



BEST PRACTICE GUIDE to **COMMUNITY COVENANTS**

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Community
Covenants



BEST PRACTICE GUIDE to COMMUNITY COVENANTS



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“With the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, the rebasing of troops from Germany and the increased numbers of Reservists expected in society, support from local authorities and local communities is going to be more vital than ever.”

Dr Chris Simpkins DMA, Hon. DUniv, DL
Director General of The Royal British Legion

Forewords and introduction



Photograph © Martin Hunter

Foreword from **Dr Chris Simpkins**, Director General of The Royal British Legion

One year on since the Legion launched its first 'Best Practice Guide to Community Covenants', the landscape has changed markedly. Not only have almost all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales signed a Community Covenant, but the military footprint itself is shifting dramatically.

With the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, the rebasing of troops from Germany and the increased numbers of Reservists expected in society, support from local authorities and local communities is going to be more vital than ever. Local authorities will need to prepare themselves and put measures in place to be ready to meet this new challenge.

Changes that your local authority (and local partners) could make have the power to truly breathe life into the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. These principles – of no disadvantage as a result of Service and special treatment where justified, e.g. in the case of injured personnel or the bereaved – will only become a reality if you are able to truly embrace your Community Covenant and make sure that it is a living document and not just a piece of paper.

As a former local authority Chief Executive I can appreciate only too well the financial pressures you are facing in these straitened times. However, the very fact that we have been able to fill a new guide with so many excellent examples of best practice shows how innovative Councils are being. I hope that this guide is helpful to you and that the examples of good practice can help you to take positive steps for the benefit of the Armed Forces and civilian communities in your area and keep the momentum going.



Dr Chris Simpkins DMA, Hon. DUniv, DL



Foreword from **Cllr David O'Neill**, President of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

COSLA are delighted that all Scottish local authorities have signed a Community Covenant. With troops soon to be returning from Afghanistan and also being rebased to Scotland from Germany, local authorities and local partners have an important role to play with integration and support. It is vital that Community Covenants are more than just a piece of paper and that Councils look to do what they can to support our Armed Forces and their families. COSLA is delighted to endorse this helpful guide. We think that it will be of real use to local authorities.

 **Cllr David O'Neill**
COSLA

Foreword from **Sir Merrick Cockell**, Chairman of the Local Government Association

Local Councils have a long and lasting relationship with our Armed Forces, and its people are deeply grateful to our Service men and women for their commitment, Service and sacrifice for our country. The Armed Forces are an integral part of who we are as a nation, and an inspiration to us all. It is important that we do all we can in local government to support them. The LGA is delighted to endorse this updated guide and we hope that it will inspire you to go further to support your local Armed Forces.



Sir Merrick Cockell



Foreword from **Cllr Brendan Toomey**, Spokesperson for Community Safety, Policing and Fire at the Welsh Local Government Association

Improving services for the Armed Forces community, and ensuring that no-one suffers disadvantage as a consequence of their Service, are key ambitions of local government in Wales. Adopting a Community Covenant is only the first step. The real challenge is to ensure that appropriate actions are now taken to improve services and outcomes. The support and assistance of The Royal British Legion has been instrumental in making real progress in a relatively short time and the WLGA is delighted to endorse and support this guide. We hope that you find it useful in the work you do to support your local Armed Forces community.



Cllr Brendan Toomey



Introduction What is a **Community Covenant**?

Community Covenants complement, at a local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. Community Covenants were launched at the same time that the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant were written into law in 2011, following a successful campaign by the Legion. A key test of the principles:

- recognising the unique nature of Service,
- ensuring that there is no disadvantage, e.g. in accessing public services, as a result of Service, and
- allowing special treatment where justified, e.g. in the case of injured personnel or the bereaved



is the extent to which they are applied in practice on the ground, which is why Community Covenants are so important. Signing a Community Covenant is also the only route through which a local authority can access funding through the Community Covenant Grant Scheme (see [pages 67-73](#) for further information).

What is a **Corporate Covenant**?

Corporate Covenants sit alongside Community Covenants and are voluntary statements of support for the Armed Forces community signed by companies, corporate entities or charities. They aim to complement the Armed Forces Covenant and the Community Covenant, and ensure that the Armed Forces community faces no disadvantage in its engagement with businesses. They encourage companies to develop a relationship with members of the Armed Forces Community who work in their business or access their products or services. Local authorities may wish to try to link in with Corporate Covenant signatories in their area to see if they can offer support to the Community Covenant, e.g. use of space for events or reduced cost services. This guide focuses on Community Covenants rather than Corporate Covenants.

The purpose of this guide

Since its launch, the Community Covenant scheme has been helping to transform the relationship between local communities and the 'Armed Forces community' - which includes serving and Reservist Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families - to the benefit of both communities.

However, despite the impressive sign up rate amongst Councils, the Legion believes that there is still progress to be made and by highlighting some of the good work that is being done in a selection of local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales, we hope that others can learn from this. Taken together, the examples in this guide amount, in our view, to an impressive body of best practice that we hope will inspire you.

We hope that this guide is a useful tool, both for the handful of local authorities yet to sign a Community Covenant or who are in the early stages of doing so, and also those that have signed some time ago but want to do more and go further to support the Armed Forces community.



How can a local authority get involved?

It is important to emphasise that Community Covenants are not intended to be identikit documents. This is a scheme where one size does not fit all, and, as such, the processes that different local authorities follow are likely to be different and reflect local circumstances. This section gives examples of approaches that have worked well for particular local authorities. You may wish to consider if they might be appropriate for you.



Process Map

Process

Details

1

Download the appropriate resources from the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) website.

The MOD's guidance notes and the template Community Covenant document can be found here: www.gov.uk/armed-forces-community-covenant

2

Get buy-in from senior members of staff and Councillors.

Having the support of both senior staff and elected members can really help increase momentum and ensure that the project gets off the ground. You may want to nominate a Councillor 'Champion' as part of the process.

3

Allocate a specific officer/department to lead on Community Covenant work.

This may sit best in a corporate department, such as the Chief Executive's office. However, it is important to ensure that other Council departments are actively involved. It is helpful to involve a combination of those who work 'on the ground' and can find out information and get things done, and also those in more senior positions who are able to make decisions quickly.

4

Engage with the Armed Forces.

It is important to involve the Armed Forces at an early stage (see [page 77](#) for further details). In addition, Armed Forces charities, such as The Royal British Legion, may be useful to engage with.

5

Speak to different Council departments to get an idea of staff awareness and current provision of services by the Council.

It is crucial to get a combination of front-facing and strategic staff involved.

11

Organise and hold the signing ceremony, ensuring that appropriate local groups are invited to sign and that the media is involved.

Having media presence on the day will ensure that better quality photographs are taken. Press releases should be drafted in advance and issued immediately to ensure wide coverage.

6

Engage with local organisations, service providers and the voluntary sector.

See [pages 19-20](#) for further details.

12

Ensure that the working group and Community Covenant Partnership Board meet regularly and develop and implement the proposals from your 'measures' section and action plan.

Regular meetings mean that momentum can remain heightened and actions are more likely to be followed through.

7

Hold a session/series of sessions with Council staff, the Armed Forces, Armed Forces charities and local organisations and service providers to identify the key issues and gaps in provision.

See [page 14](#) for further details.

13

Publicise the Community Covenant Grant Scheme amongst local organisations and stakeholders.

Publicising the scheme means that local groups in your area can potentially access Community Covenant Grant Scheme funding.

8

Set up a main working group and potentially a few smaller sub-working groups to develop and lead on specific actions.

Sub working groups can be useful where lots of different groups are involved, as they allow different people to lead on things relevant to them.

14

Ensure that you keep momentum heightened and continue to keep your Community Covenant relevant and engaging.

See [pages 29-30](#) for examples of how you can do this.

9

Put together an action plan to sit alongside your Community Covenant and work on details for the 'measures' section of your document.

The 'measures' section of a Community Covenant document can be personalised to list the specific commitments that a local authority is signing up to. It is best to personalise this if you can as it helps to set the overall direction.

10

Set up a Community Covenant Partnership Board that is able to convene regularly after signing to approve decisions made by your working group.

It is important that the signing does not mark the end. Having a working group in place helps to ensure that any proposed plans are implemented.



* If you require the above process map in larger text, please email publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk or telephone 020 3465 9371

Examples of what works



Hold a **workshop**

Holding a workshop or seminar event is a good way to get all of the key players (including Council staff, local service providers and stakeholders, Armed Forces representatives, Service charities and business representatives) in one room to talk about the issues, map out current service provision, and to look at gaps in provision and opportunities to improve service provision and signposting. Bringing different service providers together can also mean that issues may be possible to resolve outside of the formal partnership.

