



HERTFORDSHIRE
HEROES



Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board Annual Report 2025-2026



Foreword



“ As I reflect on my first year as Chair of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board, I feel privileged to support the work of partners across the county who are committed to ensuring that members of the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly and with respect. I am delighted to

be supported in this role by Fiona Hill, former Chair of the Board, as my Deputy this year.

A key priority for me has been to listen closely to the voices of local veterans and their families. To support this, we have expanded the Board's membership to include a wider range of organisations that represent and support the veteran community, ensuring that lived experience is reflected in our discussions and decisionmaking.

I have also been keen to see a Valour presence develop in Hertfordshire and have encouraged Board members to work together to progress this ambition. Strong partnership working remains central to our success, and by aligning our efforts we can strengthen the support available to veterans and their families across the county.

In my role as Armed Forces Champion at Hertfordshire County Council, I take seriously the responsibility to ensure that all those from the Armed Forces Community feel heard. While challenges remain for some, I firmly believe that by working together we can make a real and lasting difference.

I would like to thank all Board members and partners for their commitment throughout the year, and I look forward to building on this progress in the year ahead as we continue to support those who serve, have served, and their families.”

Cllr Ajanta Hilton

Chair, Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board

Armed Forces Champion, Hertfordshire County Council

Introduction to the Covenant, the Covenant Duty and the Hertfordshire Board



The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, including the bereaved, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives. Its two principles are that, recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces:

- Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board

Local authorities and the Armed Forces Community are encouraged to work together to establish a Covenant and, in 2011, Hertfordshire launched one of the first. In 2012 the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board was established to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant locally.

The Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board brings together around 45 organisations representing business, the military, charities, NHS, police, parish and town councils and local authorities in a shared commitment to ensure that those who serve and have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. [Further details about the Board are available from the Hertfordshire Heroes website.](#)

Members of the Armed Forces Community can face challenges because of frequent moves, periods of separation, exposure to risk, injury, or trauma, and the difficulty of transitioning from military to civilian life. Without specific consideration, these factors can create disadvantage when accessing everyday services such as housing, healthcare, education, and employment.

At a local level, the Covenant is essential in coordinating partnership working, raising awareness of Armed Forces issues, and embedding Covenant principles into policy and service delivery. It helps ensure that national commitments translate into tangible, consistent support within communities, enabling veterans and their families to thrive and to feel valued for their contribution to society.

Introduction to the Covenant, the Covenant Duty and the Hertfordshire Board



The Armed Forces Covenant Duty

The Armed Forces Covenant Duty, introduced in 2021, requires public bodies to consider the needs of the Armed Forces Community when delivering healthcare, housing and education. The Duty has evolved from a voluntary promise, the Covenant, into an increasingly comprehensive legal framework, moving steadily into national policymaking. In June 2025, the Government formally committed to fully enshrining the Armed Forces Covenant in law, extending the legal duty beyond local bodies to all UK Government departments and Devolved administrations and encompassing around 14 policy areas rather than three. The legislation is expected to come into force in 2027.

Information about the Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty Extension is available on the [Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Covenant website](#).

Equalities considerations have been embedded throughout the work of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board during 2025/26. This includes taking account of the findings from the 2025 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which highlights the diverse and sometimes complex health and wellbeing needs of the Armed Forces Community, particularly in relation to ageing, mental health, and access to services. Hertfordshire County Council continues to utilise the Equality Impact Assessment process to ensure relevant policies and service changes show due regard to the Armed Forces Community as required by the Armed Forces Covenant Duty. This approach supports the identification and mitigation of potential disadvantage, promotes fair and equitable access to services, and ensures that the specific needs and experiences of veterans, serving personnel and their families are appropriately recognised and addressed in local decision making.



The Lord-Lieutenant meets Gurkhas who took part in the Watford Remembrance parade 2025.

