



 **THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST**

Strengthening and Empowering Delivery of the Covenant

Evaluation of the Strengthening Delivery of the
Armed Forces Covenant Programme

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Executive Summary

The Covenant Fund team, operating originally as part of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), set up the Strengthening Delivery Programme (SDP) in 2016 to provide a series of grants to Local Authorities (LAs). These were provided through an open application process, enabling LAs to deliver projects aimed at addressing identified needs in improving local implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant Fund team later transitioned to become the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT; hereafter also termed ‘the Trust’).

This report is aimed at all who may have an interest in this programme, but may be of particular interest to Local Authority (LA) employees that have been tasked with implementing the Armed Forces Covenant or that have an interest in this area. The report first highlights areas of good practice that LA employees can draw upon, before turning to recommendations intended to help LAs improve the provision of services to serving members of the Armed Forces, their families, and veterans in their areas. Recommendations also include areas in which the AFCFT might be able to better support and empower its grant-holders.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) commissioned RAND Europe to assist in strengthening local delivery of the Covenant through evaluation and other support services

The AFCFT commissioned RAND Europe and its project partner, Shared Intelligence (Si), to conduct two parallel streams of activity: an Evaluation workstream, led by RAND Europe, and a Support and Development workstream, led by Si. The Evaluation workstream is comprised of two deliverables: an Interim Report detailing the findings from a summative evaluation of the SDP, carried out after the programme finished, and a Final Report detailing the findings from a formative evaluation of a follow-on programme, the SDP Sustaining Delivery programme, to take place concurrently. The Support and Development workstream will culminate in Si’s development of a ‘toolkit’ or repository of good practices for grant-holders derived from findings from both the SDP and SDP Sustaining Delivery programme.

This interim report summarises the findings of the summative evaluation of Phases I and II of the SDP, and draws out recommendations for the AFCFT and LAs

The study team examined the activities of SDP grant-holders against four evaluation questions (EQs), summarised below in Box 0.1 and detailed in full in Annex A.

Box 0.1 SDP evaluation questions

1. To what extent, and if so how, has the SDP contributed to an improvement in the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in the areas where funding has been awarded, in terms of the 11 strands of activities identified?
2. What are the risks and barriers to local Covenant implementation?
3. To what extent have the grants supported under the SDP led to sustainable changes in terms of what they achieved in implementing the Covenant locally?
4. What learning and good practices can be identified from the administration of the SDP as a funding mechanism and process itself?

Source: RAND Europe analysis

RAND Europe investigated these questions through a combination of document review, an online questionnaire distributed to grant-holders, and detailed investigations of five selected case studies. These case studies were explored through interviews with stakeholders, including both grant-holders and beneficiaries of these projects. More detailed information about methodology and data collection is included in Chapter 1 and Annex B.

The evaluation findings strongly indicate that the SDP funding has had a significant positive impact on delivery of the Covenant

Insights gained through the questionnaire responses and the interviews strongly suggest that the funding received through the SDP has had a positive impact across different regions and different strands of activities, and is viewed as essential to the gains achieved in this period. The vast majority of grant-holders who responded to the questionnaire felt that the grant had a positive impact on the delivery of the Covenant. Box 0.2 includes a brief summary of areas in which grant-holders perceived SDP funding to have had significant success, the full explanation of which is included in Chapter 3.

Box 0.2 Example of SDP successes

- A majority of questionnaire respondents felt the SDP had helped improve implementation of the Covenant 'to a great extent'.
- According to an analysis of the questionnaire responses, the most successful activities in terms of both implementation and impact were: (i) improving coordination and the sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders; (ii) providing tailored support to the Armed Forces Community; and (iii) raising awareness among public authorities about the support available to the Armed Forces Community.
- Insights from both the questionnaire and the interviews indicate that some grant-holders produced outputs that they felt were only achievable because of the SDP grants.
- Some questionnaire respondents felt that the funding received through the SDP acted as an initial stimulus to help LAs to start implementing the Covenant and achieve further funding.
- In many cases, the funding enabled the employment of a dedicated resource, which grant-holders described as essential to increasing capacity and driving forward the implementation of the Covenant.
- Many grant-holders claimed new signposting resources had been established as a result of the SDP funding, highlighting the value of signposting in increasing awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them.
- Where funding was used to support the use of veterans' hubs, grant-holders reported that these were instrumental in providing a one-stop-shop and tailored approach to accessing various local services.
- A significant majority of grant-holders said that the activities or services undertaken as a result of the SDP project continued after the grant ended, indicating success in achieving sustainability.
- In numerous cases, activities that were carried out to achieve a specific goal also resulted in various indirect benefits, leading to some activities supporting various different strands (e.g. activities meant to engage with the general public led to the identification of previously unknown members of the Armed Forces Community).
- The use of clusters was reported by some grant-holders to have resulted in significant benefits, such as increased collaboration, improved consistency, expansion of stakeholder networks, and enhanced ability to share information and learn from others.
- The funding model used, whereby the Trust funded a range of different activities based on the needs and priorities perceived by each individual cluster, resulted in improvements at different levels of Covenant implementation. This suggests that the funding model has been sufficiently flexible to enable progress at different stages.

Source: RAND Europe analysis

Across the grants, grant-holders pointed out that some outputs were only achieved because of the SDP grants, such as awareness-raising activities, development of training materials, building of referral/signposting pathways, or setting up of new – or improvement of existing – support services. In addition, general signposting seemed to have unintended positive consequences: members of the Armed Forces Community appear to have gained awareness about the support available to them from activities targeted at other aims; for example, one project noted that events organised to engage the general public (some of which attracted more than 300,000 members of the public) led to the identification of previously unknown members of the Armed Forces Community, who were then made aware of available support and

services. Where funding was used to support the creation of new or existing veterans' hubs, these were seen as important enablers to veterans accessing a range of public services as one-stop-shops. The existence of the hubs as centres that enable signposting and collaboration between different service providers may also have allowed some LAs to enable access to support services that they otherwise would have been unable to provide by themselves, thus helping them improve Covenant implementation. In other cases, funding enabled LAs to invest in dedicated resources or individuals that were strictly focused on delivering the Covenant. This helped avoid a commonly reported problem of lack of capacity whereby delivering the Covenant was often an additional duty to a staff member's existing responsibilities. Many grant-holders described this in both interviews and questionnaires as a key enabler for achieving their grant aims and supporting delivery of the Covenant. Other responses indicated that the funding acted akin to an initial stimulus to start implementing the Covenant, helping LAs to both demonstrate the value of their activities in this area, as well as highlighting areas of need, both of which led to further funding. This may be a contributing factor to the suggestion by the majority of grant-holders that the activities undertaken as a result of SDP funding continued after the grant ended.

Questionnaire and interview responses also articulated areas of continued need, including areas where grant-holders felt they lacked support, or in which continued effort is required

While the majority of questionnaire respondents indicated a positive experience with their grant, the findings also led the study team to identify some areas where grant-holders felt the Trust, working in collaboration with them, could better enable them to deliver the Covenant. These areas are more fully detailed in Chapter 3. Some grant-holders felt that they would benefit from receiving increased guidance or instruction from the Trust, or felt that they did not fully understand the Trust's intended outcomes. Others were unsure about the clustering approach that had been adopted, and considered whether they might have been better served by working independently.

In addition to elements related to the grant-management, grant-holders identified additional areas in which continued effort or future work is required to better enable delivery of the Covenant. The importance of dedicated personnel, for example – as well as difficulties collecting data about the local nature and needs of the Armed Forces Community – were frequently cited topics, both from questionnaire respondents as well as interviewees. Finally, certain areas were seen as particularly challenging. Box 0.3 provides a summary of some of the key areas in which grant-holders felt both they and the AFCFT, working together, could improve delivery of the Covenant (a detailed explanation is included in Chapter 3).

Box 0.3 Areas for continued improvement

- According to an analysis of the questionnaire responses, the least successful activity strands in terms of both implementation and impact were: (i) raising the awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community; (ii) improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community; and (iii) raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. It should, however, be noted that private sector engagement was not a priority within the programme guidance, and thus may not have been a priority to grant-holders.
- Many questionnaire respondents felt that a key barrier they faced was the difficulty in obtaining reliable data on the local Armed Forces Community.
- Many questionnaire respondents also described the impact of COVID-19 as one of the greatest challenges they faced in achieving the aims of their grant.
- Many respondents felt that the sustainability of their projects was endangered by a lack of resource, including the lack of dedicated personnel.
- Working in partnership, including within clusters, was identified as a challenge by multiple questionnaire respondents and interview participants, thus suggesting the potential need of more guidance around forming clusters and successful relationships.

Source: RAND Europe analysis

The majority of projects felt that COVID-19 was a significant challenge in delivering the Covenant. However, the study team felt that firstly, COVID-19 is likely to be a unique experience, particularly in its unprecedented nature. Secondly, despite delays imposed by COVID-19, most grant-holders were able to find solutions, such as remote working practices that will bring long-term benefits that might not otherwise have been adopted. Therefore, while this paper discusses the implications of COVID-19 as articulated by questionnaire respondents and interviewees, the study team chose to deemphasise challenges related to COVID-19 in favour of other challenges that are unlikely to be overcome with time.

While some grant-holders indicated that they found the use of clusters to be an efficient way of administering individual projects and that the clusters led to benefits such as improved collaboration and consistency, not all grant-holders felt the same. Some LAs noted that the partners they had chosen to cluster with proved to be too different (be that in vision, internal processes, size and make-up of the Armed Forces Community), which resulted in difficulties in collaborating. At the same time, some non-lead LAs reported that they struggled to communicate with the lead LA and with the Trust, and did not feel that they had access to the same information or opportunities as the lead LA. Factors such as previous existing relationships, shared priorities, or efficient division of responsibilities across partners were identified as potentially contributing to the success of some clusters. These findings may therefore be useful to improve future funding programmes by providing guidance to LAs on how to manage the clustering process in order to maximise the benefits.

Based on these findings, the study team identified several areas where both LAs and the Trust could better enable delivery of the Covenant

Based on the evaluation findings, as well as consultation with Si in an expert workshop, RAND Europe identified several key recommendations for both LAs and the AFCFT. These recommendations are summarised in Box 0.4, with a full description in Chapter 4.

Box 0.4 Recommendations

- LAs may benefit from ensuring that they have the right individuals in place, and ideally invest in dedicated posts, to improve the delivery of the Covenant.
- LAs may benefit from further exploring possible barriers to private sector implementation of the Covenant to support delivery of the Covenant in this area.
- The Trust and LAs may benefit from identifying best practices for collecting and sharing data about the nature and needs of the Armed Forces Community.
- The Trust and LAs may benefit from continuing to work together to identify and proactively distribute good or promising practices to help support the delivery of the Covenant. Use of the toolkit and repository being developed alongside the AFCFT by Si, will provide an important platform to help enable this.
- In future funding programmes, the Trust may benefit from providing additional guidance and support, including clear explanation of the Trust's aims, sharing of good practices, and continuing communication.
- The Trust may benefit from continuing to offer grant applicants the option of clustering, while also providing applicants with additional guidance on how to best form and utilise their clusters.

Source: RAND Europe analysis

Many of these recommendations support the importance of the repository developed by Si in collaboration with the Trust as a necessary resource to enable grant-holders to achieve the aims of the Trust more effectively. Within the recommendations are a number of findings that may prove useful to the development of the repository. RAND Europe and Si will continue to work together to ensure that the outputs of both workstreams are complementary.

The aim is for these recommendations to better enable the LAs to implement the Covenant, as well as the Trust to support grant-holders in their work. However, it is important to note that simply identifying recommendations and lessons learned is not sufficient: they must be incorporated into existing processes and implemented in order to bring about positive change. RAND Europe and Si will continue to work with the Trust in subsequent phases of the project in order to identify the best ways to act on these recommendations.

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Abbreviations

AF	Armed Forces
AFCFT	Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
AFCLO	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer
BC	Borough Council
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
EDP	Enhancing Delivery Programme
EQ	Evaluation Question
FCSE	Forces Connect South East
GM	Greater Manchester
GP	General Practitioner
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LA	Local Authority
LGA	Local Government Association
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NHS	National Health Service
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
QA	Quality Assurance
SDP	Strengthening Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Programme
SSAFA	Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association
TV	Television
WYLA	West Yorkshire Local Authority

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter provides information about both the context in which the project was undertaken, and the point within the project at which this evaluation report falls. It then continues to detail the study team’s purpose and evaluation approach, before moving on to an explanation of the methodology. Finally, the chapter provides a roadmap for the remainder of the report.

1.1. Background to the evaluation

The Covenant is a pledge created in 2011 between the UK government, the nation and the Armed Forces, articulating the nation’s obligations to the Armed Forces Community, which consists of serving personnel, reservists, ex-Service personnel, and the families of these groups. At its core, the Covenant acknowledges that the Armed Forces Community should be treated fairly and with respect, and should not face discrimination as a result of their (or their family member’s) military service.¹ The Covenant Fund was launched in 2015 as a set of funds to support the Armed Forces Community. Initially based in the MOD, the Covenant Fund moved to be administered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT; hereafter also referred to as the Trust) in 2018.² Since 2011, ‘every local authority in mainland Great Britain has signed a “community covenant partnership” with their local armed forces.’³ This ‘community covenant’ seeks to:

‘encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their areas and to nurture public understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the armed forces community

recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the armed forces community

encourage activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life

encourage the armed forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.’⁴

¹ Armed Forces Covenant (2021).

² Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (n.d.2).

³ Ministry of Defence (2019).

⁴ Ministry of Defence (2019).

The ‘Our Community, Our Covenant’ study, funded by the Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association (LGA), was conducted by Shared Intelligence in 2016 to understand how the Armed Forces Covenant is being delivered by Local Authorities (LAs) in England, Scotland and Wales, and to explore how delivery could be improved.⁵ As the first study of its kind, it provided an overall picture of the implementation of the Covenant at the local level, and highlighted a number of gaps and challenges, such as insufficient understanding of the Covenant and a lack of, or underdeveloped, core infrastructure to deliver the Covenant (for example, existence and implementation of action plans, employment of Armed Forces Covenant Officers, and existence of dedicated webpages). The study also produced a toolkit designed to help LAs improve their implementation of the Covenant.

Given the gaps and challenges identified in the 2016 study, the Covenant team in MOD saw the need for funding focused on strengthening local Covenant implementation, while at the same time providing resources for LAs to implement the toolkit. The Strengthening Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Programme (SDP; henceforth also referred to as ‘the Programme’) was set up in 2016 to provide a series of grants to LAs ‘enabling them to deliver projects linked to needs identified by their Local Covenant Partnerships.’⁶ In 2017, the Covenant Fund awarded a total of £3,493,296 across 23 grants, which included 107 LAs in total. These grants formed the first phase of the SDP. The second phase of funding followed in 2018, consisting of £2,768,055 across 20 grants, which included 80 LAs. Grants were awarded to ‘clusters’ of LAs, as per the Covenant Fund’s instructions relating to grant awards. Each cluster was comprised of a lead LA that was in charge of administering the funds and the relationship with the Covenant Fund on behalf of the cluster. Members of the cluster were determined by the LAs in the submission of their application to the Covenant Fund. The Trust took over administration of the funds after its establishment in 2018. Chapter 2 describes the SDP grants across both phases in further detail.

1.2. Purpose and evaluation approach

The Trust commissioned RAND Europe to undertake a summative evaluation of both phases of the SDP to understand whether and how the Programme had met its goals. The evaluation approach is detailed in Annex A and included:

- (i) Contextualising the policy and political landscape within which the SDP was implemented, emphasising the importance of **context** (what works for whom, why, how and under what circumstances).
- (ii) Developing a **contribution analysis**, to provide evidence and a line of reasoning regarding the contribution of the SDP to the documented results.
- (iii) Grounding the evaluation in a **logic modelling approach** to explain, in logical steps, how the activities of the Programme can lead to the intended outputs, outcomes and impacts. This approach is widely recognised as being rigorous and particularly well-suited to evaluations of complex interventions in complex environments. A logic model ‘graphically represent[s] the

⁵ Forces in Mind Trust, Local Government Association, and Shared Intelligence (2017).

⁶ Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (2021b).

“theory of change” of how an intervention works’,⁷ illustrating the various stages and causal pathways for an intervention to succeed. A logic modelling approach can examine how project objectives translate into activities, outputs and outcomes; the extent to which these have been realised in practice; and, to understand how and why each step of the project leads to the other to achieve the Programme’s aim.

- (iv) The evaluation is guided by four evaluation questions (EQs). These questions were developed by the study team, based on questions provided by the Trust as part of the original tender as well as additional input from the Trust. These EQs are outlined in Table 11 Evaluation questions.

Table 11 Evaluation questions

N°	EQ
1	To what extent, and if so how, has the SDP contributed to an improvement in the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in the areas where funding has been awarded, in terms of the 11 strands of activities identified?
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) What are the risks and barriers to Local Covenant implementation? (b) Are there specific risks and barriers relating to the various components comprising the implementation of the Covenant, i.e. the 11 strands of activities identified? (c) To what extent can particular grants or approaches be identified as overcoming these risks and barriers to implementation? (d) What mitigation strategies have helped, or could help, overcome these risks and barriers? (e) What learning and good practice about the implementation of the Covenant has emerged from the grants funded through the SDP?
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) To what extent have the grants supported under the SDP led to sustainable changes in terms of what they achieved in implementing the Covenant locally? (b) Are there specific risks and barriers to sustainability relating to the various components comprising the implementation of the Covenant, i.e. the 11 strands of activities identified? (c) To what extent can particular grants or approaches be identified as the most sustainable ways of delivering the Local Covenant? (d) What mitigation strategies have helped, or could help, overcome these risks and barriers to sustainability? (e) What learning and good practice about the sustainability of the implementation of the Covenant has emerged from the grants funded through the SDP?
4	What learning and good practices can be identified from the administration of the SDP as a funding mechanism and process itself?

Source: RAND Europe analysis

Following identification of the EQs, the research team developed an overarching logic model to map and describe the aims of the SDP, which can be found in part in Chapter 2 and in full in Annex A, along with the requirements necessary to achieve these goals and the activities undertaken. As part of this exercise, the

⁷ Public Health England (2018).

study team identified the main activity strands comprising the SDP. These strands were subsequently shared and refined with the Trust – as described in Annex A – and are provided below:

1. **Understanding of the target population** (e.g. mapping of the local Armed Forces Community, needs assessment, mapping of existing support services).
2. **Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. producing and delivering training and e-learning packages).
3. **Raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. establish communication strategies aimed at the private sector to encourage organisations to sign up to the Covenant). Although the private sector is outside this Programme's area of focus, and as such it was not a priority within the programme guidance, some LAs chose to carry out these activities as part of their grant and as part of working with a range of partners.
4. **Raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. organising and participating in events promoting the Armed Forces, such as Armed Forces Day or Memorial Day events).
5. **Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. producing and delivering training and e-learning packages, developing resources for signposting and referrals).
6. **Raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community on the support available to them** (e.g. creating drop-in information centres and hubs, and establishing communication strategies aimed at the Armed Forces Community).
7. **Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders** (e.g. setting up regular conferences and events, establishing networks including LAs, charities, front line organisations, Armed Forces, and Veteran Champions).
8. **Strengthening links between service providers** (e.g. setting up a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant point of contact, developing resources for signposting and referrals for housing, finance, education, etc.).
9. **Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. developing standard forms and policies that adhere to the spirit of the Covenant).
10. **Provision of tailored support for the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. setting up and facilitating specialised support addressing the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community, such as GPs asking whether someone is a veteran and providing adequate support, schools providing educational support for Service children, etc).⁸
11. **Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community** (e.g. setting up social events for the Armed Forces Community, such as Veterans' Breakfast Clubs).

⁸ Asking whether individuals seeking services are veterans was often referred to in interviews as 'asking the question'.

In addition to generating recommendations for the Trust, the evaluation findings have implications for an additional component of the project: in parallel with RAND Europe's evaluations, Shared Intelligence (Si) was commissioned to create a digital toolkit incorporating the tools, best practice guides, case studies and other resources produced through the SDP. Chapter 4 includes details on the next steps for this project.

1.3. Methodology

This interim report summarises the findings of the evaluation of the SDP. Evaluation of this programme started in October 2020 and ran until May 2021, and is based on primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The data collection is outlined below and described in detail in Annex B:

- **Document review:** The study team undertook a review of all secondary sources provided by the Trust, the LAs and relevant third parties (e.g. Si, the MOD Covenant team) relating to the SDP. This included background documentation around the Programme, the original grant applications and assessments, official grant quarterly and end-of-grant reports, and completed evaluations of the grants.
- **Exploratory interviews:** As part of shaping the understanding of the SDP and the grants funded through this Programme, the study team conducted three exploratory interviews with four key stakeholders from the Trust, LGA and MOD Covenant Team. These interviews enabled the study team to gain further in-depth understanding as to how and why the SDP was set up, as well as external perspectives in terms of the grants and outcomes.
- **Questionnaire:** In March 2021, the study team circulated an online questionnaire aimed at all LAs who had obtained grant funding from the Trust, to acquire additional information as to their impressions on the implementation of the Covenant locally, risks and barriers to the implementation of the Covenant, sustainability of the implementation relating to the Covenant, and the grant administration. The study team sent the questionnaire to the lead LAs, with the request to circulate it within their clusters. In total, the study team received responses from 35 LAs, out of a total of 127 that were involved in the SDP. These responses represented 27 grants – out of a total of 43 grants given as part of the SDP – and were comprised of 27 responses from lead LAs and 8 responses from LAs forming part of a cluster (i.e. not the lead LA).
- **Case studies:** Based on the questionnaire responses, the study team selected five grants to serve as case studies and provide a more in-depth view on the impact the SDP has had on the ground, and to give insight of potential good practice (Annex A details how the case studies were selected). The selected grants were the following (lead LA is provided in brackets):
 - **CFLG17-272: Local Delivery of the Local Authority Support for the Armed Forces Covenant** (Dorset County Council).
 - **GFLG16-85: Sub Regional Armed Forces Covenant Partnership and CFLG17-85: Armed Forces Covenant Service Hub Partnership** (Kingston upon Hull City Council).
 - **CFLG16-106: Forces Connect South East and CFLG17-106: Forces Connect South East – Veterans Hubs** (Surrey County Council).

- **CFLG16-105: Appointment of Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (AFCLO) for the Partnership Area and CFLG17-105a: Veterans Advice Service** (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council).
- **CFLG16-61: Highland/Moray Covenant Project Officer** (Highland Council).

Between March and May 2021, the study team conducted 15 interviews with 21 people across all case studies, to obtain views from at least two of the lead LAs, another LA within their cluster and from a beneficiary of the activities of the project. Details on interviews conducted are provided in Annex B.

- **Expert workshop:** Using the questionnaire responses, case studies and document review as background material, the study team held a workshop with Si to go through the questionnaire responses, case study results, and document review findings in order to identify key themes and findings. As part of the workshop, RAND Europe and Si worked together to identify the recommendations that emerged out of those findings.

1.3.1. Caveats and limitations

The following caveats and limitations apply to the SDP evaluation:

- **Defining terms.** From an evaluation perspective, ‘implementation of the Covenant’ is difficult to define and operationalise. Although the study team identified from project application forms the main activity strands that projects undertook as part of the SDP, it is possible that not all grants articulated the intended outputs and outcomes in the same vocabulary or against the same common criteria, although this was required as part of the development of applications. This may have resulted in limitations in the extent to which the study team can assess the contributions of the SDP and effectiveness of the grants.
- **Impact of COVID-19.** The pandemic and its impact represented a limitation on the study team’s ability to gather data such as questionnaire response from LAs. In many instances, the pandemic resulted in LAs having to cease everyday work related to the Covenant in order to prioritise support to the pandemic response. In some cases, staff within Covenant partnerships were removed from normal roles and reprioritised elsewhere, such as in co-ordinating emergency care for veterans. This will have likely reduced the LAs’ ability to respond to the questionnaire.
- **Representativeness of survey respondents.** The questionnaire was sent to the lead LAs only, as the Trust interacted only with the lead LAs and was not required to hold the details for all non-lead LAs involved in each cluster, although they were fully aware of which authorities were grant-holders under the terms of the partnership agreements. To overcome this, and to obtain views aside from those of the lead LA, the study team requested that the lead LA share the questionnaire with the other LAs that were part of their cluster(s). The study team, however, were not able to verify or ascertain whether or not the questionnaire was received by all LAs involved across all the clusters.
- **Timing of the evaluation.** The study team conducted this evaluation following the conclusion of the large majority of the grants. As such, some individuals within the LAs were no longer in post or had moved on to another role, and therefore certain grants no longer had a contact point who

could take part in the evaluation. This may have also impacted the response rate to the questionnaire. In addition, because this evaluation was undertaken a significant period of time after the projects had ended – with some projects not yet finished or delayed due to COVID-19 – the study team cannot accurately undertake an independent assessment of the extent to which project activities have been embedded or have continued in time.

- **Limitations on data availability.** Overall, the evaluation is based on the document review, the questionnaire responses and the case studies. It should be noted that while the document review included, where available, the official quarterly and end-of-grant reports, as well as any existing external evaluations, such documents varied in terms of quantity and level of detail. As such, it is possible that the information available for those grants that did not fill in the questionnaire may not be as accurate, as in-depth or as reflective of the practical contributions of the SDP funding.
- **Self-selection of survey respondents.** The self-selection of survey respondents also limited data availability. Overall, the majority of the evaluation, especially with regards to evidence of impact, is based on the questionnaire responses and the case study interviews. However, the overall response rate to the questionnaire was low, with only 62 per cent of all grants, and 18 per cent of all grant-holders, represented among respondents. In addition, the case study interviews were only conducted with representatives of five of the grants that had already filled in the questionnaire. As a result, it is possible that the evaluation results disproportionately reflect the impact and experiences of different grant-holders in the 27 grants that filled in the questionnaire. They therefore may not be generalisable to all grant-holders. Although the study team triangulated evidence to the extent possible, we were unable to always verify the results directly reported by the grant-holders; in particular, aside from the case study interviews and some of the questionnaire responses, we were unable to get the perspective of non-lead LAs in the cluster, and we did not engage with any beneficiaries from the public or private sectors, or the Armed Forces Community.
- **Synthesis of available data.** The study team’s analysis of good practice is based on a synthesis of grant-holders’ views from the document review, questionnaire responses and case study interviews, as well as the study team’s assessment. Good practices and recommendations included in this report are therefore not an exhaustive list, but rather high-priority items.
- **Limitations of evidence and evaluation approach.** Based on the existing evidence and the evaluation approach, the study team cannot confidently state the extent to which the SDP led to an improvement in the implementation of the Covenant, as this is difficult to measure and can be influenced by many factors, out of which the grants may only be one. However, evidence provided by the grant-holders in their responses to the questionnaire suggests the programme has had a positive impact on the implementation of the Covenant. This is further detailed in Chapter 3.

1.4. Report structure

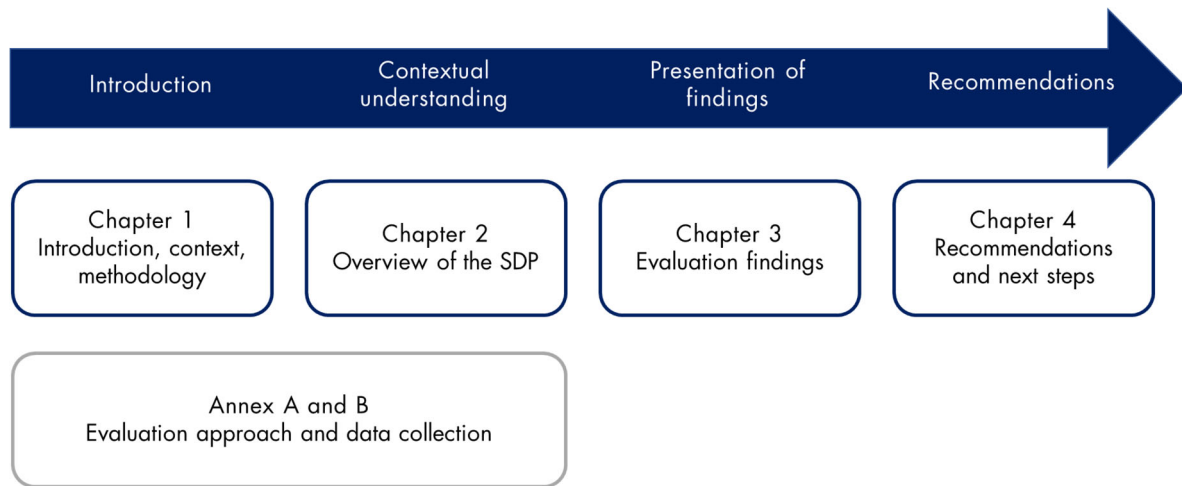
In addition to this introductory chapter, the report contains an additional three chapters and two annexes:

- **Chapter 2** provides an overview of the SDP and the grants funded through the Programme.

