

North Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Pledge

Summary:

The National Armed Forces Covenant represents a promise by the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly. All 407 local authorities in mainland Great Britain and 4 Northern Ireland councils have pledged to uphold the National Armed Forces Covenant. Thousands of organisations have signed the covenant, including businesses and charities.

North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) signed the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant at an official ceremony on 7 March 2012.

The Covenant, in its current form, has been in operation for nearly ten years. Whilst positive progress has been made, the Government is concerned that some members of the Armed Forces Community still face disadvantage when accessing public services.

Legislation will soon be introduced to increase awareness of and improve the delivery of the Covenant in key areas fundamental to a good life, while retaining the ability of local service providers to honour the Covenant in the best way to suit local needs.

To further demonstrate North Norfolk District Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and to ensure compliance with the forthcoming legislation, it is proposed that the Council publishes and signs its own Armed Forces Covenant Pledge. The pledge will include a commitment to achieve the Bronze, Silver and Gold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) awards.

Options considered:

There is no legal requirement for NNDC to publish its own pledge. However, a pledge forms part of the eligibility criteria for the ERS and will help the Council ensure compliance with the new Armed Forces Covenant Duty of Due Regard legislation. It will also demonstrate the Council's gratitude and support to members of the Armed Forces Community.

From a reputational and legislative perspective it is considered essential that the Council publishes a pledge therefore no other options have been considered.

Conclusions: The publication of a North Norfolk District Council Armed Forces Covenant Pledge will demonstrate NNDC's gratitude, support for and commitment to residents of the Armed Forces Community that live in or visit North Norfolk.

It will help the Council to meet the eligibility criteria to achieve the Bronze, Silver and Gold Defense Employer Recognition Scheme.

It will support compliance to the forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant Duty of Due Regard legislation

Recommendations: To give authority to the Armed Forces Member Champion and Lead Officer to write a North Norfolk Armed Forces pledge in accordance with this report and ensure actions are implemented within an agreed timescale.

The pledge to be formally signed by the Leader of the Council.

Reasons for Recommendations: The pledge will identify specific actions that NNDC will take as an employer and community leader to support members of the Armed Forces Community and achieve the criteria for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Bronze, Silver and Gold awards.

To ensure that NNDC is able to meet the forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant legislative Duty of Due regard.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

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Cabinet Member(s) Cllr. John Toye	Ward(s) affected All wards in North Norfolk
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1. Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant

1.1 An Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and the local armed forces community. The Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant was signed by all Norfolk Councils on 7 March 2012.

The development of the Armed Forces Covenant in Norfolk is overseen by the Norfolk Armed Forces Board. The districts represented on the board are those where there is an existing armed forces base.

The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant priorities are:

- Building Communities
- Health, Housing and Wellbeing
- Education, Employment and Skills

1.2 The Council has appointed an Armed Forces Member Champion who is responsible for ensuring North Norfolk District Council proactively fulfils its responsibilities in relation to the Covenant. The Member Champion or their substitute will be the representatives on the newly formed Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Elected Member Champions Group. The Health and Communities Manager is the Covenant Lead Officer and supports the Armed Forces Member Champion and substitute.

1.3 An internal review has recently been carried out to identify how North Norfolk District Council and key services it provides or contracts support the implementation of the Covenant and the forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant Duty of Due Regard legislation.

1.4 Based on best practice guidance and discussions with the other local authorities in Norfolk that have achieved the Gold ERS award, a number of actions the Council could adopt to demonstrate their commitment to the Armed Forces have been identified. It is recognised some of the actions could have financial implications.

Potential actions:

- Publish a covenant pledge to identify specific actions and commitments which will demonstrate NNDC support as an employer and community leader to the Armed Forces Community.
- Fulfil the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme criteria to obtain the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards
- Enable staff to learn more about the issues faced by the Armed Forces Community by enabling access to specific eLearning training on Skillgate. Consideration would be given as to whether the training should form part of the induction process for new members of staff
- Establish a dedicated Armed Forces area on the Intranet and external NNDC website.

- Hold information sessions for staff supported by the responsible Member and lead officer.
- Ensure Members and staff particularly those in customer facing services are aware of the national and local charities, financial and practical support available to serving personnel, reservists and veterans. Promote use of Veterans Gateway App on relevant staff mobile phones.
- Amend application and request for support forms to offer the option for people to identify themselves as a member of the Armed Forces Community, i.e. a Serving Person, Reservist, Veteran or an immediate family member of such a person.
- Ensure appropriate NNDC policies including Human Resource and Equality and Diversity recognise staff who are reservists or who have immediate family that are serving in the Armed Forces and are given appropriate support and flexibility regarding leave and for reservist's additional paid leave whilst on deployment duties.
- Advertise job vacancies on the Careers Transition Partnership and Forces Families for Jobs websites. Offering a guaranteed interview to anyone leaving the Armed Forces or has left in the previous 24 months and who sufficiently meets the essential criteria of the role applied for.
- Encourage leisure contractors of NNDC facilities to widen concessionary discounts to include to serving and reservist armed forces personnel.
- Ensure compliance with new Armed Forces Duty of Due Regard legislation and that Council policies particularly in relation to housing allocations, housing and Council Tax benefits do not disadvantage serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans or reservists.
- Hold staff events to support Armed Forces charities
- Ensure significant Armed Forces commemorative days are appropriately recognised
- Offer free parking in NNDC car parks on Remembrance Sunday.
- Promote North Norfolk as a district that supports Armed Forces Communities. Encourage Town and villages to participate in the Heroes Welcome scheme <https://heroeswelcome.co.uk/> designed to inspire communities to demonstrate their support to members of the Armed Forces Community.

2. Conclusion

- The publication of a North Norfolk District Council Armed Forces Covenant Pledge will demonstrate NNDC's gratitude, support and commitment to residents of the Armed Forces Community that live in or visit North Norfolk.
- Publication of a pledge is one of the essential eligibility in relation to the Defense Employer Recognition Scheme Bronze, Silver and Gold awards
- A pledge will help ensure compliance with the forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant Duty of Due Regard legislation

3. Implications and Risks

3.1 Reputational risk, it is understood that North Norfolk District Council is the only Council in Norfolk that has not written and published an Armed Forces Covenant pledge.

3.2 The Council is required to demonstrate how it has fulfilled its responsibilities in relation to the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant. Currently there is no cohesive corporate document that identifies or monitors how NNDC fulfills its responsibilities or supports the Armed Forces Community in North Norfolk.

3.3 Implementation of the pledge will enable the Council to demonstrate compliance to the forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant Duty of Due Regard legislation.

4. Financial Implications and Risks

4.1 A small number of actions within the pledge may have a financial implication such as advertising job vacancies on the Careers Transition Partnership and Forces Families for Jobs websites and the addition of Armed Forces eLearning training on Skillgate. All actions with a potential financial implication, will be identified, discussed and the budget agreed prior to being included in the pledge.

5. Sustainability

5.1 An annual report will be presented to Cabinet / Full Council to demonstrate progress on and implantation of the pledge.

6. Equality and Diversity

6.1 The publication of a pledge will support the Councils commitment to Equality and Diversity

7. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

7.1 There are no crime and disorder considerations