



ARMED FORCES

COVENANT

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

ENGLAND



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.

ENGLAND

HEALTHCARE

Whilst the Ministry of Defence provides primary healthcare to serving members of the Armed Forces, NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups are responsible for their secondary healthcare needs alongside all the healthcare provision for military families and veterans. In the majority of cases their health needs will be the same as the rest of society, but sometimes the mobile nature of service life creates challenges that need ironing out.

We also have to remember those who have been injured as a result of their Service and may require additional help in accessing specialist medical treatment, equipment or social care; remembering that this help can still be required years after the Service person has left the military.

Therefore, the Covenant sets the following goals with respect to healthcare for families and veterans:

- 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 treatment (subject to the clinical needs of others) in respect of NHS hospital treatment relating to a condition 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.
- Members of the Armed Forces Community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen in the area they live
- Personnel injured on operation as should be treated in conditions that recognise the specific needs of service personnel
- Those injured in service should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation's moral obligation. Veterans should be able to access mental health professionals and services who understand of Armed Forces Culture

What can you do?

Ensure that the Clinical Commissioning Groups or equivalents in your area are aware of the difficulties that can face members of the Armed Forces Community, either due to mobility issues or because they require on-going treatment for a condition acquired in Service. Make sure that you involve representatives from your local Clinical Commissioning Group, Health and Wellbeing Board in your discussions too.



Are your local GPs aware of the provisions offered to ex-Service personnel under the Covenant? If not, can you direct them to the appropriate information? This links may prove useful - [Covenant](#) and [NHS Choices](#)

Do your local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (which analyse and describe the current and future health needs of a population, providing an accurate picture of local needs) take consideration of the Armed Forces community? This links may prove useful – Forces in Mind Trust’s Call to Mind report – available here - <http://www.fim-trust.org/reports/> and NHS England’s guide for health professionals <https://www.local.gov.uk/meeting-public-health-needs-armed-forces-resource-local-authorities-and-health-professionals>

Disabled Facilities Grants - Home adaptations, primarily funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), play a crucial role in allowing disabled veterans to live an independent life, such as stair lifts, level access showers and widened doors for wheelchairs.

For those whose disability is a result of service in the Armed Forces the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has created a special funding stream. Through this, local authorities can reclaim the full amount of any DFG paid to a veteran in receipt of either an Armed Forces Compensation Scheme award at tariff levels 1-8 or a War Pension at 80% plus Constant Attendance Allowance. For further details please contact the DCLG’s DFG team: disabled.facilitiesgrants@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Our Community – Our Covenant Report – Health and wellbeing Good Practice

In **Bradford** the council is putting a new system into its assessments for adult social care whereby the public facing member of staff will have to ask if the person has ever served. NHS partners also have questions in their surveys about people’s service, and a council information officer is doing work to understand the size, need and location of the Armed Forces Community locally.

One of the difficulties with this approach is achieving the right approach to ask the question. The council is therefore working with Public Health to develop the best way to do this, taking into account that it might be a sensitive question to ask of people, particularly if it is the first thing they are asked.

Veterans have priority access to social care in Bradford if their social care needs relate to their service. Where they don’t meet this criteria, the council will signpost them on to other services such as the Regimental Support Service.

In **Glasgow**, the council worked with a wide range of partners to set up Helping Heroes. This was created in response to the difficulties faced by Veterans, particularly in navigating disparate services before being able to get treatment for mental health issues. Having to go to through multiple organisations or agencies before being able to access mental health services can dissuade Veterans from pursuing treatment.

The council worked with health partners in the city to enable Veterans to be referred directly into mental health services without having to see a GP. Helping Heroes can now refer Veterans with mental health issues directly into treatment without having to see a GP. Being able to circumvent the GP means that the process is quicker and smoother, and more people are likely to take up this support.

In **Gloucestershire**, community engagement officers have been working with Army families living in Forces Accommodation. Often young spouses on base find it difficult to integrate into both the Armed Forces Community 'behind the line', as well as the wider civilian community. Some have little professional experience and may have left a social and family support network at home to move with their spouses who are serving. This social isolation and lack of meaningful work have the potential to lead to mental health difficulties.

Community officers set up a Look Good Feel Good course, with a free crèche funded through the former Community Covenant Grant Scheme that enabled the women on base to socialise and build self-esteem. This proved popular and was critical in engaging them in further adult education courses in Maths and English. The activities provided a space for the women to improve their employment skills and to socialise with other women with similar experiences, helping them to avoid social isolation and the potential difficulties this causes. On redeployment, many of the women whom officers had worked with reported feeling more resilient and having the confidence to move on.

