



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

Findings from the 'Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond' case studies

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Preface and acknowledgements

This report presents the findings from a series of case studies examining how the Armed Forces Covenant (hereafter, 'the Covenant') and wider support to the Armed Forces Community are being delivered in local authority areas across England, Scotland, and Wales. The case studies were conducted as part of the *Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond* research project, which delves into the local realities of how Covenant pledges are implemented, including through different local and regional models, partnerships, and structures.

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Abbreviations

AFC	Armed Forces Community
AFCFT	Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
AFHQ	Armed Forces HQ
AFPM	Armed Forces Programme Manager
CMP	Civilian-Military Partnership
CVS	Community Veterans Support
DMWS	Defence Medical Welfare Service
DST	Defence School of Transport
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FiMT	Forces in Mind Trust
GHH	Glasgow's Helping Heroes
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
GMP	Greater Manchester Police
ICB	Integrated Care Board
JSNA	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
M.A.S.H.	Military Assistance Social Hub
MoD	Ministry of Defence
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OVA	Office for Veterans' Affairs
RBL	Royal British Legion
SSAFA	Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association
SAFCO	Stockport Armed Forces Community Organisation
SCiP Alliance	Service Children's Progression Alliance



Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Armed Forces Covenant (hereafter, 'the Covenant') is a pledge established in 2011 between the UK Government, the nation, and the Armed Forces. Outlining the nation's obligations to the Armed Forces Community (AFC),¹ it acknowledges that members of this group should not face disadvantage compared to the wider population in the provision of public and commercial services. In certain cases, the Covenant recognises that special consideration may also be awarded to 'those who have given most' among the AFC.²

Local authorities, other public service providers, and third sector organisations play an essential role in realising the Covenant's vision by embedding its principles into local policies and practice, as well as by offering wider assistance to the AFC. While previous studies

have outlined a 'core infrastructure' for Covenant delivery among these organisations,³ there is nevertheless growing appreciation that the local contexts in which the Covenant is implemented vary significantly throughout the UK. This has translated into an array of delivery models and approaches, including various Covenant-related posts, guidance, and collaboration forums.

In recognition of this growing diversity, Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) commissioned the *Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond* study to examine how the Covenant and wider support activities are being delivered across England, Scotland, and Wales, with the overarching aim of identifying cases of good practice together with potential opportunities for improvement.

The objectives of the *Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond* study are presented in Box 1.

Box 1 *Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond* research objectives

- Characterise the evolving environment for delivery of the Covenant and wider support to the AFC.
- Examine how local and national partners work with statutory authorities to support delivery of the Covenant and wider collective effect for the AFC.
- Improve understanding of how the Covenant is delivered at a regional level to mitigate disadvantage among the AFC.
- Characterise how different local delivery models shape the implementation of the Covenant and wider support to the AFC, including what constitutes good practice.

1 The term 'Armed Forces Community' is understood by the research team to comprise serving personnel, reservists, former-Service personnel, and their families, including the bereaved.

2 Armed Forces Covenant (n.d.).

3 We refer to 'Covenant delivery' as the delivery of activities that are linked to advancing the Covenant's core objectives. As discussed in the main study report (Bryan, et al. 2025), the concept of 'Covenant delivery' is inherently flawed as the Covenant does not represent a clearly delineated programme of activities. Working towards Covenant objectives also frequently involves a range of activities that cannot be clearly distinguished from wider support provided to the AFC.

1.2. Objectives and scope of this report

This document describes case study research that was performed as part of the *Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond* project. It serves as a supplementary evidence-base to the main study report by offering a more detailed description of how the Covenant and wider AFC support are delivered in five local authority areas across England, Scotland, and Wales, namely Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, East Riding of Yorkshire, Glasgow, Greater Manchester, and Oxfordshire (see Table 1.1).⁴

The case studies aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of:

- What constitutes good practice in specific local, regional, and sub-regional contexts. This aligns with the main study's realist evaluation approach, which emphasises that not all practices or interventions work equally well in any given setting.

- How the Covenant enables and interacts with wider work to support the AFC. This draws attention to the ways in which local service providers collaborate and work in partnership to deliver collective effect for the AFC.

The five case studies were selected based on scoping interviews with relevant stakeholders alongside initial regional engagement with local authorities and partner organisations. The selection process was further guided by a desire to capture Covenant delivery in a range of different local contexts (e.g. rural and urban).

The case studies were conducted through multiple data collection and analysis activities. As captured in Table 1.2, the research team reviewed relevant documentation from each area as well as consulted local authority representatives, partner organisations, and members of the AFC to build a comprehensive picture of Covenant delivery. Following analysis and consolidation of their findings, a write-up of each case study was shared with at least one local representative from each area for validation.

4 See: Bryan et al. (2025).



Table 1.1. Overview of case studies

Case study	Region	Local government structure	Rural/Urban	AFC presence	Delivery focus
Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan	Wales	Welsh unitary	Mixed	Significant AFC presence (serving)	Layered, public-facing, including Armed Forces Liaison Officers
East Riding of Yorkshire	England	Unitary	Rural	Modest AFC presence (serving and veteran)	Targeted support and delivery
Glasgow	Scotland	Scottish Unitary	Urban	Significant AFC presence (veteran and Reserve)	Facilitation
Greater Manchester	England	Combined Authority (constituent unitary authorities)	Urban	Modest AFC presence / Significant known presence of veterans in some areas	Regional coordination
Oxfordshire	England	Two-tier	Rural	Significant AFC presence (serving)	District coordination

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

Table 1.2: Case study areas and data sources

Case study area	Document review	Local authority member interviews	Partner interviews	Beneficiary focus groups
Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan	Yes	6	7	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yes	7	8	2
Glasgow	Yes	6	9	2
Greater Manchester	Yes	5	5	3
Oxfordshire	Yes	4	3	0

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.



1.3. Structure of the report

The remainder of this report describes the following aspects of each case study:

- **Context:** Each case study describes key elements of the local context, such as geography and AFC presence, which have shaped support requirements and organisations' approaches to Covenant delivery.
- **Approach to Covenant delivery:** Each section summarises the local approach to Covenant delivery and its key components.
- **Components of Covenant delivery:** Building on the summary, each case study describes the purpose, structure, and evidence of outcomes achieved by

each component of the local Covenant delivery approach.

- **Challenges to Covenant delivery:** This section discusses challenges that local areas have experienced in progressing Covenant delivery.
- **Evidence of good practice:** Each chapter concludes with a summary of what has been identified as good practice in the local area. This section also describes what considerations and resources may be required to adopt similar practices or models in other local areas.

The report concludes with a reflection on the case studies' key findings and identified examples of good practice for Covenant delivery.

Chapter 2. Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan

Headline findings

- Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan are neighbouring unitary authority areas in South Wales. They were recorded as hosting around 14,500 former UK Armed Forces Service personnel under the 2021 Census and house a small number of active military bases, including HMS Cambria and Maindy Barracks.
- Cardiff and the Vale uphold the Covenant using a collaborative approach based on aligning resources and support activities where appropriate. Central to this arrangement is the Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Armed Forces Community Forum, which is chaired by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and brings together key public and voluntary sector stakeholders to coordinate Covenant-related activity.
- Both Cardiff Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council have appointed a Veterans Advice Officer to publicise Covenant-related assistance among local authority staff and the AFC. The current Veterans Advice Officer for Vale of Glamorgan Council is also the Armed Forces Liaison Officer for the whole of Cardiff and the Vale – a Welsh Government-funded position designed to coordinate AFC assistance at a regional level.
- Benefitting from large urban centres as well as strong public transport provision, Cardiff and the Vale host a number of charity- or volunteer-run Armed Forces Community hubs that provide social and wellbeing support. These include Woody's Lodge and Cardiff City Football Club Veterans Hub.
- Identified cases of good practice in Covenant implementation include awarding complementary Covenant-related roles to individual local authority staff, concentrating council AFC services in a single team and publicly accessible location, involving NHS services in strategic Covenant coordination, and supplementing regional Covenant forums with local operational delivery groups.

2.1. Context

Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan are neighbouring unitary authority areas in South Wales. Cardiff is predominantly urban and recorded a population of 362,200 under the latest Census.⁵ The Vale includes urban centres such as Barry, Penarth, and Llantwit

Major and had a population of 131,900 as of 2021.⁶ Although the Vale is classified by the Office for National Statistics as an 'intermediate urban' area,⁷ around 85 per cent of its land remains agricultural.⁸

Cardiff hosts two UK Armed Forces Reserve centres (HMS Cambria and Maindy Barracks), while the Vale is home to Ministry of Defence

5 Office for National Statistics (2022a).

6 Office for National Statistics (2022b).

7 Gov.uk (2025).

8 Vale of Glamorgan Council (2024).

(MoD) St. Athan.⁹ In 2021, 8,600 people in Cardiff (2.3 per cent of the total population) and 5,900 people in the Vale (4.5 per cent of the total population) reported as having previously served in the UK Armed Forces.¹⁰ The demographic profile of the AFC is similar across both Cardiff and the Vale. The veteran population is predominantly older – 76.7 per cent and 81.3 per cent of former Service personnel are aged 50 or over in Cardiff and the Vale respectively.¹¹ The gender distribution is likewise consistent across the two areas, with approximately 85 per cent of the AFC identifying as male and 15 per cent as female.¹² Ethnically, the AFC is more than 95 per cent ‘white’ in Cardiff and over 98 per cent ‘white’ in the Vale.¹³

Local stakeholders have identified several key issues shaping the support needs of the local AFC. Housing insecurity is acknowledged to be a widespread issue and, while not unique to the AFC, presents particular risks to veterans upon leaving the Armed Forces.¹⁴ Although a dedicated Armed Forces homelessness officer and associated assistance are available in Cardiff, concerns remain around navigating and accessing this support.¹⁵ Mirroring findings from other parts of the UK, there is also evidence that some veterans have encountered difficulties in

securing stable employment across both local authority areas.¹⁶ For instance, one member of the AFC mentioned that, despite possessing relevant experience, they had been perceived by some employers as underqualified due to challenges in communicating Armed Forces skills and qualifications.¹⁷

Social isolation is additionally seen to be a common issue within the local AFC, particularly among veterans who may lack strong community ties following their transition to civilian life. This challenge reportedly worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued for some due to difficulties in (re)establishing social connections with other members of the community.¹⁸ Wider mental health among the AFC is a further concern,¹⁹ with many members relying on the support provided by local AFC hubs such as Cardiff City Football Club Veterans Hub and Woody’s Lodge (see Section 2.3.5.).²⁰ The wider AFC – most notably the families of current or former Service personnel – can also feel overlooked by local service providers.²¹

2.2. Approach to Covenant delivery

Cardiff and the Vale uphold the Covenant through a collaborative approach centred on

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- 9 Vale of Glamorgan Council (2024); RAF (n.d.). Royal Navy (n.d.).
 - 10 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 - 11 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 - 12 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 - 13 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 - 14 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2). Research focus group (WP4).
 - 15 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2)
 - 16 Ribera Almandoz & Keeling (2024).
 - 17 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 - 18 Research focus group (WP4).
 - 19 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4). Research focus group (WP4).
 - 20 Cardiff City Football Club Community Foundation (n.d.); Woody’s Lodge (n.d.).
 - 21 Research focus group (WP4).

aligning resources and support activities via the Cardiff and Vale Armed Forces Community Forum. This work is supported by dedicated officers in each local authority: the Armed Forces Lead and Veterans Advice Officer in Cardiff Council and the Veterans Advice Officer in Vale of Glamorgan Council. At the time of

writing (Summer 2025), Vale of Glamorgan Council's Veterans Advice Officer also acts as the Welsh Government funded Armed Forces Liaison Officer (AFLO) for the entire Cardiff and the Vale region. Table 2.1 provides a summary of these and other key actors.

Table 2.1. Cardiff and the Vale model for Covenant delivery

Name	Coordinating Organisation(s)	Description
Veterans Advice Officer and Armed Forces Lead Officer	Cardiff Council	- A complementary dual role - As Veterans Advice Officer: provides guidance to staff and members of the AFC on the Covenant and support available - As Lead Officer: promotes understanding of the Covenant across the council and with partners
Cardiff Community Hubs	Cardiff Council	- A network of community hubs across the city that provide information and access to a range of local authority services - Cardiff Council's Veterans Advice Officer sits in the central Cardiff hub
Veterans Advice Officer and Armed Forces Liaison Officer	Vale of Glamorgan Council	- A complementary dual role As Veterans Advice Officer: provides guidance to staff and members of the AFC on the Covenant and support available As Armed Forces Liaison Officer: funded by the Welsh Government and coordinates Covenant action across the Vale and Cardiff
Armed Forces Lead Officer	Vale of Glamorgan Council	Promotes understanding of the Covenant across the council and with partners
Armed Forces Champions	Cardiff Council Vale of Glamorgan Council	- Advocate for the Armed Forces Community - In Cardiff, the Armed Forces Champion is the leader of the Council - In the Vale, the Armed Forces Champion is the cabinet member for social care and health
Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Armed Forces Community Forum	Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Cardiff Council Vale of Glamorgan Council	- Chaired by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board - A strategic, agenda-setting body working with public and voluntary sector partners - Oversees the Armed Forces Community Forum's action plan

Armed Forces Community Hubs	Cardiff City Football Club Veterans Hub	• A community-based charity in Cardiff • Offers a range of services designed to support veterans and their families, including welfare assistance, advice, and social activities that help ease the transition to civilian life
	Woody's Lodge	• A community-based charity in Barry • Offers a variety of services, ranging from emotional support to practical assistance and social activities
	Barry Veterans Group	• A community-based charity in Barry • Provides support to ex-Service personnel and their families throughout the Vale, as well as the wider region

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

2.3. Components of Covenant delivery

2.3.1. Cardiff Council

Purpose & structure:

Cardiff Council's approach to Covenant delivery focuses on embedding related support across council departments with the overarching aim of delivering more integrated services. In 2017, aided by funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT), Cardiff Council was the first local authority to establish a dedicated Veterans Advice Service as well as appoint a Veterans Advice Officer, who also holds the role of Armed Forces Lead Officer.²²

The leading duty of the Veterans Advice Officer is to provide tailored assistance and referrals for members of the AFC (e.g. supporting benefit and social housing applications).²³ In their adjoining role of

Armed Forces Lead Officer, meanwhile, they are responsible for promoting the Covenant across the council and among external partners, along with acting as the primary point of contact for local authority staff who require guidance relating to the AFC.²⁴ Although all council members receive training about the Covenant and associated support, the Armed Forces Lead Officer's stationing at a single known location – 'the Hub' at Cardiff Central Library – has been praised by local authority staff for increasing the accessibility of relevant information and expertise.²⁵

Cardiff Council additionally has an elected member Armed Forces Champion, who is currently Leader of the Council and works to ensure that the needs of the AFC are taken into active consideration by the local authority and beyond.²⁶ This includes an important convening function, including working with various third and voluntary sector organisations (e.g. the Royal British Legion (RBL)) to strengthen

22 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

23 Research interview: Local authority (WP4). See also: Cardiff Council (n.d.).

24 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).

