



Delivering the Armed Forces Covenant Locally

Case studies and key lessons from Covenant Fund Grants in 10 council areas.

Shared Intelligence

May 2019

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Armed Forces Covenant, launched in 2012, is a promise by the nation that those who are serving in the Armed Forces, or who have served, and their families, are treated fairly and do not suffer disadvantage as a result of their service. During its seven years existence, it has been signed by every council in the country along with over 3,000 business and other organisations.
- 1.2 The Annual Population Survey¹ estimated that there were 2.5 million veterans in households across Great Britain in 2016 and were estimated to make up 5 per cent of household residents in England. There are currently 144,200 full-time, and 35,060 reserve members of the UK Armed Forces². Data is limited on the number of spouses and partners of serving personnel, but in 2018 there were 49,800 Service Family Accommodation properties in the UK³.
- 1.3 The Covenant Fund, launched in 2015, is delivered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and has £10 million to fund projects which support the delivery of the Covenant and benefit the Armed Forces Community each year. Amongst a wide-ranging programme of activity, the Fund awarded 17 large grants to local authorities in England in 2016/17, the majority of which will be completed by the end of this year. Alongside this, the Fund awards grants to local projects up to a value of £20,000.
- 1.4 Local authorities and their partners have taken advantage of this funding to better understand the presence and needs of the Armed Forces Community and to take action to meet those needs. The Local Government Association commissioned Shared Intelligence to pull together ten case studies of projects supported by the Covenant Fund. This report presents the results of that research. It provides a pen portrait of each case study and summarises the key learning from each. We also highlight some key lessons from the ten case studies as a whole for councils, government and the Covenant Fund Trust.
- 1.5 The case studies are based on telephone interviews with around four stakeholders in each area including the project officer, a representative of the Armed Forces Community, a key local stakeholder and a senior councillor or council officer. The lessons learned section was informed by a sense-making workshop attended by project leads, the LGA and the Ministry of Defence's Covenant Team.
- 1.6 This report highlights the action that councils and their partners are taking to deliver the objectives of the Armed Forces Covenant and the important part that the Covenant Fund is playing in supporting that action. It provides examples of good practice and evidence of the steps that councils are taking to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly and do not suffer disadvantage as a

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654734/20171023 - APS 2016 Bulletin.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654734/20171023_-_APS_2016_Bulletin.pdf)

² <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7930/CBP-7930.pdf>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713818/UK_SFA_Publication_2018_.pdf

result of their service. The research demonstrates that without receiving Covenant Fund grants the projects would not have been delivered to the same scale, and the value of the action in each area would not have been achieved. It highlights the wealth of resources that have been developed and which can be used by those councils which are less advanced in the development of actions to help deliver the Armed Forces Covenant.

1.7 The research highlights a number of lessons for councils and Government to take forward, which are set out in detail in section four of this report, and include:

- The importance of high-quality data and intelligence in order to both design and deliver high quality services, and understand level of need;
- The value of establishing a comprehensive library of the material and products that have been developed using Covenant funding and ensuring that any future rounds of Covenant funding builds on this work rather than duplicates it;
- The need for greater collaboration with service providers during, before and after transition which could help to meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community and prevent them from needing longer term, and expensive, state support.

1.8 The report builds on our previous research into local government and the Covenant which culminated in the report, *Our Community - Our Covenant*⁴. It adds to the growing body of research on action that councils and their partners are taking to ensure that members of the Armed Force Community are not disadvantaged when accessing their services. This growing body of research is beginning to craft a picture of the impact of the Covenant on the Armed Forces Community, but more evidence of impact is needed in order to demonstrate this more effectively.

⁴ <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Covenant-Report-2nd-Ed.pdf>

2 Areas of activity

2.1 The ten case studies were chosen to reflect a range of geography, type of council, presence of the Armed Forces Community and type of project. The case studies, which are described in more detail in the next section, are:

- A Partnership approach to embedding the Covenant in Charnwood, Melton and Rushcliffe;
- Forces Connect South East;
- The Armed Forces Community Outreach Service, in the North East;
- Greater Manchester's Person-Centred Approach;
- The Sub-regional Armed Forces Covenant Partnership centred around the Humber;
- The York and North Yorkshire Partnership;
- The South West Armed Forces Covenant Project;
- The Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant e-learning programme;
- Westminster RAF Centenary Community event; and
- Veteran Housing Support Project in Wolverhampton.

2.2 Each of these projects is different, reflecting the characteristics of the area, the nature of the Armed Forces presence and local priorities. There is, however, a core set of activities which feature, to a greater or lesser extent, in each of the case studies. We summarise these activities below.

Needs assessment

2.3 For most areas considering what action to take to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant, a first step is to get a better understanding of the presence of the Armed Forces Community in the area and their needs. Carrying out a needs assessment is an important feature of many of these case studies.

Outreach and signposting

2.4 Most of the projects involve action to meet particular needs of the Armed Forces Community. Common features include an outreach service, often provided by people with personal experience of service, or as the spouse of a serving person, and signposting to other service providers including charities.

Training

2.5 Despite there being an estimated 10 million members of the Armed Forces Community, there exists a lack of understanding of this community, their needs and the services they may require. Training packages have been developed for frontline staff, managers and commissioners and Armed Forces Champions.

Advocacy and awareness raising

- 2.6 In many areas, training aimed at key groups of staff and councillors is supplemented by broader awareness raising activity aimed at businesses, other local employers and the public.

Collaboration

- 2.7 One of the themes highlighted in *Our Community – Our Covenant* was the importance of collaboration between different organisations. Collaboration is also a common theme of these case studies, including collaboration between councils, between councils and the Armed Forces and between different service providers including the voluntary and charity sector.

Intergenerational

- 2.8 A theme explored in some of the projects is the value of intergenerational activity to meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community and raising awareness of the community and its contribution to society.

