

citizens
advice

Telford &
the Wrekin

A TOOLKIT for Voluntary, community & social enterprise organisations



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Foreword by Councillor Chris Turley



On the 14 December 2012, a Partnership of local organisations came together to state their commitment to support the Armed Forces community, their families and veterans. This commitment takes the form of a living partnership document called the **Armed Forces Community Covenant**.

The aim of the Covenant is to remove any disadvantage caused to service personnel, their families and veterans caused by their service and sacrifice for the country. It supports the National Armed Forces Covenant and helps to deliver its aims within local communities.

The key to successfully meeting the aims of the Covenant is partnership. By bringing together communities, organisations both voluntary, private and statutory we can understand the needs of service and civilian communities. This understanding will allow us to:

- encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces Community in their area;
- nurture public understanding and awareness amongst 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.

As a Partnership we have identified a single key priority which is to **ensure that local information and advice is clear, easy to find and helpful**. To this end, Telford & Wrekin Council commissioned the Citizens Advice Telford & Wrekin to engage with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and to develop a joint approach to the delivery of services for service personnel, service leavers, veterans and their families. This Toolkit has subsequently been developed and it is hoped that it encourages organisations to consider becoming more 'forces friendly' and to join the 4,000+ organisations, within the UK, who have formally signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

If you would like to find out more about the Covenant please contact the Partnership on email communitycovenant@telford.gov.uk.

Councillor Chris Turley

What is the Armed Forces Covenant?

The covenant focusses on helping members of the armed forces community have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen. It supports serving personnel, service leavers, veterans, and their families. It is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives.

Additional support is provided in a number of areas including:

- education and family well-being
- having a home
- starting a new career
- access to healthcare
- financial assistance
- discounted services



For more information about the background of the Armed Forces Covenant go to the Armed Forces Covenant page [here](#)

The Link in full is at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-2015-to-2020/armed-forces-covenant

The VCSE Toolkit

Citizens Advice Telford & the Wrekin has been commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council to undertake a piece of work engaging the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector with the Armed Forces Covenant and developing, and piloting a joint approach to the delivery of services for serving personnel, service leavers, veterans, and their families. This Toolkit is for VCSE organisations to use as part of this to:

- Encourage organisations to consider becoming a formal signatory to the Covenant
- Help VCSE organisations to become more "forces friendly"
- Create a combined approach to monitoring the use of existing services by serving personnel, service leavers, veterans, and their families, so that levels of local need can be better understood.

Signing up to The Armed Forces Covenant

Business and charitable organisation who wish to demonstrate their support for the armed forces community can sign the covenant. In doing so they make a range of written and publicised promises to set out their support. The covenant aims to bring together the armed forces community and the civilian community on a local level, nurturing mutual understanding and raising awareness of issues faced by the armed forces. Organisations can choose specific promises or pledges to support their employees within the armed forces community.

Do you know what pledges you want to make?

Yes 

No? You can look download a template at www.gov.uk/government/publications/corporate-covenant-pledge

You can, for example, pledge to:

- promote the fact you are an armed forces-friendly organisation
- support the employment of veterans and service leavers
- offer flexibility in leave for service spouses and partner before, during and after deployment
- support reservist employees, allowing leave for training and deployment
- offer discount to members of the armed forces community

The covenant should be signed by someone in authority who will make sure that these promises are implemented, this could be the CEO or HR Director. It could also be co-signed by a member of the armed forces.

Do you where to get more information?

Yes 

No?

- If you're an organisation interested in signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant, please contact Cindy Mason-Morris, Telford & Wrekin Armed Forces Covenant Project Support Officer by emailing cindy.masonmorris@telford.gov.uk or telephone 07458 119628.
- For more information and referrals, go to www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk
- To sign up www.gov.uk/government/publications/corporate-covenant-pledge

Towards becoming a forces friendly organisation

The Armed Forces Covenant relies on organisations, businesses and communities to actively support it in order to make a difference. On an organisational level, it encourages the signees to include policies that encourage reserve service, support employment of veterans and service spouses/partners as employees or volunteers and as clients or service-users

+ **Do you know what “forces-friendly” looks like for your organisation?** Yes

No? You might want to consider discussing it with your trustees or volunteers, opening-up debate and/or finding someone to “champion” the issues.

a) Running a workshop: You could ask groups to discuss key questions such as:

