

Armed Forces Covenant Toolkit

Updated edition (2025)



Shared Intelligence

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Introduction

One of the key achievements of Forces in Mind Trust's (FiMT) *Our Community - Our Covenant* series of reports, beginning in 2016, has been to establish a toolkit for local authorities to help them develop support for their local Armed Forces Community (AFC).

The 2016 report launched the idea of a "core infrastructure", supported by self-assessment questions and some wider tips. Formal research and informal engagement show that the toolkit still provides an important contribution to successful local delivery of Covenant pledges and wider AFC support. It's a baseline in the face of ever-present funding stresses and a point of reference when there are changes in member and officer responsibilities.

This means it is important that the toolkit remains up to date. It was last reviewed in 2022 and presented as an Annex to FiMT's research report [A Decade of the Covenant](#). Since then, there has been further research into local support for the Armed Forces Community for the next iteration of the *Our Community - Our Covenant* series. This updated toolkit reflects these recent findings about local practice as well as developments following the introduction in the Armed Forces Act 2021 of the duty of due regard to the principles of the Covenant in the focus areas of housing, education and healthcare.

As with the original document, the toolkit remains targeted at local authorities. It covers their own direct role in supporting the local AFC, but also the crucial activity of convening local partnerships and so enabling effective local collaborative action.

The key changes to the core infrastructure and self-assessment cover:

- More emphasis on embedding AFC support into the mainstream of local authority work.
- An extended top tips section with more advice based on recent research.
- We have dropped the descriptive scenarios of challenges that members of the AFC face. These have now been overtaken by analytical scenarios included in the freely available national training material and in the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) Covenant Legal Duty toolkit, which helps to explain the legal duty aspect of the Covenant.
- Some additional material about the individual roles, collaboration, communication and vision and commitment elements of the core infrastructure.

This toolkit update is being made in spring 2025 at a time when further change in the Covenant environment is likely, with potential extension of the Covenant duty and expected re-organisation in English local government and creation of new combined or strategic authorities. Additional modules could be added to the toolkit to reflect these ongoing policy developments.

Core infrastructure

The core infrastructure highlights a number of local building blocks for local authority AFC support. The style of implementation will vary according to local context, but these are roles and ways of working that councils should consider embedding into their operations and partnerships.

Covenant core infrastructure

Core infrastructure to deliver the Covenant	Individuals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An elected member Armed Forces Champion. This is a councillor who can represent the needs of the local AFC in both council policy and operations.• A lead officer point of contact within the council. This is to provide co-ordination inside a local authority and with external partners.• An officer Armed Forces lead (or “departmental champion”) within key council departments. These roles may need additional training to serve as departmental experts. This is an important mechanism for pushing AFC thinking into mainstream operations. The role is to provide guidance to front line staff (e.g. in housing or social care) about complex cases and to highlight front-line insight (e.g. changing patterns of need) back to the lead officer.• A senior officer sponsor for AFC support, responsible for promoting the importance of the Covenant at a strategic level. This helps to identify opportunities to link AFC support to wider policy developments.

Collaboration

Local partnerships

- A local Covenant forum/partnership or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year. Membership should reflect the nature and needs of the local AFC. Core members are likely to include:
 - Representatives of the serving community (regular and reserve) and possibly cadet organisations.
 - Veterans' organisations and third sector providers.
 - NHS representatives, covering commissioning, primary care and relevant providers.
 - Probation/criminal justice social work and police.
 - Department for Work and Pensions/Jobcentre Plus.
 - Housing partners, including key housing associations or registered social landlords.
 - Education representatives.
 - Council member champion, the lead officer and representation from key departments including housing, social care, children's services, and in Scotland, community planning. In Wales, consider involving the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) Head of Commissioning and Public Service Board (PSB) Co-ordinator.
- Depending on local context, areas may consider breaking forums/partnerships into strategic and operational groups.
- Forums/partnerships should review their membership, terms of reference and frequency of meeting every three or four years.
- In some places (for example where there are combined authorities or anticipating their future creation) councils and their partners may wish to establish a mechanism for collaboration at a sub-regional level. This could include joint forums and action plans, training packages and joint training co-ordination across the local public sector, applications for funding, and a shared web presence.