25 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

26 Cardiff Council (2013).

ties between the AFC and the wider public.²⁷ By appointing its Leader as Armed Forces Champion, Cardiff Council has reportedly been able to foster advocacy for the AFC at senior levels of local government and streamline the integration of Covenant principles into policy.²⁸

Activities & impact

The Armed Forces Lead Officer drives Cardiff Council's Covenant-related work by holding biannual meetings with council team managers to discuss Armed Forces issues and share associated updates.²⁹ As the Veterans Advice Officer, they also undertake a number of activities to ensure that effective referral pathways are established within the council. For example, the Veterans Advice Officer has hosted training sessions for council members on what to do when someone identifies as a member of the AFC.³⁰ This guidance is designed to be both continuous and proactive, with local authority staff able to reach out to the Veterans Advice Officer on an ad-hoc basis if an issue or need is identified.³¹

Alongside the instruction provided by Cardiff Council's Armed Forces Lead/Veterans Advice Officer, the local authority continues to prioritise the training of frontline staff on the Covenant through both face-to-face and e-learning sessions.³² Awareness raising campaigns have also been undertaken with the support of the council's Communications and HR teams (e.g. bulletins, news features),

which seek to improve staff knowledge of existing council services for the AFC and encourage them to engage with available internal guidance. These initiatives are felt to have had a beneficial impact overall, marked by a noticeable increase in awareness of the Covenant across council departments.³³ Cardiff Council has similarly worked to publicise its Covenant-related services to external partners (e.g. Citizens Advice) so that these organisations can confidently signpost the AFC to local authority support.³⁴

2.3.2. Vale of Glamorgan Council

Purpose & structure

Vale of Glamorgan Council has adopted an equally coordinated approach to delivering the Covenant, which focuses on embedding support for the AFC within council services and wider community engagement activities. In 2019, the council launched its own Veterans Advice Service and appointed a Veterans Advice Officer, who has also served as the Welsh Government funded AFLO for Cardiff and the Vale since 2020.³⁵

Like their counterpart in Cardiff Council, the Veterans Advice Officer for Vale of Glamorgan Council is intended to inform staff and members of the AFC about Covenant-related services. In their role as the AFLO, by contrast, they seek to promote the Covenant and coordinate relevant activity across the wider

27 Cardiff Council (2013).
 28 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 29 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 30 Research interview: Local authority (WP2). Research focus group (WP4).
 31 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 32 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 33 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 34 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 35 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

Cardiff and Vale area. This includes working in close collaboration with the local authorities' Armed Forces Lead Officers to identify emerging issues, convey this information to the Welsh Government, and share national-level guidance with relevant local stakeholders.³⁶ The Vale of Glamorgan Council's current Armed Forces Champion – a veteran and cabinet member for social care and health – provides further insight and support to the AFLO on Armed Forces matters and is tasked with actively promoting the AFC throughout the local authority.³⁷

Activities & impact

The AFLO for Cardiff and the Vale has led a series of initiatives to support the AFC within the Vale of Glamorgan and wider region. On an evening when significant noise was expected from a local firework display, for example, the AFLO organised a free cinema event to provide an alternative space for former Service personnel who could be negatively affected.³⁸ The AFLO has also assisted successful bids for projects designed to support ethnic minority and LGBTQI+ AFC members and worked with a rugby club in Barry to provide a warm space hub.³⁹ Efforts have also been made to raise the awareness of the Covenant Duty within the two councils and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (CAVUHB) (see Section 2.3.4.) together with encouraging local businesses to sign the Covenant.⁴⁰

Vale of Glamorgan Council's Armed Forces Champion has played an equally important role in delivering the Covenant. Working closely with the AFLO, they have successfully convened a policy forum within the council to incorporate veterans' needs into existing policy and practice – an initiative that has been seen as a significant step towards embedding the Covenant's principles into the council's core operations and thereby helping to ensure more integrated long term support.⁴¹ For instance, the Armed Forces Champion has used this forum to collaborate with the council's HR department to run a click-post poll through Staffnet, asking all staff whether they are members of the AFC. This has enabled the council to identify and record AFC membership among employees, creating a baseline understanding of the profile of this community and allowing members to be signposted to relevant services.⁴² The council also collects this information from frontline staff in its contact centre, providing referrals to the Veterans Advice Service when needed.⁴³

Building on the work of the Veterans Advice Officer and Armed Forces Champion, Vale of Glamorgan Council has sought to improve organisational awareness of the Covenant and associated support services by requiring all new employees to complete an e-learning package followed by refresher training every three years.⁴⁴ This training addresses core components of the Covenant alongside

36 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 37 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 38 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 39 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 40 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 41 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 42 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 43 Research interview: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 44 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

how council members can uphold the Covenant Duty through having ‘due regard’ to its principles.⁴⁵ Further guidance on the Covenant’s delivery has been issued via the AFLO, who has also offered related instruction to the police and other local stakeholders.⁴⁶

2.3.3. Partnership Forums

Purpose & structure

At the heart of Cardiff and the Vale’s collaborative approach to Covenant delivery is the Cardiff and Vale Armed Forces Community Forum. Hosting representatives from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils, the MoD, and various third sector partners, this strategic body is chaired by the CAVUHB and oversees an evolving action plan that tracks progress in local Covenant implementation. The plan is updated regularly, with follow-up actions and changes agreed after each quarterly meeting. Between 30 and 40 stakeholders typically attend these sessions, with the Community Forum’s membership also maintaining an *Armed Forces Directory of Support* for all of South East Wales.^{47, 48}

The Cardiff and Vale Armed Forces Community Forum is complemented by partnerships in each local authority area. In Cardiff, a Partnership Forum has been founded that focuses on Covenant activity within the city and is only attended by council members. Operating at both strategic and operational levels, this body seeks to inform

local authority policies and priorities while also coordinating practical, day-to-day support for the AFC.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the Vale Armed Forces Covenant Group serves the Vale area and is characterised by a more operational focus. Chaired by the Armed Forces Champion, it acts as a space to raise community issues, seek responses from statutory bodies, and facilitate wider discussion relating to the Covenant and AFC. The Covenant Group meets on a quarterly basis and each session is typically attended by around 25 people, including council officers and elected officials, statutory bodies, and charities.⁵⁰

Activities & impact

Local stakeholders have identified the CAVUHB’s chairing of the Cardiff and Vale Armed Forces Community Forum as a major asset to local Covenant delivery, helping to ensure that members of the AFC receive coordinated, timely healthcare that is tailored to their unique requirements. CAVUHB’s involvement has led to other tangible outcomes, such as the local implementation of GP ‘Veteran Friendly’ accreditation, which has seen growing uptake and continues to strengthen.⁵¹ Another key success of the Community Forum has been an increased awareness among both Covenant stakeholders and the wider region of the needs of the AFC, which has reportedly improved signposting and referrals to services.⁵²

45 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 46 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 47 See: Ministry of Defence (n.d.).
 48 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 49 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 50 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 51 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 52 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

2.3.4. Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Purpose & structure

As well as chairing the Cardiff and Vale Armed Forces Community Forum, the CAVUHB has undertaken several other activities that signal its commitment to supporting the AFC.⁵³ The CAVUHB re-signed the Covenant in September 2023 and holds the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award. It has also been re-accredited as 'Veteran Aware': a recognition that underscores its efforts to provide specialised care for veterans and their families.⁵⁴

The CAVUHB has appointed its own Armed Forces Champion and founded an Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Healthcare Collaboration Lead position that is currently funded as a two-year pilot by the AFCFT.⁵⁵ Initially conceived as fulfilling a strategic and coordinating function with respect to Covenant delivery, the post has since evolved to take on more operational responsibilities. This includes a strong focus on raising awareness about the Covenant and wider assistance for the AFC within the CAVUHB, as well as facilitating referrals and guiding members of the community through available support pathways.⁵⁶

Activities & impact

A leading activity undertaken by the CAVUHB has been the development of a consistent process for identifying whether hospital patients are members of the AFC. This

has involved extensive work with hospital computing teams to allow an individual's AFC status to be logged digitally on local systems alongside other key pieces of demographic information. While these new recording measures were originally restricted to inpatients, they have since been extended to outpatients as well.⁵⁷

Through enabling the systematic identification and recording of whether a patient is a member of the AFC, the CAVUHB has supported both local hospitals and their partners to deliver Covenant-related services in a targeted and efficient manner. A case in point is the assistance provided by the Defence Medical Welfare Service's Veterans Welfare Officer for Cardiff and the Vale, which focuses on assessing the welfare needs of patients who identify as members of the AFC and working with local third sector organisations to secure appropriate support.⁵⁸ Through this process, the Welfare Officer aims to limit the time that members of the AFC are required to remain in hospital settings and build wider resilience by linking individuals with services that can address a broad range of welfare requirements.⁵⁹

2.3.5. Armed Forces Community Hubs

Purpose & structure

The third sector plays a vital role in providing support to the AFC throughout both Cardiff and the Vale. In addition to organisations such as the RBL and Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's

53 In Wales, the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant is structured along the administrative boundaries of the seven university health boards.

54 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP2).

55 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP2).

56 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP2).

57 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP2).

58 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

59 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

Families Association (SSAFA) South-West Wales,⁶⁰ there is a comprehensive network of charity- or volunteer-run AFC hubs across the two local authority areas, including Cardiff City Football Club Veterans Hub, Woody's Lodge, and the Barry Veterans Group. These hubs form part of the wider ecosystem of support available to the local AFC and aim to provide dedicated spaces for its members to socialise and enhance their wellbeing.⁶¹ The hubs also strengthen the resilience of the AFC and address immediate support needs by offering in-house assistance and signposting to local partner organisations if needed.⁶²

Activities & impact

AFC hubs throughout Cardiff and the Vale provide a suite of activities to help to build social support networks among the AFC. Cardiff City Football Club Veterans Hub offers a mix of online sessions and in-person events at the Club's memorial garden and stadium, as well as a 'Match Day Hub' that brings members of the AFC and general public together with the aim of building new community connections. The organisation also arranges outings for its members every four to six weeks and will make welfare calls if appropriate.⁶³ In a similar manner, Woody's Lodge hosts drop-in centres, farm days, mentoring, and practical help with paperwork and entitlements, supporting over 5,800 people between 2017 and 2022.⁶⁴ The Barry Veterans Group, meanwhile, provides

cooked meals for those struggling with cost of living expenses and makes referral to appropriate charities or services.⁶⁵ Both local stakeholders and beneficiaries believe that AFC hub services are having a positive impact throughout Cardiff and the Vale. In particular, the activities hosted by the likes of Cardiff City Football Club Veterans Hub and Woody's Lodge are seen as vital to supporting AFC members' mental health by fostering social connectedness and making individuals feel valued.⁶⁶ The incorporation of personalised and peer-to-peer support by all three hubs has been highlighted as a further benefit, with staff noting that this gives attendees a vital sense of purpose and an opportunity to 'give back to the community'.⁶⁷ Through forming partnerships with local public service providers, third sector partners, and other AFC hubs throughout the area and beyond, these facilities are likewise seen to increase the accessibility of AFC support by providing clearer pathways to assistance in the local area.⁶⁸

2.4. Challenges to Covenant delivery

The delivery of the Covenant in Cardiff and the Vale is supported through a combination of partners, initiatives, and collaborative approaches across the region. However, Cardiff and the Vale has encountered challenges in some areas:

60 SSAFA (n.d.a.); Royal British Legion (n.d.).
 61 Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP2).
 62 Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP2).
 63 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).
 64 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).
 65 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).
 66 Research focus group (WP4).
 67 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2). Research focus group (WP4); Research focus group (WP4).
 68 Research focus group (WP4).

- **Staff turnover:** Although not unique to Cardiff and the Vale, both councils face the ongoing challenge of human resource and knowledge retention. While there is a strong focus on training frontline staff, high staff turnover presents a recurring burden as organisational expertise needs to be rebuilt.
- **Qualification for Covenant support:** While CAVHUB's introduction of AFC status recording procedures has served to enhance its upholding of the Covenant, stakeholders nevertheless reported difficulties in its practical implementation. A key issue is discerning whether the condition of a patient who identifies an AFC member is related to their military Service and therefore permits them to receive Covenant-related hospital assistance (e.g. prioritised access). This is a complex and subjective process, with CAVUHB staff noting that it can potentially lead to inconsistent or erroneous application of the Covenant's principles.⁶⁹
- **Funding limitations:** A pervasive national issue, limited funding has impacted the capacity of both councils and their partners to fully support the AFC and deliver the Covenant commitments.

2.5. Evidence of good practice

The approaches to Covenant delivery adopted in Cardiff and the Vale work well within the specific context of these areas, reflecting the strength of local partnerships and other geographical factors. Any attempt to replicate elements of these approaches should therefore be carefully adapted to reflect a location's unique needs, resources, and dynamics. With

that in mind, the following features could be considered for wider adoption:

- **Complementary dual roles:** The combining of the Armed Forces Lead Officer and Veterans Advice Officer roles in Cardiff, and the Veterans Advice Officer and AFLO posts in the Vale, supports both the strategic coordination and direct delivery of services. In so doing, Cardiff and the Vale have been able to promote efficient use of resources while also ensuring that the needs of the AFC are addressed at both policy and frontline levels.
- **Embedded Veterans Advice Service:** In Cardiff, the Veterans Advice Service is embedded as part of the Housing and Communities department and based in 'the Hub' at Cardiff Central Library. This integration and centralisation of Covenant-related support enhances the sustainability of Cardiff Council's approach by making the service a core part of the council's operations, reducing reliance on external funding, and ensuring consistent support for veterans and the wider AFC in a publicly accessible location.
- **Involving local NHS organisations in strategic Covenant coordination:** In Wales, aligning Covenant delivery with the regional university health board boundaries has supported strong cross-sector collaboration. Involving NHS partners in strategic coordination can also ensure AFC needs are considered in health planning and delivery. Similar alignment with Integrated Care Boards (ICB) or equivalent NHS structures in other parts of the UK could support joined-up planning and improve access to health services for the AFC.

69 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP2).



- **Three partnership forums:** The Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Armed Forces Community Forum provides a space for stakeholders from both local authority areas to come together and exercise strategic oversight over Covenant delivery. In contrast, the two local partnership forums function at an operational level, making them well-suited to identifying and addressing community-specific issues.

Chapter 3. East Riding of Yorkshire

Headline findings

- The East Riding of Yorkshire is a largely rural local authority area characterised by extensive agricultural land, dispersed villages, and small market towns. An estimated 11 per cent of the area's population are members of the AFC, which includes those serving at the Defence School of Transport – Europe's largest Armed Forces driver training facility.
- Covenant delivery within East Riding of Yorkshire Council is led by the Corporate Policy Team, which includes three council officers who ensure that the local authority honours its commitments to the AFC alongside their other duties. The council is also responsible for administering the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund, which is intended to allow local charities and volunteer groups to pilot Covenant-related initiatives and evidence their impact on the AFC.
- The Defence School of Transport's Welfare Team works in close collaboration with the local authority and other service providers throughout East Riding to support its members and their families. This includes helping Service children to secure places at maintained schools and offering a large portfolio of social activities.
- Reflecting East Riding's rural nature and geographically dispersed population, an extensive network of breakfast clubs and AFC hubs has been established across the area. One example is the Military Assistance Social Hub, which runs multiple centres throughout East Riding that offer tailored welfare advice among other services.
- Identified cases of good practice include sharing Covenant responsibilities among multiple council officers, using Covenant forum sub-groups for targeted service delivery, and establishing local sources of funding to supplement national Covenant funds and grants.

