

Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board meeting

Wednesday 5 March 2025, 14:00-16:00

Location: Beech Room, Hertfordshire Development Centre,
Stevenage



Attending:

- His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire Mr Robert Voss CBE
- Cllr Fiona Hill, Chairman Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board
- Cllr Mark Mills-Bishop, Vice Chairman Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board
- Ashley Lamprell, HCC
- Cllr Val Bryant, North Herts District Council
- Cllr Claire Parris, Stevenage Borough Council
- Cllr Dawn Gamble, St Albans City and District Council
- Cllr Sarah Nelmes, Three Rivers District Council
- Cllr Amanda Grimston, Watford Borough Council
- Cllr Paul Seeby, Broxbourne Borough Council
- WO2 Stan Nilsson, 162 Hospital Squadron
- Gp Capt Neil Towers, Northwood HQ
- Clare Smith, Northwood HQ
- Rab Davies, Northwood HQ
- Lt Cdr Rubin Nash, HMS WILDFIRE
- Jim Robinson, SAAFA Herts
- Ricky Bartlett, Hertfordshire Constabulary
- Barrie Griffiths, East of England Veterans Advisory Committee
- Harper Brown, Herts and West Essex ICB
- John Phillips, Op Nova
- William Brown, East Anglia Reserve Forces' and Cadet's Association Herts County Forum
- Luther Blissett OBE DL, Forces United
- Ian Pearce, Carers in Herts
- Pip Darby, DWP
- Leslie Billy, Viewpoint
- Shawn Pignon, Viewpoint
- Donna Shultz, Chamber of Commerce
- Charlotte Jones, NFF
- Adam Twidell, HAPTC

Apologies received from:



- Kate Brierley, Hertfordshire County Council
- Councillor Alan Chesterman, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
- Veronica Barbaglia, HCT
- Lorraine Lees, Defence Transition Service
- Vanessa Plumley, RAF Families Federation
- Cat Calder, Army Families Federation
- Royal British Legion Chair
- Kristina Carrington, EARFCA

Board members not in attendance:

- Cllr David Andrews, East Herts District Council
- Cllr Alpha Collins, Hertsmere Borough Council
- Cllr Ron Tindall, Dacorum Champion
- Angela Fox, Citizen's Advice
- Dr Oliver Pugh, HPFT
- Louise Savoury, HCC Public Health

Guests attending to speak:



- Darren Hickie, The Bridge for Heroes
- Roxanne Brind, OVA
- Paul Robin, Hertfordshire Community Foundation

1	Welcome from the Chairman and introductions	Actions
	The Chairman welcomed attendees and introduced His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire Mr Robert Voss who emphasised the critical support needed for the Armed Forces during these challenging times.	
2	Apologies and Substitutions	
	Apologies were read by Ashley Lamprell and are detailed above.	
3	Minutes and actions from the previous meeting held 14 March 2024	
	<p>Ashley Lamprell reviewed the actions from the meeting held 9 October March 2024. Updates for two actions were not available at the time of meeting and have been included in the actions progress and minutes here.</p>  <p>Action Progress and minutes_9Oct2024.pc</p> <p>The minutes were agreed upon with no comments.</p>	
4	Hertfordshire County Council's Gambling Harms strategy	
	<p>Fiona Deans, Health Improvement Lead at Hertfordshire County Council presented to the Board on Hertfordshire County Council's Gambling Harm strategy including statistics, strategic priorities and actions to support veterans.</p>  <p>05.03.25 Hertfordshire Armed</p> <p>Fiona mentioned that she was keen to work with the Board on connecting with veterans, increasing awareness amongst veterans groups about support services, organisations including screening questions as well as gambling awareness training for organisations.</p>	<p>Roxanne Brind to share specific training available on gambling harms with Fiona Deans</p>

