is provided by the Council to spouses and partners of serving personnel in accessing training and finding employment on arrival to the city;
 - that the Council feeds into the Ministry of Defence transition service in order to develop an offers and needs assessment and criteria with the intention of helping personnel move out of the forces and into employment within the city;
 - that partnership working is further considered and strengthened to the benefit of the covenant;
10. to recommend to the Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Panel to explore further opportunities to support employment and development for veterans, ex-personnel and service families in the city; for scrutiny to consider if improvements could be made as to how the armed forces covenant is communicated in the city; and that the structures of the city's covenant are reviewed in light of legislative changes.

5. **Select Committee Review Plan**

The Select Committee Review Plan was attached to the agenda for information.

6. **Armed Forces Covenant**

The Armed Forces Covenant was attached to the agenda for information.

7. **Witnesses**

Several witness, both internal and external, including officers of the Council and the Cabinet Member were invited to the meeting and took part in the discussion as detailed in minute 4 above.

8. **Recommendations**

The Committee, having considered written submissions contained within the agenda and heard from witnesses on the day, collectively formulated several recommendations as detailed in minute 4 above.

This page is intentionally left blank