



Local approaches to Armed Forces Covenant delivery and wider support for the Armed Forces Community

BACKGROUND

What is the Armed Forces Covenant?

The Covenant is a pledge acknowledging that the Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to the wider population in the provision of public and commercial services. In certain cases, special consideration may also be awarded to 'those who have given the most' among members of this group.

What was the purpose of this research?

- The 'Our Community, Our Covenant' (OCOC) research series has been commissioned by the Forces in Mind Trust to examine the Covenant's delivery and how it could be improved.
- In this study, Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond, we examined different local, regional, and sub-regional models that have been adopted by local authorities and their partners to deliver the Covenant across England, Scotland, and Wales.

- To provide a richer understanding of Covenant delivery and identify good practice, we conducted case study research in five local authority areas: 1) Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, 2) the East Riding of Yorkshire, 3) Glasgow, 4) Greater Manchester, and 5) Oxfordshire.

This brief provides an overview of how the Covenant and wider support to the Armed Forces Community are delivered in England, Scotland, and Wales, including the ways that local approaches and models of delivery can vary, and key considerations for facilitating progress in reducing disadvantage.¹

CORE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COVENANT DELIVERY

Local authorities play a leading role in Covenant delivery through direct service provision as well as their ability to draw together key local, regional and national stakeholders.

Previous research has identified a 'core infrastructure' for effective Covenant delivery that consists of four components which provide the building blocks for local support to the Armed Forces Community:



Individuals

- An elected member Champion
- An officer point of contact



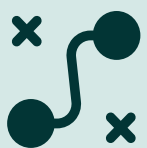
Collaboration

- An outward-facing forum
- A mechanism for collaboration with partners



Communication

- A web page with key information and links
- Training of frontline staff
- A clear public statement of expectations
- Production of an annual report with key actions
- A route for raising issues or concerns



Vision and commitment

- An action plan that is monitored and reviewed
- Enthusiasm and commitment
- Regular policy reviews

¹ This research only examined the Covenant's implementation in England, Scotland, and Wales. The context for Covenant delivery in Northern Ireland is highly distinct from the devolved nations of Great Britain and including Northern Ireland within the research's scope therefore risked masking findings relating to this unique setting.



Partnership working in Covenant delivery

Covenant delivery is inherently collaborative and involves a range of local and national partners. These include:



Third and private sector actors



Other public service providers (e.g. integrated care or health boards, emergency services)



Higher education and research institutions



National government departments and offices.



The nature and extent of partnership working varies significantly. Some local authority areas have prioritised a collaborative approach to implementing the Covenant while others rely on more informal or ad hoc engagement with partner organisations.

