

# COMMUNITY COVENANT CONFERENCES

## SYNDICATE GROUPS FEEDBACK

Each of our syndicate groups looked at one of the four main challenges facing us in taking forward the Community Covenant (see the Next Steps presentation for more detail).

In addition we asked each group to consider the issues surrounding the adoption of “pledge lists” for both Local Partnerships and Government.

Here's a summary of what our delegates made of these issues over the series of conferences we held. Some of the suggestions you read below against one Challenge may be repeated under another or may be contradictory to other suggestions that you read here but we wanted to share with you the variety and scope of opinions that we heard. What do you think?

### **1. HOW DO WE ENSURE ALL LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS CAN SHARE AND MAINTAIN GOOD PRACTICE?**

#### Challenges

Best Practice Guide provides examples of good work but there is not consistent take up among Local Authorities; sometimes this will be for a good reason ie differing demographics composition.

How can we all help local partnerships to establish not only **how** to support AF Community but the **best** way to do it?

Continuing resource pressures.

#### Suggestions and Comments

Extend Community Covenant Grant Scheme for a further two years as it currently acts as an effective lever in encouraging Local Authority support.

Local Partnerships and Armed Forces stakeholders should make more effort to engage to engage with each Local Authority's Well-Being and Health Boards (looking at strategic health issues and delivery across their Regions). This would lead to greater consistency across the country on health assessments

It was felt that Clinical Commissioning Groups do not always follow best practice.

The Armed Forces Covenant Team should take ownership of a Best Practice Guide to act as repository of best practice and guidance.

Armed Forces Civil Engagement needs to be better tailored to the local region as no single approach will work across the range of different communities.

Conferences and Covenant Newsletter are helpful and we should hold more of them (locally and nationally).

Re-launch Covenant Newsletter as it was found to be very useful but local partnerships could also produce their own publications covering Covenant issues.

The Covenant newsletter should be particularly targeted at those who have less understanding of the Covenant and its aims.

Communications tends to be about the needs of AF community but should also focus on the benefits that they bring the country so that they are not seen as a burden.

Implement a quarterly review of Local Partnership Action Plans – possibly peer review from another Local Authority.

A forum that can be easily accessed by all Covenant stakeholders where challenges and solutions can be shared should be set up. We should all seek to make better use of social media

## **2. HOW DO WE MAINTAIN REGULAR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES, ARMED FORCES AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS?**

### Challenges

As the Armed Forces come home from Operations overseas we may see a possible realigning of priorities away from AF community.

There is still a lack of awareness of what the Covenant is.

Continuing resource pressures.

What is the role description of an AF Champion – what support is there for them?

Resourcing constraints in Local Authorities mean we need to ensure that AF is still represented.

No one organisation has the resources to deliver the Covenant alone or to support the One-Point-of-Contact model.

### Suggestions and Comments

There was agreement that better explanations of what the Covenant is and aims to do should be produced. The MOD should therefore issue Covenant briefing material and/or conduct on-site visits (by covenant briefing team

made up from individuals from across our stakeholder groups on a case by case basis) to provide briefing/guidance direct to Local Authorities and other service providers.

There is a need for “job descriptions” and training for AF Champions.

Defence may not be devolved BUT major attention needs to be given at Scottish Government level to Serving personnel and families living in Scotland.

A comprehensive list of Service Charities would be useful in maintaining key contacts.

A wiring diagram of relationships between Government Departments, Local Authorities, AF units, welfare and charitable organisations in terms of Covenant work would be useful.

It was suggested regular Covenant Steering groups should be set up to take forward and review the partnerships’ actions and aims at a local level.

It was felt that there was a real benefit from encouraging more charities and welfare organisations to sign a corporate covenant and including them more in wider Covenant work.

### **3. HOW DO WE ENSURE LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS CAN REMAIN FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING COMMUNITY COVENANT ISSUES?**

#### Challenges

Continuing resourcing pressures is adding to challenge of delivering Covenant.

As the Armed Forces come home from Operations overseas we may see a possible realigning of priorities away from AF community.

The drawdown from Germany will increase pressure on public services in some areas.