Where to find help

Information about how NHS services for Armed Forces families are commissioned can be found [here](#). Service families will need to inform their GP or care provider before moving. The systems are slightly different in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but the team providing their care should be able to assist them regardless of which region they live in.

[E-learning for Healthcare](#), which is part of Health Education England, have worked with various organisations, including the Families Federations, Royal British Legion and NHS England to produce an on-line training programme for healthcare providers. This e-learning programme is designed to highlight both the similarities and the differences to allow healthcare personnel to understand both the context of military life and also how to appropriately respond to patient need. The programme is broken into three broad areas – the NHS care of current serving personnel, the NHS care of the families of military personnel and veterans, and the NHS care of veterans.

<http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/nhs-healthcare-for-the-armed-forces/>

Further information on health services can be found at [NHS Choices](#) and [Find a NHS Dentist in England](#).

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 set the following goals with respect to Education:

- 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.

To meet these goals the Government has taken the following steps:

The code for the allocation of state-funded school places have been amended so that in respect of children in the first couple of years of education (key stage one) classes MAY exceed the legal limit of 30 pupils for the admission of Service children. The Schools Admission Code in England now prioritises Service children in the admissions process and Service families can also now apply for, and be allocated a place before they move into the area. More information available from DfE website – <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education> and the MODs Children's Education Advisory Service - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service>

Our Community – Our Covenant Report - Top Tips

- In every school, but particularly those with a high number of serving parents, members of staff are aware of the stresses children might be under and can recognise and respond to signs children might be having difficulty coping.
- If there is more than one child of a serving parent in a school, creating links between these children will mean they will benefit from being around other children who understand their situation.

What can you do?

A **Service Pupil Premium** is offered to all schools in England which have children of Service personnel in Reception to Year 11 can receive funding (currently £300 per child per annum) which is designed to assist the School to provide pastoral care. Families must inform the school that they are members of the Armed Forces Community to allow the school to claim this funding. This funding can continue for up to six years after the Serviceperson has left the Armed Forces too. 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 to their pupils. So ensure that the schools in your area are aware of the Service Pupil Premium and are claiming all that they are entitled to.

The MOD Directorate of Children and Young People (DCYP) has written to all Head Teachers in England offering further guidance about Service Families who may wish to take their children out of school during term time, explaining when the operational needs of the Armed Forces may legitimately prevent Service families from taking leave during School holidays.

Our Community – Our Covenant Report - Children's Services Good Practice

Wiltshire has an active relationship between the council and bases which has enabled a more joined up approach to the delivery of the Covenant. Bases make Wiltshire council aware of possible future admissions so that schools can make sufficient preparation. This has been vital in the Army rebasing programme where 4,000 Army personnel and their families (a further 3,200 people) will be redeployed from Germany to Wiltshire by 2020. Wiltshire has plans to implement a pen pal programme for children in Germany who will be moving to Wiltshire with the aim to make their transition smoother.

Plymouth is a Navy city with an estimated 7-9 per cent of school children having a Serving parent. Plymouth has created an innovative programme called MKC Heroes (Military Kids Club – formerly known as HMS Heroes). This is a national support group led by children of Serving personnel and Veterans, that can be joined by any school or setting. In each member school or setting, children of Serving personnel/Veterans can attend a discussion group to share their experiences (sometimes difficult ones) with their peers, who understand and are likely sharing similar concerns or experiences. It is also a chance for these children to get to know other children of all ages in a similar position to them.

Across Plymouth there are approximately 3000 children from Service families enrolled, along with a significant number of Veterans children across pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools. Plymouth facilitates a termly meeting of MKC delegate young people (x 6 yearly) for the sharing of good practice and comradeship. MKC Heroes has now been exported to across the United Kingdom and overseas with 130 schools and settings participating, currently.

The success of MKC Heroes highlights the importance of listening to and involving children and young people. MKC Heroes is represented on Plymouth's Community Covenant board and within the Plymouth Youth Council. The Community Covenant also supports the MKC Heroes Military Kids Choir. Getting to know issues that children are experiencing themselves is a good way to understand the issues which they and their families may be facing.

What the MOD is doing

The MOD offers the following advice and guidance to Service personnel and their families on education issues:



Children's Education Advisory Service - this MOD team provide information and support to Service families on all aspects of the education of their children in the UK and overseas. They have Parent Support Officers in key locations around the country, who may be able to act as an intermediary between families and local authorities

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>

ACCOMMODATION

Due to the mobile nature of Service life, some families may find that they have to move around the country as the Serviceperson in their lives is posted to different roles. Some Service families will not own their own home and may therefore need assistance finding accommodation on leaving the Services. The Armed Forces Covenant therefore has set the following goals with respect to Housing:

- 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 to private housing or Service accommodation while serving.
- Where Serving Personnel are entitled to publicly-provided accommodation, it should be of good quality, affordable and suitably located.
- Service Personnel should have priority status in applying for government sponsored affordable housing schemes and Service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge.

