



Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022

Virtual meeting held on Microsoft Teams

Present:

Air Cdre Kevin Pellatt (KP)	Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner (Chairman)
Jenny Ward (J Ward)	Naval Families' Federation
Wg Cdr Jim Walls (J Walls)	RAF Marham
Jocelyne Newman (JN)	RAF Marham
Lt Matt Paterson (MP)	Royal Navy
Hugh King (HK)	Royal British Legion
Paul Smith (PS)	Royal British Legion
Craig Chalmers (CC)	Norfolk County Council
Andrew Holdsworth (AHO)	Breckland District Council
Wg Cdr Stew Geary (SG)	Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Norfolk
Maj Rob Mansell (RM)	1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
Andy Tovell (AT)	Norfolk County Council
Dr Andrew Hayward (AHa)	NHS
Natalie Spurdens (NS)	Guest Speaker: Homestart Norfolk, Item 2 only.
Merry Halliday (MH)	Norfolk County Council
Bev Herron (BH)	Norfolk County Council

Apologies:

Sarah Rhoden (SR)	Norfolk County Council
Jan Feeney (JF)	Norfolk County Council
Adrian Tearle (AT)	SSAFA
Cllr Keith Kiddie (KK)	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Stuart Dark (SD)	King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (SCA)	Breckland District Council
Maj Gavin Rushmere (GR)	3rd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment
Jamie Athill (JA)	Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Norfolk
Wayne Farrow (WF)	DWP
Cdre Rob Bellfield (RB)	Royal Navy
Chris Haystead (CH)	Norwich City Council
Maj David Hoey (DH)	1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
David Powell (DP)	NHS Op Courage

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

- 1.1. KP welcomed everyone attending today and listed the apologies.
- 1.2. Paul Smith, MBE was welcomed as a new member of the Board representing the Royal British Legion. KP thanked Hugh King for his enthusiasm and commitment to the Covenant during his time as Chairman of the RBL in Norfolk.
- 1.3. Hugh King said how much he had enjoyed his time on the Board and the benefits it brought to the RBL through networking with Board members.
- 1.4. KP asked for any comments on the minutes of the previous meeting, held 23 September 2021. SG reported completing the action to support Hockwell Parish Council and Feltwell Council to write their Covenant Pledges.
- 1.5. The minutes were agreed.

2. Virtual Speaker – Natalie Spurdens, Homestart Norfolk

- 2.1 Natalie Spurdens gave a presentation of the work Homestart Norfolk are doing with families at RAF Marham who have children aged 0-5 years. She explained they secured funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust under the “Tackling Loneliness” programme. In response to families’ needs, the project has been adapted during the pandemic; it now runs a baby-weigh clinic, offers home-visiting support, facilitates a Thursday parent group and provided a paediatric first aid training course. The project is successful, with the numbers of families attending and being supported increasing.
- 2.2 KP invited the Board to ask questions – the following was noted:
 - How many families are currently engaging? This is a growing number, 14 families attended initially, 29 for activities including baby weigh and around 16 for toddler support. 1:1 support is also provided.
 - Are those living off Base experiencing less support than those on? This is an area of concern as it can be complex to reach families off Base, however there are facilities available in the wider community across Norfolk. Covid and the change from the Tornado force has meant lots of new families unfamiliar with the area.
- 2.3 When asked what the families main concerns were, Natalie said they focused on children’s development and mental health as well as supporting parents. The absence of health visitors made parents feel isolated and unsure they were doing the right things. The baby-weigh sessions have helped build confidence and given parents the opportunity to leave their houses when lockdowns lifted and to meet other parents.
- 2.4 Natalie reported the return of the Carrier Strike Group from a nine-month deployment has improved the situation for families and resulted in increased attendance at the baby-weigh sessions and the Thursday parent group. Homestart

are looking to recruit more volunteers for home visits. No difference in the types of support being required has been seen since the return.

3. Budget update 2021/22 and 2022/23

- 3.1. BH ran through the current budget. This included an update on the unspent funding from the Norfolk 2020 Commemoration Fund, with 30/56 projects cancelled because of the pandemic.
- 3.2. The Wellbeing Fund projects are in their early stages and Board will receive progress reports at the next meeting.
- 3.3. The Board noted the budget report.

4. Terms of Reference for the Finance Sub-Group

- 4.1. BH invited comments on the revised ToR for the Finance Sub-Group. MH explained the ToR form part of the Board's governance arrangements and they had been amended to remove reference to the assessment of bids from the national Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust; a process that ceased some time ago.
- 4.2. The revised ToR were agreed unanimously.