3.1. Context

East Riding of Yorkshire is a unitary authority area in England's Yorkshire and Humber region and has population of 342,200 according to the 2021 Census.⁷⁰ The area is predominantly rural, characterised by extensive agricultural land, dispersed villages, and small market towns. While it includes several urban settlements (e.g. Bridlington, Beverley, Goole), East Riding remains sparsely populated outside of these key centres.

East Riding has historically hosted a number of UK Armed Forces bases and garrisons, as well as Reserve and Territorial Army units, which together have contributed to a large military presence in the area. The main site today is the Defence School of Transport (DST), which is currently Europe's largest Armed Forces driver training facility.⁷¹ Situated at former RAF Leconfield, the DST provides logistics and transport instruction across all UK Armed Forces branches.

⁷⁰ Office for National Statistics (2022c).

⁷¹ British Army (n.d.).

Under the 2021 Census, 17,732 residents in East Riding were recorded as having previously served in the UK Regular or Reserve Armed Forces. This represents 6.2 per cent of the local population;⁷² when the broader AFC are included (e.g. partners, children), this figure is speculated to rise to approximately 11 per cent.⁷³ The veteran population is predominantly older and male, with 81.9 per cent aged 50 or above and 85.1 per cent identifying as male. With respect to ethnicity, nearly all veterans identify as 'white' (99.3 per cent).⁷⁴

Local stakeholders have highlighted several key issues for East Riding's AFC:

- **Healthcare access:** Access to dental care is an identified source of concern among the AFC, with long NHS waiting lists and the high cost of private treatment often limiting its availability.⁷⁵ Although neither unique to East Riding nor the AFC, there are also reportedly ongoing difficulties in registering and securing appointments with local GPs.⁷⁶
- **Accommodation access:** On discharge, Service leavers can face complications in accessing housing that are compounded by local pressures. For example, Beverley is a high market value area where private rents are expensive and buying is often unfeasible for low-income families, including many members of the AFC.⁷⁷

There are also concerns that local services may not always be effectively reaching homeless veterans, particularly due to a reluctance among individuals to disclose their Service history.⁷⁸

- **Transport availability & safety:** The rural nature of East Riding compounds many of the challenges that local AFC members can experience in accessing services and support. Indeed, public transport is currently limited in many parts of East Riding. This can disproportionately affect older veterans, as many rely on public transport to access services.⁷⁹ Moreover, Armed Forces families based at the DST (see Section 3.3.3.) have registered traffic safety concerns due to roads being busy near the site.⁸⁰
- **Education & wellbeing of Service children:** Many children from local Armed Forces families in East Riding have experienced multiple relocations due to their parents' military commitments and may not receive adequate support to mitigate associated education or wellbeing challenges.⁸¹ There has also been a rise in the number of Service children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in the local authority area; over the past five years, the number of Service pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans in East Riding increased from 13 to 31.⁸²

72 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 73 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 74 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 75 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP4).
 76 Research: Local authority (WP2). Research focus group (WP4).
 77 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2).
 78 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2).
 79 Research interviews: Other public service provider (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 80 Research focus group (WP4).
 81 Research focus group (WP4).
 82 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).



3.2. Approach to Covenant delivery

Within East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Covenant delivery is supported by the Corporate Policy Team that maintains a focus on AFC support alongside other policy areas. Wider assistance for the AFC is coordinated via the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group, which draws together over 40

stakeholders from across the area, including the DST, Military Assistance Social Hub (M.A.S.H.), and SSAFA.

Table 3.1. provides an overview of the key actors involved in delivering the Covenant and additional assistance to the AFC throughout East Riding.

Table 3.1. East Riding of Yorkshire model for Covenant delivery

Name	Coordinating Organisation(s)	Description
Corporate Policy Team	East Riding of Yorkshire Council	- Consists of three council officers who carry out Covenant-related duties as part of their wider roles: Principal Policy Officer: coordinates cross-departmental and external partner collaboration in support of the Covenant, manages the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund, and drives Covenant delivery by embedding its principles into council policy and strategy Senior Policy Officer: responsible for management of Covenant-related sub-groups and development of needs assessments - Strategic Service Manager of Corporate Strategy, Policy, Performance and Risk Management: oversees delivery of the Covenant and acts as budget holder for the East Riding Covenant Delivery Group Fund
Armed Forces Champion	East Riding of Yorkshire Council	- Advocates for the AFC - An independent elected council member - Chairs the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group
East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group	East Riding of Yorkshire Council	- Strategic, agenda setting body - Oversees the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group action plan - Includes four operational subgroups: - Children and Young People - Employment, Education and Skills - Housing and Finance - Health and Wellbeing

Defence School of Transport	Ministry of Defence	• Operated by the Ministry of Defence • A driver training facility for the UK Armed Forces • Supports educational access and family stability for Armed Forces families
Armed Forces Community Hubs	M.A.S.H.	• Set up initially with funding from the East Riding Covenant Delivery Group Fund • A volunteer-run charity supporting the AFC across the East Riding • Offers support to the AFC, helping to reduce social isolation and providing practical and emotional support

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

3.3. Components of Covenant delivery

3.3.1. East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Purpose & structure

As noted above, delivery of the Covenant within East Riding of Yorkshire Council is led primarily by the Corporate Policy Team. In particular, three council officers within this team balance Covenant-related duties alongside other responsibilities:

- (i) The Principal Policy Officer, who coordinates cross-departmental and external partner collaboration in support of the AFC, manages the East Riding Delivery Group Fund (see Section 3.3.2.), and drives Covenant delivery by embedding its principles into council policy and strategy;
- (ii) The Senior Policy Officer, who is responsible for the management of Covenant-related sub-groups and development of local needs assessments; and

(iii) The Strategic Service Manager for Corporate Strategy, Policy, Performance, and Risk Management, who oversees delivery of the Covenant and acts as budget holder for the East Riding Covenant Delivery Group Fund.⁸³

In addition to the coordination and partnership working undertaken by the Corporate Policy Team, East Riding of Yorkshire Council has appointed an elected member Armed Forces Champion to support the Covenant's implementation. Their primary duties include ensuring that Covenant principles are upheld across council forums, acting as a key point of contact for the AFC within the local authority, as well as chairing the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group (see Section 3.3.2.).⁸⁴ The council's Armed Forces Champion is also a member of the AFC at the time of writing (Summer 2025), which has reportedly helped to foster a strong sense of commitment to the Covenant throughout the local authority. Up to 14 other elected council posts are currently also filled by members of the AFC.⁸⁵

83 Research interview: Local authority (WP2). The Corporate Policy Team leads on developing and coordinating strategic policy, performance management and corporate planning to ensure the council delivers its priorities effectively and in line with national and local objectives.

84 Research interview: Local authority (WP2). See also: East Riding of Yorkshire Council (n.d.a.).

85 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

Between 2017 and 2019, East Riding of Yorkshire Council participated in a sub-regional partnership with Hull City, Doncaster, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire councils. While these links have since become more informal and centre on exchanging best practice, East Riding of Yorkshire Council continues to work closely with Hull City Council on a selection of Covenant-related initiatives and activities.⁸⁶ The council also participates in a number of national-level partnerships and forums, such as the MoD and FiMT chaired Armed Forces Covenant Community Action Group and the Local Government Association Armed Forces Network.⁸⁷

Activities & impact

A key priority for East Riding of Yorkshire Council has been educating frontline staff about specific AFC issues or vulnerabilities; to date, approximately 1,000 of the council's 6,000 employees have completed Armed Forces awareness training.⁸⁸ To further embed this organisational knowledge, the local authority has trained and appointed staff Armed Forces Champions for each of its directorates. These individuals are intended to provide peer support and act as points of contact for members of the AFC within individual departments, such as Children and Family Services.⁸⁹

Through the work of the Corporate Policy Team, the council has been able to incorporate Covenant principles into a number

of service areas. A case in point is the local authority's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which was informed in part by the Covenant Duty and features explicit reference to the unique disadvantages that the AFC can face.⁹⁰ The council has also conducted an Armed Forces Covenant Duty analysis to ensure that the development of relevant policies, strategies, and services considers the needs of the AFC.⁹¹ Drawing on this work, the Corporate Policy Team has so far collated and assessed over 40 impact statements that collectively demonstrate the council's due regard for the Covenant.⁹²

The council post of Armed Forces Champion is critical to promoting and resourcing Covenant-related work within the local authority and beyond. For example, the previous Armed Forces Champion successfully lobbied for internal council funding for a range of projects, including the establishment of M.A.S.H. (see Section 3.3.4.).⁹³ Building on this legacy, the current Armed Forces Champion has secured funding over two further successive periods, including £80,000 in 2024/25 and a further £80,000 in 2025/26.⁹⁴ Approximately 65-70 per cent of these funds were allocated to the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund (see Section 3.3.2.), with the remainder used for staff training, communications campaigns, and projects aiming to deliver key elements of the Delivery Group's action

86 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

87 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

88 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2).

89 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

90 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

91 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

92 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

93 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

94 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).

plan.⁹⁵ To broaden awareness of the Covenant Delivery Group Fund and associated support among the AFC and wider public, the Armed Forces Champion has also arranged for Covenant content to feature regularly in the council's magazine, *Your East Riding*.⁹⁶

3.3.2. East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group

Purpose & structure

Beyond the council, local coordination of the Covenant's delivery is led by the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group. This strategic, agenda-setting body is chaired by the council's member Armed Forces Champion, while its agenda is developed by the Corporate Policy Team, partner organisations, and other council departments. The Delivery Group features over 40 statutory and non-statutory organisations, including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the DST, M.A.S.H., and SSAFA, together with representatives from the East Riding Health and Care Partnership.⁹⁷ Its members meet on a triannual basis and are primarily responsible for overseeing East Riding's Covenant Action Plan, which is reviewed regularly to ensure that Covenant initiatives correspond to local need and are being delivered as intended.⁹⁸

The Delivery Group therefore helps to guide support for the AFC throughout the local authority area, driven by strong commitment

from its members. To aid the Covenant's implementation in practice, the main body of the Delivery Group is complemented by four operational sub-groups centred on key thematic areas: (i) Children and Young People; (ii) Employment, Education, and Skills; (iii) Housing and Finance; and (iv) Health and Wellbeing. This combining of strategic and operational components within a single forum is felt to have a number of advantages. In particular, while the sub-groups allow members to focus and share their expertise on specific areas of need, the overarching Delivery Group is seen to play an important governing role and helps to address cross-cutting issues.⁹⁹

Activities & impact

A major output from the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group has been the creation of the Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund. Maintained by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, the Fund allows members of the Delivery Group (and its sub-groups) to apply for grants of between £500 and £5,000. These grants are intended primarily to act as seed funding, allowing local charities and voluntary organisations to develop or pilot new Covenant-related projects as well as evidence their impact on the AFC.¹⁰⁰ The Fund also helps to ensure that local Covenant-related activities align with existing strategic priorities, as any allocated funding must be used to address one or more components of the Delivery Group's action plan.¹⁰¹

95 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

96 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

97 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

98 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

99 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

100 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP2).

101 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

Multiple projects and activities have also been implemented via the Delivery Group's sub-groups:

- **Children and Young People:** The sub-group has supported the development of both a 'top tips' guide and bespoke Continuous Personal Development training for local schools with the aim of generating better support for Service pupils. Furthermore, this sub-group has sought to strengthen links with local schools to improve collaborative working when preparing for the intake of children from military families.¹⁰²
- **Employment, Education and Skills:** Members of this sub-group have committed to numerous Covenant-related initiatives, including promoting the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme among partner organisations, offering social enterprise support for ex-Service personnel considering self-employment opportunities, and undertaking campaigns to raise awareness of the benefits of employing veterans throughout the local area.¹⁰³ The council itself has led by example, having achieved the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme's Gold Award at the end of 2024.¹⁰⁴
- **Housing and Finance:** In addition to publishing an updated Private Sector Housing Guide that includes instruction for Service families entering the private housing market, the Housing and Finance

sub-group has requested feedback from the AFC about where further information on local housing schemes is required as well as developed partnerships with Armed Forces charities across the wider Yorkshire and Humber region (e.g. Hull 4 Heroes).¹⁰⁵ Members of the group have likewise supported the founding of a dedicated East Riding Armed Forces Money Advice service, which is delivered by Citizens Advice Hull and East Riding.¹⁰⁶

- **Health and Wellbeing:** The Health and Wellbeing sub-group has supported a new ICB representative to encourage local GP surgeries to pursue 'Veteran Friendly' accreditation, reviewed the impact of Armed Forces Mental Health First Aid training undertaken across the sub-region, and drawn on recent AFC-focused research (e.g. the Naval Families Federation's *Experiencing Parental Absence*) to identify further vulnerabilities and wellbeing challenges confronting members of the community.¹⁰⁷

3.3.3. Defence School of Transport

Purpose & structure

The DST is a key player supporting Covenant delivery in East Riding. Leading this effort is the DST's Welfare Team, which provides tailored support to Service personnel and their families at the school. The Welfare Team meets on a bi-monthly basis and comprises six core members, with the capacity to expand to ten when needed. Its members include civil

102 East Riding of Yorkshire Council (n.d.b.).

103 East Riding of Yorkshire Council (n.d.b.).

104 East Riding of Yorkshire Council (2024).

105 East Riding of Yorkshire Council (n.d.b.).

106 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

107 East Riding of Yorkshire Council (n.d.b.); Naval Families Federation (2023).

servants, a community development worker, a Padre, a HIVE information officer,¹⁰⁸ an Army welfare community worker, and a representative from the Royal Voluntary Service.¹⁰⁹

The size and diversity of the Welfare Team reflect the DST's diverse population, which spans trainees, permanent military staff, civil servants, and their families. Much of the Welfare Team's engagement is reportedly focused on trainees, with this group noted as often exhibiting the most significant and acute welfare needs. Indeed, many trainees use the Welfare Team's facilities as both a social and support space where they can find camaraderie and talk openly about a issues such as homesickness or relationship problems.¹¹⁰ In addition, the Welfare Team assists approximately 500 permanent staff as well as their families, who are similarly entitled to its services.¹¹¹

Activities & impact

The DST has partnered with multiple organisations to offer facilities and events that enhance life on site. For example, the DST has worked closely with East Riding of Yorkshire Council to secure funding for a dedicated family support space, a community allotment, arts and crafts classes, along with a life skills hub.¹¹² Additionally, a £25,000 grant from the National Lottery Community Fund has enabled the DST to deliver tailored assistance to five

families experiencing complex challenges with the support of the charity CatZero. Such specialist initiatives are paired with a programme of regular activities for individuals of all ages, including weekly craft clubs, bingo nights, and two youth club sessions. These were noted by beneficiaries to offer essential opportunities for socialising among those residing at the DST, especially for military partners and children while their partners/ parents are away on duty.¹¹³

The assistance provided by the DST Welfare Team has had a beneficial impact on those attending the school and their families, with staff speculating that its welfare output is up to four times greater than a typical team located in an equivalent Armed Forces establishment.¹¹⁴ One example of the Welfare Team's impact is the newly funded art club, which provides a setting in which members of the DST and their families can gather and participate in regular creative activities. This has reportedly led to an improvement in many individuals' mental wellbeing and allowed the Welfare Team to make referrals to more specialised support if appropriate.¹¹⁵

3.3.4. Military Assistance Social Hub

Purpose & structure

M.A.S.H. is a volunteer-run organisation that provides support to current and former

-
- 108 HIVE delivers information support for the whole military community on a wide variety of topics affecting their everyday Service and personal life, including relocation, accommodation, health and wellbeing, finance, education, employment, deployment, resettlement, military discounts and local area information.
 - 109 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).
 - 110 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).
 - 111 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).
 - 112 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).
 - 113 Research focus group (WP4).
 - 114 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).
 - 115 Research interview: Other organisation (Private sector, Armed Forces, Education) (WP4).