Case studies

A partnership approach to embedding the Covenant in Charnwood, Melton and Rushcliffe

The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a project through Charnwood, Melton, and Rushcliffe Borough Councils which aims to improve the councils', and third sector organisations', awareness of the Armed Forces Community through the area, and the Armed Forces Covenant, and better provide support to those members of the Armed Forces Community who need or request it.

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The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a project being spearheaded by a partnership of three councils, Charnwood, Melton, and Rushcliffe. The project has had two phases, the first phase was more strategic, focused on embedding the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant into councils and the community. The second phase was more community focused and went further, specifically targeting harder to reach Armed Forces reservists and serving personnel, as well as rolling out the training to additional councils and organisations in the area and beyond.

The funding has been used to embed the Covenant in Charnwood, Melton, and Rushcliffe Borough Councils and organisations in the area. Specifically, they have:

- Mapped the Armed Forces presence in the area, using a survey distributed through organisations with links to the Armed Forces Community. With 206 responses, this helped develop an understanding of where veterans live and several other factors, including their main concerns, whether the GP knows they are a veteran, etc.
- Implemented training courses for staff across the council, and third-party organisations, so they have a better understanding of the Covenant and can better signpost veterans to sources of assistance. This training is being rolled out to councils and other organisations outside the current remit.
- Encouraged charities and other organisations, including GP's to sign and embed the Covenant in their way of working, for example, specifically asking the question 'are you a veteran?'. Procurement opportunities include information about the Covenant and an encouragement for winners to sign the Covenant.
- Developing a resource library which is available to charities, GP's and other third sector organisations for better signposting and response for veterans who need support.
- Identifying 'Community Champions' who will become trained advisors, working in rural areas, further spreading the ideas of the Covenant and the support that is on offer.
- Putting on events for the Armed Forces and veterans, as well as their families, such as breakfast clubs.

There have been several successes as a result of the Covenant funding. Phase one has resulted in a working relationship with over 70 charities, social enterprises and private businesses, with a further 100 community and social groups identified to partner with in phase two. There have been over 600 attendances at the two veteran's breakfast clubs, while on Armed Forces Day 2018, over 4,000 people attended Rushcliffe's 'Proms in the Park' event and over 22,000 attended Charnwood's town centre events. The project has 13 local partners either having signed or committing to sign the Covenant, and have got four national organisations, including Sky and Lidl, to sign. Citizens Advice have helped 7 extra cases, directing them to SSAFA or the British Legion. There has also been council support for reservists, including paid days off for training, and support for their return if they are called up.

Additionally, the councils have received further funding to provide training and consultancy to over 20 District, County and City councils and universities. They are going to write an action plan to encourage and enable them to meet their Covenant pledges and provide resources to maximise impact.

The funding has made a significant difference in the area, and it would have been difficult to achieve these results without it. In particular, the funding has enabled the employment of a good project lead, who is passionate about the project and can steer it, engaging with outside organisations. The end of the Covenant funding means the project will have to stand on its own, but there is a strong belief that the project is sustainable. The top down shift in perspective, encouraged by the Covenant, means there is a real ability for the project to continue. The resources document will also remain available, giving front line staff access to clear signposting to support the Armed Forces.

Lessons learned

- Covenant Grant funding was critical for the development and implementation of the project.
- It is important to have a central person who steers the project, and who is fully committed to driving the project to success.
- The project could not have been achieved nearly as successfully without the full engagement of third sector organisations and their willingness to adapt their way of thinking, implement specific actions related to veterans and sign the Covenant.
- Most people leave the military and are very successful, but some need a little extra support, therefore it is important to have a structure in place in which proud veterans are identified and given the support they need to find a house, job or medical support.

Forces Connect South East

FCSE is a partnership which exists to support the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant and promote a greater understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces Community within public services across the South East region. It aims to establish a common standard of quality service, for the Armed Forces Community as a whole, by providing training opportunities and signposting pathways to front line public service staff and councillors.

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<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/armed-forces/forces-connect-south-east>

A partnership of councils in the South East including: The county councils of Surrey (lead council), Kent, Hampshire, East Sussex, West Sussex and the unitary authorities of Medway and Brighton and Hove. Other partners include: The NHS Armed Forces Networks, Sussex & Kent; 11 Infantry Brigade; SSAFA; RBL and the South East RFCA (SERFCA). The partnership functions at two levels. First, an officer group which involves an officer Armed Forces lead from each of the councils and officers from 11 Infantry Brigade and RBL. Second, a member's board which involves councillors and senior representatives of the local Armed Forces Community, NHS Armed Forces Networks, SERFCA and SSAFA. It is important to have buy-in from senior members of the council as well as from officers to keep up the momentum and maintain a consistent approach.

The key strands of the FCSE project are:

- Training packages: a four-hour accredited training course for officer level Armed Forces Champions in frontline services (Service Champions); a 2-hour overview for Councillor Armed Forces Champions; a one-hour briefing for call centre and frontline staff.
- An online e-learning package which was adapted from Warwickshire's e-learning module.
- An online e-learning employee mentoring package which targets HR leads to help them better understand the needs of service leavers coming into their organisation, and which encourages existing veterans to become mentors.
- A mobile app offering signposting pathways for members of the Armed Forces Community and practitioners.

The project has exceeded its initial targets and has engaged with over 4,000 people in some form of training, with around 750 trained Service Champions by the end of the programme. Equally, the mobile app was launched earlier this year, and has had over 600 downloads.

FCSE has enabled public services in the region to more effectively reduce the disadvantage that the Armed Forces Community face through the provision of training and effective signposting. The increase in knowledge and awareness has meant that services are able to intervene in any issues earlier, which helps both those in need at a much earlier stage and at the same time saves the public sector money.

The partnership has been a particularly important feature of this project; and will continue to be in ensuring the sustainability of FCSE. It has driven the project forward and enabled high quality work to be

achieved by being action focused. Key to the success of the project is the role of individuals and councils which are passionate about removing disadvantage faced by the Armed Forces Community in accessing services.

Similarly, the growth in communication across the region has been a key outcome of the project, both across public services and with the Armed Forces Community themselves. Engagement with the Armed Forces Community has gained momentum over the duration of the project.

