1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1. To provide the Education, Libraries and Localism Cabinet Panel with an update on the progress of work undertaken by the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board since the last report to Panel in October 2018.

2. **Summary**

2.1. Over the past year the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board has progressed work across the three Covenant aims which are outlined in this report. Particularly, work has focussed on better understanding the Armed Forces community in Hertfordshire by establishing a health subgroup to investigate access to health services as well as compiling existing information into one report to aid future projects. The Board’s secretariat is also undertaking a review of the Hertfordshire Heroes website to ensure it is effectively fulfilling the objectives.

2.2. The main commemorative events this year were around the centenary of World War One and Armed Forces Day in June 2019. There were a number of Beacon lightings across Hertfordshire as part of a National effort as well as stone unveiling ceremonies to honour Hertfordshire Victoria Cross recipients. Ahead of Armed Forces Day the work of the Covenant was promoted in the press and on social media. Events were organised across Hertfordshire to celebrate the commitment of those who have served or are serving.

2.3. The Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas art competition in 2018 was a great success with over 750 entries, an increase in the number of schools since 2017. Three children enjoyed a day out at Northwood HQ, Hertfordshire’s principle military base, as their prize. The 2019 art competition has already launched.
2.4 A programme endorsed by the Board and run jointly by Northwood HQ and the Bury Lake Young Mariners was awarded funding of £20,000 from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The programme offers free places at the sailing club for military families at Northwood to aid in cohesion between military and civilian communities.

2.5 Upcoming projects include conducting a self-assessment as recommended by the Ministry of Defence, seeking funding to survey veterans in Hertfordshire regarding access to health services and marking commemorative and celebratory events such as 75 year anniversary of VE Day in May 2020, Armed Forces Day in June 2020 and 75 year anniversary of VJ Day in August 2020.

3 Recommendation

3.1 The Panel is invited to note the contents of this update report.

4 Background

4.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. Local authorities and the Armed Forces community are encouraged to work together to establish a Covenant and, in 2011, Hertfordshire launched one of the first Covenants.

4.2 The aims of the Covenant are:
- to ensure that veterans and those in the armed forces are not disadvantaged in accessing services;
- that the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community are recognised and remembered;
- to encourage the integration of service life into civilian life.

4.3 Hertfordshire is not a garrisoned county but is home to the UK’s Permanent Joint Headquarters (HQ) in Northwood, the 254 Medical Regiment at the Reserves Base in Hitchin and a sub-division of the Royal Anglian Regiment at the Hertford Reserves Unit. The Commanding Officers of the Hitchin Reserve Base and the Northwood Joint HQ both sit on the Covenant Board.

4.4 The Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board (HAFCB) is responsible for delivering the aims of the Covenant and meets bi-annually. The Board is chaired by Councillor Terry Douris in his role of Executive Member for Education, Libraries and Localism. It operates under the name Hertfordshire Heroes. Membership of the Armed Forces Covenant Board comprises of representatives from:
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Armed Forces Tri-Services;
- the Commanding Officer of the Northwood Headquarters;
- representatives of 254 Medical Regiment;
4.5 The known make-up of the Armed Forces community in Hertfordshire is as follows:

- The estimated number of veterans living in Hertfordshire is approximately 36,000 based on ONS statistics and the 2018 Hertfordshire Residents’ survey.
- There are currently 405 children of military families attending Hertfordshire schools.
- Northwood has over 2,000 active personnel from all three services.
- Other regular forces may be resident in the county but currently posted elsewhere.

5 Projects and achievements

5.1 This year, Hertfordshire County Council has been selected to receive the prestigious Gold Award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The Gold Award represents the highest badge of honour available to those that employ and support those in the Armed Forces community, including veterans and their families. This is recognition of the policies in place to support employees who are members of the Armed Forces community as well as the activities undertaken to honour their sacrifice.

5.2 To better understand the picture of the Armed Forces community in Hertfordshire, two projects were conducted this past year. In 2018, a question was added to the Hertfordshire County Council Residents’ Survey. Collecting this data enabled us to have a geographical breakdown of the estimated number of veterans living in Hertfordshire, the total of which is 36,000. The estimated majority of veterans are living in East Herts (7,300), with Watford (4,400) and Three Rivers (4000) having the estimated second and third highest populations respectively.

5.3 Recently, the Board’s secretariat also put together a literature review of research conducted nationally about the demographics and views of the Armed Forces community. This project was designed to deepen the understanding of the Armed Forces community and their needs as well as to identify any knowledge gaps.
6 Fair Access to services

6.1 The following outlines the progress made since October 2018 on the Board’s aim of fair access to services.

6.2 This year the Board established a health sub group which is chaired by the Board’s representative from East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group and with membership from Military, charities and District Councillors. The group is focused on identifying the big issues for veterans accessing health services in Hertfordshire and making recommendations to the Armed Forces Covenant Board about how to work together to develop local solutions.