Service personnel, as well as their families.¹¹⁶ Originally established as a Bridlington-based organisation via grant funding from the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund, M.A.S.H. has since developed into a network of social hubs based throughout East Riding that each offer activities and in-house assistance designed to combat social isolation and associated wellbeing issues.¹¹⁷

Alongside a group of core volunteers, M.A.S.H.'s operations are coordinated via two key individuals:

- **The founder and chair of M.A.S.H:** M.A.S.H.'s chair performs both strategic and operational functions, with a particular focus on ensuring that each of the organisation's hub is adequately resourced and their users have access to appropriate services.
- **An East Riding of Yorkshire Council staff Armed Forces Champion:** Supporting M.A.S.H. in a voluntary capacity, the staff Armed Forces Champion performs a supervisory function by monitoring the quality of available services and leading the M.A.S.H. Families Hub based at the DST.¹¹⁸

Activities & impact

M.A.S.H. is seen as an essential and unique source of support to the AFC in East Riding. Unlike typical social groups, M.A.S.H offers a comprehensive range of services, such as tailored welfare advice, practical assistance

with housing and health issues, along with structured fitness and wellbeing activities.¹¹⁹

A central part of the organisation's role is signposting; when an individual's needs extend beyond the M.A.S.H.'s available support, volunteer staff will refer them to specialist organisations such as SSAFA.¹²⁰ M.A.S.H. also delivers monthly AFC support sessions at the DST, together with a 12-month weekend activity programme that is open to Service families and funded by the AFCFT.¹²¹

A further defining element of M.A.S.H.'s approach is community engagement and outreach. Its staff attend public events across East Riding (e.g. rural fairs, agricultural shows), using these occasions to publicise available services and foster links with the wider public by hosting tea or coffee mornings.¹²² M.A.S.H. has also received support via the 'HELP - Jim's Story' – a fund under the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity umbrella that provided a bench for M.A.S.H.'s Veterans Allotment with discreet QR codes linked to mental health services.¹²³ The organisation has similarly sought to promote open discussion around mental health within the local AFC through use of innovative methods, such as hosting 'Army comedy' nights. This approach that has been particularly well-received among younger Service personnel, many of whom may not be aware of 'conventional' local support activities or otherwise do not feel comfortable accessing assistance via these routes.¹²⁴

116 By Community Vision (n.d.).

117 Association of Drop-In Centres (n.d.).

118 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

119 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

120 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

121 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

122 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

123 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

124 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

3.4. Challenges to Covenant delivery

Several ongoing challenges to Covenant delivery in East Riding have been reported by stakeholders:

- **Engaging health partners:** Despite significant efforts on the part of the East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group, persistent challenges remain in securing the involvement of local health partners. This has been attributed partly to NHS capacity constraints and complex organisational structures, which have the potential to limit the integration of health services into wider Covenant delivery.
- **Local Covenant Fund application:** The application process for the Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund has been noted by some stakeholders to be complex and extensive, which can discourage smaller charities and informal groups from applying. Taking this feedback on board, East Riding of Yorkshire Council has taken steps to support organisations in submitting bids while still ensuring proper due diligence and accountability in the allocation of public funds.
- **Non-mandatory Covenant training:** Although East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Armed Forces Covenant training has registered high completion rates across select policy areas (health, housing, and education), it is not mandatory at the time of writing (Summer 2025). This has the potential to reduce long-term awareness of the Covenant and limit consistency in its delivery, especially given high rates of staff turnover.

3.5. Evidence of good practice

The success of Covenant delivery in East Riding reflects strong local partnerships, long-standing collaboration, and committed

leadership from the local authority. The following elements of its approach could be considered for wider adoption:

- **Shared Covenant leadership, collaboration, and coordination:** East Riding of Yorkshire Council's approach to delivering the Covenant via three committed officers offers a practical and scalable model for local authorities that may have limited resources. This brings together individuals with distinct areas of expertise and responsibility, which provides a basis for coordinated and effective Covenant delivery without placing undue burden on a single member of staff. Through their location within the council's Corporate Policy Team, the officers also have strong strategic oversight over the local authority's upholding of the Covenant and can leverage this position to foster effective cross-departmental collaboration.
- **East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group sub-groups:** The use of themed sub-groups within East Riding's Community Covenant Delivery Group is a clear example of effective governance. These sub-groups focus on specific areas of support, many of which are in line with the Covenant Duty and allow the main Delivery Group to concentrate on providing strategic oversight.
- **East Riding Community Covenant Delivery Group Fund:** The Covenant Delivery Group Fund is a unique example of localised financial support for Covenant-related activity. At its core is a requirement that funded projects align with the priorities set out in the Delivery Group's action plan, which ensures that local delivery is focused, coordinated, and capable of demonstrating measurable impact.

Chapter 4. Glasgow

Headline findings

- Glasgow is a predominantly urban Scottish unitary authority area and has the third highest concentration of UK Armed Forces veterans in Scotland. While most of Glasgow’s veterans are able to thrive and flourish, securing access to appropriate accommodation and the ‘cost of living crisis’ have been identified as potential challenges for members of this community.
- Glasgow’s overall approach to Covenant delivery is characterised by a ‘gateway model’ through which members of the AFC are signposted to local service providers via centralised hubs.
- Key organisations responsible for delivering the Covenant and wider support to the AFC include Glasgow City Council, Glasgow’s Helping Heroes, Glasgow’s Firm Base, and Glasgow Community Veterans Support.
- Identified cases of good practice within Glasgow’s Covenant delivery include the use of gateway organisations, fostering cultures of accountability and continuous improvement, and involving members of the public in Covenant-related initiatives when resource permits.

4.1. Context

Glasgow is a Scottish unitary authority area with a population of 622,050 as of 2024 (11.4 per cent of Scotland’s total population).¹²⁵ The area is predominantly urban and has a rapidly expanding economy centred on the professional services sector; the 2024 Ernst & Young *United Kingdom (UK) Regional Economic Forecast* predicted Glasgow to be the fastest growing city between 2024 and 2027 at an average gross value added rate of 1.9 per cent.¹²⁶ That said, the city also hosts pockets of social and economic deprivation, with 45.4 per cent of the Glasgow local authority area featuring in Scotland’s most deprived localities according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.¹²⁷

Glasgow is home to one of the largest veteran populations in Scotland. 10,700 veterans were found to be living in the Glasgow in 2024, with only Fife and Edinburgh registering higher populations.¹²⁸ When combined with Service personnel and their families, some estimates have placed the total AFC in Glasgow at over 50,000 people.¹²⁹ While the vast majority of this group feel adequately supported and are able to thrive, some members have nevertheless faced challenges. Among the most significant is securing appropriate accommodation, especially amid the city’s ongoing ‘housing emergency’ as declared by Glasgow City Council in November 2023.¹³⁰ Indeed, a recent survey of Glasgow’s homeless population found that 12 per cent of respondents self-identified as having

125 Glasgow City Council (2024a).
 126 Ernst & Young (2024).
 127 Glasgow City Council (2024a).
 128 Scotland’s Census (2024).
 129 Glasgow Caledonian University & University of Stirling (2022).
 130 Glasgow City Council (2024b).

previously served in the Armed Forces – a significant over representation of Scotland’s 3.9 per cent veteran population.¹³¹ The ‘cost-of-living crisis’ also continues to impact the local AFC and has increased the number of its members seeking local assistance.¹³²

4.2. Approach to Covenant delivery

Reflecting its extensive veteran population and predominantly urban nature, Glasgow’s overall

approach to delivering the Covenant and wider support for the AFC adheres to what can be termed a ‘gateway’ model, whereby members of the AFC are signposted to the comprehensive array of services that are available across the city via a collection of centralised hubs and support providers. Table 4.1. provides a summary of the main actors, networks, and forums that support this approach.

Table 4.1. Glasgow model for Covenant delivery

Name	Coordinating Organisation(s)	Description
Armed Forces and Veterans Champion	Glasgow City Council	- A city councillor who advocates on behalf of the AFC both within and beyond the council - Chairs the quarterly meetings of Glasgow’s Firm Base and manages partnerships with external service providers
Armed Forces Lead Officer	Glasgow City Council	- A city councillor acting as the main point of contact for Armed Forces matters within the council - Fosters partnerships with other local service providers and ensures council policy honours Covenant commitments
Glasgow’s Helping Heroes	Soldiers’, Sailors’ and Airmen’s Families Association (SSAFA) & Glasgow City Council	- A joint initiative between Glasgow City Council and SSAFA - Acts as a ‘one-stop-shop’ for the AFC to access in-house support as well as a network of external delivery partners
Glasgow Firm Base	Glasgow City Council	- A networking and agenda-setting body that brings together Covenant stakeholders from across Glasgow and beyond - A forum for sharing information, especially between the council and local service providers - Holds quarterly meetings that are chaired by the council
Glasgow Community Veterans Support (GCVS)	GCVS	- A volunteer-run drop-in and support centre for former Service personnel residing in the Glasgow area - Hosts regular social activities and provides emergency assistance

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

131 Royal British Legion (n.d.); Scotland’s Census (2024).
 132 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

As a provider of numerous statutory services, Glasgow City Council plays a central role in supporting the AFC and has created a series of positions to aid the Covenant’s delivery. This includes the post of Armed Forces & Veterans Champion, which is held by an elected city councillor and designed to ensure that the AFC is given sufficient regard in council forums and meetings. The council also has an Armed Forces Lead Officer, who acts as the main point of contact for Covenant-related issues within the local authority and performs this duty alongside other council responsibilities.

Beyond Glasgow City Council, numerous partnerships and service providers seek to mitigate disadvantage within the AFC and help this group to flourish. A core component of this wider ecosystem of support is Glasgow’s Firm Base: an information sharing and networking forum through which statutory and non-statutory service providers from across the city (and beyond) can publicise their assistance for the AFC and identify opportunities for collaboration. Among the Firm Base’s membership is Glasgow’s Helping Heroes (GHH), which encapsulates the city’s ‘gateway’ model for Covenant delivery by acting as a self-proclaimed ‘one-stop-shop’ for members of the AFC to receive and be signposted to appropriate services.¹³³ The city is also features multiple AFC hubs (e.g. Glasgow Community Veterans Support (GVCS)) that seek to combat social isolation and support wider health and wellbeing.

4.3. Components of Covenant delivery

4.3.1. Glasgow City Council

Purpose & structure

Within Glasgow City Council, the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion is a non-statutory position and held by a sitting councillor. While the nature and scope of this role varies depending on the current holder’s priorities or preferences, it is nevertheless linked with a group of core responsibilities.¹³⁴ A leading duty of the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion is to advocate on behalf of the AFC throughout the local authority area, ensuring that their needs and potential disadvantage are given adequate consideration by relevant service providers.¹³⁵ This also includes a scrutiny function, in which the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion ensures that the interests of the AFC are considered and addressed within council strategies and plans.¹³⁶ The Champion is similarly tasked with liaising with key Covenant stakeholders both within and outside of the council via ad-hoc engagements or dedicated forums such as Glasgow’s Firm Base (see Section 4.3.3.).¹³⁷

Alongside the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion, the council has an Armed Forces Lead Officer who is currently based in the Financial Inclusion Team. This role is once again non-statutory yet, unlike the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion, has a remit that is primarily strategic in nature.¹³⁸ This comprises acting as a focal point within

133 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 134 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).
 135 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 136 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 137 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 138 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

the council for Armed Forces matters as well as supporting the work of the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion in ensuring that local authority policy honours its Covenant commitments.¹³⁹ Fostering partnerships with other local service providers and charities is another key responsibility of the Lead Officer, together with developing staff training on the AFC that can be delivered by either the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion or relevant department leads.¹⁴⁰ The importance of this training and additional support for AFC is further emphasised by the Lord Provost, who acts as a public figurehead for the council's Covenant commitments by attending key ceremonial events (e.g. Remembrance Day).¹⁴¹

Activities & impact

The council's Armed Forces & Veterans Champion performs numerous activities in their role as an advocate for the AFC. Alongside reporting to the council's Leader and cabinet about AFC issues on a regular basis, the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion engages proactively with local service providers, military charities, and private businesses to raise awareness about the Covenant and develop new referral pathways.¹⁴² They also chair the quarterly meetings of Glasgow's Firm Base (see Section 4.3.3.), which are used to disseminate information between stakeholders and facilitate greater partnership working. A critical part of this work is encouraging

the Firm Base membership to reflect on potential shortcomings or gaps in their service provision, helping services to develop in line with the AFC's evolving requirements.¹⁴³ The Armed Forces & Veterans Champion is likewise responsible for conveying national-level Covenant guidance from the Scottish Government to local authority staff as well as monitoring existing council partnerships in support of the AFC, such as GHH that is run in collaboration with SSAFA (see Section 4.3.2.).¹⁴⁴

As mentioned above, the Armed Forces Lead Officer is primarily responsible for embedding the Covenant's principles into council policy and thus ensuring that it honours its commitments to the AFC. This follows a broadly structured process, in which newly drafted policy is subject to review before the addition of further specifications if required. To support a policy's adoption by council staff and evidence its impact, the Armed Forces Lead Officer may also develop related training as well as collect evidence on how it has benefitted members of the AFC.¹⁴⁵ The pairing of this work with the Armed Forces Lead Officer's wider responsibilities in the City Council's Financial Inclusion Team is seen to be highly beneficial, particularly as it gives them access to external service providers (e.g. the DWP) who can offer insight on Covenant-related issues and help to establish formal referral pathways.¹⁴⁶

139 Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 140 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 141 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 142 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 143 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 144 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 145 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 146 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2).

