



Oversight and Governance

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Published 28/10/22

SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW

Armed Forces Covenant Select Committee Review

Monday 7 November 2022
1.00 pm
Warspite Room, Council House

Members:

Councillors Finn, Hulme, Luggar, Murphy, Penberthy and Poyser.

Members are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business overleaf.

For further information on webcasting, attending Council meetings and how to engage in the democratic process please follow this link <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/accesstomeetings>

Tracey Lee

Chief Executive

Select Committee Review

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive apologies for non-attendance submitted by Members.

2. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

The Committee will be asked to appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for this meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

Members will be asked to make any declarations of interest in respect of items on this agenda.

4. Chair's Urgent Business

To receive reports on business, which in the opinion of the Chair, should be brought forward for urgent consideration.

5. Armed Forces Covenant Review:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5a. Select Committee Review Plan | (Pages 1 - 2) |
| 5b. Armed Forces Covenant | (Pages 3 - 12) |
| 5c. Witnesses | (Pages 13 - 110) |
| 5d. Recommendations | |

SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW PLAN

Overview and Scrutiny



ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

Raised by - Councillor Penberthy

Date - 7 November 2022

Purpose of Review

Post decision scrutiny – To consider the past 10 years of the Armed Forces Community Covenant/ where it has worked and not worked/ how it is to be taken forward and include post decision scrutiny of renewal of community covenant (signed off at Cabinet June 2022).

Select Committee Membership

Councillor Penberthy – Chair

Councillor Murphy

Councillor Finn

Councillor Luggier

Councillor Hulme

Councillor Poyser

Process

Methodology/Approach A single half day session to undertake post decision scrutiny.

Sources of Information/Evidence Witnesses –

- Armed Forces Community
- Regulars
- Reservist
- Cadets
- Veterans
- Charities
- Children & Young People
- Council Officers
- Cabinet Member

Consultation Exercises N/A

Witness/Expert Participation As above

Site Visits N/A

Resource Requirements Internal officer capacity

Post Review	
Reporting Process	Report to Cabinet/ Cabinet Member
Anticipated Completion Date	November/ December 2022
Draft Report Deadline	November 2022
Meeting Frequency	One half day meeting
Dates of Meetings	7 November 2022
Further Information	Not required

Cabinet



Date of meeting:	09 June 2022
Title of Report:	Renewal of Armed Forces Covenant
Lead Member:	Councillor Mark Shayer (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Economy)
Lead Strategic Director:	Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
Author:	Alan Knott – Policy and Intelligence Advisor.
Contact Email:	Alan.Knott@Plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	AFC/001
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to request Cabinet approval of the renewal of the Armed Forces Covenant by Plymouth City Council and to delegate to the Leader of the Council authority to effect signing.

Recommendations and Reasons

The Armed Forces Community Covenant no longer exists in its original form. This is because it was an agreement signed by multiple organisations. The new Armed Forces Covenant is an individual organisation's commitment. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet approves the renewal proposal so that the Council can demonstrate its individual commitment, not only to serving members of the armed forces, but to veterans, reservists and their families.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Plymouth City Council originally signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012. It is not possible to continue registration of Community Covenants like Plymouth's 2012 commitment because they are signed by multiple organisations. Therefore, organisations like Plymouth City Council must now choose to refresh their commitment individually.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

We provide strong community leadership and the role the Council plays in supporting the Armed Forces Covenant is fundamental to this element of the Corporate Plan.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Approval of the Armed Forces Covenant does not constitute a specific resource commitment. Future decisions, particularly in the areas of Housing, Education and Health may have particular implications: these however, will be considered on a case by case basis.

Financial Risks

None

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None specific to the recommendations of this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

The Armed Forces Act 2021 received Royal Assent in December 2021 and new guidance will enact this legislation in summer 2022. The new Armed Forces Act 2021 creates a legal obligation on relevant bodies, when exercising relevant statutory functions and to have due regard to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. This is the Armed Forces Covenant Duty. The signing of the Plymouth Armed Forces Covenant helps implement this legislation into Council policy.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Renewal of Armed Forces Covenant report							
B	Plymouth City Council Armed Forces Covenant agreement 2022							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	pl.22. 23.16	Leg	EJ/38 666/2 5.5.22	Mon Off		HR		Asset s		Strat Proc	
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 25/05/2022											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Mark Shayer (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Economy)											
Date approved: 24/05/2022											

RENEWAL OF ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Cabinet – 09 June 2022



Background

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation to those who serve or have served in the British military, and to their families. It is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they served with their lives. It recognises the unique and selfless sacrifice associated with service and encourages local communities to support the service community in their area.

Home to the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Army, Plymouth boasts an inspiring rich maritime heritage and is steeped in military history. With the citadel being built in the 1660s and the first Royal Dockyard opening in 1691, the armed forces has continued to grow and now in the 21st century, hosts the largest naval base in Western Europe and most importantly the city retains a special and reciprocal relationship with those who serve and have served.

Plymouth City Council originally signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012, along with representatives of the Armed Forces, Military Charities, public sector partners, and the business and voluntary sectors. Historically the Armed Forces Covenant Team at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) managed the process for the Community Covenant. This process and the responsibility for management of Covenant signings has been transferred to the Department of Defence Relationship Management (DRM). Within the new system, and to ensure transparency, there is a requirement for signed Covenants to be registered individually. It is not possible to 're-sign' Community Covenants like Plymouth's 2012 commitment because they are signed by multiple organisations. Therefore, Plymouth City Council must now choose to refresh their commitment individually.

Legal implications

The Armed Forces Bill 2021, which passed Royal Assent on 15 December 2021 places a new statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant. The legislation will not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes or advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces Community. It is designed to ensure that the relevant decision-makers consider the issues facing the Armed Forces Community in the key areas that impact upon their day-to-day lives. Under the new duty, those public bodies in scope will be required to have 'due regard' to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when formulating policy and taking decisions in the specified areas of Housing, Education and Health.

The requirement will be like other duties to have 'due regard' already in operation, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty. As with those existing duties, the legislation will not be defining exactly how the requirement to have due regard can be met. Accompanying statutory guidance, which public bodies will be required to consider will provide advice and examples of best practice to indicate how bodies might comply with the duty. All relevant strategic governance agreements and documents should be updated in line with the 2021 Act as required.

Conclusion

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation to those who serve or have served in the British military, and to their families. By signing, Plymouth City Council commits that we

acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in all the services the Council offers, and that we recognise the unique and selfless sacrifice associated with service and will do all we can do to support all those in the Armed Forces Community.



Plymouth City Council

We, the undersigned, agree to work and act together to honour the Armed Forces Covenant. We recognise the value Serving Personnel (Regular and reserve) Cadets, Veterans, and military families contribute to our business/school/charity and our country.

Date:
Signed:

Date:
Signed:

Name:

Name:

Position Held:

Position Held: Leader of the Council

Signed on behalf of the Armed Forces

Signed on behalf of Plymouth City Council

Date:

Date:

Signed:

Signed:

Name:

Name:

Position Held: Deputy Leader of the Council

Position Held: Chief Executive

**Signed on behalf of Plymouth's
Armed Forces Champion**

**Signed on behalf of Plymouth City Council
Chief Executive**

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of
the Crown

And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

Section 1: Principles of The Armed Forces Covenant

- 1.1 We, Plymouth City Council, will endeavour in our business dealings to uphold the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, which are:
- No member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen.
 - In some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved.

Section 2: Demonstrating our Commitment

- 2.1 Plymouth City Council recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of the armed forces community. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise made by Plymouth City Council to support in-service personnel, ex- service personnel and their families to receive fair and consistent service. We seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by:
- Removing disadvantage from our Armed Forces Community with regards to accommodation, employment and school provision.
 - Raising awareness through engagement, celebration and commemoration.
 - Encourage business community engagement with the Armed Forces community.
 - Improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community .

Section 3: Plymouth City Council support to the Covenant

- 3.1 Supporting servicemen/women and ex-servicemen/women to secure suitable accommodation:
- The Council will offer suitable advice to Armed Forces applicants who present in Plymouth so they are able to access affordable housing in the City.
 - Accepting the UK Armed Forces Veteran ID Cards as proof of status.
 - The Council will offer preference for those requiring social housing who are currently in the Armed Forces or leaving the forces.
 - The Council will allocate a proportion of stock through local lettings plans for Armed Forces applicants.
 - Develop appropriate housing schemes to meet veterans needs.
- 3.2 Assisting with requests for adapted homes for wounded soldiers:
- Those living in Plymouth Social Housing can be directly matched to a suitable property where there is a medical need.
 - The Council will offer relevant advice and support to injured veterans to help them access home adaptations.
- 3.3 Seeking to support the employment of veterans young and old:
- Welcoming applications from, and guaranteeing interviews with, veterans who meet the criteria in the job specification.
 - Recognising military skills and qualifications in our recruitment and selection process.

3.4 Striving to support the employment of Service spouses and partners:

- Welcoming applications from spouses/partners who meet the criteria in the job specification.
- Endeavoring to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner 's deployment.

3.5 Seeking to support our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, including accommodating their training and deployment where possible:

- Up to 2 weeks per year of special paid leave is available to attend annual training camps.
- Fully supporting and accommodating mobilised deployment of Reservist employees if required.

3.6 Offering support to our local cadet units, either in our local community or in local schools, where possible:

- Up to 2 weeks per year of special paid leave may be available to attend annual training camps and courses.
- Accommodation of Cadet training commitments where possible.
- Considering sponsorship bids to support worthwhile Cadet projects.

3.7 Champion the needs of service and veterans' children and their families in Plymouth

- Provide support and assistance to service families requiring school placements for their children.
- Support Children's Education across the Armed Forces Community.
- Changing perceptions - Educating providers at local level to broaden understanding of the service context.
- Incorporate the 'families strategy' core workstreams, family life, service life, family home and children's education into Plymouth's education policies.

4 Actively participate in Armed Forces Day (AFD);

- By becoming the lead AFD partner:
- In advance; promoting AFD through the web, social media, membership and other networks.
- Encouraging employees to take part in Reserve Forces Day, Uniform to Work Day and any Flag Raising Ceremonies; assisting with case studies and stories and working with the Wessex Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (RFCA) to get them to press.
- Publishing stories of the day on the web, social media, through our own membership and other networks as well as working with the RFCA Communications lead & the press.

5 Encourage business community engagement with the Armed Forces Covenant

- Promote the Armed Forces community in Council dealings with the business community.
- Encourage businesses to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Support businesses in relation to skills and employment.

6 Help improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community

- We will seek to strengthen our military covenant with the Armed Forces by looking at our veterans' ongoing needs especially around medical support and mental health provision. We want Plymouth to be recognised as a centre of excellence for veteran support.
- Promote the Armed Forces Community in commissioning arrangements with the NHS and CCG.
- Following assessment provide support and assistance to meet Veterans eligible needs; including those needs that relate to their service. Also, providing advice, information and signposting onto other services where eligibility criteria is not met.
- To ensure Veterans and their families with caring responsibilities are able to access timely carer support within the City.
- Public Health will promote the AFC when we are helping to shape new policies or services, both as a commissioner and a health and care system partner.

7 Offering a discount to members of the Armed Forces Community

- Proactively work with the local business community offering bespoke and/or limited time offers to Defence personnel

8 Promoting that we are an armed forces-friendly organisation

- Promoting our work, activities and events through our own digital and social media channels as well as working with the press.
- Publishing our Covenant pledge on a dedicated Covenant section/page on our web site

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT - SCRUTINY

Briefing on purpose, structure and roles

7 November 2022



Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) is a nationwide agreement between the armed forces community, the nation and the government. It aims to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. Previously called the “Community Covenant” it is replaced by the new Armed Forces Covenant which asks individual organisations to uphold the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, which are:

- No member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen.
- In some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved.

Plymouth City Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant, as an individual organisation, on the 16th August 2022 and in doing so recognises and remembers the sacrifices made by members of the armed forces community. (Appendices 1) The City Council will seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by:

- Removing disadvantage from our Armed Forces Community with regards to accommodation, employment and school provision.
- Raising awareness through engagement, celebration and commemoration.
- Encourage business community engagement with the Armed Forces community.
- Improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community.

Plymouth Armed Forces Covenant partnership

More than 100 individual Plymouth businesses have signed the Armed Forces Covenant. Many of these play an active role in the Plymouth Armed Forces Covenant partnership. The Partnership meets 4 times per year and is chaired by the City Council’s Armed Forces Champion. The Partnership is very well attended and seeks to support the city’s whole Armed Forces Community. The Partnership involves representatives from services within the council, public sectors and city businesses and organisations including: The Royal Navy, The British Army, The Royal Marines, RAF, Reserves and Cadets, voluntary and charity sectors, service children, war widows, and the Ministry of Defence. Any organisation or individual is encouraged to and warmly welcomed to join the partnership.

The Partnership have their own Priorities for 2022-24 which are:

- Remove disadvantage from the Armed Forces Community
- Raise awareness through engagement, celebration and commemoration
- Increase businesses community engagement with the Armed Forces Covenant
- Improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community
- Support Service Children’s Education across the Armed Forces Community
- Help tackle Housing issues faced by the Armed Forces Community
- Better connect the Armed Forces Community with new opportunities for skills, training, education, careers and jobs

Current Structure

The current Plymouth Armed Forces Covenant structure has been in place for many years. Chaired by a Plymouth City Council Councillor who is appointed the City’s ‘Armed Forces Champion’ and is supported by 4 Theme Groups who cover 4 of the key AFC aspects in the city. Each Theme group is led by a volunteer organisation (or individual) who in turn seeks out other volunteers to help support the Armed Forces Community in that particular area.

- Armed Forces Covenant ‘Champion’- Cllr Shayer (Plymouth City Council)
 - Theme groups leads, chaired as follows:
 - ‘Serving Personnel’ chaired The British Army (supported by The Royal Navy)
 - ‘Children and Families’ – chaired by Plymouth City Council
 - ‘Veterans’ – chaired by the Voluntary and community sector
 - ‘Corporate Partners’ – chaired by the business sector

Theme Groups

The Theme groups' membership is made up from a variety of different organisations and individuals across the city. As with the main Partnership, any organisation or individual is encouraged to and warmly welcomed to join a theme group. The Theme groups meet regularly and have their own actions plans to help support the Partnerships priorities and uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Roles

Attached to this briefing is *appendices 2*, which sets out the current structure, priorities and organisations involved in Plymouth Armed Forces Covenant. Each Theme group has a lead, or in some cases a rotating lead.

Best Practice

The Local Government Association (LGA), Forces in Mind Trust (FIMT) and Shared Intelligence report "Our Community-Our Covenant – Improving the Delivery of local Covenant pledges" (Appendices 3) sets out core infrastructure and governance recommendation for successful delivery of covenant expectations. Plymouth's current structure incorporates the majority of these recommendations but could also adopt others which would enhance delivery.

New legislation to be introduced in 2022.

The Armed Forces Covenant Duty

The Armed Forces Act 2021 amends the Armed Forces Act 2006 to create a legal obligation on relevant bodies, when exercising relevant statutory functions, to have due regard to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant(AFC). This is the Armed Forces Covenant Duty.

Bodies within scope

The new duty will apply to specified persons or bodies, including councils, when exercising certain housing, education or healthcare functions (excluding social care). The private sector is not in scope. When such a body develops, implements or reviews a relevant policy, or makes decisions on its delivery of relevant services, it must consider the Covenant principles. Namely, whether the Armed Forces Community experiences disadvantages, attributable to the unique obligations and sacrifices of service life, that can be removed, and whether special provision is merited. The Duty is not prescriptive about the actions bodies should take in order to comply, and it does not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes or advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces Community.

Functions in scope of the Covenant Duty

The Covenant Duty applies to specific functions within the fields of **healthcare, education, and housing** services. These are key areas where disadvantages to members of the Armed Forces Community have commonly arisen. The focus of the legislation is on local – and, as appropriate, regional – provision of these services.

Healthcare

- Provision of services
- Quality of services
- Funding
- Co-operation between health bodies and professionals
- Functions concerning additional needs that healthcare bodies have a role in delivering.

Education

- Admissions
- Transport
- Attendance
- Additional Needs support
- Educational attainment and curriculum
- Student Wellbeing
- Use of Pupil premium

Housing

- Allocations policy for social housing
- Homelessness
- Disabled facilities grants
- Tenancy strategies (England only)

Summary

Plymouth's Armed Forces Covenant Partnership continues to evolve and adapt to the changing expectations from both the local and national perspectives. Local support, across all sectors is high and membership is growing. The new legislation has been a catalyst for change which the Partnership seek to utilise. The Partnership is always looking to ensure it meets the expectations of the Armed Forces Covenant locally and nationally.

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Plymouth City Council

We, the undersigned, agree to work and act together to honour the Armed Forces Covenant. We recognise the value Serving Personnel (Regular and reserve) Cadets, Veterans, and military families contribute to our business/school/charity and our country.

Date: 16th August 2022
Name: Brigadier Mike Tanner OBE RM
Position Held: Plymouth Navel Base Commander

Signature:

Date: 16th August 2022
Name: Councillor Mark Shayer
Position Held: Deputy Leader Plymouth City Council and Armed Forces Champion

Signature:

Date: 16th August 2022
Name: Tracey Lee
Position Held: Chief Executive Plymouth City Council

Signature:



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

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The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

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Section 2: Demonstrating our Commitment

2.1 Plymouth City Council recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of the armed forces community. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise made by Plymouth City Council to support in-service personnel, ex- service personnel and their families to receive fair and consistent service. We seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by:

- Removing disadvantage from our Armed Forces Community with regards to accommodation, employment and school provision.
- Raising awareness through engagement, celebration and commemoration.
- Encourage business community engagement with the Armed Forces community.
- Improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community .

Section 3: Plymouth City Council support to the Covenant

3.1 Supporting servicemen/women and ex-servicemen/women to secure suitable accommodation:

- The Council will offer suitable advice to Armed Forces applicants who present in Plymouth so they are able to access affordable housing in the City.
- Accepting the UK Armed Forces Veteran ID Cards as proof of status.
- The Council will offer preference for those requiring social housing who are currently in the Armed Forces or leaving the forces.
- The Council will allocate a proportion of stock through local lettings plans for Armed Forces applicants.
- Develop appropriate housing schemes to meet veterans needs.

3.2 Assisting with requests for adapted homes for wounded soldiers:

- Those living in Plymouth Social Housing can be directly matched to a suitable property where there is a medical need.
- The Council will offer relevant advice and support to injured veterans to help them access home adaptations.

3.3 Seeking to support the employment of veterans young and old:

- Welcoming applications from, and guaranteeing interviews with, veterans who meet the criteria in the job specification.
- Recognising military skills and qualifications in our recruitment and selection process.

3.4 Striving to support the employment of Service spouses and partners:

- Welcoming applications from spouses/partners who meet the criteria in the job specification.
- Endeavoring to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner 's deployment.

3.5 Seeking to support our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, including accommodating their training and deployment where possible:

- Up to 2 weeks per year of special paid leave is available to attend annual training camps.
- Fully supporting and accommodating mobilised deployment of Reservist employees if required.

3.6 Offering support to our local cadet units, either in our local community or in local schools, where possible:

- Up to 2 weeks per year of special paid leave may be available to attend annual training camps and courses.
- Accommodation of Cadet training commitments where possible.
- Considering sponsorship bids to support worthwhile Cadet projects.

3.7 Champion the needs of service and veterans' children and their families in Plymouth

- Provide support and assistance to service families requiring school placements for their children.
- Support Children's Education across the Armed Forces Community.
- Changing perceptions - Educating providers at local level to broaden understanding of the service context.
- Incorporate the 'families strategy' core workstreams, family life, service life, family home and children's education into Plymouth's education policies.

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- By becoming the lead AFD partner:
- In advance; promoting AFD through the web, social media, membership and other networks.
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- Publishing stories of the day on the web, social media, through our own membership and other networks as well as working with the RFCA Communications lead & the press.

5 Encourage business community engagement with the Armed Forces Covenant

- Promote the Armed Forces community in Council dealings with the business community.
- Encourage businesses to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Support businesses in relation to skills and employment.

6 Help improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community

- We will seek to strengthen our military covenant with the Armed Forces by looking at our veterans' ongoing needs especially around medical support and mental health provision. We want Plymouth to be recognised as a centre of excellence for veteran support.
- Promote the Armed Forces Community in commissioning arrangements with ONE Devon and the relevant Local Care Partnership (LCP).
- Following assessment provide support and assistance to meet Veterans eligible needs; including those needs that relate to their service. Also, providing advice, information and signposting onto other services where eligibility criteria is not met.
- To ensure Veterans and their families with caring responsibilities are able to access timely carer support within the City.
- Public Health will promote the AFC when we are helping to shape new policies or services, both as a commissioner and a health and care system partner.

7 Offering a discount to members of the Armed Forces Community

- Proactively work with the local business community offering bespoke and/or limited time offers to Defence personnel

8 Promoting that we are an armed forces-friendly organisation

- Promoting our work, activities and events through our own digital and social media channels as well as working with the press.
- Publishing our Covenant pledge on a dedicated Covenant section/page on our web site

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Revised priorities following Chair and theme lead strategic meeting

28 January 2022

**1. Plymouth Armed Forces Covenant - Priorities for 2022-2024**

Armed Forces Covenant Priorities 2022-2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove disadvantage from the Armed Forces Community • Raise awareness through engagement, celebration and commemoration • Increase businesses community engagement with the Armed Forces Covenant • Improve Healthcare provision to the Armed Forces Community • Support Service Children's Education across the Armed Forces Community • Help tackle Housing issues faced by the Armed Forces Community • Better connect the Armed Forces Community with new opportunities for skills, training, education, careers and jobs

2. Priorities for 2022-24 – Theme Group Actions

Theme Group Priorities for 2022-24 – Actions			
Serving Personnel Group (QEWG)	Veterans Group	Children Young People and Families Group	Business Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness through engagement, celebration and commemoration • Engage business community to support the recruitment of reservists. • Ensure the reputation of the Armed Forces in Plymouth is maintained • Promote Plymouth businesses signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant • Keep service personnel and facilities in Plymouth • Maximise the promotion of Military Tuesday and services delivered by Skills Launchpad Plymouth for serving personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with partners to ensure safe, high-quality care for serving personnel and their families is commissioned appropriately • Identifying and supporting Armed Forces veterans and making services work better by addressing inequalities • Create a hub where Plymouth is recognised as a centre of excellence for Veteran support • Ensure local veterans get the care and support they need by developing a 'veterans village' • Help tackle Healthcare and mental health issues faced by the Armed Forces Community • Help tackle Housing issues faced by the Armed Forces Community • Maximise the promotion of Military Tuesday and services delivered by Skills Launchpad Plymouth for veterans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting families, carers, children, and young people in the Armed Forces community • Support Children's Education across the Armed Forces Community • Changing Perceptions - Educating providers at local level to broaden understanding of the service context • Ensure the "families strategy" core workstreams: family life; service life; family home and children's education, is embedded in Plymouth • Maximise the promotion of Military Tuesday and services delivered by Skills Launchpad Plymouth including the dedicated Youth Hub supporting those 16-24 years old 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase businesses community engagement with the Armed Forces Covenant • Increase the number of businesses signed up to the AFC Employee Recognition award • Work with businesses and partners to secure employment for vets and those about to leave service (Skills Launchpad Plymouth) • Helping the transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life. • Align efforts with the Skills 4 Plymouth strategic plan ensuring that the Armed Forces Community have better access to the right skills to enter into and progress in work • Champion the Regional Employer Engagement Group (REEG) for Plymouth
Lt Col Rob Williams (165) (Lead) The British Army Royal Navy Royal Air Force Royal British Legion VAPC Cornwall Council Wessex Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association St Luke's Defence Transition Service Plymouth City Council	Kate Hughes (RNRMC) (Lead) Improving Lives Plymouth NHS Battling On RFEA DWP Livewell British Legion Plymouth City Council	Michael House (PCC) (Lead) Young carers and Young families lead hub Improving Lives Plymouth Naval Families Federation Aggies Royal British Legion Royal Navy University of St Mark and St John RNRMC University Hospital's Plymouth NHS Trust) Plymouth City Council	Natasha Mason (Wolverstans Solicitors) (Lead) Wessex Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association Gold Alumni Defence Employer Recognition organisations (5) Plymouth City Council

Task and Finish Groups for 2022-24**Offering and keeping Employment and Skills in the city**

Emma Hewitt, Plymouth City Council (Skills Launchpad) (Lead)

RFEA

DWP

CTP

Wessex Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association



Our Community – Our Covenant

Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges



Second Edition



Our Community – Our Covenant

Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges



Second Edition



NOTE ON THE SECOND EDITION

Since we published the first edition of *'Our Community – Our Covenant'*, a great deal of hard work has been undertaken by local authorities and other service providers, including charities and governments, to improve the delivery of local Covenant pledges. We have also invested in further research to cover gaps in our original work, and to review our recommendations in the light of honest and informed feedback.

We decided to retain the format and indeed the original forewords from the first edition, for the sake of readability, and for context. The report is intended to provide an accessible tool that informs and provides practical guidance. No doubt this second edition will soon also require updating as those responsible for delivering local Covenant pledges continue to improve. This is real progress.