- **Chapter 3** presents the findings for each of the EQs.
- **Chapter 4** concludes the report by providing recommendations and outlining next steps in the evaluation.
- **Annex A** describes the evaluation approach.
- **Annex B** presents the data collection methods employed.

A graphical representation of the report structure is presented in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Report structure



Source: RAND Europe.

2. Overview of the Strengthening Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Programme

This chapter provides an overview of the SDP and the grants that have been allocated as part of both phases of funding. All evidence in this chapter came from the research team's review of documentary sources.

2.1. Programme overview

The programme was launched in 2016, following a direction to the Covenant Fund to fund a programme to support the findings of 'Our Community, Our Covenant'.

The programmes awarded grant funding to LAs with the purpose of:

‘enabling them to deliver projects linked to needs identified by their Local Covenant Partnerships, building on the concepts in the “Our Community Our Covenant” publication, which sought to improve consistency in the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant locally.’⁹

As part of this programme, LAs were able to link grant activities to work identified by their Local Covenant Partnership, which therefore allowed them to choose specific activities and outcomes that met local need.

This was a competitive programme, and funds were limited. As detailed in Section 1.1, under this Programme, a total of £6,261,351 was awarded across both phases of funding. A first phase of funding totalling £3,493,296 was awarded across 23 grants, which includes 107 LAs in total, in 2017. This was followed by a second phase of funding in 2018 of £2,768,055 across 20 grants, which includes 80 LAs. Grants were awarded by the Covenant Fund National Panel, who were independent in their decisions.

Grants were awarded to 'clusters' of LAs, with each cluster having a nominated 'lead LA' in charge of administering the funds and the relationship with the Covenant Fund on behalf of the cluster. The lead LA was responsible for the grant, and the delivery of the grant through the cluster was managed using a partnership agreement. Members of the cluster were determined by the LAs in the submission of their application to the Covenant Fund. The cluster approach was adopted by the Covenant Fund to provide the Covenant Fund with better value for money, as it was felt that the same amount of funding could be used across a larger amount of LAs, as well as to avoid duplication of effort.¹⁰

⁹ Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (2021b).

¹⁰ RAND Europe Interview with Steven Inman and Carol Stone, 25 November 2020.

As part of the evaluation, a retrospective logic model outlining the SDP background, inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes was developed, and is provided in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 SDP logic model

Background	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<p>A study, funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, was conducted in 2016 to understand how the Armed Forces Covenant is being delivered by Local Authorities (LAs) across the UK (aside from Northern Ireland) and how delivery could be improved. This was the first time an overall picture emerged regarding the implementation of the Covenant at the local level, highlighting gaps and challenges.</p> <p>The Trust saw the need for funding to overcome these gaps and challenges, and was well-positioned to do so given its</p>	<p>The SDP funding was allocated in two waves, for projects lasting between one and two years.</p> <p>In Phase I, the Trust allocated a total of £3,493,296 across 23 grants, which includes 107 LAs in total (see details in Section 2.2.1).</p> <p>In Phase II, the Trust allocated a total of £2,768,055 across 20 grants, which includes 80 LAs in total (see details in Section 2.2.2).</p> <p>Additional option for grantees under Phase II to benefit from support regarding Covenant-focused media and communications training and advice.</p> <p>Altogether, £6,261,351 in funding was provided through the SDP.</p>	<p>Specific activities were not mandated by the Trust. A range of activities was identified as being undertaken by LAs, as clustered below by the study team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1) Undertaking mapping and needs assessments of the local Armed Forces Communities. • (2) Producing and delivering training and e-learning for staff in public authorities and frontline services. • (3) Updating LA processes, policies and procedures to take into account the Covenant. • (4) Creating drop-in information centres or hubs. • (5) Establishing communication strategies aimed at the Armed Forces Community. • (6) Establishing communication strategies aimed at the private sector to encourage organisations to sign up to the Covenant. • (7) Setting up regular conferences, events and networks including LAs, charities, organisations, Armed Forces and Veteran Champions. 	<p>(1) Better understanding of the target population.</p> <p>(2) Increased awareness of the Covenant and of the Armed Forces Community among public authorities and frontline services.</p> <p>(6) Increased awareness of the Covenant and of the Armed Forces Community among the private sector.</p> <p>(13) Increased awareness of the Covenant and of the Armed Forces Community among the general public.</p> <p>(2, 9) Increased awareness of the support available for the Armed Forces Community among public authorities and frontline services.</p> <p>(4, 5, 9) Increased awareness among the Armed Forces Community of the support available.</p> <p>(7) Improved coordination and best-practice sharing between relevant local stakeholders.</p>	<p>The Covenant is a voluntary pledge, so the Trust is not able to mandate outcomes. However, the Programme aimed to achieve a certain set of outcomes.</p> <p>Shorter term outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the implementation of the Covenant across all LAs in England, Wales and Scotland. • Increase the sign-up to the Covenant. • Improve consistency of the services available at the LA / cluster level and avoid duplication of services. <p>Longer term outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed delivery of the Covenant within mainstream processes. • Change the culture and mindset about the Covenant and Armed Forces Community. • Improve the integration of the Armed Forces Community within the

Background	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
independent nature of the funding source.	Programme staff include the Strategic Grants Manager and the Grants Director.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (8) Setting up a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant point of contact. • (9) Developing resources for signposting and referrals. • (10) Setting up and facilitating specialised support addressing the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community (e.g. GPs asking the question, educational support for Service children). • (11) Engaging with the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and other similar schemes (e.g. mentoring for veterans, Careers Transition Partnership). • (12) Setting up social events for the Armed Forces Community (e.g. veterans' breakfast clubs). • (13) Organising and participating in events promoting the Armed Forces, such as Armed Forces Day or Memorial Day events. 	<p>(8, 9) Strengthened links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.).</p> <p>(3, 7, 8) Improved LA processes aimed at the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>(4, 10) Provision of more tailored support for the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>(12) Increased cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community.</p>	<p>wider community (e.g. sense of connectedness).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the overall reach of existing services. • Sustainable and continuous Covenant delivery by LAs.

Assumptions: (1) Providing grants to clusters of LAs will provide better value for money (same amount of funding can be used across a larger amount of LAs) and less duplication of activities; (2) Change and sustainability can be embedded over a 2-year funding period.

Source: RAND Europe.

2.2. Overview of the grants funded through the programme

The tables below provide an overview of all grants that the Covenant Fund and the Trust awarded through the SDP. Information provided includes the name of the grant, the lead LA in each cluster, additional cluster members, the amount of funding included in the grant, and the main aims of the grant as derived by the study team from the document review. As previously stated, the SDP grants were divided into two temporal phases. The tables are divided to reflect recipients for each phase of the funding.

2.2.1. Phase I funding

Name of Grant	Lead LA	Others in Cluster	Grant Amount	Grant Aim
CFLG16-100 Wiltshire Council: South West Armed Forces Training and Awareness	Wiltshire Council	Cornwall Council, Devon City Council, Plymouth City Council, Gloucestershire City Council, Somerset City Council	£190,291	Identify members of the Armed Forces Community who are most in need and equip organisations to meet those needs and identify preventative measures.
CFLG16-61 Highland Council: Highland/Moray Covenant Project Officer	Highland Council	Moray Council	£73,200	Establish Armed Forces Covenant Development Officer.
CLFG16-63 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council: Armed Forces Covenant Officer	Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council	North Warwickshire Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council	£76,000	Recruit Armed Forces Covenant Development Officer.
CLFG16-65 Charnwood Borough Council: Improving Community Covenant Delivery in the Charnwood, Rushcliffe, and Melton BC Areas	Charnwood Borough Council	Rushcliffe Borough Council, Melton Borough Council	£97,000	Appoint resource to support integration between Armed Forces Community and local communities.

RAND Europe

CLFG16-68 Northamptonshire County Council: Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership	Northamptonshire County Council	Northampton Borough Council, Corby Borough Council, Daventry District Council, South Northamptonshire District Council, Kettering Borough Council, Wellingborough Borough Council, East Northamptonshire District Council	£109,214	Employ an officer to provide an integrated and comprehensive service to the Armed Forces Community.
CLFG16-74 City of York Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant	City of York Council	North Yorkshire County Council, Hambleton District Council, Scarborough Borough Council, Richmondshire District Council	£196,017	Deliver an integrated 11-point programme of training, research and information-sharing to improve regional awareness and delivery of the Covenant.
CLFG16-83 Sheffield City Council: South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Project/Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Sheffield City Council	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	£180,695	Gain better understanding of the communication between LAs and the regional Armed Forces Community.
CLFG16-85 Kingston upon Hull City Council: Sub Regional Armed Forces Covenant Partnership	Kingston upon Hull City Council (Hull City Council)	East Riding of Yorkshire Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, North Lincolnshire Council, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	£480,000	Creation of Humber Sub-Region network to deliver the Covenant regionally.
CLFG16-89 City of Edinburgh Council: Lothian Armed Forces and Veterans Project	City of Edinburgh Council	Midlothian Council, East Lothian Council, West Lothian Council	£200,000	Bespoke training delivered through Councils and NHS partnership.
CLFG16-90 Gateshead Council: Armed Forces Outreach Service – Durham and Northumberland	Gateshead Council	Northumberland Council, Durham County Council, Newcastle City Council, North and South Tyneside Councils	£241,363	Establish a North East service to provide specific (housing) support.

Strengthening and Empowering Delivery of the Covenant

CLFG16-91 Staffordshire County Council: Promoting the Covenant across the West Midlands	Staffordshire County Council	Shropshire Council, Stoke City Council, Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Herefordshire Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	£321,300	Purchase suite of promotional materials to promote the Covenant.
CLFG16-99 Portsmouth City Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Portsmouth City Council	Gosport Borough Council, Southampton City Council, Isle of Wight Council, Hampshire County Council	£161,000	Produce comprehensive needs-assessment and develop quality work-experience opportunities.
CLFG16-103 Carmarthenshire County Council: Regional Armed Forces Community Liaison Officer	Carmarthenshire County Council	Ceredigion County Council, Pembrokeshire County Council	£84,303	Appoint a Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant at a regional level.
CLFG16-104 Caerphilly County Borough Council: Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer	Caerphilly County Borough Council	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Torfaen County Borough Council, Newport City Council, Monmouth County Council	£99,750	Appoint a Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant at a regional level.
CLFG16-105 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council: Appointment of Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (AFCLO) for the Partnership Area	Rhondda Cynon Taf Council	The Vale of Glamorgan Council, City of Cardiff Council, Merthyr Tydfil Council	£79,146	Appoint a Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant at a regional level.
CLFG16-106 Surrey County Council: Forces Connect South East	Surrey County Council	Kent County Council, Medway Council, Hampshire County Council, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council	£321,300	Promote awareness and understanding of issues affecting the Armed Forces Community to ensure the Covenant is embedded in mainstream service delivery.

RAND Europe

CLFG16-108 Lincolnshire County Council: Join the Dots – For Armed Forces organisations (Join the Forces Dots)	Lincolnshire County Council	North Kesteven District Council, West Lindsey District Council, East Lindsey District Council, South Kesteven District, South Holland District Council, City of Lincoln Council, Boston Borough Council	£74,341	Embed the principles of the Covenant by employing a Covenant Development Officer for two years.
CLFG16-110 Wrexham County Borough Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Wrexham County Borough Council	Anglesey County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council	£231,830	Employ two fixed-term Armed Forces Liaison Officers and develop a Veterans Network.
CLFG16-116 Hampshire County Council: Strengthening the Delivery of the Covenant	Hampshire County Council	Gosport Borough Council, Fareham Borough Council, Winchester City Council, Rushmoor Borough Council, Test Valley Borough Council	£73,095	Train public-facing staff in Mental Health First Aid specifically for the Armed Forces Community.
CLFG16-124 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Rhondda Cynon Taf Council	Welsh Local Government Association	£74,500	Develop resources available across Wales to support delivery of the Covenant.
CLFG16-142 Colchester Borough Council: Strengthening The Covenant Grant Programme: Colchester	Colchester Borough Council	Braintree District Council, Tendring District Council	£70,000	Employ a full-time resource to enhance delivery of the Covenant within the region.
CLFG16-172 Manchester City Council: GM Armed Forces	Manchester City Council	Bolton Council, Bury Council, Oldham Council, Rochdale Council, Salford Council, Stockport Council, Tameside Council, Trafford Council, Wigan Council	£232,000	Strengthen local-government delivery of the Covenant.

CLFG16-174 City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council: Strengthening Delivery of the Covenant across West Yorkshire Local Authorities (WYAs)	City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	Wakefield Council, Leeds Council, Calderdale Council, Kirklees Council	£98,961	Appoint a dedicated project officer to work on projects and develop a website to support Armed Forces Community.
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Source: RAND Europe analysis of documents provided by the Trust and grant-holders.

2.2.2. Phase II funding

Name of Grant	Lead LA	Others in Cluster	Grant Amount	Grant Aim
CLFG17-33 Cambridgeshire County Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire County Council	Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council	£88,541	Employ Covenant Development Officer.
CLFG17-63: Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council: Nuneaton, Bedworth, and North Warwickshire Hub Development Project	Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council	Warwickshire County Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council	£146,000	Plan a series of Community Hubs in the area.
CLFG17-65: Charnwood Borough Council: Development of Information Hubs	Charnwood Borough Council	Melton Borough Council, Charnwood Borough Council, Rushcliffe Borough Council	£150,650	Deliver a 'hub' structure to support Armed Forces Community.

RAND Europe

CLFG17-85: Kingston upon Hull City Council: Armed Forces Covenant Service Hub Partnership	Kingston Upon Hull City Council	East Riding of Yorkshire Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, North Lincolnshire Council, Doncaster Council	£131,450	Develop a Veteran Community Hub to provide access to quality services.
CLFG17-99 Portsmouth City council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant: Veterans' Family Drop-Ins	Portsmouth City Council	Southampton Council, Isle of Wight Council	£152,997	Ensuring the Covenant is embedded within day-to-day practice of public service organisations.
CLFG17-100 Wiltshire Council: South West Covenant Project/Mobile Veterans Outreach Support	Wiltshire Council	Wiltshire Council, Devon Council, Cornwall Council, Gloucestershire Council, North Somerset Council, Somerset Council Plymouth Council (withdrew in 2018)	£154,050	Use Outreach Officer and mobile outreach vehicle to raise awareness of available services to the Armed Forces Community.
CLFG17-103 Carmarthenshire County Council: West Wales Region Veterans' Hubs	Carmarthenshire County Council	Cyngor Sir Ceredigion County Council, Pembrokeshire County Council	£152,700	Hire an Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer and develop Veterans Hub.
CLFG17-105a Rhondda Cynon Taf Council: Veterans Advice Service	Rhondda Cynon Taf Council	The Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil Council	£140,000	Develop resources to increase availability of information and signpost local sources of information for members of the Armed Forces Community.
CLFG17-105b Rhondda Cynon Taf Cardiff: Veterans Advice Service	Rhondda Cynon Taf/Cardiff	City of Cardiff Council	£150,000	Develop resources to increase availability of information and signpost local sources of information for members of the Armed Forces Community.
CLFG17-106 Surrey County Council: Forces Connect South-East: Veterans' Hubs	Surrey County Council	Kent County Council, Hampshire County Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove County Council, Medway Council	£147,888	Research, design, pilot and evaluate new approach to improve outcomes of young people from Services families.

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CLFG17-231 The County of Herefordshire District Council: Covenant Fund Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	The County of Herefordshire District Council	Worcestershire County Council, Shropshire County Council, Telford and Wrekin Council	£246,820	Funding to employ two part-time members of staff.
CLFG17-241 Rutland County Council District Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Rutland County Council District Council	Rutland County Council (Unitary), Harborough District Council, South Kesteven District Council	£111,550	Fund an Armed Forces Officer to support the delivery of the Covenant.
CLFG17-252 Milton Keynes Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Milton Keynes Council	Milton Keynes Council, Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council	£91,500	Increase access to support for Armed Forces Community.
CLFG17-254 North East Lincolnshire Council: Military Hive	North East Lincolnshire Council	North Lincolnshire Council, East Lindsey District Council	£79,050	Establish Veterans' and Service Support Centre.
CLFG17-260 Lancashire County Council: Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub	Lancashire County Council	Preston City Council, Burnley Borough Council, Chorley Borough Council, Fylde Borough Council	£152,700	Employ two project officers to ensure coordinated delivery of the Covenant.
CLFG17-266 Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council	Bridgend County Borough Council, City and County of Swansea Council	£88,083	Appointment of a Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer.
CLFG17-269 Derbyshire County Council: Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant	Derbyshire County Council	Derbyshire County Council, North East Derbyshire District Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council, South Derbyshire District Council, Derby City Council	£50,000	Commission research to better understand the needs of the hidden Armed Forces Community in the region.

RAND Europe

CLFG17-271 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council: South Yorkshire Veterans Outreach Connection	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Sheffield City Council	£101,050	Increase awareness of services available to veterans.
CLFG17-272 Dorset County Council: Local Delivery of the Local Authority Support for the Armed Forces Covenant	Dorset County Council	Poole Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, West Dorset District, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, North Dorset District	£234,786	Provide Programme Coordinator resource to implement development programme of the Dorset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.
CLFG17-277 Lewisham Borough Council: Renewing the Covenant in the Capital	Lewisham Borough Council	Westminster City Council, Enfield Borough Council	£198,240	Improve understanding and facilitate delivery of the Covenant.

Source: RAND Europe analysis of documents provided by the Trust and grant-holders.

3. SDP evaluation findings

This chapter lists the main findings from the document review, questionnaire and case studies undertaken for the purposes of evaluating the SDP. These findings then feed into the recommendations detailed in Chapter 4.

3.1. EQ1: What has the contribution of the SDP been to improvements in the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in the areas where funding has been awarded, in terms of the 11 strands of activities identified?

Box 1 EQ1 Summary

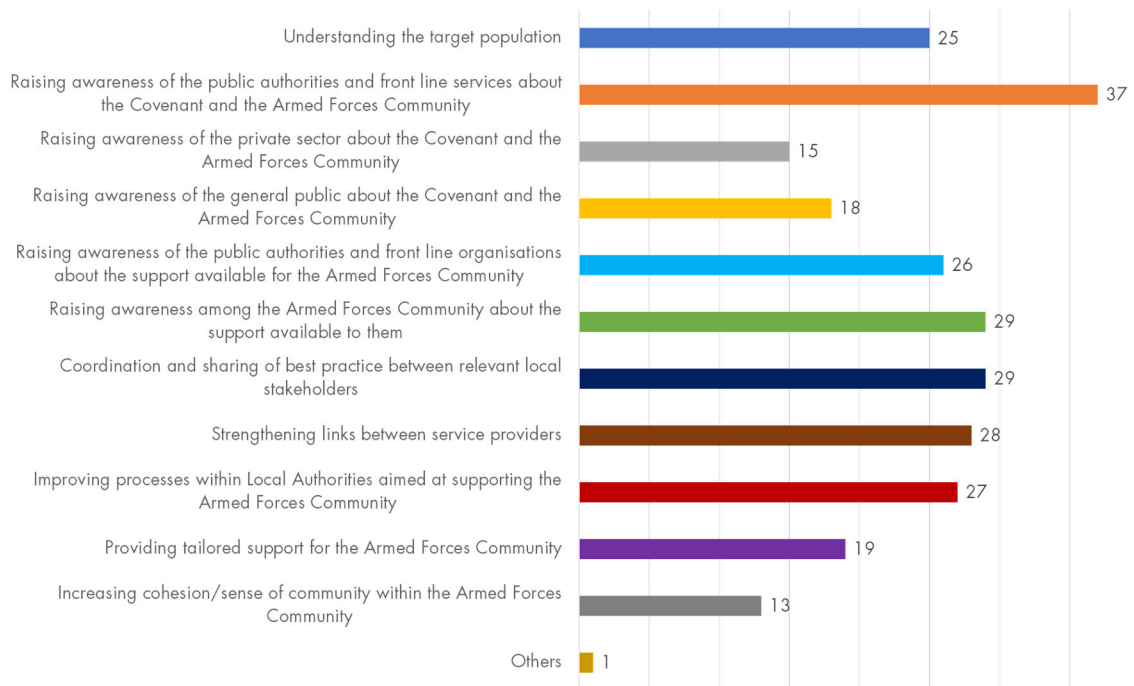
- The most frequently pursued activity strand, in terms of the number of projects, was raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (37). The second-most frequent activity strands were raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them (29), and improving coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant stakeholders (29).
- The least frequently pursued activity strands, in terms of the number of projects, were increasing cohesion and a sense of community within the Armed Forces Community (13), and raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (15).
- Insights gained through questionnaire responses and interviews suggest that the funding received through the SDP has had a positive impact across different regions and different strands of activities, being viewed as essential to the gains achieved in this period. When questioned to what extent the SDP had helped improve implementation of the Covenant, 28 out of 35 grant-holders that filled in the questionnaire claimed it had done so 'to a great extent'.
- Across the grants, grant-holders pointed out that some outputs were only achieved because of the SDP grants, including awareness-raising activities, development of training materials, building of referral/signposting pathways and setting up of new, or improvement of existing, support services.
- In some cases, the funding received through the SDP acted akin to an initial stimulus to start implementing the Covenant, helping LAs highlight existing areas of need, as well as demonstrate the value that existing activities had in meeting those needs, thus leading to further funding.

- According to questionnaire data, the most successful activity strands in terms of both implementation and impact were: (i) improving coordination and the sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders; (ii) providing tailored support to the Armed Forces Community; and (iii) raising awareness among public authorities about the support available to the Armed Forces Community.
- According to questionnaire data, the least successful activity strands in terms of both implementation and impact were: (i) raising the awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community; (ii) improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community; and (iii) raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community.

The Trust intentionally did not mandate any specific SDP activities, in order to empower grant-holders to leverage their expertise regarding the specific local situation. Instead, the Trust chose to fund a range of different activities that the LAs suggested could help improve local implementation of the Covenant. Figure 3.1 shows a breakdown of the different strands of activities undertaken with SDP grants (the numbers represent the number of projects that undertook each strand). This is based on two sources: for the projects that responded to the questionnaire, the study team used the self-assessment of the lead LA; for the projects that did not respond to the questionnaire, the study team made assessments based on the document review, including application documents and progress reports. As such, it is possible that the data did not differentiate between the activity strands that were intended to be carried out at the application phase, and the extent to which they were carried out in practice. Most projects undertook several activity strands to varying extents; there has been no weighting attached to reflect which activity strands dominated in each project.

Out of the 11 strands of activities, **the largest number of grants sought to raise awareness among the public authorities and frontline services** about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (37), as well as raise awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them (29) and improve coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders (29). Conversely, **the strands of activities that were undertaken the least were raising awareness among the private sector** about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (15) and **increasing cohesion and a sense of community within the Armed Forces Community** (13). The ‘others’ category refers to an activity that was specific to one of the grants, namely working with the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre.

Figure 3.1 Overview of the activity strands undertaken by the projects



Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from all 43 grants, using self-assessments from the lead LAs of the 27 grants represented by questionnaire respondents, and RAND Europe assessment of the remaining grants based on a review of grant applications and progress reports. No weighting was attached to the above assessments in terms of which activity strands dominated each project. The numbers represent the number of projects that undertook the activity strand in question.

3.1.1. The overall contribution of the SDP

Insights from the 27 grants represented by questionnaire respondents and from the interviews suggest that **the funding received through the SDP had a positive impact across different regions and different strands of activities**, helping to improve the implementation of the Covenant at various levels, depending on the needs of the LAs in question. When questioned to what extent the SDP had helped improve implementation of the Covenant, **28 out of 35 grant-holders¹¹ that filled in the questionnaire claimed it had done so ‘to a great extent’**, and five ‘to some extent’. Only two grant-holders claimed to be unable to comment on the SDP’s impact.

More specifically, grant-holders noted that **without the funding received through the SDP, none of the resulting gains would have been achieved**, whether those came in the form of awareness-raising, development of training materials, building of referral/signposting pathways or setting up of new, or improvement of existing, support services.¹² They claimed that the funding placed the Covenant on the

¹¹ For the purpose of this evaluation, we use ‘grant-holders’ to refer to both lead LA and non-lead LA representatives. Grant-holders that completed the questionnaire include representatives from the lead LAs, partner LAs and other organisations that formed part of the clusters. As the questionnaire captured views from more than one grant-holder per grant, please note that these numbers do not correspond directly with the number of grants.

¹² Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 2; Project 17D; Project 17U; Project 17J; Project 16P.

agenda and, in doing so, gave them both the motivation and the push needed to progress.¹³ In particular, in many cases, **the funding enabled the employment of a dedicated resource**, which was viewed as essential in driving forward the implementation of the Covenant.¹⁴

In addition, grant-holders explained that **the funding acted akin to an initial stimulus to start implementation of the Covenant**, helping them to highlight existing areas of need, as well as demonstrate the value of the activities they were carrying out in meeting those needs. As a result, they were able to secure additional funding.¹⁵ In one case, it was noted that this recognition enabled the continuation of funding even in spite of existing budget difficulties.¹⁶

The SDP funding helped achieve different levels of implementation, depending on the starting points of different LAs. According to one grant-holder, one of the main benefits of the funding was that it allowed LAs whose attention to the Covenant had originally been low to become more aware of its meaning and importance, to train more staff, and in general to strengthen implementation.¹⁷ This was confirmed by two grant-holders who noted that the funding helped to jump-start implementation of the Covenant by providing the resources needed, as well as by highlighting the main gaps that needed to be filled.¹⁸ Furthermore, it was also claimed that in some cases, the grants – both in terms of the funding and of being set up as clusters – acted as a catalyst to the establishment of a collaborative approach in delivering the Covenant between LAs that had not been collaborating before, or had not yet collaborated on this topic.¹⁹ Conversely, some grant-holders who were already experienced in delivering the Covenant noted that the funding helped them expand and become involved in new areas of implementation, by providing the time and resources to understand the specific challenges of these areas and to learn how to tackle them.²⁰ This suggests that the funding model used, whereby the Trust funded a range of different activities based on the needs and priorities perceived by each individual cluster, was successful in enabling improvements at different stages of Covenant implementation.

In general, grant-holders expressed that **the SDP helped create 'a real difference' for the Armed Forces Community** through the support that the LAs were able to provide because of it.²¹ The SDP led to a more comprehensive understanding of the Armed Forces Community, and in turn, to a greater commitment and effort to address its needs.²²

¹³ Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 2.

¹⁴ Project 16A; Project 17P; Project 17T; Project 16G; Case Study E, Interview 1.

¹⁵ Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 2; Project 16G.

¹⁶ Project 16E.

¹⁷ Project 17U.

¹⁸ Case Study B, Interview 2.

¹⁹ Project 17O.

²⁰ Case Study B, Interview 1; Project 16E.

²¹ Project 16N; Project 17E; Project 16E; Project 16O.

²² Project 16G.

Box 2 Overview of the activities grant-holders claimed to be most proud of, according to questionnaire responses

When prompted by the questionnaire to list, overall, which activities undertaken as a result of the SDP funding they were most proud of, the following emerged, with the points mentioned by most grant-holders clustered at the top²³:

- Providing direct support to the Armed Forces Community, which resulted in more members of the Armed Forces Community being provided with more tailored and more holistic support (9).
- Carrying out awareness-raising activities aimed at LAs, frontline services and the general public (8).
- Interacting with diverse sectors of the Armed Forces Community and, as such, giving it a voice, learning more about its needs and helping to create more connections and cohesion within it (7).
- Receiving the Bronze, Silver and/or Gold Employer Recognition Scheme Award (6).
- Improving collaboration and coordination between LAs, resulting in lasting connections and more comprehensive support for the Armed Forces Community (6).
- Improving collaboration and coordination with service providers in the private and third sectors, resulting in more efficient and more comprehensive support for the Armed Forces Community (6).
- Working with the private sector to raise awareness of the Covenant and to encourage businesses to sign up to the Covenant (3).
- Creating sustainable infrastructure, such as signposting/referral pathways (3).
- Sharing best practice at regional and national levels (3).
- Changing policies to reflect the Covenant and the needs of the Armed Forces Community (2).
- Providing structural action plans to improve implementation of the Covenant (1).

When it comes to the separate activity strands, the SDP funding has had different levels of success, both in terms of the extent to which the activity strands were carried out in reality, as well as the outcomes that were achieved in return. Based purely on a calculation of the percentage of grant-holders who answered confidently ('to a great extent') and affirmatively ('yes') to the multiple-choice questions posed as part of each activity strand in the questionnaire, the activity strands can be ordered, from most to least successful, as follows:

1. Improving coordination and the sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders;
2. Providing tailored support to the Armed Forces Community;
3. Raising awareness among the public authorities and frontline services about the support available to the Armed Forces Community;

²³ While purely qualitative in nature, this ordering may help understand which benefits were noticed by most grant-holders.

4. Raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them;
5. Raising awareness among the public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community;
6. Strengthening links between service providers;
7. Understanding the target population;
8. Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community;
9. Raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community;
10. Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community; and
11. Raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community.

It is possible that the success of the top six strands can be partly attributed to the fact that the different activities carried out within them may have contributed to more than one of the outcomes. For example, in raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them, the grant-holders may have interacted with different sections of the Community, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of its needs, and thus leading to more successful tailored support. In addition, the more coordination is achieved and the greater the number of best practices shared, the more defined and understood the support landscape, and the more relevant and successful the tailored support offered to the Armed Forces Community.

By contrast, the bottom five activity strands are less interconnected. In addition, they also represent areas where measuring impact may be more difficult, as well as areas that are less within the projects' control. For example, in raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about available support, the projects may have had an automatic buy-in because the message is already relevant to the Community and can be controlled by ensuring the support offered has a good reputation within the Community. Conversely, raising awareness among the general public or the private sector is more dependent on individual personalities and level of interest.

3.1.2. Activity strand one: Understanding the target population

Table 2 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand one

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	25 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	21 out of 35

Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders whose projects conducted needs assessments	13 out of 21
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to the identification by the LA of previously unknown members of the Armed Forces Community	6 out of 21
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an overall enhanced understanding by the LA of the needs and situation of members of the Armed Forces Community living in the local area	14 out of 21

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

Insights gained from the questionnaire responses and the interviews suggest that grant-holders considered that becoming acquainted with the region and the local Armed Forces population was key to the overall success of the projects.

To understand the target population, the 25 projects carried out various activities, such as consulting with the Armed Forces Community through surveys and focus groups, or joining networks of local Armed Forces charities. Some projects undertook mapping exercises and built new databases.²⁴ For example, one project claimed that as a result of the SDP grant, they were able to capture data from Primary and Secondary Care systems into one central data warehouse, and, as such, map the veterans living in their area.²⁵ As a result of such activities, **six out of the 21 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand felt that the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to the identification by the LA of previously unknown members of the Armed Forces Community.** Fifteen grant-holders felt that the grant had done so 'to some extent'. Although these numbers do not represent the outcomes of the projects that did not complete the questionnaire, the fact that only six grant-holders had high confidence in the outcome of these activities suggests that they were not entirely successful. This corroborates insights presented in Section 3.2, where the identification of members of the Armed Forces Community is listed as one of the main challenges encountered by the projects, thus suggesting that the extent to which these activities actually met the purpose of increased identification is uncertain.

In trying to understand the specific needs of the local Armed Forces Community, one of the most common activities was conducting area-level needs assessments of members of the Armed Forces Community, with 13 out of 21 grant-holders claiming these were conducted as part of their projects. Some projects conducted region-wide surveys, directly asking members of the Community to express where they had noticed gaps in support and which areas of the Covenant the project should focus on.²⁶ One project acted in collaboration with the county's public health services to develop a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment,²⁷ an approach that was also adopted by others, who also collaborated with relevant stakeholders in developing needs assessments.²⁸ In addition, one project worked to identify members of the Armed Forces Community within

²⁴ Project 17H; Project 17T.

²⁵ Project 17T.

²⁶ Project 16F; Project 16G; Project 17E; Project 17R; Project 16C.

²⁷ Project 17T.

²⁸ Project 17E.

the cluster's workforce, before using their knowledge and insight to help shape the direction of the local implementation of the Covenant.²⁹ When prompted to consider whether **the grant had led to an overall enhanced understanding by the LA of the needs and situation of members of the Armed Forces Community living in the local area, 14 grant-holders felt it had done so 'to a great extent'**, and seven, 'to some extent'. Overall, this suggests that **increasing the awareness and understanding of the needs and challenges specific to the Armed Forces Community proved to be more achievable** than improving the identification of members of the Armed Forces Community. In part, this may also be because this awareness may result from other activities, with some projects expressing that data on needs and challenges was also gained through communication and cooperation with different service providers.³⁰

In some cases, **the SDP grant provided a starting point towards achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the target population**, thus indirectly enabling future work in this area. For example, two grant-holders noted that having recognised the importance of having accurate data on the Armed Forces Community, they included the Armed Forces Community in an ongoing project around equality monitoring, with the assumption that this will provide more robust data.³¹ In addition, another project building on the work they had done during the SDP grant claimed to have secured new funding to identify and assess veteran-specific social prescribers, which will enable the provision of more tailored support in the future.³²

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this strand of activities, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed both benefits directly related to understanding the local Armed Forces Community, and benefits that indirectly contributed to other strands of activities related to the implementation of the Covenant.³³ These are outlined in Box 3 below. The fact that **improved identification or increased understanding of the needs and challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community were not the main benefits** highlighted by most grant-holders as resulting from this activity strand also suggests that, for most grants, achieving the main objective of this activity strand proved to be less successful relative to other benefits that were more prevalent.

Box 3 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand one, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 21 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Increased knowledge of the landscape of the Armed Forces Community (2).
- Statistical data to support and improve identification, in turn leading to improved service

²⁹ Project 17E.

³⁰ Project 16G.

³¹ Case Study D, Interview 1.

³² Project 17T.

³³ The classification of benefits as 'direct' or 'indirect' has been made on the basis of the evaluation team's understanding of the activity strand in question.

<p>provision (2).</p> <p>In terms of indirect benefits, the grant-holders mentioned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved coordination, collaboration and signposting between relevant stakeholders, resulting in more informed and more cohesive support to the Armed Forces Community (7). • The development of more tailored support that more appropriately addresses individuals' needs (4). • Helping staff in LAs and frontline services understand the specific needs and issues of the Armed Forces Community, including by debunking existing incorrect assumptions regarding service life, transition and mental health (2). • Reinforcing support of the Covenant among the senior leadership, thus ensuring that enough staff resources are allocated to support implementation of the Covenant (2). • Development of senior-level structures designed to bring together relevant stakeholders to provide a joined-up strategic approach or action plan to supporting the Armed Forces Community (2). • As a result of engagement with the Armed Forces Community, increased awareness of the Community about the support available to them (2). • As a result of engagement with the Armed Forces Community, decreased social isolation amongst veterans (1). • Increased awareness of the general public about the Armed Forces Community (1). • Helping to maintain the Covenant, along with awareness of its importance, on the agenda (1). • Support for preliminary identification of gaps in addressing needs, leading to funding for other projects (1).
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3.1.3. Activity strand two: Raising the awareness of public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

Table 3 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand two

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	37 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	31 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an overall increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community	19 out of 31
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to a greater awareness of the Armed Forces Community among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community	18 out of 31

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

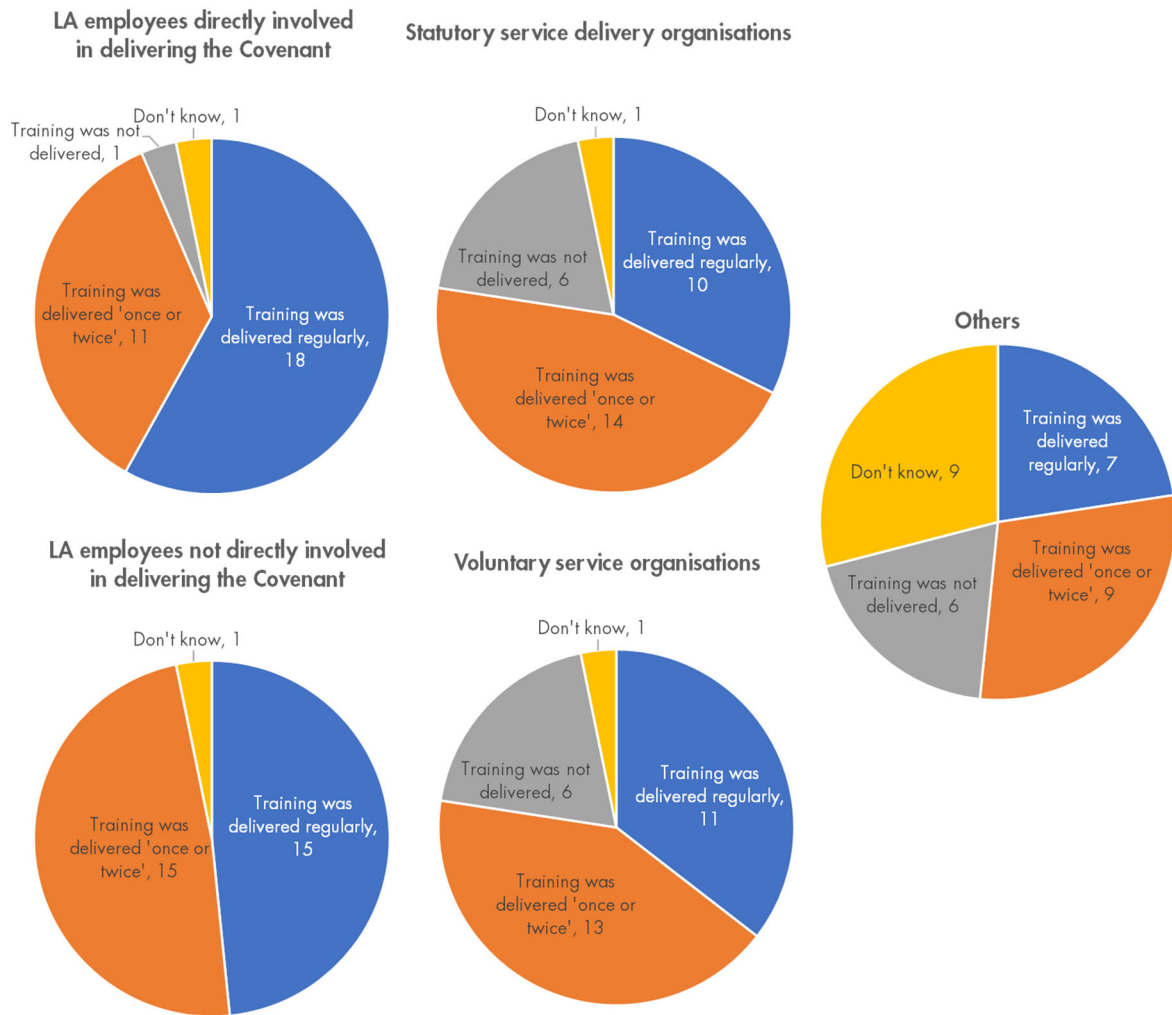
As can be seen in Figure 3.1, raising the awareness of public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community was the activity strand that was undertaken with the largest number of grants (37). Activities in this category mostly focused on developing and delivering awareness-raising training or introducing Covenant- and Armed Forces Community-related content into existing staff training, such as induction training. Of 31 grant-holders that responded to the questionnaire and whose project focused on this activity strand, **19 claimed that the SDP funding resulted ‘to a great extent’ in an overall increase in communication activities** with the purpose of awareness raising; 12 grant-holders claimed that the SDP funding resulted in this outcome ‘to some extent’.

The training included programmes that were specifically developed as part of the projects, programmes that were adapted from existing resources (e.g. programmes developed in other areas that were adapted to specific local or regional circumstances) and existing programmes that were delivered to a wider audience (e.g. the Military Human training, the Mental Health First Aid training). Depending on the project, the training sessions were conducted by the LAs or by external providers (e.g. the Armed Forces Network, First Light Trust) and were offered through various means, such as face-to-face interactions or e-learning platforms, training sessions or team meetings. Furthermore, as Figure 3.2 shows, they were delivered to a range of audiences with varying intensity. **The most targeted audience was that of LA employees directly involved in delivering the Covenant**, with 18 out of 31 grant-holders claiming that as part of their project, training was delivered ‘regularly’ to this audience, and 11 grant-holders claiming that it was delivered ‘once or twice’. When it comes to LA employees not directly involved in delivering the Covenant, 15 grant-holders claimed training was delivered ‘regularly’, and 15 ‘once or twice’. It is possible that some projects prioritised staff that were most likely to come in contact with members of the Armed Forces Community, with two grant-holders claiming that, once all key staff were trained, the training was rolled out to the rest of the LA staff.³⁴ Training was also delivered to statutory service delivery organisations, with ten grant-holders claiming it was done so ‘regularly’, and 14 ‘once or twice’. Finally, when it comes to voluntary service organisations, 11 grant-holders claimed training was delivered ‘regularly’, and 13 ‘once or twice’.

The ‘others’ category includes audiences such as elected councillors in the LAs and relevant organisations outside of the partnership, such as Armed Forces charities, Department of Work and Pensions, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, town and parish councils and community groups. In the case of these, seven grant-holders claimed training was delivered ‘regularly’, and nine ‘once or twice’.

³⁴ Case Study A, Interview 1.

Figure 3.2 Overview of the training audiences by training intensity



Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from the 31 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand.

When questioned to what extent **the project had led to a greater awareness of the Armed Forces Community among public authorities and frontline services**, 18 out of 31 grant-holders claimed it had done so 'to a great extent', and 13 'to some extent', thus suggesting that this activity strand has been perceived as successful. This is supported by insights gained through the interviews carried out as part of the case studies, as described below.

Some projects were able to provide statistics with regard to the training, suggesting that they were able to reach large audiences. One project claimed to have carried out training in a train-the-trainer format to 25 individuals from across the partnership cluster and to 37 individuals from associated organisations.³⁵ One project offered the Military Culture and Transition training³⁶ to 22 people, and the Military Human

³⁵ Project 16D.

³⁶ This training provides an in-depth understanding of military life and the challenges some members of the Armed Forces may face when transitioning to civilian life, thus enabling a more effective interaction with veterans. See: Voluntary Action Rotherham (2018).

training³⁷ to over 1,000 people over the course of the project.³⁸ Another offered the Armed Forces Mental Health First Aid training to 32 staff.³⁹

One project delivered a total of six training programmes – in both physical and e-learning formats – across all LAs that were part of the cluster, as well as LAs that were not. It claimed to have trained 7,000 people across the country, including: 180 elected councillors, Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Officers; 1,000 Service Champions; 2,400 contact centre and frontline staff; and 2,200 public sector employees.⁴⁰ Aside from reaching a wide audience, **the project was also able to demonstrate more concrete success in terms of awareness-raising.** As a result of these training programmes, both the lead LA and partner LAs considered awareness-raising to have been one of the main successes of the project,⁴¹ with one grant-holder noting that awareness (measured by surveys carried out pre- and post-training) improved following the training and continued to be high even once the project had ended.⁴² According to an independent evaluation cited in one of the project's progress reports, 95 per cent of trainees claimed they would recommend the courses, and 77 per cent of Service Champions and 67 per cent of frontline staff trained claimed the training made a big difference to their knowledge of the needs of the Armed Forces Community and the services they require.⁴³ In addition, the evaluation noted that the training – along with increased online resources and a signposting app developed by the project – has significantly increased the confidence of councillors and staff in supporting members of the Armed Forces Community.⁴⁴ In terms of qualitative feedback, a grant-holder from a LA that was not part of this project cluster, but which benefited from the training, described it as 'comprehensive'.⁴⁵ When questioned about which aspect of the training they found to have been most relevant, two grant-holders singled out the focus on improving identification and teaching staff how to 'ask the question',⁴⁶ and one also mentioned gaining an enhanced understanding of the challenges facing the spouses and children of Armed Forces personnel, such as changing jobs and schools.⁴⁷ This project also made the training materials available in an accessible format, resulting in LAs across the country benefiting from the programme by adapting it to their own needs and circumstances.⁴⁸

Other projects also noted similar improvements in staff as a result of such training. For example, one project claimed that customer service teams improved their ability to identify members of the Armed Forces

³⁷ This training provides an in-depth understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces Community. It also provides attendees with a range of resources to enable more effective interaction with members of the Community, including information of the services and funding available to support them. See: York St John University (2021).

³⁸ Project 16E.

³⁹ Project 16K.

⁴⁰ Case Study C, Interview 1; Project 16G; Project 17J.

⁴¹ Case Study C, Interview 1; Case Study B, Interview 3.

⁴² Case Study B, Interview 3.

⁴³ Project 17J.

⁴⁴ Project 17J.

⁴⁵ Case Study E, Interview 1.

⁴⁶ Case Study B, Interview 3; Case Study C, Interview 3.

⁴⁷ Case Study C, Interview 3.

⁴⁸ Case Study C, Interview 1.

Community.⁴⁹ As a result of the Military Human training, the same project reported a decrease in the percentage of staff who had never heard about the Covenant from 48 per cent to 3 per cent, and an increase in the percentage of staff who were aware that their LA had signed the Covenant from 34 per cent to 70 per cent.⁵⁰ In addition, the project reported that 72 per cent of staff reported having cascaded learning from the training into their respective organisations via a staff briefing, meeting, memo or dedicated training day, thus leading to increased sustainability.⁵¹ Another project reported that, as a result of training, over 60 frontline practitioners reported becoming more aware of and better able to respond to the needs of the Armed Forces Community.⁵² Another project reported that of 160 staff trained, 96 per cent reported feeling more knowledgeable about the Armed Forces Community.⁵³

As a result of developing, delivering, or receiving training funded by the SDP programme, **some grant-holders also noted that they had become more aware of the importance of these awareness-raising activities**, and incorporated them into their structures. For example, one grant-holder noted that their LA now provides Covenant-focused training every three months, and targets new members of staff.⁵⁴ Other projects focused on encouraging councils to incorporate the issues pertaining to the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community into mandatory staff induction programmes.⁵⁵

Aside from training, some projects also completed other activities related to awareness-raising. For example, one project created a local Armed Forces Forum with contact points from various service providers that were committed to raising awareness within their organisations, which enabled the sharing of good practice in this domain.⁵⁶ Projects also focused on developing awareness-raising resources, such as films,⁵⁷ or on holding awareness-raising workshops.⁵⁸ One project that focused on developing a Service Children's Education Guide and on holding a Service Children's Conference reported that the conference was attended by 63 people from across the county's schools, Armed Forces support organisations and early years organisations.⁵⁹

In general, **the SDP funding also contributed to awareness-raising among public authorities** simply by placing the Covenant on the agenda. For example, one grant-holder noted that, although they did not have a lot of knowledge about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community, and although their LA was not advanced in delivering the Covenant, the grant prompted them to consider the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community, begin a local review and create an action plan.

⁴⁹ Project 16O.

⁵⁰ Project 16F.

⁵¹ Project 16F.

⁵² Project 17E.

⁵³ Project 17U.

⁵⁴ Project 17H.

⁵⁵ Project 16B.

⁵⁶ Project 16G.

⁵⁷ Project 16L.

⁵⁸ Project 16V.

⁵⁹ Project 17A.

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed both benefits directly related to awareness-raising among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community, and benefits that indirectly contributed to other strands of activities related to the implementation of the Covenant. These are outlined in Box 4 below.

Box 4 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand two, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 31 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Increased staff awareness and understanding of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (12).
- Increased knowledge of the support available across LAs, partner organisations and other relevant stakeholders (3).
- The development of dedicated support and development pathways that can be re-used, such as e-learning programmes (1).

In terms of indirect benefits, the grant-holders mentioned:

- As a result of understanding the importance of the Covenant and the needs and challenges of the Armed Forces Community, greater involvement and progress of public authorities and frontline services in implementing the Covenant, such as 'asking the question', setting up dedicated resources (e.g. Armed Forces Champions), working with partner authorities to increase coordination, setting up connections with specialist support providers (16).
- Greater identification of members of the Armed Forces Community, leading to increased access to services by the Armed Forces Community (4).
- Improved internal policies aimed at staff who are former Armed Forces personnel (1).
- Increased benefits and improved policies for council staff who are veterans (1).
- More tailored support for the Armed Forces Community (1).

In addition, an indirect benefit noted by one interviewee was that increased awareness of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community led to a beneficial reallocation of internal resources, by making Covenant implementation an official part of someone's job description, thus representing a long-term commitment to the Covenant.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the grant-holder noted that increased awareness regarding the significance of the Covenant and the challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community also resulted in more determination and commitment among LA staff, as well as among partners (National Health Service

⁶⁰ Case Study B, Interview 3.

(NHS); Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA); police, fire services, local Armed Forces barracks, etc.).⁶¹ This also led to increased cooperation between LAs and these partners.⁶²

3.1.4. Activity strand three: Raising the awareness of the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

Table 4 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand three

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	15 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	14 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an increase in overall communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising among the private sector ⁶³	5 out of 14
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to increased awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community	4 out of 14
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the awareness-raising activities carried out as part of the grant had led to new businesses signing up to the Covenant	8 out of 14
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the awareness-raising activities carried out as part of the grant had led to local businesses obtaining a Bronze, Silver or Gold award (or improving upon their previous award)	9 out of 14

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

Although the private sector is outside of this Programme's area of focus, and as such it was not a priority within the programme guidance, some LAs chose to carry out these activities as part of their grant and as part of working with a range of partners. As can be seen in Figure 3.1, raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community was the second-least-commonly reported activity strand in terms of the number of projects in which it was carried out (15). Specific activities in this strand included running awareness-raising campaigns targeted at the private sector, encouraging local businesses to sign the Covenant and to join the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme, demonstrating the specific skills of the Armed Forces Community, and the benefits of employing or providing guaranteed interviews for members of the Community. Overall, 5 out of 14 grant-holders that responded to the questionnaire and whose project focused on this activity strand claimed that the **SDP funding resulted, 'to**

⁶¹ Case Study B, Interview 3.

⁶² Case Study B, Interview 3.

⁶³ It should be noted that, although an increase in overall communication activities with the purpose of increasing awareness among the private sector appears to be a benefit that was reported by grant-holders, this was not one of the intended outcomes of the funding programme.

a great extent' in an overall increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness raising;⁶⁴ 9 grant-holders claimed that the SDP funding resulted in this outcome 'to some extent'. This suggests that, while some projects did intend to raise awareness of the private sector, this activity strand may not have been carried out to its full or intended extent. Given that the private sector was previously identified in the 'Our Community – Our Covenant' report as an area with low awareness of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community,⁶⁵ the fact that relatively few projects chose to focus on it, and that the majority of those that did claimed not to have carried out the relevant activities to the full extent, suggests that **productive engagement with the private sector may be hindered by specific barriers** that did not otherwise emerge during this evaluation. However, at this time the study team did not have sufficient information to conclude what these barriers might be.

In terms of outcomes, 4 out of 14 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in increased awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community; 9 grant-holders claimed the funding resulted in this outcome 'to some extent', while 1 claimed not to know the outcome. More specifically, 8 out of 14 grant-holders claimed new businesses had signed up to the Covenant as a result of the awareness-raising activities carried out as part of the project; 6 claimed not to be aware of the outcome. Further, 9 out of 14 grant-holders claimed local businesses had obtained a Bronze, Silver or Gold award (or had improved upon their previous award) as a result of the project; 1 grant-holder claimed this has not happened, and 4 claimed not to know. **The relatively low confidence with which grant-holders judged the success of this activity strand suggests that it may not have been entirely effective.** However, the relatively high number (compared to other activity strands) of grant-holders that claimed not to know the outcome of these activities suggests that **the low confidence may also partly come as a result of grant-holders finding it particularly difficult to assess outcomes** in this area. It is possible that, because engaging with the private sector was not part of the programme guidance, LAs may have not prioritised these activities, which could explain the relative low level of success of this activity strand reported as part of this Programme.

However, information from grant-holders that were able to assess outcomes suggests some grants have had some success in this activity strand. For example, one project noted that, in the two years that the project lasted, they saw an increase in Covenant signatories – from 38 to 72⁶⁶ – while another claimed to have generated more than 1,000 new members.⁶⁷ There is also some qualitative evidence of success. For example, one project claimed to help find employment for spouses or older children of serving Armed Forces personnel, thus helping them overcome barriers related to frequent relocation due to the demands of service

⁶⁴ It should be noted that, although an increase in overall communication activities with the purpose of increasing awareness among the private sector appears to be a benefit reported by grant-holders, this was not one of the intended outcomes of the SDP.

⁶⁵ Forces in Mind Trust, Local Government Association, and Shared Intelligence (2017).

⁶⁶ Project 17K.

⁶⁷ Project 16F.

life.⁶⁸ In addition, one project claimed that its activities led to the skills of the Armed Forces Community being recognised by more employers.⁶⁹

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the majority of grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed benefits directly related to awareness-raising among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. These are outlined in Box 5 below.

Box 5 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand three, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, 14 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Increased awareness of the needs of members of the Armed Forces Community, as well as of the benefits of employing them, leading to a higher number of Forces-friendly employers and to increased commitment to and engagement towards delivering the Covenant, including increased sign-up and participation in delivering services and activities to the Armed Forces Community (14).
- Increased numbers of local businesses that received the Bronze, Silver and Gold Defence Employers Recognition Scheme Awards (2).
- Increased employment opportunities for members of the Armed Forces Community (2).

An indirect benefit that was mentioned as emerging from this activity strand was increased integration of the Armed Forces Community within the wider private sector (1).

⁶⁸ Case Study A, Interview 1.

⁶⁹ Project 16F.

3.1.5. Activity strand four: Raising the awareness of the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

Table 5 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand four

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	18 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	20 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising among the general public	11 out of 20
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to increased awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community	9 out of 20

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

To raise the awareness of the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community, 18 projects undertook activities such as organising events to honour the sacrifices and to raise awareness of the needs of the Armed Forces Community, attending local community gatherings, setting up social media accounts, and developing and distributing local newsletters. Of 20 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, **11 claimed the SDP funding had, 'to a great extent', resulted in an increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising;** 9 out of 20 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding had resulted in this outcome 'to some extent'.

In terms of outcomes, **9 out of 20 grant-holders felt that the awareness-raising activities carried out as part of the projects led, 'to a great extent', to increased awareness among the public** about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. Nine grant-holders felt the activities had led to this outcome 'to some extent', and 2 claimed not to know. These numbers suggest that **activities in this area were at least partly successful**, according to some of the projects.

Additional insights from the questionnaire and from the interviews carried out as part of the case studies also suggest a degree of success in this activity strand. For example, one project carried out a survey to identify the general public's perception of the needs and challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community, receiving more than 1,800 responses; the survey was used as a means to raise awareness, as well as to gauge how future awareness-raising activities should be tailored.⁷⁰ Several projects used events such as Armed Forces Day to promote awareness of the Armed Forces Community, claiming their events were attended variously by 4,000 and 22,000 people,⁷¹ and 40,000 people,⁷² thus suggesting a high level of engagement. One project claimed to have reached 690,000 people with its various awareness-raising activities,⁷³ while

⁷⁰ Project 16G.

⁷¹ Project 16C.

⁷² Project 16G.

⁷³ Project 16K.

another claimed to have reached 1.7 million people across the area.⁷⁴ One grant-holder noted that the videos produced during the project, in particular those that were animated, led to positive engagement from the public, thus suggesting that they could have resulted in increased awareness.⁷⁵

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed only benefits directly related to raising awareness of the public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. These are outlined in Box 6 below.

Box 6 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand four, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 20 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of the general public about the existence and the needs of the Armed Forces Community, including of the sectors that come into contact with the Community but are not direct service providers, such as the education system (7). Development of resources and infrastructure that can continue to generate awareness, such as videos, social media accounts and websites (2). Development of a more consistent approach to public communication regarding the Armed Forces Community (1). Increased communication audience (1). More opportunities to intermingle between the general public and the Armed Forces Community (1). Creation of a single point of contact for the general public on the Armed Forces Community (1). 	

3.1.6. Activity strand five: Raising the awareness of public authorities and frontline services about the support available to the Armed Forces Community

Table 6 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand five

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	26 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	29 out of 35

⁷⁴ Project 17E.

⁷⁵ Project 16X.

Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising among public authorities and frontline services about the support available to the Armed Forces Community	20 out of 29
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to increased awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the support available to the Armed Forces Community	21 out of 29
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the awareness-raising activities carried out as part of the grant had led to staff feeling more confident in their ability to support members of the Armed Forces Community	24 out of 29

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

To raise the awareness of public authorities and frontline services about the support available to the Armed Forces Community, the 26 projects carried out activities such as awareness-raising campaigns and training, most likely undertaken in conjunction with activities meant to raise awareness of the Covenant and the needs and challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community. Of 29 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, **20 claimed that the SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in an increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising**; 8 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding had led to this outcome 'to some extent', and 1 claimed not to know.