6.3 The health sub group of the Board is this year launching a project to ensure contracts for primary care networks (PCN) for each of the 10 Districts include specific requirements around veterans’ health e.g. GPs to code and count veterans with details of diagnosis and number of times services are accessed.

6.4 Recently the health sub group has partnered with Healthwatch Hertfordshire to apply for funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The funding would be to cover staff costs associated with conducting a survey of the veteran population in Hertfordshire to find out the top three barriers they face when accessing health services in the county and to make recommendations to the Board on how to address them.

6.5 The group have investigated the national veteran friendly GP practice accreditation scheme and are looking to replicate this in Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire GP surgeries will be encouraged to become a part of the national “veteran friendly practice” scheme.

6.6 The e-learning training module, launched in March 2018, which can help colleagues in frontline services better understand the needs, experience and perspective of the armed forces community continues to be promoted. Seeking to ensure up to date training for front line staff is part of The Board’s commitment to remove barriers which might exist for veterans accessing services.

6.7 A group has been set up in Dacorum for organisations who are working to support veterans, initiated by the local job centre. The group plans to build connections and work together to ensure veterans know what support is available to them. The first meeting was attended by Cllr. Mark Mills-Bishop as Deputy Chairman of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board as well as Cllr. Julie Banks as Dacorum District Champion. As a result of the first meeting, staff at the Job Centre will ask if someone has served in their first conversation with job centre staff. Knowing this information from the first meeting means that colleagues
will be able to advise accurately any support that is available. This will also be communicated to other job centres throughout Hertfordshire. A career event specifically for veterans is being planned for November. The group are working with colleagues to develop similar groups in other areas across Hertfordshire.

7 Community Engagement

7.1 The following outlines the progress made since October 2018 on the Board’s aim of joining the military and civilian communities.

7.2 Each year the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board and Hertfordshire County Council host the annual Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas Art Competition in schools. The competition was run for the sixth year in 2018 and invited key stage two pupils from Hertfordshire schools to produce artwork on the commemoration of the centenary of the end of the First World War. Out of about 750 entries, there were 2 winning artists and one runner-up chosen by Military colleagues at Northwood HQ. The three winners were honoured at their school during a special assembly and then spent a “day of adventure” sailing, rock climbing and shooting at Northwood HQ as their prize. The winning entries were sent to Military personnel serving overseas. The winning pictures are attached as Appendix A to this report.

7.3 The e-learning training module continues to be promoted to the public as a means of helping the civilian community in Hertfordshire better understand the experience and perspective of those who have served or are currently serving in the Armed Forces. In particular promoted Armed Forces Day this year.

7.4 In 2018, the Board endorsed an application from Northwood HQ and the Bury Lake Young Mariners (BLYM) to the Covenant Fund Trust which was successful in securing nearly £20,000 for their programme, “Sailing Together.” BLYM’s aim is to make sailing accessible and affordable to every section of the community. The project launched this year and the funding has acted as pump priming to encourage a long-term relationship between the Armed Forces community in Northwood and the local civilian community through the joint participation of servicemen/women, spouses and their children in a range of sailing and other water-based activities at BLYM. The project will see the evolution of a new shared community base at BLYM for armed forces staff, their families and the civilian population to learn to sail together and in so doing forge new and lasting friendships.

7.5 The Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board Chairman continues to promote the work of the Board to the public and this year conducted two radio interviews, one about the anniversary of the D-Day landings and the other about Armed Forces Day.
The Board was pleased to note the great strides that Eastbury Farm Primary School has made to achieve an Ofsted report of “good” overall and “outstanding” specifically for personal development, behaviour and welfare in May 2018. The report specifically mentions the care given to service children and the Board was delighted to see the efforts they make to ensure a smooth transition for service children. Eastbury Farm Primary School is nearest to Northwood HQ and 10% of the pupils there are from service families.

8 Celebrating and Honouring

8.1 The following outlines the progress made since October 2018 on the Board’s aim of celebrating and honouring the commitment and sacrifice made by those in the armed forces and their families.

8.2 To commemorate the centenary of World War One, seven stone laying ceremonies were conducted across the county in honour of local Victoria Cross recipients with the final ceremony taking place in early 2019. Over 100 people attended the ceremony in Hitchin which commemorated Frank Young who was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1918.

8.3 As part of the National effort to commemorate the centenary of World War One, the Board took part in seven beacon lighting events across the county to honour all those who lost their lives.

8.4 Hertfordshire County Council promoted Armed Forces Day 2019 and the work of the Covenant Board on social media and across internal communications channels. Each day a different topic was highlighted including veteran’s support, the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant and community engagement by promoting events taking place in Hertfordshire as well as the e-learning module. The Facebook posts and Tweets about Armed Forces Day resulted in nearly 150 social media interactions with the public. Armed Forces Day was also promoted to staff in the departmental newsletters. Additionally, school assembly resources about Armed Forces Day were shared with Hertfordshire teachers.

