

HR Committee

15 December 2022



Report of: Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Title: Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

Ward: City Wide

Officer Presenting Report: Ben Mosley (Head of Executive Office)

Contact Telephone Number: 0117 922 2000

Recommendation

To apply for the Armed Forces Covenant Bronze Award as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces.

To develop an implementation plan to progress towards becoming a Silver Award employer by November 2023.

Summary

To consider joining the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. To apply for the Armed Forces Covenant Bronze Award as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces across the scope of our work to support members of the armed forces, veterans and wider armed forces community both in the workplace and the City of Bristol.

1. Policy

- 1.1. The Council's Leave Policy sets out the framework for training and mobilisation of employees who are reservists. Employees attending Territorial and Auxiliary Forces training must inform their manager as soon as possible, who will authorise up to 10 working days paid leave in addition to their normal annual leave.

Consultation

2. Internal

This report has been developed in consultation with the Bristol Community Covenant Steering Group and colleagues from HR, Legal and Finance services.

3. External

Not required.

Context

4. Background

- 1.2. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise between the nation, the government and the Armed Forces community, ensuring that those who serve, and have served, in the Armed Forces and their families, are treated fairly and are not disadvantaged by their service.
- 1.3. The community covenant signed by Bristol City Council in 2014 along with our public and voluntary sector is our commitment to our Armed Forces Community. For further information regarding Bristol's community covenant please appendix A.
- 1.4. The Covenant covers all serving personnel, regular and reservists, and their families, as well as bereaved families, veterans and cadet adult volunteers.
- 1.5. All local authorities in the country are signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant, which is a commitment to ensure that members of armed forces communities receive the support they need in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice. However, as a Council we also want to make sure that members of the armed forces and veterans, and their families, are integrated into local life in the city and that we promote understanding of the issues affecting the armed forces communities in Bristol.
- 1.6. Bristol City Council has consistently shown its support for the Armed Forces community. The Council leads in the organisation and coordination of Bristol Community Covenant Steering Group. The multi-disciplinary group of Council officers, forces representatives, and agencies such as the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, and the DWP meets regularly to ensure support is coordinated and that information regarding support services is shared across the city and wider region to support the Armed Forces Community. These meetings are chaired by the Council's Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Helen Holland.

2. Census

- 2.1. According to the recent Census 2021 data, there were 9,491 people aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces in Bristol (2.4%). The data shows that 6,450 people had served in regular UK armed forces (1.7%), 2,623 in reserve UK armed forces (0.7%) and 418 who had previously served in both (0.1%).
- 2.2. This compares to Bath and North East Somerset 3.7% (5,858 veterans), North Somerset with 5.3% (9,443 veterans) and South Gloucestershire with 4.0% (9,498 veterans).
- 2.3. The South West was the region within England that had the highest proportion of veterans (5.6%, 317,000 people), followed by the North East of England (5.0%, 109,000 people). The areas in the South West with the highest percentages were Plymouth (8.4%, 18,279), Wiltshire (7.5%, 31,378), West Devon (7.3%, 3,508) and Dorset (7.1%, 22,884). Across the country, the areas with the highest proportion of UK armed forces veterans tended to be near existing armed forces bases.
- 2.4. Within Bristol neighbourhoods, Westbury-on-Trym has the highest proportion of veterans at 4.4% of all people aged 16 and over and St Pauls and University and Brandon Hill neighbourhoods have the lowest proportions at 0.8%.
- 2.5. In Bristol, 281 (3.0%) out of the total 9,491 veterans live in a communal establishment. This is a higher proportion than in the other West of England local authorities, all regions and in England and Wales as a whole.

3. Bristol and Armed Forces community

- 3.1. The Council works closely with the Armed Forces community on a range of priority areas within Bristol including:
 - a. building communities
 - b. education, skills and employment
 - c. housing, benefits, health and welfare
- 3.2. One of the aspects of this work is making sure that veterans and members of armed forces communities are supported into employment, which is why Bristol City Council, alongside 67 other businesses have signed their own covenants. We are developing a work programme specifically to support employees who are veterans and reservists to ensure their needs are accommodated and they are supported to thrive in their careers at the council.
- 3.3. The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 3.4. The ERS is designed primarily to recognise private sector support although public sector organisations such as the emergency services, local authorities, NHS trusts and executive agencies are also eligible to be recognised.
- 3.5. There are three award levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. Employers can self-nominate for each

award.

