



RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL

PROJECT REPORT



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FOREWORD

The first duty of government is to keep people safe and for that we depend upon the service of those men and women who are our Armed Forces. We expect them to give their all in that endeavour, and even risk the ultimate sacrifice, on behalf of us all.

While we are prepared to place our Armed Forces in harm's way during conflict, we also rely on them to lead on the reconstruction of devastated communities abroad and in civil emergencies at home. For all this we are thankful, but we owe them more than gratitude. There has long been an understanding, a covenant, that in return for the special burdens we place on our Armed Forces, that they can expect their government, in all its forms of public service, to ensure proper support for the Armed Forces community (serving personnel, veterans and their dependants).

Local authorities provide many of the essential services that the Armed Forces community relies on e.g. housing, education and training and mental health support. Returning personnel may take time to adjust to civilian life even without suffering long lasting physical or mental injuries in the course of their active service. All of these may well of course impact on the wellbeing of their families too.

So, it is right that local authorities like mine in Lewisham recognise and address these challenges in local Armed Forces Covenants that set out our specific public service commitments for our citizens who are also part of the Armed Forces community. In so doing, we are not unfairly giving our Armed Forces community

any special treatment over others. Rather we seek to ensure that no-one is disadvantaged in accessing public services by reason of their own or a family member's service in the Armed Forces.

But for a local Armed Forces Covenant to achieve its purpose, it cannot merely exist as a policy document; it has to be an ongoing relationship with the Armed Forces community. Any successful relationship needs constant effort - 'Renewing the Covenant in the Capital' as a project has helped local authorities across London to audit and improve their service offer to the Armed Forces community. Just as importantly, the project has increased a mutual understanding of what a local Armed Forces Covenant means in practice – both for the providers of local services and local residents from the Armed Forces community.

I know that the implementation of our own local Armed Forces Covenant has and will continue to improve as a result of this project and I trust this is the same for our counterparts across London.



RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL PREFACE

I am proud to have been able to use my military background, having previously served in the Royal Navy, to provide support, direction and an understanding to London's councils since becoming Project Manager for Renewing the Covenant in the Capital in December 2018. We have been able to develop the good work that many councils have already put in place to try and standardise the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across London.

My vision is for London to be the best place in the UK to find support as a member of the Armed Forces community. With 33 committed councils and

organisations such as the Greater London Authority and London Councils supporting their work, there is every opportunity for this vision to be realised.



Headquarters London District has always been committed to assisting Local Authorities in London with the understanding and delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. Over the years tremendous work has been achieved by Local Authorities to embed the Covenant, and as a result several polices have been adjusted to ensure that service personnel do not suffer any disadvantage.

In 2017 a need was identified by both the Local Authorities themselves and Headquarters London District for a programme of work to develop a consistent approach across London for the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant that met the needs of both the Local Authorities and the Armed Forces community.

With the establishment of this project and working in close partnership this has enabled us to concentrate on ensuring all Local Authorities have the support

they need ranging from training of front facing staff, to adjusting their websites. It also ensures that the Armed Forces community and their families will have access to clear information and signposting to support them in their local community, and in their day to day dealings with public services. This work will continue going forward and it will maintain the high standard that has been reached so far.





INTRODUCTION

Our Armed Forces fulfil the government's responsibility of the defence of our realm and in doing so, sacrifice some civilian freedoms. Their families also play an important role in supporting the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces and can face some of the same challenges associated with service life. In return, the nation has a moral obligation to support the whole of the Armed Forces community. The Armed Forces Covenant was established in 2011 and states:

“Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.”

It was signed by all 407 Local Authorities in the UK between 2011 and 2013, but since that point there have been changes and observations on its delivery in the community that needed to be addressed:

- The previous 'Community' and 'Corporate' Covenants are now combined as a single Armed Forces Covenant, recognising that many organisations are businesses and employers as well as providing services for the community.
- There is a varied level of understanding and knowledge of the Armed Forces community within Local Authorities. Leadership and management teams that physically signed the Covenant understand the need to support but this is not always filtered down to customer facing staff.
- Although many policies have been altered to account for the Armed Forces community, it can be difficult to access key information relating to the Armed Forces.

- High turnover of Armed Forces champions within councils has led to reduced focus or, in some cases, loss of the role entirely.
- Some of the Armed Forces community themselves do not understand the Covenant and this can lead to unrealistic expectations and conflict when dealing with councils.

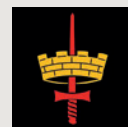
A number of projects have been established in recent years to address some of these issues at a regional level. In light of the landscape of London's councils being unique, a bespoke project, 'Renewing the Covenant in the Capital', was established to address the needs of London.

