



Forces Connect South East

Final Report 2020



FOREWORD



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Armed Forces Champion for
Surrey County Council

Chairman of Forces
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Chairman of Surrey Civilian
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Deputy Commander 11
Infantry Brigade and HQ SE

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As Chairman and Vice Chairmen of Forces Connect South East (FCSE), it gives us great pleasure to present to you our final report.

This follows what has been a hugely successful two year project funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund to embed and mainstream the Armed Forces Covenant within our public services across Hampshire, Kent, Medway, Surrey, East Sussex, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex, building on existing best practice from health and local authorities. The Armed Forces community now has consistent access to clear information and signposting, additional support when transitioning to civilian life and support when dealing with public services 'outside the wire'. This has been provided through a seamless approach by all partners supporting community needs and requirements.

We know that there is a large Armed Forces presence with 50 Regular/Reserve Units or Stations, Service families and over 280,000 veterans in the area. Our partnership, which comprises local authorities, the Armed Forces, the NHS Armed Forces Networks and Service Charities, has worked hard to ensure that the Armed Forces community are able to get fair and consistent advice at all points of access to our services across the SE Region.

We are very pleased to say that the project has been an overwhelming success. Shared Intelligence (our external evaluators) concluded: 'The training has increased the level of understanding of Armed Forces Champions (AFCs) and frontline staff of the needs of the Armed Forces community and the services that are required if they are to reduce the risk of disadvantage in accessing public services. Our evidence suggests that this increase in understanding from the training leads to AFCs feeling more empowered and with greater confidence to support members of the Armed Forces community'. Our training packages have been delivered to over 7,000 staff and councillors, who are now 'Forces aware and Forces friendly', can identify and respond appropriately to the specific needs of the Armed Forces community and recognise the importance of asking the question 'Have you or a family member served?'.

To complement the training, we have built a hugely successful 'Forces Connect' mobile app which is available free to download to support both the Armed Forces community as well as those who are there to support them. This app contains comprehensive signposting information for both local and national organisations which is easily accessible within four simple clicks.

We have also risen to the challenge of sharing our work across the UK. We launched a national toolkit containing our materials at the Local Government Association (LGA) Annual Conference in Bournemouth in July 2019 and delivered our training in areas as far afield as the Scottish Highlands, West Midlands, East Anglia and the South West including Wiltshire, for example.

We feel justly proud of all that we have achieved not just in the South East but also across the UK as 'Forces Connect Together We Stay Connected' over the past two years. The FCSE programme has built a legacy of sustainable training packages, a range of useful resources and a mobile app as well as a culture of cross-border partnership working. This has enabled us and empowered others to actively deliver against the principal aim of the Covenant to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged because of their service to the Nation.

We have delivered in every respect on the commitment that we made to the MoD in 2017.

INTRODUCTION

This report sets out a summary of the key achievements of the FCSE Partnership in effectively embedding the Armed Forces Covenant at all levels within public authorities across Hampshire, Kent, Medway, Surrey, East Sussex, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the Nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

In 2017 Surrey County Council, on behalf of the FCSE partnership was successful in applying for a £281,300 Armed Forces Covenant Fund grant to promote understanding and awareness of issues affecting the Armed Forces community to ensure the Covenant is embedded in mainstream Service delivery through sharing and building on best practice. The partnership was awarded an additional £40,000 to share best practice across the UK. This funding was used to develop and deliver a range of face-to-face and e-learning training packages targeted at frontline staff who deal directly with residents, managers and councillors, as well as signposting information available both online and via a new mobile app to achieve the following five outcomes:

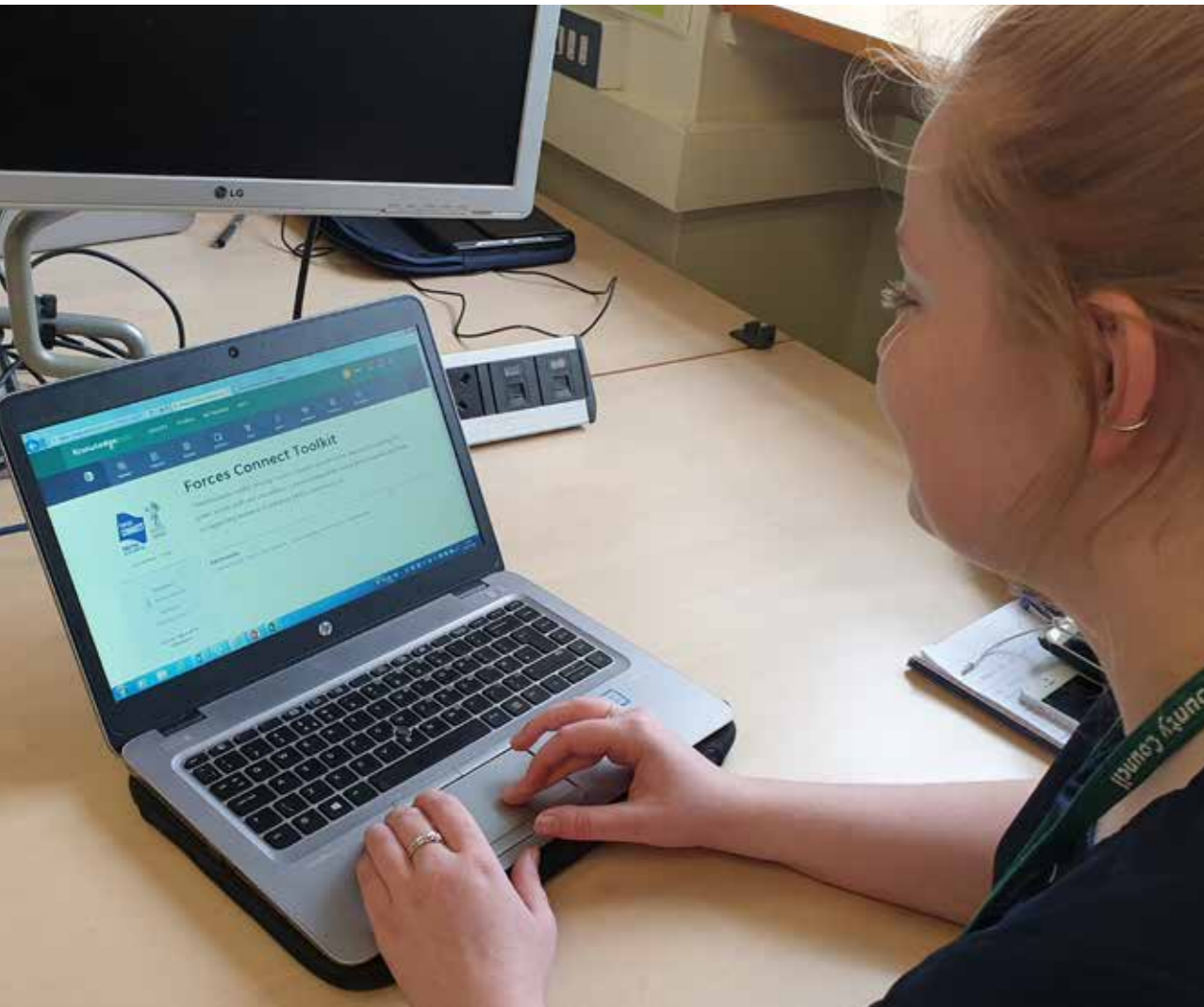
1. **Councils have a good understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces community and the expectations associated with effective delivery of the Covenant;**
2. **Clear integrated signposting pathways ensure that the Armed Forces community benefits from improved access and signposting to clear and relevant information, advice, guidance and support to ensure no disadvantage;**
3. **A partnership approach between the Armed Forces and Local Authorities is embedded throughout our ways of working;**
4. **The delivery of the Covenant is embedded and maintained at all levels from the strategic to the frontline within public sector organisations across the South East;**
5. **Disadvantage in accessing crucial public services such as housing, schools and adult social care is reduced through wider and increased awareness of the issues faced by the Armed Forces community.**

This report sets out on the following pages how each outcome has been delivered and achieved. It draws on key findings from Shared Intelligence, who were appointed as external evaluators to FCSE. They carried out a series of surveys, interviews and focus group discussions with councillors, trainees, service families, veterans and members of the Armed Forces community to look at their knowledge, understanding and confidence both before and after training.



FORCES CONNECT TRAINING AND TOOLKIT

To support the successful delivery of the FCSE project, partners combined their different skills, knowledge and expertise around training programmes, digital technology and signposting tools to produce a comprehensive and cohesive package of training and materials – these are referred to under each of the relevant outcomes. They are available to access free via the Forces Connect Toolkit on Knowledge Hub <https://khub.net/group/forces-connect-toolkit>



Face-to-face training packages:

Elected Councillor Armed Forces Champion training – a two hour course which enables elected councillors and Covenant lead officers to raise their profile and in so doing connect better with the Armed Forces community raising awareness of their needs both within the council and externally.