Ray Lock CBE,
Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust





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FOREWORDS



Air Vice-Marshal Tony Stables CBE,
Past Chairman, Forces in Mind Trust

The Armed Forces Covenant is a much misunderstood concept, which owes its history at least to the Peloponnesian wars of the fifth century BC. In the United Kingdom, it is only in recent times that it has taken the form of a written document, and it is just a few years since it entered statute.

The Covenant describes the transaction whereby the nation provides its support to the Armed Forces, and those who have served previously, together with their families, in return for which it expects to be defended, at the cost of personal liberty and even life. Whilst within the serving community much can be, and is being done working with the Ministry of Defence and councils, supporting those in need in the ex-serving community is a far harder task.

First and foremost, ex-Service personnel and their families are primarily citizens of the state, and should expect to be supported in the same way as the rest of the population. Only where they have been disadvantaged by their service should they, and their needs, be highlighted. But in many cases, such as housing, education, employment and health, the means whereby this extra support is delivered will to a large extent also be the same – fair treatment, but not generally a different type of treatment.

The exception to this is, of course, the military charities sector, funded as it is by a mixture of statutory provision and the extraordinary and sustained generosity of the British public. Even here though, most charities can be selective in what they undertake, limited as much by resources as by any concerns about 'charitable objects'. It's also fair to reflect that the state of public finances is such that the resources available to local authorities across the United Kingdom are also severely constrained, and stark choices are having to be made on a daily basis.

Hardly surprising then that by attempting to codify the Covenant, the United Kingdom's Government, which has limited authority in certain aspects of support provided by individual countries, soon to include regions, has set broad principles rather than specifics with the associated resources being centrally allocated.

Equally foreseeable, and as this report clearly shows, is that the expectation of the Armed Forces Community has in some cases grown to exceed the modest 'fairness' the Covenant calls for.

At the front line of delivering the Covenant are local authorities through the medium of local pledges, without perfect clarity and additional centrally derived resources. The role of Forces in Mind Trust has been to fund an independent and credible examination of how these pledges can be better delivered. Improved delivery would help in the successful and sustainable transition of ex-Service personnel and their families, the Trust's mission.

But improved delivery requires honesty: from Government in what the Covenant does not seek to do as much as in what it does; from local authorities to recognize where they could, and should take further steps to help the Armed Forces Community; and from individuals leaving the Services, who in accepting individual responsibility must ask whether they have done everything in their power to make that successful transition.

The Armed Forces Covenant is an imperfect vehicle operating in an ambiguous environment. This report 'Our Community, Our Covenant', will not on its own fix either. If diligently read, if sensibly and vigorously led, the report will make a substantial contribution to improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges.

Air Vice-Marshal Tony Stables CBE
Past Chairman, Forces in Mind Trust



Councillor Izzi Seccombe,
Chair of the Local Government Association Community Wellbeing Board

Our Armed Forces Community, including those who are serving, their spouses, children and families, our community who have served, and our reservists, are all important members of our whole community.

This report shows the tremendous work that councils have been doing before the Armed Forces covenant and as a result of the Armed Forces covenant; in housing, education, liaison, and so forth. There are areas to work on, and as the LGA Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board, with the lead on health and social care, I'll be taking a particular interest in how we can support councils looking to incorporate the needs of serving families and Veterans in their health and care policies. For councils to do this well, and for such an important and high profile national issue, having access to information with regards to families with needs, those transitioning out of the Armed Forces who may need our support, and our Veteran populations is essential.

I'm particularly thankful to Forces in Mind Trust for their leadership and investment of resources and time in this report, and we look forward to working closely with them and other third sector and charitable organisations, alongside national government, to jointly give our Armed Forces Community the opportunities and support they need to be active members of our local communities.

I would also like to thank the council officers and member champions who contributed to the survey and deep dives, which meant that we could start identifying good practice and start sharing it, and to Shared Intelligence for doing the hard work. I hope this report provides a practical resource for every council and that it is the platform for further work at a national and local level for creating a better mutual understanding of the practicalities and opportunities of the Armed Forces covenant.

Cllr Izzi Seccombe
Chair of the LGA Community Wellbeing Board
Leader of Warwickshire County Council



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association commissioned Shared Intelligence to carry out research into ways of improving the local delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The research, which was supported by the Ministry of Defence, was commissioned in the context of concerns nationally that implementation of the Covenant locally was inconsistent.

Our main sources of evidence were:

- A literature review;
- Surveys of council Chief Executives, council Armed Forces Covenant Champions, stakeholders and members of the Armed Forces Community;
- “Deep dive” research visits to: Cornwall, Glasgow, Gloucestershire, Moray, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Surrey, Westminster, West Yorkshire, Wigan, Wiltshire and Wrexham.

We also had the benefit of interviews with a number of key stakeholders, a discussion with an advisory group and a sense-making event with members of the advisory group and other people with an interest in the delivery of the Covenant.

We have amended this edition of the report to take into account the additional research we have carried out. This research includes four further deep dive visits to Staffordshire, North Yorkshire, Birmingham and Caerphilly, and a session with London Boroughs.

The Covenant: awareness and expectations

The Armed Forces Covenant was introduced in 2011. It is a “promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly”. The Covenant focusses on helping members of the Armed Forces Community “have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen”.

The Covenant also states that:

- “The Armed Forces Community *should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens* in the provision of services; and that
- “*Special consideration* is appropriate in some cases especially for those who have given the most.”

Our survey of Council Chief Executives shows that councils consider that they have a good understanding of the Covenant, with 48 per cent reporting that they have a good understanding and

39 per cent a moderate understanding. According to our survey of the Armed Forces Community, awareness is also high among members of that Community, with 81 per cent of respondents saying that they were aware of the Covenant.

Through our deep dives and stakeholder interviews we have found significant evidence of mixed expectations about what the Covenant means. Some members of the Armed Forces Community think that it gives them a right to a service, as opposed to not being disadvantaged compared with others in the delivery of that service. This is a particularly significant issue in relation to housing, with some people leaving the Armed Forces believing that the Covenant gives them the right to social housing.

Our survey of members of the Armed Forces Community also revealed that over 38 per cent of respondents felt that they had been disadvantaged as a result of their service at least once. Almost a quarter felt that their council did not understand their needs. These findings demonstrate the importance of the Covenant.

Councils and the Covenant

Drawing on the findings of our research we have developed a description of a core infrastructure reflecting the action taken by councils that have successfully implemented the Covenant. It is summarised in table 1.

We tested our first draft of this core infrastructure through our surveys and deep dives. The vast majority of councils report that they have a champion, an officer point of contact and a forum in place. Around half of councils report that they have an action plan, but only 20 per cent say that the plan is active. Similarly, only a quarter of councils report that they have an active webpage. Our survey of stakeholders paints a similar picture of the extent to which our core infrastructure is in place. Councils with no significant Armed Forces presence in their area are less likely to have the core infrastructure in place.



Our survey of council Chief Executives showed that councils are most likely to ensure that expectations flowing from the Covenant are reflected in the relevant policies rather than through the provision of targeted support or special entitlements. Over 90 per cent of councils with responsibility for housing

report that they have reflected the Covenant in their policies and 70 per cent report that they offer targeted support and special entitlements. Adult social care has emerged as the area in which the Covenant is least likely to be reflected in policies and strategies.

Table 1: Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An elected member champion • An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Covenant Forum or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year. It includes the following: military representatives; military charities; public sector representatives; effective council members (senior elected members on cabinet); and the officer champion. Each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years. • In some places (for example London) councils and their partners may wish to establish a mechanism for collaboration at a sub-regional level. This could include: joint forums and action plans, applications for the Covenant fund, training packages and a shared web presence.
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web page or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces Community. • A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the council • A route through which concerns can be raised • Training of frontline staff • A vehicle for reporting action and achievements such as an annual report, newsletter or forum minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action planning process that is proportionate to local needs and circumstances. For example, an action plan, a time line, or minutes with recorded actions. • Policy reviews • Enthusiasm and commitment



We have developed a typology of places reflecting the extent and type of the presence of the Armed Forces Community in different areas. It is summarised in table 2.

In our deep dives we have found that the relationships between local councils, their partners and the Armed Forces Community work best in places that match our categories 1 and 4. In these places good relationships are “how things are done round here”. This is often the case in our second category, but some of these places find it challenging to establish a shared understanding of the most appropriate arrangements – for example the frequency of forum meetings. Delivering the Covenant is most challenging in our third and fifth categories: in these places an understanding of the Armed Forces is often not “in the blood stream.”

The impact of the Covenant

In the vast majority of places where we carried out deep dives, action to meet the needs of members of the Armed Forces Community was already in place before the Covenant was introduced. The Covenant has, however, encouraged a more collaborative and comprehensive approach. In most places the driving force for achieving the outcomes envisaged has been one or two individuals who have used the Covenant to

reinforce the case for action. These people are often either former members of the Armed Forces or have close links to a member of that community.

Our survey of council Chief Executives asked what steps could be taken at a national level to improve the delivery of the Covenant. The most popular steps were: the publication of a checklist of issues to be addressed (68.7 per cent); a clearer statement of the expectations associated with the Covenant (67.3 per cent) and advice on how to meet those expectations (66.8 per cent).

We have identified a number of steps that could be taken by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to enable more effective delivery of the Covenant. They are:

- Improving the processes for preparing members of the Armed Forces and their families for transition and resettlement;
- Improving the data available to councils, particularly in areas to which significant numbers of former serving people and their families move or return after leaving the Armed Forces;
- Addressing the variability in the priority that Base Commanders give to relations with civil society and the delivery of the Covenant in particular.

Table 2: Typology of places

1. Major Armed Forces Community presence	2. Significant Armed Forces Community presence	3. Modest Armed Forces Community presence	4. Significant known presence of Veterans	5. Minimal known Armed Forces Community presence
The Armed Forces Community is a very important presence in the area. Many of these places have a major serving and Veteran community. For example, Wiltshire, Moray and Plymouth.	The Armed Forces Community is a significant presence in the area. Many of these places have a significant serving and Veteran community. For example, Cornwall, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.	There is a smaller but nonetheless important Armed Forces Community presence.	Often important areas from which members of the Armed Forces are recruited and to which many resettle. There is no serving presence in these places. For example, Wigan and Glasgow.	Places where the only presence comprises Reservists and a Veteran population of unknown size.



Recommendations

Our report includes a number of recommendations aimed at Government, the Ministry of Defence, the LGA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and councils and their partners.

The LGA, COSLA and Government

We recommend that:

- The LGA, COSLA and Government agree a statement on the legitimate expectations flowing from the Covenant, including what it can and cannot deliver, which should form the core text of national and local statements on the Covenant.
- The core wording on the Covenant is strengthened by including the following question as a way of testing whether or not a person or family is suffering from comparative disadvantage as a result of their mobility and deployment through service in the Armed Forces:

"Had the person/family been a long-term resident of the area would the decision have been different?"

Councils and their partners

We recommend that:

- A core infrastructure is adopted by councils seeking to successfully implement the Covenant at a local level.
- To be effective a Covenant co-ordinating group:
 - Meets at least twice a year;
 - Regularly reviews how it works, including frequency of meetings and any sub-groups;
 - Evolves in terms of its membership to reflect energy and interest.
- Councils identify people on their staff and council who have a personal link with the Armed Forces and use their understanding and commitment to help galvanise the delivery of the Covenant.
- Councils develop a mechanism for planning and recording action. This is an essential element of the core infrastructure but different action planning and monitoring tools may be appropriate in different circumstances.

The LGA, COSLA and the MoD

We recommend that:

- The LGA and COSLA work with the MoD, the Forces in Mind Trust and other key partners to put in place an action research framework to enable councils which are seeking to improve their delivery of the Covenant to work collectively to develop and implement ways of doing so.
- The MoD and the Armed Forces explore ways of improving the transition process by:
 - Putting more effort into identifying people who are at risk of facing challenging circumstances and to whom additional support could be offered;
 - Ensuring people leaving the Armed Forces are well briefed on the realities of civilian life and that spouses are at least as well-briefed as their serving partner;
 - Involving more outside organisations in the transition process.
- The LGA, COSLA and MoD explore ways in which communications could be improved between significant Armed Forces bases and councils in whose areas people leaving the Armed Forces seek to live in order to facilitate effective briefing and preparation for resettlement.
- Whilst there is an imperative on councils to build good relations with new senior officers, the MoD ensures that Base Commanders and their equivalents are briefed on the importance of their role in relation to the Covenant.
- The opportunities and implications of devolution are reviewed in any further research on the delivery of the Covenant.
- The LGA, COSLA and MoD keep under review the way in which the Armed Forces operate and the implications for the Covenant and the expectations that flow from it.



INTRODUCTION

The Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) and the Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned Shared Intelligence to carry out research into ways of improving the local delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The research, which was supported by the Ministry of Defence, was commissioned in the context of concerns nationally that implementation of the Covenant locally and of local pledges flowing from the Covenant was inconsistent.

This report sets out our findings. We present our findings under three headings:

- First, we set out our findings in relation to awareness of and expectations flowing from the Covenant;
- Second, we set out our core findings on the delivery of the Covenant by councils and their partners at a local level;
- Third, we present some conclusions in relation to the impact of the Covenant, ways in which its delivery could be improved and the role of the MoD in improving the delivery of the Covenant.

Our report also includes:

- A short explanation of the methodology we have used in this research;
- A final section pulling together our conclusions and an update on progress since the initial report;
- A toolkit, which has been tested in our further work, to help councils to implement the Covenant.

This is the second edition of *Our Community – Our Covenant*. The first edition recommended further work in a number of areas which FiMT commissioned Shared Intelligence to carry out. This includes the following:

- Four further deep dives to enable us to test our findings in four new places;
- A session with London Boroughs to explore further the delivery of the Covenant in London.

The second edition of this report includes the following changes:

- An update on core findings, including some additional and refined recommendations;
- Some reflections on the possible future development of the Covenant in the light of the changing nature of the Armed Forces presence at a local level.

The other outputs from this additional research include:

- An improved version of the core infrastructure that we recommended is adopted by councils seeking to successfully implement the Covenant;
- A revised draft of the self-assessment tool we have produced to enable places to review the arrangements they have in place to deliver the Covenant;
- Some additional good practice case studies to supplement those in our first report.



METHODOLOGY

This section briefly summarises our main sources of evidence and the methodology we adopted to carry out this research.

Literature Review

The initial phase of the research was to systematically review the material relating to the Armed Forces Covenant and how it is being implemented locally. This included the following: the contents of the Covenant website, Covenant annual reports, local Covenant documents, good practice materials and information on the needs of the Armed Forces Community. The results of the literature review informed the identification of our 'deep dive' locations and our key lines of enquiry.

Advisory group meeting

We had one meeting with an advisory group to whom we gave a presentation on the findings from our literature review and stakeholder interviews together with our draft key lines of enquiry. We used the meeting to test our emerging approach which included the first draft of a core local infrastructure, the draft surveys, and places that we were considering approaching for our 'deep dives'. A list of the members of the advisory group is included in the annex.

Surveys

These form a key element of our evidence base. They enabled us to understand the extent to which local Covenant pledges are being implemented across England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland was out of scope because of the unique environment and an ongoing study by the University of Ulster commissioned by FiMT. The surveys were of:

- **Councils.** This was sent out to every council Chief Executive in England and Wales via the LGA survey system. We received 266 responses, 13 of which were from Wales. This means 65 per cent of councils responded (which is 59.1 per cent of Welsh councils and 65.4 per cent of English councils). We sent the same survey to Scottish councils via Survey Monkey and received 23 responses which is 71.9 per cent.
- **Council Champions.** This was sent to every English and Welsh council's elected member Armed Forces Covenant Champion (through the council leader) via the LGA survey system. We received 171 responses, 14 of which were from Welsh councils. This means a total response rate of 45.8 per cent (44.7 per cent from English councils and 63.6 per cent from Welsh councils).

The same survey was sent to Scottish Armed Forces Champions via Survey Monkey and we received 12 responses, which is 37.5 per cent.

- **Stakeholders.** This was sent to members of organisations who frequently deal with councils and the Armed Forces Community on Covenant matters. This includes the regional officers from the Royal British Legion, Poppy Scotland, and the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force Families Federations, and Ministry of Defence regional officers (MCIs). We received a total of 75 responses.
- **Armed Forces Community survey.** This was promoted on Twitter and Facebook for any member of the Armed Forces Community (following the national definition – see section 3) to complete. We received a total of 349 responses from the following:
 - 32.9 per cent are working age Veterans;
 - 18.4 per cent are family members of serving personnel;
 - 13.2 per cent are serving personnel;
 - 9.7 per cent are reservists; and
 - 8.1 per cent are non-working age Veterans.

The members of the advisory group helped to disseminate the stakeholder and Armed Forces Community surveys.

Deep dives

We used the literature review and advisory group meeting to identify 12 places in which to carry out an initial set of 'deep dives'. We reviewed key local documentation, and spent a day in the location of each deep dive where we met with members of the council, the Armed Forces Champion, local organisations and other local Covenant stakeholders. We visited places that were mixed in terms of geography, type of council, Armed Forces population, and type of military presence (if applicable).

The places we visited were the following: Cornwall, Glasgow, Gloucestershire, Moray¹, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Surrey, Westminster, West Yorkshire (Bradford and Wakefield), Wigan, Wiltshire, and Wrexham.

¹ This deep dive was carried out through telephone interviews



We used the deep dives to identify examples of good practice, to develop our list of the core infrastructure that is necessary in order to deliver local Covenant pledges well, to gain an understanding of the perspective of service users, commissioners and deliverers, and to identify action that could improve delivery.

In our further work, we carried out four additional deep dives to supplement the 12 mentioned above. We visited two places with a major Armed Forces presence: North Yorkshire (including Richmondshire Council), and Staffordshire; and two places with a minimal known Armed Forces presence: Birmingham and Caerphilly.

An important objective of these additional deep dives has been to test our proposed core infrastructure and self-assessment tool.

Sense-making event

We held an event for members of the extended advisory board and contacts from our deep dives. This event was held part way through conducting deep dives, so we could test our emerging findings and tailor subsequent deep dives if necessary. This one-day event introduced our emerging conclusions and recommendations which had been gathered from the previous stages and an initial analysis of the survey results.

Workshops

In conjunction with London Councils we held a workshop which was attended by 15 London Boroughs. This was intended to address the fact that we did not do justice to the situation in London in our initial research.

We also drew on the discussion on the first edition of this report at a number of events, including the Covenant in the Community conference and FIMT's Scottish reception.

THE COVENANT: AWARENESS AND EXPECTATIONS

The Armed Forces Covenant was introduced in 2011. It is a “promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly”.² The Covenant “is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives”.³ It focuses on helping members of the Armed Forces Community to “have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen”.⁴

For the purposes of the Covenant the Armed Forces Community is defined as including:

- Regular Personnel – any current serving members of the Naval Service, Army or Royal Air Force;
- Volunteer and Regular Reservists – Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marine Reserve, Territorial Army and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and the Royal Fleet Reserve, Army Reserve and Air Force Reserve, Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy (where they served on a civilian vessel whilst supporting the Armed Forces);
- Veterans – anyone who has served for at least a day in the Armed Forces as either a regular or a reservist;
- Families of regular personnel, reservist and Veterans – spouses, civil partners and children, and where appropriate can include parents, unmarried partners and other family members;
- Bereaved – the family members of service personnel and Veterans who have died, whether that death is connected to their service or not.

When the Covenant was first introduced there was a distinction between the national Covenant, the Community Covenant (which focused on locally delivered public services and community integration) and the Corporate Covenant (which focused on the contribution of businesses). That has now been simplified and brought together with a single Armed Forces Covenant and local pledges flowing from it.

The recent changes to the wording of the Covenant have introduced a reference to ensuring that members of the Armed Forces Community are “treated fairly”. The core wording of the expectations that flow from the Covenant remains as it was when the Covenant was first introduced and is that:

- The Armed Forces Community “*should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services*”; and that
- “*Special consideration is appropriate in some cases especially for those who have given the most*”.

In this section of our report we summarise the results of our survey on awareness of the Covenant and expectations that flow from it. We explore the key issue of expectations further in the light of the findings from our deep dives and stakeholder interviews.

Councils

Our survey of council Chief Executives shows that 48 per cent of councils report they have a good understanding of the Covenant, with 39 per cent reporting a moderate understanding, and 13 per cent reporting a little understanding. No respondents said their council had no understanding. Our survey also shows that almost all councils believe that they have a similar understanding of the expectations flowing from the Covenant as the government (figure 1).

² www.armedforcesCovenant.gov.uk

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Respondents were asked whether or not their council had a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the Covenant (figure 2). Over half of respondents (55 per cent) said that their council does have a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the Covenant, and 39 per cent said their council did not have a mechanism.

We tested to see whether there was a link between the extent of the council's understanding of the expectations associated with the Covenant and the presence of a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on them (figure 3). We found that councils stating that they have a briefing mechanism were more likely to report a higher level of understanding than those without. Similarly, councils without such a briefing mechanism were more likely to indicate lower levels of understanding.

Figure 1: To what extent would you say your council and central government share the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Covenant? (n=231)

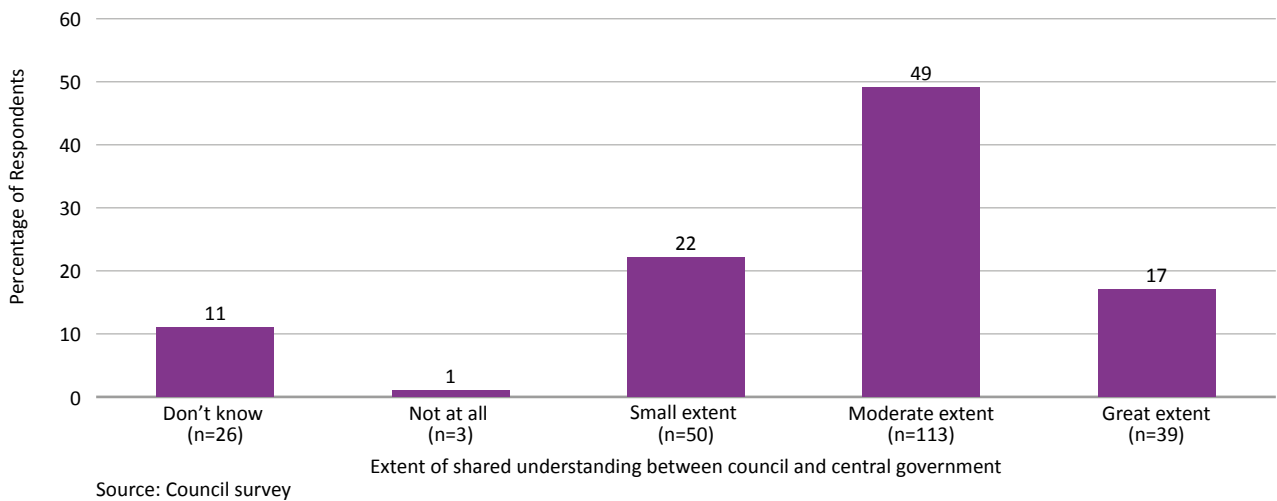
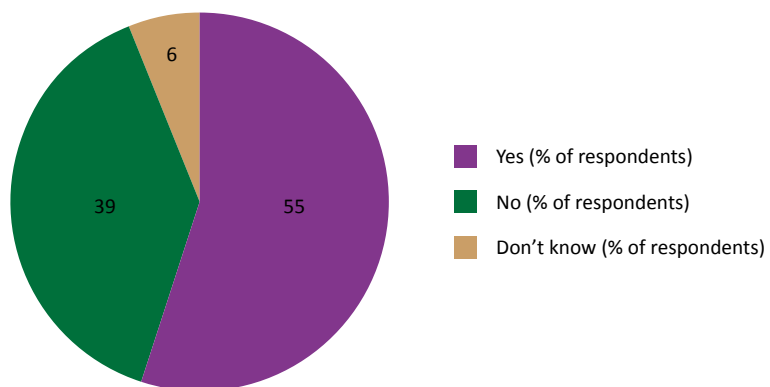


Figure 2: Is there currently a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the covenant? (n=231)



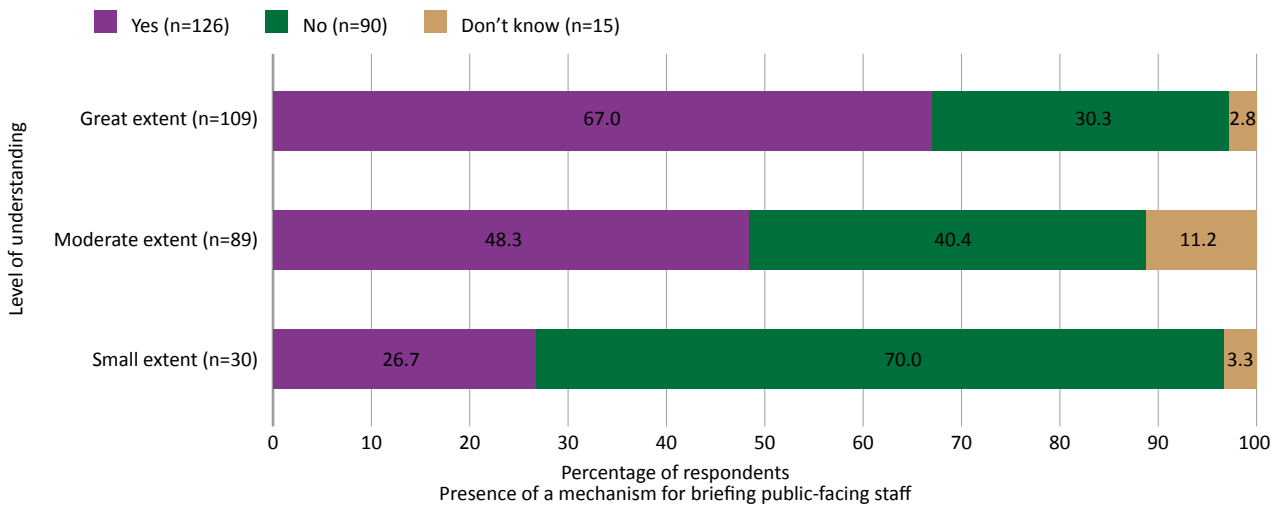


Council Armed Forces Covenant Champions

Our survey of Covenant Champions in councils, most of whom are senior councillors, paints a similar picture (figure 4). Levels of understanding were high, with just 1.3 per cent of the 157 respondents indicating that they had no understanding of the expectations of the Covenant and 8.3 per cent reporting having little understanding. A high proportion of respondents said they had a moderate understanding (31.2 per cent) or a good understanding (59.2 per cent).

