



Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Plan

Introduction

Welcome to the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board's Action Plan.

Norfolk is home to both current and ex-serving men and women and their families from across the armed forces. These individuals form an important part of Norfolk's community, bringing with them skills and a contribution that is unique and valuable.

In 2011, the Government established the Armed Forces Covenant, a commitment to all those who serve, those who have served and their families that they will be treated fairly and not be disadvantaged because of their service.

Since 2012, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Board has developed and delivered action plans with the armed forces community in mind.

Based on the discussions at Norfolk's first Armed Forces Covenant Conference in 2018, this Action Plan sets out the local priorities across the three pillars of the Covenant: Building Communities; Health, Housing and Wellbeing; and Education, Employment and Skills. It demonstrates Norfolk's commitment to supporting the armed forces community who live and work in the county. Through the projects contained in this Action Plan, Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Board believes that working with partners, it will make a positive difference; it will improve the support available to the families of serving personnel, to veterans and to those serving and transitioning out of the armed forces who decide to settle here permanently.

I commend it to you.

Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt
Armed Forces Commissioner for Norfolk

Our plan

Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant Plan is designed to deliver key activity to support the Armed Forces community in Norfolk.

In 2020, due to the complexity of the activities identified and the impact of the pandemic, it was decided that the plan should become a 'rolling' plan to ensure that it remains live to the needs of the local community as well as national challenges.

The plan is reviewed on an annual basis and new actions added when identified by the Board or the community.

The following terms are used in the plan:

- **Complete** – the action is complete.
- **Closed** – the action was not completed but is no longer being taken forward.
- **Ongoing** – the action is complex and will take time to achieve.

A progress summary is provided against each priority.

Our priorities

1. Building communities
2. Health, wellbeing and housing
3. Education, employment and skills

Priority 1: Building communities

Promote understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant among the serving community, local authorities and the civilian community.

Why this is a priority

Whilst there is an awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant among the armed forces community, what it means for individuals on a local level isn't always clear. There is therefore a need for the community in Norfolk to understand what can be expected under the tenets of the Covenant and for support services to have a clear framework to work within.

What success will look like

Members of the armed forces community will be able to use the Norfolk Covenant Pledge web page to find out what they can expect from service providers. They will also have a better understanding of what the Armed Forces Covenant can do for them. Statutory agencies will be clear about their "local commitment" to Norfolk's armed forces communities.

Establish a baseline of understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant in Norfolk

1. Engage all local authority Chief Execs, Leaders and senior managers to establish what is already being done to achieve the Covenant's national priorities as well as aspirations and challenges at a local level, and their commitment to supporting Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant. **Completed 2020**
2. Ask each local authority to assess itself against the MOD's Covenant Toolkit. The results will be collated to allow for a better understanding of the county-wide picture. **Completed 2020**
3. Meet with Service representatives from Robertson Barracks, RAF Marham and the 3rd Royal Anglian Reserves to establish current levels of understanding amongst the serving community and their families in Norfolk about the Covenant and what their understanding is of the local services and support mechanisms available to them. **Completed 2020**
4. Identify the ways in which the Service personnel and their families are disadvantaged and not treated fairly. **Completed 2020**
5. When required, work with the Serving representatives to deliver presentations to serving personnel, spouses and dependents to improve understanding of what the Covenant is and what it can do for them. **Ongoing**

6. Engage with representatives from the veterans' community (including charities) to establish the current level of understanding of the Covenant in Norfolk as well of the local services and support mechanisms available to them. **Ongoing – veterans workshop held in 2023 will reshape this action.**

Develop a Covenant Pledge for Norfolk which sets out how members of the community will be supported in the county

7. Use the data and information gathered by the Commissioner to review the advice/information available at a practitioner level in Norfolk for relevant agencies (for example in housing and social care) specific to the armed forces community, to inform development of a 'local commitment'. This should include a review of information available to the armed forces community on Veterans' Gateway. **Completed 2021**
8. Develop guidelines regarding what someone in the armed forces community should expect from the Covenant in Norfolk. This should include criteria like – what the Covenant means for you while you are here and information sources. This piece of work will be called 'Norfolk's Covenant Pledge' and will be agreed by all relevant agencies. **Action renamed in 2021: Develop a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to underpin the Covenant duty of due regard. Completed 2022.**
9. Develop a communication plan/actions to improve the promotion of the Covenant, particularly focusing on what it means for the armed forces community in Norfolk and the achievements/challenges of the Covenant Board. This should include exploring communication tools such as a Commissioner's blog/information surgery etc. to provide an ongoing dialogue with the community. **Closed 2021**
10. Develop a communication plan/actions to raise awareness of the armed forces in Norfolk among the civilian community, including local authorities and other relevant agencies. This will ensure that Norfolk is linked into national programmes such as Armed Forces Day as well as looking at identifying any gaps in local knowledge. **Closed 2021**

Priority 1 update

In 2021, a Norfolk Covenant Officers Group was established, bringing together officers from the districts, boroughs, city and county level to discuss how best to support members of the armed forces.

