



Armed Forces Covenant Self-Assessment

Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board

August 2019

Reviewed April 2020

The self-assessment toolkit was recommended to Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board by The Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans as part of the Forces in Mind Trust and Local Government Association commissioned report – [Our Community: Our Covenant](#) – that sets out the key commonalities to successful Covenant partnerships.

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The Armed Forces Covenant says this about the toolkit. “We drafted a self-assessment tool during the first edition of this report and have tested this out throughout our subsequent deep dives. We developed this tool for councils who are wanting to assess the situation of their local Covenant pledges. It will enable local partners to have a meaningful discussion about their commitment to ensuring members of the Armed Forces Community do not face disadvantage due to their service. It will identify any gaps in provision and focus future action for delivery and therefore would be a useful activity to complete every year. The tool is split into four sections: vision and commitment; individuals; collaboration; and communication. It is designed for members of the Armed Forces Covenant Forum, or a range of stakeholders (including council officers, military representatives, and representatives from military charities) to have a conversation about their local area in relation to the prompts. It is not designed for every question to have an answer, but merely a way for a question to be considered if it is relevant in each local context.”

Vision and Commitment

Armed Forces Community presence

What is the AFC make-up in your local area?

The Armed Forces Community within Hertfordshire can be defined as Regular and Reserve service personnel and veterans from all three Services, along with their immediate families, working and/ or residing in Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire is not a garrisoned county, but is home to a number of military units, service personnel and service organisations that represent the Armed Forces Community and who play an important role in the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board. These include:

- Permanent Joint Headquarters, Northwood, which accommodates over 2,000 service personnel from all three services.
- D Squadron of 254 Medical Regiment based at the TA Centre in Hitchin.
- 3 Platoon of E Company, 3rd Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment based at Hertford.

These are supported by cadet organisations from all three Services, and organisations such as the Royal British Legion, the Royal Naval Association, the Army Benevolent Fund and the Royal Air Force Association, all of which represent the interests of Military veterans within Hertfordshire.

What more could be done to fully understand the AFC footprint?

Recently we have completed a review of national data studies and local resident's survey to understand more about the Armed Forces community in Hertfordshire. Pulling this information together has allowed us to identify gaps in our knowledge and address how and when we might fill those gaps.

Is there potential for collaboration on the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant with neighbouring councils?

Currently, officers from Hertfordshire County Council are in close contact with those in neighbouring counties as well as other Local Authorities who are from non-garrisoned counties.

Armed Forces Community needs

Is there a good understanding of the needs of the AFC in housing, health, employment and schools and children's services? How were those needs identified?

We have a good understanding of the needs in the AFC in Hertfordshire which have been identified through different means. The level of understanding is commensurate with knowledge across the country as we recognise it is difficult to gather data from certain parts of the AFC. We recently put together a summary of relevant national research studies as it pertains to the Covenant. This paper includes information about serving personnel, veterans and their families nationally as well as the information we have regarding veterans in Hertfordshire.

In 2019 a Veterans Forum was established in Dacorum, a District of Hertfordshire, which is bringing together representatives from organisations in the area who support veterans. We expect this will be a source of anecdotal information on needs, identify and address any issues around access to services as well as raising the profile of the armed forces.

This year the Board has established a health sub group who are focused on determining and developing solutions to the top three access issues for veterans in Hertfordshire to health services and working to influence current NHS workstreams to consider the health needs of veterans.

Which organisations would be able to help address those needs? (ie. Council, Armed Forces, charities)?

Members of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board:

Hertfordshire County Council, Councillor Champions from each District, Northwood Joint Headquarters, 254 Medical Regiment, Military Civilian Integration, Army Families Federation, RAF Families Federation, Naval Families Federation, Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Viewpoint, Ministry of Defence, East & North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group, Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group, Hertfordshire Public Health, Department for Work and Pensions, Hertfordshire Constabulary,

Hertfordshire Committee of the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, East Anglia Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, East of England Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee, Stevenage Citizens Advice.