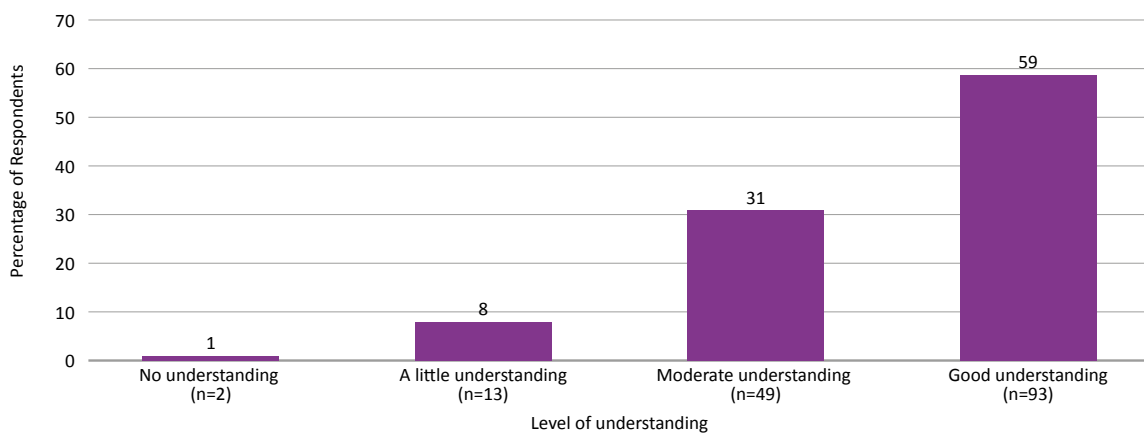
We tested to see whether respondents' understanding of the expectations associated with the Covenant was affected by their motivation for taking on the Armed Forces Champion role (figure 5). We split respondents into two cohorts: those with personal Armed Forces experience (they or a family member serves/has served/is a reservist) and those without personal experience. We found that levels of understanding were similarly high for both cohorts.

Figure 3: Extent of the council's understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Armed Forces Covenant vs. existence of mechanism for briefing public-facing staff



Source: Council survey

Figure 4: How far would you say you have a clear understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Armed Forces Community Covenant? (n=157)

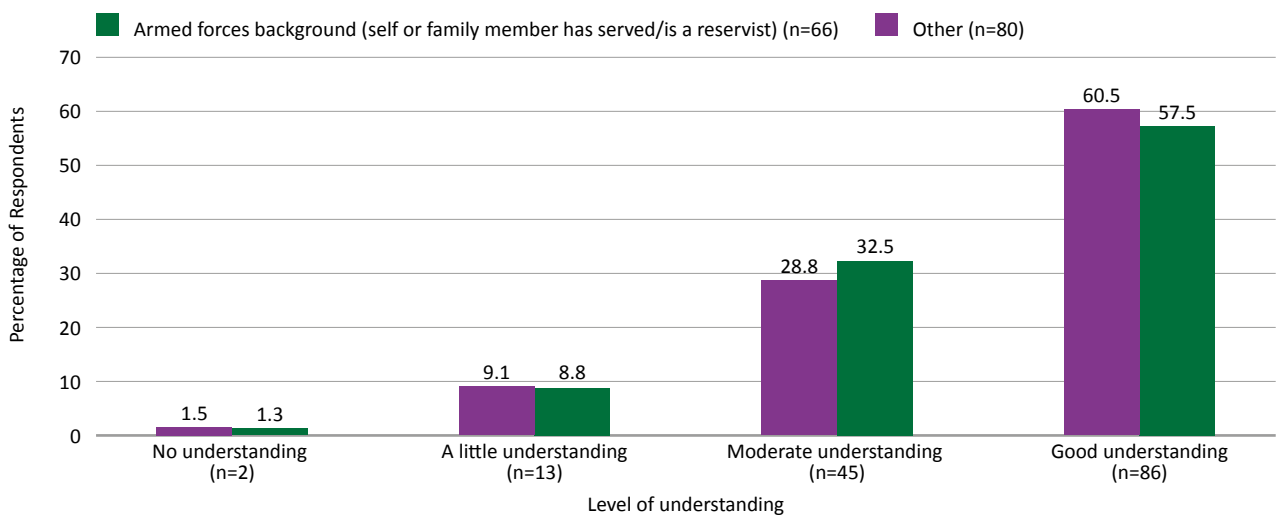


Source: Champions' survey

We also tested to see if there was a link between respondents' levels of understanding of the expectations associated with the Covenant, and the impact their role has on ensuring the council delivers on its commitments to the Armed Forces Community (figure 6). We found that there was a link between the two, in that respondents who reported a higher level of understanding were more likely to think that their role had a higher impact.

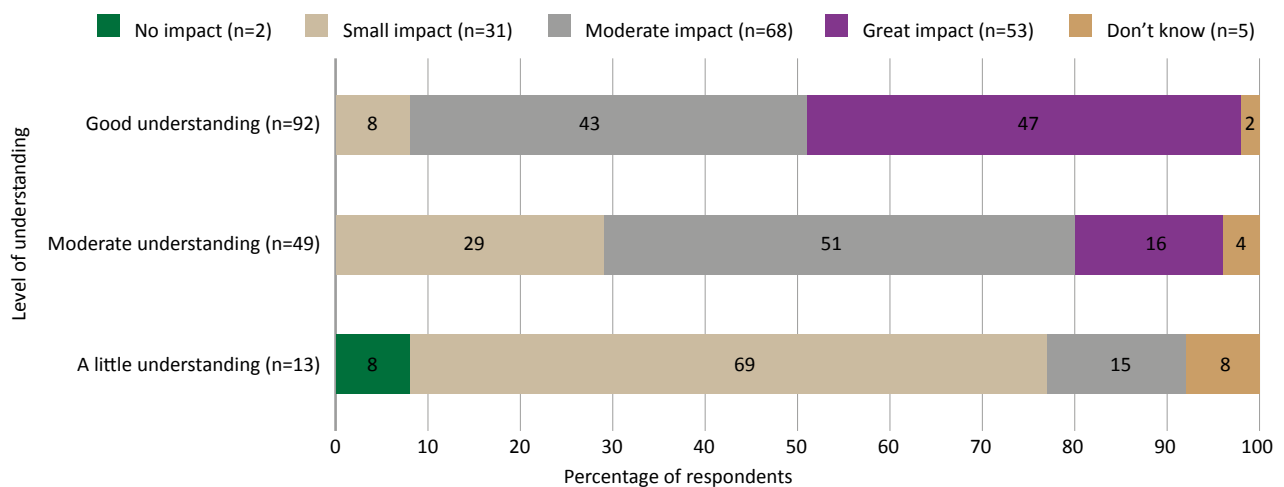
Armed Forces Champions were asked to what extent they thought their council and central government shared the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Covenant (figure 7). Respondents generally thought that councils and central government did share the same understanding, with one quarter (25 per cent) saying this was to a great extent, and 48.1 per cent saying this was to a moderate extent. Few respondents (3.2 per cent) thought that councils and central government did not

Figure 5: Motivation vs level of understanding



Source: Champions' survey

Figure 6: Level of understanding vs. impact of the role on ensuring the council delivers its commitments to the Armed Forces Community



Source: Champions' survey



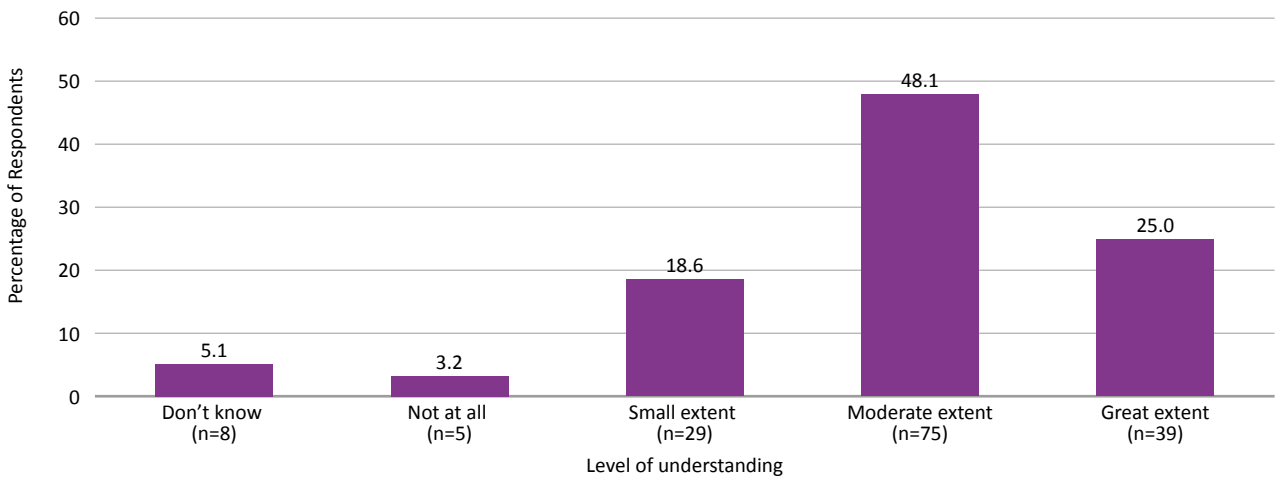
share the same understanding of the expectations of the Covenant at all, while 18.6 per cent thought that they did to a moderate extent, and 5.1 per cent did not know.

The Armed Forces Community

In our survey of members of the Armed Forces Community we tested individuals' awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant and local Covenant pledges.

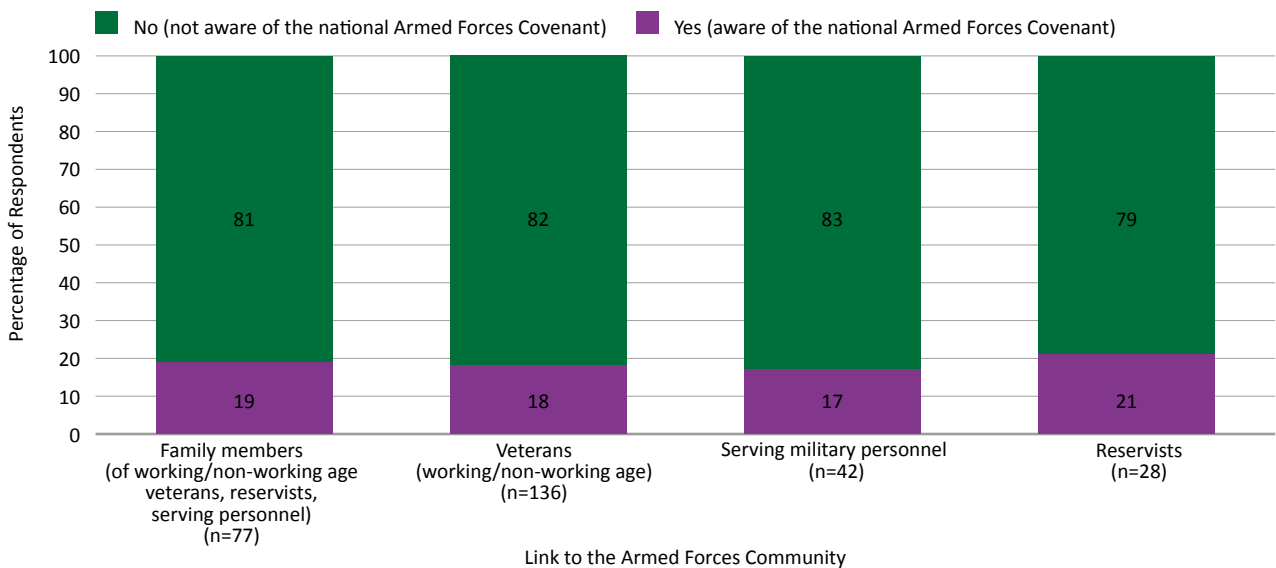
Awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant was high, with 81 per cent of respondents saying they were aware of the Armed Forces Covenant, and 19 per cent saying they were not. We tested to see whether there was a relationship between respondents' links to the Armed Forces (i.e. whether they were family, Veterans, serving personnel or reservists) and their awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant (figure 8). We found that levels of awareness were similar across all groups.

Figure 7: To what extent would you say your council and central government share the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Covenant? (n=156)



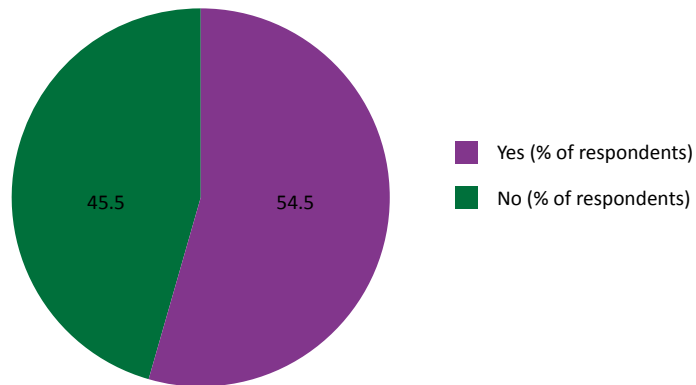
Source: Champions' survey

Figure 8: Links to the Armed Forces Community vs awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant



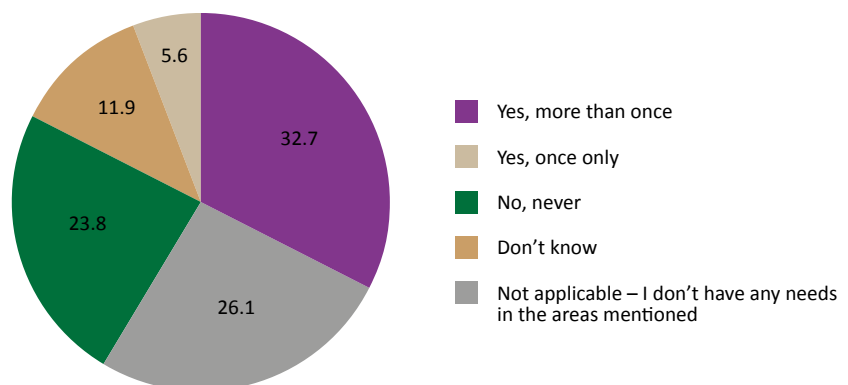
Source: Armed Forces Community survey

Figure 9: Are you aware that your local council has signed its own Armed Forces Covenant (previously referred to as 'Community Covenant')? (n=341)



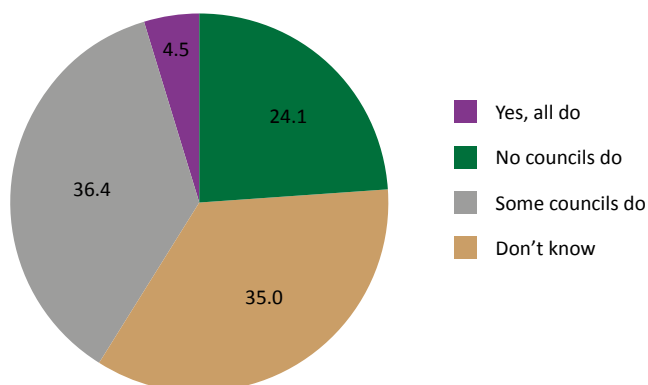
Source: Armed Forces Community survey

Figure 10: In relation to the treatment of those needs, have you ever felt disadvantaged because you are a member of the Armed Forces Community? (% of respondents. n=303)



Source: Armed Forces Community survey

Figure 11: As a member of the Armed Forces Community, do you feel that councils who you've had dealings with have a good understanding of your needs? (% of respondents. n=286)



Source: Armed Forces Community survey



However, levels of awareness that their local council had signed the Covenant were significantly lower (figure 9). This is an important finding and the statements we recommend below should help to communicate the role of councils in relation to the Covenant.

We have tested the question of the expectations flowing from the Covenant in our deep dives and stakeholder interviews. We have found significant evidence of mixed expectations with some members of the Armed Forces Community thinking that the Covenant gives them the right to a service as opposed to not being disadvantaged compared with others in the delivery of that service. This issue was reinforced during our second round of deep dives and highlights the need for action in response to the recommendation we have made below.

This is becoming less of an issue in relation to schools, but it remains a significant issue in relation to housing. Significantly, some people leaving the Armed Forces believe that the Covenant gives them the right to social housing. There is also evidence of a widespread lack of understanding of the housing pressures that exist in many areas and what this means for people who are trying to rent or buy accommodation.

We have evidence that this lack of understanding of reasonable expectations of the Covenant is shared by some senior responsible officers in the Armed Forces.

We recommend that the LGA, COSLA and Government agree a statement on the legitimate expectations flowing from the Covenant, including what it can and cannot deliver, which should form the core text of national and local statements on the Covenant.

We recommend that the core wording on the Covenant be strengthened by including the following question as a way of assessing whether or not a person or family is suffering from comparative disadvantage as a result of their mobility and deployment through service in the Armed Forces:

“Had the person/family been a long-term resident of the area would the decision have been different?”

Our survey also asked members of the Armed Forces Community whether they felt that they had been disadvantaged as a result of their service and whether they felt that their local council understands their needs. The results suggest that many people believe that they have suffered disadvantage (figure 10) and that councils do not fully understand their needs (figure 11). These findings demonstrate the importance of the Covenant.



DELIVERING THE COVENANT

Councils and the Covenant

In this section of our report we explore the extent to which councils have the core infrastructure and delivery mechanisms in place to deliver the Covenant. In the next section we look in more detail at the steps that councils and their partners are taking to deliver the Covenant in key service areas.

Core Infrastructure

Drawing on the findings of our research we have developed a description of a core infrastructure that reflects the action being taken by councils that are successfully implementing the Covenant. In order to show how our thinking has evolved our initial draft of the core infrastructure is set out in table 3 below.

We have tested and refined this during our initial surveys (figure 12), both sets of deep dives and our stakeholder discussions. Our revised core infrastructure is towards the end of this section (table 4) and in the toolkit in the annex to this report.

It is clear from our surveys that the vast majority of councils have an elected member Champion and officer point of contact in place. Ninety per cent of councils report that they have a champion and 95 per cent an officer point of contact. It is important to note that in the vast majority of places these post

holders have a number of other roles. There are also questions about the impact of these roles in some councils as just under 55 per cent of councils say these posts are both in place and are very active.

The vast majority of councils report that they have a forum in place that brings together the relevant partners and meets regularly, providing a mechanism for collaboration and information sharing between organisations. Our deep dives suggest that these forums tend to meet between one and six times a year, and usually include representatives from any nearby Armed Forces, the charity sector (including military charities), council staff and representatives from other public sector bodies.

Fewer councils, around a quarter, report that they have a web page that is very active, with almost 30 per cent not having a specific web page dedicated to providing information to the Armed Forces Community. This situation seems to be more acute for district councils,

Table 3: Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant (initial version)	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An elected member Champion An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outward-facing forum A mechanism for collaboration with partners
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A web page with key information and links A clear public statement of expectations A route through which concerns can be raised Training of frontline staff The production of an annual report highlighting the key actions taken that year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed Policy reviews Enthusiasm and commitment

as of the 105 district councils who responded to this question in our survey, almost 40 per cent of them did not have a web page in place. This is particularly relevant as over two thirds (68 per cent) of respondents from the Armed Forces Community survey highlighted that having more communication between the council and the Armed Forces Community would make them feel more supported, and two thirds of respondents (59.5 per cent) identified the need for a web page with relevant links.

Similarly, fewer councils meet the requirements in our core infrastructure in relation to an action

plan. Around half of councils say they have one in place, but only one in five say their action plan is in place and very active. Councils that do have an active action plan in place are more likely to have an active forum and similarly, those that do not have an action plan less likely to have a forum in place (figure 13).

In our stakeholder survey we asked about perceptions of the extent to which the core infrastructure is in place. The findings confirm our earlier conclusion that many places do not have an active webpage or action plan in place.

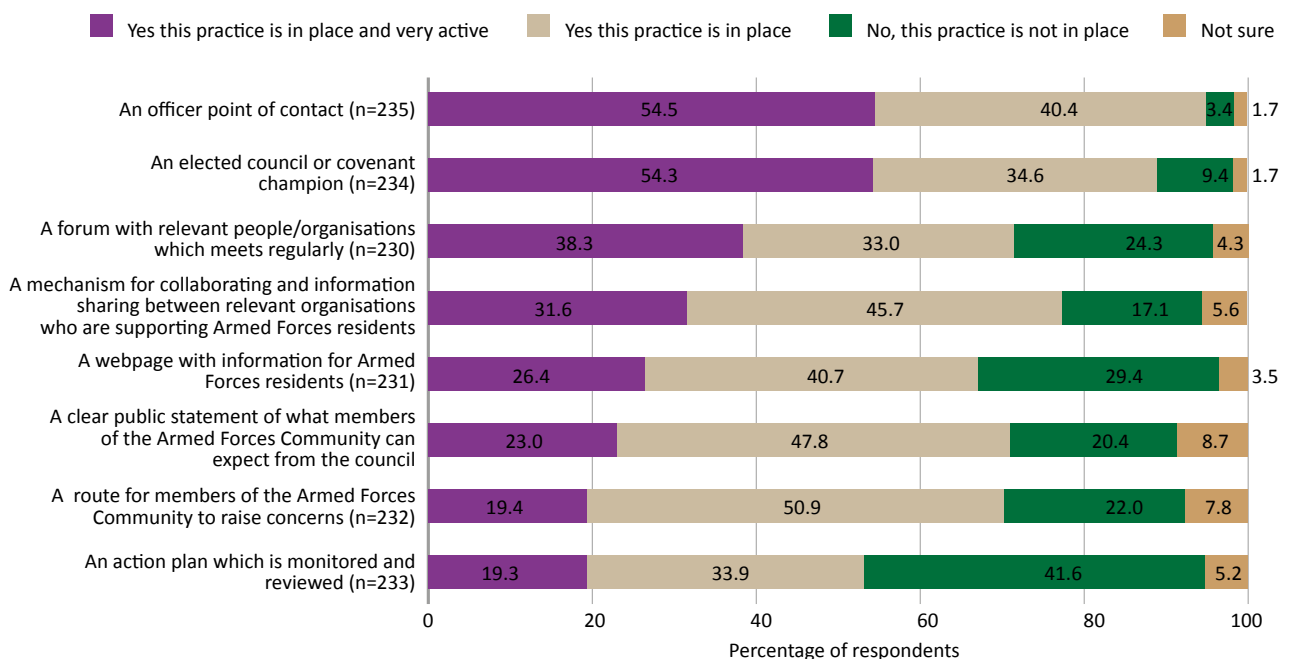
Good Practice: Oxfordshire Champions

Oxfordshire County Council (Category 2) goes further than having a single elected member military champion. In order to strengthen the level of engagement between the council and the Armed Forces, each of the five bases in Oxfordshire has a designated elected member military champion. This has the effect of strengthening the links between the Armed Forces and the council. Units therefore do not need to call up the civilian integration officer to ask any questions, and they are actively encouraged to contact the council themselves.

Champions take it upon themselves to be the link between an individual base and the county. This requires that they develop and maintain relationships with relevant officers. It also means having and maintaining presence, such as through attending events on base.

Individual relationships between champions and bases differ in terms of formality. This is down to the commitment of the champions themselves and of the relevant personnel on base. Key to the effective working of this system is enthusiasm 'on both sides of the fence'.

Figure 12: Does your council have any of the following practices in place, and if so, to what extent?



