



# **Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board Terms of Reference**

## **Updated March 2024**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary commitment by local authorities, statutory services, military charities, and the private sector to support members of their local armed forces community. Its aim is to ensure that members of the armed forces community receive the support they need in their local communities in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice. At its heart, the Covenant expects those in the armed forces community to be treated fairly, not to be disadvantaged because of their service, and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured and the bereaved.
- 1.2. The Government's Armed Forces Act of 2011 set out the requirement for the creation of local military / civilian partnership boards to ensure the Covenant was honoured locally. The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board was formed in March 2012.
- 1.3. The Board's Terms of Reference originally agreed in 2012 were revised by the Board in March 2018. They were further revised in 2024 to reflect changes in legislation, due to the Armed Forces Act 2021, which brought in a Duty of Due Regard, officially enshrined in law in November 2022. The Terms of Reference set out the governance arrangements for the Board.

### **2. Purpose of Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board**

- 2.1. The purpose of the Board is to oversee the development of the Armed Forces Covenant in Norfolk, by:
  - Raising awareness of the Covenant among the serving and civilian communities, within local authorities, statutory services, and the private sector.
  - Working with partners to identify the issues that may affect all service personnel, veterans, and their families in Norfolk e.g. housing, health, employment, skills, and education, and recommend appropriate responses, projects, and solutions.

- Engaging organisations that have a specific delivery focus in the areas of housing, health and education as required by the Duty of Due Regard in a supportive / advisory / scrutiny capacity.
- Encouraging local businesses to sign the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge and become part of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS).
- Supporting community integration through joint activities.
- Developing, implementing, and monitoring the action plan.

### **3. Membership and quorum**

3.1. The membership will be as follows:

- Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner.
- Norfolk County Council (NCC) – Member Champion for Armed Forces.
- Two District Council representatives (one from Breckland and one from Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, representing the geographical location of the serving bases).
- Four serving personnel representing all three of the regular services and one from the reserves.
- Three representatives from the national armed forces charities / families' federations.
- Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association.
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Armed Forces lead.
- Norfolk Employer Engagement Group representative.
- Veterans' Pensions and Advisory Committee.
- Four Health Armed Forces representatives\* (to include the Integrated Care System, mental health services, commissioning services and either primary or secondary care).
- Adult Social Services representative\*
- Housing representative\*
- Education representative\*
- Economic Development representative\*

3.2. Members depicted with \* represent organisations or specialisms that are not required to attend every Board meeting unless they are project sponsors closely involved in the work programme. They may be called upon periodically for specialist advice by Norfolk County Council (NCC), the Armed Forces Commissioner or other Board members. It will be the responsibility of these representatives to maintain their working knowledge in relation to the

Covenant, irrespective of meeting attendance, in recognition of the need to support the armed forces community to access statutory services. It should be noted that some of these organisations also have a statutory responsibility to deliver the Duty of Due Regard which sits outside of the jurisdiction of the Board.

- 3.3. If members are unable to attend, they should nominate a substitute representative from their organisation.
- 3.4. Members are accountable for reporting to and from all the organisations they represent on the Board.
- 3.5. The quorum for the Board is one quarter of the voting membership rounded up. In this situation, the Commissioner will decide, based on the organisations present and the meeting agenda, whether there is sufficient representation across the AF community to go ahead with the meeting.

#### **4. Board Chair**

- 4.1. The Chair of the Board will be the Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner.
- 4.2. The role of the Chair will be to:
  - Determine the agenda for Board meetings, in consultation with Norfolk County Council.
  - Chair meetings of the Board. If they are unable to Chair, the meeting will be chaired by the Norfolk County Council Elected Member Champion for the Armed Forces.
  - Represent the Board at appropriate public / private events and meetings to promote Norfolk's Covenant work and to engage with communities.
- 4.3. The Commissioner's initial term of office will be for three years, extendable for a further maximum period of two years at the discretion of the Board. A period of succession planning will be built into the final three months of the term of office to enable an effective handover.
- 4.4. If the Commissioner decides they no longer wish to be in the role or they are unable to fulfil their commitments for health / personal reasons, they should resign, giving three months' notice if possible. They will be expected to notify Norfolk County Council's Armed Forces Elected Member Champion and Senior Armed Forces Covenant Officer in writing via email. The NCC Armed Forces Champion will temporarily carry out the role until a successor is appointed.

