



ARMED FORCES

COVENANT

**A Guide for Local Authorities:
How to deliver the Covenant in your area**



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.



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served, and their families, are treated fairly. This commitment is made in recognition of the sacrifices they make on behalf of the country. The Armed Forces Covenant is not designed to give the Armed Forces, Veterans and their families' preferential treatment compared with other citizens but it should ensure that they get a fair deal and are not disadvantaged because of their Service.

The Armed Forces Covenant relies on the government, communities, businesses, and individuals of the UK to actively support it in order to make a difference. Local Authorities are at the heart of that support group, but your organisation will be one of many who are working hard to make sure that Servicemen and women, veterans and their families get a fair deal.

This guide aims to explain how Service life affects the Armed Forces and the ways you can make sure that your services take account of the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

Who do we mean by the Armed Forces Community?

All serving personnel (regulars and reserves), veterans and their families are considered to be the Armed Forces Community. Children of Armed Forces personnel – no matter the marital status of their parents – should always be considered part of the community while still dependent.¹

The Armed Forces Covenant applies to all elements of the Service community, whether they are based in the UK or overseas. Service families should not expect to face disadvantage from the requirement to serve overseas. A number of remunerative and non-remunerative measures help to offset those aspects of hardship associated with Service life abroad. However, Local Authorities have a part to play in addressing the enduring effects of domestic upheaval, whether constraints are felt in gaining fair access to housing, schooling, employment or healthcare.

Why do we need an Armed Forces Covenant?

Life in the Armed Forces is different to the rest of society. Whilst a military career is challenging and rewarding, Armed Forces personnel make sacrifices in order to serve. They go where they are sent, when they are sent. As long as we need to defend our nation and its interests in an uncertain and dangerous world, we will need Armed Forces that are ready and willing to serve when called. So families will have to move, sometimes with little notice, to unfamiliar areas. Or they may have to live apart for extended periods of time and cope with the issues that this can bring. And they will face the stresses and strains that arise when their loved one is deployed on operational commitments.

All of this means that they can find themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their civilian neighbours in accessing the goods and services that as citizens we should all expect.

1. We also encourage local authorities to include provision for separated/divorced spouses or civil partners as they transit out of the Armed Forces Community.



What to do

Your local Armed Forces Community is part of your local community, and as such, ensuring that they are treated fairly and not disadvantaged should be integrated into all the services, support, engagement and work you do with your local community.

There is not a set formula for Local Authorities to follow. The level of support you provide will depend on the size of your Armed Forces Community and their individual needs. However, every Local Authority has a role supporting its Armed Forces Community.

This may seem like a daunting challenge but put simply, it is about ensuring the Armed Forces Community are taken into account when writing and implementing policies that impact upon your local population – and there will be members of the Armed Forces Community in your local population.

When considering how you should approach the Armed Forces Covenant you should remember that underlying the promise that the Armed Forces Community should be treated fairly lay two principles:

- The Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases for those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved.

What do we mean by these principles?

What do we mean by the first? Where do our Armed Forces Community find themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their fellow citizens?

Service personnel and their families can experience a far higher level of mobility than other citizens and could for example find themselves continually at the bottom of health or social housing waiting lists, or have real difficulties finding places for their children at local schools. So Covenant pledges that support the Armed Forces Community will need to ensure that the key policies in housing, healthcare and education are flexible enough to reflect the realities of life in the Armed Forces.

This does not mean that those in the Armed Forces Community should jump to the top of the queue or be given special treatment – they don't want that - but it does mean that we can't allow them to fall behind or be forgotten.

It does not mean, for example, that when returning to their home area after years of Service they are automatically entitled to a house; but it does mean that they should be given the right to have the same local connection and consideration as their old school friend who never left his or her home town.

It does not mean that children of Service families should have guaranteed places at the top schools; but it does mean that there should be procedures - and enough flexibility in the system - to allow these children a school place – often at short notice, sometimes with no accommodation or postcode finalised and mid-term.



And the second principle?

All those who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant – and every Local Authority in Great Britain has – will agree that we have a duty as a nation to support those who have made the greatest sacrifices on the country's behalf; those who have been injured or those who have been bereaved.

