



Our Community – Our Covenant

Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges



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FOREWORDS



Air Vice-Marshal Tony Stables CBE,
Chairman, Forces in Mind Trust

The Armed Forces Covenant is a much misunderstood concept, which owes its history at least to the Peloponnesian wars of the fifth century BC. In the United Kingdom, it is only in recent times that it has taken the form of a written document, and it is just a few years since it entered statute.

The Covenant describes the transaction whereby the nation provides its support to the Armed Forces, and those who have served previously, together with their families, in return for which it expects to be defended, at the cost of personal liberty and even life. Whilst within the serving community much can be, and is being done working with the Ministry of Defence and councils, supporting those in need in the ex-serving community is a far harder task.

First and foremost, ex-Service personnel and their families are primarily citizens of the state, and should expect to be supported in the same way as the rest of the population. Only where they have been disadvantaged by their service should they, and their needs, be highlighted. But in many cases, such as housing, education, employment and health, the means whereby this extra support is delivered will to a large extent also be the same – fair treatment, but not generally a different type of treatment.

The exception to this is, of course, the military charities sector, funded as it is by a mixture of statutory provision and the extraordinary and sustained generosity of the British public. Even here though, most charities can be selective in what they undertake, limited as much by resources as by any concerns about 'charitable objects'. It's also fair to reflect that the state of public finances is such that the resources available to local authorities across the United Kingdom are also severely constrained, and stark choices are having to be made on a daily basis.

Hardly surprising then that by attempting to codify the Covenant, the United Kingdom's Government, which has limited authority in certain aspects of support provided by individual countries, soon to include regions, has set broad principles rather than specifics with the associated resources being centrally allocated.

Equally foreseeable, and as this report clearly shows, is that the expectation of the Armed Forces Community has in some cases grown to exceed the modest 'fairness' the Covenant calls for.

At the front line of delivering the Covenant are local authorities through the medium of local pledges, without perfect clarity and additional centrally derived resources. The role of Forces in Mind Trust has been to fund an independent and credible examination of how these pledges can be better delivered. Improved delivery would help in the successful and sustainable transition of ex-Service personnel and their families, the Trust's mission.

But improved delivery requires honesty: from Government in what the Covenant does not seek to do as much as in what it does; from local authorities to recognize where they could, and should take further steps to help the Armed Forces Community; and from individuals leaving the Services, who in accepting individual responsibility must ask whether they have done everything in their power to make that successful transition.

The Armed Forces Covenant is an imperfect vehicle operating in an ambiguous environment. This report 'Our Community, Our Covenant', will not on its own fix either. If diligently read, if sensibly and vigorously led, the report will make a substantial contribution to improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges.

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Air Vice-Marshal Tony Stables CBE
Chairman, Forces in Mind Trust



Councillor Izzi Seccombe,
Chair of the Local Government Association Community Wellbeing Board

Our Armed Forces Community, including those who are serving, their spouses, children and families, our community who have served, and our reservists, are all important members of our whole community.

This report shows the tremendous work that councils have been doing before the Armed Forces covenant and as a result of the Armed Forces covenant; in housing, education, liaison, and so forth. There are areas to work on, and as the LGA Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board, with the lead on health and social care, I'll be taking a particular interest in how we can support councils looking to incorporate the needs of serving families and Veterans in their health and care policies. For councils to do this well, and for such an important and high profile national issue, having access to information with regards to families with needs, those transitioning out of the Armed Forces who may need our support, and our Veteran populations is essential.

I'm particularly thankful to Forces in Mind Trust for their leadership and investment of resources and time in this report, and we look forward to working closely with them and other third sector and charitable organisations, alongside national government, to jointly give our Armed Forces Community the opportunities and support they need to be active members of our local communities.

I would also like to thank the council officers and member champions who contributed to the survey and deep dives, which meant that we could start identifying good practice and start sharing it, and to Shared Intelligence for doing the hard work. I hope this report provides a practical resource for every council and that it is the platform for further work at a national and local level for creating a better mutual understanding of the practicalities and opportunities of the Armed Forces covenant.

Cllr Izzi Seccombe
Chair of the LGA Community Wellbeing Board
Leader of Warwickshire County Council



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association commissioned Shared Intelligence to carry out research into ways of improving the local delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The research, which was supported by the Ministry of Defence, was commissioned in the context of concerns nationally that implementation of the Covenant locally was inconsistent.

Our main sources of evidence were:

- A literature review;
- Surveys of council Chief Executives, council Armed Forces Covenant Champions, stakeholders and members of the Armed Forces Community;
- “Deep dive” research visits to: Cornwall, Glasgow, Gloucestershire, Moray, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Surrey, Westminster, West Yorkshire, Wigan, Wiltshire and Wrexham.

We also had the benefit of interviews with a number of key stakeholders, a discussion with an advisory group and a sense-making event with members of the advisory group and other people with an interest in the delivery of the Covenant.

The Covenant: awareness and expectations

The Armed Forces Covenant was introduced in 2011. It is a “promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly”. The Covenant focusses on helping members of the Armed Forces Community “have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen”.

The Covenant also states that:

- “The Armed Forces Community *should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens* in the provision of services; and that
- “*Special consideration* is appropriate in some cases especially for those who have given the most.”

Our survey of Council Chief Executives shows that councils consider that they have a good understanding of the Covenant, with 48 per cent reporting that they have a good understanding and 39 per cent a moderate understanding. According to our survey of the Armed Forces Community, awareness is also high among members of that Community, with 81 per cent of respondents saying that they were aware of the Covenant.

Through our deep dives and stakeholder interviews we have found significant evidence of mixed expectations about what the Covenant means. Some members of the Armed Forces Community think that it gives them a right to a service, as opposed to not being disadvantaged compared with others in the delivery of that service. This is a particularly significant issue in relation to housing, with some people leaving the Armed Forces believing that the Covenant gives them the right to social housing.

Our survey of members of the Armed Forces Community also revealed that over 38 per cent of respondents felt that they had been disadvantaged as a result of their service at least once. Almost a quarter felt that their council did not understand their needs. These findings demonstrate the importance of the Covenant.

Councils and the Covenant

Drawing on the findings of our research we have developed a description of a core infrastructure reflecting the action taken by councils that have successfully implemented the Covenant. It is summarised in table 1.

We tested our first draft of this core infrastructure through our surveys and deep dives. The vast majority of councils report that they have a champion, an officer point of contact and a forum in place. Around half of councils report that they have an action plan, but only 20 per cent say that the plan is active. Similarly, only a quarter of councils report that they have an active webpage. Our survey of stakeholders paints a similar picture of the extent to which our core infrastructure is in place. Councils with no significant Armed Forces presence in their area are less likely to have the core infrastructure in place.

Our survey of council Chief Executives showed that councils are most likely to ensure that expectations flowing from the Covenant are reflected in the relevant policies rather than through the provision of targeted support or special entitlements. Over 90 per cent of councils with responsibility for housing report that they have reflected the Covenant in their policies and



70 per cent report that they offer targeted support and special entitlements. Adult social care has emerged as the area in which the Covenant is least likely to be reflected in policies and strategies.

We have developed a typology of places reflecting the extent and type of the presence of the Armed Forces Community in different areas. It is summarised in table 2.

In our deep dives we have found that the relationships between local councils, their partners and the Armed Forces Community work best in places that match our categories 1 and 4. In these places good

relationships are “how things are done round here”. This is often the case in our second category, but some of these places find it challenging to establish a shared understanding of the most appropriate arrangements – for example the frequency of forum meetings. Delivering the Covenant is most challenging in our third and fifth categories: in these places an understanding of the Armed Forces is often not “in the blood stream.”

The impact of the Covenant

In the vast majority of places where we carried out deep dives, action to meet the needs of members of

Table 1

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An elected member Champion An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outward-facing forum A mechanism for collaboration with partners
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A web page with key information and links A clear public statement of expectations A route through which concerns can be raised Training of frontline staff The production of an annual report highlighting the key actions taken that year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed Policy reviews Enthusiasm and commitment

Table 2

1. Major Armed Forces Community presence	2. Significant Armed Forces Community presence	3. Modest Armed Forces Community presence	4. Significant known presence of Veterans	5. Minimal known Armed Forces Community presence
The Armed Forces Community is a very important presence in the area. Many of these places have a major serving and Veteran community. For example, Wiltshire, Moray and Plymouth.	The Armed Forces Community is a significant presence in the area. Many of these places have a significant serving and Veteran community. For example, Cornwall, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.	There is a smaller but nonetheless important Armed Forces Community presence. For example, Surrey.	Often important areas from which members of the Armed Forces are recruited and to which many resettled. There is no serving presence in these places. For example, Wigan and Glasgow.	Places where the only presence comprises Reservists and a Veteran population of unknown size.



the Armed Forces Community was already in place before the Covenant was introduced. The Covenant has, however, encouraged a more collaborative and comprehensive approach. In most places the driving force for achieving the outcomes envisaged has been one or two individuals who have used the Covenant to reinforce the case for action. These people are often either former members of the Armed Forces or have close links to a member of that community.

Our survey of council Chief Executives asked what steps could be taken at a national level to improve the delivery of the Covenant. The most popular steps were: the publication of a checklist of issues to be addressed (68.7 per cent); a clearer statement of the expectations associated with the Covenant (67.3 per cent) and advice on how to meet those expectations (66.8 per cent).

We have identified a number of steps that could be taken by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to enable more effective delivery of the Covenant. They are:

- Improving the processes for preparing members of the Armed Forces and their families for transition and resettlement;
- Improving the data available to councils, particularly in areas to which significant numbers of former serving people and their families move or return after leaving the Armed Forces;
- Addressing the variability in the priority that Base Commanders give to relations with civil society and the delivery of the Covenant in particular.

Recommendations

Our report includes a number of recommendations aimed at Government, the Ministry of Defence, the LGA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and councils and their partners.

The LGA, COSLA and Government

We recommend that:

- The LGA, COSLA and Government agree a statement on the legitimate expectations flowing from the Covenant, including what it can and cannot deliver, which should form the core text of national and local statements on the Covenant.
- The core wording on the Covenant is strengthened by including the following question as a way of testing whether or not a person or family is suffering from comparative disadvantage as a

result of their mobility and deployment through service in the Armed Forces:

“Had the person/family been a long-term resident of the area would the decision have been different?”

Councils and their partners

We recommend that:

- A core infrastructure is adopted by councils seeking to successfully implement the Covenant at a local level.
- To be effective a Covenant co-ordinating group:
 - Meets at least twice a year;
 - Regularly reviews how it works, including frequency of meetings and any sub-groups;
 - Evolves in term of its membership to reflect energy and interest.
- Councils identify people on their staff and council who have a personal link with the Armed Forces and use their understanding and commitment to help galvanise the delivery of the Covenant.

The LGA, COSLA and the MoD

We recommend that:

- The LGA and COSLA explore the factors underlying our finding that councils are less likely to have adjusted their policies and strategies on adult social care to reflect the Covenant than other service areas.
- The LGA and COSLA work with the MoD, the Forces in Mind Trust and other key partners to put in place an action research framework to enable councils which are seeking to improve their delivery of the Covenant to work collectively to develop and implement ways of doing so.
- The MoD and the Armed Forces explore ways of improving the transition process by:
 - Putting more effort into identifying people who are at risk of facing challenging circumstances and to whom additional support could be offered;
 - Ensuring people leaving the Armed Forces are well briefed on the realities of civilian life and that spouses are at least as well-briefed as their serving partner;
 - Involving more outside organisations in the transition process.



- The LGA, COSLA and MoD explore ways in which communications could be improved between significant Armed Forces bases and councils in whose areas people leaving the Armed Forces seek to live in order to facilitate effective briefing and preparation for resettlement.
- Whilst there is an imperative on councils to build good relations with new senior officers, the MoD ensures that Base Commanders and their equivalents are briefed on the importance of their role in relation to the Covenant.
- The opportunities and implications of devolution are reviewed in any further research on the delivery of the Covenant.



INTRODUCTION

The Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) and the Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned Shared Intelligence to carry out research into ways of improving the local delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The research, which was supported by the Ministry of Defence, was commissioned in the context of concerns nationally that implementation of the Covenant locally and of local pledges flowing from the Covenant was inconsistent.

This report sets out our findings. We present our findings under three headings:

- First, we set out our findings in relation to awareness of and expectations flowing from the Covenant;
- Second, we set out our core findings on the delivery of the Covenant by councils and their partners at a local level;
- Third, we present some conclusions in relation to the impact of the Covenant, ways in which its delivery could be improved and the role of the MoD in improving the delivery of the Covenant.

Our report also includes:

- A short explanation of the methodology we have used in this research;
- A final section pulling together our conclusions and some proposals for further work;
- The first draft of a toolkit to help councils to implement the Covenant.



METHODOLOGY

This section briefly summarises our main sources of evidence and the methodology we adopted to carry out this research.

Literature Review

The initial phase of the research was to systematically review the material relating to the Armed Forces Covenant and how it is being implemented locally. This included the following: the contents of the Covenant website, Covenant annual reports, local Covenant documents, good practice materials and information on the needs of the Armed Forces Community. The results of the literature review informed the identification of our 'deep dive' locations and our key lines of enquiry.

Advisory group meeting

We had one meeting with an advisory group to whom we gave a presentation on the findings from our literature review and stakeholder interviews together with our draft key lines of enquiry. We used the meeting to test our emerging approach which included the first draft of a core local infrastructure, the draft surveys, and places that we were considering approaching for our 'deep dives'. A list of the members of the advisory group is included in the annex.

Surveys

These form a key element of our evidence base. They enabled us to understand the extent to which local Covenant pledges are being implemented across England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland was out of scope because of the unique environment and an ongoing study by the University of Ulster commissioned by FiMT. The surveys were of:

- **Councils.** This was sent out to every council Chief Executive in England and Wales via the LGA survey system. We received 266 responses, 13 of which were from Wales. This means 65 per cent of councils responded, which is 59.1 per cent of Welsh councils and 65.4 per cent of English councils. We sent the same survey to Scottish councils via Survey Monkey and received 23 responses which is 71.9 per cent.
- **Council Champions.** This was sent to every English and Welsh council's elected member Armed Forces Covenant Champion (through the council leader) via the LGA survey system. We received 171 responses, 14 of which were from Welsh councils. This means a total response rate of 45.8 per cent (44.7 per cent from English councils and 63.6 per cent from Welsh councils).

The same survey was sent to Scottish Armed Forces champions via Survey Monkey and we received 12 responses, which is 37.5 per cent.

- **Stakeholders.** This was sent to members of organisations who frequently deal with councils and the Armed Forces Community on Covenant matters. This includes the regional officers from the Royal British Legion, Poppy Scotland, and the Army, Navy and RAF Families Federations, and Ministry of Defence regional officers (MCIs). We received a total of 75 responses.
- **Armed Forces Community survey.** This was promoted on Twitter and Facebook for any member of the Armed Forces Community (following the national definition – see section 3) to complete. We received a total of 349 responses from the following:
 - 32.9 per cent are working age Veterans;
 - 18.4 per cent are family members of serving personnel;
 - 13.2 per cent are serving personnel;
 - 9.7 per cent are reservists; and
 - 8.1 per cent are non-working age Veterans.

The members of the advisory group helped to disseminate the stakeholder and Armed Forces Community surveys.

