



Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board meeting

Wednesday 9 October 2024, 10:00-12:00

Location: Committee Room B, County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8DQ

Attending:

- His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire Mr Robert Voss CBE C Snt J
- Cllr Fiona Hill, Chairman Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board
- Cllr Mark Mills-Bishop, Vice Chairman Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board
- Ashley Lamprell, HCC
- Kate Brierley, HCC
- Ant Chapman DL
- Cllr Paul Seeby, Broxbourne Borough Council
- Cllr David Andrews, East Herts District Council
- Cllr Val Bryant, North Herts District Council
- Cllr Dawn Gamble, St Albans City and District Council
- Cllr Sarah Nelmes, Three Rivers District Council
- Cllr Amanda Grimston, Watford Borough Council
- WO2 Stan Nilsson, 162 Hospital Squadron
- Gp Capt Neil Towers, Northwood HQ
- Andy Stephenson, Royal British Legion Herts
- Jim Robinson, SAAFA Herts
- Barrie Griffiths, East of England Veterans Advisory Committee
- Harper Brown, Herts and West Essex ICB
- John Phillips, Project Nova
- William Brown, East Anglia Reserve Forces' and Cadet's Association Herts County Forum
- Luther Blissett OBE DL, Armed Forces United, Former Players Club CIC
- Ian Pearce, Carers in Herts

Apologies received from:

- Cllr Ron Tindall, Dacorum Borough Council
- Cllr Claire Parris, Stevenage Borough Council
- Lt Cdr Rubin Nash, HMS WILDFIRE
- Paul Bishop, EARFCA
- Kristina Carrington, MOD Regional Representative
- Donna Schultz, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Leslie Billy, Viewpoint
- Ricky Bartlett, Hertfordshire Constabulary
- Pip Darby, DWP
- Veronika Barbaglia, HCT

Board members not in attendance:

- Cllr Alpha Bird Collins, Hertsmere Borough Council
- Cllr Alan Chesterman, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
- Gail Jones, MOD Military Civilian Integration
- Patricia Chadwick, RBL
- Angela Fox, Citizens Advice
- Louise Savoury, Hertfordshire Public Health
- Dr Oliver Pugh, HPFT
- Lorraine Lees, Veterans UK
- Vanessa Plumley, RAF Families Federation
- Cat Calder, Army Families Federation
- Nicola Thompson, Naval Families Federation
- WO1 Barry Smith, 254 Medical Regiment

1	Welcome from the Chairman and introductions	Actions
	<p>The Chairman welcomed attendees and introduced His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire Mr Robert Voss.</p> <p>Mr Voss acknowledged the sad passing of former Board member and Commanding Officer of Northwood HQ, Colonel Clinton Read. He expressed his condolences and spoke of Colonel Read's commitment to the work of the Board. The Board then held a one-minute silence in respect of Colonel Read.</p> <p>The Chairman then made the following announcements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office for Veterans Affairs now sits within the MOD • There is a new Veterans Minister, Alistair Cairns MP • The Prime Minister mentioned housing for veterans in his recent conference speech. Ashley will monitor policy announcements and update the Board accordingly. <p>The Chairman welcomed the new Board members since our previous meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Commanding Officer for Northwood HQ - Group Captain Neil Towers • New District and Borough Champions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cllr Val Bryant, North Herts ○ Cllr Dawn Gamble, St Albans ○ Cllr Sarah Nelmes, Three Rivers ○ Cllr Alan Chesterman, Welwyn Hatfield • New Parish and Town Council representative Cllr Adam Twidell from Sandridge Parish Council • New SSAFA Hertfordshire Chair – Jim Robinson • New Commanding Officer for HMS WILDFIRE Lt Cdr Rubin Nash but he is unable to attend today. 	<p>Ashley to update the Board re policy changes on veteran housing</p> <p>Ashley to ensure the Board TORs reflect the membership of a Parish and Town Council Representative</p>
2	Apologies and Substitutions	
	<p>Apologies were reported by Ashley Lamprell and are detailed above.</p> <p>The Lord Lieutenant mentioned his role as President of the EARFCA in Kristina Carrington's absence.</p>	
3	Minutes and actions from the previous meeting held 14 March 2024	
	<p>Minutes from the meeting held 14 March 2024 were agreed upon with no comments.</p> <p>All actions from the previous meeting have been completed.</p>	
4	Standing item: The Military Perspective	
	<p>The Chairman invited the following Board members to share their updates.</p> <p>Hertfordshire Lieutenancy Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord-Lieutenant mentioned that he and the Deputy Lieutenants will be attending 33 Remembrance events and a Trafalgar Day parade. • Please let the Lieutenancy office know if you would like to invite a representative from Hertfordshire Lieutenancy to your event via Lieutenancy.Office@hertfordshire.gov.uk. 	<p>Board members to contact LL office to invite a representative from Hertfordshire Lieutenancy to</p>

