

Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020
Virtual meeting held on Microsoft Teams

Present:

Air Cdre Kevin Pellatt (KP)	Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner (Chairman)
Lisa Thipthorp (LT)	RAF Families' Federation
Col Jamie Athill (JA)	Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Norfolk
Jocelyne Newman (JN)	RAF Marham
Cdr Glynn Johns (GJ)	Royal Navy
Hugh King (HK)	Royal British Legion
Capt Jason Davies (JD)	1 st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
Andy Tovell (AT)	Norfolk County 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)	3 rd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment
Chris Haystead (CH)	Norwich City Council
Ann Berry (AB)	NHS
David Powell (DP)	NHS
Maj David Hoey (DH)	1 st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
Cllr Elizabeth Nockolds (EN)	King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council
Judy Hill (JH)	SSAFA
Dr Andrew Hayward (AH)	NHS
Merry Halliday (MH)	Norfolk County Council
Bev Herron (BH)	Norfolk County Council
Apologies:	
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (SCA)	Breckland District Council
Wg Cdr Jim Walls (JW)	RAF Marham
Sarah Rhoden (SR)	Norfolk County Council
Jan Feeney (JF)	Norfolk County Council
Cdre David Elford (DE)	Royal Navy
1.0	Welcome introductions and apologies
1.1	KP welcomed everyone attending today and gave apologies.

1.2	KP ran through the protocol for the meeting circulated to attendees with papers.	
2.0	Update on Norfolk 2020 Commemoration Fund	
2.1	The Norfolk 2020 Commemoration Fund was set up by the NAFC Board to award money to projects in support of commemoration activity relating to the 75 th anniversary of VE/VJ day, 80 th anniversary of Dunkirk and Operation Dynamo. In reflection of the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions imposed, NAFC Board agreed to extend the deadline when monies could be spent and activities undertaken to September 2021.	
2.2	The NAFC Board received the following update from Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF) who are administering the fund on the 56 grants awarded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 applicants have withdrawn their bid; • 5 projects have gone ahead; • 24 applicants have paused but are keen to progress by September 2021, potentially with adaptations to their project; • 9 applicants have not returned their signed funding agreement and are therefore being chased by NCF; and • 15 applicants have not responded to NCF. 	
2.3	NAFC Board agreed to provide a deadline of 31 January 2021 for applicants to have responded to NCF or it will be assumed that funding is no longer required and either returned to the NAFC or not issued.	
3.0	Update on the current budget	
3.1	The overall budget position remains the same as reported in March, with the addition of the annual award given by NCC at the start of the financial year meaning that the overall 20/21 budget stands at £37,974.27. NAFC Board were asked to consider what priorities should be met using the budget in order to continue to support the armed forces community, while reflecting changed working practices and restrictions in place as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Members of the Board discussed the valuable work carried out by some local military charities supporting vulnerable members of the community.	ALL
4.0	Action Plan 2019-22	
4.1	Workstream leads gave updates on activity to date against the action plan.	
	Building Communities	
4.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KP has delivered both formal and informal presentations to all the audiences stated in the action plan, including visiting all District Councils. • Due to restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a further round of face to face meetings and presentations is not currently possible. • It was agreed that KP should keep conversations going but he may need to utilise different methods such as phone conversations, virtual meetings / presentations moving forward to make the most of opportunities to engage in a safe way. This also takes into account the pressure being experienced by many organisations during this time. 	MH