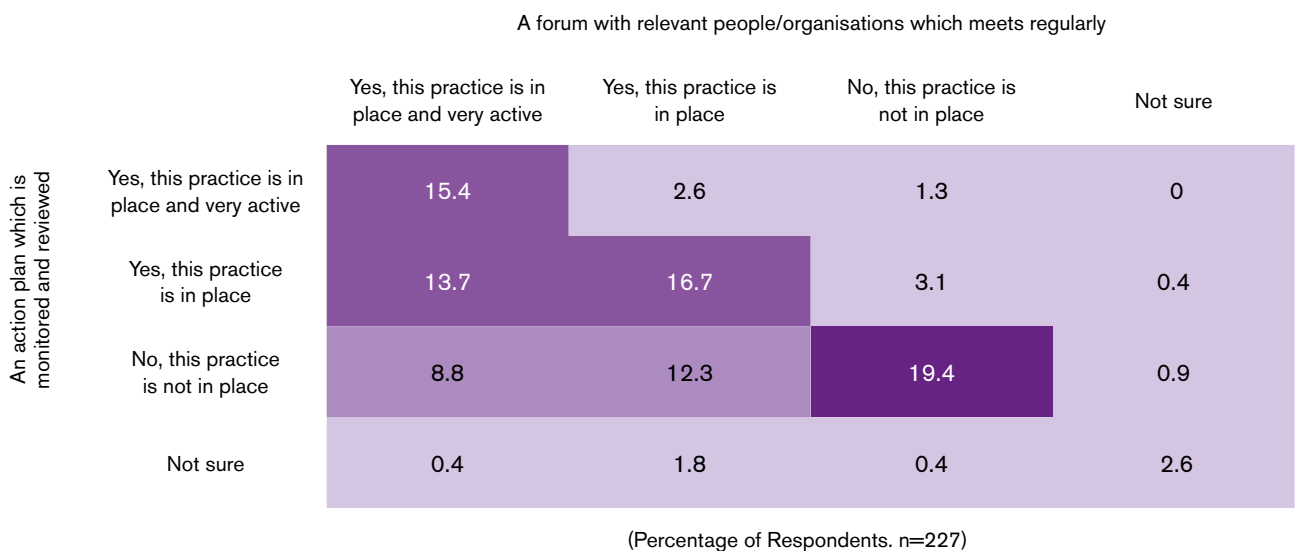
Source: Council survey



Good Practice: Local scrutiny of the delivery of the Covenant

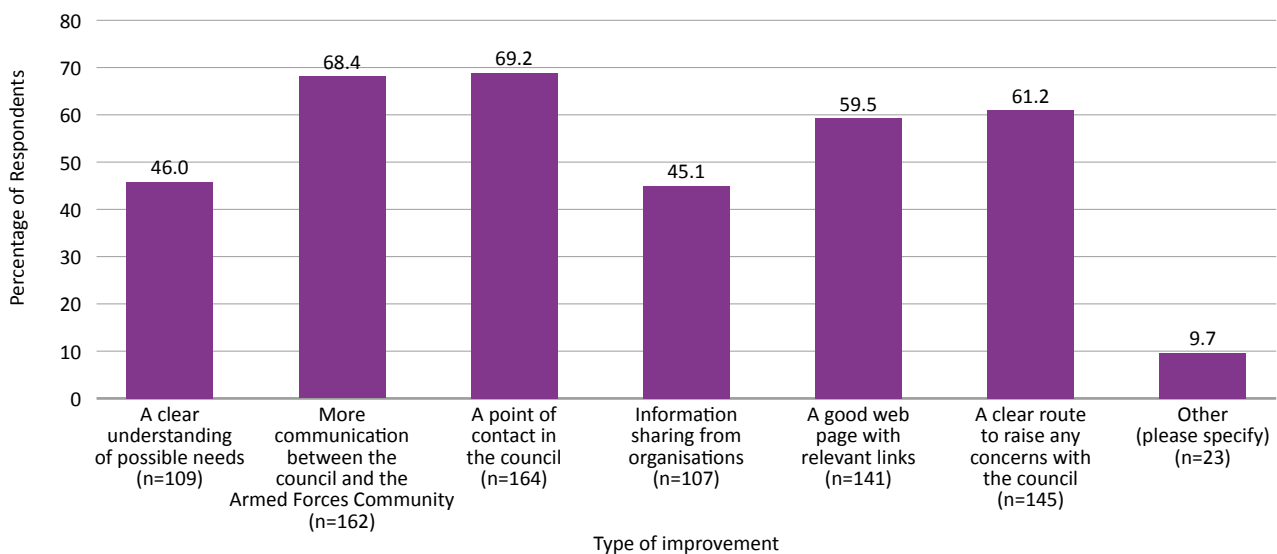
Our deep dive visit to **Surrey** (Category 3) coincided with a meeting of the county council's Resident Experience Board which was considering a report on the progress being made in the county on the implementation of the Covenant. The board is part of the county's overview and scrutiny arrangements. The board received a detailed report on the work of the county's Civilian Military Partnership Board and received oral evidence from a number of witnesses including 11 Infantry Brigade Transition Officer, the Civil Military Engagement Officer, SSAFA, the Armed Forces Champion for Woking Borough Council and county council officers.

Figure 13: Councils with an action plan vs. councils with a forum



Source: Council survey

Figure 14: Are there any actions which could be taken at a local level which would make you feel more supported, and if so what? (n=237)



Source: Armed Forces Community survey

We also tested whether the extent to which a council has the core infrastructure in place is affected by the type of Armed Forces population in the council area. Councils with no significant Armed Forces Community presence are less likely to have any of the core infrastructure in place. This is particularly evident in relation to having a forum, a web page and an action plan in place.

Our surveys of the Armed Forces Community and stakeholders explored what more could be done locally to improve the delivery of the Covenant (figure 14). Members of the Armed Forces Community were particularly concerned about communication and accessing information and support. Specifically, respondents thought that there should be more communication between the council and Armed Forces (68.4 per cent) and a dedicated point of contact within councils. In line with this, the next two most common responses were 'a clear route to raise any concerns with the council' (61.2 per cent) and 'a good web page with relevant links' (59.5 per cent).

Stakeholders were most likely to indicate that councils should have a web page with relevant links as a way of better ensuring the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly (figure 15). Members of the Armed Forces Community were more likely than stakeholders to think that there should be more communication between the council and

themselves and a point of contact for the Armed Forces Community within the council. Stakeholders were more likely to select 'a clear understanding of possible needs'; 'information sharing between organisations' and 'a good web page with relevant links'.

We have reviewed our suggested core infrastructure in the light of the survey results and initial deep dives. We have also tested this revised version out in the second round of deep dives, discussion at the event for London Boroughs and the London workshop.

The discussion focused on three aspects: the forum, the action plan and the web presence. We explore each of these issues in turn below.

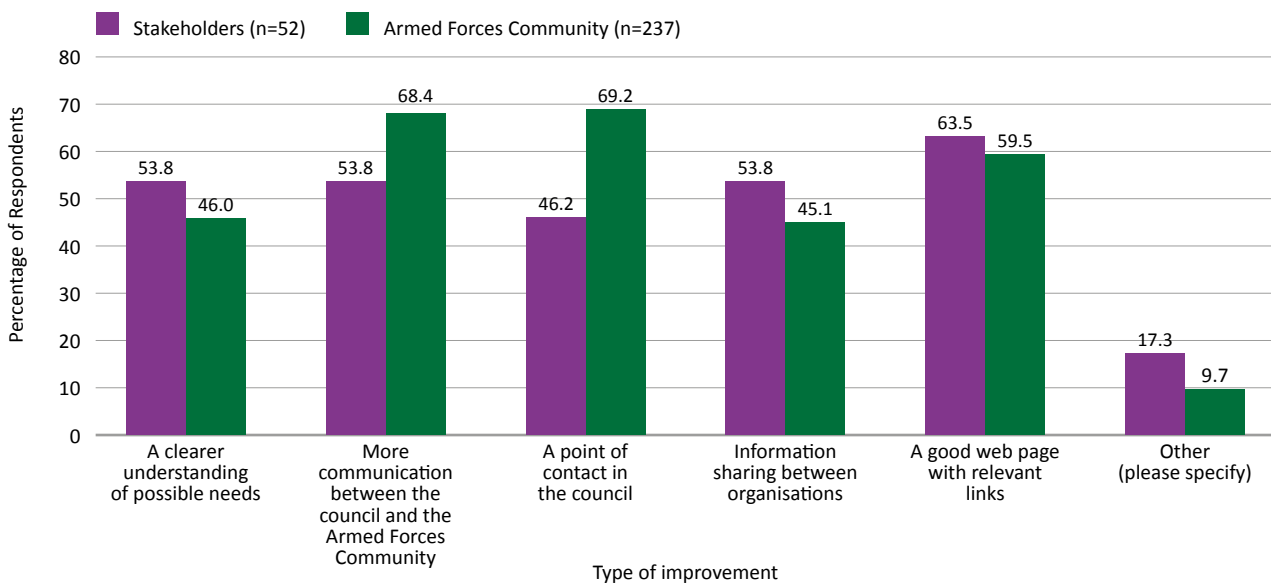
One dimension which spanned all three topics is the scope for collaboration on Covenant issues between neighbouring councils.

A forum

The original version of the core infrastructure envisages the existence of an outward facing forum which meets regularly. Some people have questioned the necessity for this. Others have pointed to examples of forums getting too big and/or losing their focus.

In our visits to North Yorkshire and Caerphilly we observed forum meetings. In both cases they

Figure 15: From your experience with councils, are there any actions which could be taken at a local level which might better ensure the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly?



Source: Stakeholder survey and Armed Forces Community survey



fulfilled an important function in reviewing progress, initiating action and, perhaps most importantly of all, identifying issues that require attention. In Staffordshire, at the time of our visit, the forum was being refreshed in terms of both its membership and frequency of meetings.

Our further research has reinforced our view that an outward facing forum is critical to effective local delivery of the Covenant. We also recommend that each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years.

We are aware, however, of the financial pressures facing local councils and the implications of this for the people resource available to support forums such as this. This coincides with increased collaboration

between neighbouring councils on a wide range of issues from shared back offices to public service reform and economic growth. In some areas, this has culminated in the establishment of combined authorities and the negotiation of devolution agreements with government.

In our London workshop there was an appetite to establish Covenant Forums at a sub-regional level. This was seen as providing a way to pool scarce resources, develop joint bids for the Covenant Fund, support a more comprehensive web presence and enable the development of joint publicity campaigns.

We recommend that collaboration of this type should be encouraged and that it may be appropriate in other

Table 4: Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An elected member champion An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Covenant Forum or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year. It includes the following: military representatives; military charities; public sector representatives; effective council members (senior elected members on cabinet); and the officer champion. Each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years. In some places (for example London) councils and their partners may wish to establish a mechanism for collaboration at a sub-regional level. This could include: joint forums and action plans, applications for the Covenant fund, training packages and a shared web presence.
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A web page or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces Community. A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the council A route through which concerns can be raised Training of frontline staff A vehicle for reporting action and achievements such as an annual report, newsletter or forum minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An action planning process that is proportionate to local needs and circumstances. For example, an action plan, a time line, or minutes with recorded actions. Policy reviews Enthusiasm and commitment

areas, including those with combined authorities and/or groups of neighbouring small unitary councils.

We are also aware of the existence of specialist forums at a local level. In North Yorkshire, for example, there is a Schools Service Families Strategy Group which acts as a forum to enable effective delivery of the Covenant in relation to education.

Finally, one of our interviewees queried whether the council should necessarily assume responsibility for supporting the forum: it may make sense for an Armed Forces charity or MoD official to do so. On the basis of our research we believe that it is essential that the council is an active participant in the forum and is appropriately represented on it. The council also has an important role in making sure that a forum is in place, but it need not chair it or provide the secretariat for it.

An action plan

The original version of the core infrastructure refers to the existence of an action plan which leads to action and is monitored and reviewed. This aspect of the core infrastructure has also been questioned.

At our London workshop participants queried whether individual boroughs have the capacity to maintain an action plan, but felt that it may be appropriate and feasible at a sub-regional level. We also found that:

- The forum in Caerphilly uses a timeline to monitor and plan activity and the forum agenda fulfils a similar function in North Yorkshire;

- In Staffordshire following a recent workshop the Covenant action plan has been slimmed down from almost twenty pages to just three;
- In York an action plan has recently been developed to help focus the forum's work.

In the light of our recent research *we recommend* that a mechanism for planning and recording action is an essential element of the core infrastructure but that different action planning and monitoring tools may be appropriate in different circumstances.

A web presence

In our initial core infrastructure, we suggest a feature should be a web page with key information on the delivery of the Covenant locally and links to relevant organisations and resources. It is significant, however, that none of the places we visited for this further research considers that the web presence for the Covenant in their area is particularly good. At the London workshop, web presence was identified as a possible activity for collaboration at the sub-regional level and there was a strong appetite for good practice on web content including common FAQs, guidance on content and potentially a template.

One issue which has emerged in our latest research is the possible role of the HIVE in providing a web presence on Covenant issues. There is a physical HIVE presence on Army bases in 55 locations, 39 of which are in the UK. Each has a HIVE Blog, for example the London HIVE blog site, which

London Borough workshop: *an overview*

The workshop held by London Councils was attended by 15 London Boroughs. Key discussions focused on the challenges they faced and the opportunities to address them. It also highlighted some good practice from across the capital. The workshop identified some important issues which build upon those found during the deep dives. These are explained in more detail below.

- **Assessing need:** London Boroughs are finding it difficult to understand the picture of the Veteran population and their specific needs. It was suggested that as well as national efforts, sub-regional work would help improve boroughs' knowledge of Veterans.
- **Core infrastructure:**
 - Producing action plans is difficult without addressing the issue of understanding need. It was agreed that they are an important tool for aiding communication.
 - It is difficult for frontline staff to be trained, but there is an opportunity to embed training in inductions and make more use of AF charities' support offers.
 - Councils were in support of sub-regional forums which will enable resources to be pooled in order to develop joint bids for the Covenant Fund, partake in joint projects, offer joint training, etc.
 - A template website would be useful but London Boroughs were keen to ensure the AFC be reflected in the relevant service delivery pages as well.

have good readership and an increasing email membership. The blogs provide a web presence for the catchment area covering the base or bases with a wide range of information. They provide information about local activity, support, advice and signpost to services. There are similar vehicles serving Royal Navy and Royal Air Force bases, but these are yet to develop a web presence.

We understand that the HIVE is seen as a valuable source of information and advice by serving personnel and their families who progress through their military careers regarding it as a first port of call. Due to this, it is also used by Veterans when possible. Given the scale and scope of the HIVE and the fact that members of the Armed Forces Community are familiar with it, especially within the Army, in areas where it exists there may be value in it becoming the core web presence which promotes local Covenant activity. Local authority sites could provide links to it rather than aiming to duplicate or compete with it.

An updated version of the core infrastructure amended to reflect our latest findings is set out in table 4. *We recommend* that a core infrastructure is adopted by councils seeking to successfully implement the Covenant at a local level.

Delivery mechanisms

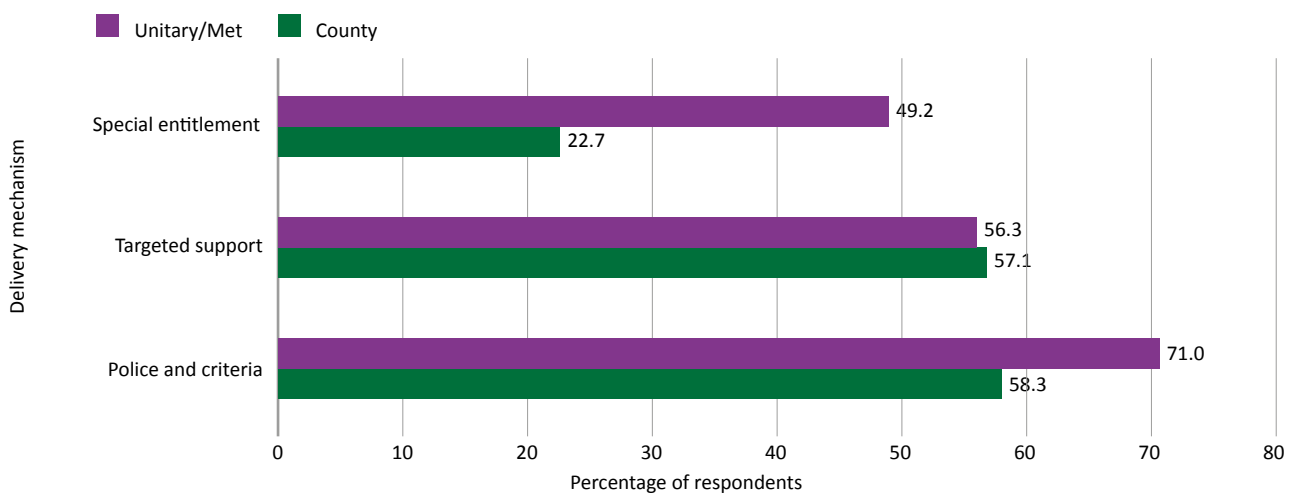
We asked councils about the extent to which the Covenant is reflected in the following delivery mechanisms: policies and criteria, targeted support and special entitlements in relation to housing, education, adult social care and public health.

We have been mindful of the fact that different council types have different functions. Unitary and metropolitan councils deal with all of the above service delivery areas. County councils deal with adult social care, education and public health and district councils deal with housing and leisure. We have therefore only used the relevant council type dependent on the type of service area being analysed. It is also important to note that the total number of responses from county councils was comparatively low (at 25 per cent) which should be taken into account in interpreting some of our findings.

The Covenant is most likely to be reflected in policies and criteria rather than targeted support and special entitlement. Over 7 in 10 councils say that their policies reflect the Covenant, varying slightly by service area, whereas this reduces to around 6 in 10 councils which say they offer targeted support, and around half offering special entitlement. This is also confirmed in the stakeholder survey where the largest percentage of respondents identified that some or all councils have policies and criteria in place.

A large number of councils report that they have adopted policies and criteria in relation to social care to reflect the Covenant – 71 per cent of unitary councils and 58 per cent of county councils (figure 16). However, this is significantly lower than the percentage of councils which report that they have done so in relation to housing (figure 17). We suspect that some older members of the AFC may not be as likely to be faced with disadvantage as a result of their service for adult social care issues

Figure 16: Adult social care delivery



Source: Council survey



in comparison to other issues faced by the AFC, such as housing. Adult social care issues that older veterans are faced with are often not linked with their AF service, rather their age. In these cases, older Veterans can be in an advantageous position as military charities offer a range of additional support services. We have no evidence in relation to the demand from Veterans for other support from social services departments.

Our different sources of evidence have produced a mixed picture in relation to housing. On the one hand, our survey of members of the Armed Forces Community identified housing as the fourth priority area, below employment, physical health and education. On the other hand, in our deep dive discussions with council officers, charities, members of the Armed Forces and Veterans, housing was consistently raised as one of the key areas to which the Covenant can add value. This explains the fact that housing is the public service area on which councils say they offer the most support to the Armed Forces Community. The Covenant is reflected in over 90 per cent of both district and unitary councils' housing policies, and over 70 per cent of councils say they offer targeted support and special entitlement.

Local context

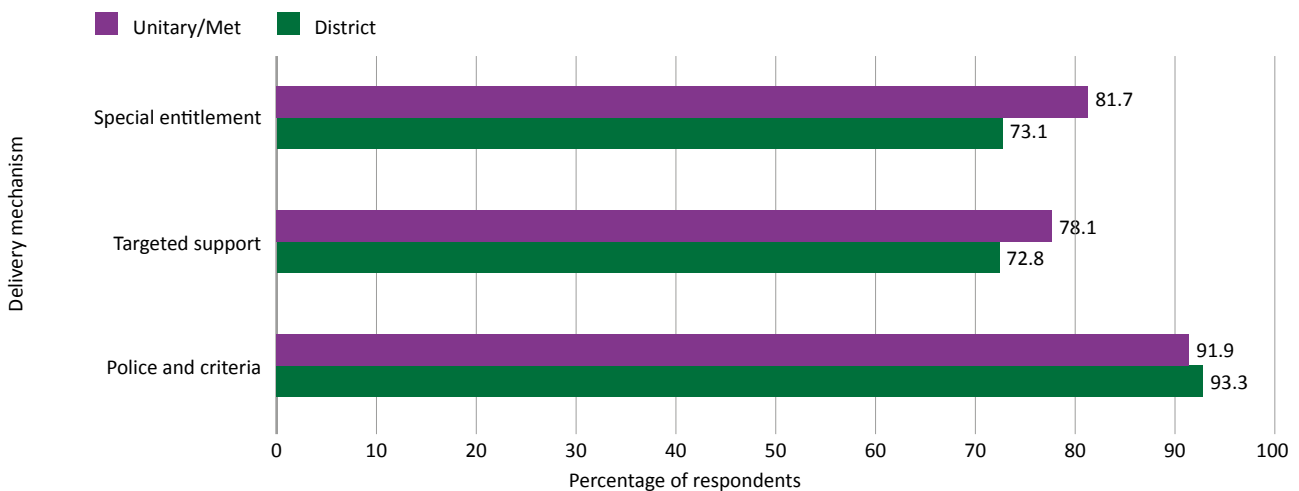
One theme that has emerged strongly from our deep dives is the impact of the nature and scale of the Armed Forces Community presence in an area on a council's understanding of the Armed Forces, and

the opportunities and challenges that arise from that presence. This has implications for the level of activity that is likely to flow from the Covenant and the nature of the arrangements that need to be put in place to manage it. We have developed a typology of places which may be helpful in thinking about what is likely to be appropriate in different circumstances. The typology is set out in table 5.

This typology is intended to reflect the different circumstances, opportunities and challenges that councils face in delivering the Covenant in different places. The importance of meeting the expectations that flow from the Covenant applies everywhere, but the context in which councils are seeking to do this varies significantly and we hope that this approach will help to establish a shared understanding of this complex picture.

In our deep dives we have found that the relationships between local councils, their partners and the Armed Forces Community work best in places that match our categories 1 and 4. In these places serving members of the Armed Forces, former members and their families are part of the community. Good relationships are "how things are done round here" and there is a good understanding of the actions required to deliver the words and spirit of the Covenant. There is often a proactive approach to meeting the needs of Veterans in challenging circumstances. Action is aided by the fact that there is often a significant presence of Veterans on the council and among its staff.

Figure 17: Housing delivery



Source: Council survey



This is often the position in our second category, but in some cases these places and those in our third category face a challenge in establishing a shared understanding of the most appropriate arrangements. We have, for example, identified one place in these circumstances where the main co-ordinating body now meets annually, which can lead to a lack of momentum and create problems when senior people change role mid-year. In another place members of the Armed Forces Community are concerned that the arrangements are too elaborate and time-consuming.

It is clear from our work that delivering the Covenant and local pledges that flow from it is most challenging in places meeting our third and fifth categories. In these places an understanding of the Armed Forces is not “in the blood stream” and the paucity of information means that it is difficult to do more than adopt a reactive approach to the needs of Veterans. There is considerable potential for councils in these circumstances to work together in order to develop approaches to delivering the Covenant that meet their particular needs and circumstances.

The section below on locally delivered public services identifies areas of good practice from each of these five categories.

The existence of a co-ordinating body is a crucial element of our proposed core infrastructure. It is essential that this body operates in a way that reflects the place’s position on our spectrum. It is also important to distinguish between the task involved in developing or improving the infrastructure needed to deliver the Covenant and what is required to operate that infrastructure once it is in place. On the basis of our research *we recommend* that to be effective a Covenant co-ordinating group:

- Meets at least twice a year;
- Regularly reviews how it works, including frequency of meetings and any sub-groups;
- Evolves in term of its membership to reflect energy and interest.

Table 5: Typology of places

1. Major Armed Forces Community presence	2. Significant Armed Forces Community presence	3. Modest Armed Forces Community presence	4. Significant known presence of Veterans	5. Minimal known Armed Forces Community presence
The Armed Forces Community is a very important presence in the area. Many of these places have a major serving and Veteran community. For example, Wiltshire, Moray and Plymouth.	The Armed Forces Community is a significant presence in the area. Many of these places have a significant serving and Veteran community. For example, Cornwall, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.	There is a smaller but nonetheless important Armed Forces Community presence.	Often important areas from which members of the Armed Forces are recruited and to which many resettle. There is little if any serving presence in these places. For example, Wigan and Glasgow.	Places where the only presence comprises Reservists and a Veteran population of unknown size.

Good Practice: Proportionality in Bradford

Bradford is a good example of a category 4 area which successfully addressed the proportionality issue within its diverse locality. Bradford identified the importance of keeping the different communities in balance by implementing the Covenant carefully. The council engages people from different communities by identifying similarities rather than differences and uses Armed Forces events as a chance to celebrate every community and their impact on the Armed Forces, and vice versa. This has led to Bradford being able to reach out to the harder to reach groups in the community.



LOCALLY DELIVERED PUBLIC SERVICES

In this section we set out our findings, primarily from our deep dives, on action being taken in relation to the key locally delivered public services, to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The examples in this section are drawn from our deep dive research. We are aware that there is a lot of activity in other areas, including action by NHS England and Clinical Commissioning Groups, all of which is contributing to the delivery of the Covenant.

Housing

Housing is an area in which many members of the Armed Forces Community perceive that they experience disadvantage compared with other people, particularly at the point of resettlement. Housing can be critical in meeting the needs of Veterans who face challenging circumstances. As noted earlier it is the policy area in which most councils say they have adjusted their policies to reflect the Covenant and statutory guidance, but it is also an area in which there can be a significant mismatch in expectations about what the Covenant can deliver.