- **What challenges affect the different groups in the armed forces community?**
- **How can we celebrate the service of those serving or who have served in our armed forces?**
- **What skills, knowledge and experience are brought to our organisation by people who are serving, have served and their families?**

Use the information and case studies from www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk to encourage discussion about how your organisation can be more forces friendly

- b) Finding a “champion; many organisations already have people with forces connections working with them. A good champion will:
- Have an in-depth knowledge of the issues affecting the Armed Forces community and be prepared to provide awareness-raising on them to the other staff/volunteers.
 - Be able to relate to the issues facing this group in a sensitive and understanding way, be a good and patient listener.
 - Preferably have personal experience of being in the UK military/being a family member of armed forces personnel member.

Useful to know

Not all suggestions will universally fit any organisation or business and it would be beneficial to have a discussion on what it means to be Forces Friendly for your organisation and what pledges you can make when you sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

One way to do this is by providing awareness training for the staff and volunteers on issues facing the Armed Forces Community.

There is training available on the NHS E-learning website through the open access sessions at <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/nhs-healthcare-for-the-armed-forces/>

Warwickshire County council have also developed the e-learning programme modules on the Armed Forces Covenant implementation for front line staff, housing/homelessness and AFC, families of the Armed Forces personnel and Adjusting to Life after Armed Forces at <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/community-safety/armed-forces-covenant-e-learning-programme>

Becoming a forces friendly employer

By becoming a “forces friendly” employer you can benefit from the wide range of unique skills and experiences that reservists and veterans can bring to your organisation. Employing armed forces community members can help diversify the talent in your workforce. Signing the Covenant means that you are supporting your employees and volunteers as reservists and veterans.

➤ **Do you know how many of your staff and volunteers have a forces connection (I)?**

Yes 

No? They may be a key resource for you during this process. You can ask them to tell you, but bear in mind that some may not want to disclose this information. If done as part of a positive process of becoming a “forces friendly” organisation, it may give you the opportunity to celebrate their service. (See also monitoring, below.)

The Defence Relationship Management (DRM) offer advice and support on employing members of the armed forces community, and enables organisations to develop a mutually beneficial working relationship with the Ministry of Defence (MOD). By partnering with organisations throughout the UK, DRM aids them in understanding the value of signing the Armed Forces Covenant whilst also providing support on employing reservists, veterans, cadet force adult volunteers and military spouses and improving fairness for the armed forces community in the consumer market. www.gov.uk/government/groups/defence-relationship-management

➤ **Do you know how to support the employment of veterans?**

Yes 

No? You may wish to:

- Work with the Career Transition Partnership (www.ctp.org.uk), a high quality, no cost recruitment service for organisations seeking highly motivated and experienced veterans, who are leaving the Armed Forces.
- Offer guaranteed interviews to veterans, young and old, if they meet the selection criteria laid out in a job advert.
- Support the employment, where appropriate, of wounded, injured or sick veterans, perhaps by working with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP Assist) or through a guaranteed interview scheme.
- Recognise military skills and qualifications when interviewing for new positions.
- Hold briefing days specifically for those leaving the Armed Forces, as a way to raise awareness of the opportunities for employment in your business.

➤ **Do you know how to support the employment of service spouses and partners?**

Yes

No?

You may wish to:

- Focus recruiting effort on the Armed Forces community, such as advertising through 'service-friendly' recruitment agencies and service charities.
- Offer guaranteed interviews to spouses/partners if they meet the selection criteria laid out in a job advert.
- If you have branches in multiple geographic areas, committing to attempt to find alternative employment within the business in another location, if they need to move to accompany their partner.

➤ **Do you know how to support reservists amongst your staff?**

Yes

No?

The Reservists Employer Toolkit provides guidance and support on all aspects of employing reservists <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reservist-employers-toolkit/reservist-employer-toolkit> including:

- Details of rights and responsibilities, and financial assistance
- Guidance for line managers on how to manage reservists
- Managing requests regarding time off for training
- Guidance and actions for when a reservist is mobilised, demobilised and returns to work

Useful to Know

During and at the end of their service, the UK Armed Forces personnel have access to a variety of vocational and academic qualifications funded by the Ministry of Defence. Some of the training is very specialised to the roles undertaken during the service and need be translated for the civilian career post transition, other skills are universal and can be utilised in civilian jobs market with minimal adjustments. Additionally, the personnel have valuable core skills developed through the military training, including ability to resolve problems under pressure, teamwork, discipline and adaptability. Military life instils qualities such as positivity, loyalty and courage. This is in addition to the excellent physical fitness that most ex-personnel possess.