Deep dives

We used the literature review and advisory group meeting to identify 12 places in which to carry out 'deep dives'. We reviewed key local documentation, and spent a day in the location of each deep dive where we met with members of the council, the Armed Forces Champion, local organisations and other local Covenant stakeholders. We visited places that were mixed in terms of geography, type of council, Armed Forces population, and type of military presence (if applicable).

The places we visited were the following: Cornwall, Glasgow, Gloucestershire, Moray¹, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Surrey, Westminster, West Yorkshire (Bradford and Wakefield), Wigan, Wiltshire, and Wrexham.

¹ This deep dive was carried out through telephone interviews



We used the deep dives to identify examples of good practice, to develop our list of the core infrastructure that is necessary in order to deliver local Covenant pledges well, to gain an understanding of the perspective of service users, commissioners and deliverers and to identify action that could improve delivery.

Sense-making event

We held an event for members of the extended advisory board and contacts from our deep dives. This event was held part way through conducting deep dives, so we could test our emerging findings and tailor subsequent deep dives if necessary. This one-day event introduced our emerging conclusions and recommendations which had been gathered from the previous stages and an initial analysis of the survey results.



THE COVENANT: AWARENESS AND EXPECTATIONS

The Armed Forces Covenant was introduced in 2011. It is a “promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly”.² The Covenant “is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives”.³ It focusses on helping members of the Armed Forces Community to “have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen”.⁴

For the purposes of the Covenant the Armed Forces Community is defined as including:

- Regular Personnel – any current serving members of the Naval Service, Army or Royal Air Force;
- Volunteer and Regular Reservists – Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marine Reserve, Territorial Army and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and the Royal Fleet Reserve, Army Reserve and Air Force Reserve, Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy (where they served on a civilian vessel whilst supporting the Armed Forces);
- Veterans – anyone who has served for at least a day in the Armed Forces as either a regular or a reservist;
- Families of regular personnel, reservist and Veterans – spouses, civil partners and children, and where appropriate can include parents, unmarried partners and other family members;
- Bereaved – the family members of service personnel and Veterans who have died, whether that death is connected to their service or not.

When the Covenant was first introduced there was a distinction between the national Covenant, the Community Covenant (which focused on locally delivered public services and community integration) and the Corporate Covenant (which focused on the contribution of businesses). That has now been simplified and brought together with a single Covenant and local pledges flowing from it.

The recent changes to the wording of the Covenant have introduced a reference to ensuring that members of the Armed Forces Community are “treated fairly”. The core wording of the expectations that flow from the Covenant remains as it was when the Covenant was first introduced and is that:

- The Armed Forces Community “*should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services*”; and that
- “*Special consideration is appropriate in some cases especially for those who have given the most*”.

In this section of our report we summarise the results of our survey on awareness of the Covenant and expectations that flow from it. We explore the key issue of expectations further in the light of the findings from our deep dives and stakeholder interviews.

Councils

Our survey of council Chief Executives shows that councils report they have a good understanding of the Covenant with 48 per cent reporting a good understanding, 39 per cent reporting a moderate understanding, and 13 per cent reporting a little understanding. No respondents said their council had no understanding. Our survey also shows that almost all councils believe that they have a similar understanding of the expectations flowing from the Covenant as the government (figure 1).

² www.armedforcesCovenant.gov.uk

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Respondents were asked whether or not their council had a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the Covenant (figure 2). Over half of respondents (55 per cent) said that their council does have a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the Covenant, and 39 per cent said their council did not have a mechanism.

We tested to see whether there was a link between the extent of the council's understanding of the expectations associated with the Covenant and the presence of a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on them (figure 3). We found that councils stating that they have a briefing mechanism were more likely to report a higher level of understanding

than those without. Similarly, councils without such a briefing mechanism were more likely to indicate lower levels of understanding.

Council Armed Forces Covenant Champions

Our survey of Covenant Champions in councils, most of whom are senior councillors, paints a similar picture (figure 4). Levels of understanding were high, with just 1.3 per cent of the 157 respondents indicating that they had no understanding of the expectations of the Covenant and 8.3 per cent reporting having little understanding. A high proportion of respondents said they had a moderate understanding (31.2 per cent) or a good understanding (59.2 per cent).

Figure 1: To what extent would you say your council and central government share the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Covenant? (n=231)

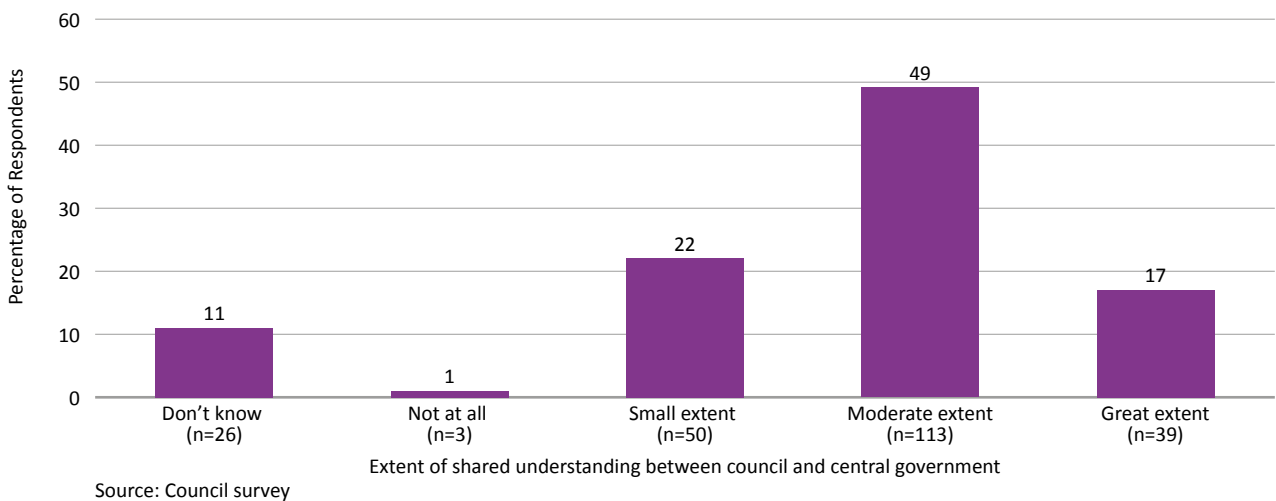
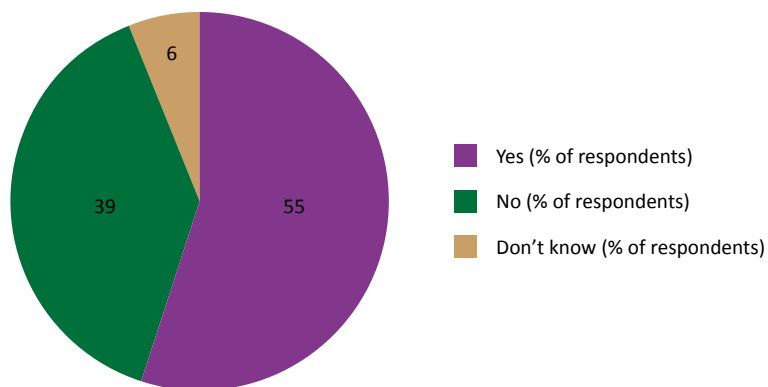


Figure 2: Is there currently a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the covenant? (n=231)





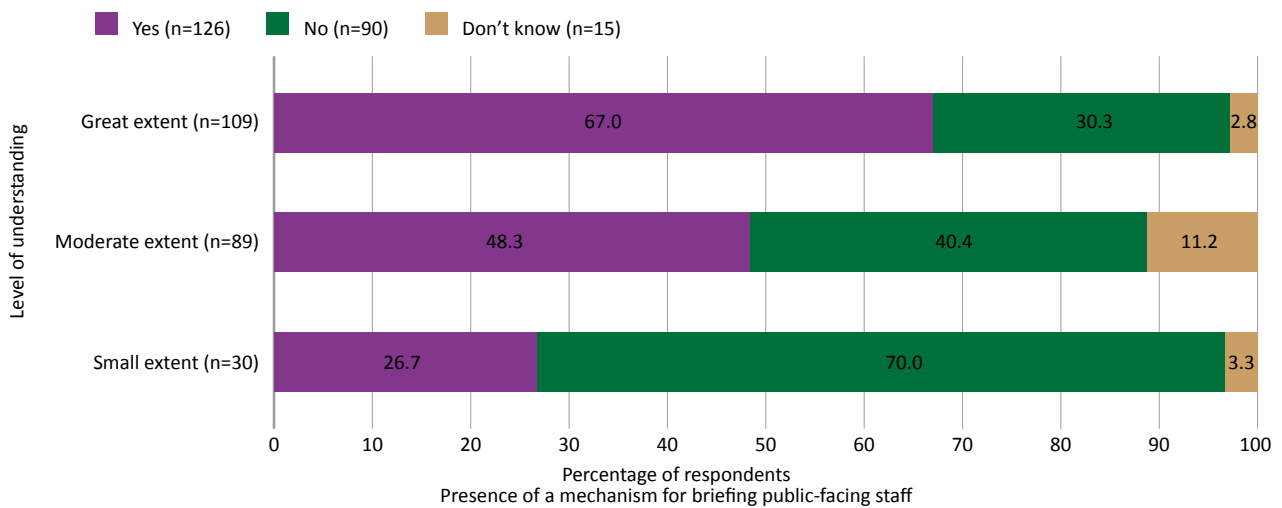
We tested to see whether respondents' understanding of the expectations associated with the Covenant was affected by their motivation for taking on the Armed Forces Champion role (figure 5). We split respondents into two cohorts: those with personal Armed Forces experience (they or a family member serves/has served/is a reservist) and those without personal experience. We found that levels of understanding were similarly high for both cohorts.

We also tested to see if there was a link between respondents' levels of understanding of the expectations associated with the Covenant, and the impact their role has on ensuring the council delivers on its commitments to the Armed Forces Community

(figure 6). We found that there was a link between the two, in that respondents who reported a higher level of understanding were more likely to think that their role had a higher impact.

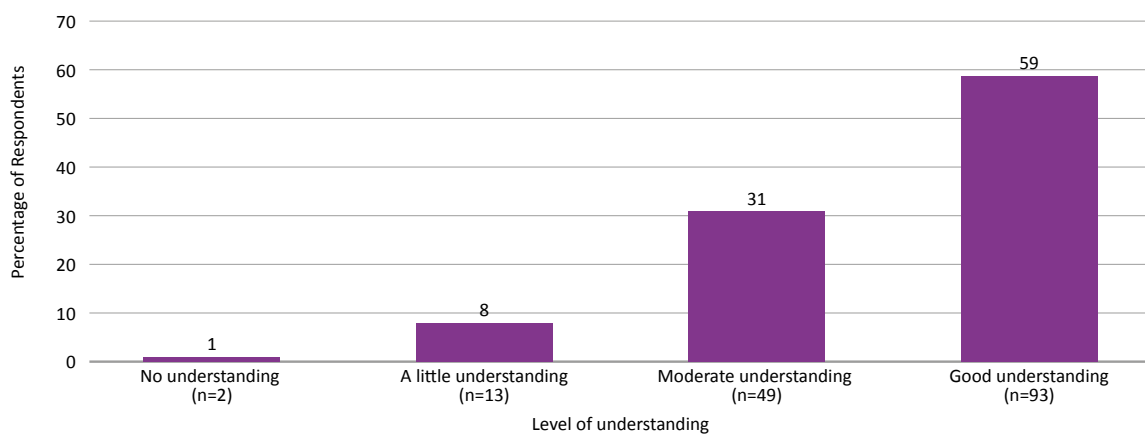
Armed Forces Champions were asked to what extent they thought their council and central government shared the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Covenant (figure 7). Respondents generally thought that councils and central government did share the same understanding, with one quarter (25 per cent) saying this was to a great extent, and 48.1 per cent saying this was to a moderate extent. Few respondents (3.2 per cent) thought that councils and central

Figure 3: Extent of the council's understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Armed Forces Covenant vs. existence of mechanism for briefing public-facing staff



Source: Council survey

Figure 4: How far would you say you have a clear understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Armed Forces Community Covenant? (n=157)



Source: Champions' survey

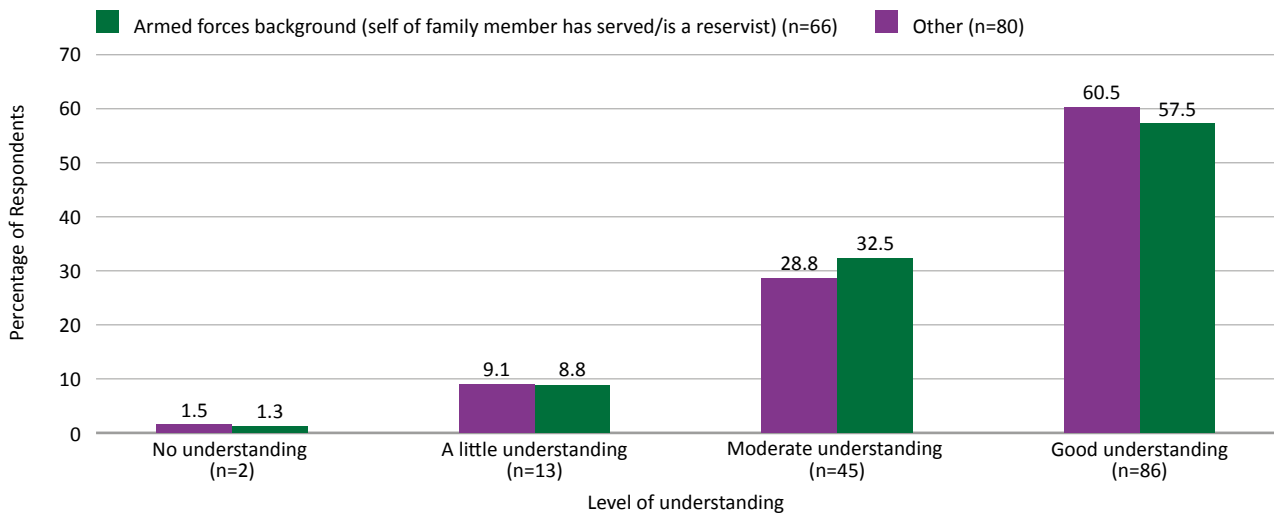
government did not share the same understanding of the expectations of the Covenant at all, while 18.6 per cent thought that they did to a moderate extent, and 5.1 per cent did not know.

The Armed Forces Community

In our survey of members of the Armed Forces Community we tested individuals' awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant and local Covenant pledges.