Put together an **action plan**



Having an action plan or charter in place prior to signing a Community Covenant can help to set the direction from the very beginning. This can be developed at a workshop or seminar event or via a working group.



Set up a **working group**

It is useful to have a working group comprised of 'on the ground' staff and middle managers who have the capacity to carry out independent research and then come back to report to the working group. It may also be helpful to separate working groups into sub groups based on different themes. The findings and proposals that are suggested by a working group can be presented to a more senior and strategic board for approval and sign off.

Alongside a working group a senior level board may also be useful, particularly to sign off decisions and provide strategic oversight. This can be an existing group which can include the Community Covenant scheme as part of its remit, e.g. the Local Strategic Partnership, or it can be a new group formed specifically for this purpose.



Officer leads and Armed Forces Champions

Having a named officer leading on Community Covenant issues means that there is ownership and accountability from the outset. An officer lead can be useful for logistical and research based tasks such as contacting all of the relevant organisations, researching what other local authorities have been doing and putting together an action plan.

A local authority may wish to consider appointing an elected member as a named Armed Forces Champion. Having an elected member as a Champion can help to spearhead the process as Councillors are well placed to network with the relevant stakeholders and organisations and are very appropriate for the role, as they are embedded in their local community.

The Legion does not feel this should be prescriptive however, and where there is not a Councillor who has the time or interest in being an Armed Forces Champion this may sit better with an officer.

Work with the **money and resources** that you have available



With unprecedented pressures on Council budgets we are aware that it is difficult to commit to new spending. However, this guide is testament to the fact that measures do not have to be expensive and that, in many cases, benefits can be achieved with minimal cost through rethinking policies and redesigning processes, as well as improving access and service delivery.



Who are the **key players** to involve?



Key players

Stakeholders

The different groups/people who are involved in a Community Covenant will vary between local authorities. Levels of involvement will also vary between different individuals and groups. For example, certain Council officers would probably be engaged throughout the process, whereas some stakeholders, such as Jobcentre Plus, would probably only get involved in matters regarding employment. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) may only get involved at a very high level, e.g. to sign off proposals rather than getting involved in day-to-day decisions or planning.

Whilst it is up to each local authority to consider which groups to involve, we would suggest that you consider involving the following:

The Council

• Councillors

Having cross party buy-in from Councillors, particularly prominent Councillors, such as the Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet/Executive members, and the Leader of the Opposition can be beneficial.

• Officers

Whilst buy-in from the Chief Executive and other senior members of staff (e.g. Directors) is important, it is officers at a lower level who will have to take on the Community Covenant scheme as part of their day-to-day work. As well as having a main officer lead, it is important to involve staff from relevant departments, such as housing, benefits and education, as well as front-facing staff.

The Armed Forces

The Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force should all be consulted and involved in a meaningful way from an early stage. It is best to contact your local regiments, stations and bases as well as any cadet or Reserve forces in your area. For further information see [page 77](#).

Armed Forces charities and organisations

Armed Forces charities, such as The Royal British Legion or Poppyscotland, can provide a wealth of information on the local situation. Local HIVEs, an information network available to serving personnel, their families and dependents, as well as civilians employed by the Services, can also be helpful. For further information on Armed Forces charities and organisations see [page 78](#).

Health sector

• Healthcare providers

NHS representatives, e.g. from local surgeries or pharmacies, your GP Consortia or Clinical Commissioning Group can also be useful to involve. In Scotland and Wales, Health Boards can be similarly helpful.

Business sector

• Chamber of Commerce

• Local Enterprise Partnership

• Prominent business representatives

Employment is a key issue for former members of the Armed Forces and their families. It is therefore very important to ensure that the business sector is involved. As well as potentially providing opportunities for employment, businesses may consider joining the Corporate Covenant Scheme or offering discounts to members of the Armed Forces community where appropriate. See [page 09](#) for further information.



Key players

Education sector



- **Local colleges and universities**

Colleges and universities may be interested in supporting Service leavers or the families of those in Service to learn new skills. They may also have facilities that they could perhaps make available to members of the Armed Forces community, or they may wish to use Armed Forces facilities themselves, where appropriate.

Local organisations and stakeholders

- **Jobcentre Plus**

Jobcentre Plus has an 'Armed Forces Champion' covering each region.

- **Citizens Advice Bureau**

- **The police**

It can be useful to engage with the police, particularly as they may record data on the Armed Forces community that they come across. If they are not doing this already they may be able to start doing so as part of their commitment to the Community Covenant.

- **Fire and Rescue Service**

See [page 23](#) for an example of the Fire and Rescue Service getting involved in Hampshire's Community Covenant.

- **Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) in England, Local Service Boards (LSB) in Wales and Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) in Scotland**

The LSP, LSB or CPP for an area can be a useful forum to engage with, as they might be interested in inputting when it comes to higher level strategic decisions.

Partnership working



Community Covenants are about the whole community coming together to look at what can be done to support the Armed Forces community and promote integration.

The partners involved in your Community Covenant, especially Armed Forces charities, may be of particular use to you as you shape the direction of your Community Covenant. This may be in the form of informal advice and suggestions, or something more formal, such as the training the Legion has provided for front-facing staff at Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils (see [page 64](#) for further information).

Case study: Wandsworth Council: Partnership work with Stoll

Through their Community Covenant engagement work, Wandsworth Council has built good links with the charity Stoll, which specialises in rehabilitative support for vulnerable and disabled ex-Service personnel. Stoll representatives have met with Wandsworth Council staff and service providers, helping to facilitate shared understanding and two-way housing referrals.



Partnership working

Case study: Portsmouth City Council: Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) event

Building on the momentum created a year earlier when Portsmouth City Council signed its Community Covenant and held a seminar event, the Community Covenant Working Group held another event in April 2013, this time aimed at the VCS. Portsmouth City Council, Community Action Portsmouth and the Naval Base worked together to facilitate the event. 80 delegates attended and were able to find out about the Community Covenant and the Community Covenant Grant Scheme, amongst other issues. VCS groups supporting the Armed Forces were able to network with other VCS groups and find out about their priorities and key issues.

The Council felt that opening this dialogue between the two groups would help to ensure that issues faced by Armed Forces communities would be incorporated into mainstream activity.



Although Armed Forces charities may be the more obvious local partners to provide you with support, other signatories may also be able to assist and it would be sensible to see what they can offer as part of signing.

Partnership working

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Assistance provided by Amey

As part of their commitment to the Community Covenant, Amey provided stewarding assistance free of charge at an Armed Forces parade organised by the Council. Amey, who are Sheffield City Council's highways maintenance provider, wanted to get involved with the Community Covenant and offer their support and assistance because of their positive view of supporting the Armed Forces. As a result of offering work experience placements for veterans, Amey has now recruited a number of these former Service personnel and has found them to be an extremely positive addition to the workforce.

Case study: Hampshire County Council: Hampshire Fire and Rescue

As part of its strategic partnership with Hampshire County Council, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has initiated a project to improve fire safety training for veterans living in parts of Hampshire. They had been identified as a vulnerable group, particularly due to the independent nature and older age of a number of the veterans in the local Armed Forces community.



Partnership working



You may wish to integrate or link your Community Covenant with a more formal structure that represents your local area. For example, with Hounslow's Community Covenant there is a reporting structure in place where decisions and key points are reported back to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

This helps to ensure that the representatives of all the key local groups, including local colleges, the Clinical Commissioning Group and Chamber of Commerce, are aware of what is happening and can get involved and offer support where appropriate.



How can a local authority ensure that the scheme is fit for local purpose and long term?



Local purpose
& long term

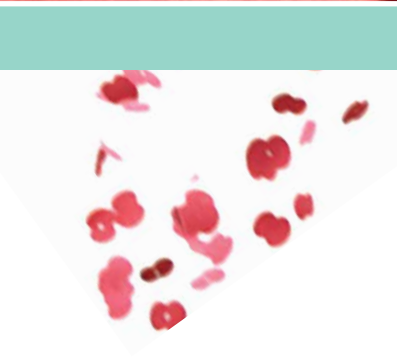
Just as the importance of the mutuality of Community Covenants cannot be overstated, neither can the significance of ensuring that a Community Covenant is fit for purpose for the civilian and Armed Forces communities in your local area. Community Covenants need to reflect the local area and neighbourhood needs, and, as such, local authorities and Armed Forces representatives may choose to take different approaches based on the situation in your area.

Different types of local authorities



There are of course different local authority structures in different parts of the UK. Whilst the situation is simpler for single-tier unitary authorities who are responsible for all local government functions within their area, it is a little more complex for two tier areas, with upper-tier Councils having different remits and responsibilities from lower-tier Councils, e.g. for education but not housing or leisure.

