



## Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021

Virtual meeting held on Microsoft Teams

### Present:

Air Cdre Kevin Pellatt (KP)	Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner (Chairman)
Lisa Thipthorp (LT)	RAF Families' Federation
Jocelyne Newman (JN)	RAF Marham
Cdr Andy Swain (AS)	Royal Navy
Hugh King (HK)	Royal British Legion
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (SCA)	Breckland District Council
Craig Chalmers (CC)	Norfolk County Council
Wg Cdr Stew Geary (SG)	Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Norfolk
Patrick Finney (PF)	DWP
Cllr Keith Kiddie (KK)	Norfolk County Council
Maj Gavin Rushmere (GR)	3rd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment
David Powell (DP)	NHS
Maj David Hoey (DH)	1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
Cllr Elizabeth Nockolds (EN)	King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council
Merry Halliday (MH)	Norfolk County Council
Bev Herron (BH)	Norfolk County Council

### Apologies:

Andy Tovell (AT)	Norfolk County Council
Chris Haystead (CH)	Norwich City Council
Ann Berry (AB)	NHS
Dr Andrew Hayward (AH)	NHS
Wg Cdr Jim Walls (JW)	RAF Marham
Sarah Rhoden (SR)	Norfolk County Council
Jan Feeney (JF)	Norfolk County Council

## 1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

- 1.1. KP welcomed everyone attending today and gave apologies.
- 1.2. On behalf of the Board, KP thanked Cdre David Elford, Col Jamie Athill and Judy Hill for their service to the Board and wished them well in the future.

1.3. Minutes from 29 September 2020 were formally agreed – two updates of note:

- Board asked that KP explore if we should instigate a project to support members of the community in prison. KP reported that he had investigated and that it was felt the Board should not pursue any action but instead seek to support existing organisations already working with veterans and their families in the criminal justice system.
- Board requested that MH contact Norfolk Association of Local Councils (NALC) with a view to encouraging signature of the Covenant Pledge. This resulted in a webinar – more information later in the meeting (4.1).

## **2. Update on the current budget**

2.1. Board noted the following items regarding the Budget paper.

2.2. The Board did not spend any of the 20/21 budget so this will be rolled over to 21/22.

2.3. The Board's understanding of how national Covenant Fund Trust money is spent in Norfolk is not as extensive as it should be, e.g. the Home-Start project at Marham. It was agreed that Wg Cdr Walls should be asked to provide updates to Board of regional funding awards made via the Covenant Fund Trust.

## **3. Update on the Norfolk 2020 Commemoration Fund**

3.1. Norfolk Community Foundation is working with successful applicants to establish the way forward, enabling events to go ahead in revised format e.g. Little Melton Cricket Club. Board noted the money returned to date, along with scheduled review points for events yet to be finalised, as detailed in the report.

## **4. Nomination of a Board member to sit on the Finance Sub-Group**

4.1. Maj Gavin Rushmere volunteered to sit on the Finance Sub-Group and this was agreed by Board.

## **5. Update on the Action Plan 2019-22**

5.1. Workstream leads provided verbal updates on activity to date against the action plan.

## **Promoting the Covenant**

5.2. Board noted activities have been restricted due the pandemic. The key event so far this year was Norfolk County Council's Armed Forces Covenant webinar, hosted by the Norfolk Association of Town and Parish Councils. It provided the opportunity to encourage town and parish councils sign up to the Covenant Pledge and join the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The event was well attended and received, and it has resulted in Sprowston Town Council signing the Pledge. Work is ongoing with other councils to try and maximise sign up. The Commissioner has attended an RFCA meeting to provide updates on the Norfolk Covenant Action Plan.

## **Health, Welfare and Housing**

- 5.3. Board were updated on NHS developments. At a King's College Veteran's Mental Health Conference on 4 March, Sir Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of the NHS, published the "Armed Forces Community Forward View 2022, Serving to Civilian". This strengthens the NHS commitment for the armed forces. The conference also included a speech by Johnny Mercer, MP who launched 'Operation COURAGE' which combines the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service, the Complex Treatment Service and the High Intensity Service; consolidating mental health services under one banner.
- 5.4. Agreed action to include reference to the funding proposal connected to mental health and social isolation being discussed on the agenda (item 5).