Central to the design of the project, and its associated tools, was the notion that the training packages could be easily sustained and replicated across the country. As a result of this project, training material has been produced which, subject to an occasional refresh, can be used “off the shelf.”

Lessons learned

- The coordination of a project this size through a project officer is important and would not have been possible without the Covenant funding.
- The importance of buy in and leadership at a senior level.
- The importance of defining clear roles, responsibilities and expectations.
- A partnership which was driven by achieving action.
- There is now a need for a central resource which pools the tools from across the country to ensure that learning is shared more widely.

Available resources

- Free Forces Connect training and train-the-trainer workshops are being delivered across the UK between May and July 2019 to help kick-start the delivery of the training in other regions.
- All editable training course material will be made available for free through the Forces Connect toolkit on the LGA Knowledge hub. This will include sample training flyers and promotion material.
- E-learning employee mentoring package launched and available for any organisation to use. Available by clicking [here](#).
- Forces Connect mobile app is available to download on Apple and Android – search ‘forces connect’. The app platform is also available for other councils to add their own local signposting information.

The Armed Forces Community Outreach Service in the North East

The Armed Forces Community Outreach Service operates across Gateshead, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Northumberland and Durham. It employs veterans as a single point of contact covering a range of support needs for members of the Armed Forces Community. The support workers are based in a housing setting.

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<https://www.armedforcesoutreachservice.org/>

The service was launched in Gateshead. The service was then extended to cover Newcastle and South Tyneside. Most recently services have been established in Northumberland and Durham.

The fact that outreach workers are based in a housing setting is important: it is the service that members of the Armed Forces Community are most likely to access. The outreach workers have all served in the Armed Forces. This is an important feature of the service and is key to engaging with veterans and their families. The wide geographical coverage of the service is also seen as being important in providing a seamless responsive service.

In the first six months of 2018-19 the service handled 310 referrals, all of whom were offered advice and support. In Gateshead alone, over that period, it prevented 15 people from being evicted (saving an estimated £90,000) and secured funding to help eight people pay off rent arrears. The fact that the case workers have received SSAFA training means that they are able to access funding of this type.

Partnership working and collaboration is seen as being critical to the success of the service. It works closely with organisations such as SSAFA, Walking with the Wounded, The Royal British Legion and Age UK. The involvement of five councils means that support is available across a large area of the North East. Another important feature is its distinctive branding which has assisted in the marketing of its expansion.

The original service in Gateshead would not have been launched without a Covenant Fund Grant and Covenant funding has also been secured to support the extension to other councils. The service is increasingly sustainable. Several of the councils now employ the outreach workers on permanent contracts and others have employed them on fixed term contracts. Future developments are likely to include further expansion of the services and the provision of advice to councils elsewhere in the country.

The quality of the outreach service has also attracted other support for the Armed Forces Community to the area, most notably the decision of Walking with the Wounded (WWTW) to establish its second regional hub in Gateshead. Given WWTW's focus on early intervention with ex-service men and women who have found the transition to civilian life more difficult, the hub will provide a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable veterans into independence.

Gateshead Council's and the Gateshead Housing Company's very supportive approach to the Armed Forces Community and the success of the outreach service were key factors in WWTW's decision to locate the hub in the area. The hub will refer housing queries to the outreach service, as will its Project Nova, working with veterans involved in the criminal justice system.

The commitment of Gateshead Council's Armed Forces Champion and key council officers is widely seen to have contributed to the launch and expansion of programme. The need for the service was in part identified in the findings of a council scrutiny report. The North East is a very important source of recruits for the Army and the area is proud of its connections with the Armed Forces and their presence in the area.

Lessons learned

- Covenant Grant funding was key to the launch and expansion of the programme.
- The success of the programme hinges on the fact that all the caseworkers are veterans and that they are located in a housing setting.
- Collaboration between councils and housing providers and between local government and charities is critically important.
- The personal commitment of the Armed Forces Champion and relevant officers are also key factors.

Greater Manchester's Person-Centred Approach

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority project is designed to deliver a person-centred approach to the issues faced by the Armed Forces Community by embedding it in place-based delivery.

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The aim of the Greater Manchester project is to link with the Ministry of Defence and other government departments to develop, and pilot, a minimum guaranteed offer for the differing cohorts of the Armed Forces Community, aiming to create pathways that are replicable across council and partner delivery nationally.

A Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant programme manager post has been created. The programme manager chairs a monthly meeting of the lead officers from each council in Greater Manchester. He sits in the combined authority's (CA) public service reform team which aims to transform the public service operating model across Greater Manchester. The work is overseen by the CA's public service reform board which enables links with, for example, the NHS and social housing providers.

A core aim is to create a pan-organisation network that becomes a knowledge base for supporting the Armed Forces Community based on the principle of co-production. Council data has been used to carry out a rudimentary needs analysis. A package of support is being created which is centred around place-based reform and which inculcates a supportive culture that wraps around those families who return to Greater Manchester.

The Greater Manchester Armed Forces Hub will provide advice and guidance on the services available to members of the Armed Forces Community. Minimum guaranteed offers are being developed for key areas including: housing and homelessness; the criminal justice system; health, mental health and social care; a youth and cadets strategy; reservists and their employers; and employment and skills. In order to generate awareness around each of these issues, and subsequent offers, a series of five innovative animated films are in the process of being produced; these are seen as the beginning of a concerted campaign to promote Armed Forces Covenant delivery in Greater Manchester.

A key strand of work is to establish a better understanding of the presence and needs of the Armed Forces Community in Greater Manchester. Systems and process are being redesigned to ensure that customers are asked whether they are members of the Armed Forces Community and that the answers are recorded and passed on the Armed Forces leads.

A Greater Manchester Transition Pilot Scheme is planned to provide a cohesive offer for families making the transition from military to civilian life in the areas. This will require buy-in from the MoD and the contracted resettlement service provider. The scheme will offer:

- A single point of contact to signpost individuals or families to the relevant council lead;
- A single point of contact for the MoD to pass information to for people leaving the Armed Forces;
- Targeted advice based on areas of need and geography.