The spouses and partners of the personnel often need to move locations at a short notice. This develops great organisational skills, independence and flexibility which are often not thought of by employers considering hiring them. Often, they attain high level educational qualifications but are unable to develop long term stable careers due to rapid changes in their spouses'/partners' deployments. Due to this, their professional development could stall despite great motivation and talents.

Employees and volunteers who are reservists and/or ex-military or their spouses and partners will therefore enhance your organisation in many ways.

➤ **Do you have an HR Policy on the recruitment and employment of veterans, service spouses and partners and reservists?**

Yes

No?

You may want to consider implementing the following policies:

- A recruitment policy which specifies where and how you advertise your posts and how you interview; you may want to consider working with the Career Transition Partnership or specialist employment agencies who work with transitioning personnel.
- A selection policy which is competences based and demonstrates an understanding of the transferable skills, knowledge and experience gained by members of the armed forces and their families
- A policy for employing Reservists. A template can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/reservist-hr-policy-development-a-template-for-employers

There are also examples of how other organisations have done this at www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/covenantinaction

➤ **Are you doing well with becoming a Forces Friendly Employer? Do you want to take the next step?**

No

Yes?

The Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) publicly recognises employers' efforts to support Defence personnel issues, such as employing reservists and veterans, while encouraging others to do the same.

The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

You must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant to nominate your organisation for one of the awards

For more information, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>

Monitoring of Service Users

Many VCSE organisations don't ask their service users about whether they are serving or former members of the armed forces community or their families. We therefore don't have a clear picture of the situation in Telford.

Do you monitor your service users' forces connections?

Yes 

No? If questions are asked, the organisation must be prepared to give a valid reason why this information is required. The reasons could include the following:

- As a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant, the organisation needs to ensure that it indeed treats the Armed Forces community fairly;
- There is additional support available exclusively to the members of the UK Armed Forces community and it is crucial that the service user for whom it could be relevant are fully aware of this support.

Do you want to monitor forces connections?

No 

Yes? You might wish to consider the value of; a) a light-touch approach, and/or; b) gathering more detailed data:

a) You could add to your normal every-day monitoring a simple question;

Are you a serving or former member of the armed forces community or do you have a close family member who is?

Useful to Know

Currently, there is no accurate record of the numbers of existing former armed forces personnel, their characteristics, occupations and needs.

The Annual Population Survey 2017 estimates that there were 2.4 million UK Armed Forces veterans (5% of household residents aged 16 and over), which is a 99,000 reduction since 2016¹.

The veterans are predominantly white (99% vs. 92% of non-veteran population), older ((47% older than 75 vs. non-veteran population of 8%), male (89% vs. 47% of non-veteran population).

The next UK census in March 2021 will include questions about the armed forces service providing up to date information about some more characteristics for this group.

It is even more difficult to estimate the number of spouses, partners and widow(er)s living in the UK.

b) You could ask questions that produce richer data or do an annual “snap-shot” survey of people using your service. Such questions might include:

- **Are you currently serving in the UK Armed Forces?**
- **Have you ever served in the UK Armed Forces?**
- **Are you a reservist in the UK Armed Forces?**
- **Which service branch are/were you a member of?**
- **Are you a spouse, partner, parent or child of a serving Armed Forces personnel?**
- **Are you a spouse, partner, parent or child of a veteran of the UK Armed Forces?**

You will also need to ensure that any GDPR statement which you use covers the collection and retention of this data and makes clear what you will be doing with the data.

You may also want to include monitoring of which of the Covenant areas your service-users were seeking support with:

- **Please indicate which of the following areas you were talking to us about today:**
 - **education and family well-being**
 - **having a home**
 - **starting a new career**
 - **access to healthcare**
 - **financial assistance**
 - **discounted services**
 - **Other (please specify)**

Collecting data regularly can help you to spot trends or increases in how serving personnel, people who have served and their families are using. However, an annual or occasional survey can be longer and generate more data. It will give you a thorough understanding of the profile of your service users which you can contribute to the general monitoring (see below).

Monitoring staff and volunteers

➤ Do you know how many of your staff or volunteers have forces connections (II)?

