

BRIEFING NOTE

MOTION:

“This Council recognises the sacrifices both physical and mental suffered by our armed forces in serving our nation both locally and internationally.

To show our commitment to them all; Serving, Reserves and Veterans, I ask that Lancaster City Council commit itself to achieving COVENANT GOLD STATUS as an employer by the end of 2022.”

PROPOSER: Councillor Dennison. Seconded Councillors Heath and Knight (Geoff)

OFFICER BRIEFING NOTE

Ensuring that all parts of our Community have the opportunity to reach their full potential and secure positive employment with the Council is a key motivation for the Employee recognition Scheme and these Covenant awards. The Council has already secured a Silver Award under the Armed Forces Covenant. This has entailed adjustment to a wide range of policies and processes, and strengthening of relationships with the sector. Some of these steps are still in the process of being implemented.

There are around 2.4 million veterans in the UK, and around 40% of these are under the age of 60. 79% of working age veterans are employed; this is the same proportion as for the general population. Other statistics around health, home ownership, skills and qualifications are also broadly similar to the general working population.

However, there is a slightly higher proportion of armed forces veterans present in information and surveys on homelessness, extreme mental health (e.g. PTSD) and some evidence of differences from the general population in some crime and prison statistics.

UK Housing Law prioritises armed forces veterans for access to accommodation. In England the NHS provides two dedicated veteran specific mental health services. The Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), that provides a range of treatment from recognising early signs of mental health problems and access to support to providing therapeutic treatment for complex mental health difficulties. This service is complemented by the Veterans Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (VMH TILS), which provides intensive care and treatment for veterans with the most complex needs, offering holistic support for the whole person and their family.

The Silver Award status held by the Council means that we have demonstrated provision of the following:

Silver award holders:

- must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- the employer must have already stated their intent to be supportive by using the ERS website to register at the Bronze level
- the employer must proactively demonstrate that service personnel/armed forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes
- employers should employ at least one individual from the AFC category that the nomination emphasises. For example, an employer nominated for support to the

Reserves must employ at least one Reservist. In exceptional circumstances where there is outstanding generic support for the Armed Forces community and/or the size or business model of the organisation makes employment of such an individual impossible, the organisation can be considered for the award where they do not employ someone from the AFC category

- the employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must have an internally publicised and positive HR policy on Reserves
- within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. They must demonstrate support to training by providing at least 5 days' additional unpaid/paid leave (wherever possible not to Reservist employees' financial disadvantage)
- the employer must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity

The work entailed in securing this, including the ongoing work to update and review policies required an estimated combined use of resources and capacity of around £50,000 over a long period of time, mainly comprising direct and indirect officer time, but also additional costs of enhanced leave, etc.

The Gold Award proposed in this motion requires the following further actions:

Gold award holders:

- must have signed the [Armed Forces Covenant](#)
- employers must have an existing relationship with their National Account Manager/REED/appropriate defence representative
- the employer must already be demonstrating support by holding a valid ERS Silver Award. Employers that do not hold a valid ERS Silver Award cannot progress to the Gold level
- the employer must proactively demonstrate their forces-friendly credentials as part of their recruiting and selection processes. Where possible, they should be engaged with [Career Transition Partnership](#) (CTP) in the recruitment of service leavers and have registered for the [Forces Families Jobs](#) (FFJ) portal
- employers should employ at least one individual from the AFC category that the nomination emphasises. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must employ at least one Reservist. In exceptional circumstances where there is outstanding generic support for the Armed Forces community and/or the size or business model of the organisation makes employment of such an individual impossible, the organisation can be considered for the award where they do not employ someone from the AFC category
- the employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must have an internally publicised and positive human resources policy on Reserves
- the employer must be an exemplar within their market sector, advocating support to defence people issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers with tangible positive results
- within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. They must provide at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid, to the Reservist employee
- the employer must not have been the subject of any negative public relations or media activity.

There are three main differences between Silver and Gold which affect Council policies, processes and finances.

