



Armed Forces Covenant Review 2018/19

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Foreword



Pride in our armed forces is something that was drummed into me by my grandad from a young age. This Covenant is about the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force, and recognises the service and sacrifice of the individual sailors, soldiers, and airmen and airwomen, both serving and veterans, as well as their loved ones, on whose support they depend.

This is why at my election I pledged to work for "a fairer deal for current and former military personnel", and why one of my first acts as Metro Mayor was to sign an Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Combined Authority.

There are deep and longstanding ties between the armed forces and our city region. That's why the Annual Service of Remembrance at St George's Plateau is typically one of the biggest outside the capital. Hence the Combined Authority covenant builds on a lot of fantastic work that is already being undertaken by the city region's local authorities - Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral.

This report celebrates that work, but also provides us with a platform to learn from best practice and to set about planning how, working together as a city region, we can collectively advance our promise to honour and respect veterans, serving personnel, and their families.

Steve Rotheram

Steve Rotheram
Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor



What is the Armed Forces Covenant?



The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served, and their families, are treated fairly. This commitment is made in recognition of the sacrifices they make on behalf of the country.

The Armed Forces Covenant is not designed to give the Armed Forces, Veterans and their families' preferential treatment compared with other citizens but it should ensure that they get a fair deal and are not disadvantaged because of their Service.

The Armed Forces Covenant relies on the government, communities, businesses, and individuals of the UK to actively support it in order to make a difference. Local Authorities are at the heart of that support group. The six councils in the Liverpool City Region have all signed the Covenant, and this review examines how they are working hard to make sure that Servicemen and women, veterans and their families get a fair deal.





Why do we need an Armed Forces Covenant?

Life in the Armed Forces is different to the rest of society. Whilst a military career is challenging and rewarding, Armed Forces personnel make sacrifices in order to serve. They go where they are sent, when they are sent. As long as we need to defend our nation and its interests in an uncertain and dangerous world, we will need Armed Forces that are ready and willing to serve when called. So families will have to move, sometimes with little notice, to unfamiliar areas. Or they may have to live apart for extended periods of time and cope with the issues that this can bring. And they will face the stresses and strains that arise when their loved one is deployed on operational commitments. All of this means that they can find themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their civilian neighbours in accessing the goods and services that as citizens we should all expect.

The Armed Forces Covenant and Local Authorities

The Armed Forces Community is part of the local community, and as such, ensuring that they are treated fairly and not disadvantaged should be integrated into all the services, support, engagement and work councils do in their local community.

When considering how local authorities should approach the Armed Forces Covenant they need to be mindful that underlying the promise that the Armed Forces Community should be treated fairly lay two principles:

- The Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases for those who have given the most, such as the injured, psychologically scarred, or bereaved.

What is this review?

To help support Local Authorities, in 2016 the Forces in Mind Trust and the Local Government Association commissioned an independent survey and review of the delivery of local Covenant pledges – the “Our Community – Our Covenant Report” - which sets out good practice and helpful steps that local partnerships can adopt. The full report and executive summary can be found here - <http://www.fim-trust.org/reports/>.

The report provides a ‘tool kit’ which describes the core infrastructure Local Authorities are likely to require for Covenant delivery. This document presents the findings from a series of interviews with each Local Authority lead officer for the Armed Forces Covenant, structured around the infrastructure suggested in the ‘tool kit’. The interviews were conducted by the Combined Authority’s lead officer as part of its commitment to supporting the work of the constituent councils, as set out in the Liverpool City Region Armed Forces Covenant signed by the Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram in September 2017. The object of the exercise is celebrate what each authority has achieved in relation to its Armed Forces Covenant, to provide a benchmark across the City Region, and to support the development of the Armed Forces Covenant agenda in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding agreed by the Council Leaders, Liverpool City Mayor and the Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor in June 2018.

Armed Forces Covenant Lead Officer: Olly Martins
olly.martins@liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk
<https://liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/afc>





Individuals

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Rob Polhill, is the elected member champion at Halton Borough Council.