This section:

- Describes the context in which this aspect of the Covenant is being delivered at a local level;
- Highlights features of the delivery of housing at a local level that are relevant to an understanding of how the Covenant is delivered;
- Sets out the core response it is reasonable to expect from councils in relation to housing and the Covenant;

- Highlights a number of examples of good practice;
- Recommends some top tips;
- Explains how a number of our recommendations could enable more effective action on the housing needs of the Armed Forces Community.

The context

Housing is a public service under pressure, in terms of the availability of social housing, the quality of the privately rented sector and the ability of people to afford to buy their own homes. These pressures are often very acute in areas with a major or significant Armed Forces presence and in which members of the Armed Forces Community wish to stay when they leave service.

Housing is also an area about which many members of the Armed Forces Community have a poor understanding of the realities of civilian life. We have heard numerous examples of members of the Armed Forces Community thinking that the Covenant gives them an instant right to a council house.

Good Practice: District Council and the Covenant in Surrey

There are 11 district and borough councils in **Surrey** (Category 3) which means that joint working between the county, districts and boroughs is particularly important. One feature of the joint arrangements is that each district council is encouraged to have its own Armed Forces Champion. A standard role description has been produced for the champions, the core element of which is to raise the profile of the Armed Forces Community within the council and the community. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of champions being kept informed of all relevant developments through the Surrey Leaders representative who sits on the Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board. The role description also notes that some Armed Forces experience would be an advantage.

Housing Top Tips

- In areas with county and district councils the district councils can develop a single shared approach to reflecting the Covenant in their policies and to the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community.
- Councils can work with the RSLs in their area to agree a shared protocol on how to meet the needs of families leaving the Armed Forces and Veterans.



We have heard even more examples of members of that community having inflated expectations of the affordability and quality of housing.

An important role for council housing teams is to provide advice and support to households leaving the Armed Forces. Their ability to do so effectively depends on them receiving as much notice as possible of people leaving service and of their housing needs and aspirations. As we explain

in a later section, adequate notice is not always provided and the task is particularly challenging in circumstances where a family or household is seeking to settle in another part of the country or where the housing need is a result of a divorce or separation.

We have also heard evidence of the difficulties facing some Veterans who get caught in a catch 22 situation requiring a job in order to obtain housing and vice versa.

Housing Good Practice

In **Plymouth** (Category 1) ex-Armed Forces personnel with medical conditions caused by their service are automatically given priority. The council is keen to promote and strengthen its ties with the Armed Forces Community in the city and is involved in a cross sector self-build project. Twenty-four affordable homes will be built as part of the Nelson project on the former site of a day centre, with twelve designated for ex Armed Forces. Armed Forces charities were approached early on in the project to try and identify vulnerable ex-Service personnel who might need housing. There is also a similar project underway in **Wrexham**.

In **Glasgow** (Category 4) where the city no longer owns any social housing the city's Veterans' hub Helping Heroes has a housing expert post which is funded by Glasgow Housing Association, the city's largest RSL. Those we interviewed in Glasgow identified housing as the greatest pressure on the Armed Forces Community in Glasgow and having a professional directly employed by the city's largest RSL means that the steps which many have to go through in order to get to the right advice are significantly reduced. More detail on Helping Heroes can be found in the 'Other Support for Veterans' section.

In **Wigan** (Category 4) where the council employs a key worker for ex-Service personnel and their families the key worker is able to navigate a public services landscape which can be overwhelming for ex-Service personnel who are not used to a sometimes confusing landscape of public services. Veterans in Wigan with medical need related to service are given priority on the housing waiting list and spouses going through divorce will also be given priority.

Wigan and Leigh Housing is an arm's length management organisation which owns the majority of social housing in the borough. Application forms now include the question, "If you or your partner are serving or have formerly served in the Armed Forces, please provide details of your service number". Housing officers were also being made aware of issues for those in the Armed Forces and the Armed Forces Key Worker maintained a direct relationship with many public facing housing officers, though knowledge about the Covenant and Armed Forces issues could be patchy because of staff turnover.

Wigan have also mapped all of the charities in the borough according to organisation, branch and then skillset or capacity of each charity and branch. Combined with a well networked Armed Forces Key Worker, this means that though they often respond to need in an ad hoc way, this is done effectively and quickly so that if for instance housing is provided without furniture the Armed Forces Key Worker can refer to his charities map to understand where he might be able to arrange for some furniture.

Wakefield (Category 5) has an effective system in place which offers a joined up approach to housing. Senior management from Wakefield District Housing (WDH), the main housing association in the district, sits on Covenant board meetings which is an effective communication method between WDH and the council. Information from these meetings gets filtered down to the appropriate team in WDH. Mechanisms are in place for information to be fed upwards from ground level, as public facing staff are aware of the Covenant. This is also a place where their links with the military and military charities are strengthened – the military know who to get in touch with in WDH, as do military charities and vice versa. This is especially useful if the member of the Armed Forces Community is facing other challenges as well. It is a system which works well due to their collective positivity and commitment to working together.



Delivery issues

It is important to be aware that in areas with district and county councils housing is the responsibility of district councils. In some areas district councils see the Covenant as being “a county council thing”. And in some counties different districts have adopted different approaches to reflecting the Covenant in their housing policies. This can add to the confusion that members of the Armed Forces Community face when they are considering their housing options as part of the transition and resettlement process.

The delivery challenge is further compounded by the fact that many councils have transferred their housing stock to either an arm’s length management organisation (ALMO) or to one or more housing associations. In many places there is a large number of registered social landlords (RSLs) each of which may treat Veterans in different ways.

The core response

Legally, councils must give reasonable preference to various categories of people who apply for social housing. Applicants could be placed in the reasonable preference category due to, for example, housing condition, health, or a welfare situation, all in light of local circumstances. Following the implementation of the Covenant, the core legal requirement for councils is that additional preference must be given to certain members of the Armed Forces Community⁵ who come within the reasonable preference category and who have urgent housing needs. Furthermore, in order to be able to apply for social housing, some councils require citizens to pass a local connection test which proves that citizen has links to that council area. Councils must disregard the local connection rule when considering applications from serving members, or Veterans who have been out of the military for 5 years or less, bereaved spouses, and existing or former reservists suffering from injury, illness or disability attributable to their service. It is important to note, however, that these requirements do not cover divorced and separated Armed Forces spouses.

In addition to this core response many councils take other steps to help members of the Armed Forces Community with their housing need, including divorced and separated spouses who are potentially vulnerable. Some examples we have discovered through our deep dives are set out on page 28.

Schools and Children’s Services

Children of serving members of the Armed Forces may face disadvantage compared with other citizens in relation to schooling. This is particularly significant in school admissions for the children of Service personnel who are regularly resettled, but also in the provision of the additional support services to children who are affected by a parent serving in the Armed Forces.

This section:

- Describes the context in which this aspect of the Covenant is being delivered at a local level;
- Highlights features of the delivery of schooling and children’s services at a local level which are relevant to an understanding of how the Covenant is delivered;
- Sets out the core response it is reasonable to expect from councils in relation to Schools and Children’s Services and the Covenant;
- Highlights a number of examples of good practice;
- Recommends some top tips;
- Explains how a number of our recommendations could enable more effective action on the children’s services needs of the Armed Forces Community.

The context

In many areas across the UK, school allocation is an area that is under pressure as often there are long waiting lists for the allocation of school places. This is especially the case for children who are going into reception.

Service families are typically quite mobile throughout the country (and abroad), and thus often have

⁵ From The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012. This includes the following:

- former members of the Armed Forces
- serving members of the Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
- bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service



short periods in a new location. In this situation, disadvantage is likely to occur when applying for school places for their children, as more often than not, the postcode of the new address is not available until the move date is near, therefore they will miss school admission deadlines. This is an issue we heard about during our deep dives in areas with a major and significant serving Armed Forces presence. Service families also can also face a challenge in having children with Special Educational Needs assessed on arrival in a new location.

Our deep dives have identified the fact that in some areas there is an expectation that councils will accept the children of serving members into any school regardless of local circumstances. This is particularly difficult in areas which have long waiting lists for school places and seems to be a further area where there is a lack of understanding of the realities of civilian life.

Service personnel's children might also require additional support from their school to help them deal with a parent being away from home for long periods of time, sometimes in conflict situations. Children describe this period as being particularly stressful, and having someone to talk to who understands these stresses would be helpful.

Children in some Service families may be considered more vulnerable than the general population because of the pressures they face, including PTSD.

Delivery issues

In areas with both district and county councils, education is a county council function. Most councils deliver well when they acknowledge this issue in policy, by making an allowance for families by, for example, accepting the base postcode.

Our deep dives have also identified the need to have staff members who understand the difficulties Service children face in dealing with having a parent away from home for long periods of time and in potentially

dangerous situations. We have also found that some schools have collaborated in order to provide the necessary services for these children.

In many of the places we visited, council officers with a good understanding of the needs of Armed Forces families and the circumstances in which they move can help the family and schools come to an acceptable solution when potential difficulties emerge. In some places the move towards academies and free schools is seen as a problem, but we have seen examples of councils developing protocols for accommodating Service families which all schools have been willing to adopt. This co-ordinating role is likely to become more important as the number of academies increases. In some places – in our categories 1 and 2 – there are schools with large numbers of Service children who are used to accommodating them and dealing with the consequences of their families being moved at short notice. Challenges are more likely to arise with schools with smaller numbers of Service children.

Delivery issues vary across countries as the education systems in England and Scotland differ. Children are classified differently in terms of school year in Scotland, which was identified as an issue for English Service families relocating to Moray (see Good Practice box). Furthermore, English qualifications are not always recognised in Scotland, and this is true of education qualifications. Some councils have altered this to allow military spouses who are qualified teachers in England to continue teaching in Scotland.

The core response

The national deadline for secondary school applications is usually at the end of October for the following year (places are offered in March), and in January for primary school applications (places are offered in April).⁶ In England the school admissions code (2014) states that admission authorities must

Children's services Top Tips

- In every school, but particularly those with a high number of serving parents, members of staff are aware of the stresses children might be under and can recognise and respond to signs children might be having difficulty coping.
- If there is more than one child of a serving parent in a school, creating links between these children will mean they will benefit from being around other children who understand their situation.

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389388/School_Admissions_Code_2014_-_19_Dec.pdf (p.21)



allocate a school place in advance of resettlement providing they have received an official letter that states the date of relocation and a Unit post code. It also states that the Council must commit to removing disadvantage for Service children, as appropriate for the area. Scotland and Wales have their own codes, although the latter is very close to the English code.

Infant class size must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single teacher, but additional children may be admitted under exceptional circumstances, which includes the children of UK Service personnel admitted outside the normal admissions round.⁷

Schools in England with Armed Forces children between reception to year 11 receive Service Pupil Premium funding for each child.

Children's services Good Practice

Wiltshire (Category 1) has an active relationship between the council and bases which has enabled a more joined up approach to the delivery of the Covenant. Bases make Wiltshire council aware of possible future admissions so that schools can make sufficient preparation. This has been vital in the Army rebasing programme where 4,000 Army personnel and their families (a further 3,200 people) will be redeployed from Germany to Wiltshire by 2020. Wiltshire has plans to implement a pen pal programme for children in Germany who will be moving to Wiltshire with the aim to make their transition smoother.

Plymouth (Category 1) is a Navy city with an estimated 7-9 per cent of school children having a Serving parent. Plymouth has created an innovative programme called MKC Heroes (Military Kids Club – formerly known as HMS Heroes). This is a national support group led by children of Serving personnel and Veterans, that can be joined by any school or setting. In each member school or setting, children of Serving personnel/Veterans can attend a discussion group to share their experiences (sometimes difficult ones) with their peers, who understand and are likely sharing similar concerns or experiences. It is also a chance for these children to get to know other children of all ages in a similar position to them. Across Plymouth there are approximately 3000 children from Service families enrolled, along with a significant number of Veterans children across pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools. Plymouth facilitates a termly meeting of MKC delegate young people (x 6 yearly) for the sharing of good practice and comradeship. MKC Heroes has now been exported to across the United Kingdom and overseas with 130 schools and settings participating currently.

The success of MKC Heroes highlights the importance of listening to and involving children and young people. MKC Heroes is represented on Plymouth's Community Covenant board and within the Plymouth Youth Council. The Community Covenant also supports the MKC Heroes Military Kids Choir. Getting to know issues that children are experiencing themselves is a good way to understand the issues which they and their families may be facing.

Wiltshire (Category 1) Children's services team has recognised the difficulties that Service families may face in accessing family social services when moving to a new council area which does not have experience in dealing with Armed Forces families. There is a danger that such families may face problems which go unaddressed in a new area, so social workers from Wiltshire visit families to do follow up visits and liaise with other social work departments. The team have regular telephone reviews with Social Work colleagues in British Forces Social Work Service to discuss families transferring to Wiltshire to ensure that cases are handed over safely. Locally there are good working relationships with the Army Welfare Service and Welfare Officers in units.

A community organisation in **Bradford** (Category 4-5), SHAPE UK provides activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Activities include sport and health activities, as well as basic vocational skills. The organisation employs a team of Veterans and Reservists and has good connections with the local brigade. The IMPACT project was started by the Director of SHAPE UK, himself a Veteran, and sets out to create a link through heritage to identify commonalities within the diverse communities in Bradford. As part of the IMPACT project visits to two local schools were conducted to help show not only what the Armed Forces has done for Bradford, but what Bradford has done for the Armed Forces.

⁷ Ibid. (p. 25-26)



Children's services Good Practice

Moray (Category 1) Council perceived that different legislation between the home nations has created disadvantage for the families of those coming to Moray from across the border. In partnership with the General Teaching Council of Scotland, the council introduced a pilot scheme to allow conditional registration for English teachers. This allowed them to work as teachers immediately whilst they gained the qualifications required of the Scottish system. This successful pilot scheme now applies to all teachers crossing the border, but an awareness of the issue stemmed from the council's attention to the Armed Forces Community present in Moray.

The council is currently working on a programme which will help to inform parents of the difference in education systems. The council is seeking to convey that in practice a child moving from year 1 in England, to P2 in Scotland will be moving horizontally to a class of their age peers. This was important to the council in Moray that not only did children receive the correct level of classroom education, but also that they were more likely to integrate socially with children of their own age.

The changes taking place within the Army, including the withdrawal of troops from Germany, contributed to more than 2,000 Service children either leaving or joining schools and settings in **North Yorkshire** (category 1) in 2015.⁸ Currently, there are over 3,000 Service pupils in North Yorkshire's maintained schools. North Yorkshire County Council offers a range of services which seek to reduce the disadvantage that service children may face due to their lifestyle and provide personal, social and emotional support to ensure their full integration in both military and civil society.

Two Service Pupils' Champions work with children, their families, the military and the council to raise the positive profile of service children in schools. The MoD funded service bridges military and civil society by promoting the positives of both. They offer training and advice to schools in order to fully equip them with effectively managing the school career of a service child, as well as support to families. They make good use of social media to both raise their profile and as a way to speak and listen to the many military families who use social media. This service also promotes and coordinates the North Yorkshire Military Kids' Club Heroes – an initiative which was discovered following the Plymouth deep dive. This work feeds into the Service Families' Strategy Group, a group of school leaders and council officers and other professionals which discuss any issues and share good practice.

North Yorkshire County Council commissions a comprehensive biennial health and wellbeing survey of school children (who are in Years 2, 6, 8 and 10) within which they ask if the child's parent is currently serving in the Armed Forces. This allows separate reports to be generated for children of Forces families so that their results can be compared with all pupils. The most recent survey shows that service children are less likely to feel anxious than previous years. The survey is a good way to identify any issues that military children may be facing in comparison to the wider population. It is a good example of being innovative about using other ways to assess the need of a population and be proactive rather than reactive. Having this data is useful as it can link with the Service Pupils' Champions' role and tailor any improvement projects to tackle any needs that were identified in the survey.

North Yorkshire County Council also recently commissioned a drama company to research what it is like to be a military child in North Yorkshire. They then created a drama production from the findings to support pupil transition called "*Wherever Home Is*". This then toured North Yorkshire schools enabling all members of the community to further understand the differences between being a civilian child and a military child, and has since toured other areas across the UK.

Employment

Employment is the area where the highest percentage (28 per cent) of respondents to the Armed Forces Community survey have identified themselves as having specific needs.

There are two groups within the Armed Forces Community that might face disadvantage in employment in comparison to other citizens: the spouses and partners of serving members of the Armed Forces, and Veterans.

The main issues

The spouses of Armed Forces members often face difficulties in getting employment due to frequent relocations. Additionally, many spouses find it difficult to manage a job as many do not offer the required flexibility, especially when a partner is away for long periods of time and they have children to care for. Councils and businesses have a role to play in recognising these difficulties.

⁸ <https://www.lgcpplus.com/services/children/how-north-yorkshire-supports-the-children-of-europes-largest-garrison/7014609.article>



Employment Top Tips

- Military, councils and businesses to work together to help equip Veterans and spouses with skills that are in short supply.

Employment Good Practice

Plymouth (Category 1) holds an employment fair which is attended by businesses, charities, the council and other local organisations as well as members of the Armed Forces Community. This enables those members of the Armed Forces Community who are looking for employment, including those facing employment difficulties to get a job by talking to employers looking to recruit. Alternatively, it is a chance to boost awareness on how to get a job, and offers opportunities such as job shadowing, CV writing, and mock interviews. Charities such as the Royal British Legion and Combat Stress attend to offer further support to those who might need help in other areas.

Plymouth also has a Corporate Covenant Group which is fed into the Community Covenant Group. This is a chance to get local businesses together to talk about the disadvantages that members of the Armed Forces Community, including Veterans are facing in their area and work towards addressing those disadvantages identified.

Wiltshire (Category 1) Council and Swindon Borough Council jointly manage an initiative called Higher Futures, which was developed by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) with involvement of the military.⁹ This seeks to equip Veterans and Reservists with the necessary higher level skills (NVQ Level 4, HND/Degree and above) in business sectors which currently experience shortages in qualified employees. This will support military leavers and military spouses to find jobs that are commensurate with their skills and abilities. Delivery is flexible by both meeting the needs of employers and providing training to prospective employees in skills that are in short supply.

Wiltshire (Category 1) Wiltshire has developed an initiative called The Enterprise Network which is a multi-faceted programme available to residents of Wiltshire and Swindon particularly aiming to increase the number of start-up businesses and to enable the growth of small, typically home-based, businesses. One of its aims is to support women in business. It was set up with the military community in mind, as evidenced by two of the original four centres located near to the area and is therefore ideally placed to assist Service leavers or spouses who are keen to start or grow a business by offering advice on business and provides low rental office accommodation or working space.

Glasgow (Category 4) has a Veterans Employment Programme which helps Veterans resettling in Glasgow in finding employment and integrating into local communities. It supports businesses and creates new jobs for unemployed Veterans in Glasgow. This is part of the holistic support for Veterans that Glasgow offers through its Helping Heroes organisation. This is an incentivised scheme fully funded by Glasgow City Council.

Wrexham (Category 5) works with Remploy, a UK wide employment service for people with specific needs. They work with Veterans on an individual basis to help them recognise their skills and experience and how this can be transferred to a civilian job.

There is a need for businesses to understand the potential of employing former members of the Armed Forces Community. When transitioning, some Veterans struggle to cope with seeking employment and accessing any opportunities for themselves. This struggle can be heightened by mental health issues or other stressful situations which Veterans

may find themselves in. It may also reflect a lack of understanding of the nature of the jobs market in many areas.

The MoD has taken action to enable Veterans to use the qualifications they have obtained while serving when seeking employment following transition. The majority of Service training is now formally accredited

⁹ <http://www.swlep.co.uk/programmes/Swindon-and-Wiltshire-Higher-Futures>



with Civilian Awarding Bodies and against National Standards. The Armed Forces apprenticeship programme is the largest in the country and where further training is required funding is available through either the Standard or Enhanced Learning Credit Schemes. In addition, the Career Transition Partnership provides a range of services, including one-to-one guidance, CV writing and training and employment opportunities.

During our deep dive research, however, we were told that some Veterans continue to face disadvantage as some military skills and qualifications are still not recognised by businesses and therefore are not easily transferable. The key task for councils is to encourage employers to see spouses and Service leavers as an economic asset. Councils also have an important contribution to make as employers in their own right.

Economic growth and employment is a priority for councils, especially in the current English devolution negotiations in which greater local responsibility for employment support is an important feature. The economic growth and employment agenda is supported by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in many areas across England. LEPs are partnerships between the private and public sectors and were created to help determine and deliver strategic

economic priorities in a local area. There are 39 LEPs in England, each contributing to the local plan for driving local skills development and job creation. Our deep dives have identified a gap which could be filled by LEPs working with councils and the military in addressing the issues outlined above.

Additionally, businesses and organisations can sign the Covenant and make their own pledges if they wish to demonstrate their support for the Armed Forces Community. Typically, this includes supporting Reservists, and supporting the employment of Veterans and Service spouses.¹⁰ The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and Nationwide Building Society published a research project in October 2016 which focussed on the delivery of Covenant pledges by organisations who have signed the Covenant.¹¹

The MoD suggests businesses work with the Career Transition Partnership,¹² which delivers among other things a recruitment service for organisations seeking Service leavers. The MoD also suggests Corporate Covenant pledges can be fulfilled by offering guaranteed interviews to Veterans and spouses/partners if they meet the selection criteria, recognising military skills and qualifications and raising the awareness of employment opportunities for Service leavers.

Good practice: linking the Army with the local economy

Staffordshire (Category 1) has had a military presence dating back to the 1930s. In 2015 the County welcomed service personnel and families from Germany as part of the Army's re-basing Borona Programme. The 22nd Signal Regiment at MoD Stafford was joined by 16 Signal Regiment and 1 Signal Regiment. The project was successfully delivered and Staffordshire County Council worked closely and effectively with Stafford Borough Council, the MoD and its Defence Infrastructure Organisation to ensure all the appropriate services, infrastructure and support were provided including 346 homes and a new primary school. The council has developed good links with the base and is exploring innovative ways of establishing the Armed Forces presence as an important part of the county's economy and infrastructure.

In particular, the council is keen to capitalise on the presence in the area of three high tech Signals Regiments, including potential links with universities and educational institutions. The aim is to develop a technology cluster. This could involve, for example, people pursuing careers in the technology sector which include spells in the Army, in local businesses and potentially as a reservist. It could also include training provision aimed at both Army and civilian personnel. This could benefit both the Army and local businesses.

This approach seeks to take advantage of the changes that are taking place in the way the Army operates by creating a career pathway which can only work in the context of a more stable workforce. The focus on developing a core sector in the county shows how it is possible to use the skills required by the Army to shape the local economy and therefore use the Army as an economic asset. It is also a good example of enabling the transfer of technical skills necessary in the Signals regiments to the civilian workplace and vice versa.

¹⁰ A list of businesses who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-for-businesses-who-have-signed-the-armed-forces-covenant>

¹¹ <https://rusi.org/rusi-news/research-project-military-covenant-scheme-announced>

¹² <https://www.ctp.org.uk/>



Health

The context

There are a number of areas in which members of the Armed Forces Community and their families are likely to face disadvantage or need priority treatment as a result of their service.

This includes having to register for primary and community care services such as dentists, 0-5's and Health Visitor services or re-join waiting lists for health and care services if they relocate due to Service (27 per cent of families reported moving at least once in the past 12 months), or physical injury resulting from their Service.¹³ Members of the Armed Forces Community might also have specific mental health needs, including drug and alcohol issues as a result of or exacerbated by their service, and the prevalence of common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. The Mental Health 5 Year Forward View highlights that currently only half of Veterans experiencing mental health issues seek treatment from the NHS. In addition, older Veterans face the same challenges as other ageing members of society.

The focus of this research is primarily on the role of councils in delivering the Covenant locally. Unitary and county councils are statutorily responsible for adult social care and public health, and are increasingly included in commissioning health and related services through their relationships with Clinical Commissioning Groups and their duty to establish and lead the work of health and wellbeing boards.

The core response

In April 2013 upper tier and unitary local authorities in England assumed legal responsibility for improving the health of their population. Local authorities are mandated to provide some public health services whereas others are discretionary. The following services are mandated:

- Sexual health services (excluding HIV treatment);
- NHS Health Checks;
- Health protection – to ensure plans are in place to protect the health of the population and to have a supporting role in infectious disease surveillance and control and in Emergency Preparation, Preparedness and Response;

- Public health advice to Clinical Commissioning Groups;
- National Child Measurement Programme.

In addition, Local Authorities are required to “*provide or commission a wide range of other services to improve and protect the health of the local population and reduce health inequalities*”. These discretionary services include (but are not limited to):

- Alcohol and drug misuse services;
- Public health programmes for children aged 5-19;
- Stop smoking services and tobacco control;
- Interventions to prevent and manage obesity;
- Physical activity;
- Public mental health programmes;
- Health at work;
- Nutrition and healthy eating;
- Community safety, violence prevention & social exclusion;
- Dental public health;
- Seasonal mortality interventions.

