

RENEWAL OF ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Cabinet – 13 Nov 2023



Background

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation to those who serve or have served in the British military, and to their families. It is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they served with their lives. It recognises the unique and selfless sacrifice associated with service and encourages local communities to support the service community in their area.

Home to the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Army, Plymouth boasts an inspiring rich maritime heritage and is steeped in military history. With the citadel being built in the 1660s and the first Royal Dockyard opening in 1691, the armed forces has continued to grow and now in the 21st century, hosts the largest naval base in Western Europe and most importantly the city retains a special and reciprocal relationship with those who serve and have served.

Plymouth City Council originally signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012, along with representatives of the Armed Forces, Military Charities, public sector partners, and the business and voluntary sectors. Historically the Armed Forces Covenant Team at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) managed the process for the Community Covenant. This process and the responsibility for management of Covenant signings has been transferred to the Department of Defence Relationship Management (DRM). Within the new system, and to ensure transparency, there is a requirement for signed Covenants to be registered individually. It is not possible to 're-sign' Community Covenants like Plymouth's 2012 commitment because they are signed by multiple organisations. Therefore, Plymouth City Council must now choose to refresh their commitment individually.

Legal implications

The Armed Forces Bill 2021, which passed Royal Assent on 15 December 2021 places a new statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant. The legislation will not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes or advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces Community. It is designed to ensure that the relevant decision-makers consider the issues facing the Armed Forces Community in the key areas that impact upon their day-to-day lives. Under the new duty, those public bodies in scope will be required to have 'due regard' to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when formulating policy and taking decisions in the specified areas of Housing, Education and Health.

The requirement will be like other duties to have 'due regard' already in operation, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty. As with those existing duties, the legislation will not be defining exactly how the requirement to have due regard can be met. Accompanying statutory guidance, which public bodies will be required to consider will provide advice and examples of best practice to indicate how bodies might comply with the duty. All relevant strategic governance agreements and documents should be updated in line with the 2021 Act as required.

Conclusion

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation to those who serve or have served in the British military, and to their families. By signing, Plymouth City Council commits that we

acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in all the services the Council offers, and that we recognise the unique and selfless sacrifice associated with service and will do all we can do to support all those in the Armed Forces Community.