

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.