What we know about the Armed Forces Community in Hertfordshire

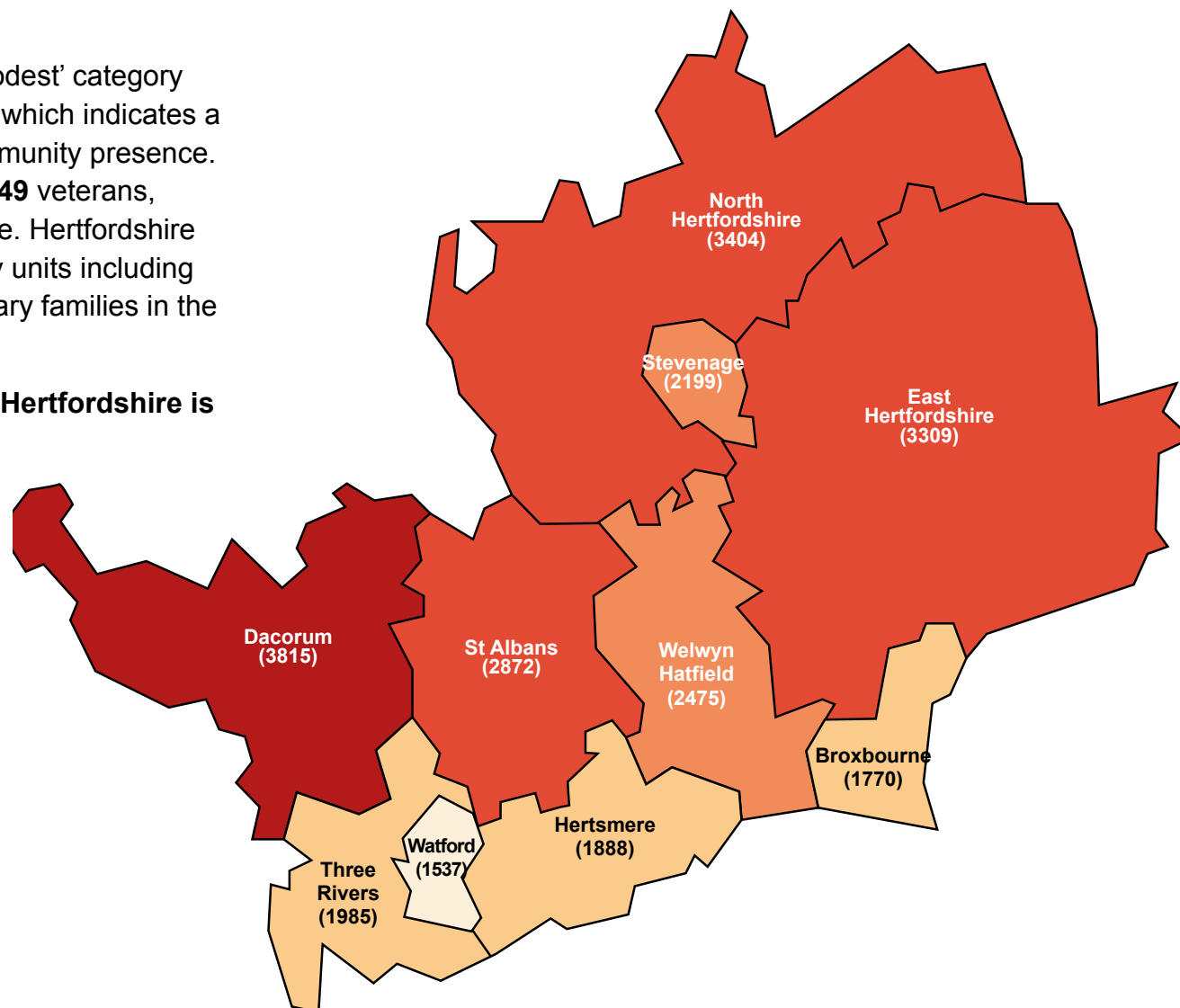
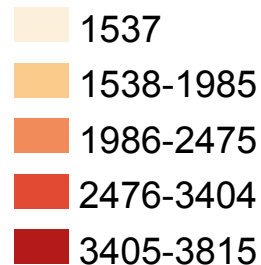
Armed Forces Community

Hertfordshire currently aligns most closely with the 'Modest' category as determined by the Armed Forces Covenant Toolkit, which indicates a smaller but nonetheless important Armed Forces Community presence. The Census tells us that Hertfordshire is home to **25,849** veterans, around **50%** of those veterans are over **75** years of age. Hertfordshire is not a garrisoned county but is home to a few military units including Northwood HQ. There are around 400 children of military families in the state schools in Hertfordshire.

Further information about the military presence in Hertfordshire is available on the [Hertfordshire Heroes website](#).