- The provision of 10 days additional paid leave to cadets and reservists. While the

additional cost of this for the current workforce is relatively low, future costs will depend on the number and grades of cadets and reservists in the workforce;

- The requirement to plan and execute meetings, engagement and campaigning activity, with the sector, including securing further signatories to the Covenant. This needs to be considered as part of the wider priorities of the Council, in terms of the likely officer time and capacity required. This would require project officer and potentially a range of other staff time, however the positive relationships we already hold with a range of local employers (Calico homes etc) would suggest that this is achievable if seen as a priority.
- The additional recruitment and training support, including the Guaranteed Interview Scheme and interview preparation support. Also to update and change policies and processes to reflect the new requirements. This would have impacts on capacity within our HR services. Changes may also be required to our existing provision of employee counselling and support, however use of our Occupational Health referrals and plans may enable the level of support proposed in the Covenant.

The Council currently employs a significant number of people who also act as unpaid volunteers in a variety of capacities, including mental health charities and counselling, schools, children's groups and organisations, police, victims, health (e.g. blood riders, first responders) and community support, homelessness, environmental and other areas which provide essential support infrastructure in our communities. We currently do not routinely offer paid or unpaid leave for this work. A volunteering policy to recognise and support this sort of work is at the advanced stages of development to be brought forward for decision, however the current draft does not propose support at the levels of the Gold (or silver) covenant. These volunteers may consider the levels of support being offered to armed forces volunteers to be out of balance with the societal contribution they are also making via formal volunteering.

Active campaigning on particular issues and participation in meetings and programmes uses staff time and hence, council resources. There are many causes and campaigns which would like to see the Council go further and faster, showing leadership on a wide range of issues, and there are standards and certifications that can be secured on these, that the Council does not currently possess. These relate to LGBTQ+, refugee support, mental health, and a wide range of formally protected characteristics and other issues. Representatives of these communities may consider that seeking to secure the highest certification or standards in one particular theme, while maintaining only basic standards in other themes to be out of balance with other forms of disadvantage and our relative performance as a Council and society in addressing these.

The same issues could be raised with regard to offering guaranteed interviews and the update of policies and procedures.

Given the issues raised above, and that there is no provision within the current year's budget for this work and its impacts, should Council be minded to approve the motion, they may wish to consider whether the time-scales are feasible for the work that would be needed, and also to ensure that provision is made in the budget setting and agreement process for FY 22/23.

Some issues for Council to consider in this motion may therefore include:

- The available finances and resources of the Council and the relative priorities.
- The support being offered relative to support that may be available to other members of our Community
- Whether the support on matters such as paid leave for volunteering may be negatively perceived by those who volunteer for other positive causes which do not relate to the armed forces.

Should the Council be generally in favour of the motion being explored by the Council, it could request further work of Officers to identify more detailed feasibility and impact information to be prepared over coming months, to then agree to pursue Gold Status in line with available capacity, resources and impacts. This would enable the pursuit of Gold status to be brought forward as a fully formed proposition with the relevant policy, process and cost implications as well as an Equalities Impact Assessment for a Council decision to be made.

Lancashire County Council has recently undertaken work to secure Gold Status and has offered to meet with Officers next month to share knowledge and information on the more detailed steps and costs involved in securing Gold Status.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):

The motivation for the Covenant is to ensure that Armed Forces veterans are positively treated in recognition for their Service to our country.

We would need to ensure that any implementation activities of this motion were in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, including the public sector equality duty.

Some issues relevant to the Act are discussed above.

The basic elements of the armed forces covenant are currently under consideration to be enshrined by law in a 'duty to have due regard' similar to the public sector equality duty.

Should it come into force this could potentially provide protection in the future against positive discrimination claims.

An Equality Impact Assessment will need to be completed.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There may be issues relevant to both Employment Law and the Equalities Act which will require legal advice.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As detailed in the briefing note, the financial consequences related to supporting this proposal generally arise through the utilisation of officer time and subsequent leave requirements. These are difficult to substantiate at this juncture but it is expected to be in the region of £50,000 over a long period of time, depending on the number of officers it wishes to support. These crude estimates will need be reviewed and considered as part of the ongoing process should the gold status be attained.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces

The impacts are discussed in the body of the report above. Changes would be required to HR policies, processes and activities and some of these may be required to be subject to staff consultation.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Whilst undoubtedly a worthy cause, Members will need to have regard to the fact that the pursuit and potential attainment of gold status will not be free and will need to be consider both the financial implications and officer capacity, at a time when the Council's finances are

increasingly under pressure.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

It is within the Terms of Reference of Personnel Committee to develop and review Council policy in respect of staff and conditions of service.