	<p>There was a brief discussion about the gambling industry's involvement in this work.</p> <p>Roxanne from the Office for Veteran's Affairs shared that there is specific training available. She will share this with Fiona Deans.</p> <p>Clare Parris shared with the Board that there is a new veterans group in Stevenage and will put them in touch with Fiona Deans about this.</p>	<p>Clr Parris to put the new veterans group, The Muster Point, in touch with Fiona Deans</p>
5	Military Perspective	
	<p>The Chairman invited the following Board members to share their updates.</p> <p>Hertfordshire Lieutenancy Update – The Lord Lieutenant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 66 Gold, 137 silver and 445 bronze holders in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) in Hertfordshire. <p>Northwood HQ - Group Captain Neil Towers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,500 personnel including 2,000 military members from NATO nations on site. • Housing standards need improvement and Defence Infrastructure Organisation addressing issues such as mould and repairs. • Collaboration with Merchant Taylor School on sharing sports facilities • Successful Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas Art Competition with schools, fostering creativity and engagement. <p>162 Hospital Squadron - Stan Nilsson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-established presence in Hitchin with a successful Remembrance Sunday parade involving 45 Army Reservists. Collaboration with the Royal British Legion in Hitchin to grow community engagement. • Positive feedback from an employer engagement event. • Received back Reserves from deployments in Eastern Europe and Africa; continuous training to maintain high standards and participation in operations. <p>East Anglia Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association (EARFCA) - William Brown</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army Centre Region HQ transitioning to Joint Military Command to free up unit resources. Focus on community engagement and potential increase in Army Cadets, requiring more adult volunteers. • Hertfordshire reserve strength: 41 Royal Navy, 70 Army personnel. • Hertfordshire cadet: Sea Cadets (96 adults, 271 cadets), Army Cadet Force (209 adults, 1200 cadets), Combined Cadet Forces (90 adults, 939 cadets), RAF Air Cadets (100 adults, 565 cadets). • Progress on rent for cadet huts; councils encouraged to develop guiding policies. • Awards among Hertfordshire councils: Gold (Hertfordshire County Council), Silver (Stevenage Borough Council), Bronze (Dacorum Borough Council, East Hertfordshire District Council, Hertford Town Council, Watford Rural Parish Council). • Encouragement for more employers to sign up for ERS. <p>Discussion on Education Costs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Amanda Grimston raised concerns about extra costs for service personnel with children in private schools due to recent tax changes. • Charlotte Jones from Naval Families Federation mentioned available funding, including a hardship fund for private school fees and support for admissions and education advice. She emphasised promoting the Service Pupil Premium to support service children. • Group Captain Neil Towers clarified that the continuity of education allowance has been increased to partially offset the VAT rise, ensuring stability for children in private and boarding schools. He also emphasized the need for more adult volunteers, particularly veterans, to support cadet units. <p>HMS Wildfire – Lt Cdr Rubin Nash</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HMS Wildfire is a maritime reservist unit located at Northwood, focusing on phase one training and general warfare output. Has a balanced mix of ex-regulars and new recruits. • Participated in Remembrance events in St. Albans and supported HMS St. Albans. • Celebrating the 25th anniversary of commissioning as HMS Wildfire this year. • Main challenge is recruitment, with a positive outlook for new recruits and engagement with employers and university naval units. 	
6	Office for Veterans' Affairs workplan and priorities	
	Roxanne Brind, Regional and Devolved Area Manager from the Office for Veterans' Affairs presented:	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OVA has moved into MOD • The Veterans' Strategy is being developed with a focus on comprehensive support for veterans, aiming for release by the end of summer. Ministerial group to convene in late April to coordinate efforts across all government departments. • Valour – this is a project to build institutional resilience through government-paid positions to improve coordination and reduce reliance on individual-driven support systems. The aim is to prevent veterans from getting stuck in the signposting loop. • OP Ascend, an employment pathway focusing on both entry-level jobs and underemployment, has launched. Run by Forces Employment Charity. Eight sector pathways designed to utilise veterans' unique skill sets, including cyber and logistics. • Veterans now receive ID cards upon leaving service, with over 350,000 cards delivered. Digital ID cards in development to be used for voter ID and other government services. • Gov.uk pages have replaced Veterans' Gateway for direct access to support services. • Nuclear Test Veterans Review launched and LGBTQ reviews underway and a creation of a memorial at the National Arboretum. • OVA working under Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to guide funding pathways focusing on reducing social isolation and engaging veterans in community activities. Encouragement for alternative engagement methods such as cadet volunteers. • Minister keen to engage with veterans at events and see service deliverables in action. • Open invitation for feedback and ideas to improve veteran support services. Please send these via Ashley Lamprell. <p>Discussion points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran ID Cards wait time reduced from 12-16 weeks to 6-8 weeks. • Positive feedback on the Minister's understanding and support for the military and veterans community. • Minister takes unpaid carers seriously, emphasis on sharing local initiatives to support unpaid carers with the OVA. Please do this via Ashley Lamprell. • Mention of the Armed Forces Carers Passport, designed to support continuity of care giving arrangements for Service Personnel. • Question about flying the progress flag at Northwood HQ to mark the 25th anniversary of lifting the ban on LGBT personnel. Cllr Sarah Nelmes noted it is a planning permission issue and they can be in touch offline. 	<p>Please send any feedback or ideas to improve veteran services for the OVA to Ashley Lamprell</p> <p>Ashley Lamprell to connect Cllr Sarah Nelmes and Group Captain Neil Towers re flag flying.</p>
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7	Hertfordshire Community Foundation introduction	
	<p>Paul Robin, CEO of Hertfordshire Community Foundation (HCF), highlighted the foundation's role as an independent grant-giving charity supporting grassroots charities and voluntary groups in Hertfordshire. He emphasised the foundation's impact, having awarded over £5.4 million last year to 547 charities and groups, and 491 families, while also providing training to nearly 900 individuals to improve their effectiveness.</p>  <p>Item7_HCFArmed Forces Covenant Boa</p>	
8	Thrive Together Programme	
	<p>Darren Hickie, programme manager of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's Thrive Together Programme in East of England, explained the programme which aims to empower veterans and their families through sustainable support networks and community integration. The programme focuses on enhancing wellbeing, reducing mental health stigma and improving access to support services across East England</p>  <p>Item8_Thrive_Together_Presentation_5_M</p> <p>Discussion points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to a question, Darren Hickie explained that the method for measuring the success of funded projects is that each project has specific KPIs and a clear reporting structure to ensure accountability and value. • Pip Darby from DWP mentioned ongoing efforts to set up hubs and clubs in Bedford, Luton, and Milton Keynes, emphasising collaboration with multiple organisations. • In response to a question about success of the projects in reducing mental health stigma, Darren noted that the project starts in April, with details to be shared later. <p>Board members invited to the 2nd East of England Armed Forces Conference, taking place on April 24th 2025, at the Newmarket Racecourses Conference Centre Select tickets – East of England Armed Forces Conference 24 April 2025 – Newmarket Racecourse, Rowley Mile Course</p>	