Legend

Observation



Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (ONS)

What we know about the Armed Forces Community in Hertfordshire

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Briefing examining the health, and wellbeing needs of Military Veterans and members of the Armed Forces Community in Hertfordshire was completed in 2025. The findings recognise that while many veterans and members of the Armed Forces Community experience good health outcomes, some face specific and sometimes complex health and wellbeing challenges linked to their service history, transition to civilian life, and ageing profile. The JSNA highlights increased prevalence of longterm physical health conditions, mobility issues, and mental health needs, particularly among older veterans and those who have experienced trauma. It also identifies barriers to accessing services, including inconsistent identification of veterans within health settings, limited awareness of Covenant entitlements, and varying levels of understanding of military life among professionals.

The Armed Forces Community in Hertfordshire can access a wide range of advice, guidance, and support through a combination of local, regional, and national provision from the statutory sector, charities and voluntary organisations. This support is designed to help individuals and families navigate civilian services, understand their rights under the Armed Forces Covenant, and access specialist assistance where needed. However, we do know that for some, challenges persist and the Board is committed to learn from these experiences and work to address them.

Information on support available for veterans, serving personnel and their families can be found via the [Hertfordshire Heroes website](#).

ARMED FORCES Community JSNA-on-a-page

- Military veterans form one part of the wider Armed Forces Community, which includes regular personnel; reservists; veterans; families of regular personnel, and the bereaved.
- Members of the Armed Forces Community work together with Local Authorities, the Public Sector, the Voluntary Sectors, and businesses to establish an Armed Forces Covenant, and in 2011, Hertfordshire established one of the first. This Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

Key causes & risk factors for ill health in Armed Forces

Housing

Over 50% of services leavers do not own their own home. Also, 1 in 400 veterans are homeless, rough sleeping or living in a refuge for domestic abuse.

Physical & Mental Health

Nearly half of veterans are disabled under the Equality Act 2010. Veterans aged 16 – 54 are more likely to experience common mental health disorders compared to the general population.

Alcohol misuse

Military veterans and their families have a higher prevalence of alcohol misuse compared to non-veterans.

Education

Veterans were less likely than non-veterans to have no qualifications or Level 4 qualifications, and more likely to have Level 1, 2 or 3 qualifications.

Gambling

Veterans are more than 10 times more likely than non-veterans to experience gambling harms and to gamble as a way of coping with distress.

Criminal Justice System

Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to be in prison, approved bail & probation premises. However, general lack of data and evaluation on Veterans within the criminal justice system.

What the stats show

- According to the 2021 Census, a total of 25,849 people aged 16+ in Hertfordshire reported that they had previously served in the Armed Forces, representing 2.7% of the population.
- Among people who reported that they had previously served in the Armed Forces in Hertfordshire, 32.4% reported being disabled under the Equality Act.
- In Hertfordshire, 62.0% who have previously served in the Armed Forces reported being economically inactive, which was statistically significantly higher than the national average (57.6%).
- 40% of Veteran Friendly GP practices had no information on their website about registering as a member of the Armed Forces Community and 45% had no signposting.

Recommendations

- Consider ways to support the transition to civilian life and establish successful long-term employment for service users, considering those who may experience significant challenges.
- Continue to raise awareness about Veteran Friendly GP services in Hertfordshire, for example by signposting through NHS services.
- Consideration should be given towards liaising with healthcare professionals to establish a standardised process for recording veteran status across Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB.
- Develop and implement targeted support programmes including specialised healthcare services, accessible housing and employment support in areas with the highest numbers of disabled veterans.
- Consider exploring trauma-focused psychological interventions such as TRiM for veterans with complex mental health needs to help effectively manage mental health problems and comorbidities.

Progress against aims

This Annual Report summarises progress made against the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board Action Plan for 2025/26, structured around the Board's three core aims:

- 1. Ensuring fair access to services**
- 2. Recognising the sacrifices of the Armed Forces Community**
- 3. Supporting the integration of service life with civilian life**

Aim 1

Aim 1: Ensure the Armed Forces Community are not disadvantaged in accessing services; recognising that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those such as the injured and bereaved.

Over the past year, the Board has strengthened its approach by expanding its membership to include a wider range of community-based, locally driven organisations representing and supporting the veteran community. This has ensured that lived experience is better reflected in discussions and informs decision-making across all areas of work.