Jim Yates, Assistant to the Chief Executive at Halton Borough Council, is the authority's lead officer on the Armed Forces Community Covenant, having taken over the role some 18 months ago at the time of writing.

The Chief Executive Mr Parr has been personally engaged in strengthening the authority's relationship with the borough's third sector hub, North West Veterans Association. It is therefore fair to say that Covenant matters are embedded at the very highest level at Halton BC.



Communication

Halton maintains separate web pages at www.afcovenant.halton.me detailing the council's commitments to the armed forces community, and signposting other advice and support services via the Confederation of Service Charities member directory. Halton's covenant webpages are clearly linked to from the 'Council and Democracy' section of the main website and is easily found using the website's own search function.

Training has been provided to staff of Halton Direct Link, the council's network of 'one stopshops', and Jim Yates is internally well-known as the link for Covenant related matters.

Collaboration

Historically collaboration by the authority in relation to Armed Forces Covenant related matters has taken place within the context of a Cheshire county-wide footprint. Therefore at the time of writing there is no authority area based forum, data capture and monitoring, or an accompanying localised action planning process.

In terms of local hubs, Halton believed a gap in provision had been identified in the Widnes area of the borough and therefore the authority commissioned provision from Armed Forces Community Support Hub based in Warrington and operating elsewhere in Cheshire. The initial evaluation suggests that the Group was not well attended and it has been decided not to proceed with the provision and look at alternative ways of supporting the veteran community.

Recent discussion the North West Veterans Association (previously Runcorn Veterans Association) have been positive and work is taking place to relocate the Group to a permanent base in Runcorn Town Centre and to develop a collaborative approach alongside Veteran HQ. New premises in Runcorn Old Town have been identified and the Group will relocate in the new year. Further work will be undertaken to develop the Group in conjunction with Veterans HQ.

Vision and commitment

Halton has a dedicated officer responsible for 'Housing Options' and 'Property Pool' in relation to Covenant related matters. The authority operates a bond scheme in relation to rent deposits and will place all members of the Armed Forces who are in housing need into Band B (high priority), within 3 months of discharge.

'Halton People into Jobs', the council's service for helping to find local people training and employment, also makes specialist provision for veterans and service leavers. It is acknowledged that more work is needed to develop the appropriate health pathways required in Halton. This was identified by a specific health needs assessment in 2014 but a subsequent review found that insufficient action had been taken to take this work forward.

Future development

In common with other authorities, Halton BC identified the lack of reliable data on the veteran cohort or notification of service leaver numbers as issues that make service planning problematic. The authority therefore supports the Royal British Legion 'Count them in' campaign for the inclusion of veteran status in the next census. Nonetheless it is felt more could be done in terms of data sharing by the MoD and armed forces.

Armed Forces Covenant Lead Officer: Jim Yates
Jim.Yates@halton.gov.uk
<http://afcovenant.halton.me/>





Individuals

Knowsley's elected member champion is Councillor Tony Brennan, who is the cabinet lead member for Regeneration and Economic Development.

Paul Peng, the authority's Community Cohesion Manager, is the lead officer providing a route through which concerns can be raised and whose details appear on the authority's website in this regard.

Communication

The Armed Forces Community Covenant is featured on the council's website under 'Policies, Plans and Strategies'. The Knowsley Veterans Hub "a local delivery for practical solutions in support of service personnel, Veterans and their families" is signposted together with information on the Veterans Gateway, a national support service. Knowsley Veterans Hub is supported by Everton in the Community, Veterans Foundation, the Royal British Legion, MSB Solicitors and enjoys a close relationship with the council.



Training has been provided to frontline One Stop Shop staff and for added effect this was carried out at the Alamein Barracks in Huyton, home to 33 Signals Sqn (Res), by the unit's OC Major Bob Dobson. GP practises have also been engaged by this provision through Knowsley CCG.

