



RENEWING THE COVENANT COUNCIL PACK

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INTRODUCTION

This document aims to provide councils with as much information as possible to support their work in developing their offering to the Armed Forces Community under their commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. This includes information, best practice, training and a suggested action plan to take the programme of work forward.



POLICY BEST PRACTICE

This section is aimed at addressing the key areas of council policy that may be affected by the Armed Forces Covenant and providing information and ideas on how these policies may be adapted to include the differing needs of the Armed Forces community. The Armed Forces Covenant says that:

“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.”

The aim of altering council policies is not to prioritise the Armed Forces community but instead to ensure fairness and that any disadvantage caused by military service is negated. These examples are not exhaustive or prescriptive, but ideas and suggestions as a starting point for policy review.

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Health

Sometimes the mobile nature of service life and the sacrifices and stresses undertaken, creates challenges that need addressing. The covenant sets the following healthcare goals:

- Family members should maintain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the service person being posted.
- Veterans should receive priority NHS hospital treatment for conditions resulting from their service in the Armed Forces.
- Veterans should be able to access mental health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture.
- Those injured in service should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation's moral obligation.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

- *All ex-service personnel will be offered information, guidance and sign-posting into statutory services via their named contact at the council.*
- *All ex-service personnel will have priority access to social care if their social care needs relate to their service. Where they do not meet this criteria, they will be signposted to other service related support services.*
- *For ex-service personnel who have returned from service in the last five years, the Council will commission additional places through the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) Service, providing specialist short term support for lower level mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.*
- *For ex-service personnel who have returned from service in the last five years, the Council will work with leisure contractors to offer concessionary access to sports and leisure facilities.*

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

- Clinical Commissioning Groups in your area should be encouraged to work closely with the council, sign the council Armed Forces Covenant and be included in Armed Forces Partnership meetings. It should be ensured that they are aware of the difficulties that can be faced by members of the Armed Forces Community, either due to mobility issues or because they require on-going treatment for a condition acquired in Service.
- Armed Forces Champions could write an article for inclusion in GP newsletters to send to every GP in the area and highlight the need to ask patients about Service background and record this information.
- Council healthcare departments should ensure that Joint Strategic Needs Assessments take consideration of the Armed Forces community.
- Adult Social Care workers should ask during assessments whether a person has ever served, in order to be able to better signpost and support the Armed Forces community
- Signposting and information about the support available to the Armed Forces community should be readily accessible to both staff and the community with contact details for any local service providers and with links to NHS information such as:

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare/>



Housing

Due to the mobile nature of service life, some families may find that they have to move around the country due to different postings. Many will not own their own home and may therefore need assistance finding accommodation on leaving the Armed Forces. The Covenant therefore sets the following housing goals:

- Members of the Armed Forces community should have the same access to social housing and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and not be disadvantaged by the requirement for mobility while in service.
- Those injured in service should have preferential access to appropriate housing schemes, as well as assistance with necessary adaptations.
- Armed Forces personnel have priority status in applying for government sponsored affordable housing schemes, service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

- *The Council recognises the special position of members of the Armed Forces (and their families) whose employment requires them to be mobile and who are likely therefore to be particularly disadvantaged by local connection requirements; as well as those injured reservists who may need to move to the area to access treatment, care or support. Such local connection requirements will not apply to those serving or ex-serving personnel.*
- *Additional preference for housing allocation will be given to the following groups:*
 - o *Members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years of discharge.*
 - o *Bereaved and Divorced spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation.*
 - o *Members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service.*
- *Households with sufficient financial resources will not qualify to join the housing register, however members of the Armed Forces who have received lump sum payments as compensation for injury or disability sustained on active service are exempt from these limits.*

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

- Housing officers should be made aware of issues for those in the Armed Forces through staff training. Key personnel from housing departments should be included in the Armed Forces Partnership meeting.
- A council could have a nominated housing officer with the training and knowledge to handle enquiries from members of the Armed Forces community.
- The council should work with housing organisations with experience of Armed Forces issues in order to develop criteria and maximise housing options and opportunities for ex-service personnel, in conjunction with maintaining a list of the charities both in the borough and the wider local area who are able to provide support.
- The council could maintain a quota of social housing properties that are specifically allocated to members of the Armed Forces community; partner housing and military charities may be able to nominate individuals for some of these properties.