	<p>Northwood HQ update - Group Captain Neil Towers, Commanding Officer of Northwood HQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gp Cpt Towers paid tribute to Col Clint Read • Gp Cpt Towers has been in post for two months. Northwood HQ is physically small but central to operations, currently accommodates 2000 personnel, exceeding its intended capacity. • Key concerns include housing, schools, consortium exams and the possibility of VAT on private school fees and people finding themselves in financial difficulties as a result. • Northwood HQ's use of Reserves is limited due to the nature of operations but there is hope to improve this. • The security team maintains a strong relationship with local police, especially in counter-protest efforts. • Additionally, Clare Smith is leading community engagement initiatives with local schools regarding the Covenant. <p>162 Hospital Squadron Update - Stan Nilsson and Major Claire Horner shared some slides.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Horner took over a year ago and the unit has transitioned to a Hospital Squadron. • Recruitment efforts are being built from scratch with initiatives to engage big healthcare providers and host events. • The squadron is involved in community activities such as parading in Hitchin for Remembrance Sunday and joint training with Herts Fire and Rescue. • Training is ongoing focusing on team cohesion, leadership and joint training with NATO. • It is still a small unit that is growing. <p>There was a brief discussion about the challenges they are facing with recruitment and the processes managed by the recruitment provider.</p> <p>The RBL offered to update 162 Hospital Squadron personnel on the services provided by the RBL and there are plans for a Christmas training weekend.</p> <p>The experience of others managing external contracts within the NHS and MOD, was shared with the need for better in-house skills to manage those contracts highlighted.</p> <p>East Anglia Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association (EARFCA) update - William Brown delivered the update in Paul Bishop's absence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Defence Review (SDR): Launched on 16 July to assess UK Defence roles and capabilities. East Anglia RFCA hosted an SDR Conversation with employers at RAF 	<p>any Remembrance events.</p>
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	<p>Marham on 22 August with feedback from over 40 employers presented to the SDR Team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationally there is a 3% reduction in Regular and Reserve forces. While intake is improving, outflow remains higher. Defence Employer Recognition Scheme: two gold awards and one silver award in Hertfordshire this year. Award revalidation outcomes are pending. Cadets: East Anglia has approx. 5586 Cadets (3,840 Army, 1167 RAF and 579 Royal Navy/Royal Marines). Community Cadets include 209 Adult Instructors and 1,201 Cadets (Army) and 47 Adult instructors and 589 Cadets (RAF). Sea Cadet figures not available. VAT on private school fees: The changes may impact some schools and their ability to fund the School Staff Instructor posts. University of Northampton research: demonstrates valuable life skills gained from the cadet experience. Estates team: addressing issues with cadet rental properties and engaging with District and Borough Councils in preparation for Local Plans to include space for youth activities. <p>Following the presentation the benefits of the business breakfasts hosted in part by the EARFCA was mentioned. The benefits of Hertfordshire Youth United, a forum that brings together cadets, St John Ambulance and other uniformed youth organisations to share information was raised.</p> <p>Ashley has requested a written update from HMS Wildfire as the Commanding Officer was unable to attend this meeting.</p>	<p>Ashley to request written update from HMS Wildfire</p>
	<p>POST MEETING NOTE:</p> <p>Lt Cdr Rubin Nash, Commanding Officer of HMS WILDFIRE provided the following written update:</p> <p>Recruitment: Continued support of external recruiting activities includes hosting recruitment evenings at Northwood HQ. Continuing to see issues with recruitment although 4 new recruits with several more in the pipeline.</p> <p>Employer support: continued engagement with employers including invitations to events.</p> <p>Community engagement: Completed the Annual Ceremonial Divisions in the Tower of London with HMS PRESIDENT. Held a Families Day at Merchant Taylors' School for the families of Reservists. Support to several community engagement events, including flag raising in Milton Keynes, and the Armed Forces week celebrations in Bricket Wood. Looking ahead, the main effort for the term will be the Remembrance Parade in St Albans (as well as five other local ceremonies).</p>	

