

# ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUND CONSULTATION 2023

*Everything you need  
to know to take part*



## **Covenant Fund: 2024-27**

# **How can we deliver the biggest impact for our Armed Forces Communities?**

### **A foreword from our Chief Executive, Anna Wright**



Since the Trust began in 2018, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund has been and remains a vital source of funding for our beneficiaries within the Armed Forces community.

Until now, we have worked on an annual cycle of community analysis, programme development and ensuring the funding awarded has a positive impact upon those in the Armed Forces community who need the most support.

Moving forward, we are delighted to now be able to look and plan further ahead. Conduct more in-depth community research to gain a better insight into the many and varied challenges within the Armed Forces community. Plan and develop funding programmes shaped around beneficiary need – whether that be longer-term support, quick, small injections of funding, or more space to develop and grow with the help of collaboration with other organisations.

Make no mistake, this is an exciting opportunity both for the Trust, and for those we support. I urge anyone within the Armed Forces community, those supporting them and those with an interest in doing more with this community in the future, to have your say in our consultation and help us build a stronger funding future using your views and experiences.

### **Introduction**

Firstly, a huge thank you for taking part in our consultation! We are really grateful to you for taking the time to help shape how we award Covenant Fund grants over the next three years.

**Since 2018, The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust has awarded over £45M across all four nations of the UK.**

This includes funding to 99 UK-wide projects, 755 projects based in England, 121 projects based in Wales, 98 projects based in Northern Ireland, 88 projects based in Scotland and four overseas based projects.

Our mission is to fund projects that support the delivery of the Nation's Covenant promise to our Armed Forces, veterans and their families, to create a thriving Armed Forces community that is valued and supported within our society.

We make our grants through funding programmes. These programmes focus on the changes that we would like to support within the different groups of people that make up the Armed Forces community.

We've run grant making programmes which explore how we can improve lives for Armed Forces families; help veterans who have serious mental health challenges; and reduce loneliness and isolation. We've also run general grant making programmes such as our small grants programme - Force for Change - which can fund lots of different types of activities if the project can show how it will deliver positive impacts for the people that it is supporting. We've put more examples of the types of programmes we have run within this document.

**We want you to help us shape the next funding programmes that we'll be running.**

Through this consultation, we'll develop a plan for the Covenant Fund programmes that we will run in 2024-2027.

**What is the Covenant Fund?**

The Government launched the Armed Forces Covenant Fund (Covenant Fund) in 2015. The Covenant Reference Group helped to shape priorities for funding. For the first three years, the Covenant Fund was based within the MOD. In April 2018, following a decision that it should become independent, it moved to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (the Trust).

The Covenant Fund supports the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are:

1. Acknowledging the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the UK Armed Forces.
2. Working together to mitigate disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
3. Understanding that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

The Covenant Fund has four key themes both now and into the future.

1. Non-core healthcare services for veterans.
2. Removing barriers to family life.
3. Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.
4. Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.

## What programmes have we run in the past?

### **2018/2019**

During 2018/2019, the Trust committed over £7.6 million from the Covenant Fund to the following funding programmes; additionally, we awarded over £1K to the Armistice and Armed Forces Covenant programme.

**The Armed Forces Covenant Local Grants programme:** We delivered the Local Grants programme as a 'rolling programme' throughout 2018/19, continually open for applications, rather than having funding rounds and deadlines. During the year, we considered applications on four occasions, awarding over £2.4M across 150 grants.

**Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans, Families and Carers programme:** The aim of the programme was to fund the design of a small number of new approaches, aimed at supporting veterans who were very unwell.

Successful portfolios had to demonstrate that they could support veterans who had chronic and or severe mental health needs, that were having a significant impact on their day to day lives, where there was no current alternative for support, or those alternatives had been exhausted. Strong and regular collaboration was put in place with the NHS to consider programme outcomes and learning. Successful grants were portfolio by design; requiring the lead organisation to collaborate with a diverse group of statutory, health and third sector organisations. The Trust awarded over £4.2M to eight portfolios, across all four nations.

**Former Service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System programme:** Under this programme, 14 grants, totalling £4.6M were awarded in 2015, as two- and three-year grants, to support projects with ex-service personnel, with the aim of reducing reoffending; duplication and improving pathways. Seven continuation grants were awarded in 2018/19 to some existing grant holders that were supporting ex-Forces personnel with complex needs.

**Armistice and Armed Forces Covenant programme:** This bespoke, standalone programme made 2,773 awards to fund the creation and installation of Armistice silhouettes across the UK. All awards were made on the understanding that by being a part of the Armistice and Armed Forces Covenant programme, the recipient organisation was helping to improve and build better understanding and stronger relationships between civilian and military communities in their local area.