In England the Health and Social Care Act 2012 gives councils the responsibility for improving the health of their local populations, although the Act does not specifically mention the Defence population. The Act also establishes health and wellbeing boards as a forum where key leaders from the health and care system work together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population and reduce health inequalities. Health and wellbeing board members collaborate to understand their local community's needs, agree priorities and encourage commissioners to work in a more joined-up way. As a result, patients and the public should experience more joined-up services from the NHS and local councils.

The Care Act 2014 introduced major reforms to the legal framework for adult social care, to the funding system and to the duties of councils and rights of those in need of social care, giving additional rights to support for carers and people who fund their own care (self-funders). The Act introduces a number of general duties on councils including:

¹³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449607/Tri-Service_families_continuous_attitude_survey_2015_main_report.pdf



- a 'wellbeing principle', which means that whenever a council makes a decision about an adult, it must promote that adult's wellbeing;
- a duty to promote diversity and quality in the local care market;
- a duty to cooperate between the council and other relevant organisations, including a duty on the council itself to ensure cooperation between its adult social care, housing, public health and children's services.

Under the Care Act councils were required to take into account the War Disablement Pension when calculating the costs of social care, but disregard the injury compensation payment. However, following pressure from the LGA, Royal British Legion (RBL) and other groups, the government announced in the 2016 budget that councils would not have to take the War Disablement Pension into account.

The majority of people we spoke to through the research discussed the problem of identifying Veterans. This can make it difficult to address the issues faced by Veterans and their families in councils' health and social care policies. There is an ongoing RBL campaign to use the census to collect data on the number and location of Veterans, to help support efforts to identify Veterans' and their families as part of local populations.

Councils have been trying to understand the health issues faced by members of the Armed Forces Community to ensure that local services are meeting their needs as part of the local population, through needs assessments. In Hampshire, for example, the council undertook work to identify the health and wellbeing needs of members of the Armed Forces Community, and compiled a list of potential sources of local intelligence/data that can help build a picture of Veterans' and families' needs as part of the local community¹⁴.

The needs of older Veterans are in most cases consistent with those of the general population. However, Veterans do have the advantage of access to support through military charities, and many of the councils we visited had arrangements in place to ensure that those who qualify are

referred. This benefits not only the people accessing services, but also councils through relieving the financial pressure on councils and limited adult social care budgets.

In some places, such as Moray, health service partners are active participants in arrangements set up to oversee delivery of the Covenant. This is a good way of ensuring that commissioners take the Covenant into account and reflect it in their work. Other places in England have put in place action to incorporate the needs of military populations within local health needs assessments such as linking the Covenant plan to the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and work of the Health and Wellbeing Board¹⁵.

Our deep dives identified a number of examples of councils and their partners providing bespoke support to meet the needs of Veterans facing health related issues including mental health and drug and alcohol abuse. These are described in the examples below but include:

- Accepting direct referrals into mental health services for members of the Armed Forces Community without having to see a GP;
- Carrying out a specific Veterans' Health Needs Assessment to understand the types and scale of issues facing Veterans;
- Giving priority access to social care for Veterans if their need is related to their service.

Other support for Veterans

Our deep dives have highlighted a number of additional areas where Veterans often face disadvantage or have difficulties which need addressing.

Assessing need

It is clear from our deep dives that there is a major difficulty across England, Scotland and Wales in understanding the extent of the local Veteran population. This includes areas in every type of category on our proportionality scale. Once someone has left the Armed Forces, there is no way of tracking their movement or checking that they have resettled to the place they intended on. A

¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488903/6_Health_and_Wellbeing_Wordshop_Summary.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488906/6b_-_FAQs_AF_Health_needs_assessment.pdf



common theme is the need for capturing the number of Veterans there are in a local area and the needs they are faced with. This could then be shared with (without breaching data confidentiality) appropriate local services.

There is currently a RBL campaign to use the census to help collect data on the number and location of Veterans. The lack of data means that it is difficult for councils to be able to integrate the needs of the Armed Forces Community into their policies.

Health and wellbeing Good Practice

In **Bradford** (Category 4-5), the council is putting a new system into its assessments for adult social care whereby the public-facing member of staff will have to ask if the person has ever served. NHS partners also have questions in their surveys about people's service, and a council information officer is doing work to understand the size, need and location of the Armed Forces Community locally.

One of the difficulties with this approach is achieving the right approach to ask the question. The council is therefore working with Public Health to develop the best way to do this, taking into account that it might be a sensitive question to ask of people, particularly if it is the first thing they are asked.

Veterans have priority access to social care in Bradford if their social care needs relate to their service. Where they don't meet this criteria, the council will signpost them on to other services such as the Regimental Support Service.

In **Glasgow** (Category 4), the council worked with a wide range of partners to set up Helping Heroes. This was created in response to the difficulties faced by Veterans, particularly in navigating disparate services before being able to get treatment for mental health issues. Having to go to through multiple organisations or agencies before being able to access mental health services can dissuade Veterans from pursuing treatment.

The council worked with health partners in the city to enable Veterans to be referred directly into mental health services without having to see a GP. Helping Heroes can now refer Veterans with mental health issues directly into treatment without having to see a GP. Being able to circumvent the GP means that the process is quicker and smoother, and more people are likely to take up this support.

Also in **Glasgow** is the Coming Home Centre. Community Veterans Support set up the Centre in Govan as a space for Veterans to go and meet up and talk with other Veterans. This set-up allows them to receive informal, word of mouth advice and support from people with similar experiences and who understand their issues better. This informal signposting approach means Veterans can seek advice discreetly, without having to formally present themselves to any organisation.

A guide on delivering an effective needs assessment for the Armed Forces Community is being developed by Public Health England. The document provides a template for understanding the health needs of the Armed Forces Community and sets out some examples of best practice.

The template includes a sample of the types of local Armed Forces population data that is useful, along with a set of self-assessment questions for councils when developing a needs assessment.

In **Gloucestershire** (Category 2), community engagement officers have been working with Army families living in Forces accommodation. Often young spouses on base find it difficult to integrate into both the Armed Forces Community 'behind the line', as well as the wider civilian community. Some have little professional experience and may have left a social and family support network at home to move with their spouses who are serving. This social isolation and lack of meaningful work have the potential to lead to mental health difficulties.

Community officers set up a *Look Good Feel Good* course, with a free crèche funded through the former Community Covenant Grant Scheme, that enabled the women on base to socialise and build self-esteem. This proved popular and was critical in engaging them in further adult education courses in Maths and English. The activities provided a space for the women to improve their employment skills and to socialise with other women with similar experiences, helping them to avoid social isolation and the potential difficulties this causes. On redeployment, many of the women whom officers had worked with reported feeling more resilient and having the confidence to move on.



Engaging Veterans

There seems to be a significant minority of ex-Service personnel with a set of problems related to health, housing or debt who are often hard to engage. The difficulty councils face in reaching this group may in part be due to an unwillingness on the part of ex-Service personnel to identify as a Veteran. It was often commented that Veterans were too proud, or embarrassed to identify themselves as Veterans, especially when they are in a situation of need. A general distrust of statutory services for various

reasons, or a lack of awareness of how they operate, may also come into play. This seems to be a particular difficulty for Veterans who entered the military at a young age and left following a few years of service.

Some councils have recognised this situation and have designed innovative programmes to engage Veterans with complex issues which are in large part likely related to their service. They are confident that investing in support for Veterans can reduce demand on public services in the longer term.

Assessing need Good Practice

In **Wigan** (Category 4) arrangements have been made so that GPs ask patients whether they have ever served in the Armed Forces.

Capturing data has been identified as an issue to address in **Bradford** (Category 4–5). Adult services are now asking if a person has ever served when being entered onto their system. GPs also have information on members of the Armed Forces Community who have filled out their surveys.

There is a small amount of serving personnel in Birmingham (Category 5) which are linked to the Queen Elizabeth hospital and an unknown amount of Veterans. Birmingham City Council has gone to great lengths to be creative about understanding the presence of and needs of their local Armed Forces Community. This includes the following:

- Armed Forces steering group – this meets quarterly and provides a space for representatives to voice concerns about any issues the local Armed Forces Community may be facing. A guest speaker often attends to inform the group on some likely needs of the AFC;
- Questionnaires – with assistance from military charities and council departments;
- Creating a housing sub-group with key stakeholders. This was on the back of national discourse around social housing being a big issue for Veterans;
- Events – in conjunction with partners such as the Centre for Defence Medicine and the RBL.

Engaging Veterans Good Practice

Glasgow's (Category 4) Helping Heroes project is a hub which is funded by Glasgow City Council but managed by SSAFA with the council acting as a strategic partner. From the outset there was a conscious decision made to have the service independent of the council which has been successful in gaining the trust of Veterans some of whom had a distrust of statutory organisations due to debt or criminal justice issues.

Wigan (Category 4) has created a full time Veteran's key worker post who is a Veteran himself. He engages with Veterans in the lobbies of town halls and due to his experience can relate to members of the Armed Forces Community who are finding it difficult to engage with the council.

Wrexham (Category 5) has developed a web system which provides subscribers with information on what's being done in Wrexham about a particular topic that they are interested in (the Armed Forces could be one of them). The bulletins cover a range of issues and aim to be proactive in helping people address their specific needs. The system links to social media as the council want information to be as accessible as possible.



Top Tips

- Making the Armed Forces Community more aware of what the Covenant is and how it can be used will encourage them to self-identify as a Veteran if they need help with addressing a problem.
- Councils can support this approach by embedding asking whether people have served in the Armed Forces in their relevant procedures.
- Using Veterans as case workers is a good way to get Veterans engaged with services.



THE COVENANT: IMPACT AND IMPROVEMENTS

The impact of the Covenant

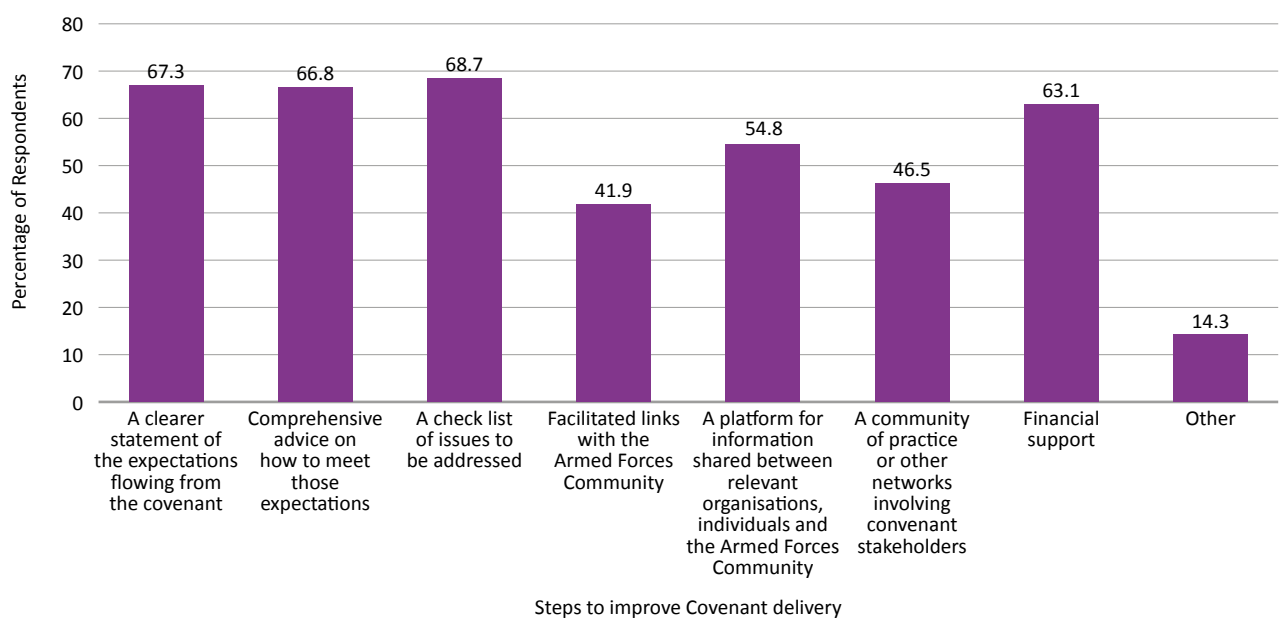
During the course of this research, and in particular in the deep dives, we have explored the impact of the Covenant on relations between councils, communities and the Armed Forces Community. And in our surveys we sought views on what steps could be taken nationally to increase the effectiveness of the Covenant. This section explores our findings in these areas.

In the vast majority of places in which we carried out the initial deep dives, action to meet the needs of members of the Armed Forces Community was already in place before the Covenant was introduced. This reflects our perception that where the councils are seen to be successful in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community it is because it is seen as core council business rather than an add-on in response to the introduction of the Covenant. This was particularly so in places that fall into our categories 1,2 and 3. Interviewees in these places report that the Covenant has enabled the development of a more comprehensive and integrated

approach to meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community. It is also seen to have encouraged a more collaborative approach, enabling a shift from joint working on particular initiatives to a more strategic set of relationships.

In only one of our initial deep dive sites was the Covenant itself reported to have had a galvanising effect on action locally. In most cases the driving force for achieving the outcomes envisaged in the Covenant has been one or two individuals in the place who have used the Covenant to reinforce the need for action. In the vast majority of cases these individuals, often council officers, are former members of the Armed Forces or have close family links with a member or former member of the Armed Forces. The Covenant has been important in providing a clear context for discussions within the council, for action with service departments, particularly those concerned with housing, schools and employment, and as the underpinning of and focus for collaboration with the Armed Forces, the relevant charities and partner organisations.

Figure 18: What steps, if any, do you think could be taken at a national level to improve the delivery of the Covenant? (n=217)



Source: Council survey

Improving the delivery of the Covenant

In our survey of council Chief Executives and Champions we explored what steps could be taken at a national level to improve delivery of the Covenant.

In the council survey (figure 18) all of the options received high response rates, with the least frequently selected option (excluding the 'other' option) being 'facilitated links with the Armed Forces Community' (41.9 per cent). The responses that were most frequently selected by the 217 respondents related to understanding what the Covenant entails. This included the need for:

- A clearer statement of the expectations associated with the Covenant (67.3 per cent);
- A checklist of issues to be addressed (68.7 per cent);
- Advice on how to meet those expectations (66.8 per cent).

The Champions expressed similar preferences (figure 19).

Our earlier recommendation on the need for a clear statement of expectations addresses the first of these

points, and the toolkit is intended to go some way towards meeting the needs reflected in the other two points.

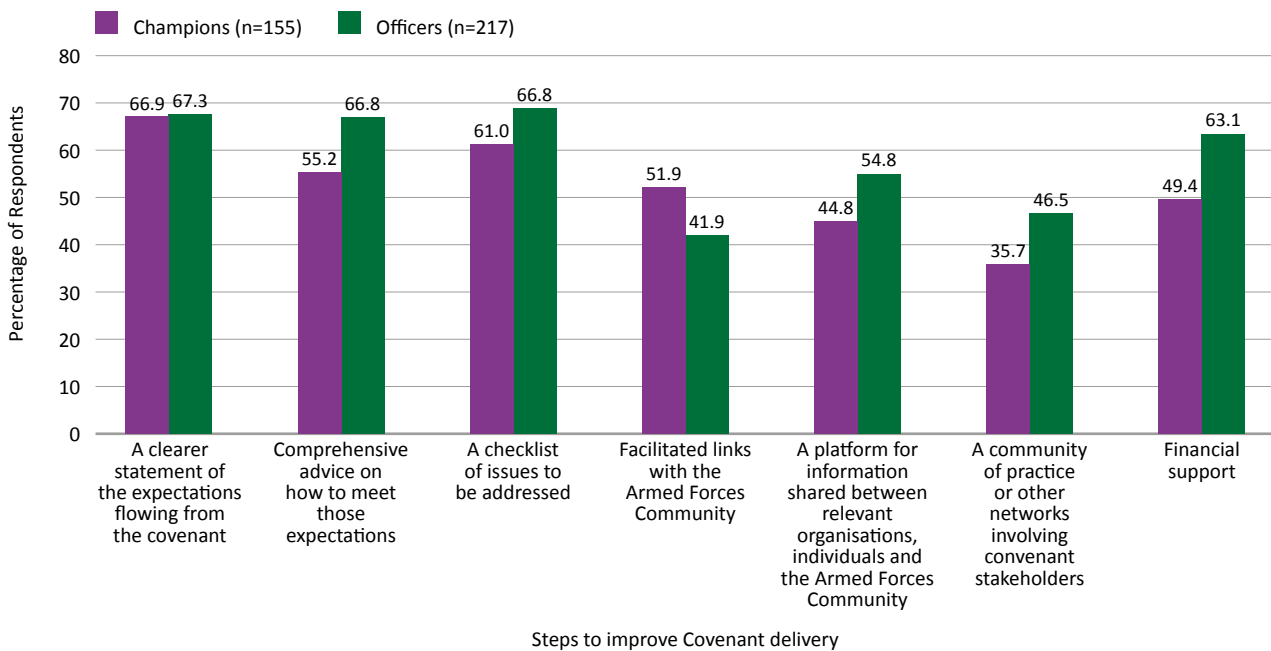
The role of the MoD and the Armed Forces

Much of the discussion nationally on the delivery of the local pledges flowing from the Armed Forces Covenant has focused on the role of local councils. It is clear from our surveys and deep dives, however, that there are also steps that could be taken by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to enable more effective delivery of the Covenant pledges.

They include:

- Improvements to the processes for preparing members of the Armed Forces and their families for transition and resettlement;
- Improving the information available to councils, particularly in areas to which significant numbers of former serving people and their families move or return after leaving the Armed Forces;
- Addressing the variability in the priority that Base Commanders give to relations with civil society and the delivery of the Covenant in particular.

Figure 19: What steps, if any, do you think could be taken at a national level to improve the delivery of the Covenant?



Source: Council and Champions surveys



This section explores these issues.

Our research has shown that in many circumstances and areas the relationship works well. This includes, for example, planned large-scale movement of Service people and their families, such as the collaboration between the Army and Wiltshire Council on rebasing. We also have evidence of good joint working between the Armed Forces and councils on transition and resettlement where people are leaving on a planned basis and seeking to remain in the area where they served. The areas for improvement we have identified relate primarily to people leaving the Armed Forces in an unplanned way and people and seeking to resettle in a different area.

We understand that the Armed Forces have improved the support given around transition and resettlement. But through our deep dive research we have received a consistent message from the Armed Forces charities, Veterans, council officers and Covenant Champions and some senior members of the Armed Forces that the quality of support for transition is inconsistent. The people we have spoken to are convinced that this is one of the factors that causes between 5 and 10 per cent of Veterans to face challenging circumstances and makes it more difficult for councils to deliver some local pledges.

Drawing on our research we have identified three areas in which the Armed Forces could make improvements to the transition process:

- First, we are confident that the Armed Forces know their people well enough to identify those who are at risk of facing challenging circumstances and to whom additional support could be offered before they leave service. Additional investment and support at this stage could significantly reduce the need for public expenditure at a later date.
- Second, we believe that in some cases more could be done to ensure that people leaving service (and their families) have a good understanding of the realities of civilian life, particularly in relation to the availability, cost and quality of housing – including social and privately rented housing. It is important that spouses are at least as well briefed as their serving partner. The three Families Federations' Transition Liaison posts, recently funded by FiMT, have a contribution to make here.

- Third, we are aware that in some places there is scope for councils and other partners to play a bigger role in helping to prepare serving people and their families for civilian life. This could include, for example, providing information on housing availability and cost and making sure they are aware of the sources of help and advice available to them. A more porous boundary pre-transition and resettlement could help people to cross that boundary.

We recommend that the MoD and the Armed Forces explore ways of improving the transition process by:

- Putting more effort into identifying people who are at risk of facing challenging circumstances and to whom additional support could be offered;
- Ensuring people leaving the Armed Forces are well briefed on the realities of civilian life and that spouses are at least as well-briefed as their serving partner;
- Involving more outside organisations in the transition process, such as:
 - Local authority housing departments;
 - Registered Social Landlords; and
 - Jobcentre Plus

We are aware that this happens in some places which means that it could happen more widely and consistently, while recognising that putting such arrangements in place is bound to be easier in locations with a significant Armed Forces presence and a relationship of trust between the Armed Forces, the council and its partners. These recommendations are similar to some of the conclusions reached in the recent SSAFA report *The New Frontline*.¹⁶

As we noted above, housing is an area in which expectations about what the Covenant can deliver are particularly high and where the differences on either side of the boundary are particularly stark. The council housing officers we have spoken to have all highlighted the importance of good notice of a families' need for housing as a crucial factor in their ability to provide them with advice, support and in some cases accommodation. The extent to which that notice is available varies from place to place and is inevitably more challenging in areas without a significant serving presence to which Service families seek to move or return. We have

¹⁶ www.ssafa.org.uk/thenewfrontline



heard that some areas receive better information than others and that in some places information that was previously available is no longer.

We recommend that the LGA, COSLA and MoD explore ways in which communication could be improved between significant Armed Forces bases and councils in whose areas Service families seek to live in order to facilitate effective briefing and preparation for resettlement.

A consistent theme of our deep dives has been the importance of good personal contacts between, for example, base commanders and senior councillors and council officers. Our interviewees have also referred to the importance of the senior officers in the Armed Forces putting their authority behind the Covenant. The frequency with which senior officers are moved in the Armed Forces means that maintaining these relationships can be challenging and inevitably different people will give this issue different levels of priority. Our further deep dives confirmed this is an issue which disrupts the pace of collaboration between partners on the delivery of the Covenant locally.

We recommend that, whilst there is an imperative on councils to build good relations with new senior officers, the MoD should ensure that Base Commanders and their equivalents are briefed on the importance of their role in relation to the Covenant.

Concerns have been expressed that policy developments such as localism and devolution to councils are hindering the delivery of local Covenant pledges. We found no evidence to substantiate this during the course of our work, but *we recommend* that the opportunities and implications of devolution are reviewed in any further research on the delivery of the Covenant.



ACTION SINCE THE FIRST EDITION

The first edition of *'Our Community – Our Covenant'* was formally launched at the Local Government Association's annual conference in July 2016, and subsequently at events held in Cardiff and Glasgow that included delegates from all sectors. The Ministry of Defence included the report in its annual 'Covenant in the Community' Conference in November 2016, and it has also been discussed at numerous smaller seminars, workshops and conferences across Great Britain, often organised by those highly committed individuals the report identified as being one of the keys to successful local pledge delivery. It would be fair to observe that for many local authorities, the report has added impetus to, or even simply validated, existing plans. For others, the report has acted much more as a stimulant, and it has in some cases for the first time provided a real framework for planning and action. By providing a common language, shared challenges, and examples of collaboration, the report has become a part of routine business for many. We intend that this second edition will further spread the learning and embed a culture around local pledge delivery. Where specific projects mature and are made widely available, such as Warwickshire County Council's staff e-learning packages, the ethos of sharing best practice can make, and is making a tangible difference.

Further encouragement can be found in awards from the Covenant Fund, where bids for 'strengthening local government delivery of the Covenant' re-open in June 2017.

Taking the recommendations from the first edition as a whole, central government's Covenant Reference Group has agreed an action plan with the aim of seeing improvements in many of the areas identified as requiring top-level work. These include: clearer and more pro-active communications; improved service delivery by encouraging local partnerships to adopt the report's recommendations leading to better implementation of policies; targeted future research to fill knowledge gaps and to measure improvements; increased emphasis during transition process of peer learning and connecting into the civilian community; and greater value placed on the role of senior leadership in delivering local pledges.

'Our Community – Our Covenant' was inspired by a willingness across local authorities to learn how they could improve the delivery of local Covenant pledges, and their collective response to the first edition has demonstrated the genuineness of this stance. We hope that when we next conduct a full review, probably in 2019, that the enthusiasm will remain undimmed, and that the often misplaced criticism will have abated somewhat. Actions taken since the first edition may take years to become fully effective, and doubtless more ideas will emerge that need to be embraced bottom-up or top-down. The principles within *'Our Community – Our Covenant'*, though, are likely to endure, as will the need for local Covenant pledges.

The future development of the Covenant

We are aware of the changes to the way in which the Armed Forces, particularly the Army, operates which will enable members of the Armed Forces Community to live more stable lives with fewer moves. This is being accompanied by steps to encourage Armed Forces families to live in the community rather than on the base. These developments will reduce the number of times service children are likely to change school and extend the number of Forces families who are familiar with the housing market. At the same time the size of the Armed Forces is reducing as is the size of the Veteran population.

This will have implications for the issues the Covenant will be required to address in the future. It also provides an opportunity for more creative relationships between local councils and other service providers and the Armed Forces Community. This could, for example, build on the collaboration around training and employment in the technology sector that is being pursued by Staffordshire County Council.

We recommend that developments of this type and their implications for the Covenant and the expectations that flow from it be kept under review.



CONCLUSIONS

Our research shows that there is a high level of awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant in local councils, particularly among Armed Forces Champions and senior officers, and that the vast majority of councils have a basic infrastructure in place to deliver the local pledges that flow from it. It is also clear, however, that many members of the Armed Forces Community perceive that they have faced disadvantage as a result of their service and that their local council does not have a good understanding of their needs. This report is intended to help government, councils and their partners to address the challenge arising from those perceptions.