As different types of Councils have different responsibilities and functions, it is vital that all commit to support their local Armed Forces community and ensure that the principles of the Covenant are being upheld locally. There are different ways that you can approach this. For example, whilst some lower-tier authorities may wish to sign their own Community Covenant to have greater ownership and set the direction of it, others might prefer to sign up to a wider Community Covenant and may perhaps implement a separate action plan alongside this. Both approaches are equally valid and each local authority will know what is most appropriate. However, in either case we would strongly encourage the individual District or Borough Council to formally sign a Community Covenant document. This demonstrates purpose and intent and lets the community know that your Council (rather than just the County Council) has signed up to the scheme and is supportive of the Armed Forces community. If you are a District or Borough Council whose County Council has already signed a Community Covenant, you can ask about your signature being added to the document.



Different demographics

There can be a difference in how the Community Covenant scheme is approached, depending on how large the Armed Forces presence is. Often, areas with a large serving or veteran presence have been doing a lot of work historically with their Armed Forces contacts, so signing up to the Community Covenant scheme is the natural next step. Examples of where this is the case include places like Wiltshire and Hampshire which have large Armed Forces communities living in the area. Other areas, such as Sheffield or Rochdale, may not have a large serving presence, but are recruiting grounds and, as such, may have significant numbers returning to the area following Service.

Case study: Wiltshire Council: High Armed Forces presence

Wiltshire Council launched its Community Covenant in August 2011, just a few months after the scheme was launched. Wiltshire was able to do this without hesitation because of its strong history of partnership working with its Armed Forces community. 6.6% of Wiltshire's population are Armed Forces personnel and their families, which equates to about 30,000 people. This figure would be significantly higher if it included veterans and their families, and it is expected to increase further as a result of the Army Rebasing Programme, which will see Service personnel rebased to Wiltshire from Germany. The Community Covenant scheme provided Wiltshire with the opportunity to increase their community level work to promote integration between their civilian and Armed Forces communities, and also to identify and remove any barriers that members of the Armed Forces may face in accessing services

Case study: Croydon Council: Low Armed Forces presence

Croydon, on the other hand, has a much smaller Armed Forces population and, as such, has focused some of its policy changes on Reservists as this reflects the local population more. Croydon felt that, although there is not a large serving presence in the area, it was still important to develop a Community Covenant for those that do have a connection to the Armed Forces and live within the borough

Engaging with **your community**

It is important that you publicise signing your Community Covenant so that individuals and local groups and organisations are aware that you have done so. Importantly, the more people that know about it, the greater the likelihood that local groups and organisations will bid for Grant Scheme funding. Your communications plan should be ongoing if you would like the impact of your Community Covenant to be long lasting and meaningful. A good webpage is a helpful way to keep the public updated with what is going on.

See [page 63](#) for information on webpages.

If your Council has a free magazine you may be able to utilise this to promote your Community Covenant at a low cost. This is an approach that a number of local authorities, including Hampshire County Council, have taken. Hampshire County Council has included a number of articles on their work with the Armed Forces in their 'Hampshire Now' magazine, which is delivered to over 550,000 households.



Case study: Croydon Council: Consultation survey

Croydon's online consultation survey offers members of the public the opportunity to help shape the support that Croydon Council is able to offer the Armed Forces community. Alongside discussions held with the Armed Forces and Armed Forces charities, the survey helps keep Croydon Council up to date with the challenges facing the Armed Forces community, as well as their priorities. The information has informed the themes of associated events and seminar sessions held by the Council. As well as the online version, a hard-copy alternative is made available on request.



Maintaining **momentum**

Community Covenants are about more than just a signing ceremony and an initial flurry of media attention. It is important that the principles of the Covenant get embedded into the workstreams within your Council and that local partners also get involved. With competing demands for Council resources and time, it is particularly important to maintain momentum. Holding periodic events and/or celebrating milestones (such as one year since signing) can be a way to refocus attention.

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: One year on event



Picture courtesy of Dave Marriott Photography

Buckinghamshire County Council held an event to mark one year since their Community Covenant signing. This brought together the partners that had been involved, to celebrate success and to encourage deeper community involvement going forward.

Community Covenants are about the whole community and as communities evolve and priorities shift, other partners may wish to get involved. Depending on their interest and level of commitment, you may wish to hold a second signing event. As well as providing an opportunity to formally recognise their commitment, this can also help generate additional press coverage.



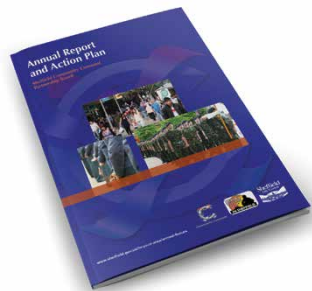
Maintaining momentum

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Second signing event

Sheffield City Council held a second signing event a year and a half after signing their initial Community Covenant. They had originally only involved the more obvious strategic partners like the NHS, however, after doing a lot of awareness raising, both within their own organisation and with others, they found that it would be useful to involve additional organisations. The following organisations were subsequently added:



- Capita- who deliver the Council's housing benefits, Council tax support and IT support
- REMPLOY
- AMEY- who are the Council's highways maintenance contractor and have recently started working with REMPLOY
- The mental health part of the local NHS
- The newly established Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group



Publishing an Annual Report showing the progress that your local authority has made against its targets can be a good way to let others know what has been achieved. Publicising this report may lead to new local partners or Council departments getting involved as they may be able to identify workstreams to align themselves with.

What are the key issues of importance to the Armed Forces community?



UK MoD/Crown Copyright 2013

What are the **key issues** of importance to the **Armed Forces community**?

Housing

Housing is the primary concern for a lot of Service leavers and their families, who, when they leave Service, lose their military accommodation and have to look for new lodgings. Many Service leavers are able to purchase their own home or rent privately and experience no problems. However, for those who wish to live in socially rented housing - which is often the only affordable option - the process can be difficult. A great deal of this difficulty arises because local authority housing allocation schemes usually reward local connection and waiting time on the Housing Register. In this regard, the mobile nature of an Armed Forces career can put its members and their families at a disadvantage.



In recent years, both the Government and local authorities have become more aware of these issues and measures have been introduced to try to address them. The difficulty with this is that although there are a number of statutory provisions, local authorities still have the discretion to make their policies particularly flexible to the Armed Forces community, and only some are choosing to do so.

Case study: Croydon Council: Housing allocations

Croydon Council's housing allocations policy gives the following categories of people additional priority and moves them to housing band one:

- Former members of the Armed Forces or Reserve Forces
- Serving or former members of the Armed Forces or Reserve Forces who need to move due to a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of Service
- The bereaved spouse or civil partner of a member of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner

In addition, the following have been agreed:

- Applications after 5 years will be accepted if there are justifiable reasons
- Applications will be considered from serving members of the Armed or Reserve Forces who are within the last 6 months of their Service if they can provide a letter from their Commanding Officer confirming their last day of Service
- Lump sums received by a member of the British Armed or Reserve Forces as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active Service will be disregarded when assessing for eligibility to be on the housing register

Croydon Council have gone beyond the central Government recommended guidance in a number of ways, including:

- Giving serving or former members of the Reserve Forces the same rights as serving or former members of the Armed Forces
- Having a nominated housing officer to handle enquiries from members of the Armed Forces community

Housing

Case study: Liverpool City Council: Registered social landlords and private landlords

Liverpool City Council, via Liverpool Veterans' Centre, is working with registered social landlords and private landlords to highlight the Community Covenant scheme and the needs of the Armed Forces. A number are showing a real interest and are looking into whether they can offer properties specifically to veterans.

Case study: Wandsworth Council: Housing quota

Wandsworth Council has a quota of social housing properties that are specifically allocated to members of the Armed Forces community. Wandsworth is working with the charity Stoll who are able to nominate individuals for some of these properties.



Case study: Sheffield City Council: Council tax benefits

When the Council Tax Benefit was abolished in April 2013 and replaced by Council Tax Support, Sheffield City Council decided that it would continue to disregard income from War Widow's/ Widower's Pensions and War Disablement Pensions in full. In taking this approach recipients will continue to receive the maximum available support to assist with Council Tax payments.

Health

New health structures

With the shifting health landscape and public health now falling within the remit of local authorities, there are many ways to tap into the new structures and ensure that support for the Armed Forces community, where needed, is joined up and strategic. Involving representatives from your local Clinical Commissioning Group, Health and Wellbeing Board or Health Board (in Scotland and Wales) in working groups, or even one off workshops, can be a way to achieve this.

