Council Policy Best Practice

**Objective**

This document aims to address the key areas of council policy that may be affected by the Armed Forces Covenant and provide information and ideas on how these policies may be adapted to include the differing needs of the Armed Forces community. The Armed Forces Covenant says that:

*“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.”*

The aim of altering council policies is not to prioritise the Armed Forces community but instead to ensure fairness and that any disadvantage caused by military service is negated. These examples are not exhaustive or prescriptive, but ideas and suggestions as a starting point for policy review.

**Health**

Sometimes the mobile nature of service life and the sacrifices and stresses undertaken, creates challenges that need addressing. The covenant sets the following healthcare goals:

* Family members should maintain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the service person being posted.
* Veterans should receive priority NHS hospital treatment for conditions resulting from their service in the Armed Forces.
* Veterans should be able to access mental health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture.
* Those injured in service should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation’s moral obligation.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

* *All ex-service personnel will be offered information, guidance and sign-posting into statutory services via their named contact at the council.*
* *All ex-service personnel will have priority access to social care if their social care needs relate to their service. Where they do not meet this criteria, they will be signposted to other service related support services.*
* *For ex-service personnel who have returned from service in the last five years, the Council will commission additional places through the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) Service, providing specialist short term support for lower level mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.*
* *For ex-service personnel who have returned from service in the last five years, the Council will work with leisure contractors to offer concessionary access to sports and leisure facilities.*

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

* Clinical Commissioning Groups in your area should be encouraged to work closely with the council, sign the council Armed Forces Covenant and be included in Armed Forces Partnership meetings. It should be ensured that they are aware of the difficulties that can be faced by members of the Armed Forces Community, either due to mobility issues or because they require on-going treatment for a condition acquired in Service.
* Armed Forces Champions could write an article for inclusion in GP newsletters to send to every GP in the area and highlight the need to ask patients about Service background and record this information.
* Council healthcare departments should ensure that Joint Strategic Needs Assessments take consideration of the Armed Forces community.
* Adult Social Care workers should ask during assessments whether a person has ever served, in order to be able to better signpost and support the Armed Forces community
* Signposting and information about the support available to the Armed Forces community should be readily accessible to both staff and the community with contact details for any local service providers and with links to NHS information such as:
<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare/>

**Housing**

Due to the mobile nature of service life, some families may find that they have to move around the country due to different postings. Many will not own their own home and may therefore need assistance finding accommodation on leaving the Armed Forces. The Covenant therefore sets the following housing goals:

* Members of the Armed Forces community should have the same access to social housing and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and not be disadvantaged by the requirement for mobility while in service.
* Those injured in service should have preferential access to appropriate housing schemes, as well as assistance with necessary adaptations.
* Armed Forces personnel have priority status in applying for government sponsored affordable housing schemes, service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

* *The Council recognises the special position of members of the Armed Forces (and their families) whose employment requires them to be mobile and who are likely therefore to be particularly disadvantaged by local connection requirements; as well as those injured reservists who may need to move to the area to access treatment, care or support. Such local connection requirements will not apply to those serving or ex-serving personnel.*
* *Additional preference for housing allocation will be given to the following groups:*
	+ *Members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years of discharge.*
	+ *Bereaved and Divorced spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation.*
	+ *Members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service.*
* *Households with sufficient financial resources will not qualify to join the housing register, however members of the Armed Forces who have received lump sum payments as compensation for injury or disability sustained on active service are exempt from these limits.*

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

* Housing officers should be made aware of issues for those in the Armed Forces through staff training. Key personnel from housing departments should be included in the Armed Forces Partnership meeting.
* A council could have a nominated housing officer with the training and knowledge to handle enquiries from members of the Armed Forces community.
* The council should work with housing organisations with experience of Armed Forces issues in order to develop criteria and maximise housing options and opportunities for ex-service personnel, in conjunction with maintaining a list of the charities both in the borough and the wider local area who are able to provide support.
* The council could maintain a quota of social housing properties that are specifically allocated to members of the Armed Forces community; partner housing and military charities may be able to nominate individuals for some of these properties.

**Education**

As Service families move around the country they may face challenges in finding school places for their children, sometimes outside normal admission periods or at short notice. Service families may also seek flexibility in arranging leave during term time in order to coincide with the Service person’s operational deployments and pre- and post-tour leave. The Covenant therefore sets the following housing goals:

* Children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education (including early years services) as any other citizen in the area where they live.
* There should be special arrangements to support access to schools if a place is required part way through an academic year as a result of a family having to move for Service reasons.

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

* *Serving Armed Forces personnel who are not living in the area but have a confirmed local posting, or who are returning from overseas will be allocated a place in advance of arriving into the borough. Any application must be accompanied by an official letter that confirms a relocation date and a Unit postal address or quartering area address. Further to this, the admission authority will hold a school offer open until you move to the area.*
* *The School Admissions Code allows service children to be considered as an exemption to the Infant Class Size Limit. Admission can only be granted under this provision where the service child is first on the waiting list for a school place and the admission authority does not consider that an extra pupil would have a detrimental impact on the efficient use of resources or the provision of education.*
* It is important to note that the provisions do not give automatic priority to service children over other children or guarantee that service children will get a place at a particular school.

Examples of other practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

* Local higher education establishments should be encouraged sign the Armed Forces 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) on 01980 618244 for advice on making arrangements to ensure continuity of education for those children of service personnel when the family moves.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service>
* Council School Admissions Forms should be adapted to include a question asking if the applicant is a member of the Armed Forces.
* A Service Pupil Premium is offered to all schools which have children of Service personnel of £300 per child per annum, designed to assist the School to provide pastoral care. The funding is paid to directly to the school and it is for them to decide how best to spend this money for the benefit of their pupils. Schools with low numbers of service pupils can work in collaboration with other local schools to provide combined pastoral care to service pupils in the area. Councils should ensure that the schools in the area are aware of the Service Pupil Premium and are claiming all that they are entitled to. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-children-in-state-schools-handbook>

**HR & Employment**

The majority of ex-service personnel have productive and successful civilian lives but transition can be challenging and support may be required to identify transferrable skills, align Armed Forces qualifications with civilian equivalents and to break into the civilian job market. It should also be acknowledged that Local Authorities may employ serving Armed Forces reservists, veterans and the families of serving personnel whose needs should be accounted for. The Covenant therefore sets the following employment goal:

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

Examples of good practice that could be included in Local Authority policies include:

* *Ex-service personnel who have left the Armed Forces in the past 2 years will be offered a guaranteed interview if they meet the criteria for an advertised council job.*
* *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 practices a council could take forward outside of policy wording:

* Promote being armed forces-friendly and proactively demonstrate that reservists, armed forces veterans, cadet instructors and military spouses/partners are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes.
* Work with local job centres to ensure the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered. Job centres and other local military employment charities should be included in local Armed Forces Partnership meetings.
* Carry out an “employee census” to ask staff whether they are a Reservist or a veteran in order to better support those individuals.
* Engage with the Career Transition Partnership (and Partner Employment Programme) to advertise job roles and employ service leavers and their partners.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/career-transition-partnership>
* The council should actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards Armed Forces issues through internal publications, web pages and staff training.