The project reflects the identification of the need for a focal and co-ordination point across Greater Manchester. Other stakeholders, such as the Royal British Legion, stress the importance of achieving a more consistent approach across the area. In too many places action by a council is determined by personality rather than need. Covenant funding was pivotal in creating the post, but discussions are underway to put the co-ordinating function on a sustainable footing in order to embed coherency and benchmarked provision across the ten local authorities that comprise the CA.

The needs assessment has concluded that the Armed Forces Community in Greater Manchester comprises around ten percent of the population. This figure is proving to be an effective way of securing interest in this work.

Lessons learned

- The value of meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community across a wide area such as Greater Manchester;
- The important role of Covenant funding in enabling the creation of the programme manager role;
- The benefits of work to meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community taking place in the context of a wider public service reform programme;
- The need for action on the quality of the transition and to ensure that frontline staff ask whether customers are members of the Armed Forces Community.

Available resources

- Bolting into existing platforms and conjoining the Armed Forces Covenant into existing web provision generates more traffic – gmarmedforces.com links directly into the GMCA website and the Armed Forces Covenant pages feature prominently on the front page of <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/>.
- Rather than create another service directory, GMCA is embedding the niche providers of Armed Forces Community support in the Northumbria University led Veterans and Families Service Directory which is hosted on the Veterans Gateway site: <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/local-support/>. This means that providers across Greater Manchester are all in the same 'place' and we become coherent and consistent with national efforts to promote the Veterans Gateway as a single point of contact.

The Sub-regional Armed Forces Covenant Partnership centred around the Humber

A partnership of local authorities including Hull, East Riding, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire and Doncaster providing a consistent approach to the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. Their coordinated delivery of training, web presence and a conference have been accompanied by a series of successful Covenant-supported local projects.

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hull.connecttosupport.org/s4s/WhereILive/Council?pageId=3256

A sub-regional partnership of Local Authorities: Hull, East Riding, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire and Doncaster Council. A project born out of the fact that service delivery was so varied across the region and they wanted to have an equality of understanding of issues affecting members of the Armed Forces Community. The five councils have strengthened the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant through a sub-regional approach to research, policy review and promotion.

They have achieved this through:

- Research: sub-regional research to identify local priorities – led by Hull City Council;
- Consistent delivery of training – led within the partnership by Doncaster Borough Council;
- A joint web offer, allowing the same web presence in all areas, an initiative led by North Lincolnshire Council; and
- A local Armed Forces Covenant Conference.

The Covenant funding allowed these four key aspects to be delivered by dedicated Armed Forces Covenant Coordinators in each area. This allowed for clear and streamlined communication between

partners and stakeholders and consistent service delivery, particularly in terms of training. These coordinators also provide a means of making sure that all information and data collected is available to everyone in the partnership, as well as all stakeholders.

The partnership has had a wide range of outcomes. For members of the Armed Forces Community, it has helped to combat the lack of awareness of the Covenant. This has been important for helping to signpost them to sources of information and support wherever they are in the region. The funding has further allowed a more coordinated approach on veterans' issues throughout the region through the funding of local projects.

For local partners and stakeholders, across the partnership area, there has been increased awareness and clarity around the needs of the Armed Forces Community. It has enabled them to coordinate their activities and projects, and to share good practice and data.

The partnership has enabled local government to be more engaged with the Armed Forces Community and their needs. It has further given local authorities the ability to more easily identify ex-service personnel and easily signpost them to the most appropriate sources of support.

Within the sub-regional partnership, Hull City Council submitted the initial bid on behalf of all the partners. Hull also led on sharing the good practice which they have implemented locally. They have done this alongside their active Armed Forces Forum and the Veterans Community Hub; also set up with the support of Covenant funding.

The sub-regional partnership approach has also been furthered at a more local level with the Veterans Community Hub. In partnership with the Goodwin Trust, and third sector partners such as the Royal British Legion and Citizen's Advice, it provides a single roof under which the various needs of veterans can be met, and community services accessed. The Covenant funding allowed them to hire a hub coordinator to pull together all the different services and partners.

The Armed Forces Forum in Hull is chaired by the Colonel of the 150 Regiment Royal Logistics Corp and has over 40 members. It acts as a way to make sure that there is a consistent approach to the Covenant within Hull and make sure that there is as little overlap as possible. The "pathways" set up around the forum mean that partners can have direct access to the right people so they can get accurate information quickly. The data that all partners collect on the Armed Forces Community is distributed to all members of the forum. The different partners and charities sit on boards related to each pathway, such as the "Housing Pathway", who deal with particular issues.

Hull 4 Heroes, a local charity in the city, is in the process of creating a new Veterans Village on 22 acres of landed gifted by Hull City Council. The close link with the Armed Forces coordinator, which the local forum provided, has allowed a more streamlined planning process with the council and communication with relevant councils across the partnership.

Through the development of the Sub Regional Partnership successes include:

- New Armed Forces forums/working groups set up throughout the region;

- Local council policies and processes reviewed;
- Increased partnership working with the wider public, voluntary and business sectors; and
- Greater awareness and increased support available for the Armed Forces Community.

Partners and representatives of the Armed Forces Community feel that the funding allowed them to maximise their effectiveness and draw on collective resources as a partnership with councils.

Lessons learned

- Dedicated coordinators are incredibly valuable for regional consistency and collaboration. They help to streamline processes locally and help to bring together local and regional partners.
- Sharing all the information and data that is collected by partners means that there can be a more informed approach to projects and service provision.
- Setting out clear roles within the partnership, so that overlap is limited, also aids in ensuring that there is clarity in who is carrying out individual tasks.
- It is important to recognise that each area will have different needs for their Armed Forces Community and different challenges to face when trying to implement a 'consistent quality approach' for supporting, recognising and valuing them.

Available resources

- Covenant leaflets/induction leaflets/policies and surveys used by the Partnership.
- Armed Forces Forum Terms of Reference/e-learning package: available [here](#).

