



# Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Officers Update

## Surrey County Council

### Canon Peter Bruinvels CC

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CPB / 43

I am writing this Occasional Update – **No. 43** on quite a sunny Thursday afternoon after heavy rain yesterday afternoon. Obviously, I do hope that you are enjoying the Summer and any holidays that you might have taken or will be taken shortly.

There are a number of issues that I need to update you all on. They include the progress of the **Armed Forces Act 2021** and the **Statutory Guidelines** that have now been tabled in The House of Commons; new **Armed Forces Champions** and Officers; our **Forces Connect App**; **Forthcoming Armed Forces Awareness Training**; **MoD Employers Recognition Award Scheme**; our **Special AFC and Covenant Lead Officer Training Event at ATC Pirbright** on 27 September 2022.

## **1. Armed Forces Act 2022 – Statutory Guidelines tabled in Parliament**

I am really pleased to report that a draft **Statutory Instrument (SI)** has now been laid in Parliament, titled 'The Armed Forces (Covenant) Regulations 2022'. It has been published [here](#). If Parliament approves the SI, the Minister will then be able to sign the SI into law, and 2 weeks later the new Covenant Duty will come into legal force. The SI also provides the legal definition of '**relevant family members**' for the purposes of the Duty and brings the Statutory Guidance into effect. The Statutory Guidance is also available on this webpage as one of the 'Associated documents' under the 'More resources' tab. A plain English explanation of the legal definition of 'relevant family members' is provided on p.20-21 of the **Statutory Guidance**.

No date has yet been set for Parliament to debate and vote on the draft SI and draft Statutory Guidance, but it is expected to happen after Parliament returns from the summer recess before or after the Party Conference season.

The MoD Covenant Team have also published a news article on their website, [Covenant in action - Armed Forces Covenant](#), that summarises what the organisations in scope of the new Duty will need to know, and where they can find more support.

**A REMINDER - Covenant Duty** – To have 'due regard' to the following functions:

**Housing** • Allocation of social housing • Tenancy strategies • Homelessness • Disabled Facilities Grants  
**Education** • Admissions • Attainment • Wellbeing • Transport • Attendance • SEND • Service Pupil Premium (£310)

**Healthcare** including: • NHS Primary Care, NHS Dental, NHS optometry and public health screening • NHS Secondary Care • Local authority delivered healthcare inc sexual health, drug and alcohol services

**Covering:** • Provision of services • Planning and funding • Co-operation between bodies and professionals

**STOP PRESS - Sarah GOODMAN and I** briefed all Surrey's CEOs on the implications of the Act in July and will be briefing the Council Leaders in early September

## **2. ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONS AND COVENANT LEADS**

Newly appointed **Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Leads in Surrey**

**Cllr Graham JONES MBE – AFC for Epsom & Ewell**

**Cllr Stephen WALSH – AFC for Runnymede**

**Cllr Adrian PAGE – AFC for Surrey Heath**

**Tandridge DC**

**Woking BC**

**Chantal NOBLE – Covenant Lead**

**Matt ELLIS – Covenant Lead**

**Adam THOMAS – Covenant Lead**

### **3. FORCES CONNECT APP**

Really good news to report! I am pleased to report that the number of people downloading, subscribing and using the App has now risen to **18,250!** Up 2500 in SIX weeks!

Recently we signed up with the Royal Navy and our App will now feature on the Royal Navy Portal. Dorset has recently signed up as a Region and we are in active discussions with both Norfolk and Plymouth with **27** Regions already signed up

**Link to short promotional film - <https://youtu.be/XCHclwT9phY>**

The Forces Connect app is aimed at connecting and supporting the entire Armed Forces community and those who work with them, signposting them to relevant help and support in just four clicks... and it's completely FREE! Find out more <http://ow.ly/fdNI50EFcya>

**#ForcesConnect**

Email: [fcse@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:fcse@surreycc.gov.uk)



### **4. ARMED FORCES AWARENESS TRAINING UPDATE**

Armed Forces Awareness Training continues to go really well with over **1300** trained since November 2021 in **57 online / in person sessions** trained by myself. Kate PARKIN has also been offering training. We had 56 at one session!!

Those taking part including AFCs, Covenant Officers and full Council Meeting special sessions including Kent CC, West Sussex CC and Medway, Surrey Adult Social Care Locality Units with Mole Valley BC and Brighton & Hove in September.

As well as the Police, Fire, PCSOs, Housing Officers, Front Desk and Contact Centre Staff, Governors, Citizens Advice, Democratic Services and CEs.