Education

As Service families move around the country they may face challenges in finding school places for their children, sometimes outside normal admission periods or at short notice. Service families may also seek flexibility in arranging leave during term time in order to coincide with the Service person's operational deployments and pre- and post-tour leave. The Covenant therefore sets the following housing goals:

- Children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education (including early years services) as any other citizen in the area where they live.
- There should be special arrangements to support access to schools if a place is required part way through an academic year as a result of a family having to move for Service reasons.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

- *Serving Armed Forces personnel who are not living in the area but have a confirmed local posting, or who are returning from overseas will be allocated a place in advance of arriving into the borough. Any application must be accompanied by an official letter that confirms a relocation date and a Unit postal address or quartering area address. Further to this, the admission authority will hold a school offer open until you move to the area.*
- *The School Admissions Code allows service children to be considered as an exemption to the Infant Class Size Limit. Admission can only be granted under this provision where the service child is first on the waiting list for a school place and the admission authority does not consider that an extra pupil would have a detrimental impact on the efficient use of resources or the provision of education.*
- It is important to note that the provisions do not give automatic priority to service children over other children or guarantee that service children will get a place at a particular school.

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

- Local higher education establishments should be encouraged sign the Armed Forces Covenant alongside the council and potentially offer courses and help in finding employment to service leavers.
- Use should be made of the MOD Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) on 01980 618244 for advice on making arrangements to ensure continuity of education for those children of service personnel when the family moves.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service>
- Council School Admissions Forms should be adapted to include a question asking if the applicant is a member of the Armed Forces.
- A Service Pupil Premium is offered to all schools which have children of Service personnel of £300 per child per annum, designed to assist the School to provide pastoral care. The funding is paid to directly to the school and it is for them to decide how best to spend this money for the benefit of their pupils. Schools with low numbers of service pupils can work in collaboration with other local schools to provide combined pastoral care to service pupils in the area. Councils should ensure that the schools in the area are aware of the Service Pupil Premium and are claiming all that they are entitled to.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-children-in-state-schools-handbook>



HR & Employment

The majority of ex-service personnel have productive and successful civilian lives but transition can be challenging and support may be required to identify transferrable skills, align Armed Forces qualifications with civilian equivalents and to break into the civilian job market. It should also be acknowledged that Local Authorities may employ serving Armed Forces reservists, veterans and the families of serving personnel whose needs should be accounted for. The Covenant therefore sets the following employment goal:

- Service personnel should expect to receive appropriate training for both personal and professional development.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

- *Ex-service personnel who have left the Armed Forces in the past 2 years will be offered a guaranteed interview if they meet the criteria for an advertised council job.*
- *Serving Armed Forces Reservists and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers are supported with 10 days' additional paid leave to carry out operational training. Mobilisation of reservists in support of UK military operations is supported through an HR framework.*

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

- Promote being armed forces-friendly and proactively demonstrate that reservists, armed forces veterans, cadet instructors and military spouses/partners are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes.
- Work with local job centres to ensure the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered. Job centres and other local military employment charities should be included in local Armed Forces Partnership meetings.
- Carry out an "employee census" to ask staff whether they are a Reservist or a veteran in order to better support those individuals.
- Engage with the Career Transition Partnership (and Partner Employment Programme) to advertise job roles and employ service leavers and their partners.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/career-transition-partnership>
- The council should actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards Armed Forces issues through internal publications, web pages and staff training.



TRAINING PACKAGES

Overview

Three bespoke training packages have been produced to embed the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) message across all levels of staff, emphasising the importance of asking “**have you ever served?**”. As well as this message, they have been designed to give a wider understanding of the Armed Forces community and the potential issues that may be faced within civilian life.



The training packages are aimed at different levels of staff depending on their requirements and are tailored to each Borough's differing requirements.

1. Armed Forces Champions Training

Audience: Elected and non-elected Armed Forces Champions, Council Leaders, Cabinet and Executive Members, Senior Managers within key departments, Training Staff, Line Managers

Format: 2 hour trainer led presentation, discussions and Q&A. CPD Accredited.

