

Supporting Sustained Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant

Highlighted practices from the Highland Council
cluster

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Preface

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 Highland-Council-led cluster (hereafter referred to as ‘Highland’) undertook multiple activities during the Sustaining Delivery project to help improve the Covenant’s implementation in their area.ⁱ The project enabled Local Authorities (LAs) to better embed the Covenant principles across Community Planning Partnership, Scotland Community Planning Partnerships and Statutory Partnerships.ⁱⁱ This integration gave cluster members a sustainable mechanism for embedding and taking forward the Covenant through various partners (e.g., Fire, Police, NHS, and third-sector organisations).ⁱⁱⁱ

This project’s specific aims include:

- Producing a suite of free online training materials for use by partners and individual agencies;
- Helping inform Community Partnerships about the local Armed Forces Community;
- Improving the public-, third-, and private-sector’s understanding of the Armed Forces Community;
- Improving LA-based support processes for the Armed Forces Community; and
- Raising awareness of the Covenant’s services amongst public authorities, frontline services and the Armed Forces Community.^{iv}

Box 1. Project details

Start date: 11 October 2021

End date: 5 September 2022

Lead LA: The Highland Council

AFCFT funding allocated: £25,000

Other organisations involved: Local Community Hubs, Armed Forces Forums and Delivery Boards.

Initial grant aim: To build relationships between civilians in local communities and Armed Forces members by raising awareness of the challenges the Armed Forces community faces, explaining their support networks and meeting their needs – facilitated via forums and Local Community Hubs.

Source: Grant documentation provided by the AFCFT.

1.2. Good practices identified

The Highland cluster identified four critical areas of good practices within their project’s context:

- Gathering information to understand the Armed Forces Community’s unique needs better;
- Sharing diverse perspectives through cluster and community partnerships;
- Creating and sharing tools facilitating training and best-practice sharing; and
- Identifying clear roles with responsibility for coordinating the delivery of the Covenant.

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

However, the training materials developed during this project were finalised and sent off only two months before this report’s submission, limiting the amount of impact currently visible.^v Community Partners’

future monitoring and feedback will assess the training's broader influence. However, participants felt they successfully compiled materials, identified needs, made connections and fostered partnerships, contributing to a more successful longer-term output.^{vi}

1.2.1. Gathering information

The Highland cluster collected and shared information with stakeholders within their area, considering this a key enabler for achieving the project aims. Initial discussions with Community Partners about the Covenant showed that most were unaware of the significant Armed Forces Community within their area.^{vii} Moreover, participants felt that the lack of awareness among those delivering or coordinating services led to a lack of overall knowledge and understanding about their needs – a knowledge gap resulting in Community Partners 'not knowing what they don't know', which can overcomplicate outreach.^{viii} Therefore, Highland engaged Community Planning Partners and raised their awareness of the Armed Forces Community.^{ix}

Strong communication links and networks within the Armed Forces community in these regions helped Councils connect with service members and those currently working with Armed Forces members, a partnership approach intended to generate feedback on project outputs and help develop the best possible materials.^x Ultimately, project materials were researched and consulted on with partners in the military and community, culminating in a robust but simple set of materials designed to engage the widest audience.^{xi}

LAs plan to continue consulting Community Partners for feedback; forthcoming legislation's reporting requirements will support this. They will use this data to examine how people engage with support, such as the training materials, or assess the efficacy of social media communications advertising available training on cluster members' websites.^{xii}

1.2.2. Sharing diverse perspectives

The Highland cluster pursued a collaborative partnership approach that placed feedback at the centre of project development.^{xiii} Such collaboration helped the project benefit from other cluster-based authorities' perspectives and experiences.^{xiv} For example, the project team benefited from the more direct military input Moray's active RAF and army bases provided and Highland Council's wider community connections.^{xv}

Grantees saw collaboration through best practices and resource-sharing as a way to improve the project's impact.^{xvi} The cluster greatly improved partnerships between within-cluster LAs and between LAs and the third sector, the private sector and local public services (e.g. health, housing, employment agencies, etc.).^{xvii} While within-cluster work was not without challenges, these differences were a shared challenge they addressed collaboratively.^{xviii} Despite contextual differences, the cluster leveraged their similarities into a 'synergy' for best practice sharing.^{xix} For example, multiple LAs within the cluster shared similar geography, demographic make-up and stakeholders, including the same health board. The cluster's shared features and longstanding relationships made it 'a tight team that worked.'^{xx}