1.1 Housing

The Housing Subgroup was dormant this last year, but any issues identified were addressed collaboratively led by District and Borough Councils Armed Forces Champions as representatives of the local Housing Authorities, strengthening clarity and support for those seeking social housing.

Outcome: Issues raised during the year were resolved promptly where possible. Factors mean that while advocacy and partnership working can improve access and awareness, social housing outcomes for veterans are often constrained by wider system pressures rather than lack of willingness to help.

1.2 Education

The Education Subgroup was dormant this last year but had previously coordinated discussions with schools and education services to identify any barriers facing service children, including mobility and admissions processes. No unmet needs were identified this last year and there is recognition that existing regional work with the county council duplicates the work of this group.

Outcome: Linked services and schools to existing best practice; no issues were raised.

1.3 Health

The Health Subgroup Chair engaged with NHS partners to review healthcare access for the Armed Forces Community, with a focus on veteran-specific services and GP veteran-friendly accreditation. Continuity has been affected by the departure of the Chair in December 2025, and a replacement from the NHS Central East Integrated Care Board is still being sought.



Outcome: There are now over 70 veteran friendly accredited GP practices in Hertfordshire, all Hospital Trusts are accredited as are three Care Homes. The NHS have committed to working with the remaining GP practices to support them in achieving veteran friendly status.



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Progress against aims

Aim 1

1.4 Alignment with National Armed Forces Covenant Policy

Hertfordshire County Council ensured the Board remained aligned with evolving national Covenant legislation and policy guidance.

Outcome: The Board maintained full alignment with national policy, including the expanded Duty and new Veterans Strategy, and embedded new requirements into local planning. This included explicitly recognising Armed Forces Communities within Hertfordshire County Council's Equality Impact Assessment process and supporting crossagency work to build staff capability.

1.5 Management of the Hertfordshire Heroes Website and Mailbox

The Hertfordshire Heroes online platform continued to provide an accessible resource for the Armed Forces Community.

Outcome: All emails were responded to within 10 working days, and the website was kept up to date throughout the year. Over the past year, the website has received an average of around 316 sessions (visits) per month.

1.6 Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Encouragement

The East Anglia Reserve Forces & Cadets Association supported employers particularly Board member organisations to pursue ERS accreditation.

Outcome: Several Board member organisations have achieved the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme awards, including Hertfordshire County Council re-accredited with the Gold

Award in 2024. The full list of organisations accredited can be seen on the MOD website.

Find out about the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, encouraging employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same.

1.7 Promotion of Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust Opportunities

Board members actively promoted grant opportunities available through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, encouraging applications from eligible organisations across Hertfordshire and seeking to increase awareness of available funding.

Outcome: Although no Hertfordshire-based applications to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust were successful during this reporting period, funding decisions are made independently by the Trust and are outside the control of the Board and the County Council. The Board's promotional activity ensured that eligible organisations were aware of the opportunity and supported engagement with the funding programme. Positively, Carers in Herts secured funding through the Thrive Together programme in the East of England, enabling the organisation to identify and support at least 300 unpaid carers within the veteran community.

Find out about the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, a charity and non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Defence, awarding grants across the UK to projects serving the Armed Forces Community.

Progress against aims

Aim 1

1.8 Representation on the GOV.UK Support Directory

Work took place to promote to organisations supporting the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Community to list their organisation on the national [Veterans Directory](#)

Outcome: Hertfordshire services are not currently represented on this site. However, the [Forces Connect app](#) does include Hertfordshire organisations and has been promoted by NHS colleagues. The app was developed by Forces Connect South East, a partnership of local authorities, tri-service armed forces, health and service charities using a grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust with the aim of making it easier for the Armed Forces Community to access direct information on the local services available to them.



Progress against aims

Aim 2

Aim 2: Ensure that the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community are recognised and remembered

2.1 & 2.2 Recognition of Armed Forces Events

All Board members played a role in promoting Armed Forces Day, Reserves Day, Armistice Day, and Remembrance Sunday across Hertfordshire.

Outcome: Events were widely recognised, with strong public engagement both in-person and online.

Find out about Remembrance from the [Royal British Legion website](#).

Find out about Armed Forces Day from the [Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Day website](#).