4.3.2. Glasgow's Helping Heroes

Purpose & structure

Established in 2010 as a partnership between Glasgow City Council and SSAFA, GHH aims to provide a 'one stop shop' for accessing a comprehensive selection of AFC services throughout the city.¹⁴⁷ The facility is therefore intended to be a central point of access to Covenant-related assistance, removing the need for beneficiaries to navigate the area's extensive support landscape by signposting them to a network of partner organisations (e.g. Citizens Advice, Crisis Counselling, Rangers Community Foundation, the DMWS). A growing number of on-site services and support options are also available, ranging from financial advice and job application assistance to dedicated housing advisory and peer support workers.¹⁴⁸

Activities & impact

GHH offers numerous activities and services to Glasgow's AFC. In addition to connecting individuals with local charities, housing associations, and volunteer organisations, GHH runs specialist clinics that provide expert advice as well as numerous projects to build beneficiary resilience and wellbeing.¹⁴⁹ One example is Glasgow Veterans United: a 12-week self-improvement course for veterans delivered in partnership with NHS Scotland and the Rangers Charity.¹⁵⁰ A 2022 study found that

GHH delivered £6.63 of social value for every £1 invested via Glasgow Veterans United and other organisational initiatives.¹⁵¹

A vital element of GHH is the frequent exchange of performance data with the council, which includes levels of demand among service users. This not only provides an evidence base for the tailoring of local authority services to address evolving requirements but also helps to motivate GHH staff by fostering a sense of progress and achievement.¹⁵² As part of their partnership with the council, the head of GHH additionally meets with the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion on a regular basis to discuss to current service provision and identify potential areas of improvement.¹⁵³ Further links with the local authority are provided via dedicated referral pathways, with the council's Armed Forces & Veterans Champion having the option to signpost members of the AFC to GHH and track service delivery from start to finish.¹⁵⁴

4.3.3. Glasgow Firm Base

Purpose & structure

Mirroring many other local authority areas in Scotland, Glasgow has established a Firm Base that brings together key stakeholders from across the city with the aim of sharing information and developing new partnerships. Glasgow's Firm Base meets on a quarterly

147 Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Local authority (WP4). See also: Glasgow Caledonian University & University of Stirling (2022).

148 Association of Drop-In Centres (n.d.b.)

149 Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Local authority (WP4).

150 During weekly sessions of Glasgow Veterans United, participants undertook two hours of self-improvement activities followed by 30 minutes of fitness training and a one-hour coaching session that allowed them to work towards receiving a Scottish Football Association Level 1 coaching certificate. SSAFA (n.d.b.)

151 Glasgow Caledonian University & University of Stirling (2022).

152 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

153 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Third sector organisation (WP4).

154 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

basis and each session is typically attended by 20-25 individuals.¹⁵⁵ At the time of writing (Summer 2025), organisations represented at the Firm Base include Glasgow City Council, City of Glasgow College, SSAFA, the Office for Veterans' Affairs, the MoD, Veterans Advisory Service, Fighting with Pride, Forces Employment Charity, GHH, Veterans' Welfare Service, and NHS Scotland.¹⁵⁶ However, the membership has been described as 'floating', with members welcome to attend meetings as frequently as needed.¹⁵⁷

One of the primary roles of the Firm Base is to bridge the gap between the council and the AFC. This is achieved through the Armed Forces & Veterans Champion's chairing of the Firm Base's meetings, which facilitates the flow of information between the local authority and other members, along with their beneficiaries.¹⁵⁸ Attending organisations are similarly encouraged to publicise their own Covenant-related services and activity, helping to ensure that support is delivered in a strategic manner and allowing members to identify potential collaboration opportunities.¹⁵⁹

Activities & impact

As a strategic forum, the Firm Base is focused primarily on ensuring that Covenant delivery efforts across Glasgow are aligned with mutually agreed objectives or target areas.¹⁶⁰ This is achieved through promoting

and maintaining a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, in which members are invited by the council's Armed Forces & Veterans Champion to reflect critically on their current support to the AFC and develop new initiatives or partnerships.

¹⁶¹ The strategic alignment of Covenant-related activity throughout Glasgow is further facilitated via regular consultations with national stakeholders (e.g. Veterans Scotland, the Scottish Government), which offer insight into regional- and national-level priorities and highlight examples of good practice that can be implemented among the Firm Base's members.¹⁶² Glasgow's Firm Base also provides a setting to develop more targeted services and support delivery, with its agendas often focusing on key thematic areas and issues based on member feedback.¹⁶³

Glasgow's Firm Base has supported the development and delivery of several initiatives in recent years. Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Directorate has established direct referral pathways from GHH to NHS mental health services, for example, bypassing the need for prior assessment by NHS primary care or GPs.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, a number of housing associations in Glasgow have agreed to provide housing nomination rights for veterans as a result of their engagement with the Firm Base, facilitating access to mainstream

155 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).

156 Glasgow City Council & Partners (2023).

157 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

158 Research interview: Higher education establishment (WP2).

159 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).

160 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

161 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).

162 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

163 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

164 Glasgow City Council (2022).

housing alongside specially adapted accommodation (e.g. wheelchair access).¹⁶⁵

4.3.4. Glasgow Community Veterans Support

Purpose & structure

GCVS – originally founded as the Coming Home Centre – is a volunteer-run drop-in and support centre for former Service personnel residing in the Glasgow area.¹⁶⁶ With the overarching objective of ‘meeting the needs of veterans’, GCVS currently supports approximately 500 beneficiaries by providing a dedicated space in which they can socialise, receive advice on a range of issues (e.g. benefits, finance, housing), access emergency assistance, as well as participate in an extensive programme of activities and events.¹⁶⁷ The support provided by GCVS is strengthened through partnerships with organisations such as GHH, Fares4Free, Combat Stress, Rocks2Recovery, Citizens Advice, Glasgow Social Work Services, and Safeguarding Communities – Reducing Offending.¹⁶⁸

Activities & impact

GCVS’s assistance for the AFC takes a number of different forms. The centre’s drop-in services are available five-days per week and comprise activities such as quizzes, guitar lessons, film evenings, and regular day outings.¹⁶⁹ Outside of this core function, GCVS offers holistic and complementary therapies in an on-site sensory room in addition to an outreach service for

vulnerable veterans in the local community.¹⁷⁰

If a beneficiary’s needs exceed available assistance at GCVS, staff will signpost individuals to a selection of partners. This includes GHH, which is conveniently located in the same building as GCVS and allows both organisations to work together to ensure that beneficiaries receive appropriate care.¹⁷¹

A critical component of GCVS is the emphasis placed by its staff on extending its activities to include members of the wider public whenever possible. The ‘Scoff and Banter’ programme exemplifies this type of support. Held on a weekly basis at GCVS’s headquarters in Govan, ‘Scoff and Banter’ was devised to form new social connections among members of the AFC and the local community through hosting open activities and karaoke.¹⁷² Engagement with beneficiaries indicates that such initiatives are highly valued by the AFC, not only for their ability to combat social isolation but also through helping to develop new friendships and networks.¹⁷³ GCVS has also made the inclusion and supporting of underrepresented groups within the AFC (e.g. LGBTQI+) a leading priority. This has encompassed working towards receiving an Equalities Network Rainbow Award alongside inviting a member of Fighting With Pride to sit on the GCVS board to ensure that the organisation offers a safe and welcoming space for all members of the AFC.¹⁷⁴

165 Glasgow City Council (2022).
 166 Association of Service Drop-In Centres (n.d.b.).
 167 Association of Service Drop-In Centres (n.d.b.); Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP4).
 168 Association of Service Drop-In Centres (n.d.b.).
 169 Confederation of Service Charities (n.d.).
 170 Association of Service Drop-In Centres (n.d.b.).
 171 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Third sector organisation (WP4).
 172 Research interviews: Third sector organisation (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP4).
 173 Research focus group (WP4).
 174 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

4.4. Challenges to Covenant delivery

A number of ongoing challenges to Covenant delivery in Glasgow have been reported by stakeholders:

- Fragmentation in the support landscape:**
 A defining feature of Glasgow’s approach to Covenant delivery is fostering continuous dialogue between local service providers. Yet beneficiaries report that the AFC support landscape remains fragmented and marked by duplication of effort in some areas.¹⁷⁵ Current resource constraints have been identified as a potential driver of this trend, most notably a lack of funding among third sector organisations that, in turn, can increase competition and create a reluctance to collaborate due to fears of losing or diluting existing funding streams.¹⁷⁶
- Uneven awareness of support services:**
 While Glasgow’s Firm Base provides a forum in which service providers can highlight Covenant-related support, evidence suggests that many members of the AFC remain unaware of key sources of assistance.¹⁷⁷ As a result, there is widespread recognition among service providers of the need to develop more proactive and accessible publicity materials. This should reduce the AFC’s current reliance on word-of-mouth referrals and ensure that even those individuals who may not necessarily identify

as a member of the AFC are aware of their eligibility for support.¹⁷⁸

- Uneven awareness and implementation of the Covenant:** Awareness and understanding of the Covenant has been observed to vary significantly among stakeholders across Glasgow. At the strategic level, the Covenant is supported unanimously and has served as a starting point for initiatives such as the city’s Firm Base.¹⁷⁹ However, many frontline service providers – particularly GPs and some local authority departments – reportedly have limited engagement with the Covenant and consequently are limited in their ability to support its delivery in a consistent and strategic manner.¹⁸⁰

4.5. Evidence of good practice

Our research identified three specific cases of good practice within Glasgow’s model for Covenant delivery:

- Gateway organisations:** GHH has been highly successful as a gateway organisation dedicated to connecting members of Glasgow’s AFC with relevant service providers from across the local area and beyond. By removing the need for individuals to negotiate Glasgow’s extensive support landscape, GHH has increased the accessibility and uptake of local Covenant services.¹⁸¹ GHH’s regular submissions of performance data to the council have likewise been vital in

175 Research focus group (WP4).
 176 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Third sector organisation (WP4).
 177 Research focus groups (WP4).
 178 Research focus groups (WP4).
 179 Glasgow City Council & Partners (2023).
 180 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).
 181 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

informing wider Covenant policy, as they provide routine insight into emerging areas of need and allow the local authority to tailor its own services.¹⁸²

- **Cultures of accountability and improvement:** Glasgow's approach to Covenant delivery benefits from a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.¹⁸³ Through their chairing of the quarterly Firm Base meetings, the council's Armed Forces & Veterans Champion has reportedly created an environment in which members feel comfortable reflecting critically on their activities and highlighting opportunities for improvement. In addition to guarding against complacency and ensuring that service provision matches the needs of the AFC, this approach helps to

promote new partnerships in the interest of addressing key capability gaps and enhancing available assistance.¹⁸⁴

- **Community-based delivery:** GCVS's extension of AFC activities to include the wider public marks another form of scalable good practice. By developing projects that are mutually beneficial to the AFC and the wider community, GCVS has been able to foster greater buy-in to the Covenant as well as publicise other available assistance to a wider audience.¹⁸⁵ This has additionally been praised by members of the AFC for the sense of social connectedness and cohesion it can create, helping to build informal support networks that supplement more formal modes of assistance.¹⁸⁶

182 Research interview: Local authority (WP4). Research focus group (WP4).

183 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

184 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

185 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP4).

186 Research focus group (WP4).

Chapter 5. Greater Manchester

Headline findings

- Greater Manchester is estimated to host between 150,000 and 200,000 members of the AFC, with the highest concentration of veterans located in Wigan and Stockport. Uneven awareness of the Covenant among GPs and limited availability of veteran housing schemes have been identified as potential challenges for members of this community.
- Covenant delivery is led primarily by Greater Manchester Combined Authority and benefits from coterminous administrative boundaries across health, housing, and policing services.
- Core components of Greater Manchester's approach to Covenant delivery include a dedicated Armed Forces Programme Manager, who acts as a focal point for local authority AFC support across the city region, as well as the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Strategic Group and Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership Forum.
- Greater Manchester has numerous third sector-run AFC hubs that provide drop-in spaces for members of the community to take part in social activities and receive emergency care. Many of these organisations also act as 'gateways' to wider assistance by referring beneficiaries to local delivery partners.
- Identified examples of good practice for Covenant delivery in Greater Manchester are the appointment of a regional Armed Forces Programme Manager, development of an Armed Forces Covenant Roadmap to articulate and monitor agreed priorities, and the balancing regional-level coordination with localised expertise and action.

5.1. Context

The Greater Manchester area comprises ten local authorities: Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, and Wigan. It is predominantly urban but also includes a mix of suburban and semi-rural areas. According to the 2021 Census, Greater Manchester has a population of almost 2.9 million people.¹⁸⁷ Manchester is the most populous district with approximately

550,000 residents, while Bury has the smallest population at just over 190,000.¹⁸⁸

Although Greater Manchester has a rich Armed Forces history, active military units are now confined to a small number of Reserve units and Cadet organisations. That said, approximately 68,000 people in Greater Manchester reported as having previously served in the UK Regular or Reserve Armed Forces in 2021 (2.4 per cent of the

187 Office for National Statistics (2023).

188 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2023).

total population).¹⁸⁹ When including their families, this totals 150,000-200,000 people (approximately 7 per cent of the overall population).¹⁹⁰ Greater Manchester's veterans are predominantly older and male – nearly three-quarters are aged 50 or above, while 87.7 per cent identify as male.¹⁹¹ Although the veteran population is distributed relatively evenly across the city region's ten districts, Wigan (10,000 veterans) and Stockport (8,000 veterans) have the largest concentrations.¹⁹²

Identified issues facing the AFC include inconsistent engagement from GPs and a lack of awareness of potential disadvantage stemming from military Service, particularly in relation to mental health.¹⁹³ Stakeholders also highlighted a shortage of veteran housing schemes in the city region amid wider accommodation challenges. In particular, difficulties distinguishing between housing-related requirements that are unique to the AFC and those that affect the general population are felt to have constrained the development of tailored support.¹⁹⁴

5.2. Approach to Covenant delivery

Greater Manchester benefits from coterminous boundaries across health, transport, and policing services, enabling a more integrated and coordinated approach to Covenant delivery. A city region-wide Armed Forces Programme Manager (AFPM) acts as the central point of contact for all Covenant-related activity, working closely with the Armed Forces Lead Officers from each of Greater Manchester's ten local authorities to coordinate and align efforts. Greater Manchester's implementation of the Covenant is further supported by two key partnership forums: (i) the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Strategic Group, which meets on a monthly basis, and (ii) the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership Forum, which convenes twice a year.

Table 5.1. Greater Manchester model for Covenant delivery summarises the key actors involved in delivering the Covenant across Greater Manchester.

189 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 190 Research interview: Local Authority (WP2)
 191 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 192 Office for National Statistics (2023).
 193 Research focus group (WP4).
 194 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).