Content:

- Designed to strengthen the understanding of the AFC and the role of the Armed Forces Champion
- Differences in service life and issues that may be faced in the community
- Borough specific military footprint and community need
- Best practice nationwide of policy changes and how to deliver commitment in the community
- Signposting to support pathways

2. Frontline Staff Training

Audience: Any staff that have one to one contact with the public on a regular basis and may come across members of the military community such as reception, contact centre, case workers, social workers, housing officers

Format: 1.5 hour trainer led presentation. CPD Accredited.

Content:

- Who the Armed Forces Community are and Borough specific military footprint
- Initial awareness of AFC and an understanding of service life and issues that may be encountered
- Identifying community and effective signposting to internal / external services and military charities

3. E-Learning

Audience: All staff and new joiners

Format: 45 min online lesson

Content:

- Broad description of AFC and service life
- Borough specific military footprint
- Identifying and signposting Armed Forces community to most appropriate services

For further information, to arrange a training session or to preview the e-learning module please contact the Project Manager on 07776 513 408 or at projectmanager@londoncovenant.co.uk



ARMED FORCES CHAMPION – TERMS OF REFERENCE

One Elected Representative and one Officer who liaise closely, care about supporting the Armed Forces and are empowered to influence and effect change across the Local Authority.

- Principal objective - raise the profile and needs of the Armed Forces community, within the Council and the Borough.
- Understand the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and the needs of the Armed Forces Community in relation to Local Authority policies and service delivery. Ensure awareness is cascaded to staff who have daily contact with the public through engagement.
- Actively communicate the AFC and the work in promoting it within the Council and the community, ensuring that Armed Forces Champion names and contact details are publicised and known both internally and externally through various communication channels.
- Act as the first point of contact for local Armed Forces Units and other key stakeholders, such as Service charities and other service providers.
- Establish and chair an Armed Forces Stakeholder meeting to:
 - i. Ensure all areas of Council services recognise the needs of the Armed Forces community
 - ii. Understand Armed Forces activities and events within the Borough
 - iii. Capitalise on Armed Forces Week and Remembrance Day opportunities to promote AFC
- Identify whether your organisation employs members of the Armed Forces Community and ensure the council is inclusive of their needs.
- Draft an Annual report to the Senior Management Team/Cabinet, detailing the Council's actions in respect of the obligations to the Covenant.

Initial Steps for new Armed Forces Champions:

- Put together an Action Plan to underpin your Covenant commitment.
- A template action plan and annual report can be provided by the "Renewing the Covenant in the Capital" Project Manager.
- The 'measures' section of the Covenant pledge can also be personalised to show the commitments that your Council is making. This helps set out the overall direction and if published can also ensure that the community are aware of your commitment and plans.



ARMED FORCES COVENANT PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Aim

“To promote understanding and awareness of issues affecting the Armed Forces community within the Local Authority and related sectors to ensure the Armed Forces Covenant is embedded in mainstream service delivery through sharing and building on best practice”

- This partnership should be used as an opportunity to promote awareness and improve provision for the Armed Forces community across health, social care, employment, education and housing.
- The partnership will recognise, as well as develop and coordinate potential solutions to, the issues faced by the local Armed Forces community.
- The partnership will support closer working relationships between the Local Authority, service providers, community groups, military charities and military units to ensure accessible front line services.

Membership / Attendance

Chair:

- Council Armed Forces Champion

Open to:

- Council Officers from key departments (such as those potentially working with the Armed Forces community in: Education, Housing, Policy, Public Health, Adult Social Services, Employment, Childrens Services, Community Services)
- Statutory and voluntary sector organisations involved in provision for the Armed Forces community (including but not limited to those involved in: health and social care provision, employment, housing, education and youth work)
- Military Units in the Borough and neighbouring Boroughs
- Local and national Armed Forces charities

Members agree to:

- Attend meetings regularly or send a representative in their absence
- Actively contribute to, and collaborate on, activity supporting the Armed Forces Covenant in the local community
- Provide support for activities and outputs where possible

Frequency

The Armed Forces Covenant Partnership will meet formally on an annual basis to review activity from the previous year, review any arising issues, plan for the following year and deconflict and events or activities as required by members

Reporting

Armed Forces Champion to sponsor an annual report to the Executive/Cabinet, detailing the Council's actions in respect of the obligations to the Covenant.