Collaboration

Knowsley Council hosts an Armed Forces Community Covenant Theme Group which meets on a cyclical basis. The authority hasn't produced an annual report in relation to Covenant matters, but regular update reports are presented at Portfolio to the Cabinet member for progress and action. In addition, Knowsley is a signatory to the joint Liverpool City Region "Memorandum of Understanding", effected 29th June 2018.

Vision and commitment

Knowsley's JSNA reflects data sourced from the Royal British Legion and the MoD dataset location of Armed Forces Pension and Compensation Recipients.

The authority has Covenant considerations included within the "protected characteristic" grouping alongside its Equality Impact Assessments as an intrinsic part of the corporate decision making process.

Future development

In common with other authorities, Knowsley MBC identified the lack of reliable data on the veteran cohort or notification of service leaver numbers as issues that make service planning problematic. The authority therefore supports the Royal British Legion 'Count them in' campaign for the inclusion of veteran status in the next census.

Nonetheless it is felt more could be done in terms of data sharing and collection by the MoD and armed forces and statutory services. Knowsley is actively canvassing local GP surgeries in conjunction with the NHS Cheshire and North West Clinical Commissioning Group veterans lead. The purpose is to encourage localised data collection of current and ex service personnel, veterans and their families. The outcome is anticipated to contribute to the increasing social prescription activity, which is now a national issue for Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Armed Forces Covenant Lead Officer: Paul Peng

Paul.Peng@knowsley.gov.uk

<https://www.knowsley.gov.uk/your-council/policies,-plans-and-strategies/people/armed-forces-community-covenant>





Individuals

Ian Francis is the Mayoral Lead for Armed Forces and Veterans and is designated as the Armed Forces Champion for the City of Liverpool. Mr Francis has therefore been appointed by the City Mayor, for his knowledge and passion about Armed Forces issues is widely respected, to continue in his champion role as an following his departure from office as a city councillor.

Further reflecting the value and importance of the Armed Forces to the City of Liverpool, a virtual team supports the Mayoral Lead, and delivery and promotion of the Armed Forces Covenant in the City. The team is led by Colleen Martin, Assistant Director - Supporting Communities and Strategic Lead for the Armed Forces; operational delivery and policy support are provided by Jane Weller and Anne Doyle, who are both – Commissioning and Contracts Managers for Adults Services and Louise Powney, information and communications officer.

Communication

Liverpool City Council has developed a dedicated website for Armed Forces Service Leavers <http://serviceleaversliverpool.co.uk/> The website contains a wealth of information about some of the big decisions service leavers will need to make, such as finding somewhere to live and getting a job.



The City Council is an Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Award winner which recognises the support it provides to its employees who have been or continue to serve in the Armed Forces as Reservists and those who are family members. It also recognises the level of commitment in its individual policies such as housing entitlement, discounted Lifestyles memberships and dispensations for school admission applications to be considered before Armed Forces families are physically present in the area. The Armed Forces Service Leavers website provides comprehensive information for that group however the authority's Armed Forces Covenant website lacks a clear statement of how the level of commitment is reflected in its service provision.

There is a clear route through which queries or concerns may be raised with reference made to both generic email addresses and named contacts.

The City Council acknowledges that following feedback from veterans and partner organisations accessing Council services there is a need to provide additional awareness briefings to staff in frontline services (including one-stop-shops and leisure facilities).

Collaboration

Liverpool Armed Forces Covenant Strategic Group (formerly Making It Happen Group for Veterans) has been meeting since 2012. It represents a joining of UK and Commonwealth Armed Forces Communities, commissioners and providers of public services, civilian communities and private, voluntary and charitable sector communities to oversee the delivery of the Liverpool City Council's Community Covenant.

Meetings of the group have been an effective mechanism for identifying "gaps" and progressing "relevant steps", as and when they arise. Actions are minuted and progress reported at subsequent meetings. The group has a work programme that is reviewed annually and a report is presented to the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee.