Service Champion training – an in-depth four hour course for managers and those who regularly come into contact with the Armed Forces community, to promote the Covenant and enhance understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces community and how to provide help. Once trained, 'Service Champions' provide consistent advice and can cascade training to frontline colleagues. This course is CPD (Continuing Professional Development) accredited.

Frontline Staff training – a 45 minute briefing for Contact Centre and frontline staff who deal directly with people either face-to-face or by phone to provide a snapshot of the Armed Forces community, explain how to effectively signpost them to help and emphasise the fundamental importance of asking the question, "Have you or a family member served?".



E-learning:

Forces Connect Employee Mentoring – this CPD accredited course was developed to support HR, recruiting professionals and line managers to achieve a greater understanding of the Armed Forces culture and the issues military personnel can face when transitioning from service life. The course provides advice on setting up mentoring and buddy systems using existing veteran and reservist employees as mentors.

Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff – FCSE widely promoted the Armed Forces Awareness e-learning packages initially developed by the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Covenant Partnership funded by Warwickshire County Council and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund.

Signposting Pathways and Mobile App:

A number of county specific Armed Forces signposting pathways (topic based information sheets with contact details used for signposting members of the Armed Forces community to relevant sources of help and support) for key services were developed. These were made available digitally via the free 'Forces Connect' mobile app available on Android and Apple which enables users to access the support they need in four simple clicks.



School Admissions Video:

This video was produced to address the challenging and often stressful process Armed Forces families face from frequent moves, by setting out the criteria and explaining in straightforward terms the process Forces families are required to undertake when applying for a school place and how to make an appeal if they are unsuccessful in gaining their school of choice.



FORCES CONNECT SOUTH EAST GOVERNANCE



The FCSE programme was governed by a cross-border group of all FCSE partners at both councillor and officer level. All training materials were endorsed by a 'Senior User Group' of officers from the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force and the Ministry of Defence's Armed Forces Covenant Team has reviewed and approved the content of the training packages. Membership of these groups can be found at the end of this document.

FCSE OUTCOMES

We have successfully delivered all 5 outcomes.

Outcome 1

Councils have a good understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces community and the expectations associated with effective delivery of the covenant

'The FCSE training has significantly increased understanding of the Armed Forces community and their needs amongst public sector staff as well as the type of services they might require' (Shared Intelligence (SI), Final Report, October 2019)

All councils, having signed the Covenant, now fully understand the implications of it and how to identify those who are serving or have served and their families, and the issues that may be of concern to them such as moving schools, finding employment for spouses and accessing health and welfare support.



This understanding is publicly demonstrated through dedicated pages for the Armed Forces on council websites, as well as frontline staff now asking residents the question of whether they or a family member have served in the British Armed Forces when they are seeking support from public services.

This has been achieved through outstanding training delivered to over 7,000 people through the hierarchy of local authorities, Police, Fire & Rescue and Health as well as colleagues in the voluntary and faith sectors in the South East. '...during in-depth interviews all interviewees said that they learned new things about the needs of the Armed Forces community whether or not they had some prior knowledge ...' (SI).

During the programme:

- **180 Elected Councillor Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Officers** have received training, along with a further 200 councillors, who are potential Armed Forces Champions. '70% said the training and networking strengthened their understanding of the military footprint, local needs and the types of services they may need to access' (SI). "...captured all key elements of the subject, anticipating obvious questions and allowing effective interaction". (Quote from trainee)
- **1,000 Service Champions** have been trained and equipped with a frontline brief and script to cascade the Covenant further into their teams. '91% of Service Champions reported an increase in knowledge' (SI). "At first point of access with Social Care we now ask "have you or any of your family served in the Armed Forces?" (Quote from trainee)
- **2,400 Contact Centre and frontline staff** have received training. '75% had an increased understanding of the types of services they require' (SI). "I shared what I learned with members of the Offender Management Team. The frontline staff presentation is also available for them to refer to on my desk" (Quote from trainee)
- **2,200 public sector employees** completed the Armed Forces Awareness e-learning. "...I now know the Covenant is about recognising challenges, supporting people and making sure that they are treated fairly and not penalised for being in the Armed Forces ..." (Quote from trainee)

The commitment of our partners to the Covenant has grown stronger during the period of the project, and participation in the FCSE programme has positively supported Kent County Council and the NHS Armed Forces Networks (under Hastings and Rother CCG) in joining Surrey and Hampshire County Councils as Gold MoD Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Award holders, and East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Medway Council and Brighton & Hove City Council gaining ERS Silver status.