Case study: Liverpool City Council: Clinical Commissioning Group involvement

In Liverpool, a representative from a local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) sits on the main Community Covenant working group. This ensures veterans' health requirements are recognised through all commissioned services. A key success has been formalising the requirement for registered patients at GP surgeries to be asked about their Service background, something that was not always happening previously. Liverpool CCG Primary Care Committee has requested that its members amend their new registration questionnaires to ask specific questions related to military Service, and a series of electronic and paper patient communications have been sent to all practices advising veterans to make themselves known as they are entitled to priority treatment if referred to Secondary Care. As a result, it is now a contractual obligation that all Secondary Care Trusts report back on the number of patients that they have prioritised following referral from GPs. This allows the CCG and the Community Covenant partnership to collect data and assess more effectively, as well as ensure that patients are being signposted to any appropriate services available to the Armed Forces community.

Health

Case study: Herefordshire Council: Clinical Commissioning Group Involvement

Herefordshire Council's Community Covenant health lead has presented to their local Clinical Commissioning Group's Service Improvement Group on the Armed Forces population in Herefordshire, covering the aims and objectives of the Community Covenant, the role that healthcare practitioners can play, the resources available and local points of assistance.



Case study: Hounslow Council: GP newsletter

Hounslow's Community Covenant Officer Lead wrote an article for inclusion in the GP newsletter. This got sent to every GP in the area and highlighted the need to ask patients about Service background and record this information. It also encouraged them to share data with the Council and open up a two-way flow of information.

Case study: Herefordshire Council: Training GPs

Herefordshire Council's Community Covenant health lead has presented to GPs training at the Post Graduate Medical Centre at Hereford Hospital. There she discussed the implications of the Community Covenant and how the individuals might address some of the key issues once they qualified.



GPs

As the main health point of contact that Service leavers and the families of serving personnel will be likely to come across, GPs and GP surgery staff are a key group to engage with as your Community Covenant takes shape. Whilst they will be likely to be too busy to attend working group meetings, you may still be able to let them know what you are doing and highlight key issues.

Case study: Carmarthenshire County Council: GP posters

In Carmarthenshire, GP practices have been asked to display posters encouraging Armed Forces personnel to make themselves known to the receptionist.

Dentists

Armed forces families can struggle to find an NHS dentist when moving into an area, particularly where there are issues with waiting lists.



Case study: Herefordshire Council: Access to NHS dentists

In Herefordshire, a short term pilot project was run through the HIVE (see [page 19](#) for information on HIVEs) to encourage families to register with a local NHS dentist. Public Health staff worked with the NHS dental helpline to provide details of dentists with capacity to take new patients, and free toothbrushes and toothpaste were given to every family member who registered with a dentist. This raised awareness about local dentists, and information about the NHS dental helpline is now provided in every welcome pack.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessments



Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) analyse and describe the current and future health needs of a population, providing those commissioning health or social care services with an accurate picture of local needs. Considering the Armed Forces as part of your JSNA, either within the main document or in a topic specific summary alongside it, should be something you consider as one way of meeting your Community Covenant commitments.

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: JSNA

Buckinghamshire County Council's Community Covenant action plan identified that their JSNA did not include a section on the needs of the Armed Forces. This has now been rectified and has been updated, enabling commissioners and Council staff to plan local services with the Armed Forces community in mind.

Case study: Hounslow Council: JSNA

Hounslow Council's Public Health Team conducted an Armed Forces needs analysis. Issues that have been flagged up include isolation, problems around frequent moves and domestic violence. This needs analysis will be able to feed into their JSNA for the first time this year. Hounslow feel that the inclusion of the Armed Forces in their JSNA is strategically helpful as it demonstrates that they have specific needs and this may help to leverage funding from other sources.

Adult social care

Disabled Facilities Grants

Home adaptations, primarily funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), play a crucial role in allowing disabled veterans to live an independent life. DFGs provide vital facilities and adaptations such as stair lifts, level access showers and widened doors for wheelchairs. In some cases, due to insufficient funding, the waiting time for DFGs - both the initial assessment and the grant being issued - can mean that individuals are left for long periods of time without vital equipment and that their social care costs are higher in the longer term.



To ensure this shortfall in resources does not impact on veterans the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has created a special funding stream. Through this, local authorities can reclaim the full amount of any DFG paid to a veteran in receipt of either an Armed Forces Compensation Scheme award at tariff levels 1-8 or a War Pension at 80% plus Constant Attendance Allowance. For further details please contact the DCLG's DFG team:

disabled.facilitiesgrants@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Disabled Facilities Grant prioritisation

Sheffield City Council prioritises occupational therapy assessments for individuals with injuries sustained as a result of Service. This greatly assists those veterans who qualify as the current waiting time for non-urgent assessments is 4-6 weeks, whereas those that have qualified for fast tracking have been able to be assessed within 24 hours, greatly speeding up the process. This allows those eligible for a DFG to access the support and equipment they need quickly.

Blue Badges



Disabled parking badges (Blue Badges) help disabled motorists to get out and about and access goods and services, by allowing them to park closer to their destination. For disabled veterans a Blue Badge is a vital part of their independent living. Local authorities administer and issue Blue Badges and set the cost of the badge itself. This is a devolved power so the costs vary between England, Scotland and Wales. In England the maximum charge is £10, in Scotland it is £20 and in Wales badges are currently free of charge. Where there is a cost, you may be able to look at whether you can waive it for members of the Armed Forces community, in particular those injured as a result of Service.

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Blue Badge fee

Sheffield's Blue Badge policy is currently being redrafted and they are considering automatically waiving the fee for those in receipt of War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement or a lump sum benefit at tariffs 1-8 (i.e. the most seriously injured) of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.



Education

Members of the Armed Forces may be rebased and deployed several times during their career. Where school aged children are involved, this can lead to upheaval with the schooling process. As well as the issue of difficulty finding a school place, particularly if the move is mid-term, the impact of frequent moves may be unsettling for the child concerned.



Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: In year transfers

In Buckinghamshire the schools team will accept those being posted to Buckinghamshire even before they have an exact moving date. They are able to go on the list from the date of the posting. This move, which is beyond statutory requirements, is greatly welcomed as it helps to reduce some of the uncertainty for the family concerned.

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: Support for Service children

Buckinghamshire County Council has been a longstanding supporter of the education of Service children. The Pupil Passport and Pupil Premium were both initiated there. Whilst other local authorities have caught up in a number of ways, Buckinghamshire is looking to go further to support the children of Service personnel as much as possible.

- Buckinghamshire funds the pupil premium for five further years if a parent on active Service dies whilst on duty or subsequently from the injuries they sustained. The national criteria is narrower, reserved just for those 'killed in action'.
- Buckinghamshire introduced a pupil premium for Early Years children in 2010 which, at the time of going to print, is not mirrored nationally.

Education

Case study: Hampshire County Council: Schools newsletter

Hampshire County Council staff compile and disseminate a regular newsletter to those working in the education sector. This enables schools to share examples of best practice approaches to the most effective use of the Service Children Premium to mitigate the problems associated with deployment, mobility and transition. Schools can learn from one another and also find out about new sources of funding or information.



Case study: Sheffield City Council: Multi-Agency Support Team prioritisation

Sheffield's Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST) works locally with children, young people and families to provide a range of services which help improve well-being, school attendance, learning, behaviour and health care. By delivering high quality preventative and supportive services, children are able to continue living successfully with their families and communities. Families identified as being from the Armed Forces are prioritised for an assessment to ensure that they are supported to settle in the city.



Resettlement and transition

The draw down of troops from Afghanistan over the coming years and from Germany from 2015 onwards, coupled with the increased use of Reservists, means that the military footprint in the UK is changing rapidly. Around 70 percent of the Army will be brought back from Germany by the end of 2015 with the final 4,300 back by the end of 2019. Serving personnel and their families returning to the UK will need support and assistance navigating the local systems. Whilst the chain of command will still be ultimately responsible for those currently serving, their families and dependents will need school places and access to local health services etc. Some of these individuals may have never lived in the UK before and may take a while to adjust to the differences. Local authorities should not underestimate the planning and additional resources that may be needed to support these individuals.



¹: <http://www.army.mod.uk/news/24802.aspx>

Resettlement and transition

Case study: Wiltshire Council: Transition planning

Wiltshire Council has welcomed the Army Rebasing Programme, which will see an additional 4,000 military personnel and their families relocated to the south of the county. The Council is working with a number of organisations to ensure that troops and their families – both new and existing – as well as local people, benefit from the social and economic advantages that the plans will bring. Welcoming troops and their families to the area and ensuring that the right services are available for the whole community is undoubtedly a challenge but work is already well underway to ensure this is achieved.



Groups have been established to oversee the integration of military personnel. They include the Military Civilian Integration Board, which is chaired by the Leader of the Council and ensures the military element of the county is at the heart of strategic decisions, and a delivery group, which is responsible for making sure that these decisions happen on time. Both of these groups involve the local authority's Councillors and officers as well as key organisations like the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (responsible for managing the change programme), and the local brigade – the ultimate recipients of the new facilities being provided.