Overall, **21 of 29 grant-holders claimed the activities carried out as part of this strand led, 'to a great extent', to increased awareness among public authorities and frontline services** of the support available to the Armed Forces Community, suggesting that this activity strand has been successful in most cases. Seven grant-holders claimed this outcome was achieved 'to some extent', and 1 claimed not to know. Two grant-holders that completed the questionnaire noted that more time was needed to embed this awareness.⁷⁶ Compared to the previous activity strand that also focused on public authorities and frontline services, a higher percentage of grant-holders felt that the SDP funding had led to increased awareness about the support available to the Armed Forces Community (72 per cent) than to increased awareness about the Covenant and the needs and challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community (58 per cent). This suggests that **increasing knowledge of the available services may be more straightforward to achieve**, particularly if done through the development of databases that can be accessed as needed, without requiring staff to keep the information in mind. By contrast, enhancing genuine staff understanding of the underlying needs and challenges facing this cohort may be more difficult.

More specifically, 24 out of 29 grant-holders claimed **staff had reported feeling more confident in their ability to support members of the Armed Forces Community** as a result of the SDP-funded activities. Five grant-holders claimed not to be aware of the outcome. For example, one project claimed that, as a result of the Military Human training, they noticed an increase in the percentage of staff who were aware of dedicated support services available to the Armed Forces Community from 43 per cent to 89 per cent; as well as an

⁷⁶ Project 17K.

increase in the percentage of staff who felt well-equipped to work with the Armed Forces Community from 48 per cent to 95 per cent.⁷⁷

Insights from the interviews carried out as part of the case studies also suggest **improvements in infrastructure carried out to increase awareness of services**. For example, one interviewee noted that, as a result of the project, call centre staff in their LA now have at their disposal an in-house database, managed by Armed Forces Champions, that grants them immediate access to information about the services available to the Armed Forces Community, organised by area (e.g. housing, education, etc.).⁷⁸ Similarly, another project set up a Veterans Community Network contact point that can help guide frontline staff to the relevant support services available for signposting.⁷⁹

Aside from awareness-raising activities, this outcome also appears to have resulted from **improved connections between and among public authorities and service providers**, which automatically increases knowledge of the existing services. For example, one project noted that linking into the Royal College of General Practitioners' veterans scheme, which encourages veteran-friendly General Practitioner (GP) practices, resulted in increased knowledge and confidence within staff working in Primary Care.⁸⁰

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed both benefits directly related to awareness-raising among public authorities and frontline services about the support available to the Armed Forces Community, and benefits that contribute indirectly to other strands of activities related to the implementation of the Covenant. These are outlined in Box 7 below.

Box 7 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand five, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 29 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Increased staff understanding of the support available to various sections of the Armed Forces Community and increased ability to effectively signpost (16).
- Increased and improved access to services by the Armed Forces Community, in terms of effectiveness, speed and relevance (6).
- Positive changes in policies and in the development of relevant infrastructure (1).

In terms of indirect benefits, the grant-holders mentioned:

- Improved communication and collaboration in supporting the Armed Forces Community (3).
- Increase in the numbers of Armed Forces Forum members (1).

⁷⁷ Project 16F.

⁷⁸ Case Study C, Interview 3.

⁷⁹ Project 17M.

⁸⁰ Project 17T.

In addition, one organisation that benefited from one of the projects claimed that following the project, they felt that the LAs have an enhanced understanding of frontline providers, in terms of the types and numbers of cases that they deal with, as well as the challenges that they face.⁸¹

3.1.7. Activity strand six: Raising the awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them

Table 7 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand six

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	29 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	28 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising among the Armed Forces Community	17 out of 28
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to increased awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them	16 out of 28
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had resulted in new signposting resources being established	26 out of 28
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the new signposting resources established as a result of the grant improved, 'to a great extent', the access of the Armed Forces Community to support services	18 out of 26

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

As Figure 3.1 shows, raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them was one of the two second-most-commonly reported activity strands in terms of the number of projects that undertook it. The 29 projects carried out activities such as: organising events meant to honour the sacrifices of and connect with the Armed Forces Community; attending local Armed Forces Community events; setting up social media accounts; developing websites or apps listing sources of support; developing resources such as leaflets; and using mainstream media such as TV and newspapers. Of 28 grant-holders that filled in the questionnaire and whose project focused on this activity strand, **17 claimed that the SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in an increase in communication activities with the purpose of awareness-raising**; 11 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding resulted in this outcome 'to some extent'.

Overall, **16 out of 28 grant-holders claimed that these activities resulted, 'to a great extent', in increased awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them**; 10 grant-holders claimed this outcome was achieved 'to some extent', and 2 claimed not to know. More specifically, 26 out of 28 grant-holders claimed new signposting resources had been established as a result of the SDP funding.

⁸¹ Case Study D, Interview 3.

As a result, **18 out of these 26 grant-holders claimed these new resources improved, 'to a great extent', the access of the Armed Forces Community to support services;** 3 grant-holders claimed not to know. For example, a by-product of the SDP funding has been the development of the Forces Connect South East (FCSE) app, which was developed to easily connect users to organisations offering support across a wide range of needs, and which was downloaded, at the time of this progress report, by 8,000 people across 12 counties.⁸²

Additional information from the questionnaire and the interviews conducted as part of the case studies also suggest this activity strand has been successful. For example, one project mentioned holding a Mental Health and Wellbeing event, from which the Armed Forces Community benefited in learning how to manage and build mental resilience, as well as where to reach out for help if needed.⁸³ Another project claimed to have used the SDP funding to train several spouse volunteers to be able to give family, housing, employment and debt advice and signposting to the Armed Forces Community living on and around a particular military base, having realised that the Community was reluctant to seek such advice and signposting off base.⁸⁴ One project also delivered Covenant-focused training to military personnel, and claimed they had found it beneficial.⁸⁵ In another example, one project noted they had been able to raise awareness, through a survey, to 30 per cent of respondents from the Armed Forces Community who did not previously know about the Covenant, and 53 per cent of respondents from the Armed Forces Community who did not previously know their Council had signed the Covenant.⁸⁶

In addition, increased awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available appears to have also resulted from activities that were not primarily directed towards achieving it. For example, one project noted that events organised to engage the general public (some of which attracted more than 300,000 members of the public) led to the identification of previously unknown members of the Armed Forces Community, who were then made aware of the range of support and services available to them.⁸⁷ Furthermore, projects that offered direct support to the Armed Forces Community, through promoting these services, inadvertently raised awareness of the Community about the services available to them. For example, as part of one project, a dedicated point of contact would advertise a time and a place where veterans could find them if they wanted to discuss any issues in person, as well as a phone number through which they could be reached.⁸⁸ One such project noted that awareness among the Armed Forces Community also increased on a rolling basis, as members who accessed support and who had a positive experience started to spread awareness of these services themselves, thus increasing the reach of the project.⁸⁹

⁸² Project 17A.

⁸³ Project 17T.

⁸⁴ Project 17T.

⁸⁵ Case Study C, Interview 1.

⁸⁶ Project 16F.

⁸⁷ Project 17P.

⁸⁸ Case Study D, Interview 2.

⁸⁹ Project 17D.

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed both benefits directly related to awareness-raising among the Armed Forces Community, and benefits that indirectly contributed to other strands of activities related to the implementation of the Covenant. These are outlined in Box 8 below.

Box 8 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand six, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 28 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Increased awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them, including from peer support organisations, leading to more confidence in reaching out (8).
- Improvements in the support landscape through the development of signposting resources or the employment of a dedicated point of contact (8).
- Development of infrastructure and resources that can be re-used to promote continued awareness, such as social media accounts, websites and apps (2).
- Timelier accessing of support, leading to the prevention of more serious issues (2).

In terms of indirect benefits, the grant-holders mentioned:

- Improved coordination and collaboration between relevant stakeholders as a result of the development of signposting pathways (4).
- Improved identification of members of the Armed Forces Community through self-identification as more members access support services (3).
- Greater willingness of services to meet the various needs of the Armed Forces Community as a result of increased numbers of Community members accessing services (1).

3.1.8. Activity strand seven: Improving coordination and the sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders

Table 8 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand seven

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	29 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	28 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to increased engagement in activities meant to coordinate and share best practice	24 out of 28

Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to greater coordination and/or more opportunities to share best practice	24 out of 28
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an increase in the size and reach of networks of stakeholders involved in supporting the Armed Forces Community	19 out of 28

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

As Figure 3.1 shows, improving coordination and the sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders was one of the two second-most-commonly reported activity strands in terms of the number of projects that undertook it. The 29 projects carried out activities such as holding and attending events (such as meetings and conferences), holding best practice presentations and circulating best practice reports, and creating or expanding networks of relevant stakeholders. Of 28 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, **24 claimed that the SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in increased engagement in activities meant to coordinate and share best practice;** 4 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding resulted in this outcome 'to some extent'.

In terms of outcomes, 24 out of 28 grant-holders claimed that the **SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in greater coordination and/or more opportunities to share best practice** regarding the implementation of the Covenant; 4 grant-holders claimed this outcome was achieved 'to some extent'. In addition, 19 out of 28 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding had resulted, 'to a great extent', in **an increase in the size and reach of networks of stakeholders involved in supporting the Armed Forces Community;** 9 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding had resulted in this outcome 'to some extent'. These numbers suggest that this activity strand was successful, which is confirmed by additional insights from the questionnaire and the interviews.

For example, one project set up an Armed Forces Forum – initially created to connect local public sector organisations that had signed the Covenant, its membership has grown to 22 members, now also including local military charities and military bases, such as one reservist barracks. According to the interviewee, the Forum meets quarterly to share best practice, and has created a common local action plan that ensures that the Armed Forces Community can access the same level of support across the sub-region in question.⁹⁰ The same project also used the appointed Covenant Officer to provide support to other organisations, thus spreading the available resources across different partners.⁹¹ As a result of another project, Forces Connect South West – a partnership between the MOD, local military charities and support agencies, and local private businesses – was created with the purpose of increasing collaboration and consistent delivery of the Covenant.⁹² In addition, one interviewee noted that as a result of the project, the local Covenant Partnership – including members such as the police, fire service, NHS, local GPs, the Department of Work and Pensions, Citizens' Advice, local military charities, local military barracks, etc. – increased in membership.⁹³ A third project, while also emphasizing the importance of collaboration, used a flexible approach across the

⁹⁰ Case Study B, Interview 2.

⁹¹ Case Study B, Interview 2.

⁹² Project 16G.

⁹³ Case Study E, Interview 1.

different LAs involved in the cluster, allowing them to form the structures that would function best in their specific local contexts, for example by taking different approaches to briefing or meeting with the different councils. Furthermore, as a result of the SDP funding, the project noted that some of the LAs in question have formed civilian–military forums.⁹⁴ In general, according to one interviewee the SDP funding also helped build trust between and among LAs and other public- and private-sector organisations.⁹⁵

According to grant-holders, these structures, as well as the cluster approach required by the SDP, have resulted in increased learning. Of 28 grant-holders, **22 noted that as a result of the SDP, they had implemented best practices from other areas, or had shared best practices** that were subsequently implemented in another area. One interviewee noted that although knowledge of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community within their LA at the start of the project was limited, they were able to learn from more experienced partners and implement the best practice they had shared with them, thus leading to an overall improvement in the implementation of the Covenant.⁹⁶ Grant-holders from one project noted they had shared the model of activities used to implement the Covenant with a range of stakeholders, including a presentation they had delivered at a conference with 160 delegates.⁹⁷ Other projects also used events to share best practice, with one highlighting they had delivered presentations at 12 meetings to over 100 professionals in total across 30 different organisations.⁹⁸

As a result of increased collaboration and the sharing of best practice, in many cases the projects have also resulted in a local or regional standardisation of approach to the delivery of the Covenant. For example, one project worked to standardise LA websites across the cluster, so that they give the same key information.⁹⁹ Furthermore, two interviewees noted that the SDP funding contributed to eliminating some of the so-called ‘postcode lottery’, whereby the area in which members of the Armed Forces Community live determines the quality of the support they can access.¹⁰⁰ Another project noted that the SDP funding contributed to the emergence of a more strategic and more connected regional approach to the delivery of the Covenant, through the development of regional Action Plans.¹⁰¹

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire mainly listed benefits directly related to improving coordination and the sharing of best practice. These are outlined in Box 9 below.

⁹⁴ Case Study C, Interview 2.

⁹⁵ Case Study B, Interview 1.

⁹⁶ Case Study B, Interview 3.

⁹⁷ Project 16F.

⁹⁸ Project 16C.

⁹⁹ Case Study B, Interview 3.

¹⁰⁰ Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 1.

¹⁰¹ Project 16F.

Box 9 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand seven, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 28 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Increased sharing of best practice on various topics, such as overcoming challenges and delivering adequate support (11).
- Increased collaboration in supporting the Armed Forces Community (10).
- Development of infrastructure conducive to continued cooperation, such as regular meetings or forums (6).
- Increased membership in structures meant to support the Armed Forces Community (2).
- Development of a common approach to collecting, recording and sharing data (2).
- Greater understanding of each other’s roles (1).
- Consistent access to advice and support across the region (1).

In terms of indirect benefits, increasing understanding of the needs of, challenges faced by and support available to the Armed Forces Community as a result of learning from partners (4) was mentioned.

3.1.9. Activity strand eight: Strengthening links between service providers

Table 9 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand eight

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	28 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	23 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, ‘to a great extent’, led to a strengthening of links between service providers	13 out of 23
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, ‘to a great extent’, led to the development of new resources to support the work of local organisations with the Armed Forces Community	11 out of 23
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had led to meetings and/or fora pertaining to the Covenant expanding membership	17 out of 23
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, ‘to a great extent’, led to existing referral pathways changing to take into account the Covenant and the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community	13 out of 23

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

In strengthening links between service providers, the 28 projects carried out activities similar to those undertaken by the previous strand, such as holding and attending events (e.g. meetings or conferences), and creating or expanding networks of relevant stakeholders. While the previous activity strand focused on improving collaboration and consistency in delivering the Covenant, the purpose behind activity strand eight was to improve connections within the existing landscape of support, so as to enhance the speed,

efficiency, accuracy and adequacy of referrals, and thus improve the quality of holistic and tailored support offered to members of the Armed Forces Community.

Of 23 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, **13 claimed that the SDP funding led, 'to a great extent', to a strengthening of links between service providers;** 9 grant-holders claimed this outcome was achieved 'to some extent', and 1 claimed not to know. More specifically, 11 out of 23 grant-holders claimed **the projects resulted, 'to a great extent', in the development of new resources to support the work of local organisations with the Armed Forces Community** across domains such as housing, finance or education. Another 11 grant-holders claimed the projects resulted in this outcome 'to some extent', and 1 claimed the outcome had not been achieved at all. In addition, 17 out of 23 grant-holders claimed that as a result of the SDP funding, meetings and/or fora pertaining to the Covenant expanded their membership to include other services; 3 claimed this did not happen, and 3 claimed not to know. Finally, 13 out of 23 grant-holders claimed that, **as a result of the SDP funding, existing referral pathways now take into account the Covenant and the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community 'to a great extent'**; 9 grant-holders claimed this is the case 'to some extent', and 1 claimed not to know.

Additional insights from the questionnaire and the interviews conducted as part of the case studies support the assessment of success suggested by the numbers above. For example, one project noted that collaboration with probation services, housing services and organisations offering support with mental health improved as a result of the SDP funding.¹⁰² This project noted that as a result of the funding a Probation Working Group was established, which works to support the complex needs of members of the Armed Forces Community who are involved with the Criminal Justice System. As a result of this Group, grant-holders highlighted that they were able to prevent members of the Community from being sentenced by proving to the court that they were in receipt of support packages.¹⁰³ In addition, the same grant-holders claimed that, as a result of the relationships they developed with service providers, they are better able to support complex cases. For example, they noted that they have been able to develop a unified database that can be accessed and used by all the practitioners working on the same case, thus enabling them to provide comprehensive support.¹⁰⁴

In terms of referral pathways, some projects built so-called directories of service, thus compiling contact points from different organisations that provide support.¹⁰⁵ One project developed mental health referral pathways that they claimed had since become a national model.¹⁰⁶ In addition, projects also developed enhanced connections with local military organisations.¹⁰⁷

Overall, insights from the questionnaire and interviews suggest that **strengthened connections within the landscape of support have benefited the service providers, as well as the Armed Forces Community.** For

¹⁰² Case Study B, Interview 4.

¹⁰³ Case Study B, Interview 1.

¹⁰⁴ Case Study B, Interview 1.

¹⁰⁵ Project 16N; Project 16L.

¹⁰⁶ Project 17T.

¹⁰⁷ Project 16G; Project 17J; Case Study B, Interview 1.

example, projects noted that local service providers benefit from having a point of contact in the LAs, as this allows them to reach out to them if they encounter barriers when supporting an individual, such as in terms of housing.¹⁰⁸ In particular, in one interview with a local service provider it was highlighted that before the SDP funding, it was difficult to receive help from the LA, which was partly a function of not having a known contact point.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, this has also benefited the Armed Forces Community, which is provided with far more efficient and comprehensive support. One project noted that, as a result of improved referral pathways, members of the Armed Forces Community are now able to access help on an almost immediate basis, as opposed to in the past, when getting support could have taken a number of weeks.¹¹⁰

Aside from activities intended specifically to strengthen links between service providers, **this outcome also appears to have resulted indirectly from activities such as training**, which facilitated networking and the development of relationships.¹¹¹ In addition, it was also a by-product of the establishment of hubs/hives, which by nature bring a range of different services together under one roof.¹¹²

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed mainly benefits directly related to strengthening links between service providers. These are outlined in Box 10 below.

Box 10 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand eight, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 23 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Improvement of referral pathways, resulting in more efficient signposting and increased collaboration (6).
- Developing new relationships with service providers, including those that previously did not specifically cater to the Armed Forces Community (3).
- Increasing representation of service providers in meetings or fora (3).
- More holistic and higher quality support being offered to the Armed Forces Community as a result of more collaboration and clearer referral pathways (3).
- Establishment of new structures intended to support the Armed Forces Community (1).
- Establishment of focus groups that helped support the Armed Forces Community (1).

¹⁰⁸ Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study B, Interview 4; Project 17P.

¹⁰⁹ Case Study D, Interview 3.

¹¹⁰ Project 16O.

¹¹¹ Project 16G; Project 16E; Case Study C, Interview 1.

¹¹² Project 16G; Project 17N; Project 17O.

In terms of indirect benefits, grant-holders mentioned:	
•	Increased understanding of the support landscape, leading to increased coordination and sharing of best practice (7).
•	Increased awareness and understanding of the Armed Forces Community across service providers (1).

3.1.10. Activity strand nine: Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community

Table 10 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand nine

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	27 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	25 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to improvements in processes within their LAs with the purpose of implementing the Covenant and more adequately supporting the Armed Forces Community	14 out of 25
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to LA policies being amended, updated or created to reflect the spirit of the Covenant	9 out of 25
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to more consistency in the way their LAs supported the Armed Forces Community	13 out of 25

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

To improve processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community, the 27 projects focused on activities such as amending policies and internal structures to reflect the Covenant. Of 25 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, **14 claimed the SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in improvements in processes within their LAs** with the purpose of implementing the Covenant and more adequately supporting the Armed Forces Community; 11 grant-holders claimed this outcome had been achieved 'to some extent'.

More specifically, 9 out of 25 grant-holders claimed that, **as a result of the SDP funding, policies within their LAs were, 'to a great extent', amended, updated** or created to reflect the spirit of the Covenant; 14 grant-holders claimed this happened 'to some extent', and 2 claimed not to know. In addition, 13 out of 25 grant-holders claimed **the SDP funding had resulted, 'to a great extent', in more consistency in the way in which their LAs supported the Armed Forces Community**; 9 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding resulted in this outcome 'to some extent', and 3 claimed not to know. The low confidence with which grant-holders judged the success of the SDP funding in changing policies relative to the confidence with which they judged its success in achieving greater consistency, could be due to the fact that the latter, as described in Section 3.1.8, may have also come as a result of other activity strands.

Despite this, additional insights from the questionnaire and from the interviews suggest that, in some cases, internal processes have been improved, leading to a positive change in the delivery of the Covenant. For example, one interviewee described setting up processes to ensure that queries from the Armed Forces Community were adequately handled by call centre agents, including checks to ensure they were ‘asking the question’. As such, as part of the training of staff, supervisors carry out regular quality-monitoring on the calls.¹¹³ Another project noted they had embedded Covenant- and Armed Forces Community-focused training into their regular induction programmes, thus helping to counter reduced awareness as a result of staff turnover.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, some projects also noted that housing policies had been reviewed and amended as a result of the funding.¹¹⁵ Additionally, some LAs adopted guaranteed interview schemes for members of the Armed Forces Community¹¹⁶ and also made changes to ensure that employees who are members of the Armed Forces Community have access to help, if needed, as well as adequate support from Human Resources policies.¹¹⁷ Similarly, one project also contributed to setting up internal staff networks for employees who are members of the Armed Forces Community.¹¹⁸

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed mainly benefits directly related to improving processes within LAs. These are outlined in Box 11 below.

Box 11 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand nine, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 25 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Revised policies and procedures in various domains in order to ensure congruence with the Covenant, including ‘asking the question’ (10).
- Employment of a dedicated point of contact within the organisation that staff can reach out to if they have any questions or encounter any issues when dealing with members of the Armed Forces Community (3).
- Improved policies to support employees who are members of the Armed Forces Community, such as 15 additional days of annual leave to support training for reservists (3).
- Changes in culture to reflect the spirit of the Covenant (2).
- Gaining support from the senior leadership (1).
- Making Covenant- and Armed Forces Community-focused training mandatory to all staff (1).

¹¹³ Case Study C, Interview 3.

¹¹⁴ Case Study E, Interview 1.

¹¹⁵ Project 16N; Project 16C.

¹¹⁶ Project 16C.

¹¹⁷ Project 16G; Project 16C.

¹¹⁸ Case Study E, Interview 1.

- As a result of the Covenant being placed on the agenda, increased consideration of how to improve internal infrastructure in the long-term (1).
 - Inclusion of the Armed Forces Community as a key demographic in the protected characteristics at a local level (1).
- In terms of indirect benefits, the grant-holders mentioned that as a result of changes in policies, there was increased awareness of staff of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (3).

3.1.11. Activity strand ten: Providing tailored support to the Armed Forces Community

Table 11 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand ten

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	19 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	16 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', helped to provide tailored support to the Armed Forces Community	12 out of 16
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had led to new services (such as hubs, breakfast clubs, community initiatives, outreach services) being created, or existing services being expanded	16 out of 16

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

To provide tailored support to the Armed Forces Community, the 19 projects undertook activities such as developing support services within the LAs or setting up external support hubs. Out of the 16 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, 12 claimed **the SDP funding had helped them, 'to a great extent', to provide tailored support to the Armed Forces Community;** 4 claimed it had done so 'to some extent'. More specifically, all 16 grant-holders claimed **new services (such as hubs, breakfast clubs, community initiatives, outreach services) were created, or existing services expanded,** as a result of the funding. It was claimed that these services resulted, 'to a great extent', in an increase in the number of members of the Armed Forces Community accessing and receiving support by 9 grant-holders; 7 claimed these services resulted in this outcome 'to some extent'. These numbers suggest that this activity strand has been successful, especially in light of the finding that it has been one of the strands most affected by COVID-19 (as described in Section 3.2).

Additional information from the questionnaire and the interviews support the above assessment. For example, one project set up a Veterans' Advice Service aimed at providing tailored support to veterans. As part of this service, the coordinator (named a Veterans' Advice Officer) described setting and advertising a time and place where veterans could meet with them if they needed support in any form. According to the coordinator, this had a positive impact. Compared to call centre staff, who have a limited time to listen to callers, the coordinator was available for at-length discussions with the veterans. They would then be able to support veterans with the issues they were experiencing, expressing that, in many cases, it was easier for them, as LA employees, to overcome some of the barriers the veterans were facing, seeing as they had both

the knowledge of internal LA processes and the contacts needed to move things forward.¹¹⁹ This dedicated point of contact – through which the veterans could easily access support from the LA – was highlighted as one of the main benefits of this service.¹²⁰ Up until the date when the questionnaire was filled in, the Veterans' Advice Service had provided support and advice (in person, via telephone or email) to more than 200 members of the Armed Forces Community, covering a range of areas, such as adult social care, benefits, finances, employment and housing.¹²¹ The Veterans' Advice Officer also signposts to other support organisations.¹²² According to one interviewee, when the SDP grant, and implicitly the Veterans' Advice Service funding, was coming to an end, floods of letters went to high political dignitaries describing how important and needed the service was, resulting in the service being extended with government funding for two additional years.¹²³

Similarly, another project set up a dedicated Armed Forces Outreach Service based within LAs. It was claimed to have vastly improved the experiences and outcomes of members of the Armed Forces Community who came into contact with these LAs.¹²⁴

Another activity was opening and/or operating hubs. One project used the SDP funding to sustain four existing hubs, as well as to open 17 additional ones.¹²⁵ Another project also produced a guide to setting up hubs, called 'Grow your hub', aimed at sharing best practice in this area.¹²⁶ According to grant-holders, the hubs primarily help by providing a go-to, one-stop-shop approach, where members of the Armed Forces Community can receive comprehensive, holistic and tailored support from a range of specialist organisations – with effective and immediate support provided if the individual is in crisis¹²⁷ – and by providing trusted advice and support in a safe and secure environment.¹²⁸ Furthermore, one project noted that because some of the hubs provide a wide range of social and support activities, they act to remove the stigma associated with reaching out for help.¹²⁹ In addition, some projects also measured the satisfaction of beneficiaries with the services offered by some of the hubs. For example, one project noted that 100 per cent of beneficiaries were satisfied with the quality of information and advice received, with how easy it was to access the service, with how they were treated by the service, and with how the service communicated with them.¹³⁰

In addition to the above, projects also provided various other services, such as regular coffee mornings for members of the Armed Forces Community, a money advice service, a full-time family support employee

¹¹⁹ Case Study D, Interview 2.

¹²⁰ Project 16O.

¹²¹ Project 16O; Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹²² Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹²³ Case Study D, Interview 2.

¹²⁴ Project 16E.

¹²⁵ Project 17J.

¹²⁶ Project 17J.

¹²⁷ Project 17G; Project 16M; Project 17N; Project 17O.

¹²⁸ Project 17G.

¹²⁹ Project 17N.

¹³⁰ Project 16I.

and music, cooking, craft and walking clubs.¹³¹ One project organised a movie event on Bonfire Night in response to the realisation that many veterans endure high levels of anxiety due to the noise of fireworks, leading to social isolation. This allowed veterans to spend a relaxing evening in a safe environment in the company of peers.¹³² In response to COVID-19, projects also provided welfare calls, organised online clubs where veterans could socialise, and delivered food parcels or medicine to veterans in need.¹³³ In addition, one project set up a scheme to loan tablets to veterans to enable them to access online support.¹³⁴

As a result of the above activities, some projects noted an increase in the numbers of members of the Armed Forces Community that were accessing support. For example, one project noted that in one year, an additional 205 members of the Community had been offered assistance.¹³⁵

Overall, these services have resulted in increased numbers of individuals receiving support.¹³⁶ For example, one of the projects that set up a hub noted that in a period of five months, they had been able to support more than 430 individuals with issues including emergency assistance with homelessness, job opportunities, debt management and mental health;¹³⁷ another hub claimed to have had over 1,500 visitors in a period of eight months, out of which 543 accessed the services available.¹³⁸ Another project claimed that in a period of almost one year, they engaged with 1,267 veterans and families through various outreach activities.¹³⁹ One project that monitored the change in demand over time showed that while only 112 people accessed support between September and November 2017, this number grew to 258 people between June and August 2018.¹⁴⁰ In addition, these services helped to reduce social isolation and to improve wellbeing, as well as instil a sense of appreciation within members of the Armed Forces Community, and a knowledge that if service-related issues arise, they will have the support they need.¹⁴¹

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire mainly listed benefits that are directly related to providing tailored support to the Armed Forces Community. These are outlined in Box 12 below.

¹³¹ Project 17D.

¹³² Project 16O.

¹³³ Project 17D; Case Study D, Interview 2.

¹³⁴ Project 17D.

¹³⁵ Project 16I.

¹³⁶ Project 17D; Case Study D, Interview 2; Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹³⁷ Project 17N.

¹³⁸ Project 16G.

¹³⁹ Project 17L.

¹⁴⁰ Project 17D.

¹⁴¹ Project 17G.

Box 12 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand ten, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 16 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Development of new support infrastructure, such as advice services and hubs, which improve and simplify the landscape of support for the Armed Forces Community (8).
- As a result of the new support infrastructure, improved ability to address issues before they escalate (2).
- Development of new social events that help reduce isolation and improve wellbeing (1).

In terms of indirect benefits, grant-holders mentioned that trust between service providers and the Armed Forces Community has increased as a result of the development of new infrastructure for direct service provision (1).