	<p>Support to Ops: there is currently one AB in the Mediterranean with others due to mobilise to Bahrain. There are others supporting various HQs at Northwood and UK defence on Full Time Reserve Service.</p> <p>Training and military activities: Continue to run weekly training at Northwood HQ and take part in other activities run by other units particularly HMS PRESIDENT.</p>	
5	Research from Royal British Legion	
	<p>Andy Stephenson, RBL Hertfordshire County Chairman presented the latest summary of knowledge put together by the Royal British Legion Policy and Campaigns team on demographics and needs of the Armed Forces Community using research from MoD, OVA Veterans' Survey and Census 2021/22.</p>	
6	Update: Education Subgroup progress report	
	<p>Cllr Mills-Bishop paid tribute to Colonel Read.</p> <p>Cllr Mills-Bishop updated the Board about the work undertaken by the Education Subgroup since March 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mount Prison and Veteran services – During COVID-19, prisoners were unable to access books needed for exams. Cllr Douris advocated for provision of books through the library service but issues persisted during exam times. Cllr Mills-Bishop noted that the Ministry of Justice has contracted educational materials to Suffolk County Council, which is now successfully embedding the service. Government VAT proposal on private education – Cllr Mills-Bishop acknowledged the concern from Northwood HQ and he will work with Officers and colleagues at Northwood HQ to understand and address the issue. <p>There was a brief discussion about testing dates for consortium schools and Service Pupil Premium and how schools are held to account for how this is spent. Cllr Mills-Bishop said it is the responsibility of the school and checks will be made by the Department for Education. Cllr Mills-Bishop agreed to raise it at a meeting with the Department for Education and relay the information to the Board via Ashley Lamprell. Cllr Mills Bishop did not meet with DfE and this was amended 19 February 2025.</p>	<p>Cllr Mills-Bishop to share an update from meeting with DfE about accountability of how SPP is spent</p>
7	Update: Housing Subgroup progress report	
	<p>Andy Stephenson spoke about the progress report of the Housing Subgroup.</p> <p>Outcome 1 and 2 – there is a reduction in the availability of this type of housing.</p> <p>Objective 3 – A programme to identify veteran rough sleepers launched in August with Police. Identified 2 veterans who are now</p>	