8.5 The County Council were pleased to start the build up to the celebrations of Armed Forces Day 2019 with a flag raising ceremony at County Hall hosted by the Chairman of the Council, Colette Wyatt-Lowe. Attending the event were local Cadets and colleagues from Northwood HQ, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Army Cadet Force and the 254 Medical Regiment, all based in the county. Also in attendance were the Vice Lord Lieutenant, the High Sheriff, District and Borough Mayors and Chairmen, County Councillors and staff from County Hall, local military charities and sixth form students from Richard Hale School in Hertford. This event was promoted on social media and streamed live on Facebook where nearly 400 people viewed it.
8.6 The County Council proactively demonstrated its support to Reserves Day in June 2019 by encouraging Reservist staff to wear their uniform to work and producing a video about a reservist employee. This video was posted on Facebook and Twitter and viewed nearly 2,000 times.

8.7 A Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant communications toolkit was distributed to partners, helping to keep the message about the joint commitment to the Covenant consistent and to maximise exposure by using relevant social media tags.

8.8 Events marking Armed Forces Day took place across Hertfordshire, hosted by members of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board and others. For example:
   - Stevenage Armed Forces Day took place in the town centre with live music, free face painting and a WW2 American tank on display.
   - In Letchworth Garden City there was a day of festivities with cadet challenges, military bands and vehicles, food and craft stalls and classic cars.
   - St Albans army cadets performed a march in the car park of a dementia care home for the residents to enjoy. The home proudly flew the armed forces flag and the cadets joined the residents for refreshments following the display.
   - Royal British Legion in Bishop’s Stortford organised a Parade through the town with a two minutes silence at the War Memorial in Castle Gardens.
   - Bricket Wood Parish Council held an Armed Forces Day Celebration. The afternoon commenced with a Parade of Standards led by a lone piper, where the Armed Forces Day Flag was raised. There was a large memorabilia display with music from the Watford Band and refreshments available on the Parish Centre lawn.
   - Hertfordshire Cheetahs American Football team in St Albans hosted a day full of activities bringing the Armed Forces community together and raising awareness of the work they do.
   - RAF Halton’s Freedom of Dacorum Parade. People lined the streets to welcome RAF Halton, marching through Hemel Hempstead to exercise its right to the Freedom of the Borough. The event culminated in a fly-past by a Lancaster bomber.

9  Next steps

9.1 To continue to meet the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant, the following projects are in progress.

9.2 The Covenant Board is currently conducting a self-assessment of The Board’s work to date using the toolkit recommended by the Ministry of Defence. The toolkit enables a self-assessment to measure the
Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board’s effectiveness and to
determine continuing priorities.

9.3 The information on demographics and views of the Armed Forces
community compiled from national research studies combined with
information about the community in Hertfordshire will be used to inform
future communications and promotional material. It will also help the
Board identify projects needed and will be vital to ensure funding can be
accessed for these projects.

9.4 The Hertfordshire Heroes website will undergo a redesign to optimise
user experience. This will be the result of a strategic rethink of the
website based on evidence gathered from website users and the
demographics data report. The redesign will accompany an overall
communications plan for the website to increase awareness of
Hertfordshire Heroes among target audiences. The website is a
dedicated central resource for partners and service users and will
continue to be updated with key information.

9.5 The schools Christmas competition for 2019 has been launched and will
conclude in early December 2019. The theme this year is “draw your
hero: wishing our Military heroes a Merry Christmas”. The competition
entries will be shortlisted by staff at Hertfordshire County Council and the
winner will be chosen by colleagues at Northwood HQ.

9.6 The Health Sub Group of the Board is working with Healthwatch
Hertfordshire to conduct a survey of the veteran community in
Hertfordshire. The survey will be based on a Healthwatch study
conducted in Northamptonshire and will seek to provide evidence of any
barriers that veterans experience when trying to access health services.
The Sub Group applied for funding from the Covenant Fund to fund this
survey.

9.7 Hertfordshire County Council continue to share advice and ideas from
the Armed Forces Families Federations with schools about spending the
Service Pupil Premium.

9.8 The Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board will continue to
support where appropriate future bids of members and partners to the
Covenant Fund.

9.9 The Board will focus on communicating the Covenant as part of its work
under the community engagement and celebrating and honouring
themes. The organisations represented on the Board will continue to
celebrate and honour the Armed Forces individually and collectively
through commemorative and annual events in the coming year such as:
Armed Forces Day, Reserves Day, Remembrance Day, VE Day and VJ
Day 75 year anniversary.
10. **Equalities**

10.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

10.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

10.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.

10.4 An EqIA has not been completed in relation to this report. The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are fundamentally based on equality. Fair access to services and promoting integration is key to meeting the objectives of the Covenant, seeking always to ensure that members of the Armed Forces, past and present, are not disadvantaged in accessing services.
Wishing UK forces a very
Merry Christmas
From Garden Fields School.
Wishing UK forces a Very Merry Christmas!
From St Mary's!