Our research has identified a mismatch in expectations of the Covenant between some members of the Armed Forces Community on the one hand and government, national and local, on the other. The recent changes to the wording of the Covenant, including the explicit introduction of the concept of “fairness” has exacerbated that mismatch. *We recommend* that there be a clearer statement of expectations flowing from the Covenant at the local and national levels, including examples of what it cannot deliver.

We have been struck by the extent to which the driving force behind the Covenant at a local level has often come from one or two individuals, who often have close personal experience of or contact with the Armed Forces. We see that as a strength and *we recommend* that councils seek to identify and work with the understanding, drive and commitment a personal commitment of this type can deliver while at the same time seeking to embed an understanding of the Armed Forces across the council.

Our research has enabled us to develop a core infrastructure that should enable councils and their partners to deliver the Covenant and the local pledges that flow from it more effectively. We have also introduced the idea of a spectrum of circumstances in which councils find themselves that should assist in the adoption of proportionate approaches in different places depending of the nature and extent of the presence of the Armed Forces Community.

Our research has also identified examples of good practice being pursued by councils in the service areas most relevant to the Covenant. In our further research we have heard of informal contact between councils on ways of improving the delivery of the Covenant and networking opportunities such as the twice yearly events for Armed Forces Champions in Wales. We are convinced that there is scope for more joint learning and sharing of good practice between councils to further test, develop and scale up these approaches. We were struck for example

by the potential for places with a very significant Armed forces presence – such as North Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Wiltshire – to learn from each other. *We recommend* that the LGA work with the MoD, the Forces in Mind trust and other key partners to put in place an action research framework to enable councils to work collectively in this way. The second round of research highlights the value that such a framework could deliver.

Finally, we have identified areas in which the MoD could work with the Armed Forces to improve the delivery of the Covenant. They include: further improvement to the processes around transition and resettlement; improvements in the consistency of the information available to councils on people leaving the Armed Forces; action to tackle the variability in the priority that base commanders give to the Covenant and related issues.

As a result of the additional research which included 4 further deep dives and a session with London Boroughs, we have updated our recommendations in the following areas:

- The core infrastructure should include a Covenant Forum or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year and that each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years;
- The core infrastructure should include an action planning process that is proportionate to local needs and circumstances. This could include a self-standing action plan, a time line or minutes with recorded actions and a follow-up mechanism;
- The local forum or co-ordinating group should ensure that there is a good web presence to support the delivery of the Covenant. In some areas this could be hosted by Hive Blogs (or the RAF and Navy equivalent). In other areas the core web presence could be hosted by a third sector organisation or the local council;
- Where appropriate councils should be encouraged to collaborate at a sub-regional level. Such collaboration could include:
 - Joint Covenant Forums and action plans;
 - Applications for the Covenant Fund;
 - Developing and delivering training packages for frontline staff, FAQs, a web presence and awareness campaigns.

This approach is likely to be particularly appropriate in London, other metropolitan areas, between small unitary councils and between unitary councils and an adjoining county council.



TOOL KIT

This tool kit is designed to help councils think constructively about their local Armed Forces Community and the implementation of their local Covenant pledges. We began developing each element of this toolkit during the initial research for the first edition of this report. We have revised the toolkit in the light of the four additional deep dives and the London Boroughs Covenant event by making some changes to the core infrastructure and the self-assessment tool. We envisage councils use the tool as a way to review their implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant, identify any gaps and prompt discussion between stakeholders. It consists of three parts:

- Core Infrastructure and the self-assessment tool
- Scenarios
- Top Tips

Core Infrastructure

The list of core infrastructure was developed during the beginning of the research for the first edition of 'Our Community – Our Covenant'. It specifies the mechanisms that we think councils which are delivering the Covenant will have in place. We tested the list throughout our initial deep dives and during our further four deep dives and have made some changes related to our findings. The final core infrastructure list can be found below.

This list will be useful for councils to use as a checklist to ensure that the basics are in place in that particular location.

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An elected member champion • An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Covenant Forum or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year. It includes the following: military representatives; military charities; public sector representatives; effective council members (senior elected members on cabinet); and the officer champion. Each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years. • In some places (for example London) councils and their partners may wish to establish a mechanism for collaboration at a sub-regional level. This could include: joint forums and action plans, applications for the Covenant fund, training packages and a shared web presence.
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web page or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces Community. • A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the council • A route through which concerns can be raised • Training of frontline staff • A vehicle for reporting action and achievements such as an annual report, newsletter or forum minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action planning process that is proportionate to local needs and circumstances. For example, an action plan, a time line, or minutes with recorded actions. • Policy reviews • Enthusiasm and commitment



Self-assessment tool

We drafted a self-assessment tool during the first edition of this report and have tested this out throughout our subsequent deep dives.

We developed this tool for councils who are wanting to assess the situation of their local Covenant pledges. It will enable local partners to have a meaningful discussion about their commitment to ensuring members of the Armed Forces Community do not face disadvantage due to their service. It will identify any gaps in provision and focus future action for delivery and therefore would be a useful activity to complete every year.

The tool is split into four sections: vision and commitment; individuals; collaboration; and communication. It is designed for members of the Armed Forces Covenant Forum, or a range of stakeholders (including council officers, military representatives, and representatives from military charities) to have a conversation about their local area in relation to the prompts. It is not designed for every question to have an answer, but merely a way for a question to be considered if it is relevant in each local context.

Here you can find a presentation to use alongside the below questions.

Vision and Commitment
<p>Armed Forces Community presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the AFC make-up in your local area? • What more could be done to fully understand the AFC footprint? • Is there potential for collaboration on the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant with neighbouring councils?
<p>Armed Forces Community needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a good understanding of the needs of the AFC in housing, health, employment and schools and children's services? How were those needs identified? • Which organisations would be able to help address those needs? (ie. Council, Armed Forces, charities). • What is currently being done to help address those needs? • What else can be done to address these needs?
<p>Future direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a shared understanding of what successful implementation of the Covenant would look like?
<p>Action planning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the areas for action been defined? • Is there an agreed method to the action planning process? • How is the action monitored and reviewed?
Individuals
<p>Armed Forces Champion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an elected member Armed Forces Champion? • What does the role involve? • Are there areas in which the role of the Armed Forces Champion can evolve?
<p>Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the senior officer responsible for the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and who has day to day responsibility for it? • How can this role be further supported?



Collaboration

Forum/ co-ordinating group

- Is there a Covenant Forum in place? Who are the members of the forum? How frequently does it meet?
- What are the key items covered at the forum?
- How are any actions being monitored?
- To what extent are the goals of the forum being achieved? What could be done to increase the impact the forum is having?
- How frequently is the forum's membership, agenda and frequency of meeting reviewed?
- Would it help if there was a sub-regional forum with neighbouring councils?

Relationships

- Are there mechanisms in place to maintain relationships between Armed Forces stakeholders?
- Could the council, the Armed Forces and charities work together more effectively?
- Would an increase in sub-regional collaboration help with delivering local Covenant pledges?

Communication

Internal

- How are council/MoD/charity officers and front line staff briefed on the Covenant?
- How is knowledge and information gathered?
- How could knowledge sharing within organisations be improved?

External

- How is action on local Covenant pledges disseminated to the public?
- How could the dissemination of information be improved?
- Is there an up to date website which is easy to use and regularly updated? Who hosts the website (council, HIVE or equivalent or charity)?
- How is the support which is on offer to the AFC communicated to the hard to reach?

Impact

- How is the impact of local Covenant delivery evidenced?



Scenarios

We developed the following scenarios for the sense-making event during research for the first edition of the report. These scenarios relate to the range of issues that we have found to occur and will not be relevant in all places. It is a useful tool for councils to use to think about the delivery mechanisms that they have in place in order to address the main issues in the scenario. Councils could use these by asking the question, “what would we be able to do if we were faced with a resident in this situation?”

The Nelsons

A Royal Navy family living in MoD Service Families Accommodation. The father is a submariner currently on patrol and can only be contacted in an extreme emergency. The mother does not have a job. They have two children aged 6 and 10. The deadline for applications for the older child for secondary schools is imminent. The parents have separated and are in the process of divorcing; the husband when onshore stays on base in MoD single living accommodation. The family has been served with a notice to vacate their house in 93 days. The mother wishes to stay in the area (in which housing pressures are acute) and has approached the council for help.

The Darlings

An Army family. They are moving from Germany to a base in an English county. Service Families Accommodation is provided at three locations in the area and the family has been told that they will not know precisely where in the county their accommodation will be until two weeks before they arrive. They have two children aged 8 and 13. The youngest has dyslexia and has a special educational needs assessment, whilst the older child requires routine but specialist secondary medical monitoring.

The Trenchards

A Royal Air Force family. He is in the RAF Regiment and is due to leave the RAF in 5 months at the end of his engagement aged 44. His wife has a part-time job. They have two children aged 16 and 17 at the local Sixth Form College and want to settle in the area. Having joined the RAF initially as an airman, the father is now a Junior Officer with qualifications which are not fully recognised outside the Armed Forces. The father is beginning to look for work and for ways of translating his qualifications to be recognised by civilian employers. They do not have enough money to place a deposit on a house. What help is available to them, in housing and employment, as well as any other areas?

Roger Jarvis

Roger left the Army in 2001 having served in the Royal Logistics Corps for 14 years and taken voluntary redundancy as a Senior NCO. He is in his early 50s and left his wife 8 years ago amidst mutual allegations of domestic abuse. He has had a variety of low-skilled jobs since leaving the Army and was recently made redundant and was not able to pay the rent on his flat. He has now moved back, without work, to the area in which he went to school, but his family no longer lives in the area and he appears to have no social network there either.



Top Tips

During the course of our deep dive visits we have identified a number of Top Tips which we think may be helpful to councils and their partners who are thinking about ways of improving the local delivery of the Covenant. The following Top Tips are intended to complement the tips that are included earlier in section five of our report.

Good relationships

Establish, maintain and regularly refresh contact with base commanders and other key people in Armed Forces bases (reflecting the regular churn in postholders).

Use ceremonies to build and maintain contacts with key people.

Invite senior representatives of the Armed Forces Community to serve on relevant local partnership bodies, not just those concerned with the Covenant.

Build and maintain good contacts with Armed Forces charities and establish a shared understanding with them on issues such as at what stage people with housing needs will be referred to them.

Council organisation

Establish a dedicated, time-limited post to help get the core infrastructure and contacts in place.

Encourage the council's overview and scrutiny function to carry out a regular review of the delivery of the Covenant.

Ensure that the Covenant features in council training programmes.

Involve the RBL or another similar charity in briefing public-facing council staff.

Employ Veterans and Service spouses as key workers providing support for Veterans.

Engaging with the bases

Secure, enable, encourage shared use of facilities on or near Armed Forces bases.

Identify a champion for each base – usually the member in whose ward or division the base is located.

Engage with young people from Armed Forces families – they bring a different and honest perspective. This can be done through the Service Youth Forums.

And finally...

Recognise that Base Commanders have to juggle a number of priorities, some of which will always have more priority than the Covenant.



ANNEX

List of Advisory Group members

Our sincere thanks, as well as those of Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association, go to all those individuals and organisations who selflessly gave their valuable time to provide the information on which this report is based. They include:

LGA

WLGA

Scottish Government

Welsh Assembly

Forces in Mind Trust

Royal British Legion

Ministry of Defence

Department of Communities and Local Government

Cobseo

Public Health England

SOLACE

Naval Families Federation on behalf of the Family Federations

Department for Work and Pensions

Veterans UK



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ARMED FORCES COVENANT - SCRUTINY

Skills Update

7 November 2022

**Skills Update****1. Skills 4 Plymouth**

The Skills 4 Plymouth Plan is an ambitious transformation 5-year programme designed to ensure:

- People have the right skills they need now and in the future to get a job and progress in work
- Employers and individuals invest in skills and lifelong learning
- Employers have people with the right skills they need for recovery and growth

As part of the Skills 4 Plymouth action plan, we are committed to 'grow and nurture talent from all communities.' We recognise that as a city, we need to better connect veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces and their families, with opportunities for skills, training, education, careers and jobs.

In response to this, we have already had significant success through Building Plymouth, the Council-led sector skills partnership with the construction and built environment sector. This is an industry with massive skills shortages which recognises the transferrable skills and pro-actively trains and recruits the talent from the Armed Forces.

2. Current support for veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces and their families**Skills Launchpad Plymouth** www.skillslaunchpadplym.co.uk

Working in city wide partnership, Skills Launchpad Plymouth is the one-stop-shop for skills, training, education, careers and jobs, which aims to help local people in and around the city access independent information, advice and guidance. We are supporting those who are facing redundancy and changing careers through the [Adult Hub](#), and offering targeted support for our young people including those with additional needs through the [Youth Hub \(for those aged 16-24 years\)](#).

Supported by Barclays Plymouth (located 140-146 Armada Way), we opened our physical home for 'Skills Launchpad Plymouth', housing both the Youth Hub and Adult Hub in September 2021, providing appointments for face to face coordinated services for young people and adults. We also undertake community outreach in targeted wards.

Military Tuesdays – specific offer for veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces and their families

As part of Skills Launchpad Plymouth delivery, we host 'Military Tuesday' drop-in sessions through a multi-agency approach, every Tuesday at Barclays Bank, 10am to 4pm, which aims to offer:

- access to impartial careers information, advice and guidance
- 1:1 skills assessments to identify transferrable skills to help you confidently apply for jobs
- sectoral insights and introductions with local employers across all industries
- opportunities to gain new skills and undertake training
- access to ongoing development once you get started, to continue up-skilling and developing your career.

Delivery of Military Tuesday is coordinated by the Skills Launchpad Plymouth team in partnership with The Forces Employment Charity, DWP Armed Forces Champions and CTP. Other providers and recruiting employers are invited to engage as part of the programme.

Job Shops

In Skills Launchpad Plymouth, we host sector specific weekly drop-in Job Shops to support local people connect with employment opportunities in construction and health and care.

The Process

We invite veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces and their families to access the wealth of resources available virtually on Skills Launchpad Plymouth's website and to sign up as a Member. Or to drop into Military Tuesdays. Once registered, we have hold an initial assessment, followed up with the development of a tailored Skills Action Plan. Skills Launchpad Plymouth commits to following up in 3, 6 and 12 months to maintain contact and track destination, and Members are welcome to access Skills Launchpad Plymouth services as frequently as required.

3. Case studies

Ed Hall

In April 2022, we held a 'Military Tuesday' recruitment event with Building Plymouth's Project Sponsor Barratt Homes where the employer launched their Armed Forces Transition Programme.

[What's on: Military Tuesday \(skillslaunchpadplym.co.uk\)](https://skillslaunchpadplym.co.uk)

Ed attended and after hearing insights about the career opportunities available in construction, supported by Building Plymouth and RFEA, we referred him to the Building Heroes course at Sherford to fast track his training through a 5-week programme to get basic skills and a CSCS card.

Ed successfully completed the course and then we matched him with Building Plymouth Project Sponsor YGS Landscapes who recruited Ed to their landscaping team.

KD

KD a homeless veteran with anxiety, attended a Building Plymouth event at Bretonside Job Centre seeking construction experience and a CSCS card. He was referred to Train 4 All's Pathway to Construction Programme held on the Vistry Partnerships site in North Prospect. Prior to doing this, the Building Plymouth team made direct contact with the trainer to explain about KDs anxiety and together, were able to provide additional support and encouragement for him to attend the course. KD successfully completed his Level 1 H & S and passed his CSCS test and was so happy and grateful. KD is now going to work on the Stirling House Alabaré Veterans Self-Build development on Honicknowle Green. KD is going to learn skills, learn a trade, whilst also having the emotional support he needs. Once the project is complete, he will get to live in the build.

Highlights of the Stirling House Alabaré collaboration to date are:

- All involved in the project have undertaken bespoke 1:1 skills action plans
- Participants have engaged with Clarion Futures regarding benefits and better off in work calculations
- Building Plymouth introductions are supporting future career steps into construction

- Each individual is working towards differing goals from work experience in tiling, to health and safety apprenticeships, applying for security work

4. Future developments to support veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces and their families

- Working closely with Plymouth's Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (AFC), November 2022 has been declared 'Military Month' with a coordinated campaign underway, supported by Plymouth City Council and Skills Launchpad Plymouth to raise awareness about the support available for skills, training and employment (amongst other city-wide services)
- As part of this campaign, the Skills Launchpad Plymouth team will be represented at the new veteran outreach pop-up events happening in community spaces throughout November 2022
- 'Military Tuesdays' in Skills Launchpad Plymouth will be extensively promoted with sector specific themed events happening in November to create opportunities to connect veterans, serving members and their families with local recruiting employers and training providers
- Explore funding for performance coaching to better support veterans on transitioning into employment
- 'Military Tuesdays' will have themed focuses and more employers, particularly the local AFC signatories engaged, mapping work underway to understand this membership and plan to assess their recruitment needs
- Promote continued access to the services of Skills Launchpad Plymouth's Youth Hub and Adult Hub, and expand community outreach to connect better with veterans in their own communities
- Skills Launchpad Plymouth is developing an online 'Employer Hub' which will have information, advice and guidance for local employers in relation to attracting and recruiting veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces and their families to better match up opportunities
- The Skills Lead is currently engaging with the AFC Business Theme Group to work together to ensure alignment with the Skills 4 Plymouth Plan and relationships with the AFC signatories

Emma Hewitt, Skills Lead, Plymouth City Council
27/10/22

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT - SCRUTINY

Briefing on Children, Young People and Families Theme Group

7 November 2022

**Introduction: Plymouth AFC - Children, Young People & Families Theme Group (AFC-CYP&F)**

Plymouth City Council (PCC) facilitates the AFC-CYP&F Theme Group, where a number of key partners and colleagues across Plymouth, come together to add value to existing activity, working collectively to support children, young people and their families in their wellbeing and development. Currently, the Education, Participation and Skills Team, within PCC provide this facilitation role, however the activity of the Theme Group, includes valuable input from across PCC. The Theme Group aims to reduce barriers to learning and development by recognising, supporting and raising awareness of the often unique challenges that life in an armed forces family presents. Its activity relates directly to section 3.7 (*Champions the needs of service and veteran children and their families in Plymouth*) of the covenant and indirectly to its wider aims.

Organisation: Plymouth AFC – Children, Young People and Families Theme Group

The AFC-CYP&F Theme Group meet on three occasions throughout the academic year, supported by continual virtual contact (and in an ad-hoc manner via sub-group or project related activity). The AFC-CYP&F Theme Group now act as a strategic group and determine the armed forces related content of the new ‘Young Carers and Service Family Leads Hub (YC&SF Leads Hub)’ – a network of the workforce that exists within schools, that provide the educational, pastoral and therapeutic support for children, young people and their families, within the school environment. This YC&SF Leads Hub, provides a new level of development for existing school based colleagues, which builds on a successful and existing model of coordination. Utilising existing research (e.g. Service Children in state Schools Report – Thriving Lives Toolkit Evaluation 2022), guidance (e.g. UK Armed Forces Families Strategy – 2022/2032), consultation with children and young people (e.g. Youth Participation / RBL creation of video – ‘What Life is Like in a Service Family’), evidence from partners and school intelligence, the AFC-CYP&F Theme Group are currently developing its annual action plan, which will be agreed during the next scheduled meeting (February 2023). The Theme Group continually evolves and develops, recently introducing a standing Agenda, rolling Chairpersonship and strategic oversight of the ‘YC&SF Leads Hub’. It is currently finalising a new Terms of Reference and the developed annual Action Plan. Representation at meetings, continues to be a challenge, thus a blend of virtual meetings and a network approach, utilising online communications is being developed. Mental Health and Wellbeing continues to be the central area that the Theme Group focuses its efforts upon, with the assertion that existing wellbeing challenges faced by service family children and young people have potentially been exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic, the increasing economic challenges that face Plymouth’s communities and the unsettled nature of wider world relations and ongoing conflict.

Activity: Plymouth AFC - Children, Young People & Families Theme Group

Over the lifetime of the Community Covenant (and now the Armed Forces Covenant), the CYP&F Theme Group has worked collectively to support children young people and their families. It is noted that the current activity of the AFC-CYP&F Theme Group builds upon, and is informed by, previous nationally recognised best practice, within the City. Some examples of previous and present collective activity include:

- Supporting the Royal British Legion’s activity regarding the Military Kids Club Heroes network (pupil voice group for the children and young people of Service personnel and veterans)
- Raising awareness of the challenges faced by service family children and young people (for example the production of the ‘What Life is Like in a Service Family’ Video - <https://vimeo.com/533532894>)
- Applying, supporting and directing grants for service family related activity
- Promoting and supporting Local and National services related events and days of importance (e.g. Armed Forces Day, Remembrance etc.)
- Facilitating peer support through a range of events, sessions, groups and clubs

Development: Plymouth AFC - Children, Young People & Families Theme Group

Core areas of development for the Theme Group going forward are:

- Increase participation from the colleagues, partners and organisations within Plymouth that have influence regarding the wellbeing of service family children and young people and integrate activity with the other AFC Theme Groups.
- Utilise further, the voice of service family children and young people to develop education and pastoral support.
- Advocate for service family children and young people regarding the identified areas of development with the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy – 2022/2032 (Admissions, Transport, Attendance, Additional Needs support, Educational attainment and curriculum, Student Wellbeing, Use of Pupil premium).

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW

Community Connections



Introduction

This briefing sets out the key updates from works aligned to Armed Forces Covenant around Housing in the City

Housing Register – Devon Home Choice

The Armed Forces Covenant in Plymouth says:

Supporting servicemen/women and ex-servicemen/women to secure suitable accommodation

- The Council will offer suitable advice to Armed Forces applicants who present in Plymouth so they are able to access affordable housing in the City
- Accepting the UK Armed Forces Veteran ID Cards as proof of a Veteran.
- The Council will offer preference for those requiring social housing who are currently in the Armed Forces or leaving the forces.
- The Council will allocate a proportion of stock through local lettings plans for Armed Forces applicants.

Assisting with requests for adapted homes for wounded soldiers.

- Those living in a Plymouth Social Housing property can be direct matched to a suitable property where there is a medical need.
- The Council will offer relevant advice and support to injured veterans to help them access home improvements.

We make provision for veterans and their families in the Devon Home Choice policy that helps meet their needs:

- Preference that upgrades households from band D to band C
- Exemption from 'deliberate worsening of circumstances'
- Disregarding of lump sums
- The Devon Home Choice policy does not apply local connection restrictions for those who are in or leaving the armed forces

Affordable Housing Delivery

We worked with partners to deliver the award winning Nelson Project which provided 24 flats including 6 for people with Learning Difficulties and successfully homed 12 single veterans in housing need who also received training while working on the build. £450,000 grant funding was provided by PCC and we provided the site at no cost.

We are currently delivering the Stirling Project which replicates the Nelson Project but also includes veterans with families and delivers a mix of houses and flats. PCC obtained £375,000 Land Release funding for the scheme which, together with £325,000 from PCC's Plan for Homes fund was used to purchase the adjoining NHS Clinic and to demolish both the Clinic and the council's former residential home. This included removing widespread asbestos contamination from the land.

The land was released to Housing Association partner Livewest in Feb 2021 and work on site started a few months later with the first homes being occupied later this year. The project will deliver 25 affordable homes including a 4 bed wheelchair adapted house and up to 12 veterans are involved in building their own homes while receiving training, which will allow them to obtain employment in the construction industry. An interview with one of the veterans can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qxf5nkfVEhQ>

We are also working with another partner RP on a new development on Council owned land where it is proposed that some of the homes will be subject to a Local Lettings Policy which prioritises lets to veterans in housing need. £90,000 Land Release funding has been secured towards abnormal costs on the site.

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Human Resources & Organisational Development – October 2022



HROD has been asked to provide a summary of what it has done to support serving personnel, reservists, veterans, etc over the past 10 years, what work is currently being undertaken and what we intend to do going forward.

Context

Plymouth has a long-established relationship with its armed forces community, and is fully committed to supporting those leaving military service to ensure that they have full access to opportunities to facilitate their transition into civilian life.

As part of this commitment, Plymouth City Council

- (a) Originally signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012, and renewed this commitment earlier in 2022
- (b) achieved the Silver Award from The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in 2018
- (c) signed an Engagement Agreement with Royal Navy in 2019

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme – Gold Award

The Council wishes to enhance its commitment and support to our armed forces community by achieving the Gold Award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The Council attempted to obtain the Gold Award in 2020 but was regrettably unsuccessful in its application.

A summary of the required criteria is set out below with comments where relevant.

