

# Supporting Sustained Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant

## Highlighted practices from the Charnwood Council cluster

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# Preface

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The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) commissioned RAND Europe to review projects conducted by 19 groups (or ‘clusters’) of Local Authorities (LAs) who received grants from the AFCFT’s Sustaining Delivery Programme. Part of this review aimed to answer the following question:

*What examples of good practice and lessons identified demonstrate how LAs, with limited amount of funding, have been able to implement measures to deliver the Covenant in a comprehensive and sustainable manner?*

This document describes practices grantees used in the Sustaining Delivery cluster led by Kingston upon Hull City Council (hereafter referred to as ‘Hull’). It is one of three documents RAND Europe produced to share examples of practices that might help others deliver the Covenant now that it has become a statutory duty. This document is intended as an educational summary highlighting the practices that Hull cluster grantees considered helpful and useful in executing their projects, hopefully enabling others to strengthen further the Armed Forces Covenant’s implementation in their area. This document does not consider funding and cost; the practices it includes are agnostic of funding, which falls outside this review’s scope.

We compiled all evidence and material in this document through literature reviews, surveys and semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders, including those working in the Hull cluster. This summary is based entirely on evidence from the research described in RAND Europe’s full research report. For more information about the research, including the specific sources used to gather evidence and the wider evaluation RAND Europe conducted, please consult the full final project report, ‘Findings from the Sustaining Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Programme’, available through AFCFT.

For more information about other practices grantees found useful in delivering the Covenant, please see the materials prepared by Shared Intelligence for the Knowledge Network, available here: <https://covenantfund.org.uk/delivering-locally/>.



## 1.1. Project description

The primary aim of the project led by Charnwood Borough Council (hereafter referred to as ‘Charnwood’) was to embed the Armed Forces Covenant into appropriate organisational processes across organisations’ areas of responsibility. Local Authorities (LAs) within the cluster first raised awareness among the Armed Forces Community, the public, authorities and frontline services about the Covenant and the support available for the Armed Forces Community. This increased awareness enabled them to embed the Covenant to deliver support where needed. The project also aimed to:

- Finalise project activities from previous Armed Forces Covenant projects;
- Raise awareness of support across Charnwood, Melton and Rushcliffe Borough Councils;
- Sustain and review the Covenant’s delivery; and
- Provide aid and empowerment to organisational partners.<sup>i</sup>

### Box 1. Project details

**Start date:** 30 September 2021

**End date:** 30 September 2022

**Lead LA:** Charnwood Borough Council

**AFCFT funding allocated:** £25,000

**Other organisations involved:** The Loughborough WellBeing Centre, parish councils, Warwickshire County Council, Rutland and Market Harborough Covenant Officer.

**Initial grant aims:** Expand signup to the GP accreditation scheme; establish training PPP, Armed Forces Community Champions and a dementia resource pack; support the Veterans Wellbeing Café Project further.

Source: Grant documentation provided by the AFCFT.

## 1.2. Good practices identified

The Charnwood cluster identified four significant areas of good practices:

- Explicitly incorporating the Armed Forces Community in existing schemes and policies;
- Communicating proactively and clearly through comprehensive guidance and knowledge-sharing;
- Building and fostering relationships to expand the Covenant’s delivery; and
- Identifying stakeholders with responsibility for coordinating the Covenant’s delivery.<sup>ii</sup>

We describe each area in more detail in the following sections.

### 1.2.1. Explicitly incorporating the Armed Forces Community

**Charnwood and their LA partners worked to explicitly embed services for the Armed Forces Community into existing structures and policies.** We describe two examples below:

- **Melton Borough Council** adjusted their HR policies to be more veteran-friendly (e.g. through a guaranteed interview scheme) and their equality impact assessments to include veterans in the Equality and Diversity Legislation.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Local General Practitioners (GPs)** worked closely with the cluster to facilitate the Veteran-Friendly GP Practice Accreditation Scheme, providing staff with relevant training and signposting information.<sup>iv</sup>

Charnwood aimed to enable the Armed Forces Community (or portions thereof) to utilise existing policies that might prove advantageous. Both participants and beneficiaries recognised these efforts as highly useful: Melton's efforts helped them achieve gold employee recognition status.

### 1.2.2. Communicating clearly and proactively

**Communication between councils and community partners must be clear from the outset, and all partners should proactively communicate with each other.** The Charnwood and Melton representatives agreed that ineffective communication was typically the cause of any resistance experienced in implementing their work or establishing partnerships.<sup>v</sup> They recommended several short- and long-term measures to help share and disseminate information:

- **Short-term:** disseminating census data and ensuring awareness of and adherence to the new Covenant Duty and Statutory Guidance Document;
- **Long-term:** appointing an allocated Covenant Officer and ensuring their continued attendance at key meetings (e.g. the Civilian Military Partnership Board).<sup>vi</sup>

In particular, projects could overcome this communication barrier by raising stakeholders' awareness of what the Covenant and its partners aim to achieve.<sup>vii</sup> Charnwood and its partners recommended bolstering project communication and cohesion by:

- Creating joint logos for the project team;
- Utilising a Single Point of Contact email address;
- Developing a project-wide communications plan;
- Bringing staff from all the councils together more often; and
- Delivering joint training for project staff and community partners.<sup>viii</sup>