- 4.5. The Commissioner may be asked to vacate the role at any point with agreement of the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board, should they be found to be unable or unwilling to carry out the full duties of the role. In most cases this may be preceded by a performance notice period to allow for improvement, usually of one month. If this period fails to achieve the required improvement, then the process for termination will be triggered by either Norfolk County Council's Armed Forces Elected Member Champion or Norfolk County Council's Senior Armed Forces Covenant Officer, in conjunction with the Leader of Norfolk County Council following a majority vote of no confidence by the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board.
- 4.6. The Commissioner may decide at any point including during the performance / termination period to vacate with immediate effect. In such cases, the post holder will be expected to notify Norfolk County Council's Armed Forces Elected Member Champion and Senior Armed Forces Covenant Officer in writing via email.
- 4.7. The Commissioner's personal or political opinions should not interfere with their work or bring NCC into disrepute.
- 4.8. The Commissioner is unable to hold any partner agency which has a statutory responsibility to deliver the Duty of Due Regard to account. However, the Commissioner may hold any agency responsible for delivering specific areas of activity within the Board's action plan to account for non-delivery.
- 4.9. The Commissioner may also carry out a scrutiny role in relation to non-delivery of the Duty of Due Regard with local agencies. Any scrutiny related activity is likely to involve relevant member(s) of the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board working alongside the Commissioner.
- 4.10. The Commissioner may not be an elected member or a current serving person.

## **5. Frequency of Meetings**

- 5.1. The Board will meet three times a year: twice formally - spring and autumn; and once informally in January for annual planning.
- 5.2. Meetings will be hosted in person by partners around Norfolk or carried out virtually or hybrid.

## **6. Decision-making**

- 6.1. Decisions will normally be made by consensus. In exceptional circumstances, where, in the opinion of the Chair this cannot be achieved, they will call for a

show of hands. In the event of a tie, the Chair shall have an additional casting vote.

- 6.2. The Board can make recommendations to individual agencies, but it cannot commit individual agencies to actions.
- 6.3. In formulating any recommendations to address identified issues, the Board will always pay due regard to the opinions of relevant communities, or relevant evidence setting out the views of communities.

### **Decision-making on proposals from Board Members**

- 6.4. Any partner agency which is part of the Board can bring a proposal for an area of activity to be taken forward under the auspices of the Covenant. This should take the form of a fully scoped document written by the proposing agency. The document should first be shared with the Commissioner to gain their consent to take it to the Board. The scoping document should include as fully costed model as possible, including an indication as to how these costs are to be met. Once approval from the Commissioner has been obtained, the proposing agency must take the paper to the Board for a collective decision to be made on whether to undertake the activity or not.
- 6.5. Where a proposal is time critical, it may be circulated for a decision outside of formal meetings, however, Board members are within their rights to request the proposer adapt / modify their proposal prior to a final decision being reached.
- 6.6. All members of the Board (except for the one making the proposal) must agree to the area of activity for it to be adopted into the Board's action plan.
- 6.7. Any funding requested by the partner agency from the Board as the result of such a proposal must follow the normal application process and will be judged on its merits as if it were an independent agency not associated with the Covenant Board. The agency making the proposal will abstain from the vote.
- 6.8. Any request for administrative support from NCC should be included within the proposal and will be dependent upon the Board's decision as to whether the proposal supports delivery of its objectives and action plan and if there is administrative capacity.
- 6.9. Any area of activity proposed by a partner agency that forms part of their statutory responsibilities, including the Duty of Due Regard will not be supported.

- 6.10. If the proposal is rejected by the Board, then the partner agency may consider carrying out the activity independently but must note that it will not be able to use any branding associated with the Covenant or resources held by Board including contact lists etc.
- 6.11. Any proposal put forward will not be limited to a single decision. The Board recognises that scoping an activity may take time and therefore, if a proposal is turned down, it may be brought to the Board for further decisions once the Board's initial feedback has been considered and the proposal amended accordingly.
- 6.12. The Board may decide to set up a Sub-group to oversee the management of the project, as set out in section 11.