	<p>receiving support. The project will continue for at least two years, depending on Constabulary resources.</p> <p>Objective 4 – The Office for Veteran Affairs has a new searchable directory on GOV.UK, replacing the Veterans' Gateway website. A list of charities supporting veteran housing will be finalised and updated at the next Board meeting.</p> <p>Op FORTITUDE has been launched but appears problematic as referring back to RBL and others. An update on this service will be brought in March.</p> <p>There was a discussion about needing to raise the profile of the issue of housing for veterans within District and Boroughs. The Chairman had written to Chief Execs and Leaders in May 2024 and the Deputy Prime Minister sent a letter to all local authorities.</p> <p>Board members were encouraged to email Ashley with ideas to further this effort of raising the profile of this within District and Borough Councils and especially to Housing portfolio holders.</p> <p>The Councillor for North Herts said she would take the issue back to colleagues, she acknowledged housing availability is difficult.</p> <p>It was mentioned that the Hertfordshire Heroes website could be nominated to be added to the GOV.UK directory. Ashley Lamprell to look into this.</p> <p>Hertfordshire organisations offering support to veterans are now live on Forces Connect app.</p>	<p>AS to share list of charities supporting veteran housing at March 2025 meeting</p> <p>All members to email Ashley Lamprell with ideas on how to raise the profile of veteran housing issues within District and Borough Councils, especially housing officers.</p> <p>Cllr Bryant to discuss the issue of housing for veterans within her Council and report back to the Board</p> <p>Ashley Lamprell to explore having HH website added to GOV.UK Directory</p>
8	Update: Health Subgroup progress report	
	<p>Harper Brown gave an update on the progress made by the Health Subgroup and plans for the next year. Harper shared a presentation.</p> <p>This presentation covers Herts and west Essex as it was for the Integrated Care Board. Royston is not covered by the ICB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NHSE Armed Forces Forward view contains 9 commitments as outlined in the slides. • The Subgroup meets monthly, colleagues from Northwood HQ or 254 and 162 are invited to join. • Primary care – Efforts are ongoing to encourage GP practices to work together in Primary Care Networks. Each PCN has 1 Veteran Friendly Accredited Practice and they are working to encourage GPs to identify and correctly code veteran patients. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Health Subgroup has been working with Carver Barracks (in Essex) and Northwood to address the issue of continuity of care for children's Education Health and Care plans (ECHPs). • All NHS Trusts in Herts are accredited as Veteran Aware with a growing network of colleagues in Watford. • The subgroup is aiming to engage NHS staff who are part of the Armed Forces Community through initiatives like Step Into Health. • Work is ongoing with the Hertfordshire Suicide Prevention Board and the Police to implement the pilot Forces Protocol for people who are at risk of suicide. • Promoting targeted health and lung checks through GP practices to identify issues early, ensuring veterans are included. • Over 170 services have been mapped and uploaded to the Forces Connect App • Op COMMUNITY, the single point of contact service, produces case studies each month. Harper shared a case study which showed successful referral of a veteran client; resource intensive but a positive outcome. 	
9	Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board Action Plan 2024/2025 progress update	
	<p>Kate Brierley presented a progress report of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board Action Plan 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action plan development: created in Spring with additions invited at that time. • Annual Report: Published in November. District Champions are encouraged to promote it and invited to submit additions each year. Thank you to those who made submissions for the 2023/24 report to be published later this year. • Kate encouraged Board members to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Apply for grants from the Covenant Fund Trust. Kate and Ashley can assist with applications and connect interested parties. ○ Encourage businesses to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and promote the Defence Discount Service. ○ Promote the Armed Forces Covenant with Parish and Town Councils ○ Promote the Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas Art Competition 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share the news that the Career Transition Partnership is now offered by REED partnership and is helpful for those leaving the Armed Forces. ○ Highlight War Memorial Funding available which may be of interest to Parish and Town Councils. <p>Discussion points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider long-term funding routes for projects initially funded by the Covenant Fund Trust. • Encourage charities with ready projects to apply for relevant funding. • Ian Pearce to share a business case on hidden voices and developing referral pathways with Ashley. 	Ian Pearce to share business case with Ashley
10	Close	
	<p>Councillor Fiona Hill expressed her heartfelt sympathy to Colonel Read's family and committed to writing a letter of condolence on behalf of the Board. She then thanked everyone for their contributions and ongoing efforts.</p> <p>The Lord Lieutenant affirmed the Board's support from the Lieutenancy and from His Majesty. He suggested the Chamber of Commerce send a substitute if unable to attend future meetings and offered a representative from the Hertfordshire Community Foundation to speak at the next meeting. He also proposed a Board representative attend a Chamber luncheon to help promote the Board.</p> <p>Cllr Hill thanked Cllr Twidell for his attendance and expressed her desire to see more Parish and Town Councils signed up to the Covenant. She suggested raising awareness among county councillors to support this initiative.</p> <p>The meeting closed.</p>	

The aims of the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board are;

- ensure that veterans and those in 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.
- that the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community are recognised and remembered; and
- encourage the integration of service life into civilian life.

Next meeting: 5 March 2025 – Location TBC

For Information:

- Support for veterans now on GOV.UK - Following the Independent Review of Welfare Services to Veterans, the Veterans' Gateway website is closed and information will be available on the GOV.UK website. The [support for veterans and their families](#) page can help veterans find the information they need, categorised by life stages: housing, employment, mental and physical health support, illness or injury, bereavement, care needs and more. [A searchable directory](#) lists both government and charity support available to veterans and their families, allowing veterans to find help locally and nationally. You can search by topic and location for easy access to appropriate support. There is also a helpline which can provide information and referral support by telephone: 0808 802 1212. Please remove any references to the Gateway from your websites or information guides and update your web copy and links to the new page, [Support for veterans and their families - GOV.UK](#).
- The Hertfordshire Heroes Christmas Art Competition 2024 has been launched. Hertfordshire Heroes is encouraging all Key Stage 2 pupils in Hertfordshire to take part in the annual Christmas Art Competition by 25 November 2024. This year, we invite children to create artwork to bring cheer to military personnel for their chance to win a day of adventure hosted by Northwood HQ. A winner will be chosen from each year group in Key Stage 2. Please do promote the competition with schools in your network. [All information is available on our website.](#)

Commemorative events 2024 – for information only:

- **The 2024 Poppy Appeal** launches in England, Scotland and Wales 24 October 2024
- **10th anniversary of the end of combat operations by British Armed Forces in Afghanistan** 26 October 2024
- **Remembrance Sunday** 10 November 2024
- **Armistice Day** 11 November 2024