### **2019/2020**

In 2019/20, the Trust committed over £9.3 million from the Covenant Fund to the following funding programmes.

**Removing Barriers to Family Life programme:** This family-focused programme supported Armed Forces families facing challenges and was delivered in two strands. The Medium strand awarded grants of £30,000-£100,000 to support existing or new projects that met a clear need for Armed Forces families. The large strand awarded grants above £100,000, with successful applicants having to demonstrate that their projects would have a transformative and sustainable impact. Nine grants were awarded in this strand. A total of 59 awards were made across both strands.

**Armed Forces Covenant Fund Local Grants:** Under the Local Grants programme, we awarded grants of up to £20,000 for local projects that supported community integration or local delivery of services.

## **2020/2021**

Reducing isolation and promoting mental wellbeing was a major theme across multiple Trust programmes in 2020/21. In January 2020, the Trust ran a consultation to discover how important it was to reduce social isolation and improve integration and engagement with provision, within the Armed Forces community. The consultation highlighted loneliness as a major factor of social isolation. In 2020/21, the Trust committed over £9.1M from the Covenant Fund to the following funding programmes.

**Force For Change programme:** Force for Change helped to support local projects supporting serving personnel, veterans and Armed Forces families. Projects had to show why their project was needed and that it wouldn't duplicate other work; alongside how their project would help people from the Armed Forces community become less isolated.

In total, 137 projects were supported with grants of up to £20,000 in the 2020/21 financial year. These projects focused on supporting Armed Forces communities in addressing challenges relating to isolation, loneliness and poor mental health.

**Forces Communities Together programme:** This programme made 100 awards towards creative and engaging projects, that could be delivered under social restrictions, for people from Armed Forces communities who were isolated because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Tackling Loneliness and Isolation programme:** The Tackling Loneliness programme targeted specific groups within the Armed Forces community who are traditionally harder to reach. The Trust awarded over £4 million to 60 projects under this programme. These projects each received a fixed grant of £70,000 over a two-year period, with projects meeting at least one of the following key themes:

- Building stronger social networks and friendships.
- Improving access to local activities and provision.
- Building emotional resilience to overcome the causes of loneliness.
- Empowering Armed Forces communities to become more independent.

## **2021/2022**

In 2021/2022 the Trust committed over £9.1M from the Covenant Fund to the following funding programmes.

**Sustaining Support to Armed Forces Communities programme:** Grants under this programme helped charities to sustain activities and services that people from Armed Forces communities used and valued, with a particular emphasis on additional difficulties or demands resulting from the Covid pandemic. 36 organisations were awarded funding under the Core Funding programme, with a further 43 organisations awarded funding under the Project Funding programme.

**Sustaining Support: Extra Support for Veterans & Armed Forces Families Impacted by the Afghanistan Conflict:** This programme provided support to Armed Forces communities with needs, following the withdrawal of UK Armed Forces from Afghanistan in 2021. We

awarded 30 projects funding under this programme. The Trust was delighted to work in partnership with the Office for Veterans' Affairs, which enabled an additional £595,000 to be awarded to 17 projects with funding from the Afghanistan Veterans' Fund.

**Force for Change programme:** In 2021/22, we made 175 awards under this programme over three rounds. The programme had a focus on supporting projects that reduced isolation and promoted integration, aiding the post-Covid recovery of our Armed Forces communities.

**Sustaining Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant programme:** Under this programme, the Covenant Fund awarded over £6.6M through two rounds of funding, to clusters of Local Authorities (LAs), with a further £500,000 awarded in 2021/22 to 20 clusters of LAs for projects that improved a wider understanding of the needs of local Armed Forces communities, to help ensure that veterans, Armed Forces families and serving personnel could access local services easily.

**Supporting Armed Forces in Acute Hospitals programme:** This programme supported a small number of pilot projects to enable better ways of supporting veterans and their families when they are in a hospital setting. This complex and strategic programme funded five projects across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with a further £1,423,279 awarded to 12 projects in England by NHS England.

## **2022/2023**

In 2022/2023, the Trust committed over £10M, across 175 projects from the Covenant Fund to the following programmes.

**Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities programme:** Under this programme, we awarded £6 million to 65 projects that address hidden or complex needs within Armed Forces communities, and where evidence has highlighted gaps in support and provision. Grants of up to £100,000, over a period of up to three years, were available.

For exceptional projects, we made larger grants available, and we awarded an additional grant to two projects to help them achieve even more with their work.

**Transformational Grants programme:** The Trust developed this programme to deliver systemic change, through long-term transformation, following consultation work we undertook with the Armed Forces charity sector.

We awarded 10 grants of up to five years in length, to address complex challenges and deliver sustainable change.

**Force For Change programme:** Under this programme we supported 101 projects with grants of up to £10,000 to support ideas that need small amounts of funding to deliver changes or improvements for Armed Forces communities. We awarded a total of £950,000.