Outcome 2

Clear integrated pathways ensure the Armed Forces community benefits from improved access and signposting to relevant information

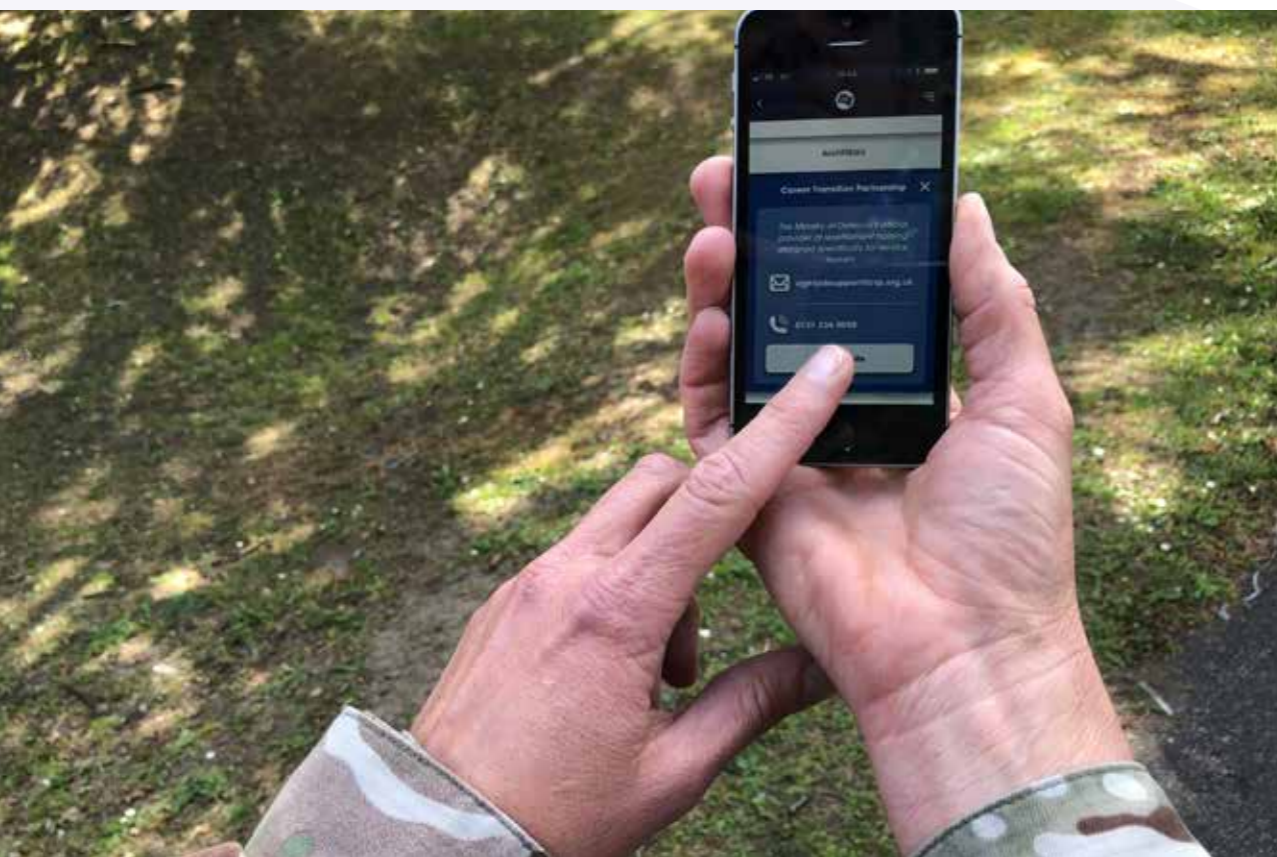
'Increased knowledge, understanding and confidence is resulting in referrals. Over a third of frontline staff have referred a member of the Armed Forces community to a service and 81% said that they felt as though they had the right information to make an appropriate referral of a member of the Armed Forces community' (Shared Intelligence Final Report, October 2019).

'The development of county specific signposting pathways and the newly created 'Forces Connect' mobile app, has increased staff and councillor confidence in their ability to help and signpost members of the Armed Forces community to local sources of support. 36% of frontline staff surveyed a month or more after training said that they had made a referral to a service since the training and 25% said that they had used a pathway' (SI).