Geographic scale

- Clusters of local action across local authority boundaries can offer economy of scale for co-ordination of action covering several council areas. In Wales, the Health Board boundaries are used to support co-ordinated delivery. This is the level at which the Welsh Government funded Armed Forces Liaison Officers provide co-ordination and is also the operational level of the RPBs.
- In English combined or strategic authorities, consideration may be given to an officer role that can provide a sub-regional focal point that adds value and brings more economy of scale to the work of champions and lead officers in the constituent councils.

Communication

Public communication

- A webpage or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information for members of the AFC. This can be supported through use of web analytics to help focus refinement of content, and social media channels to highlight events and support offers. Links to partner organisations providing support can be very helpful but do need maintaining to ensure they remain up to date.
- Clear and accessible public statements of what members of the AFC can expect from the council and partners.
- A route through which concerns can be raised.

Internal staff communication

- AFC members who work for local authorities (such as veterans, reservists and spouses) need to understand the support the council offers. This is both for their own welfare and also so they can be effective advocates. Some authorities have found it helpful to develop AFC staff networks and to publicise these on a staff intranet, as well as in new joiner inductions.
- Training. This should include awareness raising of the AFC, the Covenant and associated duty in induction programmes for all new staff and more detailed training for frontline staff tailored to scenarios they may face with different cohorts within the AFC. Training packages, such as that developed by the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership are designed to be used across the UK and are available for use at no charge by other areas.

Local partner and stakeholder communication

- A vehicle for reporting local action and achievements helps to sustain focus on the needs of the AFC locally. Mechanisms can include an annual report, newsletter or forum/partnership minutes. Ideally this should bring partnership action together into one place and be linked to the local action plan.

Vision and Commitment

Policy consistency

- Review the council's policies to ensure the commitment to the Covenant and associated duty is reflected in core operational material. This can be an effective means to mainstream commitments to support the AFC, reducing reliance on advocacy by key individuals.

Action plans

- An action planning process that is proportionate to local needs and circumstances. This should set out planned actions, success criteria, which organisation is responsible or needs to be engaged and target timings.
- An action plan is a helpful tool for developing cross-partner involvement locally – actions should be devised so that other local organisations, not just the local authorities, play a role in delivery.
- An action plan should link to annual reporting to record progress.
- The scale and scope of the action plan can reflect local collaborations and, providing there is clear accountability, does not need to be at an individual local authority or local partner boundary level.

Self-assessment

We have updated the self-assessment to support local authorities and their partners in having meaningful discussions about the nature of their commitment to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community do not face disadvantage due to their service.

It supplements the core infrastructure by outlining some questions to ask about how to apply those guidelines locally. The self-assessment aims to provide a set of considerations to assess when finding the approach that best suits the context for the AFC in a particular locality.

It should also help to highlight gaps in provision and focus future action for delivery.

The tool is split into four sections, mirroring the core infrastructure: individuals; vision and commitment; communication; and collaboration. It is designed for members of the Armed Forces Covenant forum/partnership, or a wider group of stakeholders, to have a conversation about supporting the AFC in their local area in relation to the prompts.

Self-assessment tool

Self-assessment	Individuals
	Armed Forces Champion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a councillor Armed Forces Champion?• What does the role involve? Is there a role description for it?• Are there areas in which the role of the Armed Forces Champion can evolve? Are there other elected members who would like to support the Champion or take the lead on a particular aspect of promotion of the interests of the AFC?
	Officers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the senior officer with overall responsibility of the delivery of the Covenant, and who is the lead officer with day-to-day responsibility as part of their role?• Can this role be further supported, for example by having lead points of contact in key service areas and customer service teams for liaison on training or resolving difficult cases?