	<p>Action: to consider if Board can use Norfolk Association of Local Councils (NALC) to contact Parish Councils to ensure they are aware of the Covenant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board agreed work should start to shape the Norfolk Covenant Pledge. 	
	Health, Welfare and Housing	
4.3	<p><u>Health</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three out of the 5 Clinical Commissioning Groups received presentations on the NHS's Veteran Friendly GP Practices Scheme (noting that this activity was prior to a single CCG being formed in the County in April 2020). This activity involved KP/AH delivering a presentation / Q&A session to Practice Manager groups. It was felt that these presentations were met with a mixed response as some groups were more engaged than others. It was agreed that this action is currently 'parked'. AH has now shifted focus on to determining how hospitals and secondary care referrals are working in relation to veterans. <p>Action: Members of NAFC Board who attend a GP practice in Norfolk were asked to consider speaking to their surgery about the Veteran Friendly GP Practice scheme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HK has been in touch with GP surgeries in Dereham and the surrounding area who have agreed to be part of the scheme. AH/BH attended a virtual meeting to discuss the issue raised by Cdre Elford about the requalification of spouses as nurses and the portability of their qualifications. This is part of an ongoing discussion to encourage more people to join health services / social care. The discussion also included details of a new medical reservist programme that the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Trust are seeking to launch. Details of the scheme will be shared via a series of webinars. The new NHS dental practice is now open just outside the wire at RAF Marham. Unfortunately, the official opening happened just before lockdown and therefore service delivery has been limited due to Covid-19 restrictions. <p><u>Housing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No update to the action plan. 	ALL
	Education, Employment and Skills	
4.4	<u>Employment and Skills</u>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workstream is focusing on the renewable energy sector through a working group of experts including the East of England Energy Group (EEEGR), Renewables UK, the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), New Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk Local Enterprise Partnership), DWP, Vattenfall and Norfolk County Council. • The sector is gearing up for rapid expansion, but it is important to recognise that jobs are not currently available – this is about getting ahead of the curve. • The group is also looking to engage with local training providers. • We will be using Forces Families Jobs to promote this work as well as CTP. • Kristina Carrington (Defence Employer Recognition Scheme) attended EEEGR’s recent Southern North Seas Conference to promote the scheme and encourage the sector to sign up to the Covenant. • Board agreed the proposed revised wording for the renewable energy action, combining actions 14 and 15. <p><u>Education</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guide about Service Pupil Premium has been developed for head teachers and parents in partnership with Swanton Morley Primary School, Cherry Tree Academy and Neatherd High School. • The guide is designed not only to give advice but also provide local contacts recognising that changes such as the Future Accommodation Model may mean that schools who have not previously had service pupils may do in the future. • The guide contains local best practice from schools who work regularly with service pupils. • The guide will be published before the end of the year. 	
4.5	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>The NAFC Board agreed that the Action Plan remains relevant and good progress is being made. Any actions which cannot be progressed due to restrictions placed by the Covid pandemic will be ‘parked’ but closely monitored.</p>	
	<p>Additional areas of activity that the Board may wish to consider</p>	
4.6	<p>Are dispersed families still an area that Board needs to look at?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The RAF Families Federation has been raising the focus on trying to encourage more dispersed families to engage with their serving person’s unit but it is a difficult audience to reach. It tends to get to the point of a serious issue before families engage. Data protection rules can also make them difficult to reach. ○ This is not just a Norfolk problem; reservists experience similar issues. 	

	<p>Conclusion – the Board will keep a watching brief on this area of work, but it will not be added as a specific action to the action plan at this time.</p>	
4.7	<p>Helping veterans in criminal justice system – is this an area the Board wishes to support?</p> <p>Board identified some key issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are already several organisations supporting veterans leaving the justice system. ○ Prisoners can be unwilling to identify themselves as veterans. ○ Some veterans may have left the prison system elsewhere in the country and travelled to Norfolk. ○ Each prison will operate slightly differently – there is no universal system. <p>Conclusion - KP to raise this, particularly how we prevent veterans re-offending, with the Police and Crime Commissioner and report back.</p>	KP
	Break	
5.0	<p>Updates from members of the Board on the impact of Covid on their working practices and on the wider armed forces community</p>	
5.1	<p>RAF Marham</p> <p>JN reported the mental health of service personnel is good and Covid has not affected operational capacity. There may be some issues within the community, but these have not yet reached a level whereby people are asking for help. Community Support has been busy providing activity packs for families. The RAF Benevolent Fund has developed online courses to provide coping strategies. The Royal Air Force Association has something similar which can be accessed by civil servants and contractors. SSAFA has continued to provide support. Everyone adapted to working at home quickly and rotas were put in place to reduce the risk, particularly to the serving population.</p>	
5.2	<p>1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards</p> <p>DH reported that throughout the Covid lockdown, the QDG were mobilised under Operation RESCRIPT driving civilian ambulances and manning Covid mobile testing sites. Soldiers have since begun training again ahead of deployment to Poland and Mali. Those soldier and families living at Robertson Barracks have not been greatly affected by Covid but their inability to go back to Wales has caused some issues.</p>	
5.3	<p>Royal Navy</p> <p>GJ reported little impact has been felt by the effects of the Covid pandemic. Activity has remained consistent.</p>	

