



Enabling progress in Armed Forces Covenant delivery at the local, regional and national level

BACKGROUND

What is the Armed Forces Covenant?

The Covenant is a pledge acknowledging that members of 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'.

Why was this research conducted?

Since its introduction in 2011, the Covenant has been a cornerstone of Armed Forces Community support, particularly in statutory settings. However, the context in which local authorities and other actors implement the Covenant is changing, giving rise to new challenges. In addition, a more nuanced understanding is needed of how the Covenant is delivered in different local and regional settings.

HOW IS THE COVENANT BEING DELIVERED?

The 'core infrastructure' for effective delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant consists of four key building blocks:



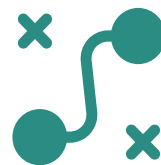
The appointment of
key individuals



Collaboration
mechanisms



Communication



Vision and
commitment

The way in which these building blocks are delivered in practice is highly varied. Models and approaches often differ based on local authority structure, geography, the local community profile, the capabilities of local partners, and other factors.

Organisations delivering the Armed Forces Covenant are navigating a highly dynamic external environment, which presents various challenges and opportunities. Key drivers of change include:

- The introduction of the Covenant Duty and the planned extension of the Duty
- Evolving Armed Forces Community policies and support structures (e.g. the VALOUR regional support network)
- Ongoing expansion of devolution across England, and corresponding changes in local government structures
- Declines in central government funding and reductions in local authorities' core spending power
- The persisting impact of COVID-19 and the 'cost of living crisis'
- Local and national elections

WHAT KEY ENABLERS AND BARRIERS ARE INFLUENCING COVENANT DELIVERY?

Enablers



Access to human resource and expertise, including resourcing of key Covenant-related posts (e.g. Lead Officer, Champion)



Historic funding for Covenant activity



Partnership working and economies of scale

WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING ACHIEVED?

- Covenant delivery has seen marked advancements in some areas but continues to be hindered by various challenges in others.
- There is confidence among many stakeholders that significant progress has been achieved over the last five years in mitigating disadvantage faced by the Armed Forces Community. Key progress includes increasing awareness among local authority staff of the Covenant, the Armed Forces Community and the disadvantage they may face.
- Further progress remains necessary, particularly with regards to awareness of the Armed Forces Community and the Covenant among frontline service providers, identification of Armed Forces Community members at first point of access to public services, understanding of the characteristics of the local Community and potential areas of disadvantage, communication and signposting to relevant services, and strategic planning.
- There is emerging evidence of good practice in Covenant implementation, which could help to promote and facilitate effective Covenant delivery; however, tailored and context-aware adoption is essential.



Barriers



Financial resource constraints



Competing local authority priorities



Limited staff availability and high turnover



Constraints on data quality, accessibility and availability



Geographic mobility of members of the Armed Forces Community and associated monitoring difficulties



RECOMMENDATIONS

Delivery of the Covenant and wider support to the Armed Forces Community is inherently collaborative and requires concerted and coordinated action from multiple stakeholders. This includes:



UK and Devolved Governments



Third sector organisations supporting the Armed Forces Community



Local authorities



Armed Forces stakeholders



Local service providers
(e.g. NHS bodies)



Researchers, analysts and evaluators

Our research provides 26 recommendations to enable further progress in Covenant delivery, grouped into the following areas:



Raising awareness and improving understanding of the Covenant: Local, regional and national stakeholders should continue to actively promote and improve understanding of the Covenant among relevant service providers, the Armed Forces Community, and the wider public.



Planning, monitoring and evaluation: Covenant delivery and support for the Armed Forces Community should be grounded in and evaluated against tangible and measurable outcomes. This is to ensure that activities and projects are effective and bring mutually-reinforcing benefits for the Armed Forces Community.



Collaboration and engagement: Partnership working is a fundamental enabler of Covenant delivery, but there are opportunities for further strengthening of local partnerships. All organisations supporting the Armed Forces Community and the delivery of the Covenant are encouraged to actively engage in partnership working.



Mainstreaming and enabling effective Covenant delivery: There are opportunities to further strengthen and better enable Covenant delivery at the local, regional and national level. For example, UK and devolved government stakeholders should work together to reinforce and align Covenant delivery across the entirety of national government.



Future research and analysis: Effective delivery of the Covenant and wider support to the Armed Forces Community should be embedded in robust data, research and analysis. Future research should particularly examine the implementation and impact of the planned extension of the Covenant Duty, the impacts of unfolding devolution in England, Covenant implementation by public bodies other than local authorities, and Covenant delivery in Northern Ireland.



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