The feedback received on the app has been unanimously positive across the UK, particularly from frontline staff, Unit Welfare Officers and other members of the Armed Forces community, both young and old. Since its launch in January 2019, there have been over 8,200 downloads and it has expanded well beyond the South East with an additional 10 regions added, with further interest from the Scottish Highlands, Wales, Cumbria and Wiltshire. FCSE welcomes further regions throughout the UK to join the app platform to further enable easy access to local and national organisations who are able to provide help and support.

"We plan to adopt the app... this will enable us to ensure our delivery partners are aware of what is available and can offer more tailored and appropriate signposting services". (Jozi Brown, Engagement Manager Cumbria CVS).

Shared Intelligence noted that '...the pathways complement existing initiatives such as the Veterans Gateway, and are an important part of the FCSE programme'. FCSE has worked hard to ensure that all materials complement and do not duplicate what is already available in other areas.



Outcome 3

A partnership approach between the Armed Forces and local authorities is embedded through our ways of working

'Networking between those in similar roles has improved, as have links with the Armed Forces' (Shared Intelligence Final Report, October 2019)

Partnership working between local authorities and the Armed Forces was the key foundation to the FCSE programme. All the local authorities within the partnership already had a relationship of mutual trust and recognised the benefits of working together to avoid duplication, build on best practice already in place, learn from each other and achieve economies of scale. This approach has led to a more consistent approach in the delivery of the Covenant by removing barriers and enabling fair access to public services.

Local authorities also had well established and successful working relationships with the Armed Forces, both Regular and Reserve, across the South East region. The partnership approach between FCSE authorities has enabled those authorities with a comparatively small military presence to benefit from working closely with authorities with greater numbers of military, thereby increasing opportunities to integrate and to share resources and best practice in supporting the Armed Forces community locally.

The training delivered through the programme has also helped to further strengthen partnership working. Councillors and officers together welcomed the additional contacts and networks that resulted from the programme. '...fellow champions are seen as an important source of advice' (SI).

The development of networks is a particularly important element of the role of elected councillors. The training, peer mentoring and networking events organised through the FCSE programme '... made a big difference in engaging with the Armed Forces community with over half of the elected councillors having improved networks with the Brigade Task Force Commanders and 61% of elected councillors had improved connection with other champions and covenant officers across the county' (SI).



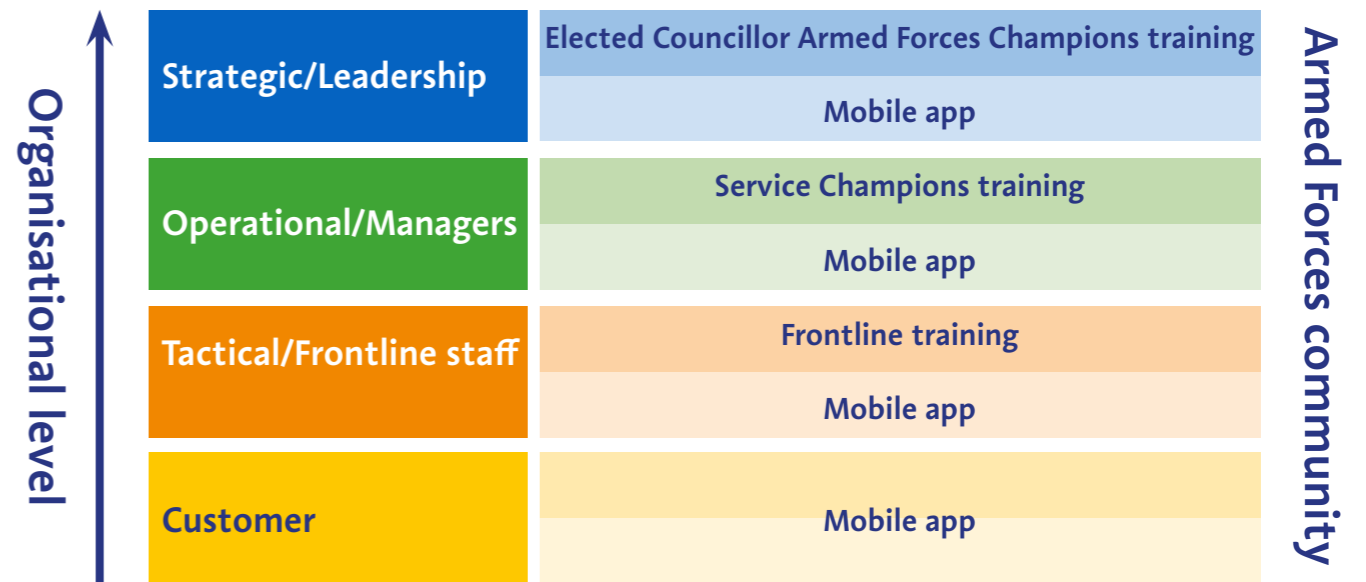
Outcome 4

The delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant is embedded and sustained within public sector organisations across the south east