9	Family Focus Programme	
	<p>Ian Pearce from Carer in Herts provided an update on a bid submitted to the Family Focus Programme Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bid aims to support unpaid carers of veterans in Hertfordshire by addressing challenges such as loneliness, mental health issues and lack of access to support services. • The proposed initiatives include setting up a co-production board, recruiting a full-time carer support advisor, increasing carer registrations, establishing peer support hubs and providing specialised training and bereavement support. • If the bid is successful there is an intention to develop a Memorandum of Understanding and work in partnership with the Board as collaboration with specialist agencies involved with the military community is crucial to the bid. There were no objectives to the HAFC entering into such an arrangement for the purpose of this project. • The Chairman noted the Board is supportive of the bid. Ian will keep the Board updated on the outcome of the bid which is expected late March. 	Ian Pearce to inform Ashley Lamprell of the outcome of the bid
10	Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board Action Plan 2024/2025 progress update	
	There were no comments to the action plan and the plan was agreed.	Ashley Lamprell to add action plan to the HH website
11	Close	
	<p>The Chairman thanked Cllr. Adam Twidell for his work to promote the Covenant to the Parish and Town Councils in Hertfordshire and highlighted the lack of engagement from Town and Parish Councils to date. Efforts are being made to encourage participation including sending letters to county councillors. Despite low engagement from Town and Parish Councils, the Chairman urged spreading the word.</p> <p>Board was reminded that County Council elections are on 1 May 2025.</p> <p>The Chairman invited the Lord Lieutenant to share any final remarks. The Lord Lieutenant echoed his thanks and encouraged keeping the Lieutenancy informed of events and emphasised support. The Chairman expressed thanks to all attendees and subgroup leads. The meeting closed.</p>	