3.1.12. Activity strand 11: Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community**Table 12 Summary of quantitative data for activity strand 11**

All data	Number of projects that undertook this activity strand overall	13 out of 43
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand	15 out of 35
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to an increase in the number of social events organised by the LA for the Armed Forces Community	6 out of 15
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the activities organised as part of the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to better support networks and decreased social isolation among members of the Armed Forces Community	8 out of 15
Questionnaire	Number of grant-holders who felt the grant had, 'to a great extent', led to increased cohesion or a more pronounced sense of community within the Armed Forces Community	9 out of 15

Source: RAND Europe analysis of questionnaire responses.

Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community was the least commonly reported strand of activity, with only 13 grants aiming to undertake it. The grants mostly carried out social activities to create connections within the Community, such as events honouring the sacrifices of the Community, breakfast clubs or buddy schemes. Out of 15 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand, **six felt that the SDP funding contributed, 'to a great extent', to an increase in the number of social events organised by the LA for the Armed Forces Community;** 8 felt this outcome had been achieved 'to some extent', and 1, 'not at all'. This suggests that this activity strand was not carried out to its full potential.

In terms of outcomes, 8 out of 15 grant-holders claimed **these activities resulted, 'to a great extent', in better support networks and decreased social isolation among members of the Armed Forces Community;** 5 claimed this outcome was achieved 'to some extent', 1 claimed 'not at all', and 1 claimed not to know. Overall, 9 out of 15 grant-holders claimed the SDP funding resulted, 'to a great extent', in increased cohesion or a more pronounced sense of community within the local Armed Forces Community; 4 grant-holders claimed that the SDP funding resulted in this outcome 'to some extent', and 2 claimed not to know. This suggests that this activity strand was at least partly successful.

Additional insights from the questionnaire and the interviews conducted as part of the case studies support this assessment. Grant-holders claim that feedback received from members of the local Armed Forces Community shows that these activities have had a positive impact. For example, one project claimed the local Armed Forces Community appreciated the increase in social events happening in the area.¹⁴² Furthermore, positive feedback on the impact of the hubs (as discussed in detail in Section 3.1.11) is also pertinent to this activity strand, as most hubs provided both social and specialised support, thus enabling members of the Community to provide mutual support and camaraderie, leading to reductions in isolation and improvements in overall wellbeing.¹⁴³ This activity strand was particularly relevant during COVID-19, which led to an increase in social isolation across the board. Some of the projects adapted to this enhanced need by providing online social activities. For example, one project organised online events that connected veterans from across the LA areas.¹⁴⁴

Main benefits resulting from this activity strand

When prompted to contemplate the biggest benefits that resulted from this activity strand, the grant-holders that completed the questionnaire listed only benefits directly related to increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community. These are outlined in Box 13 below.

Box 13 Overview of the main direct and indirect benefits arising from activity strand 11, according to questionnaire responses

In terms of direct benefits, the 15 grant-holders who filled in the questionnaire and whose projects focused on this activity strand mentioned:

- Setting up social activities that act to (i) bring the Community together; (ii) create a sense of belonging; and (iii) reduce social isolation (9).
- Increased referrals of members of the Armed Forces Community to services and support groups that help reduce isolation (1).
- Increased trust between the LAs and the Armed Forces Community (1).
- Increased confidence among the Armed Forces Community that they are an important and appreciated part of the wider community (1).

¹⁴² Case Study A, Interview 1.

¹⁴³ Project 17D; Project 17G; Project 17H.

¹⁴⁴ Project 16O.

3.2. EQ2: What were the risks and barriers faced by the SDP in implementing the Local Covenant?

Box 14 EQ2 Summary

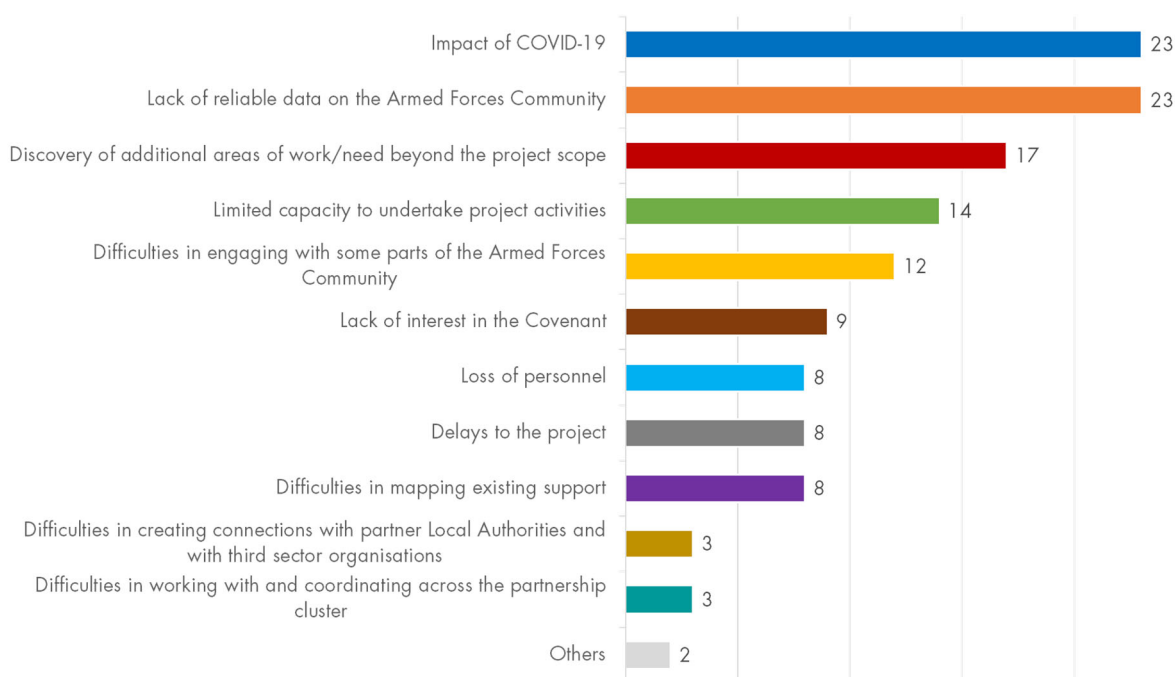
- According to the questionnaire, the two barriers faced by most grant-holders were the difficulty obtaining reliable data on the Armed Forces Community, particularly at a local level (23), and the impact of COVID-19 (23). These lie mostly outside of the projects' control, and as such, it was not possible to find effective mitigation strategies to overcome them.
- The two barriers that were faced by the fewest grant-holders were difficulties in creating connections with partner LAs and with third-sector organisations (3), and difficulties in working with and coordinating across the partnership cluster (3). These lie mostly within the projects' control, and it was possible to find mitigation strategies to overcome them.
- Although some activity strands were naturally more susceptible to certain challenges (for example, the provision of tailored support to the Armed Forces Community due to the impact of COVID-19), in general, these risks and barriers apply across all activity strands.
- Four main mitigation strategies were identified: having a dedicated resource; having good relationships with partners; having good project planning and management; and having the flexibility to adapt to new needs and challenges.
- The challenge that has been the easiest to mitigate is that of difficulties with partnership working.
- The challenge that has been the most difficult to mitigate is insufficient data on the Armed Forces Community and COVID-19.
- While the mitigation strategies all apply to different challenges, the most useful ones appear to have been (i) having a dedicated resource within LAs to drive implementation of the Covenant; and (ii) having good relationships with partners.
- Aside from difficulties with obtaining sufficient and adequate data on the Armed Forces Community, none of the barriers and mitigation strategies are specific to the Armed Forces Community. This suggests that projects encountered mostly systemic challenges, and that the good practices they developed in overcoming them could be applied when dealing with other vulnerable populations.

The grant-holders encountered a wide range of risks and barriers when implementing the SDP projects. Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the risks and barriers identified by the 35 grant-holders that completed the questionnaire. According to the questionnaire, **the two barriers that were faced by the most grant-holders were the lack of reliable data on the Armed Forces Community (23) and the impact of COVID-19 (23)**. The two barriers that were encountered by the fewest grant-holders were difficulties in creating connections with partner LAs and with third-sector organisations (3), and difficulties in working with and coordinating across the partnership cluster (3). The 'others' category includes facing local government reform (1) and measuring the quality of services offered by different support organisations (1). Upon analysing Figure 3.3, it appears that the barriers that were encountered by the fewest projects, namely those related to difficulties in creating connections with stakeholders or coordinating across the partnership cluster, are related to areas that lie mostly within the projects' control. Therefore, this suggests that the

majority of the projects have been successful in finding mitigation strategies to counter them, as will be described in more detail in Section 3.2.1. Conversely, the barriers that were encountered by most projects, such as the lack of reliable data on the Armed Forces Community, the impact of COVID-19, the discovery of additional areas of need, difficulties in engaging with some parts of the Armed Forces Community, low interest in the Covenant, and difficulties in mapping existing support, all lie mostly – or at least partly – outside of the projects’ control.

Additional insights from the questionnaire and the interviews conducted as part of the case studies confirm the above assessment, as well as provide more information regarding these barriers, as described in more detail in the sections below. They also show that, although some activity strands were naturally more susceptible to certain challenges (for example, the provision of tailored support to the Armed Forces Community due to the impact of COVID-19), in general, these risks and barriers apply across all activity strands.

Figure 3.3 Overview of the risks and barriers identified through the questionnaire



Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from the 35 grant-holders (representing 27 projects) that filled in the questionnaire. The numbers reflect the number of grant-holders that encountered each risk/barrier. Please note that in the case of some grants, more than one grant-holder filled in the questionnaire.

Difficulties in obtaining reliable data on the Armed Forces Community

As shown in Figure 3.3, a lack of reliable data on the Armed Forces Community was identified by most grant-holders as a significant barrier. This is despite recent improvements brought about by the Map of Need and Veterans Gateway. This manifested as (i) issues with the identification of members of the Armed Forces Community; (ii) more general issues with appraising the size and spread of the local Armed Forces Community; and (iii) issues with understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by the local Armed Forces Community.

According to additional insights from the questionnaire and the interviews, issues around identification appeared to be most relevant.¹⁴⁵ One of the projects noted that the MOD does not provide data to LAs about people who are leaving the Armed Forces and that, if such data was available, it would enable them to provide more effective support to veterans, or at the very least ensure that they are aware of the support that is available to them by providing them with information packs.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, two interviewees noted that, although they carried out activities to improve identification of the Armed Forces Community, most people who answered the respective consultation were members of the Community that they had already known about.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, another project claimed that low response rates in surveys directed at the Armed Forces Community led to low amounts of usable data.¹⁴⁸ According to another interviewee, the only way to locate members of the Community who do not self-identify as members of the Community, or do not engage with support services, is to verify those who receive benefits or pensions, leaving a large gap encompassing those who do not.¹⁴⁹ As such, the challenge of reliable data also spills into a related challenge – that of engaging with some parts of the Armed Forces Community, such as veterans.¹⁵⁰ In general, projects expressed hope that data from the 2021 census would help improve identification.¹⁵¹

Impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 was also identified as a significant challenge. This manifested in various forms, including in relation to (i) the ability to coordinate with partners; (ii) delays to the project and a reduction in the ability to meet project aims, especially provision of direct support to the Armed Forces Community; and (iii) increased need, especially in terms of social isolation and mental health.

Firstly, COVID-19 posed challenges in terms of coordination between and among LAs and external service providers. One interviewee noted that especially at the beginning of the pandemic, not all stakeholders had access to adequate digital infrastructure, which led to reduced connectivity in the short-term.¹⁵²

Secondly, many projects experienced delays due to COVID-19, and some were unable to run at full potential.¹⁵³ For example, interviewees noted that because of the pandemic, they had been unable to recruit staff or volunteers,¹⁵⁴ unable to conduct all intended training,¹⁵⁵ or unable to raise awareness as planned.¹⁵⁶ In the case of some projects, the pandemic also resulted in loss of personnel due to changing priorities

¹⁴⁵ Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 2; Project 16H.

¹⁴⁶ Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹⁴⁷ Case Study A, Interview 1.

¹⁴⁸ Project 16O.

¹⁴⁹ Case Study C, Interview 2.

¹⁵⁰ Project 17J; Project 16A.

¹⁵¹ Case Study A, Interview 1; Project 16M; Project 17J; Case Study B, Interview 3.

¹⁵² Case Study B, Interview 1.

¹⁵³ Project 17A; Project 17R; Project 17U.

¹⁵⁴ Project 17A.

¹⁵⁵ Case Study B, Interview 3.

¹⁵⁶ Project 17C.

within LAs and the re-assignment of staff to meet these priorities; as a result, some corporate knowledge and continuity was lost, impacting the overall effectiveness of the projects.¹⁵⁷ In the same vein, internal reviews of some policies were put on hold due to COVID-19.¹⁵⁸

The projects were particularly hindered in providing direct support to the Armed Forces Community. Some hubs were unable to open,¹⁵⁹ and some events were cancelled, thus depriving members of the Community of the subsequent benefits and, in general, resulting in an increased sense of social isolation.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, some of the services that did continue reported doing so with difficulties. One interviewee discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the Veterans' Advice Service noted that, because the Veterans' Advice Officer was unable to meet beneficiaries or colleagues face-to-face, they had to guide veterans through resolving issues themselves, which was more complicated and less efficient. For example, the interviewee claimed that instead of fast-tracking forms regarding benefits or housing by simply picking them up, filling them in, and dropping them off at a nearby office, they had to spend time walking the veterans through how to fill in the forms and how and where to submit them, which was both more time-consuming and more stressful to the veterans.¹⁶¹ In addition, COVID-19 also led to enhanced difficulties in reaching certain sections of the Armed Forces Community, especially those who were not digitally-enabled, thus resulting in a decrease in impact.¹⁶²

Finally, COVID-19 resulted in a significant increase in demand for support due to increased need from the Armed Forces Community; this, coupled with significant restrictions on the type of support they could offer, or with limitations on staff and budget resulting from the pandemic, impacted their ability to adequately support the Armed Forces Community.¹⁶³

At the same time, in forcing some of the projects to develop and implement mitigation strategies, COVID-19 also led to opportunities to improve implementation of the Covenant (as described in more detail in Section 3.2.1). Overall, although it had a significant impact on a large number of projects, the pandemic appears to have represented a short-term challenge, rather than a systemic or enduring one.

Limited resources and lack of dedicated staff

A general challenge faced by the projects was also that of limited resources. In particular, insufficient funding in LAs is a well-documented problem that also applies to the implementation of the Covenant. With continued budget restrictions and the future economic consequences of COVID-19, projects highlighted concerns that delivery of the Covenant could easily become overlooked.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ Project 17G; Case Study D, Interview 1; Project 17C; Project 17L.

¹⁵⁸ Project 17T.

¹⁵⁹ Case Study C, Interview 2.

¹⁶⁰ Project 16H; Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study B, Interview 2; Project 17M; Project 17F.

¹⁶¹ Case Study D, Interview 2.

¹⁶² Case Study B, Interview 2; Project 17A.

¹⁶³ Project 17E.

¹⁶⁴ Project 16Z.

Grant-holders from various projects highlighted that in most LAs, delivering the Covenant is an add-on role to a staff member's existing responsibilities, meaning that the person has no additional time or resources set aside to complete this job.¹⁶⁵ As a result, the capacity to undertake relevant work can be limited and the overall level of commitment to the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community can fluctuate with factors such as staff turnover or changing priorities due to wider contextual factors.¹⁶⁶ The capacity to undertake relevant work can also be limited as a result of discovering additional areas of need. For example, one interviewee noted that, during the course of the project and as a result of increasing interaction with members of the Armed Forces Community, new needs were discovered, such as the challenges that parts of the Community were facing on Bonfire Night, when the sound of fireworks triggered PTSD symptoms.¹⁶⁷ In addition, one project that provided direct support to the Armed Forces Community claimed that when assessing veterans who were referred to them, they discovered numerous further unmet needs.¹⁶⁸

Due to these reasons, many grant-holders used the SDP funding to employ a dedicated resource to drive implementation of the Covenant, which they found to be extremely valuable and a key contributor to project success.¹⁶⁹ Without this resource, grant-holders expressed concern that momentum will not be sustained and that delivery of the Covenant will suffer.¹⁷⁰ One project noted that this has already happened before, when the local Armed Forces Covenant Board was dissolved due to insufficient funding and due to not having a dedicated resource to drive progress,¹⁷¹ while another project claimed to already be experiencing a loss in momentum following the end of the grant, and, implicitly, the end of the funding for the dedicated resource.¹⁷² Interestingly, one project noted that, once awareness about the Armed Forces Covenant Officer post that they had funded through the SDP improved, the Officer's work doubled, suggesting that the dedicated resource was needed by the Armed Forces Community, but also leading to concerns about their ability to progress towards achieving the project goals in the given timelines.¹⁷³

In addition, one project highlighted some of the ramifications emerging from a lack of committed funding in terms of the impact of temporary contracts on individuals and, more generally, on implementation of the Covenant. The interviewees claimed that temporary contracts lead to people searching for more stable and permanent positions, usually resulting in the loss of valuable resources in terms of experience and corporate knowledge, as well as a disruption in continuity. It was noted that this may also have an impact on beneficiaries, not only because some establish a relationship of trust with the respective point of contact, but also because they start to feel anxious about whether they will continue to be supported. The interviewees highlighted that in their experience, when support is removed from beneficiaries, trust in the

¹⁶⁵ Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 3.

¹⁶⁶ Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹⁶⁷ Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹⁶⁸ Project 17M.

¹⁶⁹ Project 16R; Project 16O; Case Study E, Interview 1; Case Study E, Interview 2; Case Study D, Interview 2.

¹⁷⁰ Case Study E, Interview 2; Project 16L.

¹⁷¹ Case Study A, Interview 1.

¹⁷² Project 16R.

¹⁷³ Project 16D.

authorities is lost; when that happens, progress is reversed, and the situation becomes worse than it was before the start of the project.¹⁷⁴

Generating and embedding culture change in Local Authorities

An additional challenge mentioned by the grant-holders was that of embedding culture change around recognising the importance of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. It was noted that generating this change requires time and persistent effort, especially when facing competing pressures from other disadvantaged cohorts.¹⁷⁵ In this sense, achieving true awareness of the needs and challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community – and the reasons and explanations underlying these – so as to ensure that people understand the whole picture, and are committed to the Covenant, has been highlighted as difficult.¹⁷⁶ As a result, grant-holders noted that it was often only towards the end of the grant period that projects started to notice steps towards culture change and sustainable impact.¹⁷⁷ This also explains why some projects highlighted scope for much more work in the future.¹⁷⁸

Difficulties in mapping the support landscape

Various projects also noted difficulties in mapping the support landscape, primarily in terms of understanding the different types of support offered by different types of actors. These difficulties were often associated with the large number of organisations offering support to the Armed Forces Community,¹⁷⁹ and the inability to cross-reference information at a national level.¹⁸⁰ One project in particular noted that while the range of support is varied, some organisations may lack accountability, and the quality of support offered by different organisations can be difficult to accurately determine.¹⁸¹ In addition, one project claimed that without an understanding of the support landscape and without adequate connections, it is possible that vulnerable individuals may be ‘lost’ in the transfer of responsibility from one organisation to another.¹⁸² Three grant-holders noted that, during the course of their projects, they had used and contributed to the Veterans Gateway, an existing network of organisations and charities that support the Armed Forces Community.¹⁸³ This resource therefore provides an accurate picture of the support landscape across the country. There were no other mentions of this resource by other grant-holders; seeing as the evaluation team did not collect information with this specific purpose, it is unclear whether this was because grant-holders were unaware of the Veterans Gateway or because they did not find it useful.

¹⁷⁴ Case Study D, Interview 1.

¹⁷⁵ Project 16X.

¹⁷⁶ Case Study C, Interview 2; Case Study A, Interview 1.

¹⁷⁷ Project 16X.

¹⁷⁸ Project 17B.

¹⁷⁹ Project 16A.

¹⁸⁰ Project 17E.

¹⁸¹ Project 16S.

¹⁸² Project 16C.

¹⁸³ Project 17T; Project 16M; Project 17G.

Difficulties with partnership working

In general, challenges related to partnership working – such as ensuring coordination within the cluster, creating connections with relevant stakeholders, and facing insufficient interest in the Covenant from some staff or service providers – were not reported to be common. However, some projects noted difficulties in convincing external partners to support them and to contribute to local Covenant implementation,¹⁸⁴ as well as in ensuring that staff prioritised Covenant- and Armed Forces Community-related training.¹⁸⁵ For example, one project noted that not every council in the structure saw the project as a priority.¹⁸⁶

Most issues converged around LAs having different structures and internal mechanisms, which presented barriers to coordination and to achieving consistency in some cases.¹⁸⁷ For example, one project noted that different LAs had different approaches to Covenant implementation, and that effort had to be put into understanding each other's approaches.¹⁸⁸ In addition, they noted an initial challenge around mapping everything that the LAs and Councils were providing.¹⁸⁹ This lack of standardisation was also an issue for other projects, one of which claimed to have encountered restrictions on the information that could be posted on websites due to different procedures related to communication and website design.¹⁹⁰ One project noted that, in some cases, these differences can lead to the effectiveness of activities being diluted, especially if combined with varying levels of appetite.¹⁹¹

Wider structural or contextual challenges

According to grant-holders, the projects also faced some wider structural or contextual challenges, particularly pertaining to changing or competing priorities. For example, grant-holders from one project highlighted that they encountered local government reform, which made implementation of activities difficult as it consumed most resources in terms of people's time and attention. Furthermore, as a result of reform two new councils emerged out of one, which posed challenges in terms of new leadership and new staff.¹⁹² Internal restructurings also affected another project, leading to delays.¹⁹³ Another project noted that implementation of the Covenant could also be affected by changing political priorities as a result of elections and staff turnover.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, some projects also faced challenges related to the wider labour force or to finding the right person for different postings, which led to delays in recruitment of key personnel, in turn resulting in delays

¹⁸⁴ Case Study C, Interview 2.

¹⁸⁵ Case Study E, Interview 1; Project 16N.

¹⁸⁶ Project 17U.

¹⁸⁷ Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study B, Interview 1; Project 17F; Project 16K; Project 16A.

¹⁸⁸ Case Study B, Interview 3; Project 17F.

¹⁸⁹ Case Study B, Interview 3.

¹⁹⁰ Case Study B, Interview 2.

¹⁹¹ Project 17M.

¹⁹² Project 17T; Case Study A, Interview 1.

¹⁹³ Project 16D; Project 16Z.

¹⁹⁴ Case Study D, Interview 1.

to the project.¹⁹⁵ One project also encountered challenges when the project officer left the post early,¹⁹⁶ while another highlighted various changes in the project team that resulted in lack of continuity.¹⁹⁷

Finally, some projects also noted some technical issues with websites and e-learning platforms that limited the reach and effectiveness of their activities.¹⁹⁸

3.2.1. What mitigation strategies, good practices, and lessons emerge from overcoming risks and barriers?

While not all barriers could be overcome,¹⁹⁹ some mitigation strategies, good practices and lessons learned were reported by grant-holders. Figure 3.4 provides an overview of different mitigation strategies, mapped against the different challenges encountered by the projects. From this overview, it appears that the challenge that has been most easily mitigated is that of difficulties with partnership working, while those that have been most difficult to mitigate are insufficient data on the Armed Forces Community and COVID-19. This is in line with Figure 3.3, which shows the number of grant-holders that reported running into these challenges. When it comes to the mitigation strategies themselves, while they all apply to different challenges, the most useful have been having a dedicated resource within LAs to drive implementation of the Covenant, and having good relationships with partners.

In addition, it should be noted that aside from difficulties with obtaining sufficient and adequate data on the Armed Forces Community, none of the barriers and mitigation strategies are specific to the Armed Forces Community. This suggests that projects encountered mostly systemic challenges, and that the good practices they have developed in overcoming them could be applied when dealing with other populations.

¹⁹⁵ Project 16M; Case Study E, Interview 2; Project 16S; Project 16G; Project 16I; Project 16K; Project 17A; Document 172; Project 16C.

¹⁹⁶ Project 17A.

¹⁹⁷ Project 17C.

¹⁹⁸ Project 17F.

¹⁹⁹ Project 17K; Project 16O.

Figure 3.4 Overview of barriers and mitigation strategies

	Having a dedicated resource within LAs to drive implementation of the Covenant	Having good relationships with partners	Having good project planning and management	Having the flexibility to adapt to new needs and challenges
Difficulties in obtaining reliable data on the Armed Forces Community		X		
Impact of COVID-19				X
Limited resources and lack of dedicated staff		X	X	
Generating and embedding culture change in Local Authorities	X			
Difficulties in mapping the support landscape	X	X		
Difficulties with partnership working	X	X	X	X
Wider structural or contextual challenges	X		X	X

Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from the document review, the questionnaire and the case study interviews. The 'X' notes that at least one grant-holder reported the barrier in question having been mitigated by the strategy in question. The figure does not indicate how many grant-holders found the particular strategies useful in overcoming particular barriers, as grant-holders did not consistently indicate which mitigation strategies served which purpose.

The mitigation strategies are discussed in turn below.

Having a dedicated resource within LAs to drive implementation of the Covenant

Having a dedicated resource – such as an Armed Forces Covenant Officer, Armed Forces Liaison Officer or programme or project coordinator – has been highlighted as essential to driving and facilitating implementation of the Covenant.²⁰⁰

Firstly, several grant-holders noted that having a point of contact with the dedicated time to devote solely to the support landscape, networking and building and maintaining relations was the reason behind the success of this activity strand.²⁰¹ In some cases, these dedicated points of contact were instrumental to sharing best practice, as they held regular meetings and acted as points of dissemination within their respective organisations.²⁰² For example, one project noted that it benefited from a network of Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officers, which significantly enhanced their ability to share good practice.²⁰³ In addition, the grant-holders noted that a dedicated resource was essential in maintaining steady progress;²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Project 16N; Project 17H; Project 16A; Project 16C.

²⁰¹ Project 16R; Project 16O; Case Study E, Interview 1; Case Study E, Interview 2; Case Study D, Interview 2; Project 16A.

²⁰² Project 16G.

²⁰³ Project 17P.

²⁰⁴ Case Study E, Interview 2; Case Study E, Interview 1; Case Study A, Interview 2.

keeping stakeholders accountable;²⁰⁵ reaching out to the Armed Forces Community, raising awareness of the services available to them and building trust and relationships with members of the Community in general;²⁰⁶ finding and organising training for staff and partners;²⁰⁷ and finding different funding opportunities and compiling the related applications.²⁰⁸

Since all of the above activities consume a significant amount of time, grant-holders were certain that the same level of progress would not have been achieved without a dedicated resource, with one project in particular highlighting that they had made more progress in the two years of SDP funding for the employment of this resource than they had in the six years prior.²⁰⁹ Many projects also felt that, once the grant had ended and the dedicated resource had left, delivery of the Covenant had stalled in terms of both progress and efficiency.²¹⁰ One grant-holder highlighted that although it was made clear that the funding was fixed-term, and the project had contributed to embedding sustainable processes within the cluster, new needs and challenges – as well as new areas of potential interest – were constantly appearing; for example, they noted that when the project ended, they were left with a list of recommendations to follow up on and goals to continue to progress towards. However, they claimed that without the dedicated resource, although implementation of the Covenant had not deteriorated, forward-looking work had stalled.²¹¹

In addition to having an employee dedicated to implementing the Covenant, grant-holders from various projects also noted that having a central coordinating resource also helped. For example, one project claimed to have reinvigorated the Armed Forces Covenant Board, which had dissolved in previous years due to insufficient funding. The board connected key decision-makers in the local area and, using the pooled expertise, allowed them to make efficient and informed decisions regarding delivery of the Covenant.²¹² According to two interviewees, one of the key outcomes of the board was the development and adoption of a five-year multi-agency plan that approached implementation of the Covenant in a holistic, systematic and consistent way.²¹³ In addition, another project that set up a Covenant Board agreed that it enabled the effective building of relationships, as well as being instrumental to discussing challenges, sharing best practice and agreeing on future collaborative steps.²¹⁴

Having good relationships with partners

In addition to having a dedicated resource, projects noted that having a regular point of contact for coordinating deliverables allowed challenges to be identified and mitigated early on.²¹⁵ Drawing on partners'

²⁰⁵ Case Study E, Interview 2.

²⁰⁶ Case Study E, Interview 2; Case Study D, Interview 2; Case Study E, Interview 1; Project 16A.

²⁰⁷ Case Study E, Interview 1.

²⁰⁸ Case Study E, Interview 1; Case Study B, Interview 1.

²⁰⁹ Case Study E, Interview 1.

²¹⁰ Project 16L; Case Study E, Interview 1.

²¹¹ Case Study E, Interview 1.

