

Recommendations of Overview & Scrutiny Committee

6.1 Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 20 January 2021

6.1.1 Review of Armed Forces Covenant

Consideration was given to a report by the Lead Member of the Armed Forces Covenant panel, Councillor Matthews who gave a brief insight into the review of the Armed Forces Covenant with particular reference to Test Valley's obligations, commitment and identifying best practice.

At its meeting of 11 December 2019, OSCOM reviewed and endorsed a scoping document to support a review of the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, in turn enabling the lead member for Armed Forces to work with officers to develop a forward plan for undertaking the review. As part of this scoping report, Overview and Scrutiny approved the establishment of a panel group to work with the lead member on progressing this area of work.

The panel was chaired by Cllr Matthews and also included Cllr Borg-Neal, Cllr Burley, Cllr Donnelly, Cllr C Dowden, Cllr Hamilton and Cllr Warnes. As a result of the review, the panel have developed an evidence base to support future development of the Armed Forces Covenant in Test Valley. This evidence base has led the panel to three key recommendations with an onward work plan highlighting a number of detailed ambitions.

The panel considers that TVBC are currently meeting their promise made under the Armed Forces Community Covenant. However, opportunities have been identified to improve communication with partner organisations and lead on a more inclusive approach to supporting the Armed Forces communities within Test Valley. The recommendations made in the report support these findings and propose ways to start engaging in the opportunities identified.

Members discussed the following:

- The Civilian/military forum to look at engaging with neighbouring authorities with regards to housing and to include links to point service personnel to the relevant authority.
- Councillor Matthews will circulate the number of service personnel living in Test Valley.
- The forum will be integrated into the Test Valley Partnership.
- Available grants will be advertised on the Forces Gateway Single Point of Contact (SPOC) once it is created on the TVBC website.
- The special relationship with the Nepalese community. The forum should look at what assistance and support the community requires.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Matthews and the panel members and officers for all their hard work in producing a very informative report.

Recommended to Cabinet:

1. **That a Civilian/military forum is created to take forward the action plan – Subsumed and intrinsically linked to the Test Valley Partnership. The composition of which will include the various professional and authority representatives from each topic in the report below. Additionally, Army Welfare Service and garrison wellbeing officers, alongside CTP and/or RFEA, where appropriate.**
2. **That a Forces Gateway Single Point of Contact (SPOC) is created on the TVBC website - enabling all information, advice and signposting for all the applicable services, including links to housing, community engagement, health, education, business, local Forces charities and potential available grants.**

6.1.2 Budget Strategy Update

Councillor Lodge, Lead Member for the Budget Panel reported that the panel had met on the 11 January 2021 where the panel considered the present budget and the future budget for 2021/22.

The coronavirus implications for the current year has had an impact on the budget resulting in a budget pressure of around £1.8m. The Government has recently announced a scheme to help with Council Tax Support scheme losses and it was anticipated that the Council will receive around £95,000. Savings from Services have been identified in the region of £600k making a total revenue pressure of £1.2m in 2020/21.

The forecast impact of the pandemic in 2021/22 from loss of income and additional expenditure, balanced against government grants will leave a revenue pressure of around £770k. It is expected that this will be funded from reserves.

With new budget savings and pressures identified, additional income taken into account and updated figures following the announcement of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, the budget gap is estimated to be £577k.

The budget for 2021/22 will be considered by Cabinet on 10 February and by Council on 26 February.

The Head of Finance and Revenues reported that the forecast for business rates income which the Council retains indicates that it is likely that there will be more income retained than previously expected. If this is confirmed then this will exceed the budget gap of £577k.

Recommended to Cabinet:

That Cabinet notes that Overview and Scrutiny Committee received and approved a Budget Update and endorsed the work undertaken to deliver a Budget for 2021/22.