This is a highly functioning model that evidences the centre of gravity it is possible to achieve as a large metropolitan authority. It nonetheless provides a methodology that others can aspire to replicate.

Vision and commitment

There is strong leadership from the Liverpool City Mayor and Lord Mayor in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant agenda. This is reflected down through the senior leadership team and across all directorates. The achievement of the ERS Gold award reflects this level of commitment, something that was also recognised with the city being chosen to host the national celebration of Armed Forces Day in 2017.

Future development

Liverpool's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Military Veterans identifies the key issues affecting the health and wellbeing of ex-service personnel, both now and in the future, and forms the basis of all commissioning plans across health, social care, public health, and children's services. The JSNA provides a basis for the development of a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Armed Forces Covenant Lead Officer: Jane Weller
ServiceLeavers@liverpool.gov.uk
<https://liverpool.gov.uk/armed-forces-communities/>





Halton Commemorate VC Winner: Pvt Thomas Jones



Liverpool City Council receive the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award from HRH Prince Harry





Remembrance Day Sefton 2018

Remembrance Day Sefton 2018



St Helens
Commemorate VC
Winner:
Pvt Norman Harvey





Individuals

Councillor Robert Brennan is the long-serving Armed Forces Champion for Sefton Council. Although Councillor Brennan does not serve in the cabinet, he is nonetheless a senior and long-serving member of the authority.

The Lead Officer for the Armed Forces Covenant is Shaun Pimblett, Sefton's Civic & Mayoral Services Officer. He reports to Ruth Harrison Democratic Services Manager, and the Chief Legal & Democratic Officer as appropriate. Although this is a somewhat unusual arrangement in that Shaun Pimblett does not have the service delivery or advisory responsibilities usually seen elsewhere with leads for the Armed Forces Covenant agenda, he is nonetheless passionate about the Armed Forces community and takes a great pride in Sefton's military heritage, particularly in relation to the Royal Navy and Battle of the Atlantic commander Captain F J Walker.



Communication

Sefton has a page on the council website dedicated to the Armed Forces Covenant and the authority's military connections. The website signposts the local third sector hub, Sefton Veterans Project, and the training resource the College of Military Veterans and Emergency Services. The page also links to the council's own directory of services, the government's Armed Forces Covenant page, and Sefton Council for Voluntary Services. The website also promotes the 'Heroes Welcome in Sefton' campaign which encourages local businesses to offer discounts to serving Armed Forces personnel and veterans. However, the website lacks a clear public statement of what specifically members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the council in consequence of it having signed the Covenant.

As Lead Officer for the Armed Forces Covenant, Shaun Pimblett provides the route through which relevant issues can be raised, reporting either up through the council's officer structure or to the quarterly stakeholder meeting.

Training for frontline staff is in the process of being refreshed.

Sefton has not recently published an annual review of its work in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant agenda.

Collaboration

The authority convenes a quarterly meeting of stakeholders which includes the Sovini Group as a significant local social landlord (and an organisation with an impressive level of commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant agenda itself) and Sefton Veterans Project.

Vision and Commitment

Although the stakeholder group referred to previously does not appear to adopt an action planning approach, there are Armed Forces Community-related Service Levels Agreements with the two aforementioned organisations.

Policy reviews have ensured a fast track school appeals process for the children of service leavers, together with priority within the housing allocations system.

Sefton Council celebrates its military, and particularly its naval heritage, as visibly evidenced by the impressive display of naval ensigns in the Council Chamber at Bootle Town Hall.

The council also enjoys a strong and supportive relationship with its local third sector hub, Veterans in Sefton. Indeed the council has recently agreed to provide 2 years funding to the total of £45,000, in recognition of their valuable work supporting over 300 veterans in the past 12 months, including working to re-house 27 veterans who were homeless. Sefton Councillor and Cabinet Member Paulette Lappin, who is also on the Veterans Pension Advisory Committee, has recently joined the board of trustees at Veterans in Sefton to provide the local authority link.