Awareness of Covenant in LAs often isolated to individual points of contact which can mean that when members of the Armed Forces community contact their Local Authority the individual they’re dealing with is unaware of the Covenant and its aims.

How can areas with smaller Armed Forces community populations engage and support the Covenant.

#### Suggestions and Comments

There was a repeated call for a central database of Armed Forces Champions/Covenant points of contact in each region.

MOD should make a greater effort to encourage Local Authorities to join the Covenant Facebook group.

It was suggested that all those endeavouring to share best practice should make better use of Local Authority trade press – Local Government Chronicle and Municipal Journal for example – as this would be more likely to reach senior officers within the authority.

Local Government Chronicle runs an award scheme to recognise successes within local government. The Covenant should work with them so that Covenant activity counts towards an award or becomes one of their criteria.

or

MOD should run our own Award Scheme to recognise good practice in delivering the Covenant.

The letter from Min(DPWV) to all Local Authorities was praised and should be repeated in the future. It really galvanised everyone to think hard about what they had achieved. Councils welcome the opportunity to report back on progress more regularly.

We need a better approach to measure success as Local Authorities find it difficult to promote benefits of Covenant work to those setting priorities and to the wider community.

#### **4. HOW DO WE MANAGE THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITIES EXPECTATION OF THE COVENANT?**

##### Challenges

There are differences in the level of services provided or adoption of policies from region to region partly as a result of further devolution of powers to UK countries and regions which is generally widely supported. How can the Covenant network of stakeholders tackle this?

We still face challenges in communication and expectation management.

##### Suggestions and Comments

MOD must be clearer on what the Armed Forces Covenant can do and be honest about what it can't in order to control the expectations of the Armed Forces community.

Need to be clear and explain differences in service provision under the Covenant from region to region.

Language and terminology used by the MOD and Armed Forces should be clear to all stakeholders.

The current communications on the Covenant is inconsistent and a better package of material using a variety of media to reach the Armed Forces community is required.

Make the Covenant more relevant to the different groups within the Armed Forces community so that they are aware of how it affects them personally – people will then feel more included and more likely to support the Covenant generally.

Each Local Partnership should publish an audit of Local Authorities/Partnerships achievements and be honest about what the Local Authority can provide.

Create lines of communication between Local Authorities, their AF Champion, Family Federation and AF welfare organisations where these don't exist so that they have better oversight of the issues affecting the AF community.

AF Covenant Team should create a template that Local Authorities can use to cascade relevant Covenant information within their own organisations.

All Local Authorities should have a dedicated page or section on their websites to deal with the Armed Forces Community and their Covenant activity.

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In addition to the four challenges we also asked syndicate members to consider how we could better share information that we need from one another. We therefore put forward two discussion papers for their consideration. Again, what do you think?

### **DISCUSSION PAPER - LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

*The questions below are examples of the type of information that we feel would be helpful to the Armed Forces Community – we don't necessarily want you to answer them for us here and now but to think how the answers to these questions and more could be presented, collated and collected in the future.*

#### **Have you appointed an Armed Forces Champion and AF POC?**

**How do you communicate the Covenant?** – to the public  
to your own organisation  
to other stakeholders

(For example - published Annual Report, Website, newsletter, in-house briefings)

**Do your policies take the AF Covenant and community into account?**  
(For example – Health, Housing, Education, Council Tax, Voting arrangement, Transition and employment opportunities)

**Have you made Covenant pledges or committed yourself to particular actions?**

**Does your area present any particular challenges in terms of meeting the need of your AF community?**

**Any others?**

### Suggestions and Comments

A centrally held list of single points of contact should be established to mitigate for the high turn over of staff which means that key points of contacts are changing too often.

It was suggested that all Local Authorities should have a dedicated page or section on the Covenant on their websites.

Newsletters, including the Covenant Newsletter (currently being re-launched) should be encouraged as a good way of sharing best practice between regions.

It was stressed that the Covenant was a responsibility for the whole community and not just the Local Authority; for example, Academies and free schools do not fall under the control of Councils and therefore must be brought into the Covenant conversation.