Vision and Commitment

AFC presence and needs

- What is the extent and nature of AFC presence in your local area?
 - As a starting point, this could be linked to the typology established in the *Our Community - Our Covenant* series of reports (see Table 4 in [*Our Community – Our Covenant: improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges*](#)) and repeated under Reference Material at the end of this toolkit.
- Is there a good understanding of the needs of the AFC in housing, health, adult social care, employment and schools and children's services?
- Are you able to describe need in relation to different cohorts, notably: serving personnel and their families; reservists; veterans; personnel and families in transition between military and civilian life?
- Has local evidence been reviewed in the light of data published in the 2021 census (England and Wales) and 2022 census (Scotland)?
 - This provides data at local authority area level of numbers of veterans, and for England and Wales, some further breakdowns including by age, health, highest qualification and economic activity status.

Addressing need

- Which organisations would be able to help address those needs (e.g. council, Armed Forces charities)? Are the referral routes from front line teams (e.g. council, NHS, third sector) clear?
- What is currently being done to help address those needs? How well do they link to your local Covenant forum/partnership action plan?
- Are AFC needs reflected in other local authority or local partnership plans and needs assessments? For example:
 - Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (Joint Needs Assessments in Scotland and Population Needs Assessments in Wales). What else can be done to address these needs?
 - Health and Wellbeing Plans.
 - Children and Young People's Plans.
 - Forthcoming local Get Britain Working Plans in England.
- Do local organisations' policies reflect those needs or is there a need for review?

Vision and Commitment continued...

Action planning and impact monitoring

- Have the areas for action been defined?
- Is there an agreed method to the action planning process?
- Are actions published, with success criteria, a timeline and responsibility for delivery?
- Is responsibility for actions shared among partner organisations?
- Do partners have a good understanding of the target impact of actions?
- How is the action plan monitored and reviewed?
- Are there other aspects of local Covenant and AFC support delivery that should be evidenced?
- How is information about the impact of local Covenant delivery shared, locally and nationally?

Future direction

- Is there a shared understanding of what successful implementation of the Covenant would look like?
- Have the local authority's Covenant pledges been reviewed since the Covenant was first signed?

Communication

Public

- Is there an up-to-date website which is easy to use and regularly updated? Who hosts the website (council, charity or partnership)?
- Does the website offer content relevant to different AFC cohorts – notably, serving personnel and their families; reservists; veterans and personnel and families in transition between military and civilian life?
- Is there a process to keep links to external organisations up to date?
- Are patterns of website use monitored and linked to updates and enhancements?
- How is the support which is on offer to the AFC communicated to people who may not have internet access, are not currently in contact with local public services, or face particular challenges, such as homeless veterans?
- Is action on local Covenant pledges disseminated to the public in a way that helps to communicate what support is available?

Communication continued...

Internal staff

- Does the council's staff intranet highlight policies, provision and opportunities relevant for members of the AFC who work for the council (such as staff networks) as well as information required to be promoted under the Employer Recognition Scheme?
- How are front-line staff briefed and trained on the Covenant and the risks of disadvantage for the AFC?
- Are front-line staff trained about when and how to ask people whether they have an Armed Forces connection?
- Have training materials, such as [e-learning](#) modules, been included on local organisations' training platforms?
- Has your authority considered including Armed Forces Covenant training among mandatory training for staff in frontline roles and those whose wider work affects the AFC?
- How is knowledge and information gathered?
- How could knowledge sharing within organisations be improved?

Local partner and stakeholder communication

- Is information about the needs of the AFC locally shared with local partner organisations?
- Is information about successes and challenges in supporting the AFC discussed among partners?

Collaboration

Forum/partnership/co-ordinating group

- Is there a Covenant forum/partnership in place? Does the membership reflect the most locally relevant drivers of disadvantage and ownership of the key levers to address them?
- What are the key items covered at the forum/partnership and do they reflect your assessment of needs of the AFC locally?
- Does the forum/partnership contribute to and monitor the local action plan?
- To what extent are the goals of the forum/partnership being achieved? What could be done to increase the impact the forum/partnership is having?
- How frequently is the forum/partnership's membership, agenda and frequency of meeting reviewed?

Collaboration continued...