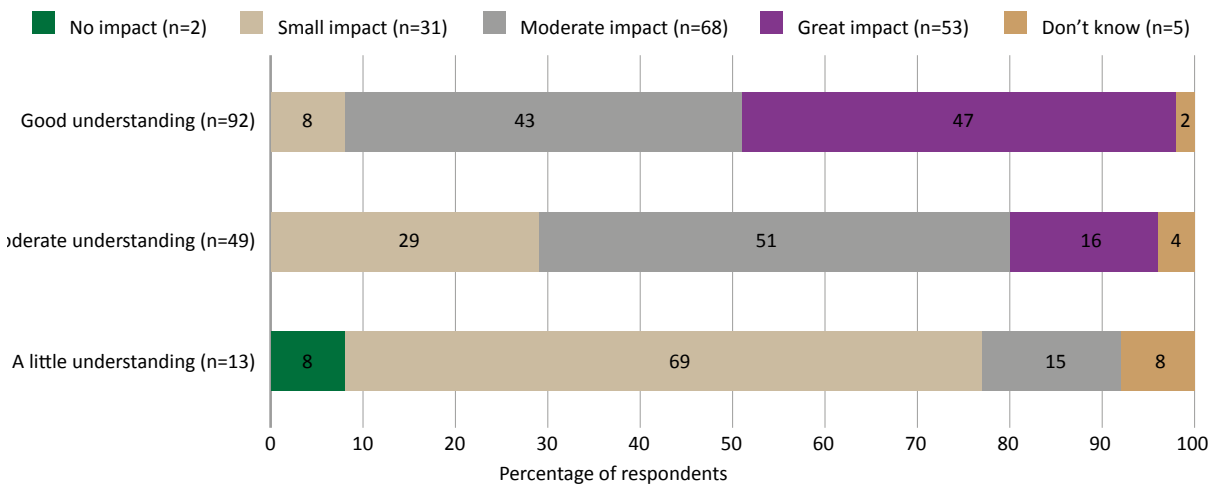
Awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant was high, with 81 per cent of respondents saying they were aware of the Armed Forces Covenant, and 19 per cent saying they were not. We tested to see whether there was a relationship between respondents' links to the Armed Forces (i.e. whether they were family, Veterans, serving personnel or reservists) and their awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant (figure 8). We found that levels of awareness were similar across all groups.

Figure 5: Motivation vs level of understanding



Source: Champions' survey

Figure 6: Level of understanding vs. impact of the role on ensuring the council delivers its commitments to the Armed Forces Community



Source: Champions' survey



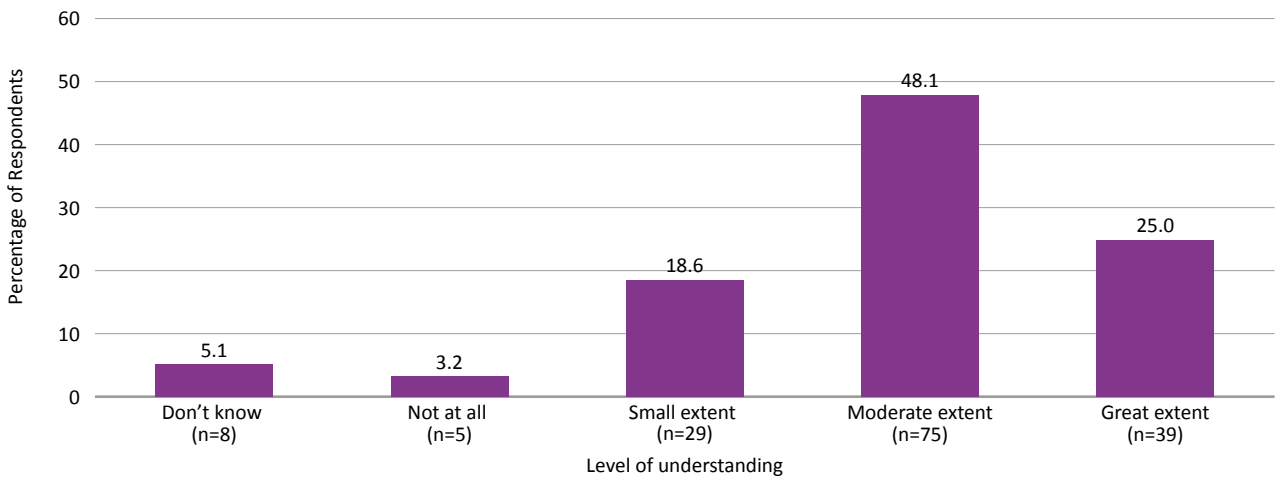
However, levels of awareness that their local council had signed the Covenant were significantly lower (figure 9). This is an important finding and the statements we recommend below should help to communicate the role of councils in relation to the covenant.

We have tested the question of the expectations flowing from the Covenant in our deep dives and stakeholder interviews. We have found significant

evidence of mixed expectations with some members of the Armed Forces Community thinking that the Covenant gives them to right to a service as opposed to not being disadvantaged compared with others in the delivery of that service.

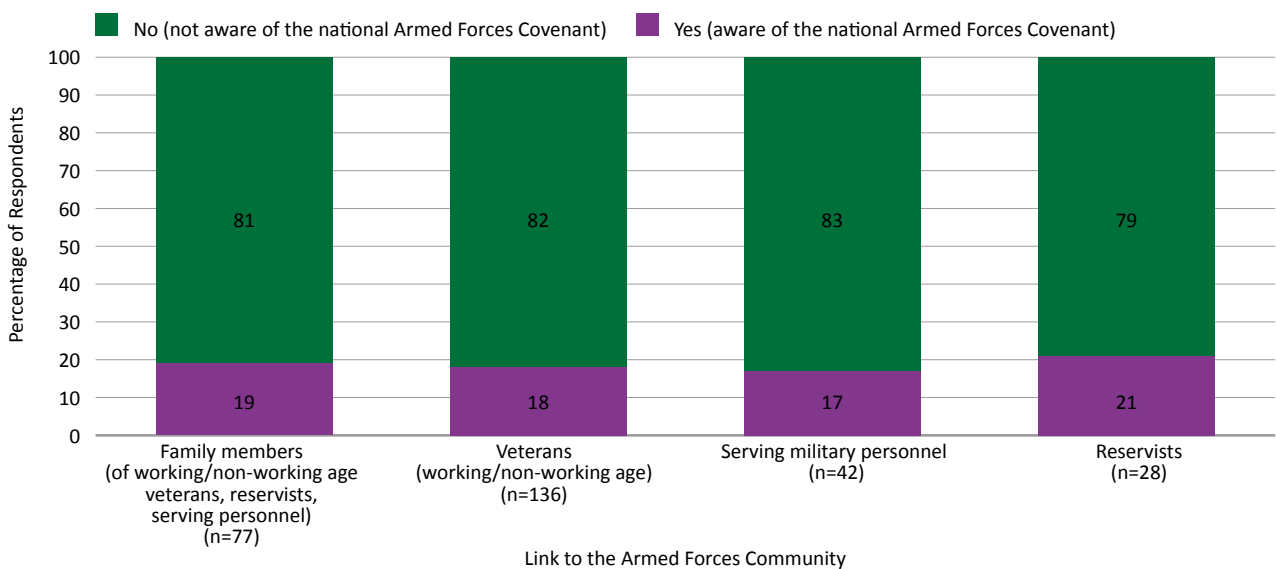
This is becoming less of an issue in relation to schools, but it remains a significant issue in relation to housing. Significantly, some people leaving the Armed Forces believe that the Covenant gives them

Figure 7: To what extent would you say your council and central government share the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Covenant? (n=156)



Source: Champions' survey

Figure 8: Links to the Armed Forces Community vs awareness of the national Armed Forces Covenant



Source: Armed Forces Community survey

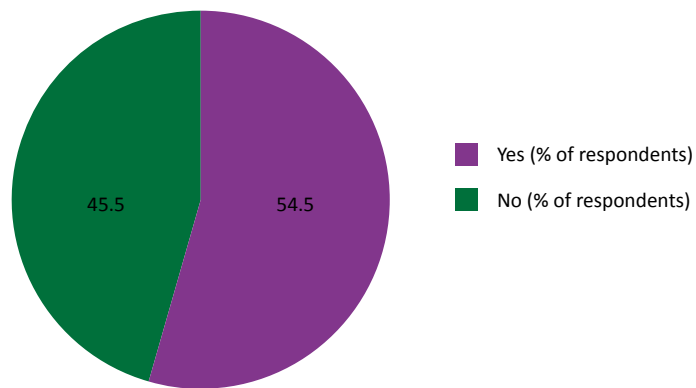
the right to social housing. There is also evidence of a widespread lack of understanding of the housing pressures that exist in many areas and what this means for people who are trying to rent or buy accommodation.

We have evidence that this lack of understanding of reasonable expectations of the Covenant is shared by some senior responsible officers in the Armed Forces.

We recommend that the LGA, COSLA and Government agree a statement on the legitimate expectations flowing from the Covenant, including what it can and cannot deliver, which should form the core text of national and local statements on the Covenant.

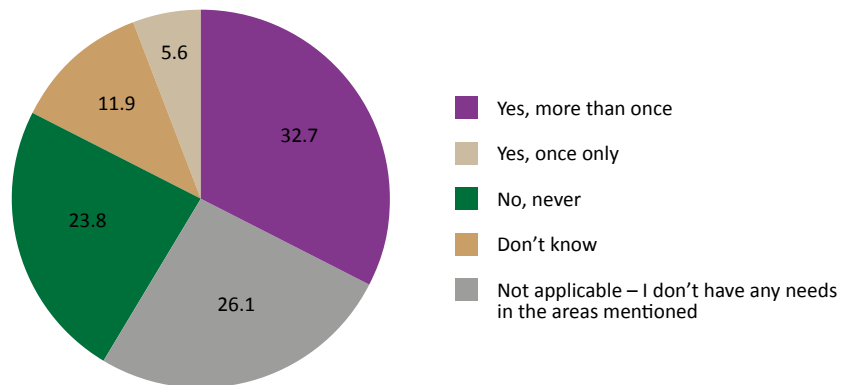
We recommend that the core wording on the Covenant be strengthened by including the following

Figure 9: Are you aware that your local council has signed its own Armed Forces Covenant (previously referred to as 'Community Covenant')? (n=341)



Source: Army Forces Community survey

Figure 10: In relation to the treatment of those needs, have you ever felt disadvantaged because you are a member of the Armed Forces Community? (% of respondents. n=303)



Source: Armed Forces Community survey

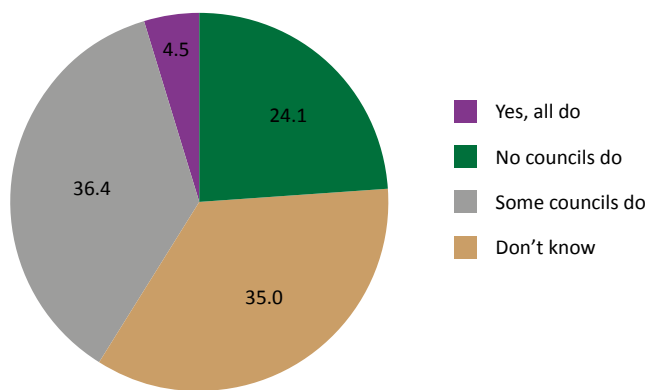


question as a way of assessing whether or not a person or family is suffering from comparative disadvantage as a result of their mobility and deployment through service in the Armed Forces:

“Had the person/family been a long-term resident of the area would the decision have been different?”

Our survey also asked members of the Armed Forces Community whether they felt that they had been disadvantaged as a result of their service and whether they felt that their local council understands their needs. The results suggest that many people believe that they have suffered disadvantage (figure 10) and that councils do not fully understand their needs (figure 11). These findings demonstrate the importance of the Covenant.

Figure 11: As a member of the Armed Forces Community, do you feel that councils who you've had dealings with have a good understanding of your needs? (% of respondents. n=286)



Source: Armed Forces Community survey

DELIVERING THE COVENANT

Councils and the Covenant

In this section of our report we explore the extent to which councils have the core infrastructure and delivery mechanisms in place to deliver the Covenant. In the next section we look in more detail at the steps that councils and their partners are taking to deliver the Covenant in key service areas.

Core Infrastructure

Drawing on the findings of our research we have developed a description of a core infrastructure reflecting the action taken by councils that have successfully implemented the Covenant. It is summarised in table 3 below and is set out in more detail in the draft toolkit in the annex to this report.

We have tested the extent to which an earlier draft of this core infrastructure is in place in our surveys (figure 12). We have also tested and refined the list through our deep dives, at our sense-making event and in subsequent stakeholder discussions.

It is clear from our surveys that the vast majority of councils have an elected member Champion and officer point of contact in place. Ninety per cent of councils report that they have a champion and 95 per cent an officer point of contact. It is important to note that in the vast majority of places these post holders have a number of other roles. There are also

questions about the impact of these roles in some councils as just under 55 per cent of councils say these posts are both in place and are very active.

The vast majority of councils report that they have a forum in place that brings together the relevant partners and meets regularly, providing a mechanism for collaboration and information sharing between organisations. Our deep dives suggest that these forums tend to meet between one and six times a year, and usually include representatives from any nearby Armed Forces, local military and other charities, council staff and representatives from other public sector bodies.

Fewer councils, around a quarter, report that they have a web page that is very active, with almost 30 per cent not having a specific web page dedicated to providing information to the Armed Forces Community. This situation seems to be more acute for district councils, as of the 105 district

Table 3: Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An elected member Champion An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outward-facing forum A mechanism for collaboration with partners
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A web page with key information and links A clear public statement of expectations A route through which concerns can be raised Training of frontline staff The production of an annual report highlighting the key actions taken that year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed Policy reviews Enthusiasm and commitment



councils who responded to this question in our survey, almost 40 per cent of them did not have a web page in place. This is particularly relevant as over two thirds (68 per cent) of respondents from the Armed Forces Community survey highlighted that having more communication between the council and the Armed Forces Community would make them feel more supported, and two thirds of respondents (59.5 per cent) identified the need for a web page with relevant links.

Similarly, fewer councils meet the requirements in our core infrastructure in relation to an action plan.

Around half of councils say they have one in place, but only one in five say their action plan is in place and very active. Councils that do have an active action plan in place are more likely to have an active forum and similarly, those that do not have an action plan in place are less likely to have a forum in place.

In our stakeholder survey we asked about perceptions of the extent to which the core infrastructure is in place. The findings confirm our earlier conclusion that many places do not have an active webpage or action plan in place.