Table 5.1. Greater Manchester model for Covenant delivery

Name	Coordinating Organisation(s)	Description
Armed Forces Programme Manager	Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)	• A dedicated role that provides a focal point for local authority AFC support in Greater Manchester • Joint funded by GMCA and the ten Greater Manchester metropolitan district councils
Greater Manchester Armed Forces Strategic Group	GMCA	• A working group organised by the AFPM • Primarily brings together the local authority Armed Forces Lead Officers and the AFPM, as well as guest speakers • Functions as a local think tank or formal strategy meeting depending on the agenda
Armed Forces Lead Officers	Greater Manchester metropolitan district councils	• Raise awareness and support the delivery of the Covenant across council departments and among partner organisations
Greater Manchester Combined Authority Armed Forces Champion	GMCA	• Overall lead for Covenant activity in GMCA • Raises the political profile of the Covenant and champions the AFC throughout the city region
Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership Forum	GMCA Greater Manchester metropolitan district councils Other local Covenant stakeholders	• A strategic, agenda setting body that brings together Covenant stakeholders from across Greater Manchester and beyond • Fosters effective collaboration and strategic alignment of Covenant-related activity across the city region
Armed Forces Community Hubs	Stockport Armed Forces Community Organisation	• A community-based third sector organisation based in Stockport • Supports the AFC through advocacy, partnership working, and community activities • Brings together local Armed Forces groups and services to strengthen support networks and improve access to support
	Armed Forces HQ	• A Community Interest Company based in Wigan • Provides comprehensive support to the AFC, including mental health services, welfare assistance, housing support, and social inclusion activities • Offers a variety of community groups and events to foster connection and ease the transition to civilian life
Greater Manchester Police Tactical Lead for the Armed Forces	Greater Manchester Police (GMP)	• Covenant responsibilities performed alongside the holder's operational policing duties • Identifies gaps in support for veterans within policing and aims to embed a more structured approach to Covenant delivery within GMP

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

5.3. Components of Covenant delivery

5.3.1. Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Purpose & structure

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) plays both a strategic and enabling role in delivering the Covenant across the city region. Its structure, leadership, and coordination mechanisms are designed to provide consistent regional support for the AFC while alleviating pressure on individual local authorities.¹⁹⁵ At the heart of this approach is the AFPM. Funded jointly by Greater Manchester's ten local authorities and GMCA, the AFPM is intended to act as a focal point for Covenant-related activity through their positioning in GMCA's Public Service Reform team.¹⁹⁶ This also helps to keep the Covenant in the mainstream of cross-cutting issues such as housing, health, and employment, as well as allows local support for AFC to benefit from ongoing discussions around the development of the city's devolution agenda.¹⁹⁷

Through the AFPM, GMCA supports the city region's council-based Armed Forces Lead Officers by acting as a conduit for information, policy updates, and partnership opportunities.¹⁹⁸ The Lead Officers are brought together through the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Strategic Group, which serves as either a strategic think tank or a formal

decision-making forum depending on current priorities.¹⁹⁹ Convened on a monthly basis by the AFPM, the Strategic Group also regularly hosts representatives from other public service providers (e.g. the DWP, Greater Manchester Police (GMP), Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service) who are invited to share emerging insights and cases of good practice in supporting the AFC.²⁰⁰

The Mayor of Greater Manchester brings a strong personal commitment to supporting the AFC and holds overall accountability for the city region's Covenant delivery as acting Armed Forces Champion. A leading element of this role is 'opening doors' or removing barriers to Covenant-related initiatives in addition to challenging leading stakeholders to do more; for instance, the current Mayor has actively promoted the interests of nuclear test veterans by spotlighting the issues that they face.²⁰¹ Stakeholders report that such political leadership has significantly enhanced the profile of the AFC and been instrumental in driving meaningful progress.²⁰²

Activities & impact

Each of the municipal council's Armed Forces Lead Officers are responsible for raising awareness of the Covenant in their local authority and among partner organisations. While the activities undertaken by each Lead Officer vary, their core duties comprise embedding the Covenant into council operations, developing local support networks,

195 Research focus group (WP4).
 196 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 197 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).
 198 Research focus group (WP4).
 199 Research interview: Local authority (WP4). Research focus group (WP4).
 200 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 201 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).
 202 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2).

signposting and supporting members of the AFC, and working with statutory and non-statutory partners to coordinate local events and activities.²⁰³ It should be noted that Salford Council has adopted a unique approach to Covenant delivery; with an elected Mayor, local authority assistance for the AFC is led by the mayoral team and therefore operates according to a distinct governance structure.²⁰⁴

All of Greater Manchester's municipal councils work with local and national charities to build strong relationships that help to accelerate and enhance their AFC services. These partnerships often comprise impactful activities and projects, such as tailored employment support for ethnic minority veterans or coordinated responses to the needs of former Service personnel leaving prison.²⁰⁵ The Lead Officers also champion good practice through collaboration and shared leadership. In Bury, for example, responsibility for the Covenant is distributed among a small team, facilitating cross-borough collaboration including a recent joint Salford-Bury council-led breakfast club initiative.²⁰⁶

5.3.2. Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership Forum

Purpose & structure

Central to Greater Manchester's coordinated approach to Covenant delivery is the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership Forum. This strategic forum meets biannually and plays a key role in fostering collaboration

and alignment among a wide range of stakeholders. Convened by GMCA, the forum brings together representatives from all ten local authorities, public sector partners (e.g. the DWP, GMP, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service) and local health services, alongside a range of voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations.²⁰⁷

A defining feature of the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership Forum is its dynamic, networking-oriented format, which facilitates timely exchange of information and relationship-building among attendees.²⁰⁸ Indeed, this structure is intentionally designed to accommodate a high proportion of new participants – typically around 25 per cent at each meeting – and thereby ensure that its core membership receives a regular influx of fresh perspectives. Stakeholders noted that this set-up also strengthens cross-sector connections and enhances the Forum's ability to remain responsive to the evolving needs of the AFC.²⁰⁹

Activities & impact

The Partnership Forum plays a pivotal role in overseeing the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant Roadmap for Greater Manchester. Structured around thematic areas such as health and wellbeing, employment, and making a home in civilian society, the Roadmap outlines key Covenant deliverables and provides a clear framework for strategic and operational meetings among relevant

203 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2). Research focus group (WP4).

204 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

205 Research focus group (WP4).

206 Research focus group (WP4).

207 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

208 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2).

209 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

stakeholders.²¹⁰ The Roadmap is also designed to act as a ‘living’ document; it is updated annually to incorporate learning from previous years, while incomplete actions are rolled forward, refined, and reprioritised.²¹¹ In so doing, the Roadmap seeks to ensure that support for the AFC is both consistent across municipal areas and tailored to meet new issues or requirements.²¹²

5.3.3. Armed Forces Community Hubs

Purpose & structure

The third sector plays an important role in supporting the AFC across Greater Manchester. Both the RBL and SSAFA have an active presence in the city region, while a range of local charities such as Operation Re-Org, Broughton House Armed Forces Support Hub, The Spearhead Foundation, and Trafford Veterans deliver community-based support across areas like employment, mental health, and social connection.²¹³ For the purposes of this case study research, we examined two local organisations: (i) Stockport Armed Forces Community Organisation (SAFCO) and (ii) Armed Forces HQ (AFHQ) in Wigan.

SAFCO supports the AFC through advocacy, partnership working, and a wide range of community activities that bring together up to 47 partner organisations to strengthen support networks and improve service accessibility.²¹⁴

The organisation additionally holds a Memorandum of Understanding with Stockport Council to act as lead for AFC support delivery in the area.²¹⁵ Through this arrangement, the organisation has been able to work closely with council decision makers for the benefit of the AFC, including a recent initiative to allow a local Sea Cadets branch to use council-maintained grassland for training exercises.²¹⁶

AFHQ was originally founded as a social inclusion hub for veterans in Wigan, running a popular Naafi Café every Friday that regularly attracted 80–100 attendees.²¹⁷ But over time and particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, its remit has expanded significantly to include addressing gaps in local housing and mental health support, especially where veterans face long waiting times for associated services. At the time of writing (Summer 2025), AFHQ delivers this assistance across the North West and is commissioned under Wigan Council’s Adult Social Care budget.²¹⁸

Activities & impact

SAFCO has established numerous initiatives to support the AFC. A leading example is an AFC hub at Hazel Grove Civic Hall, which is run in partnership with the RBL and Pure Innovations. Funded initially via Manchester Airport, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the high sheriff’s office, the hub operates daily and provides a welcoming drop-in space for members of the

210 Research interview: Local authority (WP2). Research focus group (WP4).

211 Research interview: Local authority (WP2).

212 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2025).

213 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP2).

214 Research focus group (WP4). See also: Veterans Welfare Group (n.d.).

215 Research focus group (WP4).

216 Research focus group (WP4).

217 Research interview: Third sector organisation. Research focus group (WP4).

218 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).

AFC.²¹⁹ This includes the provision of hot and cold drinks, together with a monthly hot meal upon receipt of a small donation.²²⁰ Mirroring many other AFC hubs examined in this research, one of the leading reported impacts of SAFCO's Hazel Grove Civic Hall hub has been the strengthening of informal support networks. By providing a space in which members of the AFC can meet and take part in a range of activities (e.g. games, discussion groups), the hub has been identified as a vital setting in which new friendships can develop.²²¹

AFHQ takes a similarly holistic approach, acting as a 'one-stop shop' in which dedicated case workers can connect beneficiaries with local volunteer groups such as community gardening and football clubs. Stakeholders noted that AFHQ's efforts have demonstrated a strong social value return, generating approximately £56 for every £1 invested.²²² AFHQ has likewise been praised for providing a location where the AFC can directly access support, including peer-led community assistance. This ranges from helping those with alcohol addiction to providing a safe space to share Service-related experiences with sympathetic listeners. In addition, AFHQ plays a leading role in the Veterans Places, Pathways and People/Thrive Together programme, which was launched in 2021 and focuses on assisting veterans with mental health needs or those at risk of suicide.²²³

5.3.4. Greater Manchester Police

Purpose & structure

Covenant delivery across Greater Manchester is further facilitated by GMP. The police force has appointed a dedicated Tactical Lead for the Armed Forces, who serves as the primary point of contact for Armed Forces matters within GMP and is tasked with coordinating associated activities across the organisation. This encompasses reviewing current policy and practice with respect to the AFC, addressing potential gaps in services, as well as identifying new opportunities to proactively engage with partner organisations from the city region and beyond.²²⁴ These duties account for approximately 20 per cent of the holder's time and are carried out alongside their primary policing responsibilities.²²⁵

Activities & impact

The establishment of a dedicated Tactical Lead for the Armed Forces has allowed GMP to deliver a number of impactful initiatives.²²⁶ For example, the police force has recently entered into a partnership with Walking with the Wounded for an annual 'Walking Home for Christmas' event, in which around 40 individuals from both organisations complete a sponsored walk across Manchester to raise funds for vital services supporting veterans and their families.²²⁷ Further evidence of GMP's commitment to the Covenant include efforts to update recruitment processes to

219 Pure Innovations (n.d.).
 220 Pure Innovations (n.d.).
 221 Research focus group (WP4).
 222 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).
 223 Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (n.d.).
 224 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 225 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 226 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Other public service provider (WP4).
 227 Walking with the Wounded (n.d.).

better identify veterans, mobilising reservists within the police force to assist COVID-19 mortality teams, and the provision of targeted support for members of the AFC receiving non-custodial sentences.²²⁸ The Tactical Lead also plays a leading role in a UK-wide network of police veteran leads (including Gibraltar), which is dedicated to ensuring that former-Service personnel within the justice system can access appropriate assistance and facilitated nearly 500 referrals in 2024 alone.²²⁹

5.4. Challenges to Covenant Delivery

Despite the comprehensive network of service providers and partner organisations helping Greater Manchester's AFC to thrive, several challenges to local Covenant delivery have been identified:

- **Third sector collaboration:** Although stakeholders praised the high levels of partnership working in support of Covenant delivery, it was proposed that collaboration between third sector organisations could be strengthened in certain areas. Reflecting case study findings from the Glasgow, this observed reluctance among some Armed Forces charities to work together was attributed to recent declines in funding and staff availability. While some organisations have responded to these pressures by pooling available resources and promoting economies of scale, others were noted as avoiding this approach because it

could potentially reduce or dilute existing funding sources.²³⁰

- **Uneven awareness of support services:** Consistent with other case study areas, there was concern among service providers and their users that many sections of Greater Manchester's AFC are not aware of the full extent of available assistance. This was reported as being a common issue for those providing support beyond the Covenant, with organisations such as AFHQ speculating that additional members of the AFC would likely benefit from their services but have not explored them due to lack of awareness.²³¹
- **Consistent implementation of Covenant procedures:** All 16 NHS trusts across Greater Manchester are accredited under the 'Veteran Aware' initiative and participate in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, demonstrating a strong foundational commitment to supporting the Covenant's implementation across the city region.²³² Nevertheless, stakeholders reported that the enactment of Covenant-related procedures such as the querying and recording of an individual's AFC status remains inconsistent in many hospital settings. The Greater Manchester ICB has recently taken proactive steps to address this issue, including devising a local framework for delivering healthcare support to the AFC along with an action plan linked to the Covenant Duty that was expected to be issued following the formalisation of NHS

228 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 229 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 230 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2).
 231 Research interview: Third sector organisation (WP2). Research focus group (WP4).
 232 Research interviews: Other public service provider (WP2); Other public service provider (WP2).

England's draft guidance on this topic (as of Summer 2024).²³³

5.5. Evidence of good practice

Greater Manchester's current model for Covenant delivery has been in place since 2018 and is supported by firmly established processes and deep familiarity among stakeholders. This has allowed the city region to incrementally develop its services for the AFC as well as secure critical resource and political support.

Our research identified several practices that could be transferred to other local authority settings, especially combined authorities. These include:

- **The Armed Forces Programme Manager:** The appointment of an AFPM has provided Greater Manchester with a focal point and additional capacity for coordinating Covenant-related initiatives across the city region. A central feature of the role is identifying where activities are best carried out at a regional level, reducing the burden on individual local authorities, avoiding duplication of effort, and helping to ensure that existing support aligns with current strategic priorities.²³⁴ Yet it should be noted that the success of the AFPM position rests on a number of contextual factors. In particular, the post's location in GMCA's public sector reform team has aided the incorporation of Covenant delivery into the

mainstream of the city region's devolved governance.²³⁵ Strong political buy-in from GMCA's elected Mayor and its ten constituent councils is similarly integral to post's operation.²³⁶

- **Armed Forces Covenant Roadmap:** Greater Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant Roadmap marks another form of good practice. In addition to signalling the city region's commitment to mitigating disadvantage among the AFC, this document offers a critical reference point and guide for service providers to ensure that their work aligns with existing strategic priorities.²³⁷ The flexibility and inherently dynamic nature of the Roadmap is also advantageous, allowing its target areas to be updated according to evolving AFC needs and the incorporation of lessons learned.
- **Regional coordination balanced with local action:** Greater Manchester's Covenant delivery is premised on combining locally led action via individual stakeholders (e.g. Armed Forces Lead Officers, AFC hubs) with regional coordination through the GMCA. By striking a balance between direct delivery and strategic alignment, the city region has been able to harness local contacts, networks, and services to address requirements among different AFC populations while also bringing a wider regional consistency to its approach.

233 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

234 Research focus group (WP4).

235 Research interviews: Local authority (WP2); Local authority (WP4).

236 Research focus group (WP4).

237 Research focus group (WP4).

Chapter 6. Oxfordshire

Headline findings

- Oxfordshire has six UK Armed Forces bases and garrisons, which together host approximately 11,000 military personnel and their families. 23,541 veterans were also recorded as residing in the county under the 2021 Census.
- Oxfordshire County Council was the first local authority in the UK to formalise its commitment to the Covenant and has worked with the county's district councils to develop a series of supporting roles and initiatives. These include six elected member Military Champions, each of which is assigned to a local Armed Forces base and requested to publicise available council services.
- Recognising the large number of Service children residing in Oxfordshire, the County Council has delivered multiple projects in partnership with local schools to help this population thrive. For example, Oxfordshire County Council's School Improvement Team recently concluded the 'Festival of Friends' initiative – a peer-led programme designed to foster and share good practice in the education of Service children.
- Oxfordshire maintains a Civilian-Military Partnership Forum that brings together Covenant stakeholders from across the county to highlight potential issues among the AFC and devise appropriate solutions. Among its members are the Department for Work and Pension's regional Armed Forces Champion and Armed Forces Lead Officer, who together guide members of the AFC through benefit issues as well as offer instruction to local employers on Armed Forces matters.
- Oxfordshire has adopted several Covenant delivery mechanisms that could be used elsewhere, including the appointment of Military Champions, the strategic selection of 'flagship' partner organisations, leveraging peer-led learning and delivery, and foregrounding the value and contributions of the AFC in Covenant communications.