‘Our research shows that the training has improved understanding of the Covenant and that Councils are embedding the Covenant in its policies. The MoD Employer Recognition Scheme Award is an important motivator for keeping the Covenant on a council’s agenda’ (Shared Intelligence Final Report, October 2019)

Research carried out has demonstrated that the most significant barrier to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant is a lack of awareness of what it is and what it means. The FCSE programme aimed to address this and ensure that there was awareness of the Covenant at all levels within local public services is demonstrated in the diagram below.

Forces Connect - embedding and sustaining the Covenant in public authorities



The training packages for elected councillor, Armed Forces Champions and frontline staff all cover what the Covenant is, what it means, why it is important and how it can be incorporated into day to day practice. ‘Our research shows that the training has improved understanding of the Covenant. 67% of Service Champions said the training made a lot of difference to their understanding of the Covenant’ (SI).

An important consideration for the FCSE programme was ensuring its sustainability past the end of the funding period. A ‘train the trainer’ approach was used with all trained service champions receiving a copy of the frontline staff presentation, with script, which enables them to continue to share the learning within their organisation.

It was also important for the programme to encourage councils to further embed the Covenant in their policies which would help ensure its delivery is sustained. The success of all FCSE partners in achieving either the gold or silver Employer Recognition Scheme Award is one demonstration of this. Linking Forces-friendly activity in with the Employer Recognition Scheme has facilitated greater opportunities for influencing council policy, especially around HR policies, for example additional paid leave for Reservists, guaranteed interviews, Covenant briefings during staff induction and a mentoring scheme for new ex-Service employees. Research highlighted that: ‘...more councils are embedding the Covenant in their policies ... the number of elected councillor Armed Forces Champions reporting that their council had incorporated the Covenant in its policies increased from 67 per cent to 93 per cent during the project’ (SI).

Outcome 5

Disadvantage in accessing crucial public services such as housing, schools and adult social care is reduced and there is a wider awareness of the issues faced by the Armed Forces community.

The purpose of the Covenant is to remove disadvantage for all members of the Armed Forces community in accessing public services, and all elements of the FCSE programme aimed to raise awareness of the Covenant and how disadvantage could be overcome.

The evaluation concluded that 'as a result of the FCSE programme, frontline staff, Service Champions and Elected Councillor Armed Forces Champions have a better understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces community. They are more confident in supporting members of the community and making appropriate referrals and ... the Covenant is becoming well-embedded within councils and other public service organisations. Finally, our research shows that, having received the training, people are more likely to ask a member of the public seeking to access a service whether they, or a member of their family, have ever served in the Armed Forces. This development is likely to contribute significantly to achieving the objectives of the Armed Forces Covenant and removing disadvantage'.

As part of the evaluation and to help measure impact of the programme, three focus groups were held with military spouses (one Gurkha unit) and ex-Service personnel. They discussed their access to a range of services including applying for school places, finding GPs and transfer of medical records, obtaining suitable local employment, as well as discussing some of the issues they faced such as loneliness, connecting with like-minded people and knowing where to go to for support. These types of issues are addressed in the training and so it is anticipated that over time, as the training is further cascaded and embedded, no members of the Armed Forces community will feel disadvantaged as a result of their service, and staff confidence will continue to increase in helping them as well as in signposting them to additional sources of support provided by service charities, community events and local groups.