This runs alongside an Elected Member Champions Group, chaired by the Commissioner.

Both groups provide a valuable resource for continuing conversations started by the Commissioner prior to the pandemic to ensure services and the practitioners are kept up to date with the issues facing the community. This also provides an opportunity to develop a more consistent approach to engagement which will be reviewed periodically to ensure its effectiveness.

Developments over several years mean each local authority already has some form of service structure and central directory to signpost citizens, including members of the armed forces community, to support, which complements some of the information held on the national Veterans' Gateway and the Norfolk Community Directory. It is therefore no longer felt necessary at a county level to review the advice and information held at practitioner level by authorities as part of the action plan.

To support delivery of the new statutory duty of due regard, the Ministry of Defence has advised local authorities to develop an evidence base to underpin their understanding of the armed forces community within their local area and inform service delivery/priorities in relation to the community.

To achieve this, the Board developed a single source of information held electronically by Norfolk Office of Data Analytics (NODA) using open data sources including the 2021 Census. Development of this evidence base is the first step towards developing a 'Pledge' for the County in relation to the local authority service delivery.

Work has been completed to add Norfolk's data to the National Forces Connect App which signposts members of the armed forces community to support and advice in their area.

In addition, a successful programme of work with town and parish councils through Norfolk Association of Local Councils (NALC) has led to several signing the Covenant. This initiative started in Norfolk has led to a UK-wide initiative in recognition of the important work carried out at this level of local government, especially in relation to promotion of the values of the Covenant.

Priority 2: Health, welfare and housing

Improve understanding and promote the health and welfare support available to the armed forces community in Norfolk.

Why this is a priority

There are many national initiatives looking to improve the health and welfare of the armed forces community. We want to ensure that Norfolk is fully aware of, and engaged in, these and able to support those most in need with clear messages and consistent service where possible.

What success will look like

Mental health professionals working in Norfolk will have improved understanding of issues specific to the armed forces community. Clearer pathways will be provided for members of the armed forces to access appropriate mental health support.

Promote greater understanding of the support available to the armed forces community in relation to health and social care services in Norfolk

11. Review the information available on Veterans' Gateway and Norfolk Community Directory regarding health and social care support for the armed forces community specific to Norfolk looking from a professional's viewpoint to determine if there is sufficient information, identifying gaps and linking with the work to promote understanding of the Covenant. This work must include services for the promotion of good mental health. **Complete 2020**
12. Working with the Veterans' Gateway, Norfolk's Covenant Board, local NHS and social care providers and relevant charities, develop a mechanism specific to Norfolk for front line practitioners/local health providers to promote national NHS schemes like 'Veteran Friendly GPs' and sources of information specific to the armed forces community. This should involve promotion of the Veterans' Gateway amongst professionals and agencies such as the PCNs. **Ongoing – was paused in 2020 due to the pandemic.**
13. **New action:** Establishment of a wellbeing fund for organisations working with the armed forces community in Norfolk (agreed by Board in March 2021). **Completed 2023.**

Priority 2 update

Work to deliver this priority area was severely impacted by the pandemic. As a result of this action 12 had to be paused but was then restarted in 2022/23.

In order to further this area of activity a place on the Covenant Board has been provided to a member of the Integrated Care Board for Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System (ICS). This is currently the Deputy Medical Director who will advocate on behalf of the community in relation to health care in conjunction with the rest of the Board. A working group has also been formed to update information on the ICS website to include links to information relating to the Armed Forces community and accessing health and social care.

A new action was added in 2021: 'Establishment of a wellbeing fund for organisations working with the armed forces community in Norfolk'. This fund was run over two rounds and successfully supported several organisations including Bridge for Heroes, Forces Employment Charity, RAF Marham in a joint project with ARU, and Walking with the Wounded.

Working with Norfolk Caring Together, activities were undertaken to significantly improve the support offer to members of the armed forces community who are carers. An armed forces specific webpage was put together along with several video case studies of people from the armed forces community working in the care sector. The idea behind this was to increase understanding of the breadth of jobs available.