In central government this means ensuring, for example, that an injured Serviceperson gets the very best medical and rehabilitation treatment that this country can offer and is equipped with the training and resources he or she needs to look to the future with confidence.

For Local Authorities it could mean, in the case of an injured Serviceperson who is transitioning to the civilian world, for example, that they are able to access supported housing or that their existing home can be modified quickly to meet their needs, and that they are quickly and compassionately assessed on their level of care requirements.

What next?

Local Authorities know their local circumstances best, and are in the best position to determine how to deliver their Covenant commitments. To help support Local Authorities, in 2016 the Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association commissioned an independent survey and review of the delivery of local Covenant pledges – the “Our Community – Our Covenant Report” - which sets out good practice and helpful steps that local partnerships can adopt. The full report and executive summary can be found here - <http://www.fim-trust.org/reports/> - but we've also included some of its key findings and examples of good practice that we feel could be helpful in this guide. A full copy of the report's tool-kit, including top tips and a self-assessment tool, can be found at the Annex.

Be a Forces Friendly Employer

Reservists and veterans bring a variety of transferable skills and qualities to the civilian workplace, developed throughout their military careers. Being flexible to the unique situations of the wider Armed Forces Community ensures fair treatment to all who are involved, including spouses/partners and families.

You can find out what the [Armed Forces Covenant means for employers](#) or to get tips for Covenant best practice visit the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) website.

Employer Recognition Scheme

The [Employer Recognition Scheme \(ERS\)](#) acknowledges employers who have provided exceptional support to the Armed Forces Community and defence by going above and beyond their Covenant pledges. Through a 3 tier approach of bronze, silver and gold awards, the scheme recognises the different levels of commitment provided by employers. This allows the Ministry of Defence to publicly thank and honour those organisations for their support.

Find out more at <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/support-and-advice/businesses/> and see what Hampshire County Council have achieved at <https://www.hants.gov.uk/community/armedforces/staffreservists>

CORE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COVENANT DELIVERY

Drawing on the findings of the Our Community – Our Covenant report’s research, a description of a core infrastructure was drawn up to reflect the action taken by Local Authorities that have successfully implemented the Covenant. These are summarised in the table below.

Our Community – Our Covenant Report – 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 plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed • Policy reviews • Enthusiasm and commitment

Armed Forces Champions and Lead Officers

A key step is to appoint both an Armed Forces Champion (the Our Community – Our Covenant report recommends this be an elected member) and a Lead Officer. Ideally the individuals will care about supporting the Armed Forces and be empowered to effect change right across the Local Authority. But it can be a busy job, especially in the beginning, and therefore they also need to be able to allocate the time required. While not prescriptive, we advise that Champions/Lead Officers should follow the general guidance set out below:

- Ensure that your role as Armed Forces Champion/Lead Officer and contact details are publicised within and outside the organisation.
- Understand the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant, how the Covenant can support these aims in local communities and how the Local Authority can uphold the Covenant.
- Consider the needs of the Armed Forces Community in relation to Local Authority policies and service delivery, such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment or housing allocation schemes.
- Actively communicate the Covenant within the Community and the Covenant Partnership's work in taking it forward both within and outside the organisation.
- Be the point of contact for local Armed Forces (including Reserve) Unit(s) and other key stakeholders, such as Service charities and other service providers.
- Ensure that staff who have daily contact with the public are aware of the Covenant and understand how it impacts upon local services and delivery.
- Capitalise on the opportunities presented by Armed Forces Week and Remembrance Day to promote the Armed Forces and the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Promote the Armed Forces Covenant to local businesses and organisations, particularly among Local Authority suppliers and contractors.
- Identify whether your organisation employs any members of the Armed Forces Community and ensure that any employment practices take the issues and concerns of the Armed Forces Community into account.
- Most of all, remember that you are not alone and there are a number of organisations who can offer help and advice on how you can effectively deliver your local Covenant.

Action Plans

Put together an Action Plan to underpin your Covenant commitment. The 'measures' section of the Covenant pledge document can be personalised to list the specific commitments that your Local Authority wishes to sign up to. This helps you to set out the overall direction and ensures that you and your fellow stakeholders keep on track. If you publish your Action Plan you can also ensure that your



local community are aware of your commitments and plans. An example of an action plan used by Woking Borough Council can be found [here](#).