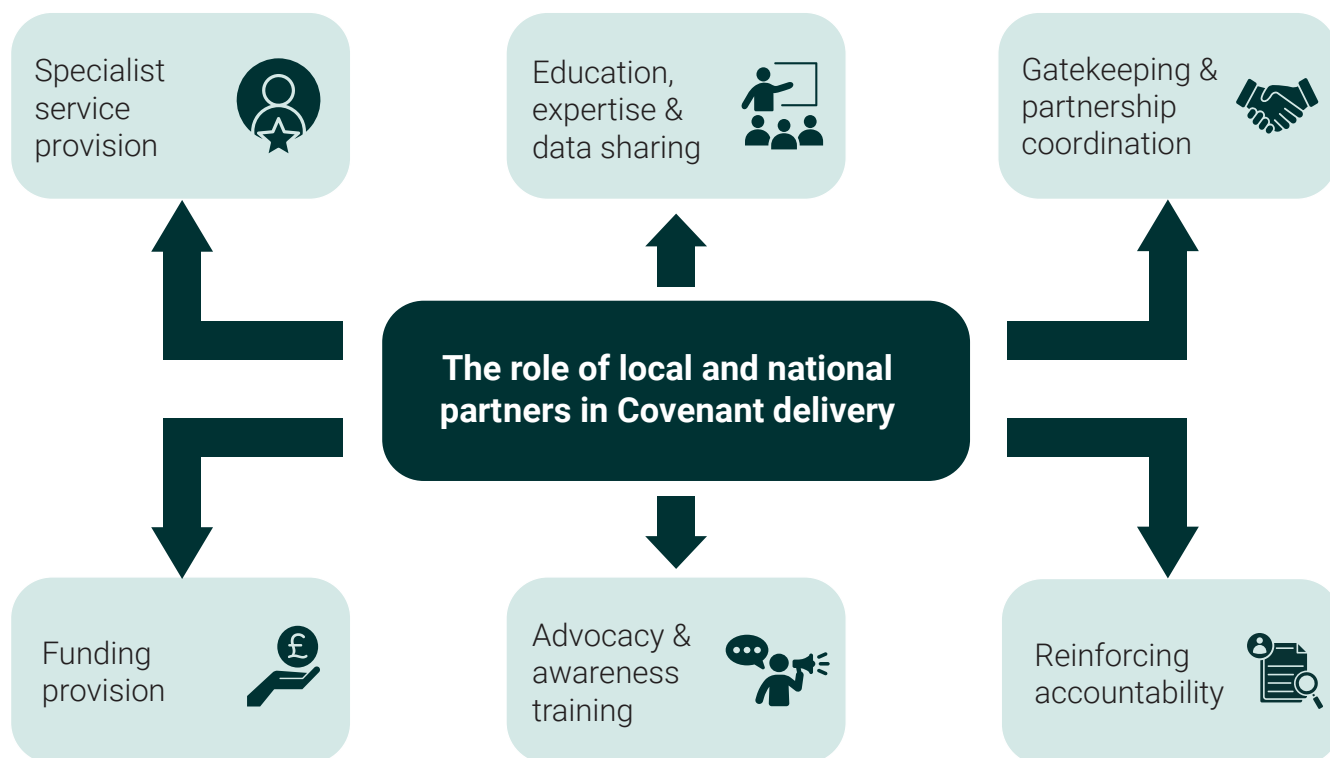
It is essential that local authorities use their convening power effectively to draw together delivery partners, share expertise, and promote the efficient use of resources in support of Covenant delivery. Similarly, all organisations involved in delivery of the Covenant along with wider support for the Armed Forces Community should actively and constructively engage in partnership working.



THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL PARTNERS

Our research identified a range of roles that local and national partners can fill to help deliver the Covenant and wider services for the Armed Forces Community.

The provision of this support may be coordinated through formal partnerships and collaboration networks, as well as direct engagement.



FACTORS SHAPING COVENANT DELIVERY

It is clear that a 'one size fits all' approach is not suitable for Covenant delivery.

There are several contextual factors that shape how Covenant pledges and wider support for the Armed Forces Community are best delivered at a local, regional or national level. These include:



Local authority structure (e.g. single-tier/unitary, two-tier, combined/county-combined)



Structure and composition of the support landscape



Geography (e.g. rural, urban)



Capacity, capabilities and priorities of service providers



Armed Forces Community profile

GOOD PRACTICE IN COVENANT DELIVERY

Our case study research identified numerous structures and mechanisms that can support effective Covenant delivery. However, Covenant delivery is highly context-specific. As such, efforts to adopt or replicate these mechanisms should consider local requirements and priorities, resource availability, and the profile of the local Armed Forces Community, among other key factors.