5.4	<p>3rd Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment</p> <p>GR reported that 152 soldiers were mobilised in April as part of Operation RESCRIPT. They managed 12 testing sites operating throughout the Eastern Region. 42 individuals deployed were from Norfolk so their familiarity with the county enabled them to provide good support to whatever was needed.</p> <p>1 Company in Norwich suspended training and moved to virtual training. In June, once lockdown had finished, they went to socially distanced training and more recently completed a training exercise in Wales. The company will continue activities / training socially distanced for the rest of the year.</p> <p>A joint military / military command stood up in March including two military liaison officers and four planners. This was to support the distribution of food to civilians and the establishment of a temporary mortuary. Support is being offered flexibly to meet local demand, reflecting the end of the initial peak of the virus. Current support includes Maj Rushmere and Sqn Leader Michelle Stedman who attend local outbreak and strategic command meetings. They will be staying ‘on task’ until July 21. This also reflects a change of remit for the Norfolk Resilience Forum to winter preparedness and Brexit planning.</p>	
5.5	<p>Transition Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) – Veterans’ Mental Health</p> <p>DP reported that patient referral rates went down at start at Covid, as was seen in many areas of the health service and some staff were pulled into other duties in the NHS. Many charities and the TILS service were unable to offer face to face appointments for three months, but some offered online consultations. In June, appointments started again. Since the start of Covid, 222 individuals came forward for support – the second highest referral rate in the East of England is from Norfolk – all patients are being offered a choice of face to face or online. Zoom meetings are successfully being used for therapy. The Complex Treatment Service is busy.</p> <p>Prior to Covid, TILS would use rooms at GP surgeries to see patients. This is no longer possible due to the restrictions on entering surgeries, so TILS are having to send two clinicians out.</p> <p>Due to the availability of online consultations, there is no current waiting list for TILS.</p>	
5.6	<p>RAF Families Federation</p> <p>LT reported she was impressed by the support shown for the armed forces community by charities. Some new funding schemes have been made available, including money to help families isolating; this was developed as a result of all three Families Federations pooling money. The Army Families</p>	

	<p>Federation provided dongles to help with online capability. Annington Homes and the RAF FF ran a programme called 'Brighten your Day' which asked people what they wanted such as a board game, a wi-fi extender or a book. All the RAF FF activity is currently online.</p> <p>Families' days were cancelled which would normally be a time for the RAF FF to get in contact and spend time with families. The Federation has continued to send out briefings and it has carried out a childcare survey to ask what families need.</p> <p>Support is being requested mainly from those overseas and those coming back from the USA. The main issues are related to quarantining and visa applications. Overall, the RAF FF have not seen a huge spike in issues being raised but this may be due to the support available at bases locally which has been well received.</p>	
5.7	<p>SSAFA</p> <p>JH reported SSAFA has continued to operate throughout the pandemic through strict guidelines. No face to face meetings have taken place and case workers have adapted to remote case working. However, this way of working is taking longer to complete. Assistance providers have been very good at accepting less evidence to support cases. Overall, they noticed an initial drop off in cases, but it is now picking up locally and nationally. They anticipate a surge in requests for assistance.</p> <p>SSAFA is experiencing slightly different cases as furlough ends; seeing more requests from younger veterans for support. There have been a few cases of family break up and assisting families to find housing locally. Funding streams have been good – SSAFA has used Crisis funding to support digital poverty.</p> <p>There have been delays in getting occupational therapy assessments and getting work such as adaptations done. There has also been an impact on training and recruitment of case workers as this is all online.</p> <p>SSAFA continues to support veterans in the criminal justice system and through their release.</p>	
5.8	<p>Royal British Legion</p> <p>HK reported RBL has adapted the way it operates, and it is working well. It is currently reviewing its operating strategy currently – this will be done by end of Oct.</p> <p>Branches across Norfolk are all doing what they can to support veterans including a buddy system.</p> <p>Halsey House in Cromer had a difficult time at the beginning of Covid. The RBL raised £6,500 to enable residents to have more access to laptops to contact</p>	