6.1. Context

Oxfordshire has a two-tier system of local government at the time of writing (Summer 2025), with governance responsibilities divided between a county council and five district councils (Oxford City, Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Oxfordshire). Key policy decisions within the County Council are made by the Cabinet, while the County Leadership Team coordinates

the delivery of numerous services across Oxfordshire, including libraries, schools, and social care.²³⁸ The county's five district councils are responsible for providing a selection of additional services (e.g. housing, environmental health, leisure and recreation, planning applications, waste management) within their electoral wards.²³⁹

The 2021 Census recorded a residential population of 726,727 in Oxfordshire, which is

238 The Oxford Magazine (n.d.).
 239 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.a).

spread across both urban centres and extensive rural areas.²⁴⁰ The county has one of the strongest local economies in the UK and is widely accepted to be an affluent place to live.²⁴¹ Oxfordshire's population has likewise been found to score more highly than the national average across multiple health metrics.²⁴² Nevertheless, the county also houses pockets of social and economic challenge. A 2019 study by the Director of Public Health found that ten of Oxfordshire's electoral wards included areas that ranked among the 20 per cent most deprived in England.²⁴³

Hosting six Armed Forces bases and garrisons (Bicester Garrison, Dalton Barracks, RAF Benson, RAF Brize Norton, Shrivenham Defence Academy, and Vauxhall Barracks), Oxfordshire has a large Service personnel population. Over 11,000 members of the Armed Forces and their families were recorded as living in the county in 2022, which included 25 per cent of all serving RAF personnel and 50 per cent of total Army Logistics capacity.²⁴⁴ This is paired with a sizeable veteran population, which accounted for 4 per cent (23,541) of Oxfordshire residents as of March 2021.²⁴⁵

Key issues facing the local AFC include securing appropriate accommodation along with accessing support for military families and veterans. Property prices are particularly high in Oxfordshire compared to other parts

of the country, posing potential difficulties for Service personnel who choose not to live on base together with those wishing to remain in the county following their resettlement.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, over 2,700 children from military families reportedly attended schools in Oxfordshire in 2024.²⁴⁷ While by no means true for all, there is recognition that some Service children may require additional support owing to the demands of Service life.²⁴⁸ Oxfordshire's veteran community also has a distinct support needs profile, with approximately 27 per cent of former Service personnel in the county classified as having a disability under the Equalities Act in 2021.²⁴⁹

6.2. Approach to Covenant delivery

Oxfordshire County Council was the first local authority in the UK to formalise its commitment to the Covenant on 20 June 2011.²⁵⁰ Signing the then-named 'Community Covenant', the County Council publicly accepted its responsibility to encourage local charities, businesses, and members of the community to work with the Armed Forces to support Service personnel, their families, and veterans. This was extended with the signing of the 'Corporate Covenant' in September 2014, which provided an additional platform for both the County Council and local employers to state

240 Office for National Statistics (n.d.).
 241 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.b.).
 242 Oxfordshire County Council (2020a).
 243 JSNA Bitesize (2023).
 244 Oxfordshire County Council (2022).
 245 Oxfordshire County Council (2025a).
 246 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 247 Oxfordshire County Council (2024).
 248 Oxfordshire County Council (2024).
 249 Norman (2023).
 250 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.c).

how they would seek to mitigate disadvantage among the AFC.²⁵¹

In June 2018, Oxfordshire moved to a single Covenant that brought together signatories of the Community and Corporate Covenants and outlined their collective approach to supporting the AFC. Based on national guidelines published by the MoD, the delivery framework set out in Oxfordshire's Covenant is structured around four key themes:

- **Community engagement:** To encourage members of the AFC to work and collaborate with the wider community, whether through specific events and joint projects or other modes of engagement.
- **Community integration:** To promote and facilitate activities that help members of the AFC to integrate into local life.

- **Encourage support:** To assist local communities in supporting the AFC as well as nurturing public understanding of the potential challenges and issues associated with Service life.
- **Recognition & Remembrance:** To acknowledge and remember the sacrifices made by the AFC.²⁵²

In February 2025, Oxfordshire renewed its commitment to the Covenant and broadened the scope of its support for the AFC to include members of HMS Diamond by signing a formal affiliation with the Royal Navy vessel.²⁵³

A comprehensive network of forums, actors, and partnerships has developed to implement Oxfordshire's Covenant. These are summarised in Table 6.1. Oxfordshire model for Covenant delivery and examined in detail in Section 6.3.

Table 6.1. Oxfordshire model for Covenant delivery

Name	Coordinating Organisation(s)	Description
Armed Forces Champion	Oxfordshire County Council Oxfordshire's District Councils	• Elected councillors that advocate on behalf on the AFC • Signpost members of the AFC to relevant local authority services and departments • Attend Oxfordshire's Civilian-Military Partnership meetings
Military Champions	Oxfordshire County Council	• Elected councillors • Assigned to each of Oxfordshire's Armed Forces bases • Exchange information between the County Council and each Armed Forces base • Provide referrals to relevant local authority teams and departments

251 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.c).

252 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.c).

253 Oxfordshire County Council (2025b).

School Improvement Team	Oxfordshire County Council	- Responsible for improving performance and reducing education performance gaps in maintained schools throughout Oxfordshire - Provides tailored monitoring, guidance, and quality assurance assistance to drive educational attainment among the AFC
Civilian-Military Partnership	Oxfordshire County Council	- Information-sharing forum for Oxfordshire's civilian and military communities to develop mutually beneficial solutions to outstanding issues or areas of need - Chaired by the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, with representatives from the county's local authorities, Armed Forces bases, as well as other statutory and non-statutory stakeholders - Includes an evolving selection of sub-groups to facilitate targeted discussion and collaboration
Armed Forces Champion & Armed Forces Lead Officer	Department for Work and Pensions	Armed Forces Champion: Part of a Great Britain-wide network of Champions who deliver Covenant-related training to JobCentre Plus staff, offer specialist advice to the AFC and third sector organisations, and collaborate with local employers to maximise opportunities for the AFC. Armed Forces Lead Officer: Coordinates the DWP's delivery of the Covenant at a regional level and builds strategic partnerships.

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

6.3. Components of Covenant delivery

6.3.1. County and District Council Armed Forces Champions

Purpose & structure

Both the County and district councils have each appointed at least one elected member Armed Forces Champion, who is responsible for raising awareness of the AFC within their

local authorities alongside performing their other duties as elected councillors.²⁵⁴ As a voluntary position, the holders do not take on Covenant-specific case work but can signpost members of the AFC to council departments when required.²⁵⁵ The County Council has also introduced Armed Forces Service Champions to further promote the needs of the AFC across council departments, as well as nominated an Armed Forces Lead Officer who helps to coordinate Covenant-related activity and works

²⁵⁴ Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

²⁵⁵ Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

to ensure that needs of the AFC are reflected in key policy areas (e.g. equality and inclusion).²⁵⁶

Activities & impact

The Armed Forces Champions aid the Covenant's implementation in several ways. All Champions are expected to attend the bi-annual meetings of the Civilian-Military Partnership (CMP) to highlight emerging issues among the AFC and identify relevant responses (see Section 6.3.4.).²⁵⁷ For example, Oxfordshire's Armed Forces Champions recently collaborated with other members of the CMP to raise awareness about a Shrivenham Defence Academy-led initiative to house Afghan refugees in the local area.²⁵⁸ The Champions also work within their own local authorities to ensure that the Covenant is taken into consideration when developing and delivering services. This ranges from issuing staff training to drawing attention to the potential impact of Service life on the AFC during council meetings.²⁵⁹ As a recognised point of contact for Covenant-related matters, the Champions additionally offer ad-hoc advice to the AFC and publicise relevant support.²⁶⁰

6.3.2. Oxfordshire County Council Military Champions

Purpose & structure

Oxfordshire County Council has supplemented its Armed Forces Champions with six elected member Military Champions – one for

each of the county's Armed Forces bases. Overseen by the Leader of the County Council as 'overall Military Champion', the Champions are expected to share information between the local authority and Oxfordshire's individual military establishments as well as represent the County Council's commitment to supporting the AFC.²⁶¹ As single point of contact for Serving personnel and their families who might need access to local authority services, the post also seeks to streamline referrals and improve support delivery.²⁶² Following the May 2025 local elections, the County Council has committed to refreshing the role of Military Champions with the aim of enhancing and extending future support.²⁶³

Activities & impact

To fulfil their existing role as a bridge between the County Council and Oxfordshire's serving military community, the Military Champions perform a range of activities with the help of relevant Armed Forces base/station commanders. At its most foundational, this includes publicising key developments or services across the local authority and reporting feedback from the AFC to the County Council.²⁶⁴ The Military Champions also maintain a presence at their designated military base by attending key ceremonies or events (e.g. Armed Forces Day), in addition to referring members of AFC to appropriate county or district council departments should they be

256 Oxfordshire County Council (2020b).
 257 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 258 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 259 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 260 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 261 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 262 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).
 263 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).
 264 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

made aware of a particular requirement.²⁶⁵ A County Council role description notes that holders should similarly engage both local employers and the civilian community to raise the profile of the AFC and champion the Covenant more broadly.²⁶⁶

6.3.3. Oxfordshire County Council School Improvement Team

Purpose & structure

Oxfordshire County Council hosts numerous other Covenant-related initiatives across its core services and departments. A leading example is the School Improvement Team. Led by the Head of School Improvement & Learning and supported by dedicated lead officers, the Team works with maintained schools throughout Oxfordshire to raise standards and reduce achievement gaps between different groups or individuals.²⁶⁷ Acknowledging the potential disadvantage that children of Armed Forces families can experience as a result of Service life, a central component of this work has been driving education outcomes among the AFC through the provision of tailored monitoring, guidance, and quality assurance assistance.²⁶⁸

Activities & impact

The School Improvement Team's recent support to Oxfordshire's AFC has encompassed both strategic and operational components. With respect to the former, the Team works closely with local and regional partners to maintain a multi-agency strategy

for upholding the Covenant. A key mechanism for this work is the Oxfordshire and Central England Hub of the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP), which is chaired by the Head of the School Improvement Team and brings together researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to share expertise and promote cross-sector collaboration throughout the region.²⁶⁹ The Head of School Improvement & Learning also attends the SCiP Alliance's National Hub Leads meetings, which gives them access to national-level guidance that can then be filtered down to Oxfordshire's maintained schools during regular network meetings with the School Improvement Team.²⁷⁰

Operationally, the School Improvement Team has previously secured funding from national and regional partners to deliver programmes that support Service children and improve their education outcomes.²⁷¹ These initiatives often draw on local and national data (e.g. Service Pupil Premium data), which allows the Team to target specific areas of need or disadvantage through projects such as the 'Festival of Friends'.²⁷² Completed in 2022-2023 and funded by the Armed Forces Education Trust, the 'Festival of Friends' was devised to foster and share good practice in the education of Service children. This included the delivery of professional development training to a collection of strategically selected 'hub' schools, whose nominated representatives then cascaded this information to 'spoke' or

265 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

266 Oxfordshire County Council (2020b).

267 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.d.).

268 Oxfordshire County Council (2024).

269 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

270 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

271 Research interview: Local authority (WP4). See also: Oxfordshire County Council (2024).

272 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4). See also: Oxfordshire County Council (2024).

‘project’ schools within pre-defined networks. Each participating school was requested to use the training to devise a project that strengthened their own provision to Service children and could be shared as an example of good practice via a celebration event and accompanying publication.²⁷³

6.3.4. Civilian-Military Partnership

Purpose & structure

Beyond the dedicated posts and projects across Oxfordshire’s County and district councils, the CMP is a leading mechanism through which the Covenant is upheld. It is chaired by the Leader of the County Council and includes representatives from each of Oxfordshire’s local authorities, Armed Forces bases, and other leading statutory and non-statutory bodies (e.g. NHS England, SSAFA). The membership meets two to three times a year with the explicit aim of sharing information between Oxfordshire’s civilian and military communities.²⁷⁴ In so doing, the CMP is intended to provide a forum for identifying and addressing challenges experienced by the AFC as well as offer a setting in which new forms of collaboration can be established.²⁷⁵

Since its founding in 2011, the CMP has featured multiple sub-groups to facilitate more targeted working and discussion around key themes or locations, including ‘Recognise and Remember’, ‘Carterton’, and ‘Bicester’.²⁷⁶ A

Veterans Forum has been created as a further extension of the CMP, which aims to promote greater coordination between Oxfordshire’s local authorities and military community, the NHS, the Veterans Welfare Service, and Service charities in supporting former-Service personnel across the county.²⁷⁷

Activities & impact

Oxfordshire’s CMP has facilitated the Covenant’s implementation across multiple issues and cases. The ongoing expansion of RAF Brize Norton has had a significant impact on local communities in Oxfordshire, not only in terms of greater demand for services such as schools, health facilities, and housing but also through increased pressure on roads and other infrastructure. In this context, members of the CMP have proactively sought and shared feedback from impacted civilian and military populations to help guide future activity and develop mutually satisfactory solutions.²⁷⁸

Through regularly convening key stakeholders from across Oxfordshire, the CMP has likewise helped to develop new partnerships and projects. NHS Oxfordshire’s Public Health Team now maintains formal links with each of the county’s Armed Forces bases,²⁷⁹ for example, while Thames Valley Police has partnered with SSAFA to deliver an Armed Forces Referral Service dedicated to reducing reoffending among members of AFC through improved access to specialist support.²⁸⁰

273 Research interview: Local authority (WP4). See also: Oxfordshire County Council (2024).
 274 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.c.); Oxfordshire County Council & 145 (South) Brigade (2011).
 275 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4). See also: Oxfordshire County Council. (n.d.c.).
 276 Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.c.).
 277 Research interview: Local authority (WP4). See also: Gov.uk (2015).
 278 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Other public service provider (WP4). See also: Oxfordshire County Council & 145 (South) Brigade (2011).
 279 Oxfordshire County Council & 145 (South) Brigade (2011).
 280 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).