²¹² Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study A, Interview 2; Project 17T.

²¹³ Case Study A, Interview 1.

²¹⁴ Project 17T.

²¹⁵ Case Study B, Interview 3; Case Study B, Interview 2; Project 17T; Project 17D; Project 16E; Project 16A.

experience and knowledge by adopting lessons learned and best practice from them allowed some grant-holders to progress faster, to save time and resources and, in general, to be able to provide the Armed Forces Community with higher quality and more consistent support.²¹⁶ In general, engaging in existing partnerships with as many external providers as possible has also been highlighted as essential to raising awareness and providing support.²¹⁷ Some interviewees noted that such engagement helped them to always be up to date with new organisations that were established, or with any changes in what the support landscape was offering, thus ensuring that referral pathways were kept up to date and of a high quality.²¹⁸

Internal to the LAs, some grant-holders also noted that having support from the senior leadership, including elected officials, enabled them to be more successful in implementing the Covenant.²¹⁹

Having good project planning and management

Good advance planning, including clear project outcomes and milestones, was mentioned as a lesson learned that can help counter difficulties in partnership working or maintaining course.²²⁰ More specifically, setting out division of responsibilities and communicating clearly regarding the requirements, expectations and deadlines falling on each project member helped to standardise the approach, keep the project on course, hold individuals accountable and ultimately meet deadlines.²²¹ In terms of good practice, having frequent meetings and reporting to measure against milestones and outcomes,²²² as well as ensuring that all partners provide equal contributions and have access to equal support,²²³ were also points highlighted by the grant-holders. Because project impact can be difficult to measure in the short-term, it was also mentioned that having a long-term view with a focus on building sustainable infrastructure was essential.²²⁴

Having the flexibility to adapt to new needs and challenges

While good planning was necessary, the flexibility to adapt was also a strategy practised by many grant-holders in mitigating some of the barriers.²²⁵ For example, one project noted that they ended up allocating more time and resources to data collection and mapping of the Armed Forces Community than they had originally anticipated in the project plan, but that they considered this to have been essential in order to

²¹⁶ Project 16O; Project 17T; Project 17M; Project 17F.

²¹⁷ Project 17J.

²¹⁸ Case Study D, Interview 2; Case Study D, Interview 1.

²¹⁹ Case Study B, Interview 2; Case Study C, Interview 2; Case Study C, Interview 3.

²²⁰ Case Study C, Interview 2; Project 16O; Project 17K; Case Study B, Interview 2.

²²¹ Project 16F; Case Study B, Interview 2.

²²² Project 16C; Project 17K.

²²³ Project 16H.

²²⁴ Project 17O.

²²⁵ Project 16E; Project 16A; Project 16E; Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 2.

ensure good understanding of the Community and its needs.²²⁶ Other projects had to adapt to delays in recruitment,²²⁷ or to new areas of need that were discovered during the course of the activities.²²⁸

However, the biggest challenge projects had to adapt to was COVID-19, to ensure that support continued to be available to the Armed Forces Community. Measures included moving both project meetings and most of the support provision online;²²⁹ changing the nature of services from drop-in to appointment-only;²³⁰ and having the Covenant Officer available to do online/telephone meetings and referrals.²³¹ However, while the pandemic changed the nature of service delivery and impacted the type and level of support that could be offered to those in need, it also led to positive adaptations, such as improved digital connectivity between organisations;²³² increased participation in meetings due to the ease of connecting online and not having to travel;²³³ and a better understanding of the value of social media in awareness-raising.²³⁴ In particular, projects noted that going forward, they would continue to maintain a strong presence in the digital world in order to continue to reach those who are younger or less mobile, or who otherwise would not engage in physical events.²³⁵ Furthermore, one project noted that increased need and outreach during the pandemic resulted in the identification of more members of the Armed Forces Community – including groups that were previously hard to reach – who could be offered support in the long-term, as well as to the increased visibility of mental health services, which led to new work in trying to map out a mental health pathway.²³⁶

²²⁶ Project 16A.

²²⁷ Project 16E.

²²⁸ Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 2.

²²⁹ Project 17B; Project 16M; Project 16E; Project 17C.

²³⁰ Project 17N.

²³¹ Case Study B, Interview 2.

²³² Project 16M.

²³³ Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study A, Interview 2.

²³⁴ Case Study B, Interview 2.

²³⁵ Case Study B, Interview 2; Project 17P.

²³⁶ Case Study B, Interview 1; Project 17A.

3.3. EQ3: What is the sustainability of the activities funded under the SDP?

Box 15 EQ3 Summary

- The majority of grant-holders expressed an ability to sustain the activities funded under the SDP grants after the lifetime of the grant, particularly where grants had supported dedicated posts or continued training.
- Specific risks and barriers to sustainability included concerns about resource, some of which were exacerbated by wider contextual factors (i.e. COVID-19).
- Good practices for overcoming these barriers included ensuring that projects had plans for sustainment, including securing additional funding, from the start.

In response to the questionnaire, **29 out of 35 grant-holders said that the activities or services undertaken as a result of the SDP project continued after the grant ended.** Of the 6 who did not respond positively, 3 said they did not know and 3 said no. It is important to note here that some projects were never intended to continue or be embedded beyond the lifetime of the grant although there was an expectation this should be the aim; therefore, a negative answer does not necessarily imply failure of the project. For example, some projects funded a specific post to conduct specific tasks within the duration of the project, or the creation of a resource that could remain in use after the project ended. Supporting this, 4 grant-holders said that the activities undertaken through the project were only temporary, and 1 answered that a question about embedding activities was not applicable to their project. In total, 21 questionnaire respondents said the activities undertaken as part of the SDP project were embedded into mainstream processes. Overall, this provides strong quantitative evidence of projects continuing beyond the lifetime of the grant.

On top of this quantitative evidence, a number of qualitative examples of projects will be sustained past the end of the project. For example, Pilot Veteran Hub is now a charity in its own right that will continue past the grant intervention.²³⁷ It has also been successful in being able to maintain a manager role through specific project work.²³⁸

Some grant-holders were also successful in sustaining positions initially enabled with SDP funding: posts were the number one grant activity that grant-holders reported would be sustained past the lifetime of the grant.²³⁹ The Veterans Community Hub Manager continued to be employed through a grant from Hull City Council.²⁴⁰ Another project sustained Armed Forces Covenant Officer and Armed Forces Liaison Officer posts.²⁴¹ Additional LAs continued to employ their Armed Forces Co-ordinator in order to provide

²³⁷ Project 17K.

²³⁸ Project 17K.

²³⁹ Eleven projects reported sustained funding of posts. In addition to those mentioned here, funded positions included Partnership Managers.

²⁴⁰ Project 17D.

²⁴¹ Project 16N.

support for implementing the Covenant.²⁴² Interviews supported the value of these posts, with one grant-holder describing a sustained Armed Forces Covenant post and the addition of another post in their Council, ensuring a continued drive around the Covenant and continuity of effort.²⁴³ Interviewees also identified sustained posts or dedicated people as a confidence builder for those using the services provided by the grant.²⁴⁴

Outside of these positions, continued training for frontline workers or access to e-learning resources and direct service provision (i.e. hubs, activities, events, etc.) were the most frequently reported activities to be sustained.²⁴⁵ The 10 grant-holders who reported continued direct-service provision described hubs that became charities, were in receipt of their own funding, or were able to find further funding; complex case meetings; or unspecified events and activities for the Armed Forces community.²⁴⁶ Others described their experience of funding Covenant Officers in post through core budgets once the project had ended, having seen the added value from that dedicated post due to the SDP funding.²⁴⁷

Seven projects reported continuing activities such as processes – including asking questions about whether anyone seeking services was a veteran – referral and signposting pathways, information-sharing processes, or implementing regular sub-regional meetings.²⁴⁸ For example, one project reported the significant changes that had been brought about in their ability to provide services, simply by teaching frontline workers to ask if the caller was a veteran.²⁴⁹ An additional seven projects reported adopting or adapting policies and processes to take the Covenant into account.²⁵⁰

Finally, projects reported the sustained ability to:

- Provide access to information and resources (i.e. leaflets, best practice guides, websites);²⁵¹
- Continuation of Armed Forces Covenant boards, partnerships and forums;²⁵² and
- Continued outreach to veterans.²⁵³

²⁴² Project 16G; Project 17K; Project 16M; Project 16O; Project 17P; Project 16G; Project 17D; Project 16X.

²⁴³ Project 16G.

²⁴⁴ Case Study D, Interview 1.

²⁴⁵ Nine respondents reported that each of these activities would be continued or embedded. The nine who reported continued training for frontline workers were as follows: Project 16L; Project 17O; Project 16A; Project 16H; Project 17U; Project 17T; Project 16G; Project 16C.

²⁴⁶ Project 17G; Project 17K; Project 17H; Project 17N; Project 16O; Project 16G; Project 17J; Project 17E.

²⁴⁷ Case Study B, Interview 2.

²⁴⁸ Project 16G; Project 17P; Project 17T; Project 17C; Project 17D; Project 16G; Project 16H.

²⁴⁹ Case Study B, Interview 1.

²⁵⁰ Project 16G; Project 17O; Project 17P; Project 17T; Project 17C; Project 16C.

²⁵¹ Project 16L; Project 17C; Project 16G.

²⁵² Project 17A; Project 17D; Project 16G.

²⁵³ Project 16L.

3.3.1. Are there specific risks and barriers to sustainability relating to the various components comprising the implementation of the Covenant, i.e. the 11 strands of activities?

A number of respondents mentioned the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the sustainability of their projects. At least one said that COVID-19 affected sustainability, causing the project to be put on hold.²⁵⁴ Interviewees also highlighted the difficulties that COVID-19 created for identifying additional sources of funding.²⁵⁵

Some respondents said that activities were only sustainable at certain sites, while others said that only certain services were given permanent funding.²⁵⁶ These respondents said that other services remained at risk because of the lack of funding.²⁵⁷ Some also expressed concern that the potential or perceived lack of sustainability affected the ability to draw in highly qualified individuals, and created doubt for service users.²⁵⁸ This concern about the ability to draw in highly qualified individuals, or the appropriate individuals, was also reflected across other interviews.²⁵⁹ The importance of having ‘the right person for the job’ is potentially a key barrier that requires further research.

Finally, some interviewees identified that despite the benefits of collaboration, different local contexts could impact the transferability of resources and good practices.²⁶⁰

3.3.2. What mitigation strategies, good practices and lessons learned emerge from overcoming risks and barriers?

A number of projects responded that partnership structures or multi-statutory approaches were often used as examples of good practice, or implemented across other LAs.²⁶¹ This is a favourable indication both that the projects themselves saw these approaches as successful, and that it was recognised as a useful practice by others working in the sector. This was supported by information from interviewees, who described other organisations taking the initiative to develop collaborative projects to sustain efforts from the SDP project.²⁶² Another interviewee talked about the positive impact of being able to share learning and good practices across their cluster, which would likely continue going forward.²⁶³ Interviewees also talked about being able to bounce ideas off one another and conduct joint responses within their sub-region following the end of the grant.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁴ Project 17N.

²⁵⁵ Case Study B, Interview 3.

²⁵⁶ Project 17G; Project 16E; Project 17C; Project 17D.

²⁵⁷ Project 17G; Project 16E; Project 17C; Project 17D; Case Study E, Interview 3.

²⁵⁸ Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study E, Interview 2.

²⁵⁹ Case Study E, Interview 1; Case Study E, Interview 2; Case Study C, Interview 3.

²⁶⁰ Case Study D, Interview 1.

²⁶¹ Project 17K; Project 17T; Project 17C; Project 16X.

²⁶² Project 17P.

²⁶³ Case Study B, Interview 3.

²⁶⁴ Case Study B, Interview 2.

The ability of projects to raise their own funds in addition to – or following on from – AFCFT funding was a key differentiator.²⁶⁵ Some grant-holders did this by deliberately funding only start-up costs and equipment, rather than running costs.²⁶⁶ This involved potential Hubs demonstrating their ability to bring in their own funding in order to ensure that they would be sustainable going forward.²⁶⁷

Other interviewees identified the importance of creating sustainable infrastructure to continue delivery of the Covenant.²⁶⁸ One interviewee stated their belief that activities were increasing without external prompting, thanks to the available resources provided as part of the grant funding.²⁶⁹

When asked if their activities had been used as examples of good practice or implemented in other LAs, 22 grant-holders said yes, and another 12 said they did not know. Of those who responded positively, the most common answer was providing resources such as newsletters, e-learning and training packages, sometimes through setting up a hub.²⁷⁰ Another relatively common answer was interaction through surveys and data collection, such as the West Yorkshire Service Pupil Premium resource directory.²⁷¹ Finally, a number of projects responded that their service offerings, which ranged from veteran online 24/7 referral forms to a PTSD cinema night, were seen as practices to emulate.²⁷² Interestingly, only one grant-holder said that an external body had taken their social media strategy as a good practice or sought to implement a similar strategy.²⁷³

²⁶⁵ Case Study D, Interview 2; Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 2.

²⁶⁶ Case Study C, Interview 1.

²⁶⁷ Case Study C, Interview 1.

²⁶⁸ Project 17O.

²⁶⁹ Project 16M; Project 17T.

²⁷⁰ Project 16N; Project 16H; Project 17U; Project 17C; Project 17D; Project 16G; Project 17J; Project 16X; Project 16C.

²⁷¹ Project 17K; Project 16G; Project 16E.

²⁷² Project 16O; Project 17H; Project 17P; Project 17E.

²⁷³ Project 16N.

3.4. EQ4: What learning and good practices can be identified from the administration of the SDP as a funding mechanism and process itself?

Box 16 EQ4 Summary

- While many grant-holders agreed that the Trust had taken a minimalist approach to administration, they disagreed about the efficacy of this approach.
- Respondents also had mixed views about the efficacy of the requirement to form clusters, with only 13 out of 35 saying they would use clusters for future grant funding, while 18 out of 35 said they would not.

Approach taken by the Trust

The questionnaire and interview respondents provided mixed feedback regarding the approach and processes implemented by the AFCFT. While most agreed that the Trust had taken a relatively minimalist approach to administering the grants, not all agreed that this approach was particularly effective, with some appreciating the lack of interference, while others wished for more guidance.

Some respondents appreciated what they perceived as a ‘light-touch’ approach from the Trust.²⁷⁴ One respondent called interactions with the Trust and necessary administration ‘painless’.²⁷⁵ Others described the reporting requirements as simple and straightforward.²⁷⁶

However, other organisations wanted more support from the Trust in fulfilling their intended tasks. Some respondents suggested that it would have been helpful for the Trust to set out clear expectations and aims, for example by creating discrete Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and evaluation criteria, or by requesting concrete deliverables.²⁷⁷ This, they felt, would better assist them in understanding how to align their goals with those of the Trust.²⁷⁸ Other respondents felt that the Trust should have initiated more regular contact to provide feedback, or made it easier for grant-holders to get in touch on an ad-hoc basis.²⁷⁹ Finally, some respondents thought the Trust should have provided more support for project-sustainability planning, including communicating about additional funding streams or giving more support with sustainability planning, including funding streams.²⁸⁰ Taken together, these observations suggest that the Trust’s light-touch approach may be more appropriate for some organisations than others, and appropriate alterations to grant administration might help grant-holders to better achieve the Trust’s goals.

A few respondents provided critical feedback on specific processes. One respondent felt that the financial forms for claiming the grants were ineffective and time-consuming, as was the process for the administration

²⁷⁴ Project 16G.

²⁷⁵ Project 16A.

²⁷⁶ Case Study B, Interview 1; Case Study E, Interview 3.

²⁷⁷ Project 17G; Case Study C, Interview 2; Case Study C, Interview 1; Project 16E.

²⁷⁸ Project 16E.

²⁷⁹ Case Study D, Interview 1; Project 16M.

²⁸⁰ Project 17T; Project 16G; Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study B, Interview 3; Case Study B, Interview 1.

of funds, and that both could have been done more efficiently.²⁸¹ It is worth noting that issues surrounding forms for claiming the grant payment could be due to MOD processes predating the formation of the Trust, as the Trust currently operates an automated grant database system with no form requirements. Another described reporting forms as difficult to understand and complete.²⁸² Finally, others felt that processes privileged the lead LAs in each cluster, making it difficult for others to interact with the Trust or MOD.²⁸³ It was felt by some LAs that this then created disadvantages for other cluster members, such as access to further funding.²⁸⁴ The creation of a lead grant-holder was intended to simplify the administration of the grants and the interaction with the Trust and in general has been a success; however, it is possible that this process may need to be better communicated by the Trust to LAs in the future. While each of these observations represents an individual data point, taken together they may suggest a need for the Trust to revisit or refine some of its processes.

More broadly, one respondent suggested that the Trust may benefit from the local knowledge and experience of LAs and suggested increasing coordination with them prior to funding projects in their area.²⁸⁵ They felt that the LAs had a better understanding of the other organisations operating nearby and their capacities, as well as what the needs of the Armed Forces community were in that area.²⁸⁶ Another respondent suggested that the Trust try to avoid geographic overlap, which could also be helped by more proactive engagement with LAs prior to awarding grants.²⁸⁷

Use of clusters

Questionnaire respondents and interviewees also gave a mixed response regarding the efficacy of requiring clusters. Ultimately, 13 out of 35 respondents said they would recommend the use of clusters in future grant funding, while 18 out of 35 said they would not. A summary list of pros and cons is included below in Table 13. However, there were also a few discrete aspects of cluster funding that respondents identified in the survey and case studies as key possible targets for making clusters more effective.

²⁸¹ Project 17T; Case Study B, Interview 3.

²⁸² Project 16R.

²⁸³ Project 16G.

²⁸⁴ Project 16G.

²⁸⁵ Project 17D.

²⁸⁶ Project 17D.

²⁸⁷ Project 16R.

Table 13 Potential and perceived benefits and disadvantages of using clusters

Potential and perceived benefits of using clusters	Potential and perceived disadvantages of using clusters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraged collaboration • Improved consistency • Increased learning from partners • Increased networks of relevant stakeholders • Maximised outcomes by enabling the creation of region-wide products, thus achieving value for money through economies of scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some clusters were perceived to be big and too different – ‘one size does not fit all’²⁸⁸ • LAs may only cluster to access the funding • Non-lead LAs had trouble communicating with the Trust, potentially leading to missed opportunities and good work going unrecognised • Administrative burdens in terms of funding allocation and reporting

Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from the document review, questionnaire and case study interviews.

Respondents who felt positively about clusters pointed out that they are a great way to maximise the impact of Trust grants by creating economies of scale.²⁸⁹ Others felt that their primary value was an opportunity to identify and share good practices.²⁹⁰ Some respondents pointed out the added advantage of creating more consistent delivery of the Covenant across a broader geographical area.²⁹¹ Those who felt positively about clusters seemed to think the Trust’s requirement would create more joint work in the future: one respondent felt it had already brought LAs closer together on other projects, while another said they hoped to find future opportunities for collaboration given its value.²⁹² Figure 3.5 provides an overview of the extent to which the cluster approach helped to improve partnership working between relevant stakeholders. As can be noticed, 22 out of the 35 grant-holders that filled in the questionnaire claimed that the clusters helped improve collaboration between LAs within the cluster ‘to a great extent’, suggesting that this was an area where the clusters were particularly effective. In addition, 14 grant-holders claimed the clusters helped improve collaboration between LAs and the third sector ‘to a great extent’. The clusters appeared to be less effective in improving partnership working between LAs not part of the same cluster, and between LAs and the private sector, with only seven and four grant-holders (respectively) claiming that the clusters improved these relationships ‘to a great extent’.

²⁸⁸ It should be noted that the LAs themselves were able to define the size and make-up of the clusters, as well as who they partnered with. Lessons learned from this programme around potential success factors of clusters could enable some of them to make better informed decisions on this matter in the future.

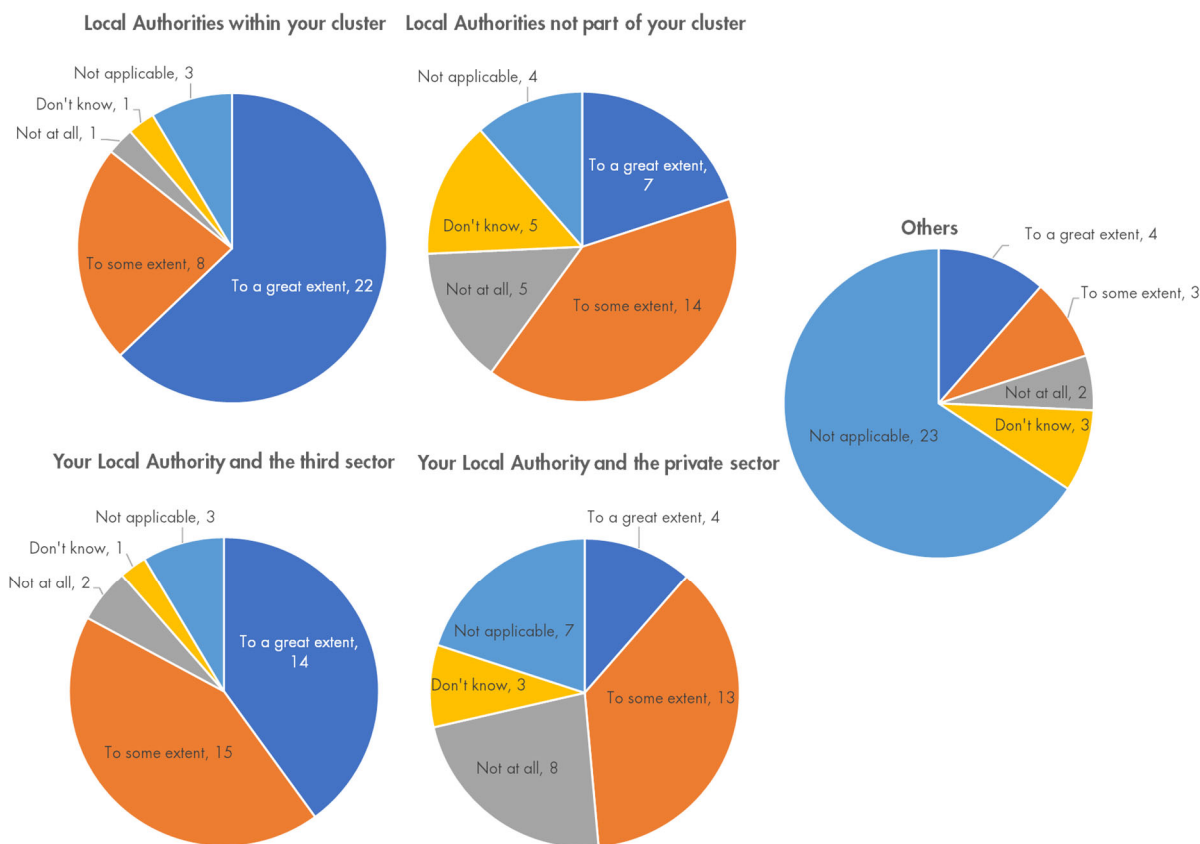
²⁸⁹ Project 16L; Project 16H.

²⁹⁰ Project 16O; Project 17D; Project 16G; Case Study B, Interview 3; Case Study E, Interview 2.

²⁹¹ Project 16N; Project 17D.

²⁹² Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study E, Interview 1.

Figure 3.5 Overview of the extent to which the cluster approach led to improved partnership working between stakeholders



Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from the 35 grant-holders (representing 27 grants) that filled in the questionnaire. 'Other' refers to other public sectors (i.e. health, defence, police, crime commission, etc.), statutory sector partners and non-partners. The numbers represent the number of grant-holders.

Regarding mechanics of the clusters, **several respondents felt that clusters were at the right size and level to be effective. However, they cautioned that clusters should not have been any bigger.**²⁹³ This seemed to be the case in both the number of participants and the geographical spread: in some areas, geographical distance made it difficult for cluster members to effectively coordinate.²⁹⁴ This points to objective characteristics that the Trust can look for in determining where clusters may or may not be most effective.

Some respondents, however, pointed to specific drawbacks of the cluster approach. At least one respondent felt that it simply created an added administrative burden without an accompanying benefit.²⁹⁵ Others pointed to the difficulty that non-lead LAs had in communicating with the Trust, which led to feelings of disenfranchisement and missed opportunities for funding.²⁹⁶

In addition to specific mechanical issues around administration of the clusters, **other responses suggested that the individual parties involved, as well as the context within which they formed the clusters, had a**

²⁹³ Case Study B, Interview 3; Project 17P; Case Study A, Interview 1.

²⁹⁴ Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 1.

²⁹⁵ Project 17K.

²⁹⁶ Project 16G.

detrimental impact on success.²⁹⁷ In some cases this problem was about logistics. For example, one respondent pointed specifically to the difficulty in sharing services across councils in London, given differing needs and contexts across different councils.²⁹⁸ Another pointed to the difficulties created by large geographic distance in facilitating equal access to resource.²⁹⁹

Some respondents shared practices or approaches to cluster work that they had found particularly beneficial. Several respondents suggested that pre-existing relationships between cluster members, as opposed to relationships formed strictly for the purpose of achieving Trust funding, were a key differentiator for success.³⁰⁰ Others pointed to the importance of ensuring that all members of the cluster shared priorities in the delivery of the grant aims and the Covenant.³⁰¹ Finally, respondents from one project said that, in their experience, clarifying expectations, roles and responsibilities for all parties involved was a significant contributor to successful working in clusters.³⁰² The study team took these suggestions into account when forming their recommendations, which are presented in the next chapter.

The Covenant-focused media and communications training and advice

Among the projects that received the Covenant-focused media and communications training and advice offered by the Trust, **there were mixed views with regard to its usefulness and applicability to the various communications activities undertaken by the projects.**

²⁹⁷ Project 17C, Project 16A; Case Study C, Interview 1.

²⁹⁸ Project 17U.

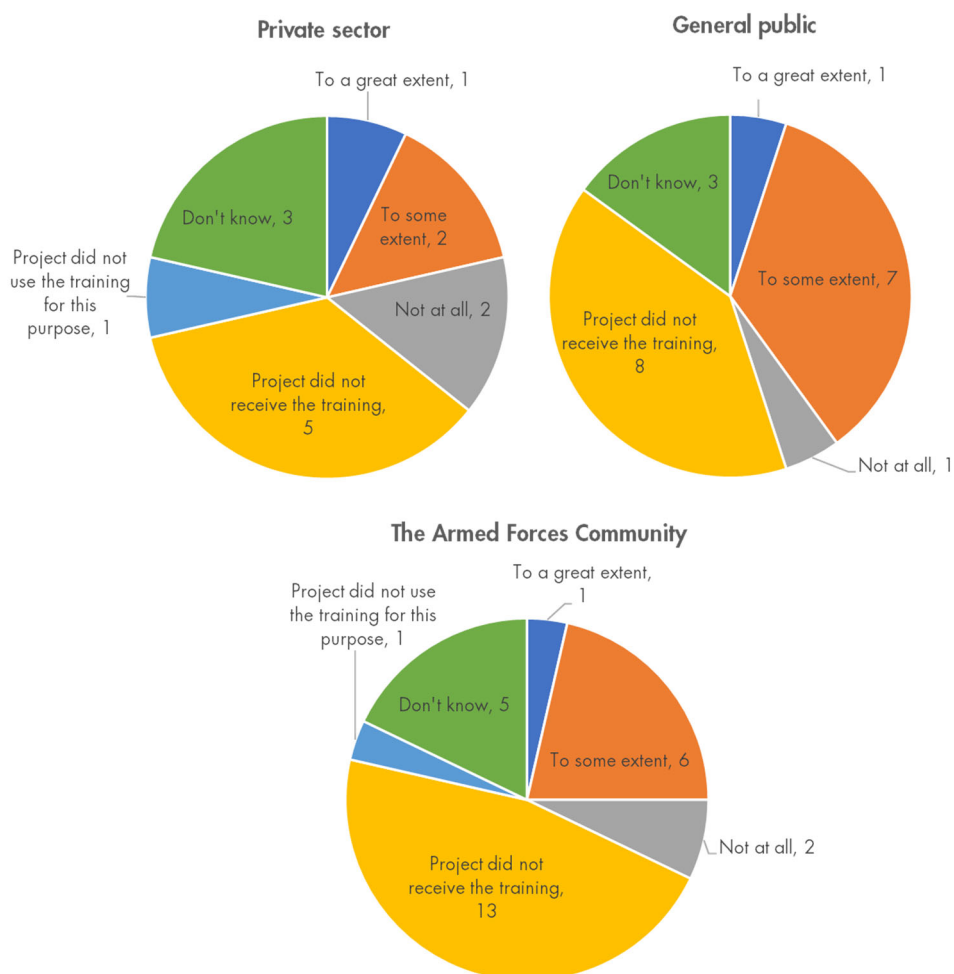
²⁹⁹ Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 1.