We supported projects across the UK, ranging from gardening and woodworking projects, to sporting projects and community wellbeing projects; offering opportunities for members of the Armed Forces community to come together and connect with others.

## **What have we learnt so far?**

The Trust has carried out a series of evaluations to highlight and evaluate the sustainability and long-term impact of the programmes funded under the Covenant Fund. A summary of the evaluations we've carried out to date, can be found below.

## Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans Evaluation

In 2018, the Trust awarded £4m in grant funding to seven portfolio projects to address the problems caused by serious stress in veterans, their carers, and families.

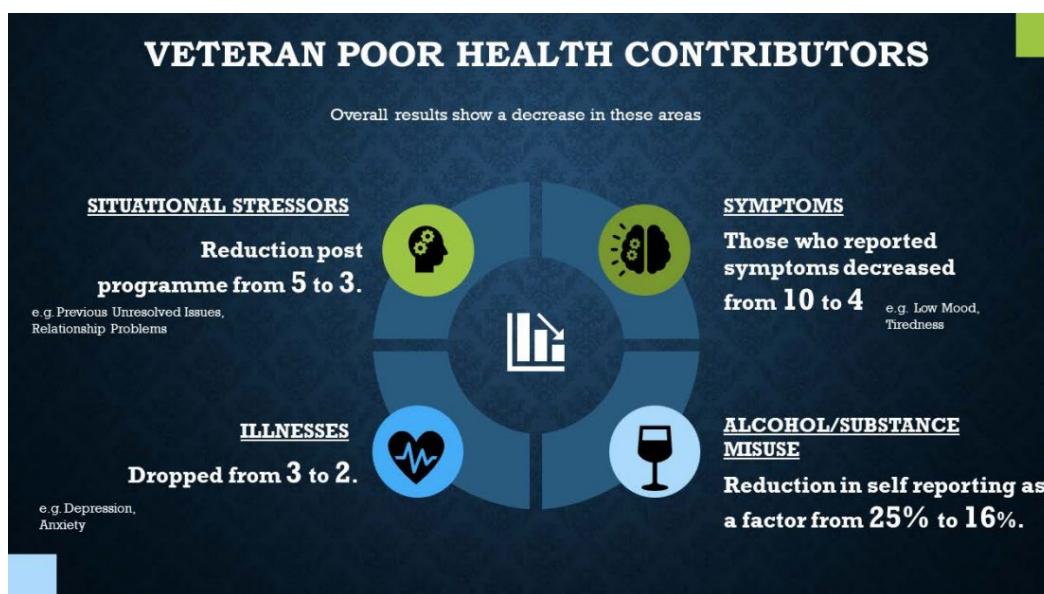
- Seven organisations, who were awarded grant funding, worked with 69 regional delivery partners.
- Through these, nearly 1,000 participants accepted entry into the Tackling Serious Stress (TSS) programmes.
- Referral partners included charities and statutory bodies; however, we found that many of the beneficiaries self-referred to services.
- TSS projects started between May and October 2019 and concluded in September 2021.

The Trust commissioned the University of Chester's (UoC) Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans to conduct an independent evaluation report of the TSS programme. Findings have revealed innovative and cost-effective ways to reduce depression, anxiety and alcohol misuse in UK military veterans and their families. The evaluation report findings were unveiled at the Centre's Veterans and their Families Research Symposium, which was held at Chester University on 13 October 2022.

### Key Findings

The study showed that participants self-reported high levels of mental health problems including anxiety, depression, PTSD and physical problems, with the most common being musculoskeletal / back injuries.

The evaluation data provided valuable evidence to demonstrate success, and some insight into where improvements were required and how these issues were going to be tackled.



### Long Term Impact

The evaluation presented a very positive reflection of the TSS programme. The grant holder's clear commitment, motivation, intelligent application of resources, alongside

participant engagement led to accomplishments across the UK. The evaluation data provided a reservoir of valuable evidence to demonstrate success and insight into projects where improvements were required, and indicators of how to redress these issues. The full report can be found [here](#).

## **Family Life and the Armed Forces Community Evaluation Report**

The evaluation explored the impact of just under £11.5 million of grant funding that the Trust awarded to support Armed Forces families experiencing difficult challenges.

The Trust awarded the grants under two different funding programmes – Families in Stress and Removing Barriers to Family Life – but the aim of both programmes was to reduce barriers that exist for Armed Forces families. These barriers can come in many forms, and the Trust's funding programmes encouraged charities to work with Armed Forces bases and units to meet those needs that Armed Forces families themselves identified as challenges.