This project has been developed to help improve the understanding and delivery of the Covenant across the 32 London boroughs and the City of London. It is in response to concerns that since it was signed, various changes had led to a reduced understanding and visibility of the Covenant in London boroughs and their military communities. The project gives an opportunity and a platform for councils to demonstrate their commitment, share best practice and adopt new approaches from across the country that may be applicable in London.

The project is also working to provide London's councils with an understanding of the Armed Forces community within their own borough borders, as well as delivering training courses to all levels of staff and a wider package of support resources available to all.

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUND TRUST

Renewing the Covenant in the Capital is funded by a grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and is proud to be working in partnership with The London Borough of Lewisham, Headquarters London District (British Army), FDM Group and The Greater London Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association.



FDM

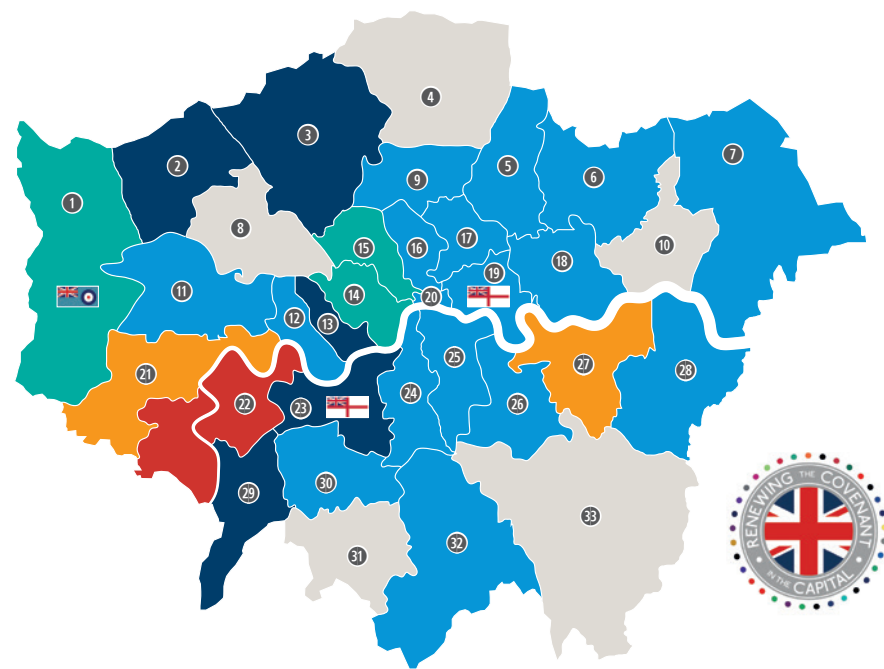


ROYAL AIR FORCE

RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL LONDON'S NEED

London is different with the density of councils and services provided in a small geographical area. There are 33 councils who have all signed the Covenant but no over-arching county council or governing body to standardise the region's approach to supporting the Armed Forces community. In many other regions, efforts can be coordinated through a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant Officer at a county council level to determine the need, formulate a response and oversee delivery across a large area. London does not have

this capability as, despite the large population and density, having 33 councils means none are large enough to justify the creation of such a role and therefore rely on it being undertaken as a secondary responsibility. All are trying to achieve similar goals but in their own way, based on local need. This project has therefore aimed to help councils to establish a consistent approach and framework for all to work from, leading to a standardised delivery of the Covenant across London.



The density of both population and business in London is also reflected in the Armed Forces community with the military spread widely across the capital and only 5 boroughs not hosting a military unit of some kind.

REGULAR & RESERVE UNITS And Service Family Accommodation	RESERVE UNITS And Service Family Accommodation	RESERVE UNITS	NO MILITARY UNITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Hillingdon 15 Camden 14 Westminster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Harrow 3 Barnet 13 Kensington & Chelsea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Waltham Forest 6 Redbridge 7 Havering 9 Haringey 11 Ealing 12 Hammersmith & Fulham 16 Islington 17 Hackney 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Enfield 8 Brent 10 Barking & Dagenham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 Hounslow 27 Greenwich 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23 Wandsworth 29 Kingston upon Thames 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 Newham 19 Tower Hamlets 20 City 24 Lambeth 25 Southwark 26 Lewisham 28 Bexley 30 Merton 32 Croydon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 31 Sutton 33 Bromley
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REGULAR UNITS And Service Family Accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REGULAR UNITS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MARITIME RESERVE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAF REGULAR & RESERVE

London is home to 56 military units, Regular and Reserve, over 140 cadet units, 1,300 pupils from service families, 2,000 married quarters and an estimated 250,000 veterans, with many more commuting into London to work on a daily or weekly basis. With such large figures in an area which equals just the 10th smallest ceremonial county in England, the size of the Armed Forces community is unarguable, and a huge amount of support is required locally.

Although there are databases of support already in existence that can direct people to regional services, these are not always as effective in London. A journey of 10-miles to access services or support wouldn't generally be considered an arduous task outside of London but, as those who have lived or worked in the capital will know only too well, journeys across London of a similar length can be much more challenging. It is key in London to be able to provide support to this large community, on a much more localised basis.

