



Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership

Annual Review Report 2021

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Purpose

To update stakeholders on progress and delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant’s aims in Herefordshire over the past 12 months.

Background

The Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (HAFCP), is tasked with delivering the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant in Herefordshire. The partnership is made up of representatives from the Armed Forces community together with the public, private, and voluntary sectors. It is facilitated by Herefordshire Council as part of their ongoing commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces community is not disadvantaged when accessing public services. Dedicated topic leads work to an action plan to address key areas of need within Herefordshire. Each year, it refreshes the action plan and priorities based on identified gaps in provision or where improvements can be made to services and support.

HAFCP would like to thank all their partners and stakeholders for the outstanding work and commitment throughout another challenging year. In particular, our military charities who work tirelessly out in the community supporting individuals and families, and also the organisations and businesses who go the extra mile to offer bespoke support and services to our Armed Forces community.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Air Vice-Marshal Mike Smart who stepped down from HAFCP in the autumn 2021. Mike was a founding member of Herefordshire's partnership in 2012. His energy, contribution and drive have been pivotal to improving services and support for our local Armed Forces. As well as lobbying, influencing policy changes and encouraging collaboration, he has been an outstanding ambassador for Herefordshire and the Covenant, using every opportunity to showcase the county at a regional and national level. Mike is now living in Yorkshire to be closer to his family and we wish him all the very best.

Highlights in 2021

Healthcare – topic lead, Tim Howson

We continue to work closely with primary and secondary healthcare partners to improve outcomes and services for all those in the Armed Services community.

- Taurus Healthcare, the federation of Herefordshire GPs and practices signed the Armed Forces Covenant as part of their ongoing commitment to the Covenant.
- 14 out of 19 Herefordshire GP practices are now 'Veteran-friendly' under the Royal College of GPs accreditation scheme.
- The Wye Valley Trust gained 'Veteran Aware' status under the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance in April 2021. This places them in a growing group of NHS providers who have agreed to be exemplars of the best care for the Armed Forces community. The Trust has also gained silver status under the MOD's employer recognition scheme.
- Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS), continue to provide independent and confidential medical welfare services to the Armed Forces community receiving treatment within the Wye Valley NHS Trust. As well as helping to free up resources for NHS colleagues and timely discharges, the Welfare Officer continues to offer regular support at home to individuals and families. DMWS also run a children and families health and wellbeing outreach project in tandem to their hospital support. Both projects work in partnership with other charity and statutory agencies.
- After the recent merge of Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Groups work has started to ensure Armed Forces healthcare needs continue to be well represented on the newly formed Integrated Care Systems Partnership.
- Survey work has been undertaken to ensure that the families of serving personnel receive timely local dental services.

Mental Health & Wellbeing – topic lead, David Thomas

David Thomas, Deputy Associate Director, Primary Care and Community Mental Health Services, from Herefordshire & Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (himself a veteran), took over the mental health topic lead role from Tim Howson who moved into the healthcare and Vice-Chair role.

- The Herefordshire Veterans and Families Mental Health Network (HVMHN), continues to meet regularly. It draws together relevant groups and organisations from the NHS, military charities, support groups and specialist services. It aims to ensure the development and improvement of

local mental health and similar services for all members of the local Armed Forces community, including family members.

- In March 2021, the NHS launched ‘Op Courage’, a new overarching service combining 3 mental health programmes: Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service, the Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service, the Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service. The new wraparound service offers a joined-up approach from early signs of mental health problems as well as more advanced mental health conditions and psychological trauma, including intensive emergency care. Mental health practitioners, many of whom will have an Armed Forces background themselves, work out in the community supporting individuals and working alongside military charities and mental health services. Our local Op Courage service liaises regularly with HVMHN.
- A new Suicide Prevention programme for Herefordshire and Worcestershire launched, funded by NHS England, to improve early intervention and suicide prevention in everyday settings. The project is looking specifically at middle aged men who may be less likely to access formal healthcare support around mental health. The specialist team are working closely in veteran settings as well as introducing new intervention initiatives and training opportunities.
- Herefordshire’s substance misuse service recommissioned and moved from Wearewithyou to Turning Point. A dedicated recovery worker for the Armed Forces community continues to be in place as part of established funding enabled by HVMHN.
- There have been a number of outstanding local initiatives for veterans with dementia including:

 - Age UK Herefordshire & Worcestershire Veterans Meeting Centre in Hereford provides a warm and friendly environment for veterans to enjoy activities and meet new people. They also work within a Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation Therapy framework which is proven to enhance wellbeing and maintain cognitive ability. Members enjoy a hot cooked meal together, take part in meaningful activities, and form new friendships.
 - Orchestra of the Swan have been delivering weekly musical workshops at the Courtyard Hereford for Armed Forces veterans living with dementia. Café Muse is an opportunity for Armed Forces veterans affected by dementia (including carers and/or family members) to meet weekly. The interactive sessions are delivered by trained musicians who are themselves veterans. Orchestra of the Swan obtained funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to offer the sessions free of charge.
- In July 2021, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust signed the Armed Forces Covenant. The Trust is now on its way to achieve its silver employer recognition award and applying for Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance Veteran Friendly accreditation.
- As part of Defence Medical Welfare Service funding portfolio, The Cart Shed delivered a range of woodland activities for military children. Funding has also enabled Herefordshire Football Association to offer regular walking football sessions to veterans.

Housing- topic lead, Hayley Crane, Strategic Housing Manager Herefordshire Council

HAFCP plays an important role to ensure that local housing needs are improved for the Armed Forces community in Herefordshire. The Strategic Housing team at Herefordshire Council ensure that current guidance and criteria for the Armed Forces is fully adopted into its housing allocation policy that aims to remove disadvantage when applying to the social housing register. Work is underway to update the housing allocation policy to incorporate the forthcoming statutory duty in accordance to the new Armed Forces Act 2021. Consultation has also started to better understand how waiting lists and the process of applying can be improved.

- Bespoke [advice and guidance for the Armed Forces seeking housing](#) in Herefordshire has been created on Herefordshire Council's website.
- Good communication between the Housing Solutions Team and the Armed Forces operational working group for caseworkers has improved housing outcomes for individuals with complex cases or those who are homeless.
- Funding from both Herefordshire Council and Homes England through the Almshouse Consortium enabled The Buchanan Trust to build four new veteran properties on their farm estate at Bosbury, Herefordshire. The Trust provides temporary residential accommodation for former service men and women and their families, to help them adjust to civilian life. In addition to housing, veterans are given access to work experience, accredited training skills and employment opportunities in the rural and construction sectors. The homes were officially opened in May 2021 by celebrity Ross Kemp.
- Leominster Veterans Self Build project is now fully operational, managed by Alabare in conjunction with Stonewater Housing. Social return on investment assessed in 2021 to be that for every £1 spent there would be savings of £10.26.

Schools & Education – topic lead, Louise Tanner, Admissions & 14-19 Curriculum Manager, Herefordshire Council

Representatives from Children & Families Directorate and from the local Garrison HIVE (military families' information support unit), and third sector partners continue to meet termly. Good relationships have developed through the year to support education and improve outcomes for children of Service personnel.

- The education sub-group presented at a schools briefing in October 2021 with 16 schools in attendance. Topics covered included admissions, Service Pupil Premium (SPP), the role of the MOD's Children's Education Advisory Service, and support available to families from the Garrison and third sector providers.
- The RAF Youth & STEM Team visited St. Mary's Credenhill and ran a workshop on coding.
- Weobley School was showcased in the last Army & You magazine for using The Thriving lives toolkit. The toolkit helps schools to evaluate their use of SPP and how effective their support is for Service children. <https://www.scipalliance.org/thriving-lives-toolkit>
- The MOD Education Support Fund was promoted by Herefordshire Council to schools. A local school has been awarded funding which aims to help schools mitigate the effects of mobility and/or deployment of service communities.
- Herefordshire has been accepted as a pilot area for the MOD Wraparound Childcare Fund. Either parents (or sole parent in a lone parent family), must be in paid employment and have a weekly income of equivalent to 16 hours at the national minimum wage. It will cover the cost of up to 20 hours of before and after-school care during term time for children age 4-11.

- In preparation for the new Covenant statutory guidance (Armed Forces Act 2021), the education sub group have contributed to the consultation rounds with MOD policy makers.
- MODLAP is a partnership between the MOD and local authorities in England to support Service children. Herefordshire is a member on both the MODLAP group and MODLAP SEND (Special Educational Needs) group, allowing Herefordshire to feed into national conversations and developments.
- A comprehensive [resource directory for schools and parents](#) has been created on Herefordshire Council’s website.