What can you do?

Social Housing: By law, a local authority's allocation scheme must ensure that 'reasonable preference', that is to say overall priority, for social housing is given to certain people, namely people who :

- are homeless or owed certain homeless duties by the local authority
- live in overcrowded or otherwise unsuitable housing
- have a medical or welfare need to move from their current home (including those who need to move because of a disability)
- need to move home to avoid hardship to themselves or others

Local Authorities can take other factors into account in giving priority. These include:

- How long they've been waiting on the list for a home
- Their financial circumstances
- Whether they have a history of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour
- Whether they already live in the area

An allocation scheme may give 'additional preference' (high priority) to people who are in the reasonable preference groups and have more urgent housing needs. For example, households who are severely overcrowded. However, an allocation scheme must give 'additional preference' to people who have reasonable preference and more urgent housing needs, if they fall within one of the following groups:

- serving members of the Armed Forces suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability attributable to their service
- former Service personnel
- bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner (where the death was attributable to their service)
- serving or former members of the Reserve Forces suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability attributable to their service

Otherwise, an allocation scheme may – but is not required to - give more priority to former members of the Armed Forces even where they are not in very urgent housing need. For example, some allocation schemes give priority to ex-Service personnel who lived in the local authority area before they joined up. Others take account of length of service in the same way as they take account of time on the waiting list for other applicants.

Local Connection:

By law, a local authority in England cannot disqualify any of the following because they do not have a local connection to the local authority's district:

- (a) serving members of the Armed Forces
- (b) former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years after discharge
- (c) bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner (where the death was attributable to their service)
- (d) serving or former members of the Reserve Forces suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability sustained as a result of their service

Statutory guidance for councils on the allocation of social housing is published on the **Department for Communities and Local Government's** website here:

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

Our Community – Our Covenant Report – Housing Top Tips

- In areas with county and district councils the district councils can develop a single shared approach to reflecting the Covenant in their policies and to the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community.
- Councils can work with the Social Landlords in their area to agree a shared protocol on how to meet the needs of families leaving the Armed Forces and Veterans.

Our Community – Our Covenant Report – Housing Good Practice

In **Plymouth** ex-Armed Forces personnel with medical conditions caused by their service are automatically given priority. The council is keen to promote and strengthen its ties with the Armed Forces Community in the city and is involved in a cross sector self-build project. Twenty-four affordable homes will be built as part of the Nelson project on the former site of a day centre, with twelve designated for ex Armed Forces. Armed Forces charities were approached early on in the project to try and identify vulnerable ex-Service personnel who might need housing. There is also a similar project underway in **Wrexham**.

In **Glasgow** where the city no longer owns any social housing the city's Veterans' hub Helping Heroes has a housing expert post which is funded by Glasgow Housing Association, the city's largest RSL. Those we interviewed in Glasgow identified housing as the greatest pressure on the Armed Forces Community in Glasgow and having a professional directly employed by the city's largest RSL means that the steps which many have to go through in order to get to the right advice are significantly reduced. More detail on Helping Heroes can be found in the 'Other Support for Veterans' section.

In **Wigan** where the council employs a key worker for ex-Service personnel and their families the key worker is able to navigate a public services landscape which can be overwhelming for ex-Service personnel who are not used to a sometimes confusing landscape of public services. Veterans in Wigan with medical need related to service are given priority on the housing waiting list and spouses going through divorce will also be given priority.

Wigan and Leigh Housing is an arm's length management organisation which owns the majority of social housing in the borough. Application forms now include the question, "If you or your partner are serving or have formerly served in the Armed Forces, please provide details of your service number". Housing officers were also being made aware of issues for those in the Armed Forces and the Armed Forces Key Worker maintained a direct relationship with many public facing housing officers, though knowledge about the Covenant and Armed Forces issues could be patchy because of staff turnover.

Wigan has also mapped all of the charities in the borough according to organisation, branch and then skillset or capacity of each charity and branch. Combined with a well networked Armed Forces Key Worker, this means that though they often respond to need in an ad hoc way, this is done effectively and quickly so that if for instance housing is provided without furniture the Armed Forces Key Worker can refer to his charities map to understand where he might be able to arrange for some furniture.