The York and North Yorkshire Partnership

A partnership of councils in York and North Yorkshire commissioned research to establish the needs of the Armed Forces Community in the area, to map the services available for them and identify any gaps. The councils have also commissioned training for Armed Forces Champions and staff in the councils and partner organisations.

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The project partners were North Yorkshire County Council, Richmondshire District Council, Hambleton District Council, Scarborough Borough Council and City of York Council. Other organisations such as the Army Families Federation were also involved.

The needs assessment used qualitative and quantitative data, including focus groups and interviews with members of the Armed Forces Community. It used national and local data sources including the 2016 Veteran Annual Population Survey and school census data. Additional data was obtained from the Ministry of Defence through a Freedom of Information Request, including data on the numbers of service leavers with an address in the area, the organisation location of service personnel, personnel with a spouse or partner with an address in the areas and the number of service family accommodation units in each council.

Despite these data sources, a key finding of the research was the existence of significant data gaps, particularly in relation to the number of members of the Armed Forces Community receiving benefits, on housing waiting lists, accessing mental health services and receiving employment support. There is also no reliable data on the destination of people leaving the Armed Forces beyond an initial address.

The research confirmed the significance of the Armed Forces Community, particularly in Hambleton and Richmondshire. It highlighted the presence of veterans with no or low qualifications in Scarborough. The work also revealed the comparatively low number of organisations in the area which have signed the Armed Forces Covenant or participated in the Employer Recognition Scheme, which is surprising given the scale of the presence of the Armed Forces.

Other areas for attention identified by the research included: spousal employment; the unemployment and under-employment of some veterans; the needs of Forces children in schools with small numbers of them; access to housing and mental health services; and isolation and accessibility issues.

The report recommended that the councils should: encourage businesses and employers to sign the Covenant; encourage all service providers to ask the “Armed Forces question”, when relevant, to help fill the data gap; and work with senior military personnel to improve the management of the transition.

The steering group has commissioned other areas that were supported by Covenant funding to deliver training in the area: the Warwickshire e-learning programme and the Forces Connect South East training for elected member champions and York St John’s Military Human training. The Army Families Federation was instrumental in identifying the work being done in other areas. A training the trainers programme has also been delivered, with 10 trainers now available to provide bite-sized training for frontline staff. The trainers have all served in the Armed Forces and have some previous training experience.

Steps are now being taken to embed the results of this work, ensure that the training is sustainable and pursue the recommendations in the needs assessment. This includes a major conference in autumn 2019 which is designed to galvanise continuing activity.

Lessons learned

- Covenant Grant funding was key to commissioning the needs assessment and training and the area has benefitted from two other Covenant funded projects in Warwickshire and the South East.
- The needs assessment has identified both significant data gaps, particularly in housing and mental health needs, and some additional data sources within the MoD which are not publicly available.
- In an area such as North Yorkshire, there are a small number of schools attended by the majority of Forces pupils, but there are a large number of schools are attended by a few Forces pupils.
- If it is to be effective, training on Armed Forces awareness must be delivered in a flexible way reflecting the pressures and needs of the different audiences.
- There is significant value in trainers having served in the Armed Forces.

The South West Armed Forces Covenant Project

A partnership of eight councils in the South West: Wiltshire, Bristol City, Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth City, Gloucestershire, Somerset and North Somerset. They are formalising the consortium of councils which has already begun to implement a joint approach, through the Covenant funding, to increase awareness and understanding of the Covenant through a range of connected outcomes.

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Collaboration between councils across the South West is at the heart of this project which is due to be formalised as Forces Connect South West. The ambition of the project, which is led by a veteran, is to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community have a common experience whether they are accessing services or support in rural Cornwall or urban Gloucester. Action is in hand to develop a Forces Friendly Quality Mark to underpin a cost-effective approach.

Features of this developing collaboration include: a regional champions conference, attended by over 120 people in November 2018; a Regional Covenant Executive including the Armed Forces Community and military charities; and a web portal which will provide a regional signposting service including a Veterans and Families Service Directory.

Understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces Community is being enhanced through a comprehensive training programme for council staff (from front line staff to senior officers), elected members and other service providers. The programme uses the Warwickshire e-learning modules and the Forces Connect South East face-to-face training. These packages are complemented by a short film, *Changing Step*, that illustrates the challenges that people experience during the transition to civilian life.

This work has been informed by a needs assessment which is intended to give councils and other service providers a better understanding of the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community, who they are and where they are.

Additional funding has enabled the development of a Mobile Veterans Outreach Support service. This capability will facilitate a greater reach into the community, specifically into rural areas where services are limited or non-existent. It will further enable stronger links with partners in the third sector to reach or be available to veterans whilst raising awareness of the Covenant amongst the civilian population. This outreach aspect will also allow the partnership to carry out research and collect data across the partnership to complement the needs assessment in a more local, regular and detailed manner.

Enabling greater collaboration across a wide geographical area is the core ambition of this project. Developing the partnership at a regional level means that this will alleviate overlap in what councils are developing. It allows them to share best practise and, where there are problems, fix them in a collaborative way. But the main benefit will be for serving people, veterans and their families who will benefit from a better understanding of their needs and a more consistent response from service providers.

The project and its coordination, including the role of the project officer, has been funded by an MoD Covenant Trust Fund grant, and it is clear that without this funding, it would not have been possible to coordinate and develop the partnership and relationships with other public authorities, MoD, and other stakeholders.

Lessons learned

- The partnership allows a network to be built up between colleagues from different authorities so that there can be collective discussion on all issues; particularly day-to-day support of the Armed Forces Community.
- The overall approach of a general partnership, with clear aims, is successful because it works at a regional level to provide support but allows local variation and autonomy in accordance with the needs of individual councils and their specific Armed Forces Community.
- The lack of overlap means that the desired effect is built on innovation and with the expertise of different partners. This joined up, consistent, approach means that there can be better products and services across the region which are consistent.
- Having veterans employed in capacities which directly link to councils' work on the Covenant is beneficial as they provide an extra depth of understanding which can strengthen local delivery of the Covenant.

The Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant e-learning programme

The Armed Forces Covenant e-learning programme was developed by the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership. It was designed to combat the mis-information around the Covenant and promote awareness amongst the Armed Forces Community and wider civilian society, local authorities, stakeholders and businesses on a variety of issues faced by the Armed Forces Community.

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The Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership includes the eight councils, military units, military charities and other third sector groups in the partnership area. The partnership has produced five e-learning modules, based around some of the key issues facing members of the Armed Forces Community. The partnership works on two levels with a large partnership group meeting every 6 months and a smaller operational working group meeting bi-monthly. An annual plan has been operational since 2015, which is regularly monitored and reported on.

The five e-learning modules were produced to target specific groups to raise awareness of key topic areas, and to raise awareness of the Covenant and how it can be used to support members of the Armed Forces Community. At the beginning, it was recognised that these modules would have national application and have been developed so they can be used by a wide range of agencies. The five modules are as follows:

1. The Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff (in councils and other agencies)
2. Housing, Homelessness and the Armed Forces Covenant
3. The Armed Forces Covenant for Armed Forces Personnel
4. The Armed Forces Covenant for families of Armed Forces Personnel
5. Adjusting to life outside of the Armed Forces

The project coordinator made sure that the Family Federations, subject matter experts and members of the Armed Forces Community were all involved in the development of module content. This means that the modules are accurate and appropriate to the specific needs of the target audiences. Furthermore, the modules also contain interviews with members of the Armed Forces Community, senior councillors and experts in issues such as housing, homelessness and the NHS.

The key outcome of the e-learning has been the increased awareness of the unique needs of the Armed Forces Community in public and military services. It has also increased awareness of the Covenant among stakeholders and members of the Armed Forces Community, particularly ex-service personnel and the families of serving personnel. For members of the Armed Forces Community, the e-learning has provided a framework for clear and easily accessible knowledge about the Covenant, what it means for them and what to do if they feel they are being disadvantaged. This is particularly important because of the transient nature of the serving Armed Forces Community. As well as this, it is a resource which they can work through at their own pace. This has been most useful for the large number of Gurkha families in the partnership area, for whom English might not have been their first language.

The members of the partnership have also ensured that the language and terminology they use within the modules, and across their services, is more accessible to members of the Armed Forces Community. For example, using ex-service personnel instead of veterans since many individuals who have served do not consider themselves to be veterans. This small change has helped local councils to further understand the needs of those members of the Armed Forces Community accessing their services.

The e-learning modules have had a wide reach outside of the partnership area as well. Data from 2018 shows that the first module alone, for frontline staff, had been provided to over 100 councils and organisations. Of this number, 52 were either using or planning to use the module for staff training. An additional four Welsh authorities were also looking to use a future bilingual version of the training. The e-learning modules are also hosted on the MoD Covenant website as well as those of key partners and other councils, which has been another key success. Other local councils and public and private sector organisations have access to the training package and can adapt the training to their own local needs and situations.

Other activities within the partnership include the refurbishment of a local veteran's hub in Nuneaton by local partner Balfour Beatty. The partnership has also worked to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Community in the local community and support outreach programmes. STEM ambassadors from the Armed Forces Community, such as female bomb disposal technicians, have run local activities including holiday clubs. In North Warwickshire, a new system has been trialled where the "Armed Forces question" is asked of those contacting council services. While on hold they are asked to inform staff if they, or an immediate family member, has ever served in the Armed Forces.

Lessons learned

- It has been incredibly valuable to have dedicated positions to develop the e-learning programme. This has enabled work within individual councils to take place and also progress the Covenant agenda across the partnership area.
- The Covenant funding was absolutely vital in allowing the e-learning programme to be developed.
- A more concerted media effort is needed to keep up the profile of the Covenant and help inform members of the Armed Forces Community, stakeholders and civilians know about the e-learning.
- Collaboration with all parties in the partnership was vital as this enabled the full range of subject matter experts to be involved in its development.

Available resources

- All modules of the e-learning are available and free to use or be adapted by other public and third sector organisations. The Frontline Staff module would also be suitable for use by business. The modules for serving personnel and families of serving personnel could be used by Tri-Service training and development programmes. Contact phildeakin@warwickshire.gov.uk to discuss further.

Westminster RAF Centenary Community Event

The RAF centenary event was an event held on the 19th of May 2018. While Westminster has done a lot of work related to the Covenant with schools, they had done little specifically targeted at older people. This event therefore was designed to help older people to feel part of their community, find out more about the history of the RAF, find out more about the local Armed Forces and to meet new people.

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Westminster has a strong connection with the Armed Forces. After the council signed the Covenant in 2012, they wanted it to mean something, and have therefore encouraged engagement and understanding of the Armed Forces within the area, particularly regarding the then-ongoing First World War Centenary events. To this end, the council has pursued several initiatives related to the Covenant, including mental health training for front line staff and Armed Forces engagement within schools. The commemoration of the centenary of the founding of the RAF formed part of its wider programme to commemorate the centenary of the First World War from 1914-1918. There are many local connections to the RAF in Westminster including the first HQ of the RAF, the bomber command memorial and St Clement Danes, the central church of the RAF.

The event was aimed at residents aged 65 and over to help them to connect with local history, feel a sense of community and meet new people. This older group, particularly older men, tend to need a reason to engage with the community, and often do not have many opportunities for getting out. In addition, many within this older group are veterans themselves, or have a strong connection to the RAF with brothers, fathers, or uncles having served.

Ahead of the event, attendees were encouraged to submit stories about their personal connections to the RAF. These were then displayed in an exhibition on the day. They were also able to join rehearsals for a First World War sing-along hosted by Westminster Music Library ahead of the event.