- 3.6. Nominations will be validated to determine the level of defence personnel employment within the nominated organisation and to check that the organisation has signed the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 3.7. Once the nomination has been validated it will be considered by a selection board at national level for gold awards and regional level for silver awards. The selection boards will be a panel chaired by a senior military officer and they will consider each nomination against the award criteria. Organisations selected for gold and silver awards will be formally notified in writing and invited to the relevant award event.

4. Bronze Award

- 4.1. Bronze award holders are self-nominated by employers who pledge to support the armed forces. In order to self-nominate for the bronze award, employers must:
 - a. have existing or prospective employees who are members of the community;
 - b. must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant;
 - c. must promote being armed forces-friendly and are open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners.
- 4.2. Bronze award holders will receive an electronic certificate and logos to display on their website, stationery and other collateral.
- 4.3. Bronze award holders include: Nottingham City Council, Bristol Port, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. Please see Appendix B, a list of Bronze award employers.

5. Silver Award

- 5.1. Silver award holders;
 - a. must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
 - b. must have already stated their intent to be supportive by using the ERS website to register at the Bronze level.
 - c. must proactively demonstrate that service personnel/armed forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes
 - d. 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
 - e. 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)
 - f. must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity
- 5.2. Silver award holders include: North Somerset Council, Birmingham City Council, Leeds City Council, Manchester City Council, Glasgow City Council. Please see Appendix C, a list of Silver award employers.

6. Gold Award

- 6.1. In order to progress towards a Gold award, the employers 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.

7. Accreditation

- 7.1. Bristol City Council does meet the criteria to self-nominate for the Bronze award. Further work is under way to ensure it meets the criteria for the Silver Award.
- 7.2. The Council does have a framework in place to support colleagues who are reservists with regards to mobilisations and training.
- 7.3. The Council's Leave Policy sets out the framework for training and mobilisation of employees who are reservists. Employees attending Territorial and Auxiliary Forces training must inform their manager as soon as possible, who will authorise up to 10 working days paid leave in addition to their normal annual leave.
- 7.4. Leave will be granted where there is a requirement to undertake training in addition to summer camps, where it is proved impossible to arrange such training on days when the person would not normally be working. Any additional leave required beyond the 10 days (as per above) can be taken by using own annual leave or unpaid leave. Managers must contact HR for guidance on the compulsory/voluntary mobilisation of Reservists for military operations.
- 7.5. Further work is underway to develop ensure the workforce is aware of our policies towards colleagues who are members of the Armed Forces community including the development of internally publicised HR policy on Reserves. We will also review the Council's existing recruitment policies to provide assurance that service personnel/armed forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes.
- 7.6. This work will be developed with HR colleagues and recommendations will be presented to the Cabinet Member and HR Committee so that the Council can progress towards becoming a Silver Award employer by November 2023.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. To apply for the Armed Forces Covenant Bronze Award as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces.
- 8.2. To develop an implementation plan to progress towards becoming a Silver Award employer by November 2023.

Other Options Considered

13. None.

Risk Assessment

14. Not required.

Public Sector Equality Duties

15a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:

- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.

15b) Not required because this report is for information only.

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant and Defence Employer Recognition Scheme is voluntary. Consideration should be given to the contractual status of any HR policies implemented to reflect the requirements of the schemes.

Financial

No Financial Implications. Highlights and publicises existing arrangements commitment to supporting members of the armed forces.

Land

Not applicable.

Personnel

“The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme operates in a similar way to the Disability Confident employer scheme, which is co-ordinated through the Human Resources service as part of the Council’s approach to employer branding and employee engagement. There are no contractual implications for employees, though the HR work required to achieve/maintain higher awards will need to be considered and prioritised in the context of the Council’s financial challenges.”

James Brereton (Head of Human Resources), 24 November 2022

Appendices:

- A – Armed Forces Community Covenant for Bristol
- B – List of Bronze Award Holders
- C – List of Silver Award Holders

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None.