Collaboration between Wiltshire Council and the MoD is key to ensuring the rebasing plans run smoothly. Both organisations are committed to sharing data to make sure planning for appropriate housing and schools takes place, as well as additional services such as health, leisure, adult care and social services.

Case study: Dumfries and Galloway Council: Support for Veterans' Road-Show

Dumfries and Galloway Council supported Veterans Scotland in organising a road-show designed to strengthen and integrate support networks for former members of the Armed Forces in Dumfries and Galloway. Topics discussed included housing, comradeship and how to help vulnerable veterans. Those present were able to hear from an ex-Serviceman who had left the Army 5 weeks earlier and had been helped with the housing process.

Case study: Wiltshire Council: Living and working in Wiltshire and Swindon event

In June 2013, Wiltshire Council and the MoD co-hosted an event aimed at those who were thinking about staying in Wiltshire after they left the Services. Over 2000 people attended this successful event and were able to find out local information on employment, training and starting up a business.

Welcome Packs

Welcome packs can be a helpful way to highlight local services to families or individuals moving into an area. Having a list of local schools, key application deadlines, local GP surgeries and dentists can be very useful and means that all of the information is in one place. A targeted welcome pack can also signpost to relevant local and national charities and support organisations.



Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: Welcome Pack

Buckinghamshire County Council has put together a welcome pack aimed at Armed Forces families. This is available on the Council's website and copies have also been distributed to military bases and other relevant organisations.

Reservists



The Government's plans to increase the size and role of Reservists, particularly Army Reserves, will have considerable implications for local communities. Plans to boost the numbers of Reservists will affect local employers, including your Council, and also local support services as the individuals will be expected to resume civilian life between deployments.

Case study: Hampshire County Council: Reservist policies

Hampshire County Council has a policy of actively supporting its employment of Reservists and has adopted a protocol which will provide enhanced support for Reservists before, during and after deployments; provide 10 paid days of additional holiday for training; and recognise the relevance of forces training and experiences in the civilian workplace. Hampshire's policy was developed in conjunction with Reservists who work at the Council. They meet with the Community Covenant lead officers periodically and offer their advice and suggestions on initiatives the Council are considering.

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Employee census

At Sheffield City Council an employee census is carried out every two years. This year, for the first time, the census has been amended and staff have been asked whether they are a Reservist or a veteran. From the data obtained, the Council hope to be able to better support the individuals.

WORKFORCE CENSUS 2012

The Council is committed to recruiting, retaining and developing a workforce that reflects as far as possible the diverse communities that we serve. It is vital that we monitor and analyse diversity information so that we can ensure that our HR processes are fair, transparent, promote equality of opportunity for all and do not have an adverse impact on any particular group.

Your cooperation in providing us with accurate data will ensure that we, not only meet our legal obligations, but meet more importantly, will result in us designing and applying policies and processes that attract and retain a diverse, talented and motivated workforce.

Any information provided on this form will be treated as strictly confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only. No information will be published or used in any way which allows any individual to be identified.

Section 1 - Personal Details

Please check the following details - If any of the information below is incorrect please provide the corrected details

Employee Number	Agency Details (if applicable)
Title	
First Name	
Family Name	
Gender (if applicable)	
National Insurance Number	
Date of Birth	
Previous Name	
Gender	

Case study: SaBRE

SaBRE is an organisation, funded by the MoD, which aims to build support for members of the Reserve Forces among employers. It does this by explaining to employers the benefits, rights and obligations associated with employing a Reservist, as well as promoting the transferable skills that they receive through their military training and then bring back to the workplace.

There are many hundreds of Reservists who work for local authorities and thousands more working elsewhere in the public sector. The support they receive from their employer is vital in ensuring their ability to fulfill their Reservist duties.

SaBRE launched a campaign in 2009 to encourage local authorities to publicly declare their support for Reservist employees. By signing up to the SaBRE online listing of supportive employers, they are making their support visible to Reservists across the country. There are now over 245 publicly supportive Councils on SaBRE's online listing of supportive employers, which can be found on the SaBRE website.

More information on the employment of Reservists can be found at: www.sabre.mod.uk or by ringing SaBRE's helpline: 0800 389 5459

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Reservist policies

As part of signing their Community Covenant Sheffield City Council have revisited their HR policy and, following SaBRE guidance, have updated it accordingly, removing inconsistencies that were previously there.



Employment

Matching up skills with needs

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: Skills survey

Buckinghamshire County Council surveyed local businesses in autumn 2012, looking at where skills shortages were. The survey identified that there were a number of small high tech companies with skills shortages. This could correspond with the skillset often possessed by members of the RAF, who have a strong link to Buckinghamshire. A representative of Buckinghamshire Business First sits on the Community Covenant working group and they are looking at possible links.

Case study: Herefordshire Council: Employability support

Herefordshire Council's Employment and Skills Programmes Manager meets with local businesses and finds out about skills gaps which he can then relay to the Armed Forces. He also offers one-to-one employment assistance and CV support to Service leavers and veterans.



Employment schemes

Case study: Glasgow City Council: Glasgow Veterans' Employment Programme

Glasgow City Council has a Veterans' Employment Programme in place, launched in August 2013. The bulk of the funding for the initiative is from the Council but it was successful in obtaining £50,000 from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme. This programme is comprised of three main features:

- Providing funding to up-skill veterans so that they are able to meet the needs of civilian jobs
- Translating military job and training equivalents into civilian equivalents
- Encouraging employers to take on veterans: this could include a wage subsidy

This was launched in response to the increased demand for support services from younger veterans, particularly early Service leavers, that the Council and its partners identified. For this younger cohort, finding a route into employment is particularly important.

Whilst guaranteed interview schemes do not guarantee a person a job, they are incredibly helpful for Service leavers, particularly those who may have been in the Services for a long time and are finding the job application process difficult. Members of the Armed Forces community may have difficulty translating their military qualifications and experiences. A guaranteed interview scheme helps to level the playing field.

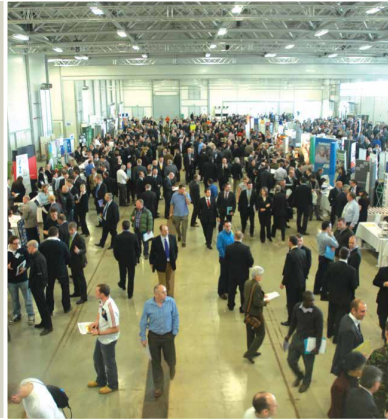
Case study: Rochdale Council: Guaranteed interview scheme

Rochdale Council has launched a guaranteed interview scheme for recent Service leavers looking for employment with the Council. If the Service leaver has left the forces in the past two years, can prove that they have been looking for work for at least six months, and meet the minimum specifications of the job criteria, they are guaranteed an interview.

Job fairs

Case study: Hampshire County Council: Job fairs

Hampshire County Council have organised a number of jobs fairs in partnership with the Careers Transition Partnership and the Armed Forces, including one in Farnborough which over 1,300 serving personnel attended. This resulted in over 50 direct job offers and offered excellent networking opportunities for those attending.



Sport and leisure

Integration is a key part of transforming the relationship between local communities and serving and Reservist Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families, to the benefit of both communities. Members of the Armed Forces and their families, particularly those who live in Armed Forces accommodation, may sometimes have limited interaction with civilian society.



Working with businesses

Case study: Sheffield City Council: Federation of Small Businesses event

In November 2012 Sheffield City Council had a Community Covenant stand at the Federation of Small Businesses networking event. This offered the opportunity to let local small businesses know about the Community Covenant and how they might be able to get involved, e.g. details of the Sheffield Heroes Welcome Scheme.



In addition, sports activities can have a key role to play in the mental and physical rehabilitation of those returning from conflict zones and transitioning to civilian life. As part of signing a Community Covenant, a number of local authorities have worked with Council or subcontracted leisure centre operators to offer free or discounted leisure entry for the Armed Forces community. This includes Conwy County Borough Council which offers free swimming for serving personnel and veterans.



Case study: Sheffield City Council: Open letter to local businesses

In advance of Sheffield City Council signing its Community Covenant, the Chief Executive of the Council sent out an open letter to organisations and businesses in Sheffield, highlighting the Community Covenant and inviting them to become part of it.

Case study: Gateshead Council: 'GO' membership

Gateshead Council provides the first month of a 'GO' membership at the leisure centre in Gateshead free of charge to Service personnel returning from conflict zones. In addition, the ex-Services community are able to pay for their leisure membership on a monthly rather than yearly basis. This helps to aid integration and supports overall health and wellbeing. Over the last year, fifty ex-Services personnel have opted to take out the monthly leisure membership.