As a project, we planned to address some of the key issues and aimed to:

- Ensure council policies have been adjusted and are easily accessible.
- Make frontline staff aware of the Armed Forces community and how to support them.
- Develop a standard job specification for Council Armed Forces Champions.
- Establish an Armed Forces Network for Council Armed Forces Champions.
- Increase awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant to all customer facing staff.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT QUALIFIES SOMEONE TO BE A VETERAN?

There is a common misconception that someone has to have served for a long time, be of a certain age or completed a number of tours of duty to become a veteran. In fact, veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.



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RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL

KEY FINDINGS

As part of the deep dive analysis, key Armed Forces community statistics for London were gathered and broken down to individual boroughs in an attempt to determine if there were any geographical trends and where the need may be greatest. Full borough factsheets are available online.

VETERANS ¹ (EST. TOTAL 250,000)	PUPILS ² (TOTAL 1,290)	SERVICE FAMILY ACCOMMODATION ³ (TOTAL 2,000)	UNITS (TOTAL 56)
H&F - 30,300 (17%) Tower Hamlets - 17,300 (6%) Merton - 14,800 (7%) Greenwich - 12,500 (5%) Bromley - 13,400 (4%)	Hillingdon - 407 Greenwich - 160 Hounslow - 67 Richmond upon Thames - 63 Kingston upon Thames - 61	Hillingdon - 806 Greenwich - 262 Kingston upon Thames - 198 Westminster - 192 Harrow - 132	Croydon - 5 units Hillingdon - 4 units Camden - 4 units Greenwich - 3 units Westminster - 3 units

From these figures, it can be seen that the London boroughs with the highest proportion of the Armed Forces community are: Greenwich (top 5 in all areas), Hillingdon (top 5 in 3 areas), Westminster (top 5 in 2 areas) and Kingston (top 5 in 2 areas).

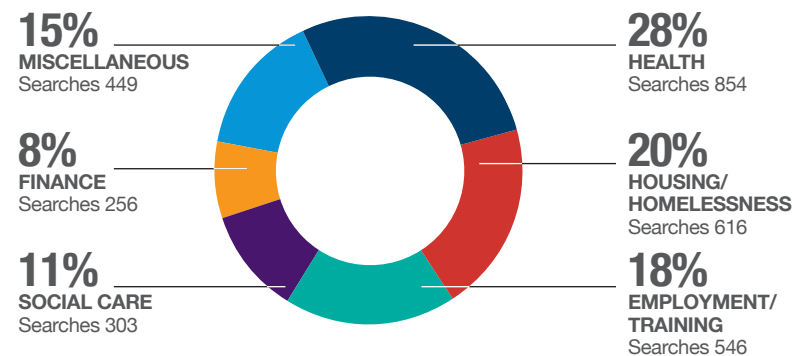
Most of these would be expected to have a large presence of the Armed Forces community due to their hosting of military units, but what can clearly be seen is that it is not always the same boroughs at the top of each statistic. In fact, 13 different boroughs appear in our 'top 5' lists, showing that the military footprint is well spread across London, even in boroughs that would not be expected. For example, there are

only 5 (plus the City of London) that do not host a military unit but together they are home to an estimated 38,500 veterans, 15% of London's veteran population.

This analysis shows that the Armed Forces community is spread widely across London, so their issues are of importance to **every** London council, not just those that have an obvious large military unit. We have developed a military footprint and factsheet for each borough to help councils understand how the Armed Forces are represented in their community and highlight the importance of action to provide support in all London boroughs.

VETERANS' GATEWAY STATISTICS⁴

3,051
TOTAL SEARCHES IN LONDON
(Jan 19 - Sept 20)



Another aspect of our analysis was to consider what support, and from which borough, the Armed Forces community is actively looking for. It can be seen that the majority of searches through Veterans' Gateway involve services or information which are regularly dealt with by councils. This highlights the need to have clear guidance from councils themselves on what support is available directly from them and signposting to local, external or partner services when it is not available.

The highest proportion of searches came from City of London (15%), Islington (7%) and City of Westminster (7%) which highlights that, although there are not necessarily the highest veteran numbers living in these boroughs, searches are likely to have been conducted by veterans who commute into these areas.

Also of note is that, on occasion, support is sometimes focused towards those areas which have a large military unit and are seen to have a large Armed Forces community but this data shows that in London, boroughs with a high military presence actually have a very low number of enquiries. For example, Greenwich (4%), Hounslow (1.3%), Hillingdon (1.3%) and Harrow (Proximity to Northwood HQ and RAF Northolt) (0.3%). This is because the communities in these boroughs know how to get support and information from their local unit.