Service Pupil Premium (SPP)

The take up of service pupil premium has increased again in this financial year by a further 28 pupils. The SSP has been promoted to all schools by Herefordshire Council and by the HIVE at the Garrison.

Financial Year	Number Service Children	SPP per Child	Total Herefordshire Schools
01/04/2021 – 31/03/2022	1138	£310	£352, 780
01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021	1110	£310	£341,000
01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020	1032	£300	£309, 600
01/04/2018- 31/03/2019	1019	£300	£305,700
01/04/2017 – 31/03/2018	906	£300	£271,800
01/04/2016 – 31/03/2017	902	£300	£270,600

School admissions

The updated admissions code came into force in September 2021. The code is more prescriptive in terms of how admissions authorities should deal with admissions applications from Service personnel. Significant awareness raising has been done with all schools across the county regarding these changes:

- Paragraph 2.21 - More detail has been included in respect of children of UK Service personnel and crown servants. It has been made clearer that these applications must not be refused/not processed because the family does not yet have an address/live in the area, as long as an official letter is provided with their relocation date. Their intended address must be used to apply the oversubscription criteria, where the parents provide *"some evidence"* of this (i.e. this does not have to be confirmed in an official letter). Alternatively, the parents can request that their unit or quartering address is used.
- Paragraph 2.16 Infant class sizes – children of UK service personnel admitted **outside** the normal admissions round can be classed as an excepted pupil and take the number allowed to one teacher over 30.

Service children with Special Educational needs & disability

- School age children with special educational needs transferring into the local authority with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are managed well. There have been times when access to specialist provision has been an issue due to provision already being over-subscribed.
- Pre-school children with special educational needs moving into the area, accessing childcare and a package of support can be challenging for families particularly if there is no existing statutory EHCP.

Criminal Justice System - topic lead, David Andrewartha/Lisa Burnett

HAFCP identified the need for a better understanding of veterans in the criminal justice system and welcomed colleagues from YSS: Remember Veterans to oversee this new topic area. Remember Veterans (RV), is jointly funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust and West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner Grant. It is for military veterans who are currently in, or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

- Through the close working relationship RV has with local police custody suites, courts, HM prisons and probationary services we are capturing data and trends in arrest rates. Around 5% of all arrests in Herefordshire are from individuals declaring they are either a veteran, reservist or regular. Assault charges, driving offences, harassment and reoffending are the most common arrests.
- RV operates in a complex arena, where there is the interplay from a number of services and agencies. By working closely with their clients they provide bespoke support and will broker specialist assistance from other agencies and military charities. Caseworkers develop an intensive 1:1 support plan which aims to enable the veteran to access sustainable, independent living.
- The project also undertakes regular Armed Forces awareness training/refreshers for frontline staff within the CJS system.
- We are working with RV to get to the root cause of re-offending rates and those at risk of entering the CJS.

Employment & Training – topic lead, Alexia Heath, Post-16 Provision Herefordshire Council

Alexia Heath, took over as topic lead for employment & training earlier this year from Paul Vicary who moved from his role supporting service leavers. Paul was responsible for brokering excellent relationships with training providers and employers. Alexia is involved with a number of skills partnerships including the Marches LEP and Herefordshire Skills Board. She also manages the adult learning provision for the county.

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), launched a team of dedicated Armed Forces coaches across the UK. The West Midlands team are fully engaged with HAFCP with representation at a strategic and operational level. They are providing a direct referral line for caseworkers and agencies who are supporting working age veterans. Job coaches, the majority of whom have an Armed Forces background themselves are able to offer bespoke support to individuals by assisting with benefits and employment. Job coaches are now offering a monthly surgery, based at the Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre.
- The Poppy Factory have established good links in Herefordshire. They are an outstanding national organisation who support veterans with health conditions on their journey into employment, helping them overcome any barriers.
- Heropreneurs is a military charity that supports the entrepreneurial business ventures of the military community. They offer one-to-one mentoring and hands-on guidance from some of the country's most successful business leaders. They also work with military spouses and can often seek financial assistance to establish a business. We are delighted they are supporting individuals in Herefordshire.
- Forces Farming provide specialist programmes for those wishing to enter agriculture and wider rural industries. They offer comprehensive training and work experience those from an Armed Forces background seeking a new career in this sector.