Sport and leisure

Case study: Rochdale Council: Free use of leisure centres

Rochdale Council in partnership with Link4Life (L4L), who manage leisure and cultural facilities on behalf of the Council, are offering Armed Forces personnel, both Regular and Reservists, free use of L4L sports facilities in the borough. This is a pilot scheme running from June to December 2013. It will be reviewed for 2014. The scheme is also open to personnel who do not live in the borough.



Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: Armed Forces Games

Stoke Mandeville Hospital within Buckinghamshire is a leader in rehabilitation and had strong links to the Paralympic Games. As part of the Paralympic legacy for the county, the Council have obtained funding to host an Armed Forces Games for both disabled ex-Service personnel and disabled civilians, as a means of promoting integration. There will be different teams from different parts of the country and they hope to make the event annual.



Photograph © Martin Hunter

Remembrance



As well as looking at how welfare services can be improved and any disadvantage removed, acts of Remembrance which acknowledge the sacrifice that people from your area have made are also important.

Case study: Rochdale Council: Street naming

Rochdale Council has implemented a policy which offers the families of fallen Service personnel who have died in active duty and were from the borough, the chance to have a street named after their loved one. Such lasting recognition, if this is the wish of the family, could be a poignant way to demonstrate the community's admiration for those who serve. On each occasion, the Council will consult with bereaved families before deciding on the street name and offer them a role during the street naming ceremony. As well as naming roads after fallen soldiers, other requests will also be considered. For example, in May 2013 a road was named after Lance Corporal Stephen Shaw MC, who was awarded a Military Cross for his heroic actions in Afghanistan.

Road closures for parades

In the run up to the centenary of World War One, Remembrance parades will be ever more important for the nation as a whole. It is vital that local authorities and police forces support Remembrance parades without charge. Whilst this is quite often the case, there have been some instances where road closure and police charges have been imposed. This is something that could be addressed as part of your commitment to the Community Covenant.

Benefits of engaging with the Armed Forces

Case study: Hounslow Council: Volunteering

Staff from Hounslow's volunteer centre have presented about volunteering opportunities at the local barracks. A number of those at the barracks volunteer with civilian projects, including the Sergeant Major who volunteers with a local youth group.

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: Rapid response emergency vehicle

Buckinghamshire County Council received £39,000 from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme for a 4X4 rapid response emergency vehicle, which will enable RAF and civilian volunteers to provide additional life saving medical response cover for more remote areas in Buckinghamshire. Alongside the Community Covenant Grant, a further £3,000 was raised to kit out the vehicle. This emergency response vehicle has

meant that RAF and civilian ambulance teams can work together more effectively towards safer and stronger communities.



Case study: Hampshire County Council: 'Fit for Life' schools project

Bridgemary School obtained £9,350 from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme for a healthy living and integration project whereby members of the Royal Navy have been able to go into 17 primary schools across the borough of Gosport to deliver lessons to all year groups. Children have learnt important life skills such as how to cook healthy meals and the importance of exercise, as well as finding out about the skills required in the Royal Navy, wider aspects of training and achievement, and the need to live a healthy lifestyle. This complements the work that the school is doing towards the Hampshire Healthy Schools Award and their duty to promote children's wellbeing.



How is the **Community Covenant** and **Council support** making a **difference** to the **Armed Forces community**?

Andy, a veteran from Wales said:

I joined the RAF immediately after leaving school and served for 17 years before being made redundant and joining the MOD for ten years, when again I was made redundant. Once I left I fell into a downwards spiral, descending into alcoholism and rough sleeping. Services were available but they weren't joined up or accessible. Luckily I have rebuilt my life now but it has taken time and support from Service charities like the Legion. I'm really happy that Community Covenants are being signed now and that my local Council, Conwy County Borough Council, has signed and is making services more accessible and united. This will be of great help to Service leavers and to the Service community more widely.

Mark, a veteran from Liverpool said:

I have found there to be a big difference with Liverpool Veterans Project in comparison to other groups and organisations. It has several agencies in one building and allows the individual to have eye to eye contact with a real and dedicated person rather than being passed from pillar to post or being given telephone numbers with faceless, heartless responses. Liverpool Veterans Project looks at you as a person; not as a statistic or a number. And most importantly, they really do care! I think it is the vital cog that makes the Community Covenant work in the city.

A veteran who relocated to Wandsworth said:

Wandsworth Council's reforms are a really good idea. It's great to know that people who serve their country have a chance when it comes to housing. Leaving the Forces is a huge change, so knowing that if you're in need of housing there'll be some help out there makes it all the easier.

A veteran who was assisted by Gateshead Council's Armed Forces Outreach Officer said:

I found that he has a wealth of knowledge about the topics I needed help with and he sorted everything out quickly and efficiently, putting me in touch with organisations I had never even heard of, who were able to help me.

How can **local authorities** improve access to **services** and **information**?



Data and statistics

In the run up to signing a Community Covenant, and often in the months shortly afterwards, local authorities can find it difficult to determine the size of their Armed Forces community and where they reside. There is unfortunately very limited public information available on this. Your local Armed Forces may be able to give you an indication of your serving population, however due to confidentiality issues broad estimates may have to suffice. Armed Forces charities, such as the Legion, may be able to give you an indication of the veteran population in your area, but again these will be estimates as Armed Forces charities only have information about individuals who come to them for support.



Whilst it is definitely worth speaking to local partners and organisations to pool information, as a local authority you are in a good position to start gathering your own data. This is an important first step.

Case study: Vale of Glamorgan Council: Data collection

Information about a customer's relationship with the Armed Forces is collected for every transaction enquiry via their main reception and corporate contact centre, which currently handles around 500,000 customer interactions per year. The information is captured on their Customer Relationship Management System and is passed to the departments responsible for delivering services so that they can provide appropriate help and assistance as necessary. From this information the Council has been able to ascertain that around 11% of enquiries for services such as social services, housing, blue badge enquiries and telecare applications are from customers with a connection to the Armed Forces.

Case study: Sheffield Council: Equalities monitoring

Sheffield's equalities monitoring form has been updated to ask questions to find out about a person's connection to the Armed Forces when they are accessing relevant services, such as adult social care and homelessness advice. All services have received the guidance and can ask the questions when applicable. This helps the Council to understand their local population and what services they are accessing.

As part of publicity to highlight that you have signed a Community Covenant you may wish to ask residents to inform you if they have a connection to the Armed Forces. As well as providing you with this useful information, you may also be able to seek their advice on how to shape your services. Carmarthenshire County Council put together a Community Covenant flyer which highlights the aims of the Community Covenant, publicises the Council's dedicated website and phone number and also encourages members of the Armed Forces community to get in touch.



If you are able to commission a study looking into the Armed Forces in your area and their specific needs, this can help provide you with evidence which will be useful if you want to commission services or bid for Grant Scheme funding.

Case study: Hampshire County Council: Ipsos Mori data

Three years ago the County Council commissioned Ipsos Mori to carry out an Armed Forces survey. This looked at the views of married Armed Forces families across Hampshire and helped to provide the Council with detailed information. With more than just anecdotes, the Council had a better understanding of the views and needs of respondents.

Targeting services more effectively

The circumstances of the Armed Forces community are quite mixed, ranging from those who have just left the Services and have not needed to access Council services since they left school at sixteen, to those who have been relocated to a new town at short notice and need a school place for their child, to the partner of someone currently deployed who is feeling vulnerable and isolated to those who are perfectly able to navigate the Council system without any assistance whatsoever. It is important that, as part of signing a Community Covenant, your Council looks at ways to target or simplify services.

Drop-in centres

Where there is a considerable Armed Forces presence in an area, a dedicated one stop shop with trained staff or volunteers may be appropriate. Another option could be to utilise space at an existing Council customer centre to offer support to the Armed Forces community.

Case study: Liverpool City Council: Liverpool Veterans HQ

Over 32,500 veterans live in Liverpool and it is one of the largest Reserve garrisons in England, providing a high percentage of recruits to the Armed Forces. Due to demand for support from the Armed Forces community, Liverpool Veterans HQ was opened in March 2013. The centre provides holistic and tailored support from a mixture of staff and trained 'buddies' with a personal connection to the Armed Forces. Those visiting the centre can use free computer stations for job searches, receive employment advice and CV support, take part in counselling and complementary therapy sessions, and access advice on services including benefits, housing and mental health support. There are strong links with statutory and voluntary agencies, with a Royal British Legion caseworker based at the centre one day a week and The Poppy Factory funding a full time member of staff. At the time of going to print the centre had 137 veterans on their books and an average referral rate of 20 people per

week, but this is increasing over time as awareness is raised. The HQ is based in a Liverpool City Council owned property which is leased out by the Council at 'peppercorn rent' meaning that only operational costs need to be found. During the first year, Liverpool City Council Councillors recognised the city-wide need for the service and opted to use their Councillors Initiative Fund to pay for its operation. Donations and grants are being sought to cover the future costs.