This data analysis shows that the wider military community, including veterans, who are no longer attached to a military unit or no longer eligible for support directly from the military, are spread out across Greater London. Those actively seeking support are not always the most obvious communities, they are the hidden community that have developed needs or disadvantages post service. To be able to support a community that is hidden, councils need to be proactive in their approach, determining needs at as early a stage as possible by encouraging staff to 'ask the question':

“Have you or any of your close relatives ever served in the Armed Forces?”

By asking at first contact, staff will then be able to determine if their need may be due to their service and direct them to the most relevant support, quickly and efficiently. This may not provide a different outcome but may provide a different pathway.

We also looked at individual councils and the work they were already doing.

- All had signed the Armed Forces Covenant
- All had changed policies to some extent to cater for the Covenant, but there was no standardised approach to what was offered or how it was worded
- Half had an Armed Forces information page on their website
- Several were signed up to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme
- A number were holding regular Covenant Stakeholder Meetings

A key result from the analysis was that all councils have taken some action and recognise that the Armed Forces community may need support, but each has a different method to address this. Until this point, with no standardised approach, no information as to how the Armed Forces are represented in their community and with no central database of support available within London, they are not able to deliver their commitment to the Covenant to its full effect. This project has therefore looked at ways that the councils themselves can be supported, by standardising the information available to them, improving their knowledge of this community and by providing opportunities for local collaboration.

RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL PROJECT DELIVERY

In meeting with Armed Forces Champions and Representative Councillors, the project looked to build on the elements of good work that were already in place across London. We wanted to work to develop resources and information to support councils, provide an example of best practice and attempt to standardise the delivery of the Covenant across London.

Training

The primary means of developing the knowledge and understanding of the Covenant and wider Armed Forces community for council staff is through face to face training. Two modules, accredited by CPD UK, have been developed specifically for London's councils. They focus on embedding the Covenant's message within the council's ways of working and all staff who have initial contact with residents. This emphasises the importance of asking the question, "have you ever served?". The 90-minute classroom training for frontline staff has been tailored for each council and is delivered in house. Staff learn:

- Who and where the Armed Forces community are in their own area
- The differences in military life and why this community may require different support
- How and where to signpost this community to the local support that is available

A 2-hour module for Armed Forces Champions and senior staff covers the same key information and adds an additional element focusing on the background of the Covenant and examples of best practice and ideas from around the UK that councils could adopt.

Many of London's councils are now working to adopt these packages with 5 councils running sessions in the first few months of availability. Over 160 staff have now been trained, from customer facing staff in contact centres, housing, HR and social care through to Armed Forces Champions, Councillors, Directors and Chief Executives, ensuring that this knowledge is rightly embedded across all levels of the council. 96% left feeling more knowledgeable on the Armed Forces and how to help residents, 98% found the information useful, 98% said the training was appropriate for their role.

CASE STUDY:

Westminster City Council saw the importance of this work at an early stage and have been proactive in finding ways to deliver training to a wide range of service areas. So far, the project has run 6 sessions for staff, across 4 different sites, including a remote, online 'train the trainer' session for managers of one of their contact centres.



e-Learning

The classroom training is supplemented using another bespoke product, the Armed Forces Awareness e-Learning module. This was adapted from a module by the Solihull, Coventry and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership and modified for a London council audience. Online training allows councils to get the important information out to a much wider audience and delivers:

- A broad description of the Covenant, military life and what challenges they may face
- An understanding of the military footprint in their area
- A range of resources and information on organisations to signpost for support

The modules have been created and are now available for each council on request. Modules have already been delivered to 13 councils across London.



Support Pathways

Although many council policies have been adjusted to cater for the Armed Forces, in some cases, there may be a different, more directed or more relevant way to support this community, by signposting them to external organisations. On these occasions, it is key to be able to turn to a local directory specifically designed for the Armed Forces community. The project has worked with the NHS Armed Forces Networks to develop support pathways which detail how support can be accessed either through statutory pathways or charitable organisations.

If the Armed Forces community can be directed to support services at an early stage via council websites, call centres or case workers, this will

reduce waiting times, reduce developing issues and the amount of support required, relieving burden on council resources.

These pathways are free to use either online⁵ or on the 'Forces Connect' app. They divide London into five regions, allowing easier access to local services and covering a large number of themes:

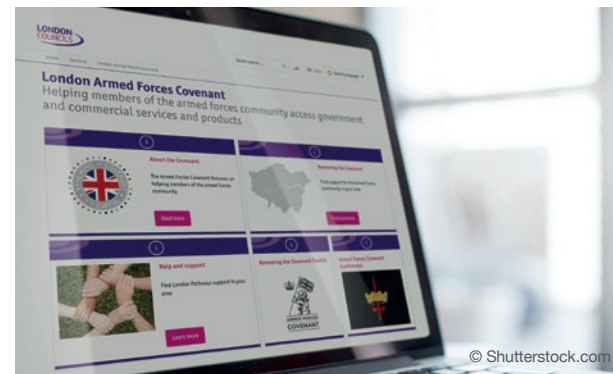
Mental Health, Physical Health, Addictions, Social Care, Housing, Employment, Criminal Justice, Carers and Families, Child and Adolescent, Gurkha and Nepalese, Adult Education and Training.

RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL PROJECT DELIVERY

Online Resources

A series of resources have been developed and are available online, with a focus on producing useful templates and examples which will reduce initial work required by councils and standardise the approach for all. Resources include:

- Terms of Reference for Armed Forces Champions
- Council Action Plan
- Policy best practice wording
- Covenant Stakeholder Meeting guidance
- Website guidance
- Training information
- Borough military footprints and factsheets



These are available at www.londoncovenant.co.uk The website is hosted by London Councils who are committed to supporting their councils' delivery of the Covenant and endorse the resources available. They will also be hosting an ongoing network for Armed Forces Champions across London to enable best practice to be shared.



CASE STUDY:

Over half of London's councils now have a dedicated Armed Forces webpage, including Wandsworth Council who have recently updated theirs to provide a background of their commitment, policy changes and useful support and contact information for their Armed Forces community to ensure they do not face disadvantage:

www.wandsworth.gov.uk/armedforces

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CASE STUDY: Despite having no military unit within their borders, Sutton Council recognised the wider Armed Forces community that may live in the borough and worked with the project at an early stage taking on our support to develop their organisational understanding. They took early and proactive steps to develop an action plan alongside the project and The Royal British Legion. They were the first London council to receive project training for their staff and were awarded the *Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Bronze Award*. In addition to this, they have renewed their commitment through the project by re-signing the *Armed Forces Covenant* at an event in June 2019.



“What ‘Renewing the Covenant in the Capital’ has meant is putting the needs of members of the Armed Forces - particularly, in Sutton’s case, members who are no longer in a serving role - at the centre of our thinking. I see my role as having as one of its prime purposes, the continual need to ask the question: ‘How will this proposal impact on members of the Armed Forces, and how can we make sure that the impact is as positive as possible?’

Work with the Covenant has been hugely successful but needs continual refinement, development and improvement to meet changing needs and I think this definitely applies to Sutton.”

Cllr. Chris Williams, Armed Forces Champion, Sutton Council



BEST PRACTICE: HOUSING

A number of key areas of council policy are affected by the Covenant so we are supporting London's councils by developing examples of how policies might be adapted to include the differing needs of the Armed Forces community. Needs may vary within the community, for example, veterans may need housing support but not schooling and vice versa for serving personnel. Each case must be assessed on an individual basis, but policy changes should account for the whole community. The alteration of policies is not to prioritise the Armed Forces, but to ensure fairness and negate any disadvantage caused by military service. For policy wording examples, see our website resources.

Housing

Research has identified that housing is the element of the Covenant most frequently enacted by local authorities (over 90%)⁶. Around 2% of all applications to Local Authorities for Social Housing are from the Armed Forces community⁷.

Due to the nature of service life, housing challenges for the Armed Forces community include:

Mobility: Some families may have to move around the country due to job postings, leading to difficult decisions about where or when to establish a home. Such mobility can lead to difficulties accessing local services on discharge, particularly if there is a lack of recent connection to a locality.

Affordability: The cost of housing can create problems for the Armed Forces community who, during service, have relative insulation from the real and varied cost of civilian housing⁸.

Vulnerability: Some personnel can leave the Armed Forces with no fixed plans, no family support or a requirement for specialist needs relating to mental health or disability. This can lead to them becoming vulnerable due to homelessness.

With these challenges in mind, the Covenant aims to ensure members of the Armed Forces community have the same access to social housing and other schemes

as any other citizen. They should not be disadvantaged by the requirement for their in service mobility and it is recognised that Armed Forces personnel have priority status in applying for government sponsored affordable housing schemes, including a period after service.

Suggested adaptations to housing policies

- Removing requirements for a local connection.
- Additional preference for housing allocation for members of the Armed Forces community within five years of discharge.
- Exemption, in financial assessments, of lump sum payments as compensation for injury or disability sustained on active service when applying to join the Housing Register.

Examples of good practice

- Maintain a quota of social housing properties that are specifically allocated to members of the Armed Forces community.
- Work with housing organisations with experience of Armed Forces issues to develop criteria and maximise housing options, in conjunction with making use of the local support pathways.
- Housing departments to attend any Covenant Stakeholder meetings.
- Councils to have a nominated, trained 'champion' in each service to handle enquiries relating to the Armed Forces community.