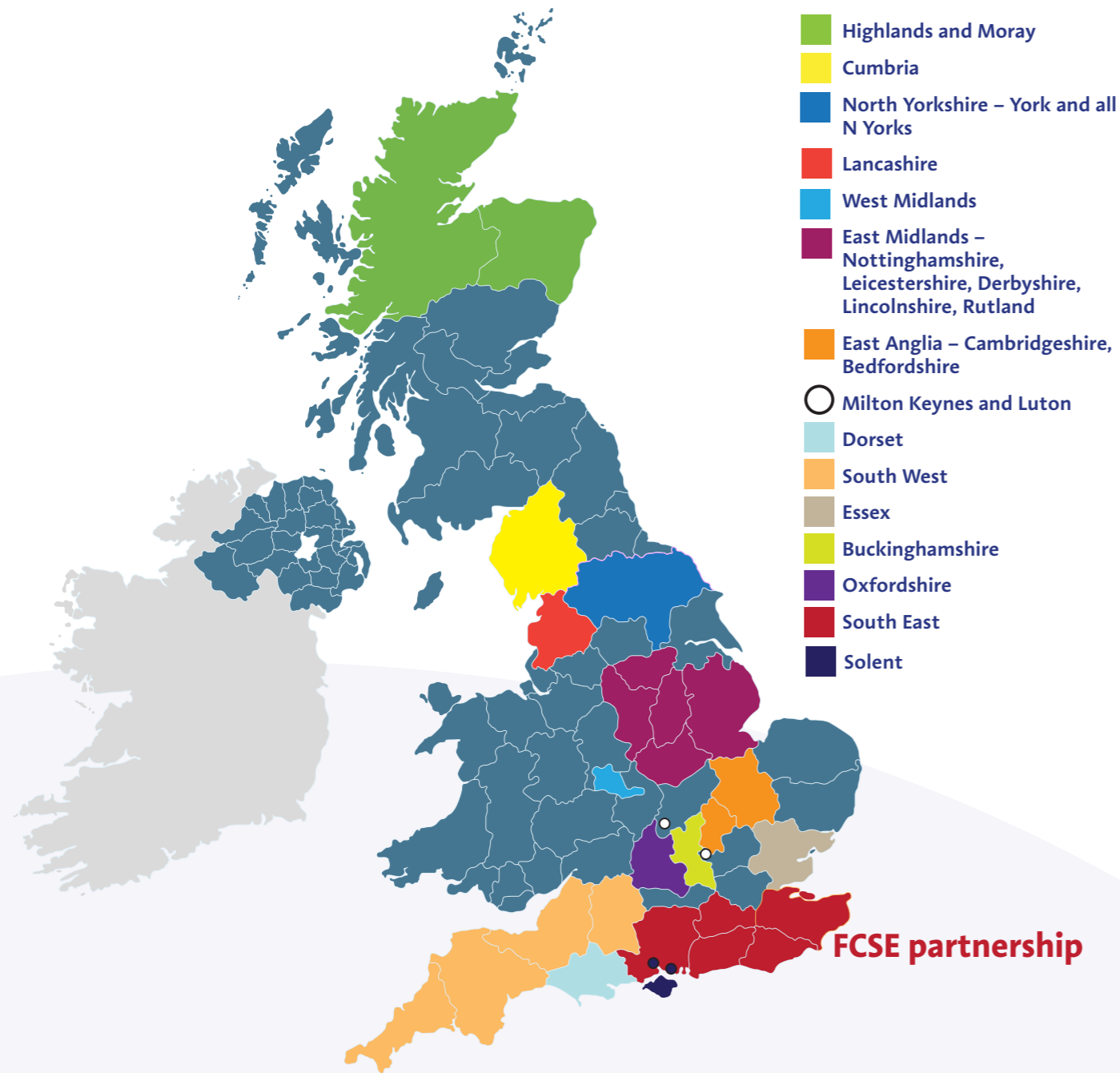
One area that the FCSE partners were keen to address when investigating disadvantage was in relation to managing expectations of the Covenant within the Armed Forces community and the message that the Covenant is generally not about positive advantage, but about removing disadvantage. School admissions was one such area where the partnership agreed further work needed to be carried out to manage families expectations. To address this, the school admissions video was produced and widely circulated, mainly aimed at families but also at schools and those who support the families. The video was produced towards the end of the programme and has been very well received by those who have seen it.

SHARING BEST PRACTICE NATIONALLY

The MoD awarded FCSE an additional £40,000 to share best practice nationally. In order to enable open access to all training materials and products produced or recommended by the FCSE partnership a 'Forces Connect Toolkit' was produced. This toolkit, hosted on Knowledge Hub (<https://khub.net/group/forces-connect-toolkit>), contains editable training materials and resources that can be accessed free by any local authority, organisation or military unit, and was widely promoted at the MoD National Covenant in the Community Conference in April 2019 as well as at the Local Government Association (LGA) Conference in July 2019.



The partnership worked with local authorities and Army brigades across the UK to deliver a series of training workshops, 'train the trainer' events and conferences to promote the Forces Connect Toolkit and to deliver the three training packages for Elected Councillor, Armed Forces Champions, Service Champions and Frontline staff to authorities across the country. There was a high demand and excellent take up of the training nationally and by the end of the programme over 170 local authorities had received the training across England and Scotland as shown on the map below.