³⁰⁰ Case Study C, Interview 2; Case Study B, Interview 4; Case Study E, Interview 1.

³⁰¹ Case Study B, Interview 2.

³⁰² Case Study B, Interview 2.

Figure 3.6 Overview of the Covenant-focused communications and media training



Source: RAND Europe analysis. Data from the 35 grant-holders (representing 27 projects) that filled in the questionnaire. The total number of projects in each graph represents the total number of projects that undertook the three relevant activity strands: raising awareness of the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (14); raising awareness of the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (20); and raising awareness of the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them (28).

As can be seen in Figure 3.6, the extent to which grant-holders found this training useful was limited. Only one grant-holder in each of the activity strands found this training to have been useful ‘to a great extent’. This reflects additional negative feedback outlined in the questionnaire and in the interviews. For example, one of the grant-holders noted that the training was too focused on video communication and did not offer any useful advice on how to capture an audience.³⁰³ Another grant-holder claimed the training was superficial, and that it did not reflect the fact that most LAs were already relatively good at communication.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Project 16N.

³⁰⁴ Case Study B, Interview 1.

The grant-holders that did find the training useful highlighted in particular the advice on how to create engaging content through video (this was the most mentioned benefit),³⁰⁵ how to increase engagement on social media,³⁰⁶ how to improve interviewing techniques, and how to create a communications plan.³⁰⁷

3.5. Conclusion

Across all four EQs, several key themes emerged from the survey responses and case studies that can help to indicate key recommendations and point to areas for future research. **Overall, many of the grant-holders indicated that funding from the Trust had a positive impact**, with 28 out of 35 grant-holders that filled in the questionnaire indicating it had helped ‘to a great extent’. This impact was both in terms of achieving specific objectives or outputs, such as establishing or improving support services and developing training materials, as well as in providing initial stimulus for implementing the Covenant through raising awareness or the creation of dedicated posts. **The majority of grant-holders also believed they would be able to sustain the activities funded under the SDP grants, indicating the potential for continued impact.**

The **most commonly reported activity strand in terms of number of projects undertaken was the raising of public awareness among public authorities and frontline services.** Grant-holders that filled in the questionnaire perceived these to be among the top three most successful activity strands in their survey responses. Other commonly reported activity strands included raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about available resources, and improving coordination and best practice among relevant stakeholders. Grant-holders also identified that improving coordination and best practice was also found to be one of the most successful activity strands. This overlap between commonly reported and successful activity strands further supports the findings of the overall positive impact of SDP grants.

One **key practice that many projects found to be successful, both for project execution as well as implementation of the Covenant, was the use of grant funds to establish dedicated posts.** This practice emerged as one of four mitigation strategies for overcoming barriers to project implementation. Some grant-holders noted that having someone with prior knowledge of the Armed Forces Community in this post was important. However, others thought having a dedicated post was most helpful in establishing a clear and consistent point of contact within organisations, which several grant-holders felt had real benefits for supporting the implementation of the Covenant.³⁰⁸ This point is further emphasised by the fact that many grant-holders expressed the need to form good relationships with other stakeholders.

However, not all activities were perceived as equally successful. **One of the activity strands perceived to be least successful in questionnaire responses was raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and Armed Forces Community.** Interestingly, this was also one of the least commonly reported activity strands. However, as mentioned elsewhere, it should be noted that private sector engagement was not part of the programme guidance, which means it may have been not been a priority to the grant-holders.

³⁰⁵ Project 16L.

³⁰⁶ Project 16G.

³⁰⁷ Project 16G.

³⁰⁸ RAND Europe analysis. 10 grant-holders responded that this was a main benefit that emerged from the activity strand dedicated to providing tailored support to the Armed Forces Community.

Other less successful activity strands included improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community, and raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. These findings point to areas where further work may be needed to better understand and apply successful methods and best practices. In less commonly reported activity strands, such as raising private-sector awareness, some of this success may simply come from increasing the number of opportunities for the private sector to become more engaged in delivery of the Covenant.

Grant-holders perceived a number of common barriers to achieving project aims. Interestingly, many of these perceived barriers – such as COVID-19, a general lack of resource and difficulties working with partners – are not specific to work with the Armed Forces Community. This suggests that good practices developed in execution of the SDP grants – such as good project planning and management, flexibility to adapt to new needs and challenges and early incorporation of sustainment planning – can be applied across other sectors. In addition, it means there are opportunities to draw best practices and lessons learned from efforts to deal with other populations. This could expand the number of resources that may be available to those trying to support the Trust in future projects.

One commonly perceived barrier that specifically related to the Armed Forces Community involved the difficulty in obtaining sufficient data on the needs of the Armed Forces Community.³⁰⁹ This is particularly interesting given that understanding the needs of the population was an area where a majority of grant-holders expended energy.³¹⁰ Many respondents were hopeful that the March 2021 census might help in this area. However, this finding also points to data collection as a key area for identifying and sharing best practices.

The use of clusters was met with mixed feedback from grant-holders. **More grant-holders said they would not use clusters for future grant funding than those who felt that they would.**³¹¹ Grant-holders felt that working in clusters added an unnecessary administrative burden, or that conflicting priorities and internal mechanisms created additional difficulty in achieving the Trust's aims. Some also felt that non-lead LAs were unable to communicate effectively with the Trust, leading to missed funding opportunities or a lack of recognition. There were concerns that some LAs had only clustered to access the funding, rather than out of a desire to work as part of a team.

However, **many unintended benefits were also reported to have emerged from working in clusters**, such as increased collaboration and consistency in delivery of the Covenant, expansion of stakeholder networks, and an enhanced ability to learn from others. Grant-holders identified a number of objective contributors to cluster success, such as pre-existing relationships and favourable geographic profiles that could be used to screen future clusters. Grant-holders also identified best practices, such as clearly established roles and responsibilities and ensuring shared priorities, that they felt helped to enhance the ability to work in

³⁰⁹ Case Study A, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 1; Case Study D, Interview 1; Case Study C, Interview 2; Project 16H; RAND Europe analysis. 23 out of 27 grants felt that the lack of reliable data was a barrier to implementing the Covenant at the local level.

³¹⁰ RAND Europe analysis. 25 out of 27 respondents to the survey identified this as an area where they expended effort.

³¹¹ RAND Europe analysis. 13 out of 35 said they would use clusters for future grant funding, while 18 out of 35 said they would not.

clusters.³¹² Given that the majority of grant-holders would not use clusters for future work, this indicates a possible need for more flexible structures that allow applicants to decide whether or not they want to use clusters. Additionally, there may be ways that the Trust can implement processes to further support working in clusters, such as sharing of best practices.

The Trust's approach to administering grants was also met with mixed feedback from grant-holders. While grant-holders generally agreed that the Trust had a relatively light-touch involvement, they disagreed as to whether this was the most effective approach. Some grant-holders expressed a desire for more support or clearer expectations for fulfilling their project aims.³¹³ This indicates the importance of identifying and distributing guidance, including best practices, to grant-holders. The repository currently being developed by Si may therefore be a valuable resource to support future grant-holders.

The study team relied on these findings in formulating an internal workshop, as well as a workshop with Si. The recommendations presented in Chapter 4 represent the outcome of these workshops.

³¹² Case Study B, Interview 2.

³¹³ Case Study C, Interview 2; Case Study C, Interview 1; Project 16E; Project 17G.

4. Recommendations and next steps

Based on the findings from the survey and case studies, as well as the expert workshop with Si, the project team identified a number of key recommendations for the Trust to consider in enhancing its ability to enable and empower grant-holders to improve delivery of the Covenant. While these recommendations apply primarily to the Trust, many also have implications at the level of grant-holders and individual projects. It is important to note that, in addition to informing the Trust's future actions, many of these recommendations also have implications for the 'repository' being developed by Si. Table 14 below identifies these high-level recommendations, against the relevant key finding from which they were generated, namely the associated EQ(s).

Table 14 Recommendations

Recommendation	Relevant EQ(s)
LAs may benefit from ensuring that they have the right individuals in place, ideally in dedicated posts, to improve the delivery of the Covenant	Importance of dedicated posts (EQ2)
LAs may benefit from further exploring possible barriers to private-sector implementation of the Covenant to support delivery of the Covenant in this sector	Limited success raising awareness among the private sector (EQ1)
The Trust and LAs may benefit from identifying best practices for collecting data and sharing on the nature and needs of the Armed Forces Community.	Importance of data (EQ1); Difficulty capturing data (EQ2)
The Trust and LAs may benefit from continuing to work together to identify and proactively distribute good or promising practices to help support the delivery of the Covenant. Use of the repository being developed alongside the AFCFT by Si will provide an important platform to help enable this.	Mitigation strategies identified (EQ2); Importance of sharing lessons learned (EQ3); Desire for further support (EQ4)
In future funding programmes, the Trust may benefit from providing additional guidance and support, including clear explanation of the Trust's aims, sharing of good practices and continuing communication	Mixed response to Trust administration (EQ4)

<p>The Trust may benefit from continuing to offer grant applicants the option of clustering, while also providing applicants with additional guidance on how to best form and utilise their clusters</p>	<p>Good relationships as a mitigation strategy (EQ2); Value of partnerships (EQ3); Mixed response to clusters (EQ4)</p>
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Source: RAND Europe Analysis.

Subsequent sections of this chapter explore each of these recommendations in more detail, before discussing next steps in the project.

4.1. Recommendations

4.1.1. Local Authorities may benefit from ensuring that they have the right individuals in place, ideally in dedicated posts, to improve the delivery of the Covenant

The importance of having the right individuals working to improve delivery of the Covenant came across strongly from many interviewees and questionnaire respondents. The exact characteristics of these individuals varied, from specific energy, expertise, or simply pre-existing familiarity with the Armed Forces Community. **LA's may benefit from ensuring that, where possible, they have the right individuals in dedicated posts to act as 'champions'** for the delivery of the Covenant, for example by guiding grant-holders to prioritise the filling of these dedicated posts as part of the projects. This will help to encourage the placement of what one grant-holder called 'the right person in the right place' to achieve the Trust's aims.

Creating dedicated posts may not always be possible. The Trust could therefore work with grant-holders to identify and implement resource-efficient processes to enable and empower individuals in existing roles to better support the Armed Forces Covenant. Cross-training opportunities, identifying efficiencies and natural synergies within other roles, or upskilling of current employees may be used to overcome issues around lack of resources, and encourage individuals to take on responsibility for delivery of the Covenant without supplementary funding. However, it should be noted that this may not be as effective as creating dedicated posts: some respondents felt that only individuals with a dedicated responsibility for the Covenant were able to be particularly helpful.

4.1.2. Local Authorities may benefit from further exploring barriers to private-sector implementation of the Covenant to support delivery of the Covenant in that sector

Few grant-holders felt they were able to make an impact on the private sector's awareness of the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community. The study team felt that this low success rate indicated the possible existence of barriers unique to work with that sector, which grant-holders may have been ill-equipped to overcome. **Local Authorities may therefore benefit from exploring these barriers in order to better support delivery of the Covenant in this area.**

It should be noted that this was also an activity strand that not many grant-holders undertook: only 15 grant-holders said they were working to raise awareness among the private sector. However, of those 15, only 5 felt that the grant had contributed to raising awareness among the private sector, and 4 felt the grant had helped to improve communications with the private sector. It is possible that this perceived low success

rate might discourage other groups from working in this area, without further support structures or resources in place. As previously mentioned, this may have been due to the fact that engaging with the private sector was not part of the programme guidance, so it is possible that LAs did not prioritise this activity strand.

4.1.3. The Trust and Local Authorities may benefit from identifying best practices for collecting data about the nature and needs of the Armed Forces Community

Data collection on the nature and needs of the Armed Forces Community was perceived as an important enabler for projects. Given the importance of data collection in order to understand the needs of the target population, and the need to continually collect this information in order to ensure that the dataset is up to date, the Trust may benefit from considering **ways in which they might enable grant-holders to collect this data, including providing guidance for how to effectively do so**. This is particularly important given that it is an area in which multiple LAs expended energy but did not feel they had been successful. This guidance could come from existing good or successful practices, as demonstrated by the grant-holders who successfully conducted data collection. **To facilitate the collection of data, the Trust may want to identify and share data-collection methods that have worked for grant-holders in the past**, for example through the use of the repository developed in collaboration with Si. This could also help to standardise findings and enable sharing of data – and identification of common interests – across different grant-holders.

In addition, LAs may benefit from existing resources, such as the Map of Need. Developed with funding from the AFCFT, this resource uses data from multiple sources (public sources, statistics, health data, data from Armed Forces charities) to map out the welfare needs of veterans and their families across the UK.³¹⁴ Given that this resource is based on data sharing partnerships, LAs could both contribute to and benefit from it. The Trust and LAs may also benefit from collaborating on the continued development of this resource into a format that is most accessible and beneficial to the users. In the same sense, LAs may also benefit from utilising the Veterans Gateway, which provides an accurate and verified picture of the support landscape.³¹⁵ Although the extent to which grant-holders already use these resources is unclear, being outside the main scope of this evaluation, the Trust may benefit from promoting these resources to LAs, as well as from providing information about them to grantees of future funding programmes. The Trust and Local Authorities may benefit from continuing to work together to identify and proactively distribute good or promising practices to help support the delivery of the Covenant

Continuing to identify and disseminate lessons learned or best practices, particularly those identified in the sections above, may help to ensure that grant-holders make the most efficient and effective use of Trust funds and improve the delivery of the Covenant. This will be supported through the generation of the Si ‘repository’. The Trust could ensure that, when available, this ‘repository’ is proactively distributed to grant-holders.

The Trust could also help grant-holders to identify best practices and improve delivery of the Covenant. It could do this through the **design and implementation of a strategic monitoring and learning framework**.

³¹⁴ Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (2021c).

³¹⁵ See Veterans’ Gateway (2021).

This framework could include further ways for identifying and sharing lessons learned and best practices that could then feed into future iterations of the toolkit. Such a framework could also help to standardise findings in order to facilitate the identification of overlapping practices, as well as facilitate their integration into the existing framework.

Finally, given the generic nature of many of the barriers and mitigation methods identified under EQ2, the **Trust could encourage its grant-holders to look to other sectors for best practices.** Other sectors that work with specific cohorts or populations may provide particularly relevant feedback. There may also be other organisations within the local contexts of grant-holders who work with different communities but have encountered similar challenges working with local partners or LAs. Drawing on a wide variety of lessons may help grant-holders, as well as the Trust itself, to optimise their performance.

4.1.4. As part of future funding programmes, the Trust may benefit from providing additional support to grant-holders, including a clear explanation of the Trust's aims, sharing of good practices and continuing communication

While light-touch administration seemed to be helpful to many projects, there are a number of small steps the Trust could take to support grant-holders who wanted more guidance. Given that many grant-holders were satisfied with their interactions with the Trust, including a few projects who specifically cited the benefit of the Trust's 'light-touch' procedures, the Trust's current processes and procedures seem to be fit for purpose. However, **grant-holders identified additional resources that the Trust could provide, such as sharing of good practices,** which might enhance the Trust's ability to support grant-holders who desired more guidance. There may also be **aspects the Trust can request or screen for in the application process** to encourage grant-holders to put good practices in place. Finally, the Trust could **ensure that they maintain clear and open communication channels with grant-holders** and maintain their availability to grant-holders' outreach.

Although the Trust did not mandate activities or outcomes, allowing grant-holders to choose activities, outcomes, and priorities according to their specific local context and the information from their Covenant Partnerships, this evaluation revealed that some grant-holders felt they would have needed more guidance from the Trust. To help organisations who felt that they lacked information on how to focus their efforts, and to ensure that projects are aligned with the goals of the Trust, the Trust may want to **provide additional, specific information to applicants about the Trust's aims and goals.** This could include suggestions for KPIs, evaluation criteria or concrete deliverables that grant-holders could incorporate in their own monitoring. The Trust could either provide these goals at the outset of projects or could request that prospective grantees set out their own KPIs as part of the application process. These could then be evaluated and adjusted if needed upon grant award, and monitored throughout the project to ensure ongoing alignment.

Given that some grant-holders expressed the need for additional guidance on how to execute their projects, it may help to **incorporate more discussion regarding the inclusion of quality assurance (QA) processes** in administration of the grants. This would signal the Trust's interest in this area, whilst allowing them to discern which applicants may or may not require more frequent interaction. Similar to information about aims and goals, the Trust could either specify required QA processes that grant-holders must implement, or request that prospective grantees propose their own processes in the application process. In addition, this

would help ensure that the products developed by grantees with Trust funding are quality assured, allowing them to be easily integrated in the repository.

Because of the importance of organisations' ability to secure external funding or create sustainment plans to generate longer term impact, as reflected in the interviews and questionnaires, the **Trust could request that applicants include additional information on pre-existing sustainment plans, or proposals for gaining their own funding.** They could then, if desired, give preference to applicants who have previously demonstrated the ability to earn their own funds. This could also be a mechanism for identifying projects that may require further support later on in the grant lifecycle.

The Trust may want to consider steps to **ensure that grant-holders feel able and empowered to contact them if needed.** Some LAs, particularly those who did not lead their clusters, felt that it was difficult to engage the Trust. While intensive ongoing engagement does not seem to be necessary based on the feedback, enabling grant-holders to contact the Trust with questions or concerns could not only help identify problems early on, but may also help grant-holders to feel supported and engaged.

Finally, the Trust may want to **institute more feedback processes** to ensure that project administration continues to be fit for purpose. This is particularly important given the changing legal environment regarding the Covenant, and the accompanying potential for new or changing requirements. This could include future questionnaires at the end of projects, or a process for inciting feedback from grant-holders. This may help to identify easy fixes or necessary adjustments to optimise grant-holders' ability to deliver projects that further the Trust's aims.

4.1.5. As part of future funding programmes, the Trust may benefit from continuing to offer grant applicants the option of clustering, while also providing applicants with additional guidance on how to best form and utilise their clusters

For many grant-holders, clustering seemed to not only offer economic benefits but also had significant auxiliary benefits. The Trust may therefore want to **continue the use of clustering in future projects.** However, the majority of respondents said that given the choice, they would be unlikely to use clustering again, indicating significant challenges with the model. The Trust could therefore provide additional resources for applicants and grant-holders to support their use of clustering and ensure that clear communication channels are maintained in order to identify and mitigate any issues that may emerge.

Given the complaints of some grant participants, the Trust may want to **provide applicants with the option to either apply as part of a cluster** or as an individual organisation. This could provide organisations with more flexibility and prevent them from clustering simply for the sake of receiving a grant, which some respondents saw as problematic.

The Trust could also **look for clusters that have traits that emerged as enablers of successful partnerships,** such as a pre-existing relationship between organisations or a favourable geographic profile. The Trust could highlight these practices as mitigation methods for prospective and current grant-holders, for example through a publicly available guide. This information could also be used in the screening process for applications to determine the applicants most likely to succeed. Grant-holders may also want to be supported in considering these traits as they seek to form clusters.

Given some of the themes that emerged about how successful clusters operated, such as clearly defining roles and responsibilities, the Trust **may benefit from using the findings from this evaluation to further inform existing guidance on the factors that influence the success of clusters.** In addition, the Trust may want to **consider how it publicises and shares guidance during the application stage or after grants have been awarded about how clusters should think about forming and operating.** If LAs were more widely aware of or encouraged to access this guidance, it could help encourage further and more effective cluster working in the future. Organisations could draw on best practices to optimise their experience, for example through use of the Si toolkit.

4.2. Next steps

As a next step, the study team will conduct a formative evaluation of the new SDP Sustaining Delivery programme to further gain insight into the Trust's practices.³¹⁶ That project will commence in the Autumn of 2021 and the report is currently scheduled for completion in March 2022, subject to the programme's revised timelines, and will be discussed further at the kick-off meeting scheduled for August 2021. That report will also be based on a logic model and evaluative framework and, similar to the summative evaluation of the SDP, will include both a questionnaire and case study interviews. The new programme, as the name suggests, will look at how progress made during the SDP can be made more sustainable through the provision of additional funding. The report will also consider how situations may have changed due to the recent initiative to put the Covenant on a statutory footing, with the 'Armed Forces Bill' that is currently progressing through parliament.³¹⁷ It will also examine how the recommendations above may or may not be incorporated into the SDP Sustaining Delivery programme, and how that inclusion might be enabled.

In parallel, RAND Europe's study team partner, Si, is compiling a 'repository' of best practices and recommendations from the various projects. The aim is to provide future grantees with the information resources they require to better execute their aims, further the goals of the Trust and improve delivery of the Covenant throughout the country. As noted in several of these recommendations, the findings from the SDP evaluation only emphasise the potential positive impact of the repository.

It is important to note that the lessons learned discussed in several of these recommendations will only be able to improve delivery of the Covenant if they are fully incorporated and implemented, both by the Trust and future grant-holders. The Si repository is one potential method for doing so; however, in the upcoming evaluation of the EDP continuation, the study team will continue to assess possible mechanisms and processes for acting on lessons learned.

³¹⁶ This new programme is intended to replace the original Enhancing Delivery Programme (EDP).

³¹⁷ UK Parliament (2021).

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Annex A. Evaluation approach

This annex sets out the SDP logic model, explains how the activity strands were formed, contains the evaluation framework and describes the case study selection.

A.1. Logic model and activity strands

As there was no Programme logic model in place, the study team created the SDP's logic model at the start of the evaluation, in order to employ a logic-model-based approach to conduct the evaluation. The logic model was shaped through the following steps:

- **Document review:** The study team undertook a review of all secondary sources provided by the Trust, the LAs and relevant third parties (e.g. Shared Intelligence, the Ministry of Defence Covenant team) relating to the SDP. This included background documentation around the Programme, the original grant applications and assessments, official grant quarterly and end-of-grant reports, and completed evaluations of the grants.
- **Exploratory interviews:** As part of shaping the understanding of the SDP and the grants funded through this Programme, the study team conducted three exploratory interviews with four stakeholders at the Trust, the LGA and the MOD Covenant Team. These interviews enabled the study team to gain a further in-depth understanding as to how and why the SDP was set up, as well as external perspectives in terms of the grants and outcomes.

Based on this data, the study team was able to determine the background, input, activities, outputs and outcomes of the Programme. In particular, the study team derived the activity strands through internal analysis of the grant data and several internal workshops. This led to the creation of 12 activity strands defining 'local implementation of the Covenant.' The logic model, including the 12 activity strands, were presented to the Trust for refinement and validation. During this stage, one activity strand, 'Improving employment outcomes for the Armed Forces Community', was removed, as the Trust noted this was out of scope for the Programme. This led to a finalised list of activities.

The SDP logic model is provided in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 SDP logic model

Background	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<p>A study, funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, was conducted in 2016 to understand how the Armed Forces Covenant is being delivered by Local Authorities (LAs) across the UK (aside from Northern Ireland) and how delivery could be improved. This was the first time an overall picture emerged regarding the implementation of the Covenant at the local level, highlighting gaps and challenges.</p> <p>The Trust saw the need for funding to overcome these gaps and challenges, and was well-positioned to do so given its independent nature</p>	<p>The SDP funding was allocated in two waves, for projects lasting between one and two years.</p> <p>In Phase I, the Trust allocated a total of £3,493,296 across 23 grants, which includes 107 LAs in total (see details Section 2.2.1).</p> <p>In Phase II, the Trust allocated a total of £2,768,055 across 20 grants, which includes 80 LAs in total (see details in Section 2.2.2).</p> <p>Additional option for grantees under Phase II to benefit from support regarding Covenant focused media and communications training and advice.</p> <p>Altogether, £6,261,351 in funding was provided through the SDP.</p>	<p>Specific activities were not mandated by the Trust. A range of activities were identified as being undertaken by LAs and clustered below by the study team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1) Undertaking mapping and needs assessments of the local Armed Forces Communities. • (2) Producing and delivering training and e-learning for staff in public authorities and frontline services. • (3) Updating LA processes, policies and procedures to take into account the Covenant. • (4) Creating drop-in information centres or hubs. • (5) Establishing communication strategies aimed at the Armed Forces Community. • (6) Establishing communication strategies aimed at the private sector to encourage organisations to sign up to the Covenant. • (7) Setting up regular conferences, events and networks including LAs, charities, organisations, Armed Forces and Veteran Champions. 	<p>(1) Better understanding of the target population.</p> <p>(2) Increased awareness of the Covenant and of the Armed Forces Community among public authorities and frontline services.</p> <p>(6) Increased awareness of the Covenant and of the Armed Forces Community among the private sector.</p> <p>(13) Increased awareness of the Covenant and of the Armed Forces Community among the general public.</p> <p>(2, 9) Increased awareness of the support available for the Armed Forces Community among public authorities and frontline services.</p> <p>(4, 5, 9) Increased awareness among the Armed Forces Community of the support available.</p> <p>(7) Improved coordination and best-practice sharing between relevant local stakeholders.</p>	<p>The Covenant is a voluntary pledge, so the Trust is not able to mandate outcomes. However, the Programme aimed to achieve a certain set of outcomes.</p> <p>Shorter term outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the implementation of the Covenant across all LAs in England, Wales and Scotland. • Increase the sign-up to the Covenant. • Improve consistency of the services available at the LA/cluster level and avoid duplication of services. <p>Longer term outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed delivery of the Covenant within mainstream processes. • Change the culture and mindset about the Covenant and Armed Forces Community. • Improve the integration of the Armed Forces Community within the

<p>of the funding source.</p>	<p>Programme staff include the Strategic Grants Manager and the Grants Director.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (8) Setting up a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant point of contact. • (9) Developing resources for signposting and referrals. • (10) Setting up and facilitating specialised support addressing the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community (e.g. GPs asking the question, educational support for Service children). • (11) Engaging with the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and other similar schemes (e.g. mentoring for veterans, Careers Transition Partnership). • (12) Setting up social events for the Armed Forces Community (e.g. veterans' breakfast clubs). • (13) Organising and participating in events promoting the Armed Forces, such as Armed Forces Day or Memorial Day events. 	<p>(8, 9) Strengthened links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.).</p> <p>(3, 7, 8) Improved LA processes aimed at the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>(4, 10) Provision of more tailored support for the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>(12) Increased cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community.</p>	<p>wider community (e.g. sense of connectedness).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the overall reach of existing services. • Sustainable and continuous Covenant delivery by LAs.
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Assumptions: (1) Providing grants to clusters of LAs will provide better value for money (same amount of funding can be used across a larger amount of LAs) and less duplication of activities; (2) Change and sustainability can be embedded over a 2-year funding period.

A.2. Evaluation framework

Following the finalisation of the logic model, the study team prepared the evaluation framework, the purpose of which was to guide the evaluation by providing the EQs, indicators and data sources.

This is set out in Table 15 Evaluation framework on the following pages.