CASE STUDY: A number of London's councils already work with the charity, Stoll, to provide housing through their Veterans' Nomination Scheme. Of the tenancies started through the scheme since 2009, over 80% have been in London⁹ and include tenancies through the councils of Ealing, Haringey, Kingston, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond, Southwark and Wandsworth.

BEST PRACTICE: HEALTH

Health

The mobile nature of service life can be a challenge for personnel and their families accessing health services as they move around the country. Issues, whether physical or mental, relating to a person's service may develop in later life once they no longer have the support of Defence Medical Services.

The Covenant aims to ensure that family members should maintain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the service person being posted. It also aims to ensure that veterans receive priority NHS treatment for conditions as a result of their service and be able to access health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture.

The NHS is incredibly Armed Forces friendly, providing a variety of veteran specific services such as The Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), the Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service and the Veterans' Trauma Network as well as personalised care services for veterans with complex physical or mental needs. The Royal College of General Practitioners is also rolling out a veteran friendly accreditation scheme to GP practices on a regional basis over the next five years. Although the full roll out has not yet reached London, 16 of the capitals GP Practices are already accredited as Veteran Friendly¹⁰.

Referrals into Veteran's Mental Health services in the NHS has increased year on year as more support becomes available and there is more awareness of how to access it. Although the NHS is providing a large amount of services, much of the social care requirements of veterans are provided by councils and are key to supporting the vulnerable Armed Forces community.

Suggested adaptations to health policies

- Information and signposting to appropriate health support services for the Armed Forces community is freely available and easy to access.
- Priority access to social care if needs relate to their Armed Forces service.
- Commission additional places through the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) Service for those having left the Armed Forces in the last five years to provide specialist short term support for lower level mental health issues.
- Offer concessionary access to sports and leisure facilities for the Armed Forces community.

Examples of good practice

- Councils should work closely with local CCGs, encouraging them to sign the Covenant alongside the council and attend Covenant Stakeholder meetings.
- Council health and wellbeing departments should ensure that Joint Strategic Needs Assessments take consideration of the Armed Forces community.
- Adult Social Care workers should ask during initial assessments whether a person has ever served in order to understand their need and signpost to relevant support.
- Information about support available to the Armed Forces community should be made easily accessible to all.

CASE STUDY: Hounslow Council's Armed Forces Champion wrote an article for inclusion in a GP newsletter. This was sent to every GP in the area to highlight the need to ask patients about Service background and record this information. They also encouraged the sharing of data with the council to open a two-way flow of information.

BEST PRACTICE: EDUCATION

Education

As service families move around the country, they may face challenges in finding school places, sometimes outside normal admission periods and at short notice. This leads to the Covenant seeking to ensure that service children have the same standard of, and access to, education as any other citizen in the area where they live. It aims to ensure that special arrangements are put in place to support access to schools for the Armed Forces community if a place is required part way through an academic year due to service reasons.

1,300 pupils from service families are registered at state funded schools in London². As expected, these are mainly around larger military units but every council, other than the City of London, has service pupils in their schools. Research has shown that 50% of schools across England that have service pupils only have 1 or 2¹¹ pupils, which means that the awarded Service Pupil Premium may not have a noticeable impact. The premium could be used more effectively in collaboration with other local schools or even when shared across all of the schools in a borough.

Suggested adaptations to education policies

- Serving Armed Forces personnel who are not living in the area but have a confirmed local posting, will be allocated a place in advance of arriving in the borough. The admission authority will hold a school offer open until they move to the area.
- The School Admissions Code allows service children to be considered as an exemption to the Infant Class Size Limit, where the service child is first on the waiting list for a school place.

Examples of good practice

- Local higher education establishments should be encouraged to sign the Covenant alongside the council and potentially offer courses and help in finding employment to service leavers.
- Use should be made of the MOD Children's Education

Advisory Service (CEAS) for advice on ensuring continuity of education for children of service personnel when the family moves.

- Council School Admissions Forms should be adapted to include a question asking if the applicant is a member of the Armed Forces.
- The Service Pupil Premium of £300 per annum offered to all schools which have children of Service personnel is designed to assist the school to provide pastoral care. Funding is paid directly to the school, but the council should provide advice, ideas and guidance on how best to use this across the area. Schools with low numbers of service pupils can be encouraged to work in collaboration with other local schools, providing combined pastoral care or activities. Councils should also ensure that the schools in the area are aware of the Service Pupil Premium and are claiming all that they are entitled to.