Wakefield has an effective system in place which offers a joined up approach to housing. Senior management from Wakefield District Housing (WDH), the main housing association in the district, sits on Covenant board which is an effective communication method between WDH and the council. Information from these meetings gets filtered down to the appropriate team in WDH. Mechanisms are in place for information to be fed upwards from ground level, as public facing staff are aware of the Covenant. This is also a place where their links with the military and military charities are strengthened – the military know who to get in touch with in WDH, as do military

charities and vice versa. This is especially useful if the member of the Armed Forces Community is facing other challenges as well. It is a system which works well due to their collective positivity and commitment to working together.

What the MOD is doing

Service personnel are offered Service accommodation according to their needs and over £65 million has been spent on improving and upgrading Service Families Accommodation in the UK.

The following advice and schemes are also available to help them find accommodation that's right for them:

The [Joint Service Housing Advice Office](#) is an MOD team providing specialist advice to Service personnel and their families on their civilian housing options. They also give advice on organisations that could help ex-Service personnel accessing housing.

The Forces Help to Buy Scheme allows Service personnel to borrow up to 50% of their annual salary (to a maximum of £25,000) to help buy a home.

The **MOD Tenancy Deposit Scheme** allows defence personnel to apply for an advance of salary loan to help meet the cost of a deposit for a rental property.

EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND SUPPORT

While the majority of Service leavers go on to have productive and successful lives in the civilian world, the period of transition can be a challenging one and personnel may require some support identifying their transferrable skills, aligning Armed Forces qualifications with their civilian equivalents and breaking into the Civilian job market. Under the Armed Forces Covenant therefore we aim to ensure that:

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

What the MOD is doing

The Ministry of Defence offers resettlement packages to all personnel who are leaving the Services. MOD Career Transition Partnership is the official scheme offering resettlement and employment advice. Those leaving the Armed Forces regardless of how long they have served will be able to use this service. Eligible partners and spouses may also receive employment support through the Partner Employment Programme.

What can you do?

We have seen some very good initiatives around the country to help ex-Service personnel gain employment in the civilian sector: for example Rochdale Council now offers a scheme for recent Service leavers and Glasgow City Council has a Veteran's Employment Programme in place –link to their website is here - <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=16174>. In addition hundreds of business organisations have signed Armed Forces Covenants which may include flexible employment arrangements for members of the Armed Forces Community – check who has signed and what they have pledged to do here – <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-force-corporate-covenant-signed-pledges>.

The [Business in the Community toolkit](#) provides useful information for both members of the Armed Forces Community and those employing them.

Our Community – Our Covenant Report - Employment Top Tips

- Military, councils and businesses to work together to help equip Veterans and spouses with skills that are in short supply.

Our Community – Our Covenant Report - Employment Good Practice

Plymouth holds an employment fair which is attended by businesses, charities, the council and other local organisations as well as members of the Armed Forces Community. This enables those members of the Armed Forces Community who are looking for employment, including those facing employment difficulties to get a job by talking to employers looking to recruit. Alternatively, it is a chance to boost awareness on how to get a job, and offers opportunities such as job shadowing, CV writing, and mock interviews. Charities such as the Royal British Legion and Combat Stress attend to offer further support to those who might need help in other areas.

Plymouth also has a Corporate Covenant Group which is fed into the Community Covenant Group. This is a chance to get local businesses together to talk about the disadvantages that members of the Armed Forces Community, including Veterans are facing in their area and work towards addressing those disadvantages identified.

Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council jointly manage an initiative called Higher Futures, which was developed by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) with involvement of the military. This seeks to equip Veterans and Reservists with the necessary higher level skills (NVQ Level 4, HND/Degree and above) in business sectors which currently experience shortages in qualified employees. This will support military leavers and military spouses to find jobs that are commensurate with their skills and abilities. Delivery is flexible by both meeting the needs of employers and providing training to prospective employees in skills that are in short supply.

Glasgow has a Veterans Employment Programme which helps Veterans resettling in Glasgow in finding employment and integrating into local communities. It supports businesses and creates

new jobs for unemployed Veterans in Glasgow. This is part of the holistic support for Veterans that Glasgow offers through its Helping Heroes organisation. This is an incentivised scheme fully funded by Glasgow City Council.

Wrexham works with Remploy, a UK wide employment service for people with specific needs. They work with Veterans on an individual basis to help them recognise their skills and experience and how this can be transferred to a civilian job.

Other Initiatives to be aware of:

[University of Wolverhampton – Supporting the Unsung Hero](#) This scheme is designed to help AF 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.

[RBL LifeWorks](#) offers courses and support services with the aim of helping veterans gain employment and [RBL LifeWorks for Families](#) which 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 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.