It was suggested that some funding could be allocated from central Government to Local Authorities to help them deliver the Covenant, for example fund or part-fund a local covenant co-ordinator.

There must be honest communications on what is actually being delivered

LAs keen to support Armed Forces Day but require guidance on how they could best do this – a toolkit could be issued that could help with examples of good practice and advice on how to go about gaining sponsorship from local businesses etc as funding always an issue.

LAs need to provide a point of contact for the charitable sector

Apps should be created and supported for AF Community to better access services and advice on what the covenant delivers in their area.

There is a need for terms of reference or job description for AF Champions in Local Authorities.

Local Partnerships should survey their community to establish size and composition of Armed Forces Community to better address their needs.

Local Authorities should consider producing material aimed at their local community covering points of contact, signing posting to other agencies etc, this could be brochures, leaflets, digital packages etc.

In all our discussions it became clear that there was already a great deal of good work being done to make the Community Covenant really work at the local level. We heard of some great examples of action plans, engagement with schools, WW1 commemorations, Armed Forces Day events, websites, partnership working and positive outcomes on individual casework involving Service families.

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## **DISCUSSION PAPER - GOVERNMENT AND ARMED FORCES**

*The questions below are examples of the type of information that we feel may be helpful to Local Community Covenant Partnerships – we need your help in identifying what information or clarifications you need. We can then begin work on how to make such information available.*

**Clarification of what the Armed Forces Covenant aims to do.**

**Clearer definition of Armed Forces Community.**  
(Veterans, Divorced/Separated Spouse)

**More data available on the local and size of the Armed Forces Community by region.**

**Publish and maintain clear guidance**  
(template action plans, AF Champion job description, examples of pledges etc)

**What else?**

### **Suggestions and Comments**

There was general agreement that a clearer definition of the Armed Forces Community is necessary. This would require to be widely discussed with open consultation.

A wiring chart of relationships between Government Departments, LAs and the various welfare and charitable organisations in terms of their role in delivering the Covenant should be created by MOD.

Covenant stakeholders (MOD, AF, Welfare Organisations, Family Federations etc) need to work together to collate evidence of what the AF community needs so that local providers can prioritise services more effectively.

It is clear that Local Authorities would like to have more interaction with their local AF community and want to know more about their specific needs. This is a particular challenge for those areas which don't have a large AF population, so have little or no regular engagement.

There needs to be greater recognition and understanding that levels of service provision will vary between Local Authority areas – much will depend on the size of the region and population and Armed Forces footprint for example. This needs to be better communicated to the Armed Forces community to help manage expectation.

LAs would like to see MOD issuing minimum standard guidelines that authorities can work to. This could help to overcome some of the Regional differences in provision and provide local partnerships with an indication of how they should target their efforts.

The terminology used by MOD/Armed Forces is not always clear to those outside these organisations and greater effort needs to be made to communicate clearly.

A definitive and clear definition of what the Covenant is required but would also need to consider better defining terms such as “veteran” and “Armed Forces Community”.

MOD should produce and disseminate Action Plan and Covenant Webpage templates.

There is a need for briefing or training packages for front line Local Authority staff – this needn't be complex or time intensive - simple e-learning packages could be incorporated in to existing internal training programmes - This information should cover basics such as; understanding the roles and differences between the three Services, explaining the terminology used, and information about the organisations within and outside the Armed Forces that have a role in delivering welfare and support to the Armed Forces community, for example.

MOD should set up a national 0800 Covenant Helpline to provide information about what is being provided under the Covenant in each region and details of other organisations that can offer assistance. It was also suggested that such a service could be provided on a central database of issues raised.

There is a need to ensure that resources match responsibilities

Covenant Facebook page should not be a closed group.



It was suggested that MOD and Armed Forces work to ensure that a flexible approach can be taken when dealing with outside agencies when a joint Covenant approach is being taken ie abatement of costs for using green space owned by MOD.

There was felt to be a need for better briefing/training within the Armed Forces throughout their careers so that they have a better understanding of the Covenant and realistic expectations of what it could deliver.