

Supporting Sustained Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant

Highlighted practices from Kingston-upon-Hull City 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 primary aims of the Kingston upon Hull City Council cluster (hereafter referred to as ‘Hull’) were to increase engagement with forums and delivery boards, businesses and the Armed Forces Community,ⁱ underpinned by an overarching desire to prioritise veterans in any work undertaken.ⁱⁱ The activities undertaken during the Sustaining Delivery project significantly helped improve the Covenant’s implementation in their area.ⁱⁱⁱ The project also aimed to:

- Build communication within the Armed Forces Community;
- Increase partner engagement; and
- Widen people’s knowledge about the Covenant.^{iv}

The project was carried out through a three-step approach. First, the grantees consulted with the Armed Forces Community to assess local knowledge about the Covenant’s function.^{vi} Secondly, they ran a social media campaign about the Covenant and the consultations available, yielding considerable engagement. Lastly, they developed the Local Standards Assessment, which included a self-assessment tool, and presented it at the National Armed Forces Covenant Conference. These project activities increased awareness of the Council and Covenant’s work, encouraged more people to access support and enabled forums and delivery boards to prioritise the needs of their local Armed Forces communities.^{vii} Media campaigns also generated wider coverage and more positive responses.^{viii}

Box 1. Project details

Start date: 15 September 2021	End date: 31 October 2022
Lead LA: Kingston upon Hull City 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 local civilians and Armed Forces members by raising awareness of the Armed Forces community’s challenges, 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 Hull cluster identified four significant areas of good practices within their project’s context:

- Raising awareness, including encouraging more people to access support;
- Building relationships that sustain the Covenant’s delivery;
- Creating and sharing tools to help others to set priorities and meet the local Armed Forces Community’s needs; and
- Utilising dedicated support for coordinating the Covenant’s delivery.

1.2.1. Raising awareness

The Hull cluster grantees saw raising awareness across multiple communities and stakeholders as a key outcome of the Sustaining Delivery project and a vital enabler of the Covenant's delivery. The Hull cluster increased the Armed Forces Community's understanding of the Council and the Covenant's work by:

- Raising public authorities and front-line services' awareness about the AFCFT and the Armed Forces Community;
- Raising the general public's awareness about the AFCFT and the Armed Forces Community;
- Providing tailored support for the Armed Forces Community and raising its awareness about available support.^{ix}

Consequently, some of the project activities' perceived strengths included increasing awareness of the Council and Covenant's work, encouraging more people to access support, and enabling forums and delivery boards to prioritise meeting the needs of their local Armed Forces communities. Furthermore, media campaigns helped generate broader coverage and more positive responses.^x

In particular, awareness-raising helped mitigate the perceived lack of visibility of the Council's and Covenant's work within the Armed Forces Community. LAs felt their wider community work to support the Armed Forces externally was not fully communicated to personnel inside the military, citing several occurrences where new reservist employees had no prior knowledge of their services.^{xi} Therefore, participants believed that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) could better promote the work of the LAs leading the Covenant on their behalf. Participants also cited closer collaboration with existing networks, such as the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), as an opportunity for increasing visibility.^{xii} They suggested that consistent messaging around the Covenant could help clarify what the Covenant does and does not do, supporting Armed Forces Community members in understanding the support available to them, facilitated through a centralised social media account for ease of access. Greater awareness of the LAs' work would also improve communication between entities and allow quicker distribution of veterans' services.^{xiii}

Relationships may help sustain work beyond a specific project's confines and link it with other efforts.

The connections made during this project were (and are) self-sustaining and persistent, with service members joining mutual clubs and travelling to meet and gather at breakfast clubs.^{xiv} One project beneficiary felt that this capacity to unite an entire Community did not previously exist. Thus, linking pockets of service members and veterans was perhaps the programme's greatest impact and an advantage of operating as part of a larger cluster.^{xv} The programme helped break down resource barriers for the region's Armed Forces Community, with benefits continuing through a network of invested personnel, project deliverables and future initiatives.^{xvi} Such a network could continue delivering dividends long after the formal project ends.

