



ANNEX to

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

NORTHERN IRELAND



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 fulfill 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.



NORTHERN IRELAND

Context

The Armed Forces Covenant is implemented in Northern Ireland somewhat differently to the rest of the United Kingdom. This is due to structural and legal specifics that apply in Northern Ireland, not least the fact that Local Authorities do not hold the same responsibilities for public services as they do in the rest of the UK. The majority of levers for delivery of the Covenant in the Community rest with the ministries of the devolved administration.

Serving Personnel and their Families

The needs of the majority of Serving personnel and their families are met by statutory bodies however, Covenant and welfare support for Armed Forces personnel – both regulars and reserves – and their families are co-ordinated through 38 (Irish) Brigade in Lisburn. All Serving personnel or their families who bring issues to their Local Authorities should therefore be referred to 38X-PersSp-OpsPol-SO2@mod.uk.

Veterans and their Families

The needs of the majority of Veterans and their families are met by statutory bodies, which include the Health Service, the Housing Executive and Education Ministries, as well as service charities and other parts of the charitable sector.

A bespoke delivery system has been established to ensure that veterans can easily access this support. This structure is based upon the Veterans' Support Office NI that links individuals to the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Committee (NIVSC)¹ and, where necessary, government departments and health trusts across Northern Ireland.

The Veterans' Support Office, including staff from the Department of Communities, sponsors veterans' champions in each of the eleven Local Authorities who will take up individual cases raised locally - <http://www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk/veteran/>. It also produces a handbook that gives details of all major service charities in Northern Ireland and how they can help – http://www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk/sitefiles/resources/pdfs/ni_vets_handbook_ver_2dated10-7-15.pdf

This structure is facilitated by the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA) NI which has taken lead responsibility for facilitating non-statutory support to veterans in NI. This is a result of RFCA NI's arms-length body status, its statutory links across society and its continuity of experience.

¹ Comprising representatives from Veterans UK, the Aftercare Service, all major ex-Service charities such as RBL, SSAFA, Combat Stress, RAFA and RN Association and many other niche charities, some of which encompass the Victims and Survivors sphere.



It should be noted that this structure complements rather than replaces statutory bodies and the charitable sector and is only used when the Veterans and their families are experiencing difficulties in accessing services through the normal channels. The above structure has been put in place to help address any anomaly that might prevent the Armed Forces Covenant from being delivered as effectively in NI as elsewhere.

Access to Support

Advice and guidance on how to access the most appropriate local services for veterans and their families is provided through the Veterans' Gateway - <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>.

Additional advice that may be useful can be found at the following the link:

<http://www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk/veteran/>

Advocacy

The case of any veteran who approaches a Local Authority Veterans' Champion will be taken up and seen through by that Champion until resolution. Further information is available [here](#).

Any difficulties or shortfalls in the delivery of support to veterans will be referred by the Veterans' Support Office on behalf of the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Committee through the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee where appropriate - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-advisory-and-pensions-committees-x13> - to pursue issues through Veterans UK - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk>. If necessary, cases or issues will be taken up by the Covenant Reference Group which oversees the government's handling of Covenant issues and includes representation from Northern Ireland.

The Covenant in Business

The Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for Northern Ireland (RFCA NI) is responsible for delivering the Covenant in business, achieved in a manner that is acceptable to local interlocutors yet which achieves the outputs envisaged by the Covenant.