Regular Stakeholder Engagement

By organising regular meetings of key stakeholders who are involved with the Armed Forces and in the provision of services in your area² and, of course with the Armed Forces themselves, you can ensure that the Armed Forces Community are considered when policies and plans are put in place.

These meetings can act as a forum where emerging challenges can be discussed and action taken to resolve them. If the right stakeholders are involved, it can also present an ideal opportunity to share good practice and to network. The Covenant will never be finished or done. It will need to flex and adapt to changing circumstances and regular meetings are an excellent way to make sure that these are addressed in a timely manner.

Annual Reports

The Secretary of State for Defence is required under law to report annually on the progress being made under the Armed Forces Covenant, setting out the areas of challenge that remain and their plans to tackle them. By doing so, the government ensures that it is held to account for delivery of Covenant initiatives. A local version of the Annual Report could well work in the same way for your Authority and for the stakeholders that work with you. It can work as a demonstration of your commitment, keeping the Covenant under effective executive oversight and identifying new challenges while also recognising local achievements.

Communications

The Armed Forces Covenant only works if people know that it's there and what it's setting out to do. It is important to publicise the commitments you have made, and highlight what the Local Authority and its partners have done to deliver these, so your local community are aware of what is on offer. This can be done through dedicated webpages or regular newsletters. Examples from Argyll and Bute and Surrey are here - <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/armed-forces> ; <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/advice-guidance-and-support/armed-forces>

It is also vital to ensure that Local Authority staff who deal with members of the public are aware of the Covenant generally and about how your Authority's specific commitments impact upon local services and delivery. Further information on the staff training package currently provided by Warwickshire County Council, which has been made available at no cost to all Local Authorities, community and voluntary sector organisations, can be found here - <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/blog/archives/alerts/free-training-on-the-armed-forces-covenant-and-community>

2. These could include organisations such as Children's services, Head of Education, Head of Housing, Housing Associations, Local Enterprise Partnership, CCG Representatives, Local police, DWP Armed Forces Champion, MH Partnership Trust, Healthwatch, Local Charities, Local military unit Commanders, Families Federations or Service Charities.

Our Community - Our Covenant report extract – Self-Assessment Tool on Communication	
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the impact of local Covenant delivery evidenced?

KEY SERVICES - DETAILED GUIDANCE

As a member of a Local Authority you may be responsible – in some degree – for the provision of health, education or social housing; all key concerns for members of our Armed Forces Community. As public services are delivered differently in each of the UK home nations, detailed guidance (in a series of four annexes) has been prepared and can be found [here](#).

Links to the key Covenant websites and useful organisations involved in delivering specific services can be found at the end of this guide.

REMEMBRANCE AND RECOGNITION

All sorts of events and functions can be organised at any time of the year to celebrate and remember the sacrifices of our Armed Forces personnel, both past and present, and there are many examples of the Local Authorities already doing so.

Examples at the links below from West Norfolk’s website and a news article about events in Herefordshire show the sort of activities that take place all over the country - https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20007/people_and_communities/237/armed_forces_support; <https://www.hcr-law.com/event/herefordshires-1916-centenary-commemoration-armed-forces-day/>.

However below are some key dates for your diary.



Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day

Remembrance Sunday is held as a day "to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian Servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts". Local Authorities lead on the delivery of these events with assistance from local police and military charities as appropriate. It is held on the second Sunday in November.

Across the United Kingdom, Remembrance Sunday is marked by ceremonies at local war memorials in most cities, towns and villages, attended by civic dignitaries, ex-servicemen and women and serving members of the Armed Forces.

Armistice Day is the commemoration of the end of hostilities in the First World War and is held every year on 11 November.

Armed Forces Day

Armed Forces Day is a chance to show your support and say thank you to the men and women who make up the Armed Forces Community: from currently serving troops, reservists, Service families, veterans and cadets. There are many ways for people, communities and organisations across the country to show their support and participate; from attending an event to throwing a party or local event. Armed Forces Day takes place each year on the last Saturday in June. To find out more about how you can get involved visit the Armed Forces Day website -

<https://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/about/>

Reserves Day

Reservists give up their spare time to serve in the Reserve Forces, balancing their civilian life with a military career to ensure that should their country require them, they would be ready to serve as part of the military.