The event was an all-day occasion split into two parts:

- The first part of the day was based in St Clements Danes, the Central Church of the RAF. This consisted of several speakers of all descriptions, from academics to archivists, who talked about the history and current context of the RAF. The speakers included Lord Trenchard, the grandson of the 'father of the RAF', and honorary air commodore for the 600 Squadron, who talked about his grandfather's role in its inception. After this was a sing-along of First World War songs, led by a Covenant funded choir. People could also register for RAF-themed walking tours through the city during the summer months following the event.
- The second part was a reception and two-course meal at the RAF club in Westminster. Buses were specifically put on to transport people from the church to the venue. The whole afternoon was attended by serving RAF personnel.

The event was supported by organisations and people who put aside their time to participate in the event free of charge, these included the speakers, the Armed Forces, Groundwork London who provided event

volunteers, Westminster Music Library, Open Age, Carers Network, Victory Services Club, Westminster Archives, St Clement Danes Church, Veterans Aid and the RAF Club.

The event was overwhelmingly popular, being oversubscribed to the point where they received more than double the number of entries than there were tickets available. Ultimately, out of the 138 people who had a ticket to the event, there was a dropout rate of just four, or about three percent. After the event, feedback forms were distributed, and feedback emails were encouraged. There was a total of 47 responses through the feedback form or by email. Of these responses:

- 94% of guests said that the event helped them to feel part of the community, against a target of 60%.
- 100% said the event helped them to meet new people, against a target of 50%.
- 97% of guests said the event was good or very good, against a target of 80%.
- 100% said the event helped them to find out more about the history of the RAF.
- 100% said the event helped them to feel a sense of pride in their city.
- 94% said the event helped them to find out more about the local Armed Forces.

Covenant funding for the event totalled just under £8000. The funding helped to ensure that the meal for participants could go ahead. This aspect of the event was essential in tackling isolation and building connections as it provided a platform for conversation and communication, both among the attendees and the RAF personnel, allowing them to share their experiences. While the event was a one off, to mark the special centenary, the success of the event has led to considerations of further events, such as the walking tours, to further engage with older people within the City.

Lessons learned

- Using landmarks, such as centenary milestones, are a useful way to engage local communities with the Armed Forces and build awareness of the Covenant.
- Utilising assets, heritage and connections within the city, enhanced the project and helped keep costs within budget.
- Events can be as beneficial to councils and their local communities as to the Armed Forces.
- Local Councils do not have the funding to hold such events so Covenant funding is essential.

Veteran Housing Support Project in Wolverhampton

A rent deposit scheme which raises awareness with landlords on the needs of veterans and which provides an opportunity for veterans to access the private rental sector through the offering of deposits.

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A project led by Wolverhampton's housing team which received funding from the Covenant Fund local grant programme, and which built on learning from a predecessor project. The aim of this work in Wolverhampton was to embed the needs of veterans in an existing rent deposit scheme and to provide veterans with access to other types of accommodation.

Born out of a project which provided supported living for ex-service personnel, but which was not sustainable, the council incorporated their work on homeless veterans into an existing rent bond scheme, with the involvement of local stakeholder organisations. Projects that focus on social housing are now not needed due to the relaxation of allocation policy, so the premise of this project is to provide veterans with various housing options.

Though the numbers of homeless veterans that have been housed in private accommodation through the scheme has not been substantial, the fact that this is embedded in service delivery means that all veterans will be offered the chance to be involved in this project if they find themselves in a situation where they are without accommodation. The project has enabled mainstream services to be more geared up to working with veterans, with staff having more understanding of their specific needs which in most circumstances can be addressed through mainstream services.

Council engagement with private landlords is high in Wolverhampton, and there has been general support from private landlords, many of whom label themselves as 'veteran friendly landlords.' Key to the success of this project is matching good landlords and good tenants. There are a range of landlords involved in the project, and a forum of landlords has been convened so that any concerns and issues can be raised.

Central to this project is understanding the needs of the homeless person that they are supporting. This is done through interviews with every rough sleeper and is inputted into a database which enables effective data collection through both monitoring and analysing needs. A large cohort of the rough sleeper population are foreign nationals, some of whom have served in their national Armed Forces and who might have similar needs to those of British veterans which, through this project, can be picked up at an earlier stage.

Covenant funding enabled them to understand where the gap was in their service, and transition from a project which was expensive and targeted support, to something that is business as usual and therefore more affordable.

This project is now embedded in the day-to-day delivery of the rent bond scheme and has the potential to be rolled out on a bigger scale.

Lessons learned

- A key element of the project has been the upskilling of staff to understand the needs of veterans and the course of action they might follow.
- Embedding the project as business as usual has enabled the needs of veterans to be understood by wider staff and ensures the sustainability of the project.
- Covenant funding was essential for the project to succeed.

4 Lessons

4.1 In this section we pull together learning and lessons from the case studies for the adoption and delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant; and action to understand and meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community. We do so under five headings: service provision; training and awareness raising; needs assessments; the operation of the Covenant Fund; and implications for national policy.

Service provision

4.2 Collaboration and consistency are important characteristics of effective services to meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community. Several of the case studies show the value of working across a wider geographical area, enabling a consistent approach whilst also allowing for appropriate local flexibility. Collaboration with Armed Forces charities is also important, bringing a deeper understanding of the community and specialist service delivery capacity. In the North East, for example, the fact that the case workers are trained by SSAFA means that they can tap into the charity's funding streams.

4.3 In some places, a key aim is for delivery of the Covenant to be business as usual and integrated in wider policies and programmes. In Greater Manchester, for example, it is part of the combined authority's approach to public service reform. In these cases, maintaining a balance between integration and a distinct Armed Forces focus will be crucial.

4.4 All of the case studies show the value of a dedicated project or programme manager to the delivery of the projects. And all of the project managers we interviewed for this research highlighted the importance of senior level buy-in among the councils' political and managerial leadership.

4.5 The role of the project manager was not just important at a local level, but also in collaboration with other projects to ensure that project learning can be distributed widely. This is something that has happened organically, but project managers would welcome a more organised approach to the sharing of learning between projects.