Work to progress ways in which opportunities to become a foster carer for Norfolk County Council can be realised by members of the armed forces community is ongoing. This is in recognition of the valuable role models that members of the community can provide in support of a child or young person in need of temporary care. As part of this work, a policy for Norfolk is being developed with guidance from the MOD Covenant and Families Strategy teams, the Families Federations, Dept for Education and SSAFA Adoption Services which will be used to influence more widely across the UK. As part of the process, we are also listening to the experiences of armed forces families who have both fostered and adopted. In 2023 this work remains ongoing due to delays with revising the DIN (Defence Instruction Notice).

Priority 3: Education, employment and skills

Work with businesses in Norfolk to develop employment opportunities for the armed forces community and promote the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge.

Why this is a priority

The health and welfare of an individual, no matter what their circumstances, can be affected by their ability to find and keep employment. We recognise that businesses in Norfolk have a lot to offer the armed forces community and therefore we want to ensure that they seize this opportunity fully.

What success will look like

The number of businesses in Norfolk to have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS) will have increased. More employers will advertise their jobs through military employment agencies. Several employers will run veteran advocate/mentoring schemes.

Promote greater understanding amongst businesses operating in Norfolk of the benefits of employing a member of the armed forces community

14. Work with representatives from CTP (Career Transition Partnership), the MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, Norfolk County Council Economic Development and local military charities, to develop an overall view of businesses operating in Norfolk including those that have signed up to the DERS and those working with CTP. **Complete 2020**
15. Develop an engagement strategy for Norfolk based upon this data and information and a local advocate/mentor scheme for businesses thinking about employing someone from the armed forces community. This needs to include recognition of some of the challenges faced by this community such as travel for spouses given the remote nature of the bases. The Board lead may wish to consider involving the DERS Regional Director, Families Federations and representatives from the serving and veteran communities in developing the advocacy and mentoring scheme. **Action refocused 2020 and became action 17.**
16. Engage with the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce and LEP to explore what support they could provide as promoters of the MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme within the County and advocates of employing members of the armed forces community. This should include the development of a joint communication strategy for the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant and its partners. **Action refocused 2020 and became action 17.**

17. Develop a partnership with the renewable energy sector and key public service partners to ensure the armed forces community is considered and provided with employment and career opportunities during the rapid expansion of the renewables sector in Norfolk. This will include service leavers, veterans and family members. The Board will work with the Career Transition Partnership, the DWP, local education and training providers, EEEGR and the industry leads to raise awareness of the range of jobs available. It will also encourage local and national businesses to sign the Covenant Pledge and employ people from the armed forces community. **Closed 2022.**

Explore how children and young people from service families are supported in Norfolk

Why this is a priority

It is important that all children and young people have support not only to ensure they achieve a good education but also so that they build resilience and aspiration to achieve their potential in life. We want to ensure that we have the right systems and mechanisms in place to support young people from Service families living in Norfolk, whether their parents are stationed here or not and no matter what age they are.

What success will look like

Service children will continue to achieve above average attainment and achievement in Norfolk. Statutory agencies and partners supporting Service children in Norfolk will be able to draw upon best practice techniques and tools to support these young people as they transition through the education system.

18. Develop a mechanism for schools to identify and promote the sharing of best practice across the county for actions like Service Pupil Premium and pastoral support techniques tailored towards the needs of service families, including parents. The lead Board member may wish, for example, to consider proposing a specific support network for schools/agencies using one of the existing channels. **Completed 2021**
19. Develop guidelines and identify/promote information on available support specific to Norfolk for statutory agencies working with children from Service families. This will link to the actions above to explore existing knowledge of the Covenant in Norfolk and the information available about the support available in the County. This should include specific areas such as mental health. **Closed 2022**

Priority 3 update

Activity to support employment and skills has not progressed as well as hoped and therefore has been paused. The decision to do this was taken as the renewable

energy sector remains a complex area due to delays in Government strategy and direction, and the sector's own uncertainty about future investment.

The workstream lead was working closely with a representative from EEEGR (the East of England Energy Group) to support development of an armed forces landing page, however due to staff changes this has not been progressed by the Group. The Covenant and the MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme had a presence at EEEGR's Southern North Sea conference in May in order to encourage businesses working in the sector to sign up to the Covenant.

A booklet to support schools and parents in understanding the experience of service children and the opportunities available to them was published in 2021. This is available online at the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant website and was also promoted with schools via Norfolk County Council's Children's Services Dept.

Action 19 was superseded by a project led by SCiP Alliance (Service Children's Progression Alliance) and Anglia Ruskin University to develop a Support Hub for the Eastern Region. Several meetings have been held which have included representatives from Norfolk County Council's Children's Services.

Find out more

Email us at armedforcescovenant@norfolk.gov.uk

To find out about Norfolk's Armed Forces Covenant visit our webpage at:
[Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant - Norfolk County Council](#)