The next dates for Surrey – please encourage your staff to book online. [Book here](#)

**29 September 2022** – AF Awareness – Online – 10.00 – 11.00 hours [fcse@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:fcse@surreycc.gov.uk)

**19 October 2022** – AF Awareness – Online – 10.00 – 11.00 hours

**26 November 2022** – AF Awareness – Online – 12.00 – 13.00 hours

### **5. MoD / DRM EMPLOYERS RECOGNITION SCHEME AWARDS**

Firstly, we do congratulate **Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust** on its Gold Award – very well deserved. Ashford & St Peter's joins Surrey CC, Woking BC and Spelthorne BC as Gold Award Holders with Guildford BC and Runnymede BC holding Silver Awards. Reigate & Banstead BC, Surrey Heath BC and Tandridge DC hold Bronze Awards.

I would ask the AFCs and Covenant Leads for Elmbridge BC, Epsom & Ewell BC, Mole Valley DC and Waverley BC to consider signing up to Bronze online today. It is really straightforward. But we are keen to get all of you to very publicly demonstrate your support for defence through your recruitment processes and forces friendly policies – as well as encouraging others to follow your lead. We will help you all the way – just ask. You've passed the 1<sup>st</sup> stage – by signing the Covenant! Your SERFCA Contact for advice is **Andrew GIBBS** [se-reed1@rfca.mod.uk](mailto:se-reed1@rfca.mod.uk)

See the DRM Website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>

### **6. Armed Forces Training and Team Activities day @ATC Pirbright 27 Sept 10.00-15.30**

**Helyn CLACK** and **Lt Col Shamus KELLY** are delighted to invite you to a special Training and Activities Day on 27 September at ATC Pirbright. Apart from receiving an upto date briefing on the Armed Forces Act – you will have the opportunity to receive briefings from 11X, ATC Pirbright and the Irish Guards along with Network opportunities over lunch before you go on the virtual firing ranges. It should be really fun day for you all and a good way to get to know your fellow AFCs and Lead Officers

### **7. Veterans Hubs and Drop-Ins**

Do please promote on social media and visit our **11** Hubs across Surrey. They really need your support. See list of venues: [Veterans' Hubs project - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

## 8. GP Veteran Friendly Practices

Here at Surrey CC, we are committed to working with Heartlands CCG to increase the number of GP Veteran Friendly Practices across Surrey

The Royal College of General Practitioners has developed the '[Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation Programme](#)', which involves a simple online process of accreditation where practices are required to meet the specified criteria and provide evidence that they are supportive of veterans' healthcare. They are working with NHS England and NHS Improvement to accredit GP practices as 'veteran friendly'. As part of this accreditation, GP practices are required to have a **clinical lead** on veterans in the surgery. This should be a registered health care professional, but could be a nurse or paramedic, not just a GP.

The clinical lead is required to undertake dedicated training, attend training events (RCGP or other provider), stay up to date with the latest research and innovations and ensure that the practice is meeting the health commitments of the [Armed Forces Covenant](#). This is extremely relevant to members of a serving Armed Forces family.

Where appropriate, GP Practices may need to refer patients to dedicated NHS services, such as **Op COURAGE**: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service and the Veterans Trauma Network. Each practice will be provided with a full list of appropriate support services, as part of its accreditation support. The accreditation system is voluntary and requires each practice to code each veteran patient. Accreditation lasts for **three years** and helps increase the GP practices understanding of the health needs of veterans and the services available to them.

Nearly **1,500** GP practices in England are already accredited through this programme. The RCGP supports these practices to identify and code their veterans, and to appoint a clinical lead who undertakes training and other activities related to veteran healthcare.

The accreditation is voluntary but is included in the key commitments of the NHS Long Term Plan, which states: '[To ensure all GPs in England are equipped to best serve our veterans and their families, over the next five years we will roll out a veterans accreditation scheme in conjunction with the Royal College of GPs.](#)' Accreditation is currently open to GP practices in England. For more information, please email [veterans@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:veterans@rcgp.org.uk).

### **The Benefits for Veterans**

1. There are many benefits to becoming veteran friendly accredited, which is why 99% of accredited practices recommend the programme.
2. As well as being supported to provide the best care to veteran patients, it will enable them to capture better epidemiological data to improve future health provision.
3. By becoming an accredited practice, it will also ensure that the NHS is better able to meet the health commitments of the [Armed Forces Covenant](#).
4. **This states that the Armed Forces community, including veterans, should face no disadvantage in accessing health services and should receive priority care for military attributable conditions, subject to clinical need.**

### **What you can do:-**

Ask your surgery to consider become a GP Veteran Friendly Practice

Ask them to ask each patient if they have ever served

I hope you enjoyed this special Update.



**Canon Peter Bruinvels CC**

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