



Bringing the Armed Forces Covenant to Life

Evaluation Report

**Delivered by Charnwood, Melton and
Rushcliffe Borough Councils Partnership**



Forces in Mind Trust funded training and consultancy: Bringing the Armed Forces Covenant to Life

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Evaluation Report

Introduction

In May 2018 a letter was sent to local authority chief executives via the Local Government Association (LGA) by the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Mrs Heather Wheeler MP and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Defence People and Veterans, the Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP. The letter encouraged local authorities to consider how they could ensure that Covenant initiatives remain current and continue to support the Armed Forces community. With the support of the LGA they were keen to gauge interest in sector-led support on local delivery of the Covenant and promote the availability of funding from Forces in Mind Trust to support councils.

The Charnwood, Melton and Rushcliffe (CMR) Borough Councils partnership began in 2017 when monies became available for local authorities to apply for under the Armed Forces Community Covenant funding round. The relocation of Headley Court in Surrey to the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Stanford Hall, Nottinghamshire, was well underway and with Stanford Hall sitting on the border of the three boroughs it was felt that a joint partnership delivering on the Armed Forces Covenant was the best for the community.

Following the development of the CMR partnership and the attendance at Civil Military Partnership Boards it was found that there were large gaps in knowledge and capacity of local authorities who did not have a dedicated Covenant officer. The work of the Armed Forces Covenant is often given to an officer who has responsibility for other areas and is therefore unable to prioritise this work.

An expression of interest was then drafted to the LGA and a funding proforma was drafted to be considered by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT).

Initial stages of development

On successful allocation of FiMT funding, the project team were able to employ a team member one day per week for a total of 30 weeks to put together a pre and post event consultation package, training event and a set of resources to take away.



The consultation consisted of speaking with all local authorities across Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire to gather information on what their current commitment to the Covenant was and areas requiring more support.

The results of the consultation were then used to develop the training event.

The Training Event

The training event took place on 4th April 2019. The agenda was as follows: -

MORNING SESSION

The Armed Forces Covenant from an employer's perspective

- *Unlocking the potential of your Armed Forces community workforce*
 - *HR, policies and procedures*
 - *Staff training packages*
- *Partnering with the Careers Transition Partnership and the Forces Employment Charity (RFEA)*
 - *Presentation by Dave Hornsey, Careers Transition Partnership & Kevin Grist, The Forces Employment Charity*
- *Reservist, Who, What and Why?*
 - *Presentation by John Wilson, Defence Relationship Management*

AFTERNOON SESSION

The Local Authorities as service providers

- *A personal perspective on the life of a Reservist*
 - *Presentation by Capt Ben Wing, 203 Transport Squadron*
- *"Are you currently or have you ever served in the Armed Forces?"*
- *Our Community Our Covenant*
 - *Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges (housing, education and social care)*
- *Your local Armed Forces Community – where are they? – Victoria Coomber & Michelle Woolman-Lane*
- *Champions in the Community – encouraging members to become your Armed Forces Champion*



Conclusion of the event

All delegates received a delegate pack to take away. Included in this pack were:

- CTP information page
- Guaranteed interview scheme policy, buddy scheme leaflet, reservist policy, employment offer letter
- Procurement procedure
- Housing information sheets
- In-house training slides and additional sources
- National resource library of charities
- Template action plans
- Mapping data resource sheet
- Website data sheet

Demographic

- There are 18 local authorities sitting across Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.
- Charnwood, Melton and Rushcliffe borough councils (the project team) have an Armed Forces Covenant Development Officer who has responsibility for ensuring that local authorities embed the principles of the Covenant. The Development Officer is the lead for the project and an Armed Forces Covenant Outreach Officer working in the community to increase awareness of the Covenant and needs of the Armed Forces community.
- Harborough District Council have an Armed Forces Covenant Officer dedicated to embedding the principles of the Covenant at local authority level.
- One local authority did not respond to the offer of training which left 13 local authorities keen to take up the offer of training.
- The training offer was also offered to the local universities of which 2 out of 5 took part on the day.



Pre and Post Consultation Results

	ACTION	Baseline Position	Progress made during training and consultation period
1	Action plans	It was identified that one of the authorities did not have an action plan to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant pledges and principles. However, it was also clear that for some of those that did have action plans, they were only in a draft format with a focus on civic events.	Authorities report using the information provided either at the event or from within their resource packs to update their in-house action plans. This has allowed officers to implement changes, highlight key areas and assign responsibility.
2	Policies	<p>Where action plans were in place, it was reported that statutory policies were in place. Action plans that were still in a draft format still required senior management team sign off.</p> <p>Any changes that required HR changes such as a reservist policy, additional leave and guaranteed interview schemes were only in a draft phase as authorities were struggling to get these changes through senior management. It was reported that without dedicated staff and knowledge this wasn't likely to move forward.</p>	<p>HR and employment is an area for development that requires additional support. For authorities who wish to progress with ERS awards, changes to enhance the recruitment of the Armed Forces community, policies in place to support the employment of reservists and adult cadet force leaders, are proving difficult.</p> <p>One authority has since been supported by CMR and has progressed to offering a guaranteed interview to candidates who meet the application criteria following the training event. A further consideration to support authorities would be to present to sub regional HR conferences/ meetings on the process.</p>

			HR Policies are to be an agenda item at Nottinghamshire's HR Managers meeting to discuss HR specific issues raised as a result of the Bringing the Covenant to Life training day.
3	Staff training	All councils reported that Armed Forces Covenant training is not mandatory for frontline staff. A small proportion of authorities were aware of the e-learning available.	Authorities have now included the e-learning modules on their learning and development platforms and made these available to their front-line staff. The training is not being made compulsory, but at least one authority is looking at the training slides developed by CMR to introduce face to face training sessions for their staff.
4.	Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) status	Two of the 13 authorities at the time of the pre-consultation had not applied for or received their