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Progress against aims

Aim 2

2.3 Covenant Signings in Hertfordshire

Board members continued to encourage businesses and local organisations to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

Outcome: Several Hertfordshire organisations have signed the Armed Forces Covenant including all Local Authorities in Hertfordshire. A searchable list is available on the [MOD website](#). The Board includes a representative from Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Council, and outreach work has resulted in 8 Town and Parish Councils now signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant, an increase from 1 in 2022.

Find out how your organisation can sign the Armed Forces Covenant on the [Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Covenant website](#).

2.4 Promotion of the Defence Discount Service

The official MoD Defence Discount Service was promoted to local businesses to broaden the availability of discounts for members of the UK Defence community.

Outcome: Greater awareness and uptake by local businesses. Nationally, Defence Discount Service partners with over 14,000 brands.

Find out how your business can offer a discount to the UK Defence community through the [Defence Discount Service](#).



Progress against aims

Aim 3

Aim 3: Encourage the integration of service life into civilian life

3.1 Military Village at the Hertfordshire County Show

Led by 254 (East of England) Multi-Role Medical Regiment, the Military Village formed a major attraction at the County Show.

Outcome: Delivered a successful and interactive space, strengthening community understanding of military roles.

3.2 Hertfordshire Heroes Monthly Newsletter

Hertfordshire County Council issued and promoted the Hertfordshire Heroes newsletter throughout the year.

Outcome: Regular publications provided consistent updates, signposting, and community stories. Since December Board members have played a greater role in contributing to the newsletter and subscription is now at 362.

[Subscribe to our newsletter via the Hertfordshire County Council website.](#)



Progress against aims

Aim 3

3.3 Promotion of Employment Pathways

Board members actively promoted employment pathways via the Career Transition Partnership and Forces Families Jobs.

Outcome: Hertfordshire vacancies were regularly advertised, increasing opportunities for service leavers and families.

3.4 Review of the Christmas Art Competition

Hertfordshire County Council worked with colleagues from Northwood HQ to review the annual Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas art competition and ran it for the 13th time in 2025.

Outcome: The review ensured the competition continues to meet engagement objectives and reflect community priorities. The competition was not as popular as in previous years and this may have been linked to an earlier timetable being put in place and the increase in the number of similar competitions. However, entries were thoughtful, imaginative, and demonstrated impressive artistic skill. Our judging panel were particularly moved by the care pupils took in reflecting messages of support and appreciation, especially for Armed Forces personnel spending Christmas away from their families.

Further information about the 2025 Christmas competition is available on the [Hertfordshire Heroes website](https://www.hertfordshireheroes.org).



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Looking ahead

The Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board remains committed to supporting those who serve, have served, and their families by working collaboratively to promote fairness, recognition, and access to services across the county. While good progress was made during 2025/26, the Board recognises the importance of continuing to listen, learn, and strengthen partnership working.

The previously used model of three subgroups will be discontinued in favour of more direct engagement with local organisations. This approach will ensure that lived experience informs discussion and decisionmaking, and that emerging issues are directed to those organisations best placed to affect change.

The Board is keen to see a strong Valour presence develop in Hertfordshire, recognising the vital role it could play in helping veterans across the county to access the care and support they deserve. With the expanded Armed Forces Duty expected to come into effect in 2027, Board members will promote awareness of these new responsibilities among organisations in scope and support them in meeting their obligations to the Armed Forces Community. Evidence based recommendations within the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) will remain at the forefront of the Board's work as partners continue to focus on those most in need of support.



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Looking ahead

As Hertfordshire prepares for Local Government Reorganisation in 2028, the Board will also work to ensure that remembrance events continue to be delivered across the county with the respect and significance they deserve. This period of change provides an opportunity to consider how the strong partnerships and achievements of the past 15 years can be carried forward into a new local government landscape.

The Board extends its gratitude to all partners, volunteers, and community members whose contribution has supported this year's achievements and ongoing commitment and looks ahead to building on this work in the coming year.

To all members of the Armed Forces Community, we thank you for your service.

Contact us: hertfordshire.heroes@hertfordshire.gov.uk

For those seeking a deeper understanding of the Armed Forces Community and the challenges they may face, free eLearning modules are available. These resources support increased awareness of service life and the role of the Armed Forces Covenant in addressing specific needs. Further details are available from the Hertfordshire Heroes website.



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