The UK-wide Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance was established to improve educational outcomes for children from Armed Forces families so that they can make informed and confident transitions through further and higher education into thriving adult lives and careers. The SCiP London Hub, established by The Royal British Legion and the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) at King's College London, facilitates communication and collaboration between stakeholders who are working to support the education of Service children in Greater London. Hub members include schools, colleges, universities, charities, and Armed Forces representatives from across London who meet regularly to share knowledge, resources, and best practice. If you are interested in finding out more or attending the Hub meetings, please email sciplondon@outlook.com

*Dr Rachael Gribble, King's College London and
Bruce Holborn, Royal British Legion.*

BEST PRACTICE: HR & EMPLOYMENT

HR & EMPLOYMENT

The majority of service leavers move on to productive and successful civilian lives, but transition can be challenging. Support may be required to identify transferable skills, align Armed Forces qualifications with civilian equivalents and to break into the civilian job market. 86% of service leavers who used the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) were employed within 6 months of leaving service¹², but support is still required to maintain and improve on these standards. It should also be acknowledged that councils may employ serving Armed Forces reservists, veterans, and the families of serving personnel whose needs should be accounted for. The Covenant looks to ensure that service personnel receive appropriate training for both personal and professional development.

Suggested adaptations to HR policies

- Veterans who have left the Armed Forces in the past 2 years will be offered a guaranteed interview if they meet the minimum criteria for an advertised council vacancy.
- Serving Armed Forces Reservists and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers are supported with 10 days' additional paid leave to carry out operational training.
- Mobilisation of reservists in support of UK military operations is supported through an HR framework.

Examples of other good practice

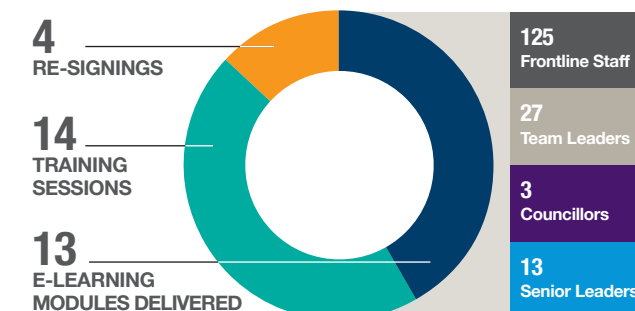
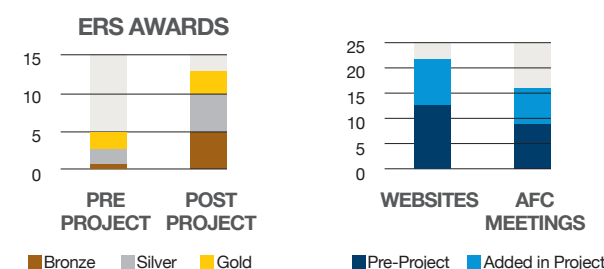
- Promote being Armed Forces-friendly and pro-actively demonstrate that reservists, veterans, cadet instructors and military spouses or partners are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of recruiting and selection processes.

- Work with local DWP job centres to ensure the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered. Job centres and other local military employment charities should be encouraged to attend council Covenant Stakeholder meetings.
- Carry out an employee census to identify employed reservists or veterans, in order to better support those individuals.
- Engage with the CTP to advertise job roles and employ service leavers and their partners.
- Enrol on the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

CASE STUDY: DWP Jobcentre Plus Area
Managers have undertaken awareness training and are delivering it to local branches to improve the understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces community by employment coaches. They've also received funding for a network of full time Armed Forces Champions across the country.

CASE STUDY: The latest London council
to be awarded the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme's highest, Gold, award is Lewisham. They were able to advocate their proactive and ongoing support of the Armed Forces through a Guaranteed Interview Scheme, policies of flexible working to support military commitments, 10 days paid leave for military training and a framework of management support pre and post mobilisation of reserves.

PROJECT SUCCESSES IN NUMBERS



4 RE-SIGNINGS
14 TRAINING SESSIONS
13 E-LEARNING MODULES DELIVERED

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has shown, through the case studies, that there is a lot of good work already in existence across London but mostly by individual councils. There is now the opportunity to learn and take best practice from each other and to work with neighbouring councils to improve the delivery of the Covenant and support to the Armed Forces community. A wide range of resources have been developed for use by councils and residents which are already proving beneficial in providing local support services. Alongside these resources, there are several key recommendations which we would suggest to help make London a good place in the UK to find support as a member of the Armed Forces community.

RECOMMENDATION 1: ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONS SHOULD BE ALLOCATED CENTRALLY BY HR WITH THE POSITION WRITTEN INTO THEIR JOB ROLE

The allocation of Armed Forces Champions in London is varied with some being appointed due to their community focused role, others have an Armed Forces background and some have taken it up through good will. This position is not written into their job description and there is generally no organisational structure relating to it. Therefore, if a Champion moves on or is uncontactable, the Armed Forces relationship is immediately weakened. Having only a single point of contact results in a potential single point of failure. The Champion should be supported by other officers who will be able to maintain the relationship in their absence. HR departments should hold Terms of Reference for the Armed Forces Champion role (available online) and ensure any new appointees are aware of the responsibilities. This will also enable the job holder to be recognised for this part of their role.