Requirement	Current Status/Required Action	Comment
Must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant	Criteria met.	
Employers must have an existing relationship with their National Account Manager/REED/ appropriate defence representative	PCC already has an established relationship with the Senior Regional Employer Engagement Director.	
The employer should already be demonstrating support by receiving an ERS Silver Award.	Criteria met.	
The employer must proactively demonstrate their forces-friendly credentials as part of their recruiting and selection processes. Where possible,	Continue to work with Career Transition Partnership to broaden our offering to the armed forces community.	Led by Service Director for HR&OD

<p>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</p>	<p>PCC is registered with the Forces Families Job portal.</p>	
<p>Employers must employ at least one individual from the armed forces community category that the nomination emphasises. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must employ at least one Reservist</p>	<p>Categories include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reservist • Veteran • Military Spouse/Partner • Cadet Force Volunteer (CFAV) 	<p>The HR system has been adapted to enable the Council to collect this information.</p> <p>Data collection needs to be undertaken.</p>
<p>The employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, an internally publicised and positive HR policy on Reserves or, in the case where no HR policy exists, support should be demonstrated by specific references in job descriptions or on the organisation's website.</p>	<p>PCC offers guaranteed interviews to Service Leavers (subject to eligibility) and this is highlight in its Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure. This offer is highlighted in guidance to applicants on PCC's external website.</p> <p>Reservist Policy has been drafted.</p>	<p>Reservist Policy requires final approval.</p>
<p>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. For example demonstrate proactive steps/activity and clear success in encouraging partner organisations and their supply chain to sign the AFC.</p>	<p>Review of existing procurement processes</p> <p>Discussion with partner organisations CCG, Delt, CaterEd to advocate support</p>	<p>Procurement Team</p> <p>Service Director for HR&OD</p>
<p>Within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place.</p>	<p>There is no evidence that PCC has had requests for leave in the last 12 months.</p>	
<p>The employer must provide at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid, to the Reservist employee</p>	<p>The Council offers up to 10 paid days per a year for non-regular armed forces absence.</p>	

The employer must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity	Criteria met: This is required for Silver Award	
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Desirable Criteria

Requirement	Current Status/Required Action	Comment
They should promote their support to Defence People issues through their full range of external communications.	For discussion with Comms Team	
Although in exceptional circumstances an award is possible for support of a single Defence People issue, such as Reserves, a nomination will be strengthened if support extends across a range of Defence People issues as outlined above.		
They should have a declared target for the number of Reservists within their workforce.		
They will have hosted a Reserve recruiting event on their premises in partnership with a local Reserve Unit or a Single Service Recruiting Team.		
Other than in exceptional circumstances they should not have appealed a mobilisation.		
The employer should provide additional paid leave for CFAV's		

Next Steps

1. Create detailed action plan in relation to outstanding areas of work, and determine what resources are likely to be needed to meet the required standards within the timescales.
2. Work with the Regional Employer Engagement Director (REED) to submit application for Gold Award.

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT REVIEW

Select Committee Review

**Plymouth Branch Royal Naval Association Response**Questions posed:

- What you think the Community Covenant is
- What you think has gone well with the Community Covenant over the past 10 years
- What you think could have been done better
- What you would like to see happen in the future (whether continuation of work, specific improvements or new activities)
- If you would also be happy to come and talk to the Select Committee when they meet to discuss this further

Q 1. We understand the introduction of the Community Covenant to be the City's Council platform from which the entire 'Family' of the Armed Forces residing/working in Plymouth together with many relevant charitable & voluntary organisations may gather with the Council in a combined response to implemented the Government's Armed Forces Covenant, in doing so develop ideas implement schemes that support the British Armed Forces, Veterans and their Families.

Q 2. We consider, credit for the accomplishments to date stems from the initial structure being established to accommodate the organisations to gather and so form Plymouth's Armed Forces Community Covenant. As Veterans we appreciate the Community Covenant Team have not only recognised the need to address mental health issues, but they have embarked on a journey to develop Veteran's mental health partnerships bringing hope and relief to those effected and to an issue that has in the past remained in the shadows. Veteran's hospital i-pad message, Vet's breakfast club, Military Tuesday, Open Site Week, serving members first home to buy ownership scheme, and the Veteran's and Families Hub as a 'drop in' gathering space, also providing connections to a wide range of services and help.

Q 3. A very high degree of efficiency is difficult to attain in some areas when much of the work is undertaken by (charity) volunteers and possibly underfunded and all are doing their level best.. No doubt there is room for improvements so in general terms we can all watch out for and guard against wasted effort & wasted finance.

Q 4. It appears from our perspective, though many are aware of the existence of the Covenant, however their appears to be lack of understanding in it's guidance or purpose. 'Greater Awareness' would be beneficial?

Q 5. Please see para 1. & 2. Shipmate Richard Tipping is very keen and would very much like to attend the Select Committee. Richard is our Branch Welfare Officer and has much experience and knowledge in dealing with welfare matters within the Military and the Royal Naval Veteran Community in particular.

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT REVIEW

Select Committee Review

**Royal Nay & Royal Marines Charity response:**Questions posed:

- What you think the Community Covenant is
- What you think has gone well with the Community Covenant over the past 10 years
- What you think could have been done better
- What you would like to see happen in the future (whether continuation of work, specific improvements or new activities)
- If you would also be happy to come and talk to the Select Committee when they meet to discuss this further

Q1. The community covenant is made up of a collection of organisations that support the wider Armed forces community. This includes services for serving personnel, veterans, and their families. The covenant group offers an opportunity for likeminded organisations to work collaboratively and provides a platform to share initiatives and knowledge to get the widest reach across the AF community.

Q2. Certainly, in more recent years, I have witnessed a positive change in the leadership and direction the Covenant to address and resolve issues faced within the community. Additional community outreach support such as the Veterans & families Hub, delivered by Improving Lives and the Veterans Sports Hub delivered by PAFC have provided essential venues for members to access resources and create 'safe spaces' to openly discuss issues in an informal environment. The signposting between organisations is exceptional here in Plymouth. Long may it continue.

Q3. Some improvements to be had around awareness of support for all members of the community. We have established a great network but do beneficiaries know what is available. I believe the next step is to improve communications to widen reach and accessibility.

Communications – A one page spread in the Evening Herald signposting to a directory of services available to the Plymouth residents within the AF community.

Continuous social media posts about activities and events available to the AF community.

Transition – I have been championing for a booklet around transition to be created and given to all those leaving service and residing in Plymouth. This could include a directory of services available and some key notes around transition for employment, debt, housing, dental & medical etc. Signposting to the Veterans hub and military Tuesdays.

Q4. Improvements around widening reach to all cohorts to raise awareness of support.

RN & RM Attendance/ support from COB/BWO/EWO HMS Drake to represent serving personnel and take information back 'behind the wire'.

Future Meetings

Alan, you asked us to feedback regarding the current model of meetings. Having attended a few when there were only 7 of us! I believe we have the right people around the table. The current model works well, offering the opportunity for F2F and hybrid attendance is useful. The smaller steering groups are a good idea to drive specific initiatives forward in key areas and as we continue there may be some cross poll around activities. Members need to take an active part and offer a diverse knowledge base within the steering groups. I would like to see members with a wide age range and experiences of transitioning within the veterans group but there is also a call for more veterans of working age to take an active role here.

Q5. Katie Hughes, RNRMC & RNA SW engagement officer, AFC member, Lead of Veterans Steering group.

ARMED FORCES COVENANT REVIEW

Select Committee Review

**Naval Families Federation response:**Questions posed:

- What you think the Community Covenant is
- What you think has gone well with the Community Covenant over the past 10 years
- What you think could have been done better
- What you would like to see happen in the future (whether continuation of work, specific improvements or new activities)
- If you would also be happy to come and talk to the Select Committee when they meet to discuss this further

Q1. My understanding is that the Community Covenant is the way the Armed Forces Covenant is implemented at a local level.

Q2. I have only been involved for the last 12 months but on having a conversation with my predecessor we both agree the focus groups are a great way for specialists to work in specific areas and then the ideas and questions are posed at the bigger overall AFC meeting.

Q3. It would be good to have a website that can inform about the AFC and how it is supported in the local area.(I understand this is being done).

Q4. I like the way that the focus groups run and the CYP one that our organisation attends is reviewing how it is run etc. I think it would be good to see more of a representation about current serving personnel and families. There are also several serving families in the area, who have chosen to settle here, where the service person is based somewhere else as well. Equally I accept that you potentially need more representation from the serving military (although I'm not sure what happens in the military sub group regarding attendance).

Q5. Sian Timms. Naval Families Federation. I am a member of the CYP Cluster.

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ARMED FORCES COVENANT REVIEW

Select Committee Review

**Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity response:**Questions posed:

- What you think the Community Covenant is
- What you think has gone well with the Community Covenant over the past 10 years
- What you think could have been done better
- What you would like to see happen in the future (whether continuation of work, specific improvements or new activities)
- If you would also be happy to come and talk to the Select Committee when they meet to discuss this further

Q1. The Armed Forces Covenant is an agreement from the nation and those authorities that sign up to it, to ensure that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. By signing up to the covenant each authority demonstrates its commitment to improving services to the serving and veteran community. It is a platform to work together to identify gaps in support or provision to meet its mission statement.

Q2. Over the past 10 years' service family and veteran support has improved due to the work that the covenant has done, by looking at improving such issues as non-core healthcare services for veterans, removing barriers to family life, extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help, coupled with putting in measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Force community to participate as citizens. In Plymouth, the veteran community and service community are very well represented across the city and have numerous avenues of support. Improving Lives Plymouth is a very good example to name only one of many, of the provision that is in place in the city, and some grants from the Covenant are utilised to fund elements of the services provided there.

The communication and understanding of the Covenant and its role have also improved over the past 10 years, and the participation in meetings is better represented across all sectors of support and industry so this can only gain momentum over the next 10 years and therefore enhance the effectiveness and understanding of the covenants work and remit to the service community, providing people and the organisations involved continue to back the concept.

Q3. As practitioner in the transition space of service to civilian life, the constant issue that is faced by many personnel and their families transitioning is that of Social Housing provision and the process that must be undertaken to secure housing upon leaving the service. It is my thoughts that this is an area that requires more resources and work to be done on the process to enable social housing to be more accessible for all i.e Single service leavers as well as families that are leaving the safety net of service family accommodation.

Q4. –

Q5. Paul Gray (Transition Support Guide) (Social Worker) Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (Attended Covenant Meetings when Possible)

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Notes from Heather Ogburn

What you think the Community Covenant is

As we all know, 'the AFC is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly'. Like the government, Plymouth Covenant should be committed to supporting the armed forces community. The Covenant in Plymouth has been a living, breathing entity, its membership ensuring the promise is upheld through working in real collaboration with the armed forces community and wider community across the city.

What you think has gone well with the Community Covenant over the past 10 years

Many excellent things have happened through the Plymouth AFC up to and including some of 2019.

The Covenant came into being via the EPS Dept of PCC as, at that time, only EPS were involved in any measurable way, with the AF community. The PCC officer responsible for supporting military and veterans' children and their families had been working with schools for some time, to ensure equality of access and opportunity for these families. By the time of the signing of the Covenant, in 2012, a schools' service pupil voice network was already in existence and this network was linked across not only schools but the military community and civic activities. The achievement and progress of military children was tracked and reported on and the officer regularly acted upon feedback from the community. Because of this, there was already a foundation laid for the Covenant, that was quickly built upon by inviting membership from across the city to participate.

A significant success of the Covenant has been the consultation with the AF community so that planned outcomes would meet needs at a local level whilst remaining mindful of the national picture. The voice of children and young people in this has been unique to Plymouth and celebrated at a national level on regular occasions. Up to 2019, it remained the only Covenant to have this element. It would have remained so, however, the voice of the young people has been lost.

Covenant grant funding was very successful, during the early days of this process, as the Covenant officer worked closely with those seeking grant funding to ensure tightly written bids that met the local and national criteria of the Covenant.

The Covenant brought together many parties to support the promise to the AF community and enabled the linkage of topics and projects to maximise outcomes. The focused plans with measurable outcomes that would evidence impact were present and actively used to ensure the Covenant made a positive difference. The plans also included a maintenance section to ensure achieved outcomes did not slip or disappear once completed.

The inclusion of young people in the Covenant enabled Plymouth to become the leading LA in work with service children and young people, sharing their practice

across other LAs, even into Scotland and North Yorkshire. We were able to link work with the families' federations and various service providers within the armed forces themselves.

Plymouth quickly became the 'go to' LA for support for service children and families and we gained a seat on the national exec of the SCISS and a key member of MODLAP plus becoming a significant voice with service charities, notably, the RBL. In addition, we were regular contributors to the SCIP Alliance, supporting their development of materials for schools and HEI settings.

The Covenant membership, including the charitable sector and veterans' groups, enabled us to better understand their needs and aim to meet these within the Covenant remit. It also enabled individual memberships to make connections and maximise their impact together rather than individually.

The Covenant brought the needs of veterans' employment to the fore through local employment fairs, that the MOD were not able to provide, and through publicising this via the media, showcasing the teamwork of the Covenant on behalf of disadvantaged veterans and their families.

Plymouth resisted the temptation to 'tick the box' and become part of the wider SW Covenant due to recognising our unique nature as a garrison city. Whilst we liaised and shared practice across the region we remained exclusively Plymothian.

The appointment of Covenant officers and members from a military background made a significant positive difference to understanding the community we served.

The AF community knew they key lead officer(s)/ Champion and could approach them for help or with their opinions.

What you think could have been done better

What ever we achieve we can always do better.

The membership became very large, and meetings proved a challenge to productivity.

The decision to join up with the Wessex Covenant group, I believe, was a mistake, shifting us from a unique identity. I would ask what the membership of Wessex has done for Plymouth, specifically, that we could not have achieved anyway?

The loss of the driving officer being from a military background placed a deal of pressure on other officers to try to gain a military perspective.

The move to theme groups, whilst logical, given my first point in this section, was not as productive as it could have been. This put extra pressure on the lead officer's time and disjointed the aims and, thus, potential positive outcomes for each group.

The AF Awards was a great idea that lost integrity as the event became an activity outside of the Covenant itself. Due to Covid, this was abandoned but the award

recipients did not receive the recognition they deserved. Covenant could have done this, despite Covid, via Teams/Zoom etc.

The focus on the voice of the AF Community began to fade in favour of voices of those at the table (not always the same thing) especially the voices of young people who, due to restructure of EPS, fell under a new officer with little or no remit to ensure these young people were not disadvantaged. Because of this, the children's voice network (MKC Heroes) has collapsed, the Military Kids Choir, a key part of the Covenant plan, has not been reinstated post-Covid and military children and young people are no longer a part of civic activity. The Covenant does not know how well Plymouth children and young people are achieving, how their health (physical and mental) is or what they see as their priorities for the future. I would ask, does the Covenant know this of any of the AF Community and why has the Covenant not held those responsible for knowing and supporting to account?

The Covenant did not manage to maintain the employment fairs and could have worked harder to support spouses and dependents employment opportunities.

The website has never been as good as it could be and needs work.

What would you like to see happen in the future (whether continuation of work, specific improvements or new activities)

I would like to see Plymouth Covenant redefine its unique nature within the UK and to have confidence in its ability to deliver the Covenant promise for the city, based on the voices of that community, including its young people.

I would like to see Covenant officers, officers linked to the military community and members held to account for their actions in support of the AF Community.

I would like the Covenant to have a comprehensive action plan with outcome focused, measurable impacts assigned across the membership.

If the theme groups remain, I would like to see these joined up with the theme leads meeting regularly to plan together and deliver joint and linked outcomes as appropriate.

I would like to see a defined focus on mental health, specifically for children, young people and their families, driven by the young people themselves, including the reinstatement of MKC H across Plymouth schools and a Military Kids Choir (a key support for families mental health) funded from the music budget. This is based on feedback I already have and regularly receive from the community.

Focusing on spouses' employment, if they see this as a priority, would also be something I see as a likely theme. This is an assumption; I don't have their voice on this.

I would like to see the Covenant focus on commemoration and celebration strengthened and to see members of the armed forces community, including children

and young people, involved in all civic events. Feedback to me is dismayed that there is no invitation to include military children in many things.

Web/social media needs to be addressed in a way that makes it easily accessible for all. Who can the community ask? Who is the Lead/Champion etc? What are the priorities and how does Covenant know this? Regular updates and links to support charities etc.

Cross party representation so that there is continuity across the political scene.

Plymouth City Council Armed Forces Community Covenant Select Committee Review

The Royal British Legion response, August 2022

1. About Us

- 1.1. The Royal British Legion (RBL) is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring that their unique contribution is never forgotten. We were created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War, and still remain one of the UK's largest membership organisations. The RBL is the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, helping veterans young and old transition into civilian life. We help with employment, financial issues, respite, and recovery, through to lifelong care and independent living. For further information, please visit www.britishlegion.org.uk
- 1.2. RBL produced a comprehensive report in 2021 *The Armed Forces Covenant Reflections on a decade of the nation's promise*.¹ The majority of our comments in response to Plymouth City Council's select committee review will be based on the findings in this report. We will however provide as many local insights as we can that focus on the work undertaken in Plymouth. RBL encourages the Select Committee to particularly consider the section on Local Government on page 69 of this report.

2. General Comments

- 2.1. Over ten years ago, following a campaign led by RBL, and supported by Poppyscotland, the Armed Forces Covenant became enshrined in the Armed Forces Act 2011. The Covenant outlines the nation's obligation to look after those who have served and their families, ensuring that members of the Armed Forces community face no disadvantage because of their Service, and that special consideration be given in certain circumstances, such as for those who have been injured or bereaved.
- 2.2. The operational context of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and failures in policy to provide adequate support and welfare for those returning home from conflict or those left bereaved, gave the RBL the impetus to launch our 'Honour the Covenant' campaign of 2007. The campaign re-articulated a long-held belief that dates back to the origins of the RBL that the sacrifices and commitment of those who serve should be recognised and any disadvantages they face addressed. Political will coalesced with the campaign's call, and political parties of all sides stepped up to provide the legislative change necessary to enshrine it in legislation in 2011.

¹ https://storage.rblcdn.co.uk/sitefinity/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/rbl-armed-forces-covenant-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=b65b18bb_0

- 2.3. Over the decade since it has been enshrined in legislation, action delivered under the Covenant has led to significant steps forward in the provision of services to Service personnel, veterans and their families; for example removing local connection criteria for social housing five years after discharge from the Armed Forces.
- 2.4. Over time, an implied shift of responsibility may have occurred away from the UK Government onto other actors, such as local government, who have more limited financial means to be able to fund new Covenant initiatives on their own in the same fashion as UK Government departments. The Armed Forces Act 2021 further consolidated that shift by creating a new legal duty that is mostly focused on policy areas which are the responsibility of local government.
- 2.5. RBL recognise that Plymouth City Council, with the limited financial resources available to it has been able to deliver on its Covenant obligations that it signed ten years ago. A starting point for evaluating Plymouth's delivery is the *Our Community Our Covenant report* "core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant."² This report sets out the important actions that local authorities should take such as; appointing an elected member champion and a mechanism for collaboration with partners. RBL also recognises the recent action Plymouth City Council has taken to update and improve their website, this is another key piece of infrastructure referenced in the *Our Community Our Covenant* report.
- 2.6. RBL understand that there is an up-to-date action plan which outlines activities and is monitored. The Covenant Board may wish to consider how it promotes that action plan and visibly demonstrates to the public how it is achieving its targets. Alternatively, Plymouth could consider producing an annual report, similar to that of Surrey County Council³ **RBL recommends publishing the Plymouth Covenant action plan and promote its achievements.**
- 2.7. During RBL's research and polling about public understanding of the Covenant, the concept of no disadvantage resonated with all sectors of society interviewed as a principle they could support. Within our interviews the terminology of labelling the Armed Forces community as a potentially 'disadvantaged' group was critiqued by one contributor for the impact it could have on veteran wellbeing, but overall, our interviewees found it useful as a framework for deciding on the application of the Covenant. For one Councillor from an area with a significant Armed Forces community similar in characteristics to that of Plymouth, it represented an idea of treating people "fairly", a term that does not appear in the original text of the Covenant but was often repeated by others in discussion of the principle. Terminology is important, whilst we acknowledge "fairness" is a positive objective, it doesn't recognise the service and unique circumstances of the Armed Forces which is why they may be disadvantaged.⁴
- 2.8. **RBL recommends that authors of any publication or statement that references the Covenant should ensure that they use the specific wording of the principles as outlined in the Covenant itself to avoid confusion and dilution of them.**

3. Response to questions

What you think the Community Covenant is

² Shared intelligence, *Our Community Our Covenant*, 2017, available at <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/our-community-our-covenant-improving-delivery-local-covenant-pledges.pdf>

³ [Surrey County Council, Armed Forces Covenant report 2021 to 2022](#)

⁴ The Royal British Legion, *The Armed Forces Covenant Reflections on a decade of the nation's promise*, 2021

- 3.1. RBL Response - When the Covenant was first conceived, its focus was on national government. Over time this has increasingly shifted to local government and businesses. The UK Government subsequently introduced Community Covenants, as they were initially known, and made them a central pillar of Covenant delivery. Community Covenants and their successor, the Armed Forces Covenant in the Community, have been supported by millions of pounds of funding for local Covenant initiatives. At its core, the 'Community Covenant' is the application of the two principles of the Armed Forces Covenant at the local authority level. Those being that members of the Armed Forces community face no disadvantage because of their Service, and that special consideration be given in certain circumstances, such as for those who have been injured or bereaved. If successful, the Covenant will pull together the Armed Forces community, local government, and the wider community in embedding those principle into local society.

What you think has gone well with the Community covenant over the past 10 years

- 3.2. RBL Response – In Plymouth the Council have done well to bring together representatives from business, the voluntary sector, and the Council. The four theme groups (veterans, serving personnel, children and families, and businesses) are unique compared to other Covenant Boards that RBL regularly attend. RBL thinks this arrangement is an example of good practice that Plymouth have pioneered.
- 3.3. Referring again to the core infrastructure in the *Our Community Our Covenant* report, most of this infrastructure is being delivered in Plymouth. RBL observes the following:
- 3.3.1. An elected member champion
 - 3.3.2. An officer point of contact within the council
 - 3.3.3. An outward facing forum
 - 3.3.4. A mechanism for collaborating with partners
 - 3.3.5. A webpage with key information and links
 - 3.3.6. A clear public statement of expectations
 - 3.3.7. An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed
 - 3.3.8. Enthusiasm and commitment

What you think could have been done better

- 3.4. RBL Response – The Plymouth Covenant has a strong focus on collaboration which is good but could do well to remind all members of the Board that it is a partnership and not all activity should necessarily be the responsibility of the Council. Whilst the Council host the meetings and provide administration support, it's important for all partners to be clear on their respective roles.

What you would like to see happen in the future (whether continuation of work, specific improvements or new activities)

- 3.5. Some councils, such as Somerset, Kent and Surrey have held an annual Covenant Conference, inviting a broad section of the community to showcase what the Covenant partners do, and share their successes. Many businesses, charities, and government agencies (such as the NHS) are often keen to ensure they are playing their part in delivering the Covenant, even if they would be unable to attend regular Covenant meetings. Inviting interested organisations to find out more and network in Plymouth could be positive in promoting awareness of the Plymouth Covenant.

- 3.5.1. With the new legislation coming into force later this year, a conference may also serve as an opportunity for the Ministry of Defence to update the wider community of this new legal duty.
- 3.6. It is likely that policy reviews are already being undertaken; referring to the *Our Community our Covenant* core infrastructure table, time could be given to updating Covenant partners of these reviews. Similarly, it may be that training of frontline staff is already being undertaken regularly, the Council may wish to inform the Covenant partners of this to highlight the steps Plymouth City Council are taking as a provider of public services.
- 3.7. New legislation contained in the Armed Forces Act 2021 is due to come into effect later this year as soon as the Statutory Guidance has been approved. This legislation creates a new legal duty to pay due regard to the Armed Forces community in the policy areas of housing, healthcare, and education. Whilst these are three important policy areas, the Plymouth Covenant should continue to support all areas of policy that impact on the Armed Forces community, and not just those they have a legal duty to have due regard of.
- 3.7.1. Prominent examples of topics where Covenant issues have been raised in recent years include employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice, and immigration. We cannot accurately predict all the issues that may arise in the future. Usage reports from the Veterans Gateway – a first point of contact portal for veterans seeking support, which is part-funded by the MoD and run by a consortium led by the RBL – indicate that employment and finance (which would include benefits and compensation) feature prominently alongside health and housing queries.
- 3.8. The Plymouth Covenant Board could consider re-signing the Covenant, as other areas have done, to reiterate their commitments, ten years on from the original signing. Whether a Covenant re-signing takes place or not, it is important to keep the core principles of ‘no disadvantage’ and ‘special consideration for those who have given the most’, at the forefront of Plymouth’s Armed Forces Covenant activity.
- 3.9. RBL recommends the Plymouth Covenant continues to focus on all policy areas that impact the Armed Forces community, and not limit itself to those that are covered by the new statutory duty of due regard.**

Your name, your organization and your involvement with the Community Covenant

- 3.10. Nick Craker, Public Affairs and Campaigns Officer, The Royal British Legion.
Represent RBL at the Plymouth Covenant Board.

4. Summary of Recommendations

- 4.1. RBL recommends publishing the Plymouth Covenant action plan and promote its achievements.
- 4.2. RBL recommends that authors of any publication or statement that references the Covenant should ensure that they use the specific wording of the principles as outlined in the Covenant itself to avoid confusion and dilution of them.

- 4.3. RBL recommends the Plymouth Covenant continues to focus on all policy areas that impact the Armed Forces community, and not limit itself to those that are covered by the new statutory duty of due regard.

For further information or for clarifications please contact Nick Craker, Public Affairs and Campaigns Officer (South), on ncraker@britishlegion.org.uk

August 2022

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