This project's stakeholders have already proactively shared areas of good practice. Stakeholders shared details of the pilot project and business engagement with other LAs through their Covenant Sense-Making Workshop. Additional cluster members also shared best practices through a workshop at the Annual Armed Forces Covenant Conference.^{xvii} Such sharing can help promote more effective and efficient delivery of the Covenant across various groups.

1.2.2. Building relationships

Cultivating relationships both within the cluster and throughout the wider Armed Forces Community bolstered the facilitation and impact of project activities. In particular, Hull and its partner LA worked to:

- Bolster previously established connections with the Armed Forces Community by creating continual opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing (e.g. training and workshops supported by community partners, along with formal and informal discussion forums).^{xviii}
- Foster greater collaboration within the project cluster, providing more consistent support for the Armed Forces Community across the region while increasing the capability for responding to unique project needs.^{xix}

The robust relationship many LAs fostered with the Armed Forces Community through an established forum was a defining characteristic of this cluster. The Hull forum was established twelve years ago to better address the Armed Forces Community's needs. Hull Council took up the forum's chairing duties several years ago, partly to bolster permanence and community among reservist regiments. Today, the forum has over seventy members dedicated to problem-solving and sharing best practices to support the Armed Forces Community better. Hull has involved all statutory services, including police, fire and rescue, probation, prison, pensions and health, regimental associations and local and national charities. The Sustaining Delivery programme drew upon this forum to communicate across various entities, define clear and tailored pathways and gather the resources to implement impactful solutions.^{xx}

The close understanding between LAs and the Armed Forces Community in these areas was often attributed to the longevity of their work together and ongoing efforts to create opportunities for integration and collaboration. As part of the activities under this grant, cluster members designed training and workshops to enhance people's awareness and skills when working with service members or veterans. One LA, for example, held trainings for workers throughout the community engaging with children, people and Family Services. These were delivered collaboratively with social workers to raise awareness of the complex issues these individuals face and resources for children in crisis and living in homes where a service member or veteran may reside.^{xxi}

Another cluster member maintains a strong relationship with their Armed Forces Community through breakfast clubs, the local Royal British Legion branch and the Local Veterans Hub. Once the North Lincolnshire Armed Forces Hub is open, engagement within the Armed Forces Community and with civilians is expected to increase.^{xxii}

The Hull-cluster grantees often viewed within-cluster working as more advantageous, partly because collaboration created a more consistent offer for the Armed Forces Community across the region.^{xxiii} Grantees felt that the cluster improved collaboration between LAs within and without the cluster.^{xxiv} The cluster also improved partnerships between Hull's LA and the third sector, the private sector and other local public services (e.g. health, housing, employment agencies, etc.). While working collaboratively, different cluster members could still respond to their region's unique needs. It has been recommended that projects be adapted across the cluster to maximise cooperation advantages, meet unique needs, and best utilise each region's resources. Each LA adapted its project towards local delivery, helping alleviate previous discrepancies in engagement and communication.^{xxv}

The connections between service members will continue developing even after the project's completion, supporting the self-sustainability of the Sustaining Delivery programme's work.^{xxvi} The partnership is expected to maintain itself more informally through its network and regional coordinator. Additionally, cluster members have invested in the new Armed Forces Hub, which will serve as a dedicated gathering space and provide a platform for future work areas identified in the project.^{xxvii} The hope is for these longstanding connections to continue facilitating brainstorming, best practice sharing and valuable support for staff members across the region.^{xxviii}

1.2.3. Creating and sharing tools

Cluster members created a tool they and other organisations across the country could use on an ongoing basis. The primary benefits of the Local Standards Assessment this project developed include:

- Improving assessment of service and support needs for LAs and public bodies and more effective ways to strategically address these issues.^{xxix}
- Mitigating the Armed Force's Community's disadvantages and access barriers (e.g. to health, education and housing).^{xxx}
- Creating a set of resources that are sustainable with minimal future effort.^{xxxi}