Context considerations	Indicative good practice	Case study examples
Where resources allow and Covenant-related activities have sufficient scope...	...dedicated Armed Forces Lead Officer posts , which include part-time roles, should be established to ring-fence capacity for Covenant-related activities and coordinate existing support	Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan
Where resources do not allow local authorities to appoint dedicated Covenant Coordinators...	...'double-hatting' Lead Officers (i.e. where Lead Officers perform multiple roles) can help to streamline Covenant delivery into policy, especially when the Coordinator's other responsibilities overlap or are closely related to community service provision	- East Riding of Yorkshire - Glasgow - Oxfordshire
Where multiple local authorities face similar demands in relation to Covenant delivery...	...regional coordinators can be appointed to cohere Covenant delivery, align activities with local and regional priorities, and avoid duplication of effort	- Greater Manchester (combined authority) - Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan (Wales AFLO)
Where local authority areas have multiple military bases and a significant Armed Forces presence...	...Military Champions can help to provide a strategic link between the local authority and individual military establishments	Oxfordshire
In urban areas with a significant and concentrated Armed Forces Community presence...	...concentrating Covenant delivery in a local hub can improve accessibility and streamline Covenant-related assistance	Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan
Where stakeholders want to increase the resilience of Covenant activity and diversify support...	...local Covenant funds can help to expand support for the Armed Forces Community in alignment with strategic priorities	East Riding of Yorkshire
Where local areas have a modest or significant Armed Forces Community presence and lack informal community support services...	...Armed Forces Community hubs can be established to supplement formal service delivery by providing a dedicated space for Armed Forces Community members to socialise and be signposted to support	- Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan - East Riding of Yorkshire - Glasgow - Greater Manchester - Oxfordshire
In urban areas with a significant and concentrated Armed Forces Community presence...	...gateway organisations can help to streamline access to local services and support by signposting members of the Armed Forces Community to a pre-existing network of delivery partners	- Glasgow - Greater Manchester

Principles and behaviours that can enable effective delivery

The case studies also highlighted principles and behaviours that can assist effective Covenant delivery:

- **Peer-led learning and delivery** (i.e. enrolling frontline staff in the delivery of capacity- and capability-building projects) can enhance the impact of new practices or processes for Covenant delivery in a resource-efficient manner.
- **Flagship partners** can be appointed by service providers to generate buy-in and establish a secure basis from which Covenant-related assistance can be expanded.
- **Involving the Armed Forces Community and the wider public in delivering Covenant activities** can help to raise awareness of the Covenant, obtain additional resource and expertise, and support the integration of Armed Forces Community members into local communities.
- **Fostering cultures of accountability and improvement** guards against complacency, ensures that available services evolve in line with current requirements, and helps to foster new partnerships between stakeholders.
- **Positive Covenant communication** and emphasising the value of a thriving Armed Forces Community can help service providers to generate public support while countering misconceptions about the Armed Forces Community (e.g. the 'mad, bad and sad' stereotype).



RECOMMENDATIONS

Through our case studies and wider OCOC research, we have identified 26 recommendations to enable further progress in Covenant delivery. These include:



Raising awareness and improving understanding of the Covenant

- Local authorities should maintain active and inclusive communication with the Armed Forces Community and invest in training to improve awareness of the Covenant among frontline staff
- Partner organisations should continue to inform public service providers and their beneficiaries about the Covenant as well as the unique characteristics of the Armed Forces Community



Planning, monitoring and evaluation

- Local authorities and their partners must ensure that their planning for Covenant delivery is embedded in clearly specified and measurable outcomes



Collaboration and engagement

- Local authorities should make a concerted effort to draw together relevant partners, resources and infrastructure in support of Covenant delivery
- Partner organisations should assist public service providers in identifying gaps in support for the Armed Forces Community
- Local organisations should engage both the Armed Forces Community and wider public in the development and delivery of services where possible



Mainstreaming and enabling effective Covenant delivery

- Local authorities should maximise the use of existing resources, information-sharing structures and data management systems to avoid duplication of effort and ensure consistent Covenant delivery
- Public service providers should continue to update their processes for identifying members of the Armed Forces Community and ensure this information is recorded in a structured and consistent manner



This research was funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, an independent UK Trust supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

This research brief describes work done in *Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond: Examining local realities and progress achieved in Armed Forces Covenant delivery* by Ed Bryan, Linda Slapakova, Harper Fine, Conlan Ellis, Tony Blake, Lisa McCance, Georgie Milligan & Meri Mayhew, RR-A4068-1, 2025 (available at www.rand.org/t/RR-A4068-1). To view this research brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RBA4068-2. Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., and Cambridge, UK. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark. RAND Europe is a not-for-profit research organisation that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

Image credits: Cover - Sgt Jimmy Wise (UK MoD Crown Copyright 2023); P3 top to bottom - bnenin, Lawrey, rawpixel.com, Duncan Andison (Adobe Stock); P6 top to bottom - Anton Gvozdikov, Drazen (Adobe Stock), LPhot Henry Parks (UK MoD © Crown copyright 2023).