Yes 

No? As you should be asking your service users about their Armed Forces connections, it could be useful to analyse this data and map it against your organisation's employee and volunteer demographic to ensure that your organisation has sufficient representation of veterans and reservists as well as their spouses/partners to reflect the proportion of the service users who also belong to the same community. It can also help you demonstrate the links your organisation has with the armed forces community.

a) As part of becoming a forces friendly employer, you may wish to add to your staff and volunteer demographic monitoring form the following questions:

- **Are you currently serving in the UK Armed Forces?**
- **Have you ever served in the UK Armed Forces?**
- **Are you a reservist in the UK Armed Forces?**
- **Which service branch are/were you a member of?**
- **Are you a spouse, partner, parent or child of a serving Armed Forces personnel?**
- **Are you a spouse, partner, parent or child of a veteran of the UK Armed Forces?**

b) You may also wish to take a "snap-shot" of your staff and volunteers, using these questions as a starting point when you start using this tool-kit. This will enable you to understand changes in the numbers of people from the covenant groups.

It will also enable us, as a VCSE sector to know how many people with forces connections work within the sector.

Towards a common approach to monitoring

It is important that VCSE organisations use our work with people who are serving, have served and their families to engage with the work going on it Telford to ensure that our community is forces-friendly and that we are delivering our services as accessibly as possible. We also need to know about the numbers of people concerned and their needs. We ask that for the next year (to October 2020) you join in with a common monitoring exercise.

1

Join the scheme by emailing ellawarburton@telfordcab.co.uk nominating a person who is leading for you on this. **Yes**

2

Get set up - if you don't already do the following you could:

Yes

- Add the monitoring questions to your demographic monitoring for clients (including a note that data will be shared anonymously with an external organisation).
- If you monitor the issues brought by your clients, add the covenant areas to these.
- Take a "snap-shot" of your staff and volunteers. We will send you a monitoring form to do this.

3

Monitor quarterly:

Yes

- We will send you a form each quarter (January, April, July, September) to collect the stats from all participating organisations.

4

Send final results – September 2020

Yes

- We will also ask you to do a further snap-shot of your staff and volunteers.

We will compile the results at each quarter and at the end of the period so that we can show the work that, together, we are achieving in this area.

How are we doing? Keeping track of progress

Have you agreed as an organisation to sign up to the Covenant?

Yes

No?

- ✚ Take a paper to your Trustee or Directors Board – see page 4 for how to get more information
- ✚ Discuss what pledges you might want to make – download the template at www.gov.uk/government/publications/corporate-covenant-pledge
- ✚ Do you need to have someone to champion the Covenant internally – see if you have a staff member or volunteer with a forces connection – see pages 6 & 7 for how you might look for someone

Have you agreed what “forces friendly” looks like for you?

Yes

No?

- ✚ Run a workshop or a series of short meetings to get the opinions of your staff and volunteers – see page 5 for how to stimulate debate and discussion
- ✚ Find a Covenant Champion with lived experience and good skills – see page 5 – to inform the internal discussion
- ✚ Think about how you might join in with other work going on in Telford such as Telford’s annual Armed Forces Day - see www.armedforcesday.org.uk
- ✚ Survey your service users – see page 9. How many of them have forces connections? Are you supporting them to the best extent? Are your services really accessible to people who are serving, have served and their families? If not, is there something you can do about that?

Are you a forces friendly employer?

Yes 

No?

- ✚ Look at the wide range of transferable skills brought to an organisation by veterans and update your recruitment policy – see page 6 for some hints and tips on how to do this.
- ✚ Do you support the employment of service spouses and partners? See page 7 for ways to improve.
- ✚ Put measures in place to support reservists amongst your staff – see the toolkit at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reservist-employers-toolkit/reservist-employer-toolkit>
- ✚ Have you got the right policies in place? See page 8 for information and templates.

Yes, and you have signed the Covenant?

- ✚ Why not sign up to the Employer Recognition Scheme – see page 8

Do you monitor your service-users' forces connections?

Yes 

No?

- ✚ Include a question in your normal demographic monitoring – see page 9 for details
- ✚ Undertake a more in-depth monitoring exercise – see page 10 for suggested questions you could use.
- ✚ Join in with the local VCSE in measuring and sharing the numbers of serving personnel, people who have served and their families we work with as a whole – see page 12 for how to become part of this