### **Education, Employment and Skills**

- 5.5. Board were informed the Covenant Renewable Energy Group is currently being refocused. It will look at the renewable sector's supply chain as well as ensuring key partners have the information they need to advise on the sector. It was confirmed that workstream activities cover all members of the armed forces community including families. SG offered to support this area of work.
- 5.6. Norfolk County Council is taking part in a Forces Families Jobs webinar on 30 March. This will promote to organisations the benefits of signing the Covenant Pledge and of employing service leavers, veterans and reservists.
- 5.7. BH/MH to meet with SG to run through any points to raise during the Forces Families Jobs webinar.
- 5.8. HK reported continuing to work with North Norfolk Railway to support veterans through volunteering opportunities.
- 5.9. Board were shown an online copy of the Norfolk Service Pupil Premium Directory, the output from the Education workstream for 2020/21. The next steps will be to circulate this amongst schools. LT was thanked for leading this work.
- 5.10. Board noted Norfolk County Council is in discussion with the Service Children's Progression Alliance and Anglia Ruskin University about establishing an education hub for Service pupils in Norfolk to support and encourage them into higher / further education.

### **6. Formal agreement by Board for the Mental Health and Social Isolation Fund 21/22 and 22/23**

- 6.1. Board fully supported the project and agreed that the funding limit for individual projects should be pitched at 'between £5k and £10k', thereby allowing applicants to develop a project that is not purely driven by the funding amount.
- 6.2. A panel will be established to finalise the project scope and to review applications. It will include the Board's Finance Sub-Group and experts from the NHS and Healthwatch Norfolk. The final decision on which projects to fund will be made by the Board.

## **7. Updates from members of Board**

### **7.1. Norfolk County Council Chairman**

- NCC is applying for DERS gold award this month.
- The council has strengthened its staff armed forces network and will launch a staff buddy scheme to support those joining the council from the armed forces.
- Due to Covid restrictions, the Chairman has not been out and about as much as usual, but has attended the Edith Cavell memorial service, the Battle of Britain service and the Remembrance Day service.
- The Chairman will be issuing a letter to town and parish councils encouraging them to sign the Covenant Pledge.

### **7.2. RAF Marham**

- The Station is on a route map to recovery out of lockdown whilst getting personnel ready for deployment on to the carrier for 9 months. Delivering deployment briefs, while adhering to restrictions, is complex.
- The date for Families' and Friends' Day is yet to be confirmed – JN has highlighted the need for event organisers to apply for funding from the NAFC Board.
- Financial support from the Covenant Board will be needed for families because deployment will be longer than previously experienced.

### **7.3. 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards (QDG)**

- The QDG will have significant numbers away overseas for the next 18 months on various exercises and operations, most significantly in Mali from June 21 to June 22.
- Noah's Ark Nursery on the camp continues to go from strength to strength and is almost at full capacity, with mostly military but some civilian families from the village as well.
- Some works are planned/in progress to the youth club and other welfare facilities, backed by Covenant grants, gratefully received.
- As normality returns, the QDG hope to host some more but smaller families' day events.
- The MOD dental service for the soliders is currently in abeyance due to capacity issues at Marham.

### **7.4. Royal Navy**

- Regulars and Reservists have been integrated to support the Desert Rats.
- Work has begun to close some operations linked to Brexit and ensuring transport links between EU and UK were maintained.

### **7.5. 3rd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment**

- 2020 was a difficult year for the Army Reserve with some activities curtailed and diverted to the virtual route.

- The Regiment has continued to support overseas defence commitments with soldiers deployed with the 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guard in Kenya and with 7 Rifles in Cyprus.
- In December, soldiers from 1 (Norfolk and Suffolk) Company were involved in training with local councils on deployment of Flood Barriers in the event of Future Tidal Surges. In January they also sent they also sent eight soldiers down to Kent to support the testing of hauliers.
- 2021 has started with plans to reset and recommence training after the Easter period with a Fireteams Patrols Competition in Staffordshire in.
- 1 R Anglian, based in Woolwich have been engaged on continuing to support the UK Op RESCRIPT effort in and around London. The whole 1 R Anglian Battalion are due to move to Cyprus in late summer to become the UK Operational Support Battalion.

#### Operation Rescript

- From the start of the pandemic, Norfolk has received some additional support from the armed forces community. Both the QDG and 3 Royal Anglian provided mobile testing teams in the County. Teams were deployed to the NCC site a Scottow to plan for mortality pathways, PPE distribution and emergency food distribution.
- More recently, 30 Combat Medics were deployed to support Critical Care at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. The vaccine task force has been vaccinating the public in North Walsham and Kings Lynn.
- 3 military liaison continue to be assigned the County at least until 31 July 2021.