Standing Agenda

- Introductions
Armed Forces Champion to open meeting, reiterate aims of the partnership and start introduction of members
- Action points from last meeting
- Update from Armed Forces Champion
Update on current Armed Forces Covenant commitment, progress and other Borough specific background information
- Update from Military units
Update on current unit activities and engagement within the Borough
- Service Areas
Information on key service areas from appropriate representatives, any issues encountered with Armed Forces Community or Covenant, new developments, requirements or opportunities
 - i. Housing
 - ii. Schools
 - iii. Employment and Adult Learning
 - iv. Health and Wellbeing
 - v. Young People
 - vi. Council as an employer (Employer Recognition Scheme)
- Events
Forward look of upcoming Armed Forces events and activities to understand what engagements local military units have in the Borough and an opportunity to deconflict as necessary
- Review of required actions and next meeting date
- AOB



COUNCIL ARMED FORCES WEBSITE

This section aims to address the accessibility of information to residents within London Boroughs and provide information, ideas and examples of best practice that could be adopted on Borough Council websites.

There should be a focus to provide an easily accessible platform for people with armed forces specific problems to find support. The benefit to the council in providing this information in an easy to find format is not only an improved level of customer service to this community, but also a reduced burden on the contact centre, reception and other frontline staff by enhanced early signposting to relevant departments or external service providers.

Best Practice

The ideal outcome would be for a separate page on the main council website, dedicated to the Armed Forces. Within this page, it would be recommended to have the following information:

- Details of the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant (date, signatories, what commitment was made, action plan in place to support the Armed Forces community)
- Military presence in the area (local units, veteran numbers, military parades/events)
- Details on any relevant policy adaptations with contact details or links to relevant officers and departments (Housing, Education, Employment, Health)
- Armed Forces Champion contact details
- Further local support (local military charities, Veterans Associations, Community Groups)
- Further national support (information, military charities, Veteran's Gateway)

Examples

A hub of both general and specific information, split between different target audiences:

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/support-armed-forces

Easy to navigate, comprehensive support page covering all areas in well marked sections:

www.hants.gov.uk/community/armedforces

Borough specific background information as well as links to support services and other departments:

www.lbld.gov.uk/support-for-armed-forces-personnel

Good general information on military background and AF covenant commitments / aims:

www.islington.gov.uk/advice/supporting-our-armed-forces

Comprehensive support information on a number of areas:

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/armed-forces>



DEFENCE EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME



The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the Armed Forces Community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

Below is the link for the scheme, it's a quick and easy application for the Bronze award which is through a self-nomination process and ensures that your Council has signed the Armed Forces Covenant, that your Council promotes being armed forces-friendly and is open to employing reservists, Armed Forces veterans, cadet instructors and military spouses / partners. On approval you will receive an electronic certificate and logos to display on your website and stationery.

The Silver and Gold awards ensure that your Council takes a more proactive approach to demonstrate their positive policies towards defence people issues and has a framework to support mobilisations or military training by providing additional special leave.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>

London Borough Councils are starting to be recognised for their support with Bronze awards held by Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Hammersmith & Fulham, Sutton and Westminster, Silver awards held by Brent, Greenwich and Hillingdon and Gold awards held by City of London, Lewisham and Wandsworth.

 ARMED FORCES COVENANT	 ARMED FORCES COVENANT	 ARMED FORCES COVENANT
EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME	EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME	EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME
BRONZE AWARD	SILVER AWARD	GOLD AWARD

COUNCIL ACTION PLAN FOR 'RENEWING THE COVENANT'

Aim

To train and prepare staff to enable the Borough Council to meet its Armed Forces Covenant obligations:

Objectives

- To ensure all policies are reviewed and adjusted accordingly to deliver our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC)
- To deliver a training programme for managers and Armed Forces Champions in the Council, specifically those who have responsibility for main Covenant policy areas
- To deliver ongoing awareness training to all frontline staff and Councillors to enable them to 'ask the question' when engaging with residents
- To establish an AFC partnership meeting with relevant stakeholders
- To renew our commitment to the Armed Forces Community by re-signing the AFC