### 1.2.3. Building and fostering relationships

**Much of Charnwood's success was due to utilising pre-existing relationships and cultivating new partnerships among councils, the Armed Forces Community and external partners.** LAs collaborated with numerous community organisations throughout the project, including the Loughborough Wellbeing Centre, Veterans Wellbeing Hub, Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, parish councils, GP practices, social prescribers and other community groups.<sup>ix</sup> Charnwood considered cooperation amongst these groups critical to achieving and sustaining the project's impact. Examples of the achievements these relationships facilitated include the following:

- Charnwood enlisted **parish councils** not previously involved with the partnership to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, and all Parish councils signed the Careers Transition Partnership. The cluster also trained and established Armed Forces Champions in multiple Parish councils (as part of a sustainability plan) that have since formed self-sustaining networks.<sup>x</sup>
- Charnwood considered good relationships with **the Armed Forces Community** (particularly on the local council's part) critical to the project's implementation. Veterans and family members connected to the Armed Forces Community when meeting with parish councils, making enlisting in the Armed Forces Covenant and establishing Armed Forces Champions 'an easy sell.'<sup>xi</sup> Armed Forces Champions disseminated information on the Covenant and the support services local Councils provide. The relationships these Armed Forces Champions generated with other community organisations helped create a self-sustaining network of local and regional support for the Armed Forces Community.<sup>xii</sup>
- **Other LAs within the Cluster** collaborated to achieve their project goals. Best-practice sharing was a highlight of the cluster structure, with the group meeting regularly to discuss setbacks and workshop solutions. While contextual differences (e.g. structures and workloads) between councils made individual project plans non-replicable or translatable, the cluster's support was considered mutually advantageous.<sup>xiii</sup> The project's work improved partnerships between LAs within and outside the cluster and between their LAs and local public services and the third and private sectors.<sup>xiv</sup> The cluster's longstanding collaborative relationships were particularly lauded and will continue beyond the project's completion.<sup>xv</sup>

**Charnwood also considered relationships vital for the project outcomes' sustainability after the Sustaining Delivery grant's lifetime.** Following the project's conclusion, similar support will continue through the long-term partnerships established. We outline key examples of such partnerships below:

- **The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre** established a strong relationship with councils during the project, providing additional links and opportunities for future work.<sup>xvi</sup>
- **The Veterans Wellbeing Hub**, a local organisation providing tailored emotional and mental well-being support to veterans, collaborated with Charnwood to implement the Hub locally. It also secured independent funding through its work with cluster members. The Hub supports the wider region, where no local support hubs provide signposting and activities. The Hub represents the cluster's accumulation of work, findings and discussions over the last five years.<sup>xvii</sup> Participants believe it will continue to support the Armed Forces Community in ways that should 'long outlive the project.'<sup>xviii</sup>

**As a result of the connections made during the project, the local communities now have a network for delivering the Covenant that encompasses a diverse range of stakeholders.** The latter includes council members, the Armed Forces Community, Armed Forces Champions, parish councils and support organisations. Ultimately, the Charnwood cluster saw relationships as a critical enabler for its project sustainability and the network it cultivated as a 'human thing' that will naturally outlive the grant activities.<sup>xix</sup>

#### 1.2.4. Identifying stakeholder responsibilities

**The Charnwood cluster identified distinguishing clear roles with responsibilities for coordinating the Covenant's delivery as an essential practice.**<sup>xx</sup> We outline some of the roles Charnwood felt contributed to their project's success below:

- The position of **Charnwood Council HR's Armed Forces Champion** in the council provided localised, tailored employment support to those looking to move from the Armed Forces into the LA.<sup>xxi</sup>
- **A dedicated Covenant Officer** yielded significant project dividends.<sup>xxii</sup> Charnwood's Project Officer also provided considerable support through their understanding of the Armed Forces Community due to their professional background and personal ties to it. Even though Charnwood no longer has a project officer, the original officer's work has given them several potential options for continuation.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- **Armed Forces Champions** have a firm commitment to the community and a robust skillset, making their role more sustainable. For example, interviewees described how the Nottingham, Charnwood, and Melton champions meet regularly to discuss how they can best support veterans.<sup>xxiv</sup> When heavy workloads and competing council priorities diverted some cluster members from Armed Forces Community issues, the Charnwood representative worked with Armed Forces Champions to engage with senior managers and CEOs. This collaboration improved buy-in and enabled project progress.<sup>xxv</sup>
- **The Multi-agency Centre**, which encompasses several partners and services, resulted in a 'one-stop shop' giving direct, concentrated access to all partners in a single location.<sup>xxvi</sup> Therefore, this collaboration has increased access for members of the Armed Forces Community.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### 1.3. Conclusions

This project's participating LAs established a portfolio of resources and implemented actions within their local communities to better serve the Armed Forces. As well as better implementing the Covenant in their area, the Charnwood cluster identified working methods and good practices that helped them achieve their aims. As highlighted above, these practices helped local service organisations embed the Covenant, empowering them to deliver a higher standard of care to the Armed Forces Community. By sharing some of these good practices more widely, it is hoped that other LAs and local government bodies can similarly strengthen the implementation of the Covenant within their communities.



## 1.4. Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>ii</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe; Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>iii</sup> Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>iv</sup> June 2022 Survey Results.
- <sup>v</sup> Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe; Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>vi</sup> June 2022 Survey Results.
- <sup>vii</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>viii</sup> June 2022 Survey Results.
- <sup>ix</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>x</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xi</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xii</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xiv</sup> June 2022 Survey Results
- <sup>xv</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xvii</sup> June 2022 Survey Results.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xix</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xx</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Interview C1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Interview C2, conducted by RAND Europe.