Local authority collaboration

- Is there potential for collaboration on the delivery of the Covenant with neighbouring councils or through a combined authority where it exists?
- Would such an arrangement offer benefits (economy of scale, consistency, better sharing of good practice) in areas including?
 - Sharing resources to fund a co-ordinator post.
 - Consistency of offer/policy.
 - Data assembly and analysis.
 - Training co-ordination.
 - Delivery (for example of Armed Forces hubs).
 - Single voice to larger local stakeholders that span local authority boundaries – housing associations, charities, Integrated Care Systems (ICS).
 - Shared web presence.
 - Joint action plan.
- If your area has a combined authority, have your or your neighbouring authorities approached it to discuss the fit between its socio-economic ambitions for the area and the needs of the AFC?
- Is it feasible for you to approach some local town and parish councils (community councils in Scotland and Wales), including through their county association, to review whether they have capacity to sign the Covenant and to promote their understanding of the needs of the AFC?

Relationships

- Are there mechanisms in place to maintain relationships between Armed Forces stakeholders?
- Could the council, the Armed Forces and charities work together more effectively?
- Would an increase in sub-regional collaboration, including involvement of combined authorities where they exist, help with co-ordination or economy of scale in delivering local Covenant pledges?

Top Tips

Since the start of the series of *Our Community - Our Covenant* reports, we have identified a number of Top Tips which we think may be helpful to councils and their partners who are trying to improve local delivery of the Covenant and associated support to the AFC. The following tips build on these observations and have been extended to reflect the findings of the latest research.

Good relationships and networking

- Networking is key to promote effective use of scarce resources in an area.
- Establish, maintain and regularly refresh contact with base commanders and other key people, such as welfare officers, in Armed Forces bases (reflecting the regular churn in post holders).
- Use ceremonies, such as Armed Forces Day, to build and maintain contacts with key people.
- Invite senior representatives of the AFC to serve on other relevant local partnership bodies, not just those concerned with the Covenant in order to promote an integrated approach across an area.
- Build and maintain good contacts with Armed Forces charities and establish a shared understanding with them on issues such as at what stage people with housing or social care needs will be referred to them.
- Work with non-Armed Forces third sector organisations so that they understand the context and needs of the AFC in the area.
- However a forum/partnership is organised, a helpful guideline is to try to avoid one partner being dominant. Local authorities often default to providing practical co-ordination, but there needs to be an expectation that all partners contribute.

Communication

- Nurture relationships with the publication of annual reports about Covenant related achievements.
- Communication is most powerful where it brings action to life as this focuses attention on to outcomes rather than process. An annual report is a good vehicle for mini case studies and to highlight measurable impacts and the value of preventative action.
- Some areas have created local directories of support. This creates a valuable resource for signposting and the process of creating it is important for developing clarity among front-line staff about referral routes. However, without focused resource, there is a challenge in maintaining it as a current reference. Joining the Forces Connect app and signposting the GOV.UK directory for veteran support (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/find-support-for-veterans-and-their-families>) can facilitate communication by using centrally maintained resources.

Action planning

- It may be helpful to review actions alongside the theories of change published in the *Decade of the Covenant* report to work through the expected impact. This can help shift thinking from inputs to how to secure outcomes for the AFC.
- Action plans are most powerful where they are living documents. Regular review is needed and some areas have established them as “rolling” planning tools so they can be regularly adjusted to match need and priority.

Interaction with other local partnerships

- With resources under stress in local public services, the fit with other local partnerships must be understood. Mainstreaming aspects of AFC support into other partnerships (for example Integrated Care and Health and Wellbeing in England, Integration Joint Boards in Scotland and Regional Partnership Boards and Public Service Boards in Wales) may make for more effective use of resources and keep a Covenant partnership more focused.

Council organisation

- Explore the potential for your council to collaborate with neighbours to make best use of the limited resources available to support work on the Covenant, including the potential role of combined authorities where they exist or are planned.
- Experience of collaboration is that it needs to work with the grain of local context reflecting wider political appetite to collaborate.
- Employ veterans and Service spouses as key workers providing support for veterans.
- Identify and involve reservists who are employed by your council. They may help connect you to wider AFC networks locally.
- Encourage the council's overview and scrutiny function to carry out a regular review of the delivery of the Covenant. This can enhance accountability for the Covenant forum/partnership and help raise awareness of its importance within the local authority.