Working in partnership with Armed Forces bases and units was a requirement under the £4.35 million Families in Stress programme, and partnerships were strongly encouraged under the £7.12 million Removing Barriers to Family Life programme too. Organisations that the Trust awarded through the Families in Stress programme had to show that the support they were offering was time limited and focused and would help families experiencing a particularly stressful period. The Trust was keen to see evidence of co-design and input from families within the design of these projects.

The Removing Barriers to Family Life programme, in turn, extended support to reach families of veterans that were experiencing difficulties and young people within Armed Forces families, as well as serving families. The Trust wanted to support projects that might have a transformative impact on Armed Forces families and has been proud to work with grant-holders as they have faced additional challenges in delivering their work as part of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of the projects supported by the two programmes were analysed by the Directory of Social Change (DSC) and the full report can be found [here](#)

## **Strengthening Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Programme**

The Covenant Fund awarded £6.6M, through two rounds of funding, to clusters of Local Authorities (LAs).

Projects sought to build local capacity and improve awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant, with a focus on improving Covenant understanding among public sector workers with the aim of promoting better access to services for members of the Armed Forces community. The second-round of funding enabled the establishment of drop-in centres, where they did not previously exist.

The Trust commissioned an external evaluation of the programme. This was conducted by RAND Europe, who worked with Shared Intelligence. The evaluation looked at how the work of the clusters, supported through their grants had impacted on the implementation of the



Armed Forces Covenant locally; how long term these changes have been by identifying key learning and good practice that took place throughout the programme.

## **Key Findings**

The evaluation findings strongly indicated that the funding had a significant positive impact on delivery of the Covenant. Insights gained through the questionnaire responses and interviews strongly suggested that the funding received through the programme had a positive impact across different regions and different strands of activities. The vast majority of grant holders who responded to the questionnaire felt that the grant had a positive impact on the delivery of the Covenant. The full report can be found [here](#)

## **Tackling Loneliness**

The Tackling Loneliness programme was built on the back of a consultation run by the Trust in early 2020. The programme sought to understand how important it was to reduce social isolation and improve integration and engagement with Armed Forces communities. 9 in every 10 respondents told us that we should focus on social isolation in our future grant making.

The Tackling Loneliness programme was designed to address this challenge by targeting specific groups within the Armed Forces community who were traditionally harder to reach. Fixed, two-year grants of £70,000 were available for projects meeting at least one of the following key themes:

- Building stronger social networks and friendships.
- Improving access to local activities and provision.
- Building emotional resilience to overcome the causes of loneliness.
- Empowering armed forces communities to become more independent.

This oversubscribed programme awarded £4M to 60 projects across the UK, for projects that encouraged Armed Forces communities to get involved with local activities, perhaps for the first time, by strengthening their support networks and building their confidence to access opportunities available to them.

In addition, the Trust awarded seven strategic grants to experienced organisations who acted as mentors for successful Tackling Loneliness projects. This followed the successful mentor model used for the Trust's Strategic Pathways/Positive Pathways programmes.

The Trust commissioned a yearlong evaluation of the 60 projects on the Tackling Loneliness Programme through Neighbourly Lab; Campaign to End Loneliness and The King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR), King's College London. The evaluation focused on the 'Reach' and 'Service Design' of services to support Armed Forces individuals experiencing loneliness.

The in-depth evaluation looked at the success of the programme, including identification of best practices, while also exploring loneliness and its effect of the Armed Forces community.

## **Key Findings**

The evaluation report identified key themes and good practice, identified throughout the Tackling Loneliness projects. These themes consisted of:

- Loneliness and Armed Forces Communities
- Reaching out
- Improving Social Connections

### **Long Term Sustainability**

Following the launch of the evaluation report, the Trust conducted a webinar, showcasing not only the evaluation report, but also highlighting some of the successful projects and the resulting 'Tackling Loneliness Toolkit'. The webinar was held in November 2022 and proved to be very popular, with positive feedback received from the audience.

The toolkit for Tackling Loneliness was separated into two sections and can be found on our knowledge network. It identified the following:

1. What works to reach lonely Armed Forces individuals
2. What works in service design to support lonely Armed Forces individuals

The toolkit contains an exploration of Armed Forces loneliness by creating a snapshot of what works, to reach those members of the community who may be experiencing loneliness. The toolkit serves as a framework for projects, whilst acknowledging that loneliness is a subjective feeling and is not experienced in the same way for everyone and to varying degrees.

The toolkit is designed to be used alongside the 'Impact Gallery for Tackling Loneliness'. When used together, the Tackling Loneliness Toolkit and the Impact Gallery provide examples of how to not only reach isolated veterans and serving personnel in the Armed Forces community, but how to tackle loneliness. The full report can be found [here](#)

### **Next steps**

We hope you have found this document a useful refresher of the work that's taken place so far under the Covenant Fund.

Head to our website for more information and click the links to take part.