6.3.5. Department for Work and Pensions' Armed Forces Champion & Armed Forces Lead Officer

Purpose & structure

A range of local and national partners complement the work of Oxfordshire's local authorities and CMP to form a wider ecosystem of support throughout the county. One partnering organisation is the DWP, whose Armed Forces Champions and Lead Officers offer tailored assistance to the AFC in each Jobcentre Plus district across Great Britain, including Berkshire-Buckinghamshire-Oxfordshire.²⁸¹

Introduced in 2010 as a set of voluntary responsibilities for individual staff members, the role of Armed Forces Champion was originally designed to build Jobcentre Plus capability in supporting the AFC through the delivery of internal training and awareness raising activities.²⁸² The role's scope was changed in 2021, however, when it was formalised and expanded to cover multiple customer-facing duties. These include guiding members of the AFC through benefit issues, offering specialist advice to third sector organisations on specific Armed Forces cases, along with helping Jobcentre Plus staff to collaborate with local employers in maximising opportunities for the AFC.²⁸³ This work is overseen by a network of 11 Armed Forces Lead Officers, who offer strategic direction to the Champions and ensure that

the DWP is meeting its obligations to the Covenant at a regional level.²⁸⁴

Activities & impact

Oxfordshire's assigned DWP Armed Forces Champion and Lead Officer perform numerous activities to support the Covenant's delivery throughout the county and wider Jobcentre Plus district. As a customer-facing post, the Champion holds regular clinics at each of the Oxfordshire's military bases as well as many of its numerous AFC hubs.²⁸⁵ Along with offering guidance on issues such as universal credit or benefit claims, these engagements enhance access to other Covenant-related services; should an individual need assistance that extends beyond Jobcentre Plus responsibilities, the Champion can signpost them to relevant local service providers.²⁸⁶ Given that many of the clinics are either hosted in collaboration with or attended by other statutory and non-statutory organisations, they also help with networking and developing collaborative solutions.²⁸⁷

Both the Armed Forces Champion and Lead Officer attend the meetings of Oxfordshire's CMP, giving routine insight into local AFC issues and working with its members to develop appropriate responses.²⁸⁸ An important part of this activity is the sharing of good practice. As the geographical remit of both the Champion and Lead Officer extend beyond Oxfordshire, they are often able to present alternative approaches to Covenant delivery based on what they have observed

281 Department for Work and Pensions & Ministry of Defence (2023).
 282 Scullion et al. (2024).
 283 Scullion et al. (2024).
 284 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 285 Research interviews: Other public service provider (WP4); Other public service provider (WP4).
 286 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 287 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).
 288 Research interviews: Other public service provider (WP4); Other public service provider (WP4).

elsewhere.²⁸⁹ The Armed Forces Lead Officer also uses the CMP to identify local partnership opportunities for the Armed Forces Champion and guide the DWP's implementation of the Covenant throughout the county.²⁹⁰

6.4. Challenges to Covenant delivery

A number of potential challenges and obstacles have been identified by local stakeholders with respect to Covenant delivery:

- Inter- and intra-local authority coordination:** Although the Oxfordshire's CMP meetings allow its members to exchange information and coordinate the Covenant's delivery, there are currently few additional opportunities for formal engagement outside of this setting. This has specific implications for Oxfordshire's county and district councils, whose interaction on AFC matters beyond the CMP tends to be limited to ad-hoc communication between individual staff.²⁹¹ This can make it challenging to monitor referrals between local authority services and avoid potential duplication of effort.²⁹² The County Council similarly does not have an internal forum for discussing Covenant activity at the time of writing, further restricting the ability of staff to publicise their work in support of the AFC and identify collaboration opportunities between departments.²⁹³
- Awareness of roles and responsibilities:** While the County Council has produced role descriptions for its Military and Armed Forces Champions, the responsibilities attached to these roles remain ambiguous and uncertain. This has, in turn, resulted in considerable variation among the holders' activities and behaviours, including the formality of their relationship with the AFC and the amount of time dedicated to fulfilling the posts' responsibilities.²⁹⁴ More work is therefore needed to publicise the Military and Armed Forces Champion role descriptions to ensure consistency in the Covenant's delivery.
- Public awareness of Covenant posts and activity:** Visibility and public awareness of Covenant-related activity in Oxfordshire remains constrained, both with respect to local authority services and the work of partner organisations such as the DWP.²⁹⁵ Many members of the AFC continue to rely on word-of-mouth referrals when first identifying relevant services and understanding of the organisations that support service delivery is limited.²⁹⁶ This uneven awareness is speculated to have not only reduced service uptake in certain instances but also constrained wider dialogue between the AFC and local service providers in the interest of promoting the Covenant.

289 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).

290 Research interview: Other public service provider (WP4).

291 Research interviews: Other public service provider (WP4); Other public service provider (WP4).

292 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

293 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

294 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

295 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

296 Research interview: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

6.5. Evidence of good practice

Our research identified five specific cases of good practice within Oxfordshire’s current approach to Covenant delivery:

- **Military Champions:** Oxfordshire County Council’s Military Champions provide a template for effective Covenant delivery, especially in contexts with a large Service personnel community that is distributed across multiple Armed Forces bases or garrisons. As noted above, assigning Champions to the county’s individual military bases has allowed the County Council to develop a detailed understanding of specific segments of the AFC that can inform future policy and support. Furthermore, the Military Champions facilitate efficient information exchange between the County Council and the Serving community, as well as work to increase the accessibility of local government services via referrals and providing tailored advice.
- **Flagship partner selection:** Another form of good practice evidenced in Oxfordshire’s approach to Covenant delivery is the identification and engaging of ‘flagship’ partner organisations during the initial stages of a project. As demonstrated by the County Council’s ‘Festival of Friends’ and other local authority-led programmes, collaborating with statutory or non-statutory service providers with an established track-record of supporting the AFC offers multiple benefits, including providing reassurance for potential sponsors and new organisations who might be more

reluctant to collaborate.²⁹⁷ Obtaining the early support of proactive and well-resourced partners can also provide a secure basis for expanding the scope of Covenant-related activity and increase the likelihood of a project’s overall success.²⁹⁸

- **Peer-to-peer learning and support delivery:** The work of Oxfordshire County Council’s School Improvement Team has similarly highlighted the value of peer-to-peer learning and delivery in initiatives designed to inform service providers about the Covenant and foster good practice. Adopting such an approach helps to spread the responsibility for Covenant delivery across a broader range of stakeholders, reducing the burden on any one organisation and supporting more efficient use of resource. It can additionally reduce the risk of resistance or pushback from the intended recipients due to perceptions of external interference and gives them more flexibility to tailor their service delivery to suit immediate circumstances or preferences.²⁹⁹
- **Positive Covenant communication:** A defining characteristic of Oxfordshire’s Covenant delivery is the use of positive language. Service providers have tried to avoid use of the term ‘disadvantage’ where possible and instead emphasise the value and contributions of the AFC to public life. By adopting this approach, statutory and non-statutory service providers have been able to foster additional buy-in and support to the Covenant and address misconceptions that *all* members of the AFC are negatively impacted by Service life.³⁰⁰

297 Research interview: Local authority (WP4).

298 Research interview: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

299 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4).

300 Research interviews: Local authority (WP4); Local authority (WP4); Other public service provider (WP4).

Chapter 7. Conclusions

7.1. Discussion of key findings

The overarching objective of the case studies presented in this report is to provide additional insight into how the Covenant is being implemented across England, Scotland, and Wales. In so doing, they aimed to identify examples of good practice for Covenant delivery as well as shed light on the ways in which the Covenant enables or interacts with wider support for the AFC.

While all five areas exhibited many features of the 'core infrastructure' for local Covenant delivery developed in previous *Our Community, Our Covenant* projects, the case studies also found considerable variation in how these components operate in practice and work to mitigate disadvantage among the AFC. This reflects the highly context-specific nature of the Covenant's implementation, which is not only shaped by a highly dynamic external policy environment but also a host of local and regional factors:

- **Local authority structure:** The structure of local government can exert a profound influence over Covenant delivery. In single-level or unitary authority areas, services and support for the AFC often align with council administrative boundaries (e.g. Glasgow, East Riding) but can also be extended or supplemented through cross-authority collaboration (e.g. Cardiff & the Vale). By contrast, Oxfordshire's current two-tier status has helped to establish a clear division of responsibility between its county and district councils, with the former primarily fulfilling coordination functions and the latter focusing more

on operational delivery. Meanwhile, the regional scope and devolved powers of GMCA has allowed it to incorporate the Covenant into mainstream policy while leveraging the local contacts and expertise of the city region's municipal councils.

- **Geography (e.g. urban, rural):** The geography of an area is another variable that can inform Covenant delivery. In urban settings with a highly concentrated AFC (e.g. Glasgow, Cardiff, Greater Manchester), many public service providers and their partners have sought to increase the accessibility and uptake of Covenant-related support via centralised hubs that offer a comprehensive range of in-house assistance and/or act as gateways to local partners. Rural settings are frequently characterised by more targeted service delivery. This includes assigning dedicated representatives for particular local AFC populations (e.g. Oxfordshire) together with establishing networks of hubs that each offer assistance tailored to local need (e.g. East Riding).
- **Armed Forces Community profile and presence:** As highlighted by each of the case studies, variation in Covenant delivery stems in part from the nature and profile of the local AFC. Alongside informing the types of Covenant-related services available, the composition of the AFC raises additional considerations relating to the accessibility and publicising of such assistance. For example, Oxfordshire's large Service personnel population has encouraged the County Council to establish elected member Military Champions to

ensure that information on Covenant-related services is conveyed to individual Armed Forces establishments. In areas with a greater veteran presence (e.g. Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Cardiff and the Vale), on the other hand, efforts have been made to increase the accessibility of available assistance through signposting and referrals, thereby reducing the burden on individuals to negotiate often extensive support landscapes.

- **Nature of the support landscape:**

While all five case study areas were characterised by extensive statutory and non-statutory assistance for the AFC, the extent and composition of their respective support landscapes varied significantly. This, in turn, has influenced how the Covenant and wider support for the AFC is delivered, presenting both challenges and opportunities for local stakeholders. Both Glasgow and Greater Manchester host numerous Armed Forces charities, yet recent declines in funding and staff availability have increased competition between some of these organisations and created an associated reluctance to collaborate. Attempts have been made to counter this trend in Glasgow through encouraging stakeholders to publicly reflect on potential gaps or shortcomings in their support as well as highlighting the value of partnership working.

- **Capacity, capabilities, and priorities:**

Among the most influential factors with respect to Covenant delivery is stakeholder capacity, capabilities, and priorities. In East Riding of Yorkshire Council, for instance, Covenant coordination and delivery is shared among three policy officers to avoid any one member of the Corporate Policy Team becoming overburdened. Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan councils, however, have chosen to combine the role

of Veterans Advice Officer with other AFC responsibilities. This has not only given the holders of these roles additional insight into local requirements but also allowed them to develop a more comprehensive network of potential delivery partners. In Greater Manchester, both the priority given to the Covenant and the availability of local funding has permitted GMCA to appoint a dedicated AFPM and develop a delivery model premised on balancing strategic regional alignment with localised action and expertise.

7.2. Evidence of good practice in Covenant delivery

Despite the highly contextual nature of Covenant delivery, the case studies revealed numerous examples of good practice that might be adopted or applied elsewhere (see Table 7.1.).

Rather than providing a 'one size fits all' approach or a blueprint for mitigating disadvantage among the AFC, the identified good practices offer insight into how existing modes of Covenant delivery might be amended, extended, or updated depending on local circumstances. To this end, Table 7.1. pairs each example of good practice with leading contextual considerations and categorises them according to the 'core infrastructure' for Covenant delivery.

Table 7.1. Context-specific best practices for effective Covenant delivery

Element of Covenant delivery	Context aspects	Indicated good practice
Key individuals	Where resources allow and local context means that Covenant-related activities have sufficient scope...	...dedicated Armed Forces Lead Officer posts, which can include part-time roles , should be established to help ring-fence the Lead Officer's capacity for Covenant-related activities and provide a focal point for the expansion of existing support for the AFC
	Where resources do not allow local authorities to appoint dedicated Covenant Coordinators...	...'double-hatting' Lead Officers (i.e. where Lead Officers perform multiple roles within the council) can help streamline Covenant delivery into Council policies in a resource-efficient manner if the Coordinator's non-Covenant responsibilities overlap or are closely related to community service provision and grant them access to key stakeholders within the local authority
	Where multiple local authorities face similar demands in relation to Covenant delivery...	...regional coordinators can be appointed to cohere local Covenant delivery, help align activities with local and regional priorities, and avoid duplication of effort
	Where local authorities have multiple military base areas and a significant Armed Forces presence...	...Military Champions can help provide a strategic link between the local authority and individual military establishments, including by monitoring key developments at each Armed Forces base
Service delivery models	In urban areas with a significant and concentrated AFC presence...	...concentrating Covenant delivery in a local hub can help improve accessibility of support for the AFC as well as streamline Covenant-related support for council staff and service providers
	Where local authorities and their partners want to increase the resilience of Covenant-related activity and diversify support to the AFC...	...local Covenant funds can help ringfence funding for Covenant-related activities and expand support for the AFC in alignment with identified and agreed strategic priorities
	Where local authority areas have a modest or significant AFC presence and lack informal AFC community and peer-to-peer support services...	...Armed Forces Community hubs can be set up to supplement formal service delivery by providing a dedicated space for AFC socialisation and improving pathways and signposting for the AFC
	Where new practices or processes are being introduced for Covenant delivery among service providers (e.g. schools)...	...peer-led learning and delivery can help enhance the impact of capacity- and capability-building activities in a resource-efficient manner

Element of Covenant delivery	Context aspects	Indicated good practice
Partnership models	In urban areas with a significant and concentrated AFC presence...	...gateway organisations can help streamline access for the AFC to congested support landscapes by signposting them to a pre-existing network of delivery partners, thus improving accessibility and uptake of local support
	In local areas with nascent Covenant delivery...	...flagship partners can be appointed by councils to generate buy-in from key stakeholders for Covenant delivery and establish a secure basis from which Covenant-related assistance can be expanded and developed

Source: RAND Europe & Shared Intelligence.

Alongside formal mechanisms and models, the case studies highlighted a series of ‘softer’ or more informal principles that might be incorporated into existing ways of working to aid effective Covenant delivery:

- Involving the Armed Forces Community and general public in delivering Covenant-related activity:** Engagement with public service providers and their partners revealed the value of extending Covenant-related activities to include the AFC and general public whenever possible. This can range from crowdsourcing insights when devising initiatives to delivering projects that benefit both the AFC and the wider community. As demonstrated by the likes of GCVS’s ‘Scoff and Banter’ programme, this form of engagement can be beneficial in multiple ways. Through developing services or activities that are mutually beneficial to the AFC and the general public, stakeholders can foster greater buy-in to the Covenant as well as advertise other available assistance. This type of Covenant delivery can also be a useful way of obtaining additional human resource and expertise, along with helping to integrate members of the AFC into local communities and build new social connections.
- Cultures of accountability and improvement:** Existing Covenant delivery

structures can be further enhanced by fostering accompanying cultures of accountability and continuous improvement. The potential value of this approach is evident within Glasgow’s Firm Base, in which the council’s Armed Forces & Veterans Champion has sought to guard against complacency amongst its members by encouraging them reflect openly on potential areas for improvement. Through sharing these insights in the welcoming and supportive environment of the Firm Base, attendees have not only been able to ensure that their services evolve in line with current requirements but also identify possible collaboration opportunities to strengthen and expand them.

- Positive Covenant communication:** While the Covenant’s overarching objective is oriented at mitigating against potential disadvantage experienced by the AFC, the case studies demonstrated the value of reducing explicit reference to ‘disadvantage’ where possible and foregrounding instead the value and contributions that a thriving AFC brings to public life. Rather than framing Service children as a potentially vulnerable or at-risk population, for example, Oxfordshire County Council’s School Improvement Team has made a conscious



decision to emphasise the resilience of this group and the richness that they can bring to school communities. By articulating the Covenant in this way, service providers and their partners can continue to generate public support while countering common misconceptions about the AFC (e.g. the 'mad, bad, and sad' stereotype).



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