### **Decision-making on proposals from external agencies**

- 6.13. Agencies without a place on the Board may also bring forward areas of proposed activity for consideration by the Board. In cases such as this, the agency should align itself to a member of the Board who will advocate on behalf of the proposal. The proposal should take the form of a fully scoped document written by the proposing agency. The document should be shared with the Commissioner to gain their consent to take it to the Board. The scoping document should include as fully costed model as possible, including an indication as to how these costs are to be met. Once approval from the Commissioner has been obtained, the proposing agency must take the paper to the Board for a collective decision to be made on whether to undertake the activity or not.
- 6.14. Paragraphs 6.5 – 6.12 also apply to external agencies.

## **7. Standing Agenda Items**

7.1. Standard agenda items will include:

- Progress made delivering the action plan.
- The budget.
- Progress reports from organisations who have received funding from Norfolk's Covenant Board.
- Presentations by invited speakers.
- Updates from members of the Board in relation to their agency.

## **8. Board administration**

- 8.1. Norfolk County Council will arrange and minute Board meetings.
- 8.2. Board meeting attendees will be provided with agenda papers at least five working days before scheduled meetings.

## **9. Action Plan**

- 9.1. The Board will develop an action plan which it will update annually and agree in March. The action plan will be formulated at an informal planning workshop in January.
- 9.2. The action plan will remain 'live' to current issues affecting the armed forces community throughout its lifespan and can be amended with full agreement of the Board at any time. This is also cognisant of the fact that agencies may bring forward proposals for additional activity as noted in section 6.

## **10. Financial Management**

- 10.1. The Board receives an annual income from Norfolk County Council.
- 10.2. The Board's Finance Sub-Group comprises the Commissioner and three volunteers, drawn from the Board. The role of the Sub-Group is set out separately. In summary, it performs a scrutiny role, on behalf of the Board, reviewing bids for funding from the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant.
- 10.3. Bids considered by the Finance Sub-Group to be of the appropriate quality will be forwarded to Board recommended for approval.
- 10.4. Where there is not a consensus either within the Finance Sub-Group or the Board, the Commissioner will make the final decision.

## **11. Sub-Groups**

- 11.1. Sub-groups will be set up to drive the Board's work programme forward, as directed by the Board. These will change as needed and the number of sub-groups will vary depending upon the work being done at any time.
- 11.2. The remit of any sub-group will be set by the Board.

- 11.3. Sub-groups will be made up of people with relevant expertise, who will be invited from outside the Board membership as needed. Each sub-group will have the fewest number of members needed to deliver the outputs required.
- 11.4. Each sub-group will elect a lead who, if they are not a member of the Board, will be invited to attend Board meetings as required to report on the work of that sub-group.
- 11.5. Sub-groups may be used as a way of delivering proposals brought to the Board referenced in section 6. This will be at the discretion of the Board and dependent upon capacity in relation to delivering the Board's action plan.

## **12. Responsibilities of members of the Board**

- 12.1. Members will attend meetings or send a substitute.
- 12.2. Members will actively contribute to discussion and decision-making both at meetings and via email.
- 12.3. Members will respect other members' opinions and values and members will behave appropriately.
- 12.4. Members will take part in sub-groups as appropriate.
- 12.5. Representatives of organisations must ensure they do not explicitly or tacitly use the Board as a platform to promote the work of their own organisation. If they do, they will be asked to leave the meeting and step down from the Board.
- 12.6. Members of the Board may be asked to vacate their place on the Board if the Commissioner and the NCC Elected Member Champion consider their behaviour to be below the standard required, if their actions (personal or professional) bring NCC and the Armed Forces Covenant into disrepute, if they fail to deliver work they agreed to undertake on behalf of the Board or if they are no longer willing or able to fulfil their role.

## **13 Conflicts of interests**

- 13.1. Board members who have a personal interest in any Board projects or decision-making being undertaken by the Board, including financial, political or business interests, must declare this.