The authority could Nonetheless consider how the governance around its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant might be strengthened, drawing on models seen elsewhere across the city region.

Armed Forces Covenant Lead Officer: Shaun Pimblett

Shaun.Pimblett@sefton.gov.uk

<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/your-council/the-mayor/armed-forces-community-covenant.aspx>





Individuals

St Helens has an elected member champion, Councillor Lynn Clarke, who comes from a family with a background of naval service. Councillor Clarke serves as cabinet member for Environmental Services.

Simon Cousins, the authority's Equalities Officer / Armed Forces Community Covenant Support Officer, is the officer point of contact within the council, providing a route through which concerns can be raised. The champion and the lead officer meet on a monthly basis.

Communication

St Helens council website includes an armed forces covenant page which contains links to partner organisations and signposts a comprehensive range of resources. The page is listed under the main index and sits within the 'Council' section on the website.

The website includes a statement outlining what the Covenant is and four key areas of support. A St Helens Armed Forces information leaflet is also produced.

Training has been provided to frontline staff and an annual Covenant report has been published yearly.



Collaboration

The council hosts an Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group brings together forces representatives, military charities and public services on a quarterly basis. Originally working to an action plan, the meeting's business is now driven by minuting actions from issues arising, and reporting progress at subsequent meetings. Housing is reported to continue to be a particular focus.

The council values its relationship with the local armed forces hub, which it sees as a key partner and conduit in delivering its commitment to the Covenant, particularly in relation to harder to reach veterans.

St Helens Armed Forces Hub has recently come under the auspices of Saints Rugby League Football Team's community wing; as veterans of the Foundation. It is felt this will give greater certainty and resilience to the hub's finance and governance, allowing the project to concentrate on its core purpose.

The council maintains a specific Covenant related email circulation list which is used to broadcast regular information bulletins and promoting the benefits of the covenant to the wider population is part of the authority's overall communications strategy.

Vision and commitment

St Helens council led a comprehensive local policy review process in accordance with an action plan agreed upon signing the Covenant. As a result policies are in place across education, employment, housing and health to ensure veterans and armed forces personnel do not experience discrimination and receive support. This includes provision and concessions aimed specifically at the armed forces community.

Improved health data gathering by St Helens CCGs and Public Health has enabled the Local People's Board to identify the following key issues for the Armed Forces Community.

- Addiction
- Mental Health
- Homelessness
- Social care

These appear in St Helens Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) which is used to set health priorities.

Future development

In terms of issues that continue to pose challenges, the lack of reliable data on the veteran cohort or notification of service leaver numbers were identified as issues that make service planning problematic. The authority therefore supports the Royal British Legion 'Count them in' campaign for the inclusion of veteran status in the next census. The Council and CCG have encouraged GPs to record Veterans Status of their patients; and this is beginning to provide a more reliable form of data. Currently, St.Helens CCG Practices records show 6,000 patients who are armed forces veterans. Nonetheless it is felt more could be done in terms of data sharing by the MoD and armed forces.

St Helens Council continues to encourage all partners who have signed up to the Covenant to be more proactive in identifying way that they can honour their covenant commitments





Individuals

After signing the Armed Forces Covenant in the early part of the decade, Wirral adopted the practise of making the civic mayor the authority's Armed Forces Champion. Wirral has recognised the need to strengthen the governance in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant agenda and the ability to influence policy. The intention is therefore now to incorporate the role of Armed Forces Champion within a cabinet portfolio.

Mark Camborne, Strategic Commissioner Environment, Community Services & Resilience is Wirral's lead officer for the Armed Forces Covenant agenda. Although Mark is a senior officer with a wide-ranging role, his personal commitment to the Armed Forces Community in the borough is reinforced by his own service background.

Communication

Other than the minute of the original cabinet decision to sign the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012 and a draft of the Covenant itself, there is no information for members of the Armed Forces Community on Wirral's council website.



Communication cont...