Benefits

- Public awareness of the commitment / support provided by the council to an under-represented community group (~10-15% of the population)
- Continuous Professional Development for staff
- Reduced (or at the very least, shared) burden of service provision through use of support pathways and external providers
- Improved customer satisfaction through knowledgeable customer service of how to support / signpost Armed Forces community (via training, e-learning and signposting app).
- Gain a better understanding of local demographics by staff regularly "asking the question" and recording how many of this community are accessing services.
- Improved visibility and reputation as a 'forces friendly' employer through the Employer Recognition Scheme. Gain benefits of employing service leavers and reservists.
- Use of Armed Forces Covenant Grants to support the community and reduce spending requirements on Council.
- Closer partnership working with neighbouring Boroughs and military stakeholders to potentially reduce burden of support and avoid duplication of effort on events or community initiatives.



Timeline

Date	Action	Description	Stakeholders
ASAP	Armed Forces Champion Approval	Discussion with Project Manager and Council Armed Forces Champion to look at military footprint, local need, what project can deliver and benefits to council	Neil Osborne (Project Manager) Council Armed Forces Champion
+ 1 week	Approval	Project approved/rejected	Council Armed Forces Champion
+ 1 month	Meet with Senior Managers to outline the proposal in more detail	Discuss in more detail how to deliver this initiative across the council. Discussions to include policy reviews, training of both senior managers and frontline staff, installation of e-learning package, establishment of partnership meetings and re-signing AFC	Neil Osborne (Project Manager) Council Armed Forces Champion Councillor Armed Forces Champion Chief Executive Officer Leader of the Council Council Policy Lead Council Training Lead Council Communications Lead
+ 2 months	Deliver senior training	Deliver two-hour training to Armed Forces Champions, senior staff, department leads and line managers to upskill them on the AFC, the unique needs / issues of Armed Forces Community and how their staff can support.	Neil Osborne (Project Manager) Council Armed Forces Champion Councillor Armed Forces Champion Extended Leadership Team Line Management Team



+ 3 months	Deliver frontline staff training	Hold multiple 1-hour training events to upskill as many frontline staff as possible.	Neil Osborne (Project Manager) Frontline Staff
+ 3 months	Launch e-learning package	Install e-learning package into Learning Management System, roll out to frontline staff who interact directly with residents and then wider council staff for awareness	Neil Osborne (Project Manager) Council Training Lead
Any time	Review Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Status	Review status of council as an employer from Armed Forces Community. As a signatory of AFC you can self-nominate for Bronze ERS Award via Greater London Reserve Forces and Cadet Association (GL RFCA). If already held, review next steps to progress to Silver / Gold. Presentation of award to CEO / Councillors can be arranged	Council Armed Forces Champion Neil Osborne (Project Manager) GL RFCA
+ 3 months	Re-sign AFC	Organise a re-signing of AFC by council with local Military Leaders with a renewed and developed action plan in place to publically deliver that commitment Potential to combine with presentation of ERS Award	Neil Osborne (Project Manager) Council Armed Forces Champion Councillor Armed Forces Champion Senior Management Team Mayor Council Communications Lead HQ London District (Army) Local Military Units GL RFCA Local military partners / charities

+ 6 months (and ongoing)	AFC Partnership Meeting	Partnership meeting to be facilitated by Project Manager to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review council commitment to AFC ii. Understand any issues raised since start of initiative iii. Discuss best practice with partner organisations iv. Plan and deconflict events with local military units / neighbouring Borough Councils v. Build relationships for collaborative working Standing agenda to be provided to ensure continuity and consistency for future meetings	Neil Usborne (Project Manager) Council Armed Forces Champion Councillor Armed Forces Champion HQ London District (Army) Local Military Units Partner Organisations
Ongoing	Sustainable awareness training	Embed e-learning package into new joiners routine and regular annual online training Frontline staff training package to be provided for service heads / line managers / Armed Forces Champion to be able to deliver to staff on an ongoing basis	Neil Usborne (Project Manager) Council Armed Forces Champion Training Lead