The Local Assessments tool identifies areas for improvement and maps out strategies to fill service and support gaps, thereby assisting LAs or any public body in assessing evidence of compliance with local legislative standards in education, healthcare and housing.^{xxxii} These fields were identified as particularly important given that they are outlined in the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022–32 and the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan 2022–24 and legally mandated in the Armed Forces Act 2021.^{xxxiii} One LA partner believed that the goal of widening people's knowledge around the Covenant itself was achieved through the consultation development of the self-assessment tool within the Local Standards Assessment. The goal of this tool is to play a central role in widespread, impactful changes to meet key legislation over the next couple of years.^{xxxiv}

Creating a live legislation-standards document enables the maintenance of a single continued resource set without ongoing additional effort. The Local Assessment Standards document developed via this project can also serve as a standing agenda item, continually updated via regular partnership meetings.^{xxxv}

1.2.4. Utilising dedicated support

A dedicated full-time Covenant Officer contributed significantly to the project activities' success since:

- They are solely responsible for Covenant work, meaning they can consistently allocate more time to the project;
- They can provide a central project resource for local councils and external partners, improving coordination and access to information; and
- They can limit external partners' work by simplifying local standards.^{xxxvi}

The Covenant's successful implementation in different areas was partly attributed to a dedicated full-time Covenant Officer who provided centralised support to local councils and external partners.^{xxxvii} While other

City Council members can be reallocated away from covenant work due to other responsibilities, Covenant Officers provide a constant momentum and continual resource for the project. Additionally, Covenant Officers can limit external partners' work by making local standards more readily accessible (e.g. by simplifying statutory guidance).^{xxxviii} Grantees thus perceived the Covenant Officer's role as a dedicated full-time position critical to the project's sustainability.

1.3. Conclusion

The Hull cluster's activities as part of the Sustaining Delivery programme have been widely successful, increasing awareness of the council's and Covenant's work, encouraging more people to access support, and enabling forums and delivery boards to prioritise meeting their local Armed Forces communities' needs. As well as achieving better Covenant implementation in their area, the Hull consortium identified working methods and good practices that helped them achieve their aims. As highlighted above, these practices have helped raise awareness of the work and support available. It is hoped that, by sharing some of these good practices more widely, other LAs and local government bodies can similarly strengthen the Covenant's implementation within their communities.

1.4. Endnotes

- i July 2022 Survey Results.
- ii Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- iii July 2022 Survey Results.
- iv Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- v Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- vi Dauris, Sarah & Terry Reilly. 'Local Standards Assessment 2023'. North Lincolnshire Armed Forces Partnership: Armed Forces Covenant Statutory Duty.
- vii July 2022 Survey Results.
- viii July 2022 Survey Results.
- ix Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe; July 2022 survey results.
- x July 2022 Survey Results.
- xi Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xii Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xiii Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xiv Interview A4, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xv Interview A4, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xvi Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xvii Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe; July 2022 survey results.
- xviii Interview A2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xix July 2022 Survey Results.
- xx Interview A2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxi Interview A2, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxii Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxiii July 2022 Survey Results.
- xxiv July 2022 Survey Results.
- xxv July 2022 Survey Results.
- xxvi Interview A4, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxvii Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxviii Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxix Dauris, Sarah & Terry Reilly. 'Local Standards Assessment 2023'. North Lincolnshire Armed Forces Partnership: Armed Forces Covenant Statutory Duty.
- xxx Armed Forces Act 2021.
- xxxi Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxxii Dauris, Sarah & Terry Reilly. 'Local Standards Assessment 2023'. North Lincolnshire Armed Forces Partnership: Armed Forces Covenant Statutory Duty.
- xxxiii Ministry of Defence. 2022. 'UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32'; Office for Veterans' Affairs. 2022. 'Veterans' Strategy Action Plan: 2022-2024'; Armed Forces Act 2021.
- xxxiv Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxxv Interview A1, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxxvi Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxxvii Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.
- xxxviii Interview A3, conducted by RAND Europe.