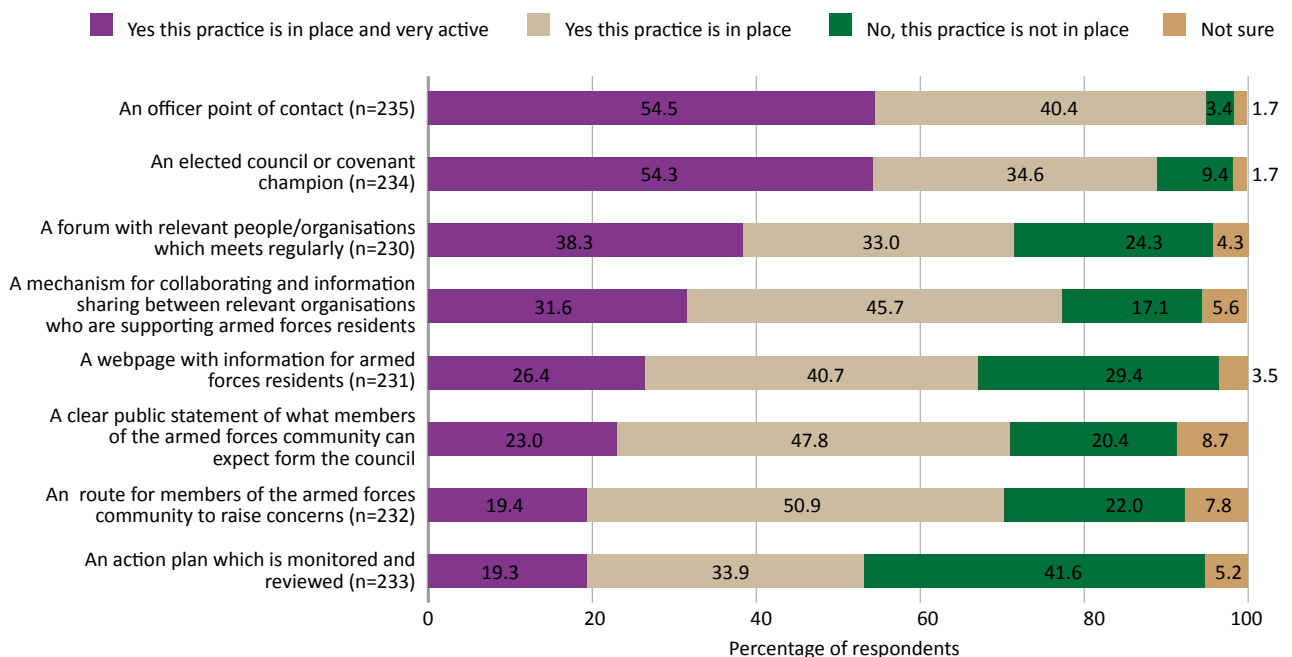
Good Practice: Oxfordshire Champions

Oxfordshire County Council (Category 2) goes further than having a single elected member military champion. In order to strengthen the level of engagement between the council and the Armed Forces, each of the five bases in Oxfordshire has a designated military champion. This has the effect of strengthening the links between the Armed Forces and the council. Units therefore do not need to call up the civilian integration officer to ask any questions, and they are actively encouraged to contact the council themselves.

Champions take it upon themselves to be the link between an individual base and the county. This requires that they develop and maintain relationships with relevant officers. It also means having and maintaining presence, such as through attending events on base.

Individual relationships between champions and bases differ in terms of formality. This is down to the commitment of the champions themselves and of the relevant personnel on base. Key to the effective working of this system is enthusiasm 'on both sides of the fence'.

Figure 12: Does your council have any of the following practices in place, and if so, to what extent?

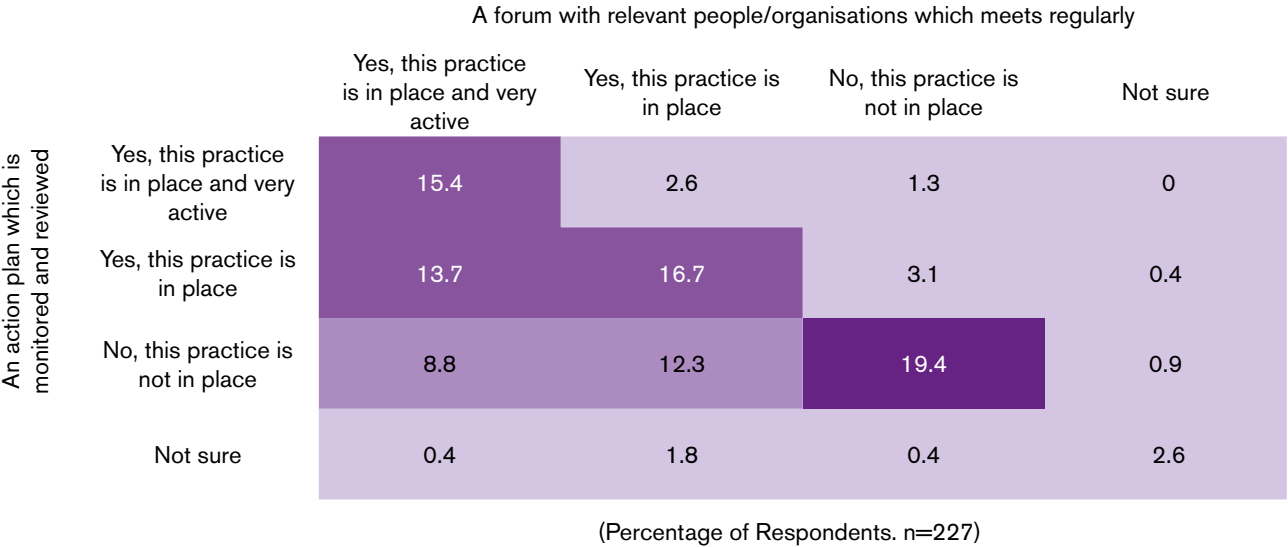


Source: Council survey

Good Practice: Local scrutiny of the delivery of the Covenant

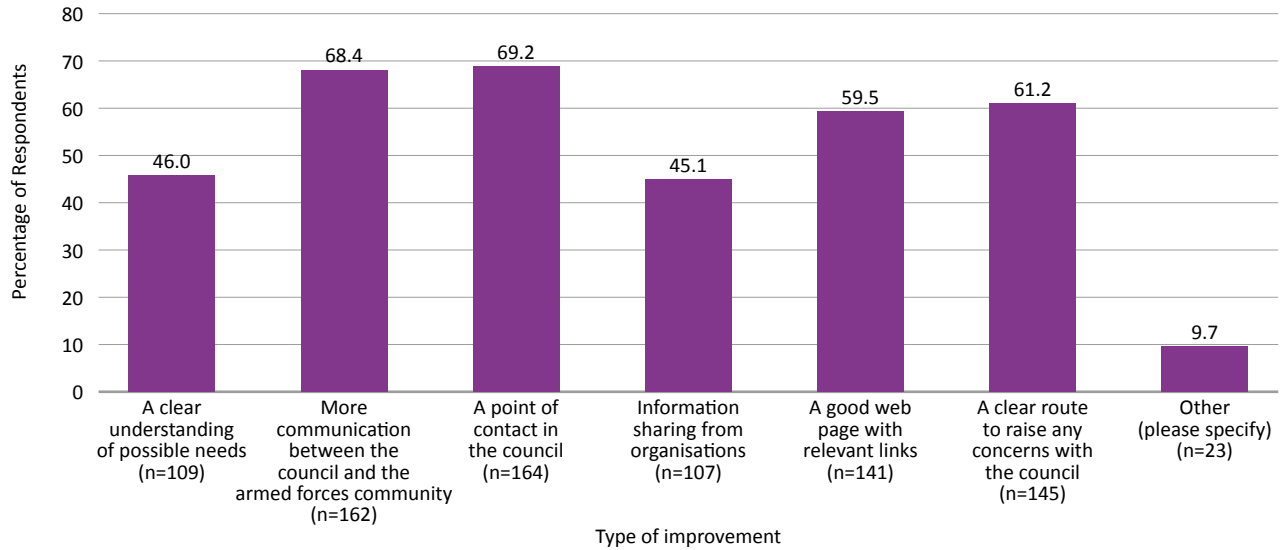
Our deep dive visit to **Surrey** (Category 3) coincided with a meeting of the county council’s Resident Experience Board which was considering a report on the progress being made in the county on the implementation of the Covenant. The board is part of the county’s overview and scrutiny arrangements. The board received a detailed report on the work of the county’s Civilian Military Partnership Board and received oral evidence from a number of witnesses including 11 Infantry Brigade Transition Officer, the Civil Military Engagement Officer, SSAFA, the Armed Forces Champion for Woking Borough Council and county council officers.

Figure 13: Councils with an action plan vs. councils with a forum



Source: Council survey

Figure 14: Are there any actions which could be taken at a local level which would make you feel more supported, and if so what? (n=237)



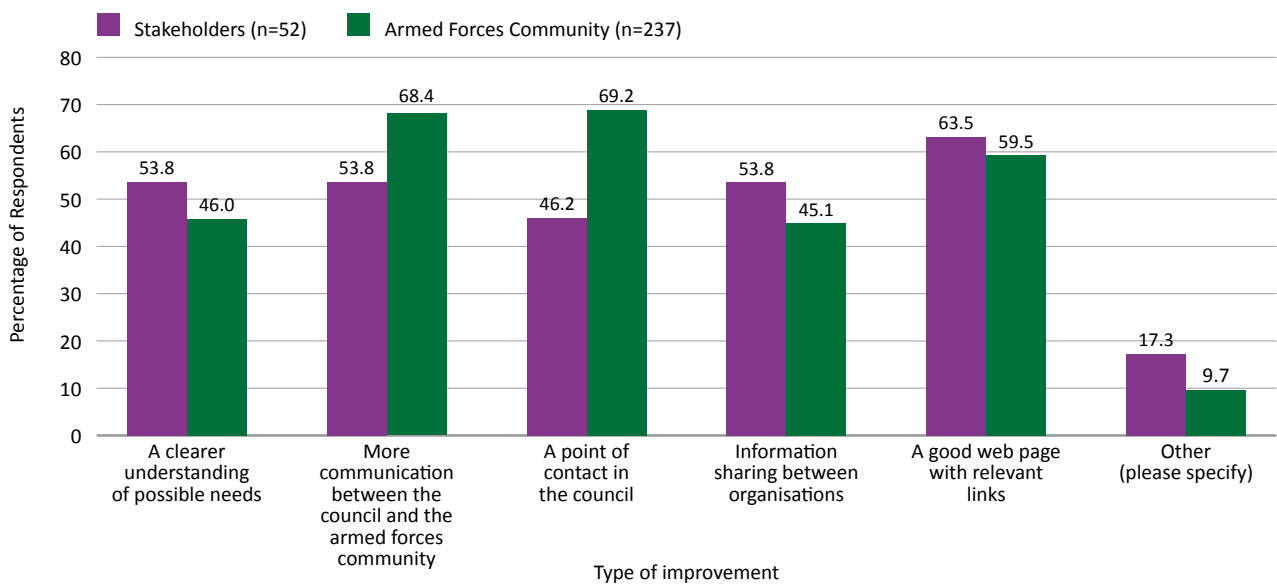
Source: Armed Forces Community survey



We also tested whether the extent to which a council has the core infrastructure in place is affected by the type of Armed Forces population in the council area. Councils with no significant Armed Forces Community presence are less likely to have any of the core infrastructure in place. This is particularly evident in relation to having a forum, a webpage and an action plan in place.

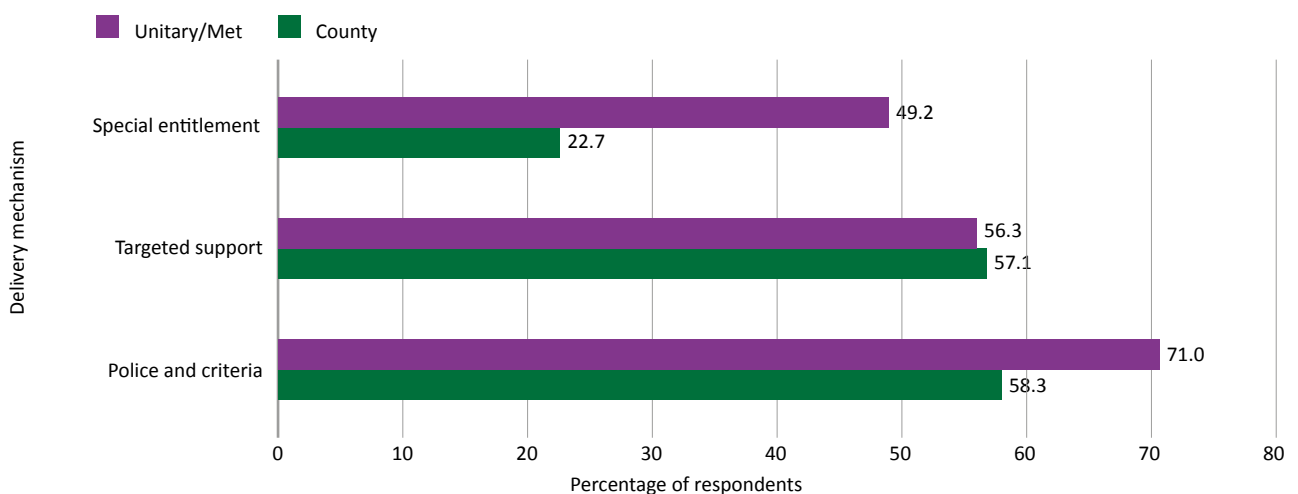
Our surveys of the Armed Forces Community and stakeholders explored what more could be done locally to improve the delivery of the Covenant (figure 14). Members of the Armed Forces Community were particularly concerned about communication and accessing information and support. Specifically, respondents thought that there should be more communication between the council and Armed

Figure 15: From your experience with councils, are there any actions which could be taken at a local level which might better ensure the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly?



Source: Stakeholder survey and Armed Forces Community survey

Figure 16: Adult social care delivery



Source: Council survey

Forces (68.4 per cent) and a dedicated point of contact within councils. In line with this, the next two most common responses were 'a clear route to raise any concerns with the council' (61.2 per cent) and 'a good web page with relevant links' (59.5 per cent).

Stakeholders were most likely to indicate that councils should have a web page with relevant links as a way of better ensuring the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly (figure 15). Members of the Armed Forces Community were more likely than stakeholders to think that there should be more communication between the council and themselves and a point of contact for the Armed Forces Community within the council. Stakeholders were more likely to select 'a clear understanding of possible needs'; 'information sharing between organisations' and 'a good web page with relevant links'.

We have reviewed our suggested core infrastructure in the light of the survey results and deep dives. A revised version is included in the draft tool kit in the annex to this report.

We recommend that a core infrastructure is adopted by councils seeking to successfully implement the Covenant at a local level.

Delivery mechanisms

We asked councils about the extent to which the Covenant is reflected in the following delivery mechanisms: policies and criteria, targeted support

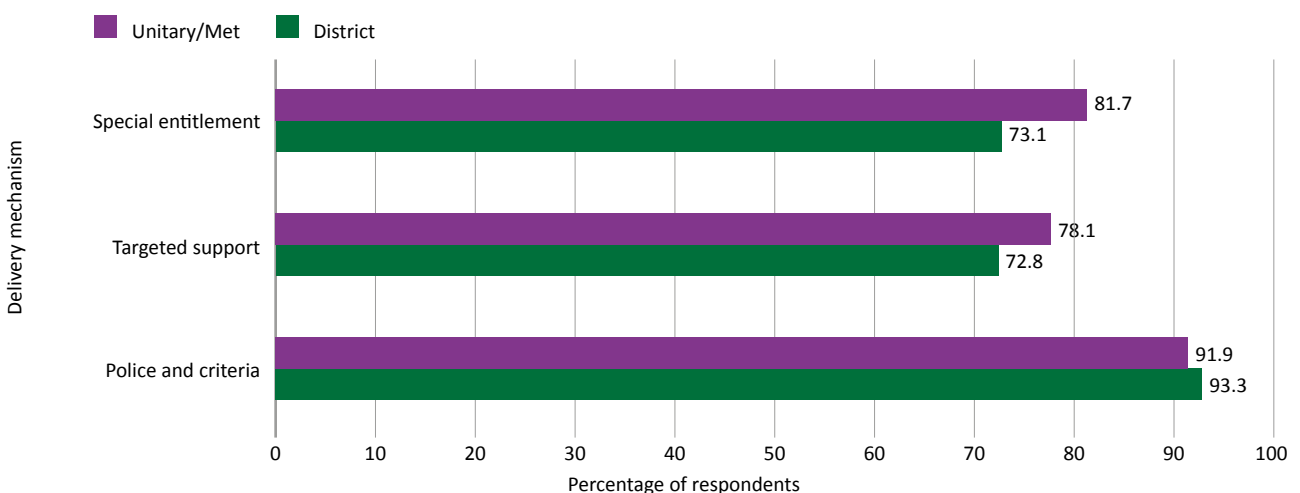
and special entitlements in relation to housing, education, adult social care and public health.