Picture courtesy of Graeme Lamb Media

Case study: Glasgow City Council: Glasgow 'Helping Heroes'

'Glasgow's Helping Heroes' was opened on Armed Forces Day 2010 and is funded by Glasgow City Council, in partnership with SSAFA and Glasgow Housing Association. The initiative was also successful in obtaining £50,000 from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme. 'Glasgow's Helping Heroes' is a drop-in centre open to veterans, spouses, partners, dependants and carers. Staff and volunteers at the centre are able to provide advice and support on issues including employment, debt, benefits, health and housing. The centre takes a partnership approach, involving a number of external agencies including the Citizens Advice Bureau and Armed Forces charities such as Combat Stress and Poppyscotland. In



the first three years of the centre's operation there were 850 referrals with a number of successful outcomes: 247 have been housed, either through registered social landlords, private rental properties or Council social housing, and 146 have had the opportunity to take up employment.

Targeting services more effectively

Case study: Herefordshire Council: Military Charities Help Desk

Herefordshire Council are piloting a twice weekly help desk session, staffed by volunteers from The Royal British Legion and SSAFA. The help desk is based at the Council's Information Centre, meaning that the volunteers are working alongside front line Herefordshire Council staff and two-way sign-posting and collaborative working can take place.



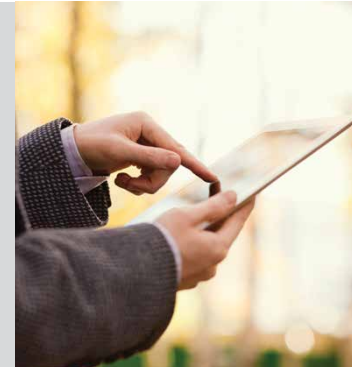
Guides to services

For members of the Armed Forces community, particularly those who have just moved to an area, it is useful to set out clearly who provides each of the key services and how to access them. As a result of the networking and promotional work that your local authority did as part of signing your Community Covenant, you have no doubt built up a list of external contacts. Producing a local guide to services is a good way to signpost to external providers as well as Council services. A number of local authorities including Buckinghamshire County Council, Gateshead Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council have produced such a guide.



Websites

Having a dedicated Armed Forces page or series of pages on your Council's website is a low cost way of highlighting what you have done or hope to do as part of signing a Community Covenant. More importantly the webpage/s can highlight the key Council services and link to local service providers.



Case study: Rochdale Council: Tailored webpages

Rochdale Council has a number of tailored Armed Forces webpages as part of their main website with information on the following:

- What a Community Covenant is
- The support available for the Armed Forces community
- Local and national Armed Forces events
- Recognition and applying for medals
- Grants and funding available
- How individuals can shape the Community Covenant and offer feedback



The Council sees the website as both a key information portal and also a tool to attract the Armed Forces community to Rochdale. The prominently displayed welcome message from the Armed Forces Champion exemplifies this. The webpages are constantly updated and moved around based on IT intelligence on numbers accessing the pages. As well as having the relevant webpages grouped together in the Armed Forces section, the pages can also be accessed from mainstream pages to aide integration. The Armed Forces community has been consulted with in order to maximise usability and improve the content. The website has proved to be very successful, with members of the Armed Forces from as far afield as Canada getting in touch to enquire about relocating to Rochdale, and the pages having received over 13,000 views in less than three months.

Staff training

Being able to understand and relate to the unique circumstances faced by the Armed Forces community is vital for front-facing staff. Knowledge of the range of external services that are provided and who has the relevant expertise internally also helps with sign-posting, meaning a better standard of service to the public.

Case study: Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils: Staff training

Staff working in the contact centres and customer services centres for Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils have received training from the Legion on the needs of the Armed Forces and the services provided by the Legion.



Case study: Vale of Glamorgan Council: Staff e-learning module

The Vale of Glamorgan Council has developed a staff e-learning module. This has been completed by all front line customer service staff working in the corporate contact centre and on receptions, and is now being rolled out across all services.

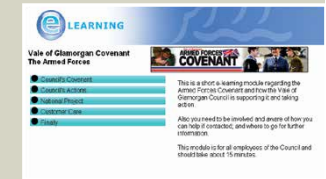
The e-learning module provides staff with the following:

- Details of the national Armed Forces Covenant and its objectives
- An introduction to the Community Covenant, its key themes and objectives and the commitments that the Council has signed up to with its partners
- An understanding of who the Armed Forces community is comprised of

- Information on what the Council has done to date and the key Council services accessed by the Armed Forces community
- Details of what is expected of staff and where they can find help and information when dealing with an enquiry from a member of the Armed Forces community

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As well as providing information, the module checks understanding through a series of interactive questions and quizzes.



Targeted phone number

Case study: Ceredigion County Council: Targeted telephone number

Ceredigion County Council has launched a dedicated Armed Forces telephone number. This will mean that call centre staff are able to see that the caller is from the Armed Forces community and will help them to tailor the call more appropriately.



Case study: Gateshead Council: Targeted telephone number

Gateshead Council has a dedicated Armed Forces telephone number which comes through to the main contact centre where staff have received training on the culture of the Armed Forces and current issues. Although the numbers using the telephone number are small, the Council's system enables them to track which services the queries relate to and the issues that are raised so that the needs of the Armed Forces community are better understood. As part of a wider holistic approach, the telephone line works in conjunction with Gateshead's Armed Forces webpages and targeted Facebook posts.

Simplification of services



Accessing services can involve a certain level of bureaucracy at times, and due to the nature of Service, Armed Forces personnel may find that they have incompatible paperwork for certain things. Sometimes a little common sense and a willingness to be flexible is required and local authorities, as well as local partners, may wish to consider how things can be made simpler.

Case study: Wandsworth Council: Parking permits

In Wandsworth, those who move into the borough need to produce proof that their car is registered to an address within the borough, as well as proof of residence. This process can take quite a while. This was identified as a problem for members of the Armed Forces and the Council has now simplified the process for them as a result. They now only need to produce or send in a copy of their Armed Forces identity card along with a letter from their Senior Officer confirming their address and the period of time they are likely to be living in Wandsworth. This means that they are able to get their permit in a day rather than a month.



How can local authority get a Community Covenant Grant?



Background to the Grant Scheme

The Community Covenant Grant Scheme was established to support the Community Covenant and to fund local projects that bring together the civilian and Armed Forces communities, strengthening ties and mutual understanding. Local authorities (and any part of the local community, e.g. volunteer groups, charities, schools) which sign up to the Community Covenant scheme can bid for grant funding for projects that deliver tangible results and meet the overall aims of the scheme.

£30M has been made available over the four financial years 2011 – 2015, and applications are invited for sums from £100 - £250,000 (although larger bids may also be considered in exceptional circumstances). Some of this money has now been allocated, however there is still £10M to be allocated between 2013 – 2014 and a further £10M to be allocated between 2014 – 2015.

Although this money is available, it will need to be successfully bid for. It is therefore very important that you advertise its availability to local groups and organisations. This is why a longer term media plan is important, with regular updates on what you and your local partners are doing and deadlines of Grant Scheme panels made available. A Grant Scheme event, as well as being a useful networking opportunity, may help to inspire local organisations and inform them of the procedures and deadlines.

Case study: The Highland Council: Funders' Fair

The Highland Council, the MoD and the local Third Sector Partnership held a Community Covenant Grant Scheme Funders' Fair in March 2013. The event was aimed at those interested in bidding for funding and consisted of a very open, round table discussion about what makes a good bid, key criteria to be met and the process involved. Groups with an interest in submitting an application were invited and it was advertised via third sector networks and press releases. A number of those present have since submitted bids.

What is the process?

The MoD has changed the way that the Grant Scheme will be administered; instead of having one national panel four times a year there will be regional panels three times a year. The funds will be distributed through these regional panels, which will be chaired on a rotating basis by the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. Although the panels are now regional, the Armed Forces Covenant team and the Treasury will still retain oversight of the process.

The Grant Scheme panel in your region will generally sit in June, October and February of each financial year, with a submission deadline of a month before.