Testimonials from National workshops

“In practical terms it has always been easy to work with the Forces Connect team who are a ready source of knowledge and willingly share resources. Forces Connect came to Preston in June and trained 60 front line staff and 30 local authority Armed Forces Champions and lead officers. This training was particularly significant for us in Lancashire as it was the first time our champions and lead officers had come together in support of the Covenant”. (Ian Barber, Project Lead, Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub).

“The Forces Connect training is delivered with such energy and passion for the Forces and it had a significant impact within Lancashire and my project. Most notably within the Armed Forces Champions who are significantly more motivated to push their relevant local authorities to do more in support of the Covenant now. By way of example, we are now working towards the creation of a military civilian partnership board, which will provide oversight and governance to our activity. I believe this wouldn't have happened without the support of Forces Connect and the motivation they created”. (Ian Barber, Project Lead, Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub).

“We were delighted to be able to work with the Forces Connect team, and offer their Elected Councillor, Service Champions and Frontline training here in Cumbria. Our armed forces support project started only recently, so this opportunity has given us a boost in terms of reaching our desired outcome – to offer better connected and accessible services in the county, for our local ex-service community. The training has enhanced our armed forces champions' knowledge of their roles, improved our understanding of support pathways for the ex-service community and reinvigorated our partners' enthusiasm and interest”. (Jozi Brown, Engagement Manager, Cumbria CVS).

CONCLUSION

The FCSE programme has achieved its original outcomes and has embedded the Armed Forces Covenant at all levels within public services through the delivery of a number of different training packages, signposting information and peer support to help to ensure that the Armed Forces community are treated fairly and not disadvantaged by their service.

The training within the South East as well as the roll out of the programme nationally has been well received by both partners and the Ministry of Defence and can be seen below:

Lt Gen Richard Nugee – Chief of Defence People tweeted “Well done Peter, an example to all of what can be done by just getting the right people together and a common purpose – getting it right for Veterans.”

Jenna Clare, Joint Head of Armed Forces Covenant Team said “We are very grateful for the work of the Forces Connect South East team in spreading the word about the importance of the Armed Forces Covenant in ensuring our Service personnel, Veterans and their families get the fair deal they deserve.”

Carol Stone, Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust said “Congratulations on the success of Forces Connect South East; which we supported with a grant through our Strengthening Delivery of the Covenant Programme. In particular, we must note the way that FCSE rose to the challenge that the Fund set you - to share best practice with local authorities across the country, which we know has been well received.”

Col Bob Crawley, Branch Vice-President SSAFA Surrey said “The project has clearly been an outstanding successI have no doubt that many service personnel and their families will now benefit from the increased understanding that FCSE has generated amongst the many agencies able to help them.”

All FCSE partners are committed to continuing to work closely together to ensure the Armed Forces community is treated fairly and will continue to work collaboratively to share best practice cross-border for the benefit of the whole Armed Forces community.





THE FORCES CONNECT SOUTH EAST TEAM

Member Group:

Chairman: Cllr Peter Martin

Armed Forces Champion, Surrey County Council

Vice Chairman: Cllr Andrew Joy

Armed Forces Champion, Hampshire County Council

Vice Chairman: Col Simon Browne

Deputy Commander, 11 Infantry Brigade and HQ SE and Army representative of FCSE Senior User Group

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Armed Forces Champion, West Sussex County Council

Cllr Richard Long

Armed Forces Champion, Kent County Council

Cllr Howard Doe

Armed Forces Champion, Medway Council

Cllr Bill Bentley

Armed Forces Champion, East Sussex County Council

Cllr Mo Marsh

Armed Forces Champion, Brighton & Hove Council

Kate Parkin

Director, NHS Armed Forces Networks (Kent & Medway and Sussex) and FCSE trainer for Service Champion training

Col (Retd) Bob Crawley

Surrey Chairman, SSAFA the Armed Forces charity

Gp Capt (Retd) Keith Lane

South East Reserve Forces and Cadets' Association

Cdr Glynn Johns

Naval Regional Command Eastern England and Royal Navy representative of FCSE Senior User Group

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Military Adviser, Surrey and Kent County Councils, Armed Forces Champion 11 Infantry Brigade and FCSE trainer for Elected Councillor AFCs and Frontline Staff training

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Covenant Officer, West Sussex County Council

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