Training and processes

- Ensure that the Covenant features in council induction and training programmes and that there is suitable training for front-line officers.
- Use available material shared by other authorities, notably the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership, to provide [e-learning](#) through the learning management system.
- Ensure that there is a process that sets out for frontline staff whether and how to take action if a member of the public answers “yes” to the question about whether they are a member of the AFC.

Data and needs

- Use the local data from the 2021 census information (England and Wales) and 2022 (Scotland) about people who identify as veterans as a chance to promote consideration of the Armed Forces Community in other local needs assessments, for example relating to health or skills.
- Suggestions for developing your understanding of the AFC footprint locally:
 - Are records held by local public services or third sector providers of the number of members of the Armed Forces Community presenting or registering for support and services (e.g. through GPs, housing and social care teams or hospitals?)
 - Have you looked at public MoD/ONS datasets? Some, such as location of Armed Forces pension and compensation recipients, do include counts at local authority area. Where they do not, have you considered a “business as usual” approach to the relevant statistics contact to enquire if a break down to local authority level data can be provided?
 - Have you considered undertaking a survey of local members of the Armed Forces Community?
- If resource constraints do not allow assessing needs at a local authority level, is it feasible to develop this with neighbouring authorities or through a combined authority where one exists?
- Develop a simple process for capturing data and success stories about Covenant delivery. The best way to sustain action is to show the value of it.
- Link this to an annual reporting process to make success visible and to show the AFC the pride the organisation takes in what it delivers.

Engaging with the bases

- Develop a relationship and explore mutual opportunities for support at or near Armed Forces bases, stations or units.
- Identify a champion for each base – usually the member in whose ward or division the base is located.
- Engage with young people from Armed Forces families – they bring a different and honest perspective. This can be done through the Service Youth Forums.

Training resources and scenarios

Previous versions of this toolkit included descriptions of some scenarios designed to illustrate a range of issues that may be encountered by members of the AFC. They were envisaged as a tool for councils and their partners to use to think about the delivery mechanisms that they have in place and to consider how to respond if faced with a resident in this situation.

There is now freely available training material, as developed by the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership which contains scenarios, with interpretation and advice about how to respond. In addition, there are some flow diagram scenarios in the MoD's Armed Forces Covenant Duty toolkit. As this material has been developed with expert input and covers most of the scenarios from previous Covenant toolkit versions, we have dropped the scenarios from this document and recommend using the other resources.

They are located at these links:

Training

Induction module (15 mins)

<https://covenantfund.org.uk/resources/raising-awareness-of-the-armed-forces-covenant>

Customer Facing Staff (45 mins)

<https://covenantfund.org.uk/resources/the-armed-forces-covenant-and-covenant-duty-for-customer-facing-staff>

The Covenant and Covenant Duty Explained - Health (Senior Officers) (30 mins)

<https://covenantfund.org.uk/resources/e-learning-the-armed-forces-covenant-and-covenant-duty-explained-health>

The Covenant and Covenant Duty Explained - Housing (Senior Officers) (30 mins)

<https://covenantfund.org.uk/resources/e-learning-the-armed-forces-covenant-duty-explained-housing>

MoD Covenant Legal Duty toolkit

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/covenant-legal-duty/armed-forces-covenant-duty-toolkit/>

Reference material

To assist in assessing local needs, it may be helpful to consider the variables about the nature of AFC presence, using the typology established in 2016 for the first in the series of *Our Community – Our Covenant* reports. A slightly amended version is shown below.

Typology from *Our Community – Our Covenant*

1. Major Armed Forces Community presence	2. Significant Armed Forces Community presence	3. Modest Armed Forces Community presence	4. Significant known presence of veterans	5. Minimal known Armed Forces Community presence
The AFC is a very important presence in the area. Many of these places have a major serving and veteran community.	The AFC is a significant presence in the area. Many of these places have a significant serving and veteran community.	There is a smaller but nonetheless important AFC presence.	Often important areas from which members of the Armed Forces are recruited and to which many resettlement. There may be no serving presence in these places but there may be serving family members.	Places where the only presence comprises reservists and a veteran population.

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