5. Update on the Action Plan

- 5.1. MH asked Board to note the Armed Forces Act 2021 brought in a new duty of due regard to the Armed Forces in the provision of public sector and local authority services in relation to housing, health and education. Work was underway to ensure this duty is met.
- 5.2. Board agreed to the proposal to make the Action Plan a rolling plan but noted an annual context with specific dates may be required for some projects. SG said the Board's January Workshop should continue to identify new projects.
- 5.3. The Board also agreed to rename Action 8 from "Develop guidelines regarding what someone from the armed forces community should expect from the Covenant in Norfolk" to "Develop a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment".

6. Updates from members of the Board

- 6.1. KP said the end of lockdowns and the reopening of society meant he was able to attend an RBL meeting in Dereham give a presentation on the Covenant and he is looking forward to visiting Robertson Barracks in July.
- 6.2. J Walls reported RAF Marham is moving to a post-Covid position with plans for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Picnic in June, the Friends and Families Day in July and the re-invigoration of social facilities on the station.

- 6.3. JN has spoken to the local school in Marham and received very positive comments about how resilient the children were during the Carrier Strike Group deployment. "Family Fridays" are reinstated in The Bull. SG offered RAFA's help with events on the station.
- 6.4. RM updated Board on the QDG's current deployment to Mali. The squadron's return will be in time for the QDG to be given the Freedom of Dereham Town in June. This will be followed by a tour of Wales, the Regiment's recruiting ground, and several parades to keep the army in the public eye. The Regiment is due to move back to Wales in 2026/27 when the new camp has been built. RM also reported Robertson Barracks' perimeter fence is being moved to release half of the housing owned by Annington Homes for local community use. J Walls commented this has happened at RAF Marham, too, without any of the anticipated anxieties emerging.
- 6.5. MP passed on Cdre Bellfield's thanks to J Ward for her support to Royal Navy families at RAF Marham. He said the RN were engaged with a community event at Burnham Thorpe Church and were looking to have a presence at the Royal Norfolk Show in June. The Ship's Company of HMS Dauntless would receive the Freedom of Great Yarmouth later this year.
- 6.6. A Ha gave an overview of the complex structural changes happening in the NHS as the Clinical Commissioning Groups are replaced by the Integrated Care System and its Primary Care Networks. The pandemic accelerated change in the delivery of care, and patients are now treated by a range of health practitioners using different technologies, which some have struggled to access. He said it was important for GPs to understand the veteran community and to work closely with veteran charities to achieve this. He proposed he and KP engage with the PCNs to promote Op Courage and the Veteran Friendly GP Scheme. KP agreed.
- 6.7. J Ward drew the Board's attention to: [The Duty and Care Report](#) published by Anglian Ruskin University and the three families federations; the NHS's intention to introduce single points of contact for the armed forces community under the new Integrated Care System; the MOD's [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy](#); the on-going wraparound childcare pilot in three locations; the forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant e-learning training, planned to launch in the summer to support the new duty of due regard; and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust should release the funding themes for the coming year soon.
- 6.8. PS said this year marks the centenary of the Norfolk Branch of the Royal British Legion. He hopes to appoint a liaison officer and to enhance Branch Community Support now the Covid restrictions have been lifted.
- 6.9. A Ho reported Breckland District Council has applied for a Gold award under the MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The Covenant is one of the Council's seven priorities and it is included in appropriate policies eg. planning policy for self-build and employment policies to address skills gaps.
- 6.10. CC commented on the immense pressure the NHS and the adult care sector are currently under due to Covid and a recruitment crisis. He asked Board members to be aware of the [Norfolk Assistance Scheme](#) which provides support for those

experiencing hardship, under certain circumstances and unable to pay their living costs.

6.11. AT reflected on the capacity issues being experienced by Norfolk schools due to Covid. It has been a very difficult period for teaching staff and children. His department is also preparing to implement the new duty of due regard across the areas of Education covered by the legislation.

6.12. SG updated Board on his employer engagement activities with North Norfolk Railway (NNR) and his intention to secure support from Defence Relationship Management to work with the East of England Energy Group to identify renewable energy companies that could sign the Covenant Pledge. He attended Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold and Silver award events. He said he will contact PS about further engagement with the NNR.

7. Any other business

7.1. KP said the Office of Veterans' Affairs has tasked the regional Veterans' Advisory and Pensions Committees to report on progress made by the Armed Forces Covenant Boards. KP suggested that a representative from VAPC should have a place on the Board, he will report back on this at the next meeting.

7.2. KP formally thanked Wg Cdr Jim Walls for his time serving the Board, noting his support and engagement on behalf of RAF Marham, and wished him well on his next posting. J Walls thanked KP saying he had enjoyed being on the Board. He hands over to Wg Cdr Rachel Portlock in due course.

8. Date of next meeting

8.1. Board – 28 September 2022.

8.2. Meetings will continue to be held virtually until further notice.