RECOMMENDATION 2: COVENANT STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED, AND AN ACTION PLAN DEVELOPED

The majority of councils are engaging with the Armed Forces on a reactive basis when a requirement needs to be addressed or an event is planned. We recommend a proactive approach to develop an ongoing relationship which will highlight developing issues or needs at an earlier stage. The establishment of an annual or bi-annual Covenant stakeholder meeting will allow key personalities to meet, all relevant parties to be kept up to date and will provide focus on the delivery of Covenant commitments at each council. Any public commitment should have a structure in place to monitor its delivery so early stakeholder meetings should look to develop an action plan, providing focus on future delivery as well as keeping track of measures committed to in the signed Covenant document.

RECOMMENDATION 3: A DEDICATED ARMED FORCES WEBPAGE SHOULD BE DEVELOPED BY EACH COUNCIL

Access to policy changes and support for the Armed Forces from each council can be difficult. Councils should therefore develop a dedicated webpage with information about their own, and external, support to the Armed Forces community. The Forces Connect app and support pathways developed for London should be publicised here with customer facing staff encouraged to use these resources.

RECOMMENDATION 4: ARMED FORCES AWARENESS TRAINING AND REFRESHERS SHOULD BE MANDATORY

All council staff who have contact with residents should have awareness and understanding of the Covenant and potential issues faced by the Armed Forces community.

Such training should be included in staff inductions and annual refreshers for all other staff. Classroom training packages are available for councils to deliver or e-Learning can be provided and tailored to each council.

RECOMMENDATION 5: ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONS AND COUNCILLORS SHOULD ATTEND THE LONDON COUNCILS' ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONS NETWORK AND THE LONDON DISTRICT ARMED FORCES COVENANT CONFERENCE

Both the Champions Network and the conference are annual events and will be planned to occur at six-month intervals. Both events will keep attendees up to date on any new changes and will provide a networking and collaboration opportunity. The Armed Forces community is not focused in a small area and support should therefore cross borough borders. Engagement between Champions and collaborative working is key to successful delivery of the Covenant, not only to share best practice but to jointly deliver support to the community and staff across a wider area, more efficiently.

RECOMMENDATION 6: COUNCILS SHOULD LOOK TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNCILS

The Armed Forces community should be helped in a wider, regional way by pro-actively arranging services and support across multiple councils. The issues being faced do not respect borough boundaries so it would be beneficial to maintain a level of consistency. Such services can address social isolation and spread awareness of the support available to the Armed Forces community such as support pathways, use of the Forces Connect app and knowledge of council policy changes under the Covenant. Grants are available through a variety of sources, such as the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and could be used to establish social groups, breakfast clubs or community activities.

RECOMMENDATION 7: COUNCILS SHOULD CAPTURE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY STATISTICS

Residents seeking support should be asked if they have ever served in the Armed Forces, with positive responses recorded for each area of need. Non-personal data capture will allow an accurate assessment of the need in each borough. When such numbers are shared appropriately, it can be assessed for geographical trends or whether adaptations need to be made by the military.

RECOMMENDATION 8: A QUOTA OF SOCIAL HOUSING SHOULD BE ALLOCATED FOR USE BY THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

To support the ongoing housing needs of the Armed Forces community in London, councils, along with their housing partners, should provide a quota of social housing to be allocated for this purpose, on top of waiving local connection requirements. Develop an agreement with Stoll for involvement in their Veterans' Nomination Scheme (www.stoll.org.uk/housing/vns).

RECOMMENDATION 9: COUNCILS SHOULD ENGAGE WITH THE DEFENCE EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

As part of a focus on ensuring HR and employment policies cater for the Armed Forces community, councils should apply to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme to build a relationship with the Ministry of Defence and see the benefits of supporting staff, recruiting from the Armed Forces community and gain public recognition of the commitment that the council has already made.

RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE CAPITAL CONCLUSION

During the project's deep dive analysis, it was seen that London's councils had already adapted policies to support their commitment to the Covenant. A key finding in this stage, however, was that councils were working on an individual basis. This led to the project focusing more on facilitating a collaborative approach to standardise the support available across London. Networking opportunities and regular updates of changes have been well received by councils who are now able to use these to begin working in conjunction with their neighbours to achieve a common goal.

It also became clear that not all frontline staff were aware of the Covenant. Training packages were developed and quickly became a key delivery element of the project. These have had positive feedback that they help build essential staff awareness and they,

alongside the support resources, will continue after the project has completed, via HQ London District's Engagement Team.

The overall goal of standardising the approach to the Covenant across London has been achieved through the project establishing a thorough framework of actions that councils can follow at their own pace and discretion. This framework, along with the recommendations made in this report, allow councils to build on already strong foundations to adapt and supplement their offer.

In conclusion, the project has been successful in improving the understanding and delivery of the Covenant and providing a focal point for the ongoing development of support in London.



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