- We have established good connections and opportunities with a number of private training providers many who offer bespoke programmes for the Armed Forces community.
- The Military 2 Business event, hosted by NMITE was held in July 2021, attended by over 50 Armed Forces friendly employers and charities. Held outside at Hereford Racecourse, the event welcomed a steady stream from the Armed Forces community seeking support or employment opportunities. Three organisations (ABT Products Ltd and Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust), took the opportunity to publically sign the Armed Forces Covenant alongside Brigadier Jock Fraser RM, the Naval Regional Commander for Wales and West England, representing the Ministry of Defence.

Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre – Topic Lead: Tracy Ricketts Grants & Programmes Manager, Herefordshire Council

The Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre, (HVSC) concept of a one-stop shop for advice and guidance was shaped through a working group of the HAFCP in 2018. Through a successful application to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust by Herefordshire Council, the centre exists today.

- The HVSC achieved charitable status in December 2020.
- Herefordshire Council currently oversees the management of the Centre Manager through grant funding secured.
- The Trustees are working on their fundraising and business plans to secure future funding.
- The Centre became a Talk Community Hub last year with good networking into the Primary Care Networks, other Talk Community Hubs and links into GPs.
- There is an established veteran-to-veteran volunteering programme that oversees requests for shopping, welfare calls, gardening and signposting for more specialist support, if needed.
- The Trustees and Centre Manager work closely with all other military charities and support organisations to ensure that veterans, Serving members, family members, carers and employers are able to be directed to the support that is needed, and no-one goes without help.

Business & Wider Covenant - Topic Lead, Kate La Barre, Armed Forces Covenant Officer, Herefordshire Council

- Over 85 Herefordshire businesses are now signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant as Forces-friendly employers. We continue to have excellent links with the MOD's Regional Employer Engagement Team at West Midlands RFCA.
- Herefordshire based firms: Kinetic Six Ltd and GRC Ltd gained ERS Gold Award status and eight organisations were awarded ERS Silver last year.
- Our bi-monthly bulletins have nearly 400 subscribers / Facebook: 389 followers / Twitter:449 followers / Instagram: 158 followers
- Armed Forces Week Events: Flag raising events were held at Hereford Cathedral, the County Hospital, city and town councils. An online social media campaign ran throughout Armed Forces Week profiling local Reservists and related features.
- Bromyard & Winslow Town Council and Kington Town Council are committed to signing the Armed Forces Covenant and hosting future Armed Forces Days.
- Ross on Wye Town Council will host Armed Forces Day on Saturday 25th June, 2022 (Rolled over from 2021)

Strategic Priorities for 2022

Next 3 months:

1. Support the awareness, understanding and delivery of the Armed Forces Act 2021;
2. Extract and utilise Census 2021 data to update and inform our Armed Forces Needs document ;
3. Facilitate representation on the newly formed Integrated Care Systems Partnerships to ensure that the voice of the armed forces is understood and considered;
4. Facilitate awareness of the needs and facilities available to support veterans within adult social care services and residential care homes;

Next 6 months:

1. Support the development and production of a clear pathway of veteran mental health support available locally, regionally and nationally to ensure that individuals and caseworkers can best navigate the appropriate support;
2. Identify and support any system changes to better capture numbers and understanding of the circumstances of those seeking housing on the social housing waiting list;
3. To improve understanding of how best to support Service children in and out of school and assist schools to access and utilise funding that provide positive interventions;
4. Ensure alignment of relevant topic areas of the Partnership to the government's new Veteran Strategy Action Plan (healthcare and employment);
5. Improve engagement with town and parish councils to help them support veterans in the community;
6. Work with DWP and other partners to build a more accurate picture of the numbers of working age veterans and family members seeking employment to identify and address any barriers or gaps in support;
7. To identify and support actions that will reduce re-offending rates and those at risk of entering the criminal justice system;

Next 12 months:

1. Promote Veteran-Friendly GP accreditation to remaining unsigned surgeries showcasing areas of good practice;
2. Improve advice and guidance available locally for the armed forces community on the Council's website;
3. Lobby to improve local dental access for military families;
4. To reach 100 Herefordshire businesses and organisations signing the Armed Forces Covenant.

Useful Contacts

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