What is currently being done to help address those needs?

This year the Board has established a health sub group who are focused on determining and developing solutions to the top three access issues for veterans in Hertfordshire to health services and working to influence current NHS workstreams to consider the health needs of veterans.

In 2014 mousemats with facts about veterans were distributed to GP surgeries across the county. This was in an effort to ensure that GPs were reminded of the different needs or perspective that veterans may have.

We continue to promote an e-learning training module which we have adapted for Hertfordshire. It is designed to help colleagues, and members of the public, better understand the needs and perspective of veterans and those in the Armed Forces.

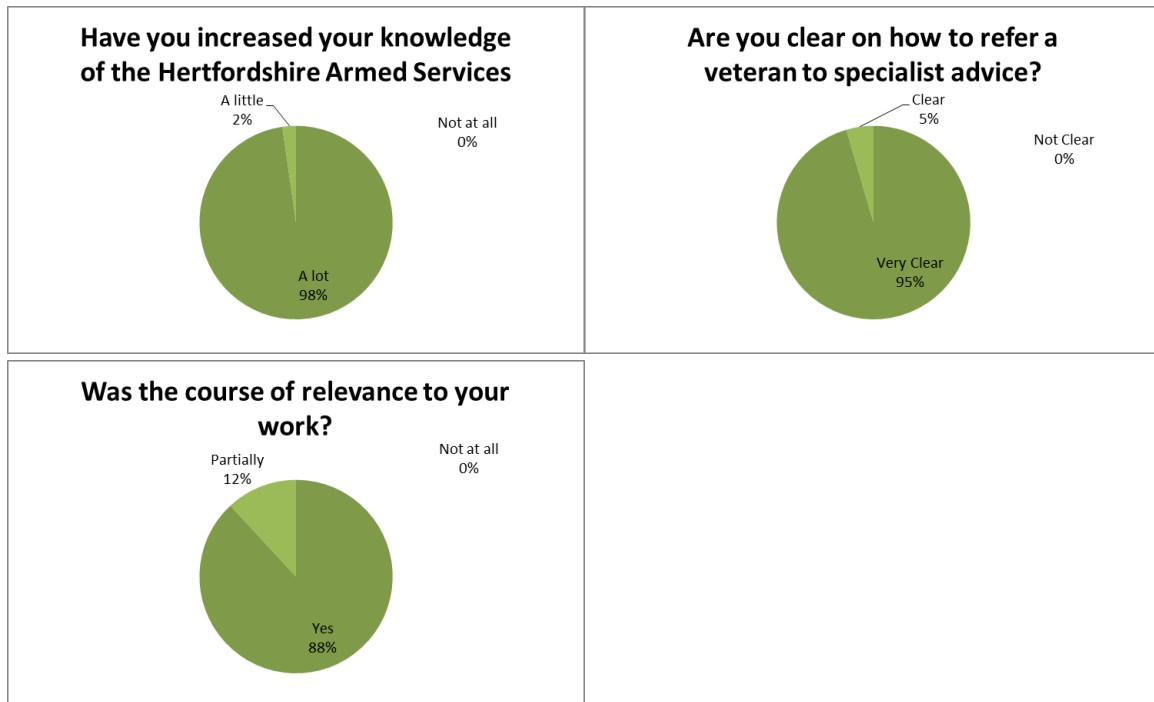
We are honouring and supporting troops who currently serve abroad by organising an annual Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas Art Competition. The competition asks primary school pupils to create pictures on a certain theme, this year about “heroes”, which are then judged by staff at Hertfordshire County Council with the final winners chosen by Northwood HQ. The winning artwork is sent to Armed Forces personnel serving away from their families at Christmas. The winning artist is honoured at a school assembly and awarded a “day of adventure”, rock climbing, sailing and shooting at Northwood HQ as their prize. This aspect of the competition is particularly relevant to the ‘joining communities’ workstream.