	<p>families and for the purchase of outside equipment like gazebos and chairs to meet outside safely.</p> <p>The Poppy Appeal in November will be different this year. Banks / supermarkets will be selling poppies instead of street collectors. There will also be more in the media about the poppies and remembrance as well as television coverage.</p>	
5.9	<p>Royal Air Force Association</p> <p>SG reported RAFA is very busy and has moved to virtual branch meetings. RAFA has two current initiatives: support to help members reach services; and an entertainment programme. Activity is designed to help get people together 'virtually' and keep them connected.</p>	
5.10	<p>Reserve Forces and Cadets Association</p> <p>JA reported that young people have greatly missed their weekly drill nights and their annual camp. He reported the adult cadet leaders were scheduled to return to activities in October, closely followed by the cadets.</p>	
5.11	<p>Adult Social Care</p> <p>CC reported that support delivered as a result of the Covid pandemic has led to some improvements - 680 homeless people in Norfolk were housed in under 48 hours to meet new Government rules. This figure is now over 700. Previously, no single organisation had an overview of who was homeless and their movements, but there is now one central data base giving better intelligence, including establishing who is genuinely homeless. People who have 'interrupted or chaotic lives' due to drug or alcohol abuse can move frequently so allowing support services to track them is useful – for example, the cohort often move between Lowestoft and Yarmouth (across county boundaries). This should help with better understanding of the homeless veteran community.</p> <p>Staff in care homes and social workers are experiencing fatigue as the pandemic triggered rapid change and new ways of working, with additional time and measures being required to ensure staff safety. Many staff are working extended hours on a volunteer basis. Norfolk County Council supports 1600 people every day with home care / day care – this has been interrupted and day centres have closed. Services to support older people had an initial lull and now are seeing increased demand. There has been a significant rise in domestic abuse and adult abuse; this is partly due to the lack of respite for carers. Bringing services back continues to be a challenge due to restricted working practices and frequently changing advice.</p> <p>CC expressed his thanks to members of the armed forces for supporting 43,000 people across Norfolk to shield by providing food and other essentials.</p>	

<p>5.12</p>	<p>NHS / Health</p> <p>AB reported a very different way of working for the NHS, currently all non-frontline staff are working from home. The fact that some services did not have to spend so much time on road has helped them to contact patients more often. The NHS is starting to see referrals rise again and it is keeping a watching brief on numbers.</p> <p>The veteran High Intensity Service for mental health will be commissioned during the next couple of months – this is out to procurement now. The armed forces have worked alongside NHS England at testing sites. AB believes this visibility will be useful for veterans of the future.</p> <p>The NHS is about to start engagement work with serving, reserve and veteran families on how it can improve health and wellbeing support. The Royal College of GPs is continuing with the Veteran Friendly GP Practices programme – Norfolk currently has 17 practices. The Veterans’ Health Alliance is made up of 53 trusts across the country – they are currently looking at the waiting list backlog and how to utilise the private sector in the future to support their work.</p> <p>AH explained challenges remain for general NHS services not only due to Covid but also for the winter season (including flu vaccinations for expanded groups and contingency planning for if and when a Covid vaccination is made available), at same time as trying to reconfigure the NHS back to where it was. Contingency planning is underway for a second peak of Covid. Care home staff / managers are outside the loop as they are not NHS and they don’t always get the support that the NHS might get. There are 10,000 care home beds in Norfolk compared to 2,500 NHS beds and a fair proportion of care homes will include be veterans / spouses; so, this is something the Covenant may wish to keep in mind.</p>	
<p>5.13</p>	<p>Education</p> <p>AT reported at the beginning of the Covid lockdown schools were closed to all pupils except those who were identified as vulnerable with a social worker assigned and those from key worker families. Additional children returned to school during June / July in line with Government guidance. Schools fully reopened on 1 Sept. Attendance has been positive so far. There has been a mixture of referrals for support, which initially dropped in the early part of the pandemic, but now are picking up particularly for vulnerable pupils.</p> <p>The key focus is pupils returning into a school setting that looks different and has new rules etc. AT explained, they want pupils to transition to new schools in a smooth way, thereby minimising the potential for exclusion.</p> <p>NCC is helping schools understand the Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health information so they can interpret it for their own settings.</p>	