The draft version of the Wirral Council's Covenant provided the following main commitments:

1. The establishment of an overarching Wirral Armed Forces Community Forum.
2. Develop action plans to support the delivery of agreed priorities to in-service and ex-service personnel and their families where appropriate:
 - Education, children and young people.
 - Skills and employment
 - Safer communities, environment, housing and Infrastructure.
 - Health and wellbeing
3. The development of a communication strategy and recognition of the Armed Forces through such activities as Freedom, Homecoming and Remembrance Parades and support to the annual Armed Forces Day.
4. Working to access the £30M Community Covenant Fund

Mark Camborne provides the route through which concerns and individual casework can be raised. He is well known within the authority as the lead officer on Armed Forces matters. No staff training has been provided within about the last 2 years. Nonetheless, there remains a legacy from previous training conducted, which included veterans providing first hand input, in that each public facing One Stop Shop has at least one member of staff who acts as a location champion for Armed Forces Community issues, as part of a network.

Collaboration

Wirral convenes a key stakeholder group (largely public sector and including Magenta Living as the most significant social landlord, and Margi Butler, Military Veteran Health & Mental Health lead for the NHS in Cheshire and Merseyside), chaired by Mark Camborne and meeting three times a year.

Historically the Council provided accommodation together with IT to the Wirral Veterans group, and gave them the role of administering the free concessionary leisure pass. The authority is now working with Veterans HQ and local partners to move towards having a Wirral Military Community Services organisation formally constituted. Again this is all part of the authority's plan to relaunch the Covenant.

Vision and commitment

Wirral has not published any form of recent annual review, although again the intention is that this practise will resume with the planned Covenant relaunch in 2019, with a line of reporting to the authority via the relevant scrutiny committee.

Wirral has developed policies specific to the needs of the Armed Forces Community in relation to housing, school allocations and provides a concessionary leisure pass. There continues to be enthusiasm and commitment to the agenda at a senior officer and member level, as evidenced by the plans to renew the Covenant.

Future development

Wirral intends to relaunch its Armed Forces Covenant in 2019, including new and stronger governance arrangements and a reinvigorated relationship with the Wirral based Armed Forces community third sector. The latter includes working in partnership with other stakeholders in the borough to develop a service level agreement with Veterans HQ, the Liverpool based third sector hub which was the first in the country to be established.





WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN?

WHAT ISSUES OR PROBLEMS HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED?

ARE YOU A...

**SERVICE LEAVER, VETERAN, FAMILY MEMBER OF
SOMEONE WHO IS EITHER OF THESE, SOMEONE WHO
WORKS WITH THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY?**

**WHAT SHOULD THE COMBINED AUTHORITY AND
THE SIX LOCAL AUTHORITIES PRIORITISE IN THEIR
FUTURE WORK ON THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT?**

Email your views to: fairness@liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk



Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

We, the undersigned, commit to honour the Armed Forces Covenant and support the Armed Forces Community. We recognise the value Serving Personnel, both Regular and Reservists, Veterans and military families contribute to our business and our country.

Signed on behalf of:
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Signed:

Steve Rotherham

Steve Rotherham, Metro Mayor



Liverpool City Region Armed Forces Covenant Memorandum of Understanding

Please sign and date below as authorisation and acceptance that your Local Authority will support the above requirements:

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Steve Rotherham, Metro Mayor
Frank Rogers, Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

Steve Rotherham

Halton Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Rob Polhill, Leader
David Parr, Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

R Polhill

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Graham Morgan, Leader
Mike Harden, Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

G Morgan

Liverpool City Council

Mayor Joe Anderson
Catherine Garnell, Assistant Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

Joe Anderson

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Ian Maher, Leader
Margaret Carney, Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

I Maher

St.Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Derek Long, Leader
Mike Palin, Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

D Long

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Phil Davies, Leader
Eric Robinson, Chief Executive
Date: 29 June 2018

Phil Davies



For further information or to find your local unit: <http://nwrfa.org.uk/find-a-unit/>