We have been mindful of the fact that different council types have different functions. Unitary and metropolitan councils deal with all of the above service delivery areas. County councils deal with adult social care, education and public health and district councils deal with housing and leisure. We have therefore only used the relevant council type dependent on the type of service area being analysed. It is also important to note that the total number of responses from county councils was comparatively low (at 25 per cent) which should be taken into account in interpreting some of our findings.

The Covenant is most likely to be reflected in policies and criteria rather than targeted support and special entitlement. Over 7 in 10 councils say that their policies reflect the Covenant, varying slightly by service area, whereas this reduces to around 6 in 10 councils which say they offer targeted support, and around half offering special entitlement. This is also confirmed in the stakeholder survey where the largest percentage of respondents identified that some or all councils have policies and criteria in place.

A large number of councils report that they have adopted policies and criteria in relation to social care to reflect the covenant – 71 per cent of unitary councils and 58 per cent of county councils (figure 16). However, this is significantly lower than the percentage of councils which report that they

Figure 17: Housing delivery



Source: Council survey



have done so in relation to housing (figure 17). We recommend that the LGA explore the reasons for this.

Our different sources of evidence have produced a mixed picture in relation to housing. On the one hand, our survey of members of the Armed Forces Community identified housing as the fourth priority area, below employment, physical health and education. On the other hand, in our deep dive discussions with council officers, charities, members of the Armed Forces and Veterans, housing was consistently raised as one of the key areas to which the Covenant can add value. This explains the fact that housing is the public service area on which councils say they offer the most support to the Armed Forces Community (figure 17). The Covenant is reflected in over 90 per cent of both district and unitary councils' housing policies, and over 70 per cent of councils say they offer targeted support and special entitlement.

Local context

One theme that has emerged strongly from our deep dives is the impact of the nature and scale of the Armed Forces Community presence in an area on a council's understanding of the Armed Forces, and the opportunities and challenges that arise from that presence. This has implications for the level of activity that is likely to flow from the Covenant and the nature of the arrangements that need to be put in place to manage it. We have developed a typology of places

which may be helpful in thinking about what is likely to be appropriate in different circumstances. The typology is set out in table 4.

This typology is intended to reflect the different circumstances, opportunities and challenges that councils face in delivering the Covenant in different places. The importance of meeting the expectations that flow from the Covenant applies everywhere, but the context in which councils are seeking to do this varies significantly and we hope that this approach will help to establish a shared understanding of this complex picture.

In our deep dives we have found that the relationships between local councils, their partners and the Armed Forces Community work best in places that match our categories 1 and 4. In these places serving members of the Armed Forces, former members and their families are part of the community. Good relationships are "how things are done round here" and there is a good understanding of the actions required to deliver the words and spirit of the Covenant. There is often a proactive approach to meeting the needs of Veterans in challenging circumstances. Action is aided by the fact that there is often a significant presence of Veterans on the council and among its staff.

This is often the position in our second category, but in some cases these places and those in our third category face a challenge in establishing a shared

Table 4: Typology of places

1. Major Armed Forces Community presence	2. Significant Armed Forces Community presence	3. Modest Armed Forces Community presence	4. Significant known presence of Veterans	5. Minimal known Armed Forces Community presence
The Armed Forces Community is a very important presence in the area. Many of these places have a major serving and Veteran community. For example, Wiltshire, Moray and Plymouth.	The Armed Forces Community is a significant presence in the area. Many of these places have a significant serving and Veteran community. For example, Cornwall, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.	There is a smaller but nonetheless important Armed Forces Community presence. For example, Surrey.	Often important areas from which members of the Armed Forces are recruited and to which many resettle. There is little if any serving presence in these places. For example, Wigan and Glasgow.	Places where the only presence comprises Reservists and a Veteran population of unknown size.



understanding of the most appropriate arrangements. We have, for example, identified one place in these circumstances where the main co-ordinating body now meets annually, which can lead to a lack of momentum and create problems when senior people change role mid-year. In another place members of the Armed Forces Community are concerned that the arrangements are too elaborate and time-consuming.

It is clear from our work that delivering the Covenant and local pledges that flow from it is most challenging in places meeting our third and fifth categories. In these places an understanding of the Armed Forces is not "in the blood stream" and the paucity of information means that it is difficult to do more than adopt a reactive approach to the needs of Veterans. There is considerable potential for councils in these circumstances to work together in order to develop approaches to delivering the Covenant that meet their particular needs and circumstances.

The section below on locally delivered public services identifies areas of good practice from each of these five categories.

The existence of a co-ordinating body is a crucial element of our proposed core infrastructure. It is essential that this body operates in a way that reflects the place's position on our spectrum. It is also important to distinguish between the task involved in developing or improving the infrastructure needed to deliver the Covenant and what is required to operate that infrastructure once it is in place. On the basis of our research *we recommend* that to be effective a Covenant co-ordinating group:

- Meets at least twice a year;
- Regularly reviews how it works, including frequency of meetings and any sub-groups;
- Evolves in term of its membership to reflect energy and interest.

Good Practice: Proportionality in Bradford

Bradford is a good example of a category 4 area which successfully addressed the proportionality issue within its diverse locality. Bradford identified the importance of keeping the different communities in balance by implementing the Covenant carefully. The council engages people from different communities by identifying similarities rather than differences and uses Armed Forces events as a chance to celebrate every community and their impact on the Armed Forces, and vice versa. This has led to Bradford being able to reach out to the harder to reach groups in the community.



LOCALLY DELIVERED PUBLIC SERVICES

In this section we set out our findings, primarily from our deep dives, on action being taken in relation to the key locally delivered public services, to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The examples in this section are drawn from our deep dive research. We are aware that there is a lot of activity in other areas, including action by NHS England and Clinical Commissioning Groups, all of which is contributing to the delivery of the Covenant.

Housing

Housing is an area in which many members of the Armed Forces Community perceive that they experience disadvantage compared with other people, particularly at the point of resettlement. Housing can be critical in meeting the needs of Veterans who face challenging circumstances. As noted earlier it is the policy area in which most councils say they have adjusted their policies to reflect the Covenant and statutory guidance, but it is also an area in which there can be a significant mismatch in expectations about what the Covenant can deliver.

This section:

- Describes the context in which this aspect of the Covenant is being delivered at a local level;
- Highlights features of the delivery of housing at a local level that are relevant to an understanding of how the Covenant is delivered;
- Sets out the core response it is reasonable to expect from councils in relation to housing and the Covenant;

- Highlights a number of examples of good practice;
- Recommends some top tips;
- Explains how a number of our recommendations could enable more effective action on the housing needs of the Armed Forces Community.

The context

Housing is a public service under pressure, in terms of the availability of social housing, the quality of the privately rented sector and the ability of people to afford to buy their own homes. These pressures are often very acute in areas with a major or significant Armed Forces presence and in which members of the Armed Forces Community wish to stay when they leave service.

Housing is also an area about which many members of the Armed Forces Community have a poor understanding of the realities of civilian life. We have heard numerous examples of members of the Armed Forces Community thinking that the Covenant gives them an instant right to a council house.

Good Practice: District Council and the Covenant in Surrey

There are 11 district and borough councils in **Surrey** (Category 3) which means that joint working between the county, districts and boroughs is particularly important. One feature of the joint arrangements is that each district council is encouraged to have its own Armed Forces Champion. A standard role description has been produced for the champions, the core element of which is to raise the profile of the Armed Forces Community within the council and the community. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of champions being kept informed of all relevant developments through Surrey Leaders representative who sits on the Surrey Civilian Military Partnership Board. The role description also notes that some Armed Forces experience would be an advantage..

Housing Top Tips

- In areas with county and district councils the district councils can develop a single shared approach to reflecting the Covenant in their policies and to the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community.
- Councils can work with the RSLs in their area to agree a shared protocol on how to meet the needs of families leaving the Armed Forces and Veterans.



We have heard even more examples of members of that community having inflated expectations of the affordability and quality of housing.

An important role for council housing teams is to provide advice and support to households leaving the Armed Forces. Their ability to do so effectively depends on them receiving as much notice as possible of people leaving service and of their housing needs and aspirations. As we explain

in a later section, adequate notice is not always provided and the task is particularly challenging in circumstances where a family or household is seeking to settle in another part of the country or where the housing need is a result of a divorce or separation.

We have also heard evidence of the difficulties facing some Veterans who get caught in a catch 22 situation requiring a job in order to obtain housing and vice versa.

Housing Good Practice

In **Plymouth** (Category 1) ex-Armed Forces personnel with medical conditions caused by their service are automatically given priority. The council is keen to promote and strengthen its ties with the Armed Forces Community in the city and is involved in a cross sector self-build project. Twenty-four affordable homes will be built as part of the Nelson project on the former site of a day centre, with twelve designated for ex Armed Forces. Armed Forces charities were approached early on in the project to try and identify vulnerable ex-Service personnel who might need housing. There is also a similar project underway in **Wrexham**.

In **Glasgow** (Category 4) where the city no longer owns any social housing the city's Veterans' hub Helping Heroes has a housing expert post which is funded by Glasgow Housing Association, the city's largest RSL. Those we interviewed in Glasgow identified housing as the greatest pressure on the Armed Forces Community in Glasgow and having a professional directly employed by the city's largest RSL means that the steps which many have to go through in order to get to the right advice are significantly reduced. More detail on Helping Heroes can be found in the 'Other Support for Veterans' section.

In **Wigan** (Category 4) where the council employs a key worker for ex-Service personnel and their families the key worker is able to navigate a public services landscape which can be overwhelming for ex-Service personnel who are not used to a sometimes confusing landscape of public services. Veterans in Wigan with medical need related to service are given priority on the housing waiting list and spouses going through divorce will also be given priority.

Wigan and Leigh Housing is an arm's length management organisation which owns the majority of social housing in the borough. Application forms now include the question, "If you or your partner are serving or have formerly served in the Armed Forces, please provide details of your service number". Housing officers were also being made aware of issues for those in the Armed Forces and the Armed Forces Key Worker maintained a direct relationship with many public facing housing officers, though knowledge about the Covenant and Armed Forces issues could be patchy because of staff turnover.

Wigan have also mapped all of the charities in the borough according to organisation, branch and then skillset or capacity of each charity and branch. Combined with a well networked Armed Forces Key Worker, this means that though they often respond to need in an ad hoc way, this is done effectively and quickly so that if for instance housing is provided without furniture the Armed Forces Key Worker can refer to his charities map to understand where he might be able to arrange for some furniture.

Wakefield (Category 5) has an effective system in place which offers a joined up approach to housing. Senior management from Wakefield District Housing (WDH), the main housing association in the district, sits on Covenant board meetings which is an effective communication method between WDH and the council. Information from these meetings gets filtered down to the appropriate team in WDH. Mechanisms are in place for information to be fed upwards from ground level, as public facing staff are aware of the Covenant. This is also a place where their links with the military and military charities are strengthened – the military know who to get in touch with in WDH, as do military charities and vice versa. This is especially useful if the member of the Armed Forces Community is facing other challenges as well. It is a system which works well due to their collective positivity and commitment to working together.



Delivery issues

It is important to be aware that in areas with district and county councils housing is the responsibility of district councils. In some areas district councils see the Covenant as being “a county council thing”. And in some counties different districts have adopted different approaches to reflecting the Covenant in their housing policies. This can add to the confusion that members of the Armed Forces Community face when they are considering their housing options as part of the transition and resettlement process.

The delivery challenge is further compounded by the fact that many councils have transferred their housing stock to either an arm’s length management organisation (ALMO) or to one or more housing associations. In many places there is a large number of registered social landlords (RSLs) each of which may treat Veterans in different ways.

The core response

Legally, councils must give reasonable preference to various categories of people who apply for social housing. Applicants could be placed in the reasonable preference category due to, for example, housing condition, health, or a welfare situation, all in light of local circumstances. Following the implementation of the Covenant, the core legal requirement for councils is that additional preference must be given to certain members of the Armed Forces Community⁵ who come within the reasonable preference category and who have urgent housing needs. Furthermore, in order to be able to apply for social housing, some councils require citizens to pass a local connection test which proves that citizen has links to that council area. Councils must disregard the local connection rule when considering applications from serving members, or Veterans who have been out of the military for 5 years or less, bereaved spouses, and existing or former reservists suffering from injury, illness or disability attributable to their service. It is important to note, however, that these requirements do not cover divorced and separated Armed Forces spouses.

In addition to this core response many councils take other steps to help members of the Armed Forces Community with their housing need, including divorced and separated spouses who are potentially vulnerable. Some examples we have discovered through our deep dives are set out on page 26.

Schools and Children’s Services

Children of serving members of the Armed Forces may face disadvantage compared with other citizens in relation to schooling. This is particularly significant in school admissions for the children of Service personnel who are regularly resettled, but also in the provision of the additional support services to children who are affected by a parent serving in the Armed Forces.

This section:

- Describes the context in which this aspect of the Covenant is being delivered at a local level;
- Highlights features of the delivery of schooling and children’s services at a local level which are relevant to an understanding of how the Covenant is delivered;
- Sets out the core response it is reasonable to expect from councils in relation to Schools and Children’s Services and the Covenant;
- Highlights a number of examples of good practice;
- Recommends some top tips;
- Explains how a number of our recommendations could enable more effective action on the children’s services needs of the Armed Forces Community.

The context

In many areas across the UK, school allocation is an area that is under pressure as often there are long waiting lists for the allocation of school places. This is especially the case for children who are going into reception.

Service families are typically quite mobile throughout the country (and abroad), and thus often have short periods in a new location. In this situation, disadvantage is likely to occur when applying for school places for their children, as more often than not, the postcode of the new address is not available until the move date is near, therefore they will miss school admission deadlines. This is an issue we heard about during our deep dives in areas with a major and significant serving Armed Forces presence. Service Families also can also face a challenge in having children with Special Educational Needs assessed on arrival in a new location.

Our deep dives have identified the fact that in some areas there is an expectation that councils will accept



the children of serving members into any school regardless of local circumstances. This is particularly difficult in areas which have long waiting lists for school places and seems to be a further area where there is a lack of understanding of the realities of civilian life.

Service personnel's children might also require additional support from their school to help them deal with a parent being away from home for long periods of time, often in conflict situations. Children describe this period as being particularly stressful, and having someone to talk to who understands these stresses would be helpful.

Children in some Service families may be considered more vulnerable than the general population because of the pressures they face, including PTSD.

Delivery issues

In areas with both district and county councils, education is a county council function. Most councils deliver well when they acknowledge this issue in policy, by making an allowance for families by, for example, accepting the base postcode.

Our deep dives have also identified the need to have staff members who understand the difficulties Service children face in dealing with having a parent away from home for long periods of time and in potentially dangerous situations. We have also found that some schools have collaborated in order to provide the necessary services for these children.