The Reserve Forces make up approximately one sixth of our Armed Forces personnel and as such are integral to protecting the nation's security at home and overseas, particularly providing capability in specialist areas such as medical and cyber.

Like their Regular colleagues, Reservists are currently supporting operations in the UK and overseas. . However, the contribution they make to our Armed Forces often goes unrecognised. As such an annual Reserves Day was created to highlight and recognise the valuable contribution Reservists make to our Armed Forces.

To find out how you can get involved and play your part in publically recognising our Reserve Forces visit the webpage here - <https://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/reserves-day/>



COVENANT FUNDING

The Covenant Fund is an enduring government grant awarded to projects that will benefit the armed forces and the community. Projects range from building new nurseries in civilian areas where many armed forces families live, to funding military themed activities that increase understanding between military and civilian communities in the same area.

Local Authorities are among the organisations eligible to apply to the Covenant Fund. Examples of projects it has funded can be found by visiting the LA section of our Covenant Webpage - <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/localauthorities/>

The Covenant Fund has 4 broad funding themes for now and in future years:

- Removing barriers to family life.
- Extra support after service for those that need help.
- Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces Community to participate as citizens.
- Non-core healthcare services for veterans.

The themes will shape the fund, but priorities will be adapted within them annually to ensure that the fund stays focussed and current.

The funding priorities for April 2017 to March 2018 are as follows:

- Families in stress
- Strengthening local government delivery of the Covenant
- Armed Forces Covenant: local grants
- A single grant to produce a map of need for the Covenant Fund
- A single grant to produce an outcomes framework for the Covenant Fund

Other information

Funding is limited, so we will only be able to fund the very best projects. As this is an enduring fund, there will be plenty of opportunity to apply in the coming months and years if your project is not quite ready yet.

Contact the Covenant Grant Team

Further information on the priorities, eligibility and application process can be found on the guidance page - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covenant-fund-guidance-on-how-to-apply>

If you have any questions which are not covered by the guidance, you can contact us by email at covenant-grantteammailbox@mod.uk.

Further details on annual priorities and how to apply for funding can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund>

VETERANS GATEWAY

The Veterans' Gateway provides a single point of contact to make it more straightforward for veterans and their families to obtain the right information, advice and support. The Veterans' Gateway provides website, online chat, phone line and text message services to all veterans wherever they are located, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It gives access to a network of specialist organisations from housing and recovery to mental health services, financial advice and employment support. It does not provide services itself, or therefore replicate, compete with or undermine existing charities or Government departments. The website is available here www.veteransgateway.org.uk

Finally...

The Covenant will never be finished or done. It will need to flex and adapt to changing circumstances that will throw up new challenges for our Armed Forces Community and for the communities in which they find themselves living. Using the Armed Forces Covenant as a mechanism to better identify areas of need and co-ordinate service provision, we can all work together to ensure that our Armed Forces Community get the fair deal they deserve.

USEFUL LINKS AND CONTACTS

The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016 details all that has already been achieved and what still needs to be done. It includes contributions from the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments on the Covenant commitments they have delivered. You can also find out more about their work by visiting their websites. To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means to you visit: www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk

The Covenant in Scotland: <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/veterans-and-armed-forces/>

The Covenant in Wales: <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/safety/armedforces/package-of-support/?lang=en>

Details of Local Authorities veterans' champions in Northern Ireland can be found here: <http://www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk/veteran/>

NHS choices - Armed Forces Community healthcare: <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/Pages/Militaryhealthcare.aspx>

Moneyforce website: <http://www.moneyforce.org.uk/>

Veterans UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk>

The Royal British Legion: <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

SSAFA: <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/>

The War Widows Association: <http://www.warwidows.org.uk/>

The Confederation of Service Charities: <https://www.cobseo.org.uk/>



The Naval Families Federation: <http://nff.org.uk/>

The Army Families Federation: <http://www.aff.org.uk/>

The RAF Families Federation: <http://www.raf-ff.org.uk/>

Citizens Advice Bureau: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Royal Navy and Royal Marines Welfare Information Service:
<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/welfare/welfare-teams>