We also work with local schools who request military representatives to be at their assemblies or events, we encourage schools to conduct assemblies for Armed Forces Day and invited local school children to attend the flag raising ceremony for Armed Forces Day at Hertfordshire County Council.

District Councils are responsible for housing needs and each of the 10 District Councils in Hertfordshire has a named Armed Forces Champion who all sit on the Armed Forces Covenant Board.

In 2017 Hertfordshire County Council conducted training for all frontline customer service and housing advisors to raise awareness of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant and local government responsibilities and to better inform front line advisors on how to support and signpost veterans. Over 100 delegates attended representing all eleven councils in Hertfordshire and also representation from Citizens Advice. There was a request that those who attended would adopt a ‘train the trainer’ concept and deliver the training content to their colleagues/teams.

Evaluation of the feedback forms indicates that the training was effective and relevant. The majority of delegates were not familiar with the Covenant - approximately 60% of delegates had not previously heard about the Covenant and did not fully understand their responsibilities towards members of the armed forces communities prior to the training.



Key headlines

- ❖ 88% of delegates said the training was relevant to their work
- ❖ 98% of delegates said they have increased their knowledge of the Covenant and the needs of the armed forces communities as a result of the training
- ❖ 95% of delegates said they were clear about how to refer a veteran or a family member to specialist support

HCC working with the RBL have ensured that the Veterans Gateway is now included on **HertsHelp** - a network of community organisations in Hertfordshire working together to listen and help residents find independent support, guidance and information to get the most out of life.

What else can be done to address these needs?

Commensurate with resources available; more partnership working between the different organisations represented on the Board.

Future direction

Is there a shared understanding of what successful implementation of the Covenant would look like?

The aims of the Covenant are set out in the [Armed Forces Covenant document](#) and understood as:

Successful implementation of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant would mean that businesses, military organisations, charities and the local authorities within Hertfordshire are working together to ensure that:

1. No veteran faces a disadvantage when accessing public services in Hertfordshire
2. Veterans and currently serving members of the military and their families are honoured and celebrated for the sacrifices they have made
3. Military and civilian communities are well integrated, have an understanding of one another's perspective and experience and upon leaving service veterans are able to adapt successfully to civilian life.

When new Board members join the Board, they are provided with a number of core documents which explain the work of the Board, terms of reference and action plans.

Each year the Board publish an annual report presented to County Councillors, also shared on the Hertfordshire Heroes website.

Action planning process

Have the areas for action been defined?

Yes, the overall aims of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board are:

- ensuring that veterans and those in the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged in accessing services;
- recognising and remembering the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community and

- encouraging the integration of service life into civilian life.

Areas of action to achieve those aims are outlined in an [annual action plan](#) which is reviewed every six months.

Is there an agreed method to the action planning process?

Yes, the Board identify needs over and above those that are of a cyclical nature e.g. recognising and remembering the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community particularly Armed Forces Week.

How is the action monitored and reviewed?

The action plan is monitored by the Officers acting as the Board secretariat and reviewed every six months.

Individuals

Armed Forces Champion

Is there an elected member Armed Forces Champion?

Yes, for the County Council as well as for each of the 10 District or Borough Councils.

What does the role involve?

The key elements of the Champion's and Lead officer's role is to:

- Understand the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant, how the Covenant can support these aims in local communities and how your organisation/local authority can uphold the Covenant.
- Consider the needs of the Armed Forces community in relation to Local Authority policies and service delivery, such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment or housing allocation schemes.
- Actively communicate the Covenant within the community and the Covenant Partnership's work in taking it forward both within and outside the organisation.
- Be the point of contact for local Armed Forces (including Reserve) Unit(s) and other key stakeholders, such as military charities and other service providers.
- Ensure that staff who have daily contact with the public are aware of the Covenant and understand how it impacts upon local services and delivery

Are there areas in which the role of the Armed Forces Champion can evolve?