	<p>The return to school has been varied with some pupils happy to be back at school and some pupils who thrived during lock down now having to reacclimatise into school. Some pupils found the lack of structure during lockdown difficult so there is a huge focus on catch up of learning. Schools are aware of the importance of support for mental health needs for all pupils.</p> <p>Schools responded to the need for e-learning in different ways. NCC is focusing on the need to be careful that the debate around potential loss of learning doesn't take away from supporting pupils' mental health: they are processing their own understanding of the pandemic. To support this, a programme of wellbeing is being rolled out.</p> <p>At the beginning of lockdown, the pressure on headteachers was significant. In response, NCC launched a free headteacher wellbeing service. For other teachers, DfE produced a wellbeing programme. In Norfolk, this was enhanced to include reflective practice sessions especially linked to safeguarding concerns. It should be noted, the legal responsibility for teacher wellbeing falls to the academy trust or governing body.</p>	
5.14	<p>Housing</p> <p>CH reported housing services across Norfolk have been overwhelmed with people experiencing the effects of Covid, such as relationship breakdown. Most of the services are working virtually.</p>	
6.0	<p>Future of the Covenant</p>	
6.1	<p>KP commented on the excellent progress made with the action plan and that Board agreed the plan remains relevant. Looking to the immediate future, the challenges are: the new project, to develop a Norfolk-wide Covenant Pledge and how to ensure that the budget is used to support the armed forces community in Norfolk in the most effective way.</p> <p>The following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SG – agreed good progress is being made despite the situation created by Covid. Everyone is embracing new technologies to help support their work and that will continue. It is good to hear that the charitable sector / support services have delivered despite the challenges. • JA – the Norfolk Covenant appears well placed to see where the gaps are, one of which may be veterans leaving prison (see pg 4 for details). • KK – in his role as Chairman of NCC, he has been encouraging the District Councils to continue engaging with the Covenant. By working with KP, he believes good progress has been made but there is always more that can be done. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed that KP will recall the Finance Sub-Group and all Board members to think about the projects they would like to support, including potentially looking at how the Board can support local charities going forward. 	ALL
7.0	AOB	
7.1	<p>The Duty of Due Regard – Covenant</p> <p>MH explained to Board the Government’s intention to introduce a new duty of due regard in relation to the Covenant. This means that public sector bodies will have to consider the impact of some of their policies and services on the armed forces community.</p> <p>The MOD have specified housing, healthcare and education as the areas to be covered by the duty. The MOD produced a policy document but has not formally consulted yet; this will be done in the next 6 to 8 weeks.</p> <p>AB said Andy Bacon is leading on the NHS review of the new proposed duty of due regard in relation to the Covenant. This work is currently paused until further information is made available by the MOD.</p> <p>AT reported he would wait for the MOD’s final detail in relation to education to be released and then would anticipate an NCC-wide response but, he will ensure that the management team in Children’s Services are aware.</p>	
7.2	<p>RBL Community Award</p> <p>HK reminded Board in February 2020, the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board were winners of the RBL Community Award but at this point a certificate was not ready. On behalf of the RBL, HK presented the certificate and thanked the Board for its hard work to support the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>In response, KP said it is a pleasure to receive the certificate and requested that KK find a place to display it at County Hall.</p>	KK
8.0	Date of next meeting(s)	
8.1	<p>January workshop – 20/1/21 from 1000-1300 March Board meeting – 18/3/21 from 1000-1300</p> <p>A meeting invitation will be sent to members of the Board shortly. Meetings will continue to be held virtually.</p>	