Collaboration was crucial for developing the training tools described below. Highland worked directly with the Community Partner chairs to keep them informed and involved in designing and producing materials from the start, including working with organisations involved in similar work to train frontline staff, raising awareness and sharing project resources. Within the cluster, LAs facilitated an adaptive co-

design of project materials by working closely with the learning-materials company and meeting with Armed Forces Community members and Community Planning Partners to ensure the training aligned with their needs.^{xxi} Such engagement was so successful that future project engagement with Community Partners is planned earlier and more frequently to bolster response.^{xxii}

1.2.3. Creating and sharing tools

The cluster ultimately created a suite of free online training materials to help increase awareness about the Armed Forces Community's unique needs and address the local knowledge gap hindering Community Partners' work.^{xxiii} The cluster designed the training to address the wider population's lack of knowledge regarding the Armed Forces and educate them about its unique challenges.^{xxiv} They developed the materials to be accessible to all, with best-practice sharing in mind, circulating them to Community Partners to embed and cascade within individual agencies for staff training. While the training animation's Scottish elements are tailored to the region, the guidance is broad enough for other settings.^{xxv}

Grantees felt that the training materials' online availability broadened their accessibility and enhanced their impact. This online format mirrored broader responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted a shift to transferring services online to support community members better. Therefore, the materials' online delivery has been crucial for improving access to services in Highland, which covers a vast territory across three coasts and includes sparsely populated areas.^{xxvi} Project materials will also be made available to the public through external websites. The project's online training was designed with best-practice sharing in mind and will be shareable across the UK.^{xxvii}

The project deliverables will remain available at minimal or no cost through the partnerships and can be cascaded for partners' use. The materials were designed to need minimal updating in the short-to-medium term and to be versatile and easily replicable, minimising the resources needed to sustain the project's deliverables^{xxviii} and generating optimism regarding the sustainability of Highland's work.^{xxix} Additionally, Highland planned to embed the training in Community Planning Partnerships, which could replicate it across several other organisations. The hope is that other people using these resources can adapt them to suit their specific needs (e.g. additional, complementary materials could tailor the resources toward an educational or healthcare focus).^{xxx}

1.2.4. Identifying clear roles

The cluster identified distinguishing clear roles and responsibilities for coordinating the Covenant's delivery as good practice.^{xxxi} Roles and responsibilities they felt contributed to the project's success included:

- **A Covenant Officer:** Sustaining Delivery allowed Highland to employ a dedicated Covenant officer, a role they ordinarily would have lacked the structural capacity to establish. The Highland representative explained that even if three or four LAs share these officers, their ability to focus exclusively on delivering the Covenant makes a huge difference.^{xxxii} The Officer helped identify the Armed Forces community in Highland and Moray and coordinated the necessary actions to support them properly.^{xxxiii}

- **Lead officers:** Interviewees suggested that the new legislation and statutory requirements will help embed the Covenant into other council services (e.g. through lead officers in education and housing). Additionally, the statutory enforcement of the Covenant has allowed the Highland cluster to work with policy colleagues in identifying Covenant Leads within each service.^{xxxiv}

It is hoped the network of relationships cultivated throughout the project between Armed Forces members, the Council, and the Community Partners will continue to grow following the project's formal end.^{xxxv}

1.3. Conclusions

This project enabled Highland and the other LAs to address longstanding gaps needed to deliver the Covenant locally, achieving their goals through engagement with the military and civilian communities. As well as better implementing the Covenant in their area, the Highland consortium identified working methods and good practices that helped achieve their aims. As highlighted above, these practices helped the Highland cluster create and consolidate materials, identify needs, make connections and foster partnerships.^{xxxvi} By sharing these good practices more widely, it is hoped that other LAs and local government bodies can similarly strengthen the Covenant's implementation in their communities.

1.4. Endnotes

- ⁱ Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ⁱⁱ Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{iv} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^v Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{vi} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{vii} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{viii} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{ix} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^x Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xi} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xii} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xiii} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xiv} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xv} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe; Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xvi} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xvii} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xviii} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xix} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xx} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxi} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxii} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xxiii} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxiv} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxv} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxvi} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxvii} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxviii} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xxix} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xxx} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxxi} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xxxii} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxxiii} June 2022 Survey Results.
- ^{xxxiv} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxxv} Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- ^{xxxvi} Interview B2, conducted by RAND Europe; Interview B1, conducted by RAND Europe.