RAF HIVE Information Service: <https://www.raf.mod.uk/community/support/raf-hive-information-service/>

Army Hive (Forces Welfare): <http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23438.aspx>

Veterans Gateway is the first point of contact for veterans and their families to access information, advice and support on a range of issues including healthcare, housing, and employment:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/veterans-gateway>

Health Issues

For England: [NHS Choices](#)

For Scotland: <http://www.scot.nhs.uk/> and <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Services/Armed-Forces>

For Wales: <http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/> and <http://www.veteranswales.co.uk/>

For Northern Ireland: <http://online.hscni.net/>

Government information pages: <https://www.gov.uk/>

Education

MODs Children's Education Advisory Service: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service>

Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) is a working group of educational specialists. They have produced a handbook for schools that explains how children's learning and well-being can be affected by their parent's service: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-children-in-state-schools-handbook>

The 'Supporting Service Children in Education' project is led by the Welsh Local Government Association and is funded by the MOD Education Support Fund <http://www.sseccymru.co.uk/home/>

Accommodation

Forces Help to Buy: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy>

Joint Services Housing Advice Office: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-service-housing-advice-office-jshao>



England: The Department for Communities and Local Government's website gives a variety of guidance on social housing and other accommodation options available to serving and ex-Service personnel. More information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/allocation-of-accommodation-guidance-for-local-housing-authorities-in-england>

Scotland: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2010/03/24165717/1>

Wales: <http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160324-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-allocation-of-accommodation-and-homelessness-en.pdf>

Wales Housing Pathway for ex-Service personnel:

<http://gov.wales/docs/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/homelessness/national-housing-pathway-fo-ex-service-personnel/?lang=en>

Housing in Northern Ireland: <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/allocations>

Employment, Training and Support

The [University of Wolverhampton – Supporting the Unsung Hero](#) scheme is designed to help Armed Forces family members start up their own businesses by providing free training, advice and support before, during and for a period of time after they set up their own companies.

[RBLI LifeWorks](#) offers courses and support services with the aim of helping veterans gain employment and [RBLI LifeWorks for Families](#) offers courses and support services with the aim of helping Service family members gain employment. [RBL Civvy Street](#) is a website for serving and ex-Service personnel and their dependents. It offers free information and advice about resettlement into civilian life, training and work.

[The British Forces Resettlement Service](#) is a not-for-profit scheme created to help members of the Armed Forces community with employment aspects of their transition to civilian life.

[The Recovery Career Services](#). This is a tri-Service scheme offering careers advice and support to wounded, injured and sick personnel who are leaving the Armed Forces.

[Department of Work and Pensions "JobCentre Plus" Armed Forces Champions](#) The Department for Work and Pensions has made commitments to support the Armed Forces community.

OUR COMMUNITY – OUR COVENANT REPORT - 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.

Our Community – Our Covenant Report – Core Infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<p>An elected member champion</p> <p>An officer point of contact within the council</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

Communication	Vision and Commitment
<p>A web page or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the Council</p> <p>A route through which concerns can be raised</p> <p>Training of frontline staff</p> <p>A vehicle for reporting action and achievements such as an annual report, newsletter or forum minutes</p>	<p>An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed</p> <p>Policy reviews</p> <p>Enthusiasm and commitment</p>

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.

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?
<p>Individuals</p>
<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?
<p>COLLABORATION</p>
<p>Forum/ co-ordinating group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<p>COMMUNICATION</p>
<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are council/MoD/charity officers and front line staff briefed on the Covenant? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is knowledge and information gathered? • How could knowledge sharing within organisations be improved?
<p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • How is the support which is on offer to the AFC communicated to the hard to reach?
<p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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 Local Authority 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 Non Commissioned Officer. 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 Local Authorities 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 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 Authority's overview and scrutiny function to carry out a regular review of the delivery of the Covenant.

Ensure that the Covenant features in Local Authority training programmes.

Involve The Royal British Legion 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.