Table 15 Evaluation framework

Evaluation question (EQ)	Our interpretation of the question	Proposed indicators	Data collection
<p>EQ1. To what extent, and if so how, has the SDP <u>contributed to an improvement in the implementation</u> of the Armed Forces Covenant in the areas where funding has been awarded, in terms of the 12 strands of activities identified above?</p>	<p>This EQ is focused on the grants given to LAs by the Trust.</p>	<p>(i) Understanding of the target population <u>Output indicator:</u> Number of members of the Armed Forces Community identified; Number of new activities undertaken to identify and understand. <u>Outcome indicator:</u> Services targeted to the types of members most present in the local area; Number of formal area-level needs-assessments conducted.</p>	<p>Document review Questionnaire for LAs Case study interviews</p>
	<p>This EQ seeks to understand the extent to which the SDP has contributed to an improvement in the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant – in terms of the 12 activities outlined above that constitute our working definition of ‘implementation’.</p>	<p>(ii) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community <u>Output indicator:</u> Number of relevant new communication activities (newsletters, leaflets, websites, training programmes, e-learning packages, events) undertaken. <u>Outcome indicator:</u> Number of people reached by these activities (e.g. relevant intranet page views, more contact points within other services, more regular communications with Armed Forces Champions/Armed Forces Liaison Officers etc.); Number of staff trained.</p>	
	<p>(iii) Raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community <u>Output indicator:</u> Number of relevant new communication activities (newsletters, leaflets, websites, training programmes, e-learning packages, events) undertaken. <u>Outcome indicator:</u> Number of new businesses/organisations that have signed the AF Covenant; Number of businesses that obtained the Bronze/Silver/Gold Employer Recognition Award (and whether they ‘improved’ over time).</p>		

Evaluation question (EQ)	Our interpretation of the question	Proposed indicators	Data collection
		<p>(iv) Raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community</p> <p><u>Output indicator:</u> Number of relevant new communication activities (newsletters, leaflets, websites, training programmes, e-learning packages, events) undertaken; Perception from grantees on helpfulness of Covenant focused media and communications training and advice.</p> <p><u>Outcome indicator:</u> Proportion of the population reached by these activities (e.g. website hits, social media followers, newsletter distribution lists, events attendance numbers); New and targeted audiences reached.</p>	
		<p>(v) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community</p> <p><u>Output indicator:</u> Number of relevant new communication activities (newsletters, leaflets, websites, training programmes, e-learning packages, events) undertaken.</p> <p><u>Outcome indicator:</u> Increased staff confidence in being able to support members of the Armed Forces Community; reported 'customer' satisfaction (where available).</p>	
		<p>(vi) Raising awareness of the Armed Forces Community on the support available to them</p> <p><u>Output indicator:</u> Number of new services or activities set-up; Number of newly set-up signposts and referral pathways to these services; Number of new communication activities (newsletters, leaflets, websites, training programmes, e-learning packages, events) undertaken.</p> <p><u>Outcome indicator:</u> Number of members of the Armed Forces Community accessing new services; New and targeted audiences reached (e.g. hard-to-reach audiences, underserved parts of the community).</p>	

Evaluation question (EQ)	Our interpretation of the question	Proposed indicators	Data collection
		<p>(vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders</p> <p><u>Output indicator:</u> Number of conferences/events/meetings held; Number of new networks created.</p> <p><u>Outcome indicator:</u> Number of participants to best practice sharing initiatives/events/ networks; Number of participants in the networks; Number of best practices that were shared and implemented in another local area; Self-reported perceptions of stakeholders about changes in coordination/ best practice sharing.</p>	
		<p>(viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.)</p> <p><u>Output indicator:</u> Whether a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant point of contact has been set-up within a LA; Number of resources developed for service providers; Number of meetings/ fora etc that have expanded their membership to include other services; Number of new referral pathways (to new services) developed.</p> <p><u>Outcome indicator:</u> Number of initiatives/services undertaken collaboratively or now incorporating the Covenant; Stakeholder perceptions about extent to which there are now more links as a result of SDP-funded grants.</p>	
		<p>(ix) Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community</p> <p><u>Output indicator:</u> Number of policies amended, updated or created that reflect the spirit of the Covenant; Number of events and networks created.</p> <p><u>Outcome indicators:</u> Number of beneficiaries to the amended policies; Number of participants to events and networks; Stakeholder perceptions about extent to which the processes have improved as a result of SDP-funded grants.</p>	

Evaluation question (EQ)	Our interpretation of the question	Proposed indicators	Data collection
		<p>(x) Provision of tailored support for the Armed Forces Community <u>Output indicator:</u> Number of new services (hubs, breakfast clubs, community initiatives, signposting and referrals, outreach services) rolled out for members of the Armed Forces Community. <u>Outcome indicators:</u> Number of people who access these services; Number of people helped/advised/referred on; reported ‘customer’ satisfaction (where available).</p> <p>(xi) Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community <u>Output indicator:</u> Number of social events set up for the Armed Forces Community. <u>Outcome indicator:</u> Number of people who attended these events.</p>	
<p>EQ2(a) What are the <u>risks and barriers</u> to Local Covenant implementation?</p> <p>(b) Are there specific risks and barriers relating to the various components comprising the implementation of the Covenant, i.e. the 12 strands of activities identified above?</p> <p>(c) To what extent can particular grants or approaches be identified as overcoming these risks and barriers to implementation?</p> <p>(d) What mitigation strategies have helped, or could help, overcome these risks and barriers?</p> <p>(e) What learning and good practice about the implementation of the Covenant has emerged from the grants funded through the SDP?</p>	<p>This EQ is focused on the grants given to LAs by the Trust, and builds on the findings of EQ1. This EQ is focused on what has hampered and helped the <u>Local Covenant implementation</u>.</p> <p>It seeks to explore areas that have hampered the implementation of the Local Covenant, identify mitigation strategies to these challenges or barriers, and understand what learning or areas of good practice have emerged as a result of the grant funding that have helped improve the implementation of the Covenant.</p> <p>Parts of this will then feed into the Support and Development Work Stream.</p>	<p>LAs’/devolved administrations’/other public bodies’ perceptions of risks and barriers to Local Covenant implementation.</p> <p>Any factors that significantly delayed the grants.</p> <p>Grant progress, e.g. planned vs. actual activities, including reporting on challenges encountered.</p> <p>LAs’/devolved administrations’/other public bodies’ perceptions of mitigation strategies that have been or could have been helpful.</p> <p>Any recommendations/lessons learned that came out of the grant activities (e.g. needs-mapping resulting in recommendations for future action).</p> <p>Good practices reported in independent evaluations.</p>	<p>Document review</p> <p>Questionnaire for LAs</p> <p>Case study interviews</p>

Evaluation question (EQ)	Our interpretation of the question	Proposed indicators	Data collection
	<p>This EQ will seek to draw upon multiple perspectives – including the lead LA, the other LAs within the cluster, devolved administration and other public bodies within Local Covenant Partnerships.</p>	<p>Assessment by the research team based on assessments against wider evidence base and synthesis of wider evaluation findings.</p>	
<p>EQ3(a) To what extent have the grants supported under the SDP led to <u>sustainable changes</u> in terms of what they achieved in implementing the Covenant locally?</p> <p>(b) Are there specific risks and barriers to sustainability relating to the various components comprising the implementation of the Covenant, i.e. the 12 strands of activities identified above?</p> <p>(c) To what extent can particular grants or approaches be identified as the most sustainable ways of delivering the Local Covenant?</p> <p>(d) What mitigation strategies have helped, or could help, overcome these risks and barriers to sustainability?</p> <p>(e) What learning and good practice about the sustainability of the implementation of the Covenant has emerged from the grants funded through the SDP?</p>	<p>This EQ is focused on the grants given to LAs by the Trust, and builds on the findings of EQ1. This EQ is focused on what has hampered and helped the <u>sustainability</u> of Local Covenant implementation.</p> <p>This EQ seeks to understand what activities have proved to be the most sustainable and what aspects ensured this sustainability.</p> <p>In particular, we would seek to understand what helps and what hinders sustainability, to understand how long-term support provision can be ensured.</p>	<p>New processes that have endured following conclusion of funding (i.e. are sustainable).</p> <p>Activities that were able to be embedded into mainstream processes (i.e. that will be repeated after the grant is concluded).</p> <p>New activities funded by the SDP that have been adapted in other contexts (i.e. transferability).</p> <p>Number of activities that relied on a staff member to keep going.</p> <p>LAs’/devolved administrations’/other public bodies’ perceptions and experience regarding sustainability of the activities and why/why not activities will be sustained.</p> <p>LAs’/devolved administrations’/other public bodies’ perceptions as to elements that are good practice (or which elements were essential to the delivery of the activities funded by the SDP).</p> <p>Assessment by the research team based on assessments against wider evidence base and synthesis of wider evaluation findings.</p>	<p>Document review</p> <p>Questionnaire for LAs</p> <p>Case study interviews</p>

Evaluation question (EQ)	Our interpretation of the question	Proposed indicators	Data collection
EQ4. What learning and good practices can be identified from the administration of the SDP as a funding mechanism and process itself?	<p>This EQ is focused on understanding whether and how the SDP, as a funding mechanism and process, helped achieve its aims. This includes seeking to understand what worked well and what worked less well.</p> <p>Parts of this would then feed into the subsequent follow-on programme funded by the Trust.</p> <p>This EQ will seek to draw upon multiple perspectives, including the lead LA and the other LAs within the cluster.</p>	<p>Perceptions from LAs involved in the clusters regarding the Programme management and set-up (e.g. organisation from the Trust, use of clusters for the distribution of grants).</p> <p>Assessment by the research team based on assessments against wider evidence base and synthesis of wider evaluation findings</p>	<p>Document review</p> <p>Questionnaire for LAs</p>

A.3. Case study selection

The study team selected five case study grants out of the 27 possible grants. In order to determine which grants to select, the study team developed a shortlist of grants based on the following criteria:

- **Inputs from the Trust.** The study team drew upon the Trust’s in-depth knowledge of the different grants. While the study team did not aim to select only the grants highlighted by the Trust, this helped provide an overview of different types of grants that would merit further investigation.
- **Response to the questionnaire.** The study team shortlisted grants based on if they had responded to the questionnaire by the deadline of 11 March 2021. It was assumed that grants that had responded to the questionnaire would be more likely to participate in interviews.
- **Different phases of funding.** The study team aimed to select at least one grant from the following phases of funding, to capture different experiences: first phase of funding only, second phase of funding only, and both first and second phases of funding.
- **Geographic location.** The study team aimed to select at least one grant in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as to capture as much geographic diversity as possible.
- **Grant size.** The study team aimed to select grants of different sizes (e.g. not just larger grants).
- **Activity type.** The study team aimed to select grants undertaking different activities to each other.

The table below describes how the selected grants respond to these criteria.

Table 16 Case study selection

Grant name(s)	Lead LA	Phase of funding	Geographic location	Grant size	Activity type
CFLG17-272: Local Delivery of the Local Authority Support for the Armed Forces Covenant	Dorset County Council	II	South-west England	Large	(i) Understanding the target population (ii) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders (viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.) (ix) Improving processes within Local Authorities aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community (x) Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community
CFLG16-85: Sub Regional Armed Forces Covenant	Kingston Upon Hull City	I & II	North England	Large Medium	(ii) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

Grant name(s)	Lead LA	Phase of funding	Geographic location	Grant size	Activity type
Partnership CFLG17-85: Armed Forces Covenant Service Hub Partnership	Council				<p>(iii) Raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(iv) Raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(v) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(vi) Raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them</p> <p>(vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders</p> <p>(viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.)</p> <p>(x) Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(xi) Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community</p>
CFLG16-106: Forces Connect South East CFLG17-106: Forces Connect South East - Veterans Hubs	Surrey County Council	I & II	South-east England	Large Medium	<p>(i) Understanding the target population</p> <p>(ii) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(v) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(vi) Raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them</p> <p>(vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders</p> <p>(viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.)</p> <p>(ix) Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(x) Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(xi) Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community</p>
CFLG16-105: Appointment of Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (AFCLO) for the	Rhondda Cynon Taf Council	I & II	Wales	Medium Large	<p>(i) Understanding the target population</p> <p>(ii) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>(iii) Raising awareness among the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces</p>

Strengthening and Empowering Delivery of the Covenant

Grant name(s)	Lead LA	Phase of funding	Geographic location	Grant size	Activity type
Partnership Area CFLG17-105a: Veterans Advice Service					Community (iv) Raising awareness among the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (v) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community (vi) Raising awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them (vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders (viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.) (ix) Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community (x) Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community (xi) Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community
CFLG16-61: Highland/Moray Covenant Project Officer	Highland Council	I	Scotland	Medium	(i) Understanding the target population (ii) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community (v) Raising awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community (vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders (viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.) (ix) Improving processes within LAs aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community

Annex B. Data collection

This annex provides an overview of the interview protocols, interview participants and questionnaire sent to the grant-holders.

B.1. Exploratory interviews

B.1.1. Interview protocol

The following interview protocol was used to conduct the exploratory interviews.

Part 1: Background to the SDP

1. Why did the SDP come about?
 - a. Where did it originate from (i.e. LAs, the MOD, the Trust, other)?
 - b. Were LAs involved in the preliminary discussions?

Part 2: Intentions of the SDP

2. What gaps was the SDP seeking to fill, if any?
3. What were the aims of the SDP?
4. How were these aims intended to be achieved at the start of the grant (i.e. what activities were foreseen to achieve these aims)?
5. How do you feel the activities achieved the Programme aims at the end of the grant?
6. What were the envisaged results of this Programme, in terms of both the short- and long-term goals?

Part 3: The SDP in practice

7. Did you receive or are you aware of any feedback regarding the SDP application process, and if so, why (or why not) did LAs apply for the grants?
8. What determined the success of applications for the SDP grants?
 - a. On the other hand, why were some applications unsuccessful?
9. Based on the grants allocated, what types of activities were funded by the Programme?
10. Overall, did the activities lead to the results you expected to see?
11. What were the main differences between the two phases of the SDP grants?
12. Are you able to share any success stories, or factors which made certain grants more successful than others?

13. Are you able to share any stories of grants which faced more challenges? Why was this the case?
14. Did you receive any feedback from grantees about the projects, and if so, can you share it with us?

B.1.2. Interview participants

The following stakeholder participated in the interviews.

Table 17 Interview participants

Name	Affiliation	Interview date
Laura Caton	LGA	23/11/2020
Steve Inman and Carol Stone	Trust	25/11/2020
John Shivas	MOD Covenant Team	30/11/2020

B.2. Questionnaire

Background Information

2. Please provide your name: *

3. Please provide your email: *

4. Please provide the name of the Local Authority you are based in: *

5. Please specify the Local Authority that was the primary recipient of the Strengthening Delivery Programme (SDP) grant you were involved with: *

6. Please specify the name of the project funded by the SDP grant you were involved with: *
If 'Other', please specify

Implementation: How the SDP grants have contributed to an improvement in the implementation of the Covenant

7. The list below includes 11 types of activities which the SDP projects undertook in order to implement the Covenant. Please indicate which of these activities were the main focus of your project: *

- (i) Understanding the target population
- (ii) Raising awareness of the public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community
- (iii) Raising awareness of the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community
- (iv) Raising awareness of the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces

Community

- (v) Raising awareness of the public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community
- (vi) Raising awareness of the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them
- (vii) Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders
- (viii) Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.)
- (ix) Improving processes within Local Authorities aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community
- (x) Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community
- (xi) Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community
- Other (please specify):

Understanding the target population

8. To what extent did your SDP project lead to the identification, by the Local Authority, of members of the Armed Forces Community (i.e. serving personnel, reservists, veterans, the bereaved, and families of these groups) living in your local area who were previously not known about by the Local Authority or other local services? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

9. To what extent did your SDP project lead to a better understanding from the Local Authority of the needs and situation of members of the Armed Forces Community living in your local area? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

10. Were area-level needs assessments of members of the Armed Forces Community conducted by the Local Authority (or another agency) as a result of the SDP project? (Please note that by 'area-level', we are referring to the geographical area covered by the Local Authority/cluster of Local Authorities in question.) *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

11. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit to the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to better identify and/or understand members of the Armed Forces Community living in your local area?

12. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Raising awareness of the public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

13. To what extent did your SDP project lead to an increase in communication activities aiming to raise awareness among public authorities and frontline services (e.g. education, health and social care) about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

14. Did your SDP project result in the delivery of training to any of the following groups, with the aim of raising awareness about the Covenant and/or the needs of the Armed Forces Community? *

	Yes, training was delivered regularly	Yes, training was delivered once or twice	No, training was not delivered	Don't know
Local Authority employees directly involved in delivering the Covenant (e.g. Armed Forces Champion, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Authority employees not directly involved in delivering the Covenant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Statutory service delivery organisations (e.g. health, education, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary service organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If 'Other', please specify

15. To what extent did your SDP project result in a greater awareness about the Covenant among public authorities and frontline services? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

16. To what extent did your SDP project result in a greater awareness about the Armed Forces Community in your area among public authorities and frontline services? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

17. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit to the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to raise awareness among public authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the needs of the Armed Forces Community?

18. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Raising awareness of the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

19. To what extent did your SDP project lead to an increase in communication activities aiming to raise the awareness of the private sector about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

20. If your SDP project received the Covenant focused media and communications training and advice, to what extent do you feel that the training better prepared you to communicate to the private sector about the Covenant and Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Our project did not receive the training
- We did not aim to communicate with the private sector
- Don't know

21. If you did receive the focused media and communications training and advice, what was the most and least useful aspect of this?

22. To what extent did your SDP project result in a greater awareness about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community in your area among the private sector? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

23. Have new businesses signed up to the Covenant as a result of the awareness raising activities undertaken by your SDP project? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

24. Have businesses in your area either obtained a Bronze/Silver/Gold Employer Recognition Award or improved upon their previous Award as a result of the awareness raising activities undertaken by your SDP project? *

- Yes

- No
- Don't know

25. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit to the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to raise awareness among the private sector?

26. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Raising awareness of the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community

27. To what extent did your SDP project lead to an increase in communication activities aiming to raise the awareness of the general public about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

28. If your SDP project received the Covenant focused media and communications training and advice, to what extent do you feel that the training better prepared you to communicate to the general public about the Covenant and Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Our project did not receive the training
- We did not aim to communicate with the general public
- Don't know

29. If you did receive the focused media and communications training and advice, what was the most and least useful aspect of this?

30. To what extent did your SDP project result in a greater awareness about the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community in your area among the general public? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

31. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit to the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to raise awareness of the general public?

32. Please add any further comments or evidence below.

Raising awareness of public authorities and frontline organisations about the support available for the Armed Forces Community

33. To what extent did your SDP project lead to an increase in communication activities aiming to

raise awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support already available for the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

34. To what extent did your SDP project result in greater awareness among public authorities and frontline organisations about the support already available for the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

35. Did staff in public authorities and/or frontline organisations report feeling more confident in their ability to support members of the Armed Forces Community, as a result of the activities your SDP project undertook to raise awareness about support already available for the Armed Forces Community? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

36. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit to the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to raise awareness of the public authorities and frontline services about the support already available for the Armed Forces Community?

37. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Raising awareness of the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them

38. To what extent did your SDP project lead to an increase in communication activities aiming to raise awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

39. If your SDP project received the Covenant focused media and communications training and advice, to what extent do you feel that the training better prepared you to communicate to members of the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Our project did not receive the training
- We did not aim to communicate with members of the Armed Forces Community
- Don't know

40. If you did receive the focused media and communications training and advice, what was the most and least useful aspect of this?

41. To what extent did your SDP project result in greater awareness among the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

42. As a result of your SDP project, were any new referral pathways or 'signposts' established with the aim of improving access by the Armed Forces Community to existing support services? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Raising awareness of the Armed Forces Community about the support available to them

43. If new referral pathways or signposts were established by your SDP project, to what extent did these improve access by the Armed Forces Community to the support available to them? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

44. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit for the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities your SDP project undertook to raise awareness on the support available to them?

45. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Coordination and sharing of best practice between relevant local stakeholders

46. To what extent did your SDP project engage in activities (such as conferences, events, networks, meetings) aiming to coordinate or share best practice about supporting the Armed Forces Community with local stakeholders? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

47. To what extent did your SDP project result in greater coordination or more opportunities to share best practice with local stakeholders about the implementation of the Covenant? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent

- Not at all
- Don't know

48. As a result of your SDP project, to what extent has there been an increase in the size and reach of your networks with other local stakeholders who are involved in supporting the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

49. As a result of your SDP project, were any best practices shared by your SDP project implemented in another local area? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

50. As a result of your SDP project, were any best practices from other areas implemented in your area? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

51. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit for the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to coordinate and share best practices between relevant local stakeholders about supporting the Armed Forces Community?

52. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Strengthening links between service providers (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.)

53. To what extent did your SDP project lead to a strengthening of links between service providers regarding the Covenant and the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

54. To what extent did your SDP project result in the development of new resources for local agencies (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.) to support their work with the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

55. As a result of your SDP project, have meetings or fora in your Local Authority pertaining to the Covenant expanded their membership to include other services (e.g. housing, finance, education, etc.)? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

56. As a result of your SDP project, to what extent do referral pathways to specific service providers now take into account the Covenant and specific support for the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

57. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit for the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to strengthen links between service providers?

58. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Improving processes within Local Authorities aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community

59. To what extent do you feel that processes within your Local Authority aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community have improved as a result of the activities undertaken by your SDP project? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

60. As a result of your SDP project, to what extent have policies within your Local Authority been amended, updated, or created to reflect the spirit of the Covenant? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

61. To what extent has your SDP project led to greater consistency in the way in which your Local Authority supports the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

62. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit for the Armed Forces Community arising from

the activities undertaken by your SDP project to improve processes aimed at supporting the Armed Forces Community within your Local Authority?

63. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community

64. To what extent has your SDP project provided tailored support for the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

65. Have new services (e.g. hubs, breakfast clubs, community initiatives, signposting and referrals, outreach services) been created, or existing services expanded, for members of the Armed Forces Community as a result of activities undertaken by your SDP project? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community

66. If new services have been created or expanded, to what extent has there been an increase in the number of members of the Armed Forces Community accessing and receiving support through these services? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

67. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit for the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to provide tailored support for the Armed Forces Community?

68. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Increasing cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community

69. To what extent has your SDP project increased cohesion or a sense of community within the Armed Forces Community in your local area? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

70. To what extent has your SDP project resulted in an increase in the number of social events organised by the Local Authority for the Armed Forces Community? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

71. To what extent have these activities led to members of the Armed Forces Community having better social support networks and/or helped decrease social isolation? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

72. In your view, what has been the biggest benefit for the Armed Forces Community arising from the activities undertaken by your SDP project to increase the cohesion/sense of community within the Armed Forces Community?

73. Please provide any further comments or evidence below.

Risks and Barriers: What risks and barriers exist to local Covenant implementation of the SDP projects

74. What were the main barriers your SDP project encountered in its efforts to implement the Covenant? *

- Lack of interest in the Covenant (e.g. from frontline staff, from the public, from partner Local Authorities, etc.)
- Delays to the project (e.g. due to organisational restructuring, foundation work, recruitment issues, etc.)
- Difficulties in working with and coordinating across the partnership cluster
- Difficulties in creating connections with partner Local Authorities and with third sector organisations
- Loss of personnel
- Limited capacity to undertake project activities
- Discovery of additional areas of work/need beyond the project scope
- Lack of reliable data on the Armed Forces Community
- Difficulties in mapping existing support
- Difficulties in engaging with some parts of the Armed Forces community
- Impact of COVID-19
- Other (please specify)

75. How did you overcome the risks and barriers you identified? *

76. Did you need to adapt your SDP project in response to COVID-19? *

- Yes

- No

77. Are there any lessons learned from the way your SDP project overcame risks and barriers that you would like to share with us?

Sustainability: What the sustainability of the grants provided under the SDP is

78. Have any of the activities or services undertaken as a result of your SDP project continued after the end of the project and grant? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

79. Are any of the activities undertaken by your SDP project now embedded or mainstreamed in services or processes in your area, as opposed to supported on a temporary basis? *

- Activities have been embedded in mainstream services
- Activities are temporary
- Not applicable
- Other (please specify):

80. Can you tell us which activities continued beyond the end of the grant or have been embedded in mainstream processes?

81. To your knowledge, have any of your activities been used as an example of good practice and/or been implemented in other areas or by other Local Authorities? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

82. If yes, what activities have been used as an example of good practice or implemented in other areas?

83. When you look back at your SDP project, what activities are you most proud of and why? *

84. When you look back at your SDP project, what would be the one thing you would do differently and why?

Grant Administration: How the SDP was administered

85. To what extent do you think the cluster approach helped improve partnership working between: *

	To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Don't know	Not applicable
Local Authorities within your cluster	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Local Authorities not part of your cluster	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your Local Authority and the third sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your Local Authority and the private sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If 'Other', please specify

86. To what extent would you recommend that the Trust use clusters in future grant funding? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Please provide any further comments below.

87. To what extent did the SDP, as a funding mechanism and process, help you improve the implementation of the Covenant in your area? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Please provide any further comments below.

88. Do you have any suggestions for improvement, lessons learnt, or areas of good practice you would like to share for either the Trust or other grantees regarding the administration of the SDP by the Trust?

Material for the online toolkit

89. To what extent would you find an online toolkit useful? *

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Please provide any further comments below.

90. What sort of information would you find useful in a toolkit? *

- Best practice case studies
- Suggested approaches to delivery (e.g. developing a needs assessment, developing training packages)
- Examples from similar Local Authority types
- Examples from areas with similar Armed Forces Community presence
- Material that can be easily replicated
- Guidance on where to start
- General information about the Covenant

Other (please specify):

B.3. Case study interviews

B.3.1. Interview protocol – grant-holders

The following interview protocol was used to conduct the case study interviews with grant-holders.

SDP contribution to an improvement in the implementation of the Covenant

1. How was work distributed across the cluster?
2. Can you briefly describe the main aim(s) of the project(s)?
3. Can you briefly describe your role and involvement in the grant?
4. How was the project impact measured?
 - a. Do you have any quantitative or qualitative data you can share? (can be emailed after the interview)
5. Overall, do you believe that the grant you receive helped improve the implementation of the Covenant in your area?
 - a. Why do you believe that it did or did not help improve the implementation of the Covenant?
 - b. What aspects in particular helped improve the implementation of the Covenant in your area?

Risks and barriers to Local Covenant implementation

6. If relevant: what were the main risks and barriers you experienced?
7. How did you mitigate this?
8. What other mitigation strategies could have helped?
9. Did your project have to adapt to COVID-19?
 - a. If so, what were the main barriers/challenges?
 - b. Were there any opportunities also identified?
 - c. Were there any adaptations that you made that you will maintain post-COVID? (e.g. anything that increased efficiency or reach?)
10. What was the main learning and/or good practice that emerged for you from this grant with regards to overcoming risks and barriers?

Sustainability of the grants

11. If activities or services undertaken as a result of your project continued after the end of the project and grant, how was this achieved?
12. To what extent do you feel that the project and its impact are sustainable?
 - a. In general, what do you think are the main barriers to sustainability that your project encountered (or that any similar projects may encounter)?
13. Based on your experience, what makes certain activities more sustainable than others?
14. What was the main learning and/or good practice that emerged for you from this grant with

regards to achieving sustainability?

Administration of the SDP more generally

15. If your LA only applied to the first grant, was there a reason why?
16. If your LA applied to both grants, was the second project intended to build on the results of the first one, or were they not connected? For example, was the second project borne out of a needs assessment carried out in the first project, or out of a need identified during the first project?
17. How did you find working within your cluster?
 - b. Was the cluster size appropriate?
 - c. Did it lead to improved relations? If so, is this sustainable?
 - d. For non-lead LAs – how did you find the grant management?
 - e. To what extent do you think that the cluster approach helped overcome the risks and barriers you identified in earlier questions?
18. Did your project discover additional areas of work? If so, which were these?

B.3.2. Interview protocol – beneficiaries

The following interview protocol was used to conduct the case study interviews with grant beneficiaries.

Grant overview

1. How did you come to know about the SDP project?
2. What was your involvement in the project?
3. Who were your main contact points?

Benefit of project and impact

4. Do you believe that the SDP project helped improve the implementation of the Covenant in your area?
 - a. Why do you believe that it did or did not help improve the implementation of the Covenant?
 - b. What aspects in particular helped improve the implementation of the Covenant in your area?

Risks and barriers

5. What are the main risks and barriers to improving the implementation of the Covenant in your area?
6. To what extent do you think that the SDP project helped overcome these risks and barriers?

Sustainability of the project

7. Have the activities or services undertaken as part of the SDP project continued after the end of the project?
8. To what extent do you feel that the project and its impact are sustainable?

General questions

9. Overall, what worked well with the SDP project?
10. What worked less well?
11. What are the main lessons learnt?

B.3.3. Interview participants

The following stakeholders participated in the interviews.

Table 18 Interview participants – grant-holders

Grant	Name	Affiliation	Interview date
CFLG17-272	Anonymous	Anonymous	20/04/2021
CFLG17-272	Anonymous	Anonymous	20/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Maxine Hunter	Kingston Upon Hull City Council	23/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Tracy Harsley	Kingston Upon Hull City Council	23/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Anonymous	Anonymous	6/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Sarah Dauris	North Lincolnshire	6/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Anonymous	Anonymous	16/04/2021
CFLG16-106 CFLG17-106	Sarah Goodman	Surrey County Council	8/04/2021
CFLG16-106 CFLG17-106	Peter Bruinvels	Surrey County Council	8/04/2021
CFLG16-106 CFLG17-106	Kate Steels	Hampshire County Council	14/04/2021
CFLG16-106 CFLG17-106	Anonymous	Surrey County Council	15/04/2021
CFLG16-105 CFLG17-105a	Anonymous	Rhondda Cynon Taf Council	9/04/2021
CFLG16-105 CFLG17-105a	Anonymous	Anonymous	9/04/2021

CFLG16-105 CFLG17-105a	Anonymous	Vale of Glamorgan	1/04/2021
CFLG16-61	Anonymous	Highland Council	22/04/2021
CFLG-16-61	Roddy Burns	Moray Council	11/05/2021

Table 19 Interview participants – beneficiaries

Grant	Name	Affiliation	Interview date
CFLG17-272	Rob Munroe	NHS Dorset CCG	10/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Clive Darnell	The Veterans Community Hub	19/04/2021
CFLG16-85 CFLG17-85	Anonymous	Anonymous	19/04/2021
CFLG16-105 CFLG17-105a	Anonymous	Valleys Veterans	7/04/2021
CFLG16-61	Nina Semple	Poppy Scotland	27/04/2021