#### MOD Integrated Review

- The PM lead on Monday on announcements regarding the Integrated Review which will lead to the White Paper next week. The Reserve forces element of that review is not expected until May.

#### 7.6. RAF Families Federation

- In response to the Selous Report, the RAF-FF has launched new pages on website on 'overseas' support. Information includes schooling / taxation and it was influenced by people who had gone through it.
- The Federation has been working alongside other families' federations to respond to Select Committees re women in the armed forces and Armed Forces Bill.

#### 7.7. Transition Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) – Veterans' Mental Health

- DP reminded Board TILS and CTS have been running for 4 years, but as yet, the High Intensity Service has not been launched. Nationally, TILS have seen over 15,000 vets – 2,000 with PTSD.
- TILS in Essex achieved a silver award and is going for gold under the DERS.
- The Covid vaccination programme is drawing on resources.
- Christmas was a quiet period for referrals (in single figures) but now 40 to 50 per month; this partly due to charity sector and others furloughing staff.
- Currently exceeding KPIs because assessments are being done via zoom which is working well.

#### 7.8. SSAFA

- KP is Norfolk's SSAFA President.
- Judy Hill has resigned as Chair, Stuart Fidler has volunteered to stand in until a new Chair is appointed.
- Norfolk SSAFA gave out £219k in grants in 2020/21.
- Action - if any Board member knows anyone who would like to be Chair of SSAFA, please let KP know

#### 7.9. Royal British Legion

- Covid restrictions have impacted greatly on activities, events and fund raising.
- In Feb, Norfolk held its first virtual County conference. Lt Gen Page was appointed President.
- The Legion has new branding and training is being done nationally rather than locally.
- This year marks 100 years of the Legion, which will be marked with a parade and a cathedral service.
- Branches are looking after veterans in their communities
- This is HK's last year as chairman
- HK has invited MH to speak to Dereham Town Council to encourage them to sign the Covenant Pledge.

#### 7.10. Reserve Forces and Cadets Association

- Col Jamie Athill, who chaired RFCA, has had to stand down from County Forum so SG is covering as deputy chair.
- Activities are limited by pandemic restrictions but there is activity going on, e.g. the cadets are operating in virtual.
- The RFCA is hoping to get cadets up and running face to face as soon as safe to do so.

#### 7.11. Adult Social Care

- Adult Social Care has taken on an additional 1,200 more people – mainly older people but some with learning difficulties and significant numbers with poor mental health.
- The Council's data is currently poor on who are veterans but they are working on this.
- It has not been possible to work out how many people are using the Norfolk Assistance Scheme to help with hardship. Approximately 1800 to 2000 have been supported but there are a significant number of people waiting.
- Support to those shielding under Covid regulations stops on 31 March.
- The Council still does not have Social Care Government guidance regarding funding for the next couple of years.
- No services have closed but day services have been suspended.
- Care homes are getting back to normal.
- There has been a marked decrease in street homelessness.

#### 7.12. Breckland District Council

- Breckland are applying for DERS gold.

- Breckland are offering business start-up grants £5 to £25k through a simple online process.
- A local discretionary hardship fund is available to families and will continue for a while.
- The Council's Vulnerability Programme is going well; one part of which is mental health organisations working with armed forces charities. It includes the Breckland Youth Advisory Board and it has allocated £20k to establish young first aid ambassadors.
- Breckland has a discretionary council tax scheme for those in hardship.
- The Census 2021 data will be invaluable in identifying how the armed forces community can be supported.

#### 7.13. King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council

- EN asked for the link to the SPP Directory so it can be sent to all councillors and staff.
- The Covenant Fund Trust have launched a "Strengthening delivery of the covenant" fund, to which local authorities can apply.
- Action - MH / BH to look at to see if we should bid

#### 7.14. DWP

- Job centres were under pressure at the start of the pandemic. Work coaches were taken off their usual role and made processors to get benefits issued quickly.
- Unemployment numbers are going up and the DWP is expecting this to increase when furlough ends.
- Action - KP to write to Office of Veteran Affairs in relation to getting a 'flag' / identifier on the universal credit system to highlight someone is a veteran so appropriate support can be provided.
- Action - MH to raise the lack of a DWP 'flag' at next regional covenant officers' meeting.

### **8. AOB**

7.15. None

### **9. Date of next meeting(s)**

7.16. September Board meeting – 23/9/21 from 10:00 to 13:00.

7.17. A meeting invitation will be sent to members of the Board shortly. Meetings will continue to be held virtually until further notice.