4.6 High quality data and intelligence is important in both designing and delivering high quality services. Needs assessment is explored in more detail in a subsequent section, but the delivery of these projects highlights the value of better information on need which could be obtained by:

- Asking, in appropriate circumstances, whether people accessing relevant services are members of the Armed Forces Community;
- Closer liaison between the Armed Forces and public service providers throughout the transition process (and before) to help target support on people in most need.

4.7 Other key learning points include:

- The contribution that personal experience of service life can bring to the design and delivery of services by, for example, employing outreach workers who have that experience and/or close engagement with service charities;
- The important part that councils can play in encouraging local employers and businesses to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and deliver Covenant pledges;
- The continued relevance of the core infrastructure for the delivery of the Covenant set out in *Our Community – Our Covenant*, including the value of an action plan which is regularly monitored and updated.

Training and awareness-raising

4.8 A theme running through most of the case studies is the contribution that high quality, targeted training can make to raising awareness of the needs of the Armed Forces Community among frontline staff, managers, commissioners and local politicians.

4.9 Key lessons from the training elements of the case studies are that:

- Training must be tailored to meet the operational constraints on the target participants – for example call centre staff will only be able to access on line material or participate in very short bite-sized provision;
- There are significant benefits in incorporating material on the needs of the Armed Forces Community into wider training provision, such as induction courses or mental health awareness training;
- People with personal service experience, including spouses, must be involved in the design and/or delivery of training packages in some way;
- There is considerable value in a cascade approach with members of the Armed Forces Community being involved in a “train the trainers” approach;
- E-learning packages can make a significant contribution.

4.10 Finally, it is clear that there is now an extensive training resource which other areas should be encouraged to access.

Needs assessments

4.11 Several of the areas covered by this research have carried out needs assessments of the Armed Forces Community in their area. A consistent theme of this research is that there are significant data gaps particularly in relation to the location of Armed Service families living off bases, the distribution of the veteran community, the housing and health needs of veterans and the needs of people going through the transition process, particularly early service leavers.

4.12 The projects have identified different ways of filling these gaps, including:

- Accessing information held by the MoD but not currently made publicly available, such as the Freedom of Information Request made as part of the North Yorkshire Needs Assessment;

- Adopting a more consistent approach to asking service users, in appropriate circumstances, whether they are members of the Armed Forces Community and using the results to inform service delivery;
- Surveying the Armed Forces Community locally and using qualitative research techniques, such as focus groups and user diaries.

The Covenant Fund

- 4.13 All the people we interviewed for this research were clear that their projects would not have got off the ground without Covenant Funding. In several cases a second round of funding is being used to either deepen or widen the scope of a project to, for example, cover a wider geographical area. In some cases, the funding has been used to employ outreach workers. In other cases, it has also been used to fund the project manager or co-ordinator which, as was noted above, is a critically important role. Our research suggests that there is a mixed picture in terms of sustainability. But in several places, posts that were funded through grant funding have been added to a council's permanent staff. In some places, training or information on the needs of the Armed Forces Community have been embedded in staff inductions. Evidence from research such as this should help to make the case for sustainable funding.
- 4.14 In terms of the impact of these projects, most of the evidence we have been referred to measures outputs or outcomes: this includes, for example, the number of people trained, or the number of referrals handled. While understanding the impacts of these project can take time in order for them to be fully established, there is very little evidence currently available on the impact of this activity on the Armed Forces Community and, for example, the extent to which they are experiencing disadvantage as a result of their service. The evaluation commissioned by Forces Connect South East shows ways in which it is possible to get qualitative information on the impact of the programme. We are aware that the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust is proposing to evaluate the impact of its grant programme. It is important that the evaluation covers impact as well as outputs and outcomes.
- 4.15 As this research demonstrates, Covenant funding has generated a number of training products, experience of carrying out needs assessments, and various approaches to outreach and service provision. This report will help to disseminate the learning from ten projects, but it is important that a comprehensive library of this material and products is established and that any future rounds of Covenant funding builds on this work rather than duplicates it.

Policy issues

- 4.16 Two key policy issues arise for the Ministry of Defence and other government departments from these ten case studies.
- 4.17 First, government departments (MoD, DWP, DHSC, DfE in particular) can help to fill the significant data gaps that have been identified in three ways:
- Reviewing what information on the local presence of the Armed Forces Community it can make available to local councils building on the Freedom of Information request submitted as part of the North Yorkshire needs assessment;

- Supporting a concerted effort by local councils and other service providers, including the health service, police and DWP to ask service users, in appropriate circumstances, whether they are members of the Armed Forces Community and using the data collected to improve commissioning and service planning.
- Working with councils, in particular those which have not received Covenant funding, and which are not as engaged in delivering the Covenant, to ensure that capacity remains to further strengthen the local delivery of the Covenant.

4.18 Second, it is clear from several of these case studies, and other work, that the Armed Forces know which people leaving service are most likely to face challenging circumstances. Greater collaboration with service providers during, before and after transition could help to meet the needs of these people and prevent them from needing longer term and expensive state support.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Three conclusions stand out from these case studies.
- 5.2 First, everybody we interviewed for this research was clear that these projects would not have got off the ground without support from the Covenant Fund. Many of these projects are moving towards sustainability, but it is generally recognised that many parts of the country are not yet benefitting from projects of this type. Further Covenant funding is likely to be required to enable similar projects to be started in other areas.
- 5.3 Second, as well as leading to action in the places concerned many of these projects have generated resources and experience which can be applied elsewhere. This includes:
- Training packages, many of which can be used off the shelf;
 - Methodologies for carrying out needs assessments and their limitations;
 - The design of outreach and signposting services.
- This resource should mean that future projects will require less Covenant funding to get off the ground.
- 5.4 Finally, there is a need for more evidence on the impact on the Armed Forces Community of the impact of projects such as these. Much of the evidence that is currently available relates to outputs and outcomes rather than impact. Evidence on impact would be valuable in terms of both justifying further support from the Covenant Fund for new projects and making the case for mainstream funding by councils in the current financial climate.