Panel date	Submission deadline
October 2013	20th September 2013
February 2014	17th January 2014
June 2014	17th May 2014
October 2014	19th September 2014
February 2015	19th January 2015

The email addresses of the regional grant administration panels are as follows:

Regional panel	Email address
Scotland	covenant-grantscheme-scotland@mod.uk
North East England	covenant-grantscheme-northeast@mod.uk
Yorkshire and Humberside	covenant-grantscheme-yorkshumber@mod.uk
North West England	covenant-grantscheme-northwest@mod.uk
West Midlands	covenant-grantscheme-westmids@mod.uk
East England	covenant-grantscheme-east@mod.uk
Wales	covenant-grantscheme-wales@mod.uk
South West England	covenant-grantscheme-southwest@mod.uk
South & South East England	covenant-grantscheme-southandse@mod.uk
London	covenant-grantscheme-london@mod.uk

If you are unsure which regional panel you should be applying to it is best to email the one you think it might be and they will let you know which panel you need.

The administration of the disaggregated Community Covenant Grant Scheme is run with support from Support Command HQ: covenant-grantscheme-coord@mod.uk

Who signs off a bid?

Bids need to be signed off by the local Community Covenant Partnership, including a senior Council and Armed Forces representative, in advance of sending them to the regional panel. The MoD would expect the Armed Forces signatory to be a Captain (Royal Navy), Colonel (Army), or Group Captain (Royal Air Force) where possible.

Support from the Council

As well as publicising the funding, it can be helpful if the Council is able to offer assistance to local groups and organisations who would like to bid for the funding. This assistance will mean that the application has gone through sufficient scrutiny before it is assessed by the MoD.

What happens once funding has been granted?

Once an application has been successful, funding for the project will be released from the MoD to the relevant local authority who will then manage the funding. The local Community Covenant Partnership will be responsible for ensuring that the grant is used for the purpose stated in the business case; that funds are managed prudently and deliver value for money; that a full account of expenditure is retained for accounting purposes; and that it is satisfied that the project manager has the required skills to manage the project.



I  Community Covenants

Top tips for your application

- Ensure that your project has at least one of the aims of the Community Covenant at its heart
- All applications must be signed by local authority and Armed Forces partners
- Keep your application simple
- Keep your application clear: describe the steps involved and how you plan to achieve them
- Provide a breakdown of costs in order to help establish value for money and give panels enough information to be able to provide partial funding, if appropriate
- Stick to the word count as vital points may begin to be lost if too much information is provided
- Stick to the application template as lengthy annexes or additional pages may not be read
- Ensure that the contact details of local authority representatives and project leaders are clear and complete and include telephone and e-mail addresses where possible

Projects that will be funded through the Community Covenant Grant Scheme must provide benefits to both the Armed Forces and civilian communities.

An example of a project that would not be likely to receive funding would be:

Floodlights for a sports pitch that is only used by the Armed Forces community.



This could be improved by:

A proposal to encourage the civilian and Armed Forces communities to jointly use the facility, e.g. via targeted coaching sessions and/or a tournament to integrate the two groups.



Examples of **successful bids**

Case study: Gateshead Council: Outreach Officer post



Through a combination of funding from Gateshead Council, the Community Covenant Grant Scheme and Jobcentre Plus' Flexible Support Fund, an Outreach Officer has been employed by Gateshead Council since October 2012 as a single point of contact for queries and requests from the Armed Forces community. At the time of going to print the Outreach Worker has received 75 referrals requesting things such as accommodation support, debt advice, health support, training and employment opportunities, home adaptations and assistance accessing benefits. The Outreach Worker has also been identified as the single point of contact with the Personnel Recovery Unit at Catterick in relation to cases of sick or injured soldiers returning to Gateshead in need of support. Gateshead Council is now working with other local authorities in the North East to expand this work.

Case study: Hampshire County Council: 'seen2help'



The Hampshire based community interest company and social enterprise, 'seen2help', was able to obtain £135,000 from the Community Covenant Grant Scheme to fund their virtual employment agency. This provides sustainable employment (usually virtual bookkeeping, call handling and receptionist and administration work) for people connected to the military, including spouses, veterans and civilians who live in and around the military community. All jobs can be done from a business hub in Aldershot or from any location, enabling employment to continue even if a spouse has to move due to a posting. As well as providing employment opportunities the social enterprise is able to facilitate networking and mentoring opportunities, and raise awareness of the skills of groups such as Service spouses.

Case study: Liverpool City Council: 'FACT'



Liverpool City Council have received £38,222 for 'FACT', a digitally based online support service which will be launched in late 2013. This will provide relevant information and link to local and national support services, as well as offering users the option of an interactive tour of the Liverpool Veterans HQ (see [pages 60-61](#)); visitors will be able to 'virtually explore' the different rooms and find out about the services currently on offer. This will be particularly useful for those who lead busy lives or are uncertain about seeking assistance face-to-face.

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council: School play equipment



A school within Buckinghamshire close to an RAF base did not have an outside play area. £8,000 of funding was obtained to purchase play equipment to facilitate faster bonding and friendships between the children as deployment and frequent moves was making this difficult.



“It is vital that Community Covenants are more than just a piece of paper and that Councils look to do what they can to support our Armed Forces and their families.”

Clr David O’Neill, President of COSLA



Conclusion and further information



We hope that this Best Practice Guide proves to be as useful as the last one was and that you are able to use some of the case studies and examples as inspiration for your own Community Covenant. We are very grateful to the local authorities featured in this guide which have shared their examples with us. Please do get in contact if you have any further examples of best practice that you would like to highlight.

Further information

Tania Hill, the Legion's Local Government Campaigns Officer, can be contacted by emailing: publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk or writing to Tania Hill, The Royal British Legion, Haig House, 199 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1AA or telephoning: 020 3465 9371.

The LGA can be contacted by emailing: info@local.gov.uk or writing to: Local Government Association, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ or telephoning: 020 7664 3000. The LGA's website address is www.local.gov.uk

The Welsh LGA can be contacted by emailing: enquiry@wlga.gov.uk or writing to: Welsh Local Government Association, Local Government House, Drake Walk, Cardiff, CF10 4LG or telephoning: 02920 468600. The WLGA's website address is: www.wlga.gov.uk

COSLA can be contacted by emailing: info@cosla.gov.uk or telephoning: 0131 474 9200. COSLA's website address is www.cosla.gov.uk

Information on Community Covenants can be found on the Legion's website: www.britishlegion.org.uk/campaigning/community-covenants or on the MoD's website: www.gov.uk/armed-forces-community-covenant

The MoD's Community Covenant team can be contacted by emailing: covenant-mailbox@mod.uk

A glossary of military terms and abbreviations can be found on the MOD's Defence Analytical Services and Advice website: www.dasa.mod.uk

Contacting your local Armed Forces

It is important to involve the Armed Forces from an early stage in any work around the Community Covenant scheme. This will help to ensure that the project is focusing on the most appropriate areas of concern and will help to meet need most effectively.

The first thing to do would be to contact any local Armed Forces presence in your area such as your local barracks, garrisons, bases or brigades. It is also appropriate to contact your local Reserve Forces and cadet groups. It is important to ensure that you engage with someone senior enough to sign the Community Covenant document and support applications to the Grant Scheme on behalf of the Armed Forces community.

For details of your local Army, Navy or RAF contacts, please email the MoD's Community Covenant team: covenant-mailbox@mod.uk or the Support Command Grant Scheme Coordination Team: covenant-grantscheme-coord@mod.uk



Armed Forces charities

As well as the Armed Forces themselves, charities working with the Armed Forces community can also be very useful in the process.

The main charities who work with the Armed Forces, their families, Reservists and veterans include:

- **The Royal British Legion**
- **ABF The Soldiers Charity**
- **BLESMA**
- **Combat Stress**
- **Help for Heroes**
- **Seafarers UK**
- **Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)**
- **Stoll**
- **The Army Families Federation**
- **The Naval Families Federation**
- **The Poppy Factory**
- **The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund**
- **The Royal Air Force Families Federation**
- **The Royal Naval and Royal Marines Charity**
- **The Royal British Legion Scotland**
- **Poppyscotland**
- **Erskine**
- **Scottish Veterans Residences**

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the officers and Councillors from the following local authorities who have been able to share their examples:

- **Buckinghamshire County Council**
- **Carmarthenshire County Council**
- **Ceredigion County Council**
- **Conwy County Borough Council**
- **Croydon Council**
- **Dumfries and Galloway Council**
- **Gateshead Council**
- **Glasgow City Council**
- **Hampshire County Council**
- **Herefordshire Council**
- **Hounslow Council**
- **Liverpool City Council**
- **Portsmouth City Council**
- **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**
- **Rochdale Council**
- **Sheffield City Council**
- **The Highland Council**
- **Vale of Glamorgan Council**
- **Wandsworth Council**
- **Wiltshire Council**



COSLA



Government
Association



WLGA • CLIC

The Royal British Legion

Haig House, 199 Borough High Street,
London, SE1 1AA

Telephone 020 3207 2100

Registered charity number 219279

www.britishlegion.org.uk