Officers

Who is the senior officer responsible for the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and who has day to day responsibility for it?

Lead Officer is Kate Brierley working with Ashley Lamprell.

How can this role be further supported?

Collaboration

Forum/ co-ordinating group

Is there a Covenant Forum in place? Who are the members of the forum? How frequently does it meet?

We have an Armed Forces Covenant Board which meets twice a year. The delivery of the Covenant is overseen by the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board which comprises of representatives from Hertfordshire County Council, the Armed Forces Tri-Services, Northwood HQ, 254 Medical Regiment RAMC, the Royal British Legion (RBL), SSAFA, Citizens Advice, Families Federations, DWP, Police, Viewpoint (a local charity) Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association, Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee (VAPC), all of the county's district and borough councils, NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and the county's Chamber of Commerce.

What are the key items covered at the forum?

The key items covered at the Board meetings are

- reviewing the action plan and updates from colleagues on progress to date,
- an update from the Military perspective to ensure we have a common understanding
- For information updates
- Dates for your diary updates

How are any actions being monitored?

Actions agreed at the Board meeting are recorded by the Officers and sent to all Board members. The status of those actions is reviewed at the next meeting.

To what extent are the goals of the forum being achieved? What could be done to increase the impact the forum is having?

Goals of the forum are being achieved and it is difficult to see how this could be increased unless more resources were allocated to this work.

How frequently is the forum's membership, agenda and frequency of meeting reviewed?

Biannually

Would it help if there was a sub-regional forum with neighbouring councils?

We network with colleagues in neighbouring councils on an informal basis as well as other non-garrisoned counties to share best practice and work on discreet projects.

Relationships

Are there mechanisms in place to maintain relationships between Armed Forces stakeholders?

Yes, biannual Board meetings. Military colleagues are also invited to events and celebrations.

Could the council, the Armed Forces and charities work together more effectively?

Yes, colleagues from the county council have attempted to work with military charities on joint projects including funding bids but none to date have been successful.

Would an increase in sub-regional collaboration help with delivering local Covenant pledges?

Communication

Internal

How are council/MoD/charity officers and front-line staff briefed on the Covenant?

Staff - Through internal communication channels such as Yammer, intranet pages, Directorate newsletters and promotion of relevant training. Also during national events such as Armed Forces Day we use it as an opportunity to raise the profile of the Covenant.

The Chairman of the Board sends an annual update letter to the Minister at the MOD.

The Council – through an annual update report for the Cabinet Panel responsible

How is knowledge and information gathered?

Information is gathered by Council Officers from Covenant newsletters, MOD newsletters and shared weekly by email with Board members. It would be useful to have information from the central Covenant team.

How could knowledge sharing within organisations be improved?

External

How is action on local Covenant pledges disseminated to the public?

Through HCC press releases and via the Hertfordshire Heroes website. We are aware that some if not all partners will share on their own communications channels if appropriate.

How could the dissemination of information be improved?

Is there an up to date website which is easy to use and regularly updated? Who hosts the website (council, HIVE or equivalent or charity)?

Yes, the Council hosts the website [Hertfordshire Heroes](#).

How is the support which is on offer to the AFC communicated to the hard to reach?

The 11 Armed Forces Covenant Champions who cover the whole of Hertfordshire are close to hard to reach communities through their work as local Councillors and we expect all partners on the Board to take a role in this. Military charities on the Board are invited to the county Voluntary and Community Sector Conference to help build strong relationships with providers and service users.

Impact

How is the impact of local Covenant delivery evidenced?

We evidence the impact of local Covenant delivery through our annual report to the Education, Libraries and Localism Cabinet Panel and to Full Council.

This self-assessment provides a deeper level of evidence of impact which is available for Board members.

Our action plan is updated with progress and achievements detailed. This is publicly available.