In many of the places we visited, council officers with a good understanding of the needs of Armed Forces families and the circumstances in which they move can help the family and schools come to

an acceptable solution when potential difficulties emerge. In some places the move towards academies and free schools is seen as a problem, but we have seen examples of councils developing protocols for accommodating Service families which all schools have been willing to adopt. This co-ordinating role is likely to become more important as the number of academies increases. In some places – in our categories 1 and 2 – there are schools with large numbers of Service children who are used to accommodating them and dealing with the consequences of their families being moved at short notice. Challenges are more likely to arise with schools with smaller numbers of Service children.

Delivery issues vary across countries as the education systems in England and Scotland differ. Children are classified differently in terms of school year in Scotland, which was identified as an issue for English Service families relocating to Moray (see Good Practice box). Furthermore, English qualifications are not always recognised in Scotland, and this is true of education qualifications. Some councils have altered this to allow military spouses who are qualified teachers in England to continue teaching in Scotland.

The core response

The national deadline for secondary school applications is usually at the end of October for the following year (places are offered in March), and in January for primary school applications (places are offered in April).⁶ In England the school admissions code (2014) states that admission authorities must allocate a school place in advance of resettlement providing they have received an official letter that states the date of relocation and a Unit post code.

Children's services Top Tips

- In every school, but particularly those with a high number of serving parents, members of staff are aware of the stresses children might be under and can recognise and respond to signs children might be having difficulty coping.
- If there is more than one child of a serving parent in a school, creating links between these children will mean they will benefit from being around other children who understand their situation.

⁵ From The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012. This includes the following:

- former members of the Armed Forces
- serving members of the Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
- bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389388/School_Admissions_Code_2014_-_19_Dec.pdf (p.21)



Children's services Good Practice

Wiltshire (Category 1) has an active relationship between the council and bases which has enabled a more joined up approach to the delivery of the Covenant. Bases make Wiltshire council aware of possible future admissions so that schools can make sufficient preparation. This has been vital in the Army rebasing programme where 4,000 Army personnel and their families (a further 3,200 people) will be redeployed from Germany to Wiltshire by 2020. Wiltshire has plans to implement a pen pal programme for children in Germany who will be moving to Wiltshire with the aim to make their transition smoother.

Plymouth (Category 1) is a Navy city with an estimated 7-9 per cent of school children having a Serving parent. Plymouth has created an innovative programme called MKC Heroes (Military Kids Club – formerly known as HMS Heroes). This is a national support group led by children of Serving personnel and Veterans, that can be joined by any school or setting. In each member school or setting, children of Serving personnel/Veterans can attend a discussion group to share their experiences (sometimes difficult ones) with their peers, who understand and are likely sharing similar concerns or experiences. It is also a chance for these children to get to know other children of all ages in a similar position to them. Across Plymouth there are approximately 3000 children from Service families enrolled, along with a significant number of Veterans children across pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools. Plymouth facilitates a termly meeting of MKC delegate young people (x 6 yearly) for the sharing of good practice and comradeship. MKC Heroes has now been exported to across the United Kingdom and overseas with 130 schools and settings participating, currently.

The success of MKC Heroes highlights the importance of listening to and involving children and young people. MKC Heroes is represented on Plymouth's Community Covenant board and within the Plymouth Youth Council. The Community Covenant also supports the MKC Heroes Military Kids Choir. Getting to know issues that children are experiencing themselves is a good way to understand the issues which they and their families may be facing.

Wiltshire (Category 1) Children's services team has recognised the difficulties that Service families may face in accessing family social services when moving to a new council area which does not have experience in dealing with Armed Forces families. There is a danger that such families may face problems which go unaddressed in a new area, so social workers from Wiltshire visit families to do follow up visits and liaise with other social work departments. The team have regular telephone reviews with Social Work colleagues in British Forces Social Work Service to discuss families transferring to Wiltshire to ensure that cases are handed over safely. Locally there are good working relationships with the Army Welfare Service and Welfare Officers in units.

A community organisation in **Bradford** (Category 4-5), SHAPE UK provides activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Activities include sport and health activities, as well as basic vocational skills. The organisation employs a team of Veterans and Reservists and has good connections with the local brigade. The IMPACT project was started by the Director of SHAPE UK, himself a Veteran, and set out to create a link through heritage to identify commonalities within the diverse communities in Bradford. As part of the IMPACT project visits to two local schools were conducted to help show not only what the Armed Forces has done for Bradford, but what Bradford has done for the Armed Forces.

The lack of school transport was an issue of concern for Armed Forces families at the Deepcut base in **Surrey** (Category 3). This was compounded by some urban myths about what some families had secured. County Council officers organised a meeting bringing together the Army Families Federation, RLC Deepcut, and officials responsible for school transport. An important outcome is that the Families Federation and the base welfare officer have a better understanding of the process and an FAQ has been produced. Spare seats available on a minibus that operates between the base and a particular school have been made available for Army families. In addition, the School Transport Team is recording communications with Armed Forces families which will be shared with key partners to help ensure that the families receive a good service.

Moray (Category 1) Council perceived that different legislation between the home nations has created disadvantage for the families of those coming to Moray from across the border. In partnership with the General Teaching Council of Scotland, the council introduced a pilot scheme to allow conditional registration for English teachers. This allowed them to work as teachers immediately whilst they gained the qualifications required of the Scottish system. This successful pilot scheme now applies to all teachers crossing the border, but an awareness of the issue stemmed from the council's attention to the Armed Forces Community present in Moray.

The council is currently working on a programme which will help to inform parents of the difference in education systems. The council is seeking to convey that in practice a child moving from year 1 in England, to P2 in Scotland will be moving horizontally to a class of their age peers. This was important to the council in Moray that not only did children receive the correct level of classroom education, but also that they were more likely to integrate socially with children of their own age.



It also states that the Council must commit to removing disadvantage for Service children, as appropriate for the area. Scotland and Wales have their own codes, although the latter is very close to the English code.

Infant class size must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single teacher, but additional children may be admitted under exceptional circumstances, which includes the children of UK Service personnel admitted outside the normal admissions round⁷.

Schools in England with Armed Forces children between reception to year 11 receive Service Pupil Premium funding for each child.

Employment

Employment is the area where the highest percentage (28 per cent) of respondents to the Armed Forces Community survey have identified themselves as having specific needs.

There are two groups within the Armed Forces Community that might face disadvantage in employment in comparison to other citizens: the spouses and partners of serving members of the Armed Forces, and Veterans.

The main issues

The spouses of Armed Forces members often face difficulties in getting employment due to frequent relocations. Additionally, many spouses find it difficult to manage a job as many do not offer the required flexibility, especially when a partner is away for long periods of time and they have children to care for. Councils and business have a role to play in recognising these difficulties.

There is a need for businesses to understand the potential of employing former members of the Armed Forces Community. When transitioning, some Veterans struggle to cope with seeking employment and accessing any opportunities for themselves. This struggle can be heightened by mental health

issues or other stressful situations which Veterans may find themselves in. It may also reflect a lack of understanding of the nature of the jobs market in many areas.

The MoD has taken action to enable Veterans to use the qualifications they have obtained while serving when seeking employment following transition. The majority of Service training is now formally accredited with Civilian Awarding Bodies and against National Standards. The Armed Forces apprenticeship programme is the largest in the country and where further training is required funding is available through either the Standard or Enhanced Learning Credit Schemes. In addition, the Career Transition Partnership provides a range of services, including one-to-one guidance, CV writing and training and employment opportunities.

During our deep dive research, however, we were told that some Veterans continue to face disadvantage as some military skills and qualifications are still not recognised by businesses and therefore are not easily transferable. The key task for councils is to encourage employers to see spouses and Service leavers as an economic asset. Councils also have an important contribution to make as employers in their own right.

Economic growth and employment is a priority for councils, especially in the current English devolution negotiations in which greater local responsibility for employment support is an important feature. The economic growth and employment agenda is supported by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in many areas across England. LEPs are partnerships between the private and public sectors and were created to help determine and deliver strategic economic priorities in a local area. There are 39 LEPs in England, each contributing to the local plan for driving local skills development and job creation. Our deep dives have identified a gap which could be filled by LEPs working with councils and the military in addressing the issues outlined above.

Employment Top Tips

- Military, councils and businesses to work together to help equip Veterans and spouses with skills that are in short supply.

⁷ Ibid. (p. 25-26)



Additionally, businesses and organisations can sign the Covenant and make their own pledges if they wish to demonstrate their support for the Armed Forces Community. Typically, this includes supporting Reservists, and supporting the employment of Veterans and Service spouses⁸. The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and Nationwide Building Society are currently undertaking a research project into the delivery of Covenant pledges by organisations who have signed the Covenant.⁹

The MoD suggests businesses work with the Career Transition Partnership¹⁰, which delivers among other things a recruitment service for organisations seeking Service leavers. The MoD also suggests Corporate Covenant pledges can be fulfilled by offering guaranteed interviews to Veterans and spouses/partners if they meet the selection criteria, recognising military skills and qualifications and raising the awareness of employment opportunities for Service leavers.

Employment Good Practice

Plymouth (Category 1) holds an employment fair which is attended by businesses, charities, the council and other local organisations as well as members of the Armed Forces Community. This enables those members of the Armed Forces Community who are looking for employment, including those facing employment difficulties to get a job by talking to employers looking to recruit. Alternatively, it is a chance to boost awareness on how to get a job, and offers opportunities such as job shadowing, CV writing, and mock interviews. Charities such as the Royal British Legion and Combat Stress attend to offer further support to those who might need help in other areas.

Plymouth also has a Corporate Covenant Group which is fed into the Community Covenant Group. This is a chance to get local businesses together to talk about the disadvantages that members of the Armed Forces Community, including Veterans are facing in their area and work towards addressing those disadvantages identified.

Wiltshire (Category 1) Council and Swindon Borough Council jointly manage an initiative called Higher Futures, which was developed by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) with involvement of the military. This seeks to equip Veterans and Reservists with the necessary higher level skills (NVQ Level 4, HND/Degree and above) in business sectors which currently experience shortages in qualified employees. This will support military leavers and military spouses to find jobs that are commensurate with their skills and abilities. Delivery is flexible by both meeting the needs of employers and providing training to prospective employees in skills that are in short supply.

Wiltshire (Category 1) Wiltshire has developed an initiative called The Enterprise Network which is a multi-faceted programme available to residents of Wiltshire and Swindon particularly aiming to increase the number of start-up businesses and to enable the growth of small, typically home-based, businesses. One of its aims is to support women in business. It was set up with the military community in mind, as evidenced by two of the original four centres being located to military bases in the area and is therefore ideally placed to assist Service leavers or spouses who are keen to start or grow a business by offering advice on business and provides low rental office accommodation or working space.

Glasgow (Category 4) has a Veterans Employment Programme which helps Veterans resettling in Glasgow in finding employment and integrating into local communities. It supports businesses and creates new jobs for unemployed Veterans in Glasgow. This is part of the holistic support for Veterans that Glasgow offers through its Helping Heroes organisation. This is an incentivised scheme fully funded by Glasgow City Council.

Wrexham (Category 5) works with Remploy, a UK wide employment service for people with specific needs. They work with Veterans on an individual basis to help them recognise their skills and experience and how this can be transferred to a civilian job.

⁸ A list of businesses who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-for-businesses-who-have-signed-the-armed-forces-covenant>

⁹ <https://rusi.org/rusi-news/research-project-military-Covenant-scheme-announced>

¹⁰ <https://www.ctp.org.uk/>

¹¹ <http://www.swlep.co.uk/programmes/Swindon-and-Wiltshire-Higher-Futures>



Health

The context

There are a number of areas in which members of the Armed Forces Community and their families are likely to face disadvantage or need priority treatment as a result of their service.

This includes having to register for primary and community care services such as dentists, 0-5's and Health Visitor services or re-join waiting lists for health and care services if they relocate due to Service (27 per cent of families reported moving at least once in the past 12 months), or physical injury resulting from their Service¹². Members of the Armed Forces Community might also have specific mental health needs, including drug and alcohol issues as a result of or exacerbated by their service, and the prevalence of common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. The Mental Health 5 Year Forward View highlights that currently only half of Veterans' experiencing mental health issues seek treatment from the NHS. In addition, older Veterans face the same challenges as other ageing members of society.

The focus of this research is primarily on the role of councils in delivering the Covenant locally. Unitary and county councils are statutorily responsible for adult social care and public health, and are increasingly included in commissioning health and related services through their relationships with Clinical Commissioning Groups and their duty to establish and lead the work of health and wellbeing boards.

The core response

In April 2013 upper tier and unitary local authorities in England assumed legal responsibility for improving the health of their population. Local authorities are mandated to provide some public health services whereas others are discretionary. The following services are mandated:

- Sexual health services (excluding HIV treatment);
- NHS Health Checks;
- Health protection – to ensure plans are in place to protect the health of the population and to have a supporting role in infectious disease surveillance and control and in Emergency Preparation, Preparedness and Response;

- Public health advice to Clinical Commissioning Groups;
- National Child Measurement Programme.

In addition, Local Authorities are required to “*provide or commission a wide range of other services to improve and protect the health of the local population and reduce health inequalities*”. These discretionary services include (but are not limited to):

- Alcohol and drug misuse services;
- Public health programmes for children aged 5-19;
- Stop smoking services and tobacco control;
- Interventions to prevent and manage obesity;
- Physical activity;
- Public mental health programmes;
- Health at work;
- Nutrition and healthy eating;
- Community safety, violence prevention & social exclusion;
- Dental public health;
- Seasonal mortality interventions.

In England the Health and Social Care Act 2012 gives councils the responsibility for improving the health of their local populations, although the Act does not specifically mention the Defence population. The Act also establishes health and wellbeing boards as a forum where key leaders from the health and care system work together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population and reduce health inequalities. Health and wellbeing board members collaborate to understand their local community's needs, agree priorities and encourage commissioners to work in a more joined-up way. As a result, patients and the public should experience more joined-up services from the NHS and local councils.

The Care Act 2014 introduced major reforms to the legal framework for adult social care, to the funding system and to the duties of councils and rights of those in need of social care, giving additional rights to support for carers and people who fund their own care (self-funders). The Act introduces a number of general duties on councils including:

- a ‘wellbeing principle’, which means that whenever a council makes a decision about an adult, it must promote that adult's wellbeing;



- a duty to promote diversity and quality in the local care market;
- a duty to cooperate between the council and other relevant organisations, including a duty on the council itself to ensure cooperation between its adult social care, housing, public health and children's services.

Under the Care Act councils were required to take into account the War Disablement Pension when calculating the costs of social care, but disregard the injury compensation payment. However, following pressure from the LGA, Royal British Legion (RBL) and other groups, the government announced in the 2016 budget that councils would not have to take the War Disablement Pension into account.

Health and wellbeing Good Practice

In **Bradford** (Category 4-5), the council is putting a new system into its assessments for adult social care whereby the public-facing member of staff will have to ask if the person has ever served. NHS partners also have questions in their surveys about people's service, and a council information officer is doing work to understand the size, need and location of the Armed Forces Community locally.

One of the difficulties with this approach is achieving the right approach to ask the question. The council is therefore working with Public Health to develop the best way to do this, taking into account that it might be a sensitive question to ask of people, particularly if it is the first thing they are asked.

Veterans have priority access to social care in Bradford if their social care needs relate to their service. Where they don't meet this criteria, the council will signpost them on to other services such as the Regimental Support Service.

In **Glasgow** (Category 4), the council worked with a wide range of partners to set up Helping Heroes. This was created in response to the difficulties faced by Veterans, particularly in navigating disparate services before being able to get treatment for mental health issues. Having to go to through multiple organisations or agencies before being able to access mental health services can dissuade Veterans from pursuing treatment.

The council worked with health partners in the city to enable Veterans to be referred directly into mental health services without having to see a GP. Helping Heroes can now refer Veterans with mental health issues directly into treatment without having to see a GP. Being able to circumvent the GP means that the process is quicker and smoother, and more people are likely to take up this support.

Also in **Glasgow** is the Coming Home Centre. Community Veterans Support set up the Centre in Govan as a space for Veterans to go and meet up and talk with other Veterans. This set-up allows them to receive informal, word of mouth advice and support from people with similar experiences and who understand their issues better. This informal signposting approach means Veterans can seek advice discreetly, without having to formally present themselves to any organisation.

A guide on delivering an effective needs assessment for the Armed Forces Community is being developed by Public Health England. The document provides a template for understanding the health needs of the Armed Forces Community and sets out some examples of best practice.

The template includes a sample of the types of local Armed Forces population data that is useful, along with a set of self-assessment questions for councils when developing a needs assessment.

In **Gloucestershire** (Category 2), community engagement officers have been working with Army families living in Forces accommodation. Often young spouses on base find it difficult to integrate into both the Armed Forces Community 'behind the line', as well as the wider civilian community. Some have little professional experience and may have left a social and family support network at home to move with their spouses who are serving. This social isolation and lack of meaningful work have the potential to lead to mental health difficulties.

Community officers set up a *Look Good Feel Good* course, with a free crèche funded through the former Community Covenant Grant Scheme, that enabled the women on base to socialise and build self-esteem. This proved popular and was critical in engaging them in further adult education courses in Maths and English. The activities provided a space for the women to improve their employment skills and to socialise with other women with similar experiences, helping them to avoid social isolation and the potential difficulties this causes. On redeployment, many of the women whom officers had worked with reported feeling more resilient and having the confidence to move on.



The majority of people we spoke to through the research discussed the problem of identifying Veterans. This can make it difficult to address the issues faced by Veterans and their families in councils' health and social care policies. There is an ongoing RBL campaign to use the census to collect data on the number and location of Veterans, to help support efforts to identify Veterans' and their families as part of local populations.

Councils have been trying to understand the health issues faced by members of the Armed Forces Community to ensure that local services are meeting their needs as part of the local population, through needs assessments. In Hampshire, for example, the council undertook work to identify the health and wellbeing needs of members of the Armed Forces Community, and compiled a list of potential sources of local intelligence/data that can help build a picture of Veterans' and families' needs as part of the local community¹³.

The needs of older Veterans are in most cases consistent with those of the general population. However, Veterans do have the advantage of access to support through military charities, and many of the councils we visited had arrangements in place to ensure that those who qualify are referred. This benefits not only the people accessing services, but also councils through relieving the financial pressure on councils and limited adult social care budgets.

In some places, such as Moray, health service partners are active participants in arrangements set up to oversee delivery of the Covenant. This is a good way of ensuring that commissioners take the Covenant into account and reflect it in their work. Other places in England have put in place action to incorporate the needs of military populations within local health needs assessments such as linking the Covenant plan to the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and work of the Health and Wellbeing Board¹⁴.

Our deep dives identified a number of examples of councils and their partners providing bespoke support to meet the needs of Veterans facing health related issues including mental health and drug and alcohol abuse. These are described in the examples below but include:

- Accepting direct referrals into mental health services for members of the Armed Forces Community without having to see a GP;
- Carrying out a specific Veterans' Health Needs Assessment to understand the types and scale of issues facing Veterans;
- Giving priority access to social care for Veterans if their need is related to their service.

Other support for Veterans

Our deep dives have highlighted a number of additional areas where Veterans often face disadvantage or have difficulties which need addressing.

Assessing need

It is clear from our deep dives that there is a major difficulty across England, Scotland and Wales in understanding the extent of the local Veteran population. This includes areas in every type of category on our proportionality scale. Once someone has left the Armed Forces, there is no way of tracking their movement or checking that they have resettled to the place they intended on. A common theme is the need for capturing the number of Veterans there are in a local area and the needs they are faced with. This could then be shared with (without breaching data confidentiality) appropriate local services.

There is currently a RBL campaign to use the census to help collect data on the number and location of Veterans. The lack of data means that it is difficult for councils to be able to integrate the needs of the Armed Forces Community into their policies.

Engaging Veterans

There seems to be a significant minority of ex-Service personnel with a set of problems related to health, housing or debt who are often hard to engage. The difficulty councils face in reaching this group may in part be due to an unwillingness on the part of ex-Service personnel to identify as a Veteran. It was often commented that Veterans were too proud, or embarrassed to identify themselves as Veterans, especially when they are in a situation of need. A general distrust of statutory services for

¹² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449607/Tri-Service_families_continuous_attitude_survey_2015_main_report.pdf

¹³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488903/6_Health_and_Wellbeing_Wordshop_Summary.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488906/6b_-_FAQs_AF_Health_needs_assessment.pdf



various reasons, or a lack of awareness of how they operate, may also come into play. This seems to be a particular difficulty for Veterans who entered the military at a young age and left following a few years of service.

Some councils have recognised this situation and have designed innovative programmes to engage Veterans with complex issues which are in large part likely related to their service. They are confident that investing in support for Veterans can reduce demand on public services in the longer term.

Assessing need Good Practice

In **Wigan** (Category 4) arrangements have been made so that GPs ask patients whether they have ever served in the Armed Forces.

Capturing data has been identified as an issue to address in **Bradford** (Category 4). Adult services are now asking if a person has ever served when being entered onto their system. GPs also have information on members of the Armed Forces Community who have filled out their surveys.

Engaging Veterans Good Practice

Glasgow's (Category 4) Helping Heroes project is a hub which is funded by Glasgow City Council but managed by SSAFA with the council acting as a strategic partner. From the outset there was a conscious decision made to have the service independent of the council which has been successful in gaining the trust of Veterans some of whom had a distrust of statutory organisations due to debt or criminal justice issues.

Wigan (Category 4) has created a full time Veteran's key worker post who is a Veteran himself. He engages with Veterans in the lobbies of town halls and due to his experience can relate to members of the Armed Forces Community who are finding it difficult to engage with the council.

Wrexham (Category 5) has developed a web system which provides subscribers with information on what's being done in Wrexham about a particular topic that they are interested in (the Armed Forces could be one of them). The bulletins cover a range of issues and aim to be proactive in helping people address their specific needs. The system links to social media as the council want information to be as accessible as possible.

Top Tips

- Making the Armed Forces Community more aware of what the Covenant is and how it can be used will encourage them to self-identify as a Veteran if they need help with addressing a problem.
- Councils can support this approach by embedding asking whether people have served in the Armed Forces in their relevant procedures.
- Using Veterans as case workers is a good way to get Veterans engaged with services.

THE COVENANT: IMPACT AND IMPROVEMENTS

The impact of the Covenant

During the course of this research, and in particular in the deep dives, we have explored the impact of the Covenant on relations between councils, communities and the Armed Forces Community. And in our surveys we sought views on what steps could be taken nationally to increase the effectiveness of the Covenant. This section explores our findings in these areas.

In the vast majority of places in which we carried out deep dives, action to meet the needs of members of the Armed Forces Community was already in place before the Covenant was introduced. This reflects our perception that where the councils are seen to be successful in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community it is because it is seen as core council business rather than an add-on in response to the introduction of the Covenant. This was particularly so in places that fall into our categories 1,2 and 3. Interviewees in these places report that the Covenant has enabled the development of a more comprehensive and integrated approach to meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community. It is also seen to have encouraged a more collaborative

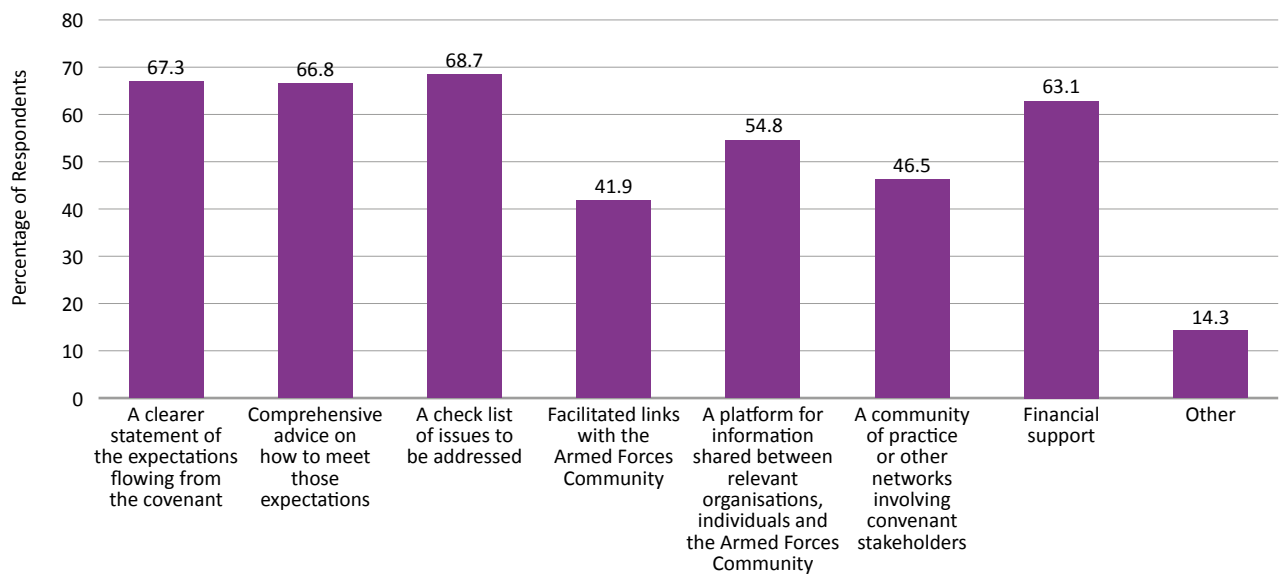
approach, enabling a shift from joint working on particular initiatives to a more strategic set of relationships.

In only one of our deep dive sites was the Covenant itself reported to have had a galvanising effect on action locally. In most cases the driving force for achieving the outcomes envisaged in the Covenant has been one or two individuals in the place who have used the Covenant to reinforce the need for action. In the vast majority of cases these individuals, often council officers, are former members of the Armed Forces or have close family links with a member or former member of the Armed Forces. The Covenant has been important in providing a clear context for discussions within the council, for action with service departments, particularly those concerned with housing, schools and employment, and as the underpinning of and focus for collaboration with the Armed Forces, the relevant charities and partner organisations.

Improving the delivery of the Covenant

In our survey of council Chief Executives and Champions we explored what steps could be taken at a national level to improve delivery of the Covenant.

Figure 18: What steps, if any, do you think could be taken at a national level to improve the delivery of the Covenant? (n=217)



Source: Council survey



In the council survey (figure 18) all of the options received high response rates, with the least frequently selected option (excluding the 'other' option) being 'facilitated links with the Armed Forces Community' (41.9 per cent). The responses that were most frequently selected by the 217 respondents related to understanding what the Covenant entails. This included the need for:

- A clearer statement of the expectations associated with the Covenant (67.3 per cent);
- A check list of issues to be addressed (68.7 per cent);
- Advice on how to meet those expectations (66.8 per cent).

The Champions expressed similar preferences (figure 19).

Our earlier recommendation on the need for a clear statement of expectations addresses the first of these points, and the draft toolkit is intended to go some way towards meeting the needs reflected in the other two points.

The role of the MoD and the Armed Forces

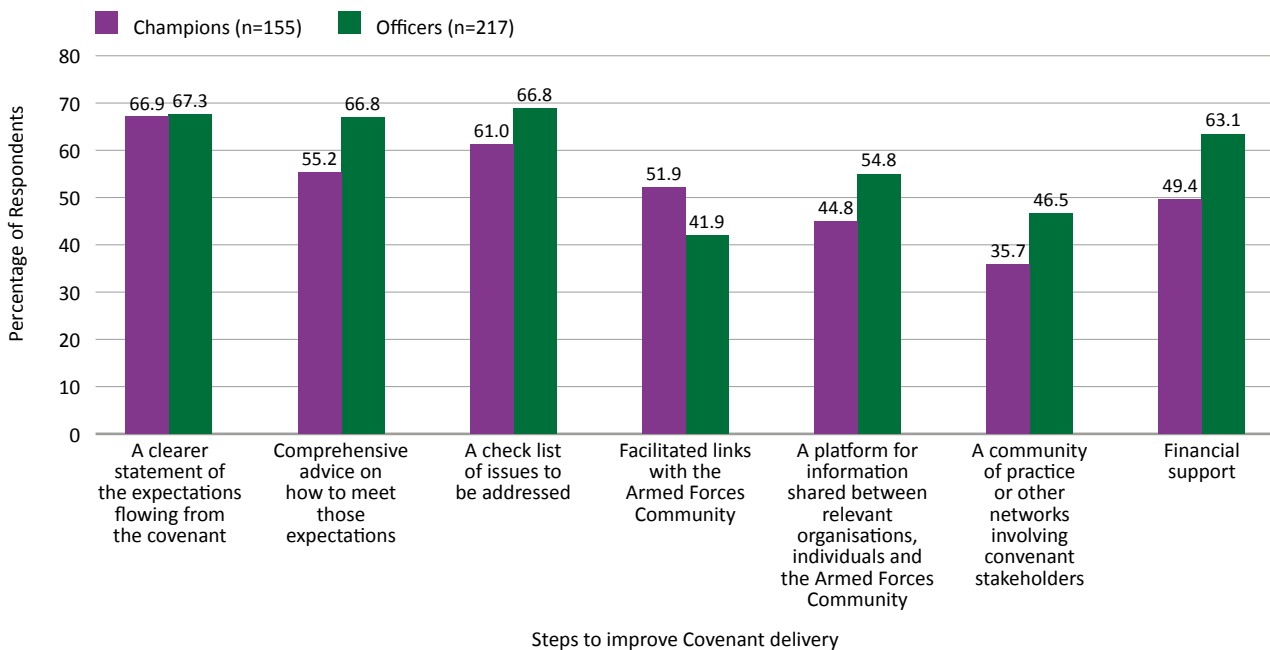
Much of the discussion nationally on the delivery of the local pledges flowing from the Armed Forces Covenant has focussed on the role of local councils. It is clear from our surveys and deep dives, however, that there are also steps that could be taken by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to enable more effective delivery of the Covenant pledges. They include:

- Improvements to the processes for preparing members of the Armed Forces and their families for transition and resettlement;
- Improving the information available to councils, particularly in areas to which significant numbers of former serving people and their families move or return after leaving the Armed Forces;
- Addressing the variability in the priority that Base Commanders give to relations with civil society and the delivery of the Covenant in particular.

This section explores these issues.

Our research has shown that in many circumstances and areas the relationship works well. This includes,

Figure 19: What steps, if any, do you think could be taken at a national level to improve the delivery of the Covenant?



Source: Council and Champions surveys



for example, planned large-scale movement of Service people and their families, such as the collaboration between the Army and Wiltshire Council on rebasing. We also have evidence of good joint working between the Armed Forces and councils on transition and resettlement where people are leaving on a planned basis and seeking to remain in the area where they served. The areas for improvement we have identified relate primarily to people leaving the Armed Forces in an unplanned way and people and seeking to resettle in a different area.

We understand that the Armed Forces have improved the support given around transition and resettlement. But through our deep dive research we have received a consistent message from the Armed Forces charities, Veterans, council officers and Covenant Champions and some senior members of the Armed Forces that the quality of support for transition is inconsistent. The people we have spoken to are convinced that this is one of the factors that causes between 5 and 10 per cent of Veterans to face challenging circumstances and makes it more difficult for councils to deliver some local pledges.

Drawing on our research we have identified three areas in which the Armed Forces could make improvements to the transition process:

- First, we are confident that the Armed Forces know their people well enough to identify those who are at risk of facing challenging circumstances and to whom additional support could be offered before they leave service. Additional investment and support at this stage could significantly reduce the need for public expenditure at a later date.
- Second, we believe that in some cases more could be done to ensure that people leaving service (and their families) have a good understanding of the realities of civilian life, particularly in relation to the availability, cost and quality of housing – including social and privately rented housing. It is important that spouses are at least as well briefed as their serving partner. The three Families Federations' Transition Liaison posts, recently funded by FIMT, have a contribution to make here.
- Third, we are aware that in some places there is scope for councils and other partners to play a bigger role in helping to prepare serving people and their families for civilian life. This could include, for example, providing information on housing

availability and cost and making sure they are aware of the sources of help and advice available to them. A more porous boundary pre-transition and resettlement could help people to cross that boundary.

We recommend that the MoD and the Armed Forces explore ways of improving the transition process by:

- Putting more effort into identifying people who are at risk of facing challenging circumstances and to whom additional support could be offered;
- Ensuring people leaving the Armed Forces are well briefed on the realities of civilian life and that spouses are at least as well-briefed as their serving partner;
- Involving more outside organisations in the transition process.

We are aware that this happens in some places which means that it could happen more widely and consistently, while recognising that putting such arrangements in place is bound to be easier in locations with a significant Armed Forces presence and a relationship of trust between the Armed Forces, the council and its partners. These recommendations are similar to some of the conclusions reached in the recent SSAFA report *The New Frontline*.¹⁵

As we noted above, housing is an area in which expectations about what the Covenant can deliver are particularly high and where the differences on either side of the boundary are particularly stark. The council housing officers we have spoken to have all highlighted the importance of good notice of a families' need for housing as a crucial factor in their ability to provide them with advice, support and in some cases accommodation. The extent to which that notice is available varies from place to place and is inevitably more challenging in areas without a significant serving presence to which Service families seek to move or return. We have heard that some areas receive better information than others and that in some places information that was previously available is no longer.

We recommend that the LGA, COSLA and MoD explore ways in which communication could be improved between significant Armed Forces bases and councils in whose areas Service families seek to live in order to facilitate effective briefing and preparation for resettlement.

¹⁵ www.ssafa.org.uk/thenewfrontline



A consistent theme of our deep dives has been the importance of good personal contacts between, for example, base commanders and senior councillors and council officers. Our interviewees have also referred to the importance of the senior officers in the Armed Forces putting their authority behind the Covenant. The frequency with which senior officers are moved in the Armed Forces means that maintaining these relationships can be challenging and inevitably different people will give this issue different levels of priority.

We recommend that, whilst there is an imperative on councils to build good relations with new senior officers, the MoD should ensure that Base Commanders and their equivalents are briefed on the importance of their role in relation to the Covenant.

Concerns have been expressed that policy developments such as localism and devolution to councils are hindering the delivery of local Covenant pledges. We found no evidence to substantiate this during the course of our work, but *we recommend* that the opportunities and implications of devolution are reviewed in any further research on the delivery of the Covenant.



CONCLUSIONS

Our research shows that there is a high level of awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant in local councils, particularly among Armed Forces Champions and senior officers, and that the vast majority of councils have a basic infrastructure in place to deliver the local pledges that flow from it. It is also clear, however, that many members of the Armed Forces Community perceive that they have faced disadvantage as a result of their service and that their local council does not have a good understanding of their needs. This report is intended to help government, councils and their partners to address the challenge arising from those perceptions.

Our research has identified a mismatch in expectations of the Covenant between some members of the Armed Forces Community on the one hand and government, national and local, on the other. The recent changes to the wording of the Covenant, including the explicit introduction of the concept of “fairness” has exacerbated that mismatch. *We recommend* that there be a clearer statement of expectations flowing from the Covenant at the local and national levels, including examples of what it cannot deliver.

We have been struck by the extent to which the driving force behind the Covenant at a local level has often come from one or two individuals, who often have close personal experience of or contact with the Armed Forces. We see that as a strength and *we recommend* that councils seek to identify and work with the understanding, drive and commitment a personal commitment of this type can deliver while at the same time seeking to embed an understanding of the Armed Forces across the council.

Our research has enabled us to develop a core infrastructure that should enable councils and their partners to deliver the Covenant and the local pledges that flow from it more effectively. We have also introduced the idea of a spectrum of circumstances in which councils find themselves that should assist in the adoption of proportionate approaches in different places depending of the nature and extent of the presence of the Armed Forces Community.

Our research has also identified examples of good practice being pursued by councils in the service areas most relevant to the Covenant. We are convinced that there is scope for more joint learning between councils to further test, develop and scale up these approaches. *We recommend* that the LGA work with the MoD, the Forces in Mind Trust and

other key partners to put in place an action research framework to enable councils to work collectively in this way.

Finally, we have identified areas in which the MoD could work with the Armed Forces to improve the delivery of the Covenant. They include: further improvement to the processes around transition and resettlement; improvements in the consistency of the information available to councils on people leaving the Armed Forces; action to tackle the variability in the priority that base commanders give to the Covenant and related issues.

We have identified four areas in which we consider that further work would be useful to help further improve the delivery of the Covenant. They are:

- To carry out four further deep dives in order to develop our understanding of the position in two types of places and to further develop and test our draft toolkit. The two types of place are: places with major serving Armed Forces presence (probably North Yorkshire and Staffordshire) and places with minimum Armed Forces presence;
- To arrange a session with London Boroughs, through London Councils, to explore the delivery of the Covenant in the capital. This reflects the fact that we have found it hard to engage with London Boroughs in this research;
- To carry out some research on the extent to which action to identify and meet the needs of people leaving the Armed Forces who are at risk of facing difficult circumstances could save public sector resources in the longer term;
- To explore the reasons for our finding that fewer councils report having adjusted their social care policies to reflect the covenant than other policies.



TOOL KIT

This is a draft tool kit we have developed throughout our research. We envisage councils could use this as a way to test their implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant. It consists of three parts:

- Core Infrastructure and the self-assessment tool
- Scenarios
- Top Tips

Core Infrastructure

This list can also be found in the councils and the Covenant section of the report. Following our literature review it was clear that there were a number of mechanisms the successful councils had in place when implementing the Covenant. We have since developed and tested the list of Core Infrastructure in each of the surveys and deep dives. We have identified that the following would be in place in a council that is delivering local Covenant pledges well.

Core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant	
Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An elected member Champion • An officer point of contact within the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outward-facing forum which meets regularly and includes the following: military representatives; military charities; public sector representatives; effective council members (senior elected members on cabinet); and the officer champion. • A mechanism for collaboration with partners
Communication	Vision and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web page or platform with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces Community • A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the council • A route through which concerns can be raised • Training of frontline staff • The production of an annual report highlighting the key actions taken that year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action plan which leads to action and is monitored and reviewed • Policy reviews • Enthusiasm and commitment



Self-assessment tool

We have developed a self-assessment tool using the core infrastructure above. This is a tool that could be used by councils to test the core infrastructure they have in place and identify any areas with gaps in delivery of local Covenant pledges.

Vision and commitment

Clarity of focus

- What is the Armed Forces Community presence?
- What mechanisms are in place to capture the data of AFC presence including information on the number of Veterans and their needs?
- Is there a shared understanding of the expectations of the local Covenant and the delivery of local Covenant pledges?
- Is there a clear local statement of entitlement?
- Is it clear what the Covenant does and doesn't do within each public service area?
- Is the type and scale of local Armed Forces population taken into consideration?
- Is there a clear understanding of the needs of the local Armed Forces Community?
 - Is this evidenced through data?
- Is there a clear direction of travel for local Covenant delivery?
 - What does successful implementation look like in the local context?

Basics

Has policy been updated to reflect local Covenant pledges (in housing, education, employment, public health, adult social care etc.)?

- Have other mechanisms been implemented which respond to the local needs of the AFC?
 - Have these mechanisms had the desired reach and impact? How has/can this be evidenced?
- Is there a strong commitment and enthusiasm from LA staff involved?
 - Are there mechanisms in place to capitalise on this enthusiasm?
- Have any gaps to effective implementation been discovered?
 - If so, have relevant steps been taken to minimise impact?

Individuals

- Is there (a) lead officer(s) who is the key point of contact for partners?
- Is there an elected member champion?
 - Is the AF champion a senior LA member (i.e. On cabinet)?
 - Is the AF Champion actively engaged in and committed to Covenant matters?
 - Does the AF Champion have a genuine interest in the Armed Forces Community?
 - Does the AF Champion regularly liaise with the Covenant officer?



Collaboration

Forum

- Is there a formal council-led forum in place?
- Does the forum include representatives from the following: local military, military charities¹⁶, council officers from different facets, elected AF Champion, officer champion, local employers or business organisations, and other stakeholders?
- Does the forum have a clear vision with key goals which address the needs of the local AFC?
 - Are these goals delivered? If not, are steps taken to ensure that the goals are delivered?
- Is there an effective mechanism in place for following up and reporting progress on the outcome of forum meetings?
 - How are the impacts of the forum tested/evidenced?
 - How could the forum have a greater impact in the local area?
- Is there a regional forum which identifies strengths and shares best practice?

Basics

- Is there an evidence-based action plan which a wide range of partners are trying to achieve?
- Is this action plan monitored and reviewed?
 - Is there a mechanism in place to test the impact of the action plan?
 - Could anything be introduced which would increase the positive impact of the plan?

Communication

Internal

- Are there key points of contact within each public service area which collaborate on Covenant matters?
 - Are there mechanisms in place to ensure these relationships are maintained?
- Are there mechanisms in place for briefing frontline staff?
 - Are these mechanisms working? If not, what can be done to increase the knowledge of the Covenant at the frontline level?
- Is there a mechanism in place for maintaining knowledge and information?
 - Does this reduce the reliance on one staff member for being the driver of Covenant implementation?

External communication

- Is there an easy route for contact on Covenant queries?
 - Would an AFC member in need know where to go?
 - Is this disseminated across military partners so they can signpost?
- Is there a website which has clear, concise information relating to the local Armed Forces Community?
 - Does the website signpost to relevant services?
- Are there mechanisms in place to communicate with hard to reach members of the AFC?
- Are the benefits of the Covenant clearly stated?
- Is the impact of local Covenant pledges clearly evidenced?

¹⁶ A database of registered Armed Forces charities can be found at www.armedforcescharities.org.uk

A list of Cobseo (the Confederation of Service Charities) members can be found at www.cobseo.org.uk/members/directory/



Scenarios

We developed the following scenarios for our sense-making event, which was attended by members of the advisory board and some council Covenant officers and champions who have been involved with the project. It is a useful tool for councils to think about the delivery mechanisms that they have in place in order to address the main issues in the scenario.

The Nelsons

A Royal Navy family living in MoD Service Families Accommodation. The father is a submariner currently on patrol and can only be contacted in an extreme emergency. The mother does not have a job. They have two children aged 6 and 10. The deadline for applications for the older child for secondary schools is imminent. The parents have separated and are in the process of divorcing; the husband when onshore stays on base in MoD single living accommodation. The family has been served with notice to vacate their house in 93 days. The mother wishes to stay in the area (in which housing pressures are acute) and has approached the council for help.

The Darlings

An Army family. They are moving from Germany to a base in an English county. Service Families Accommodation is provided at three locations in the area and family has been told that they will not know precisely where in the county their accommodation will be until two weeks before they arrive. They have two children aged 8 and 13. The youngest has dyslexia and has a special educational needs assessment, whilst the older child requires routine but specialist secondary medical monitoring.

The Trenchards

A Royal Air Force family. He is in the RAF Regiment and is due to leave the RAF in 5 months at the end of his engagement aged 44. His wife has a part-time job. They have two children aged 16 and 17 at the local Sixth Form College and want to settle in the area. Having joined the RAF initially as an airman, the father is now a Junior Officer with qualifications which are not fully recognised outside the Armed Forces. The father is beginning to look for work and for ways of translating his qualifications to be recognised by civilian employers. They do not have enough money to place a deposit on a house. What help is available to them, in housing and employment, as well as any other areas?

Roger Jarvis

Roger left the Army in 2001 having served in the Royal Logistics Corps for 14 years and taken voluntary redundancy as a Senior NCO. He is in his early 50s and left his wife 8 years ago amidst mutual allegations of domestic abuse. He has had a variety of low-skilled jobs since leaving the Army and was recently made redundant and was not able to pay the rent on his flat. He has now moved back, without work, to the area in which he went to school, but his family no longer lives in the area and he appears to have no social network there either.



Top Tips

During the course of our deep dive visits we have identified a number of Top Tips which we think may be helpful to councils and their partners who are thinking about ways of improving the local delivery of the Covenant. The following Top Tips are intended to complement the tips that are included earlier in section five of our report.

Good relationships

Establish, maintain and regularly refresh contact with base commanders and other key people in Armed Forces bases (reflecting the regular churn in postholders).

Use ceremonies to build and maintain contacts with key people.

Invite senior representatives of the Armed Forces Community to serve on relevant local partnership bodies, not just those concerned with the Covenant.

Build and maintain good contacts with Armed Forces charities and establish a shared understanding with them on issues such as at what stage people with housing needs will be referred to them.

Council organisation

Establish a dedicated, time-limited post to help get the core infrastructure and contacts in place.

Encourage the council's overview and scrutiny function to carry out a regular review of the delivery of the Covenant.

Ensure that the Covenant features in council training programmes.

Involve the RBL or another similar charity in briefing public-facing council staff.

Employ Veterans and Service spouses as key workers providing support for Veterans.

Engaging with the bases

Secure, enable, encourage shared use of facilities on or near Armed Forces bases.

Identify a champion for each base – usually the member in whose ward or division the base is located.

Engage with young people from Armed Forces families – they bring a different and honest perspective. This can be done through the Service Youth Forums.

And finally...

Recognise that Base Commanders have to juggle a number of priorities, some of which will always have more priority than the Covenant.



ANNEX

List of Advisory Group members

Our sincere thanks, as well as those of Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association, go to all those those individuals and organisations who selflessly gave their valuable time to provide the information on which this report is based.

They include:

LGA

WLGA

Scottish Government

Welsh Assembly

Forces in Mind Trust

Royal British Legion

Ministry of Defence

Department of Communities and Local Government

COBSEO

Public Health England

SOLACE

Naval Families Federation on behalf of the Family Federations

Department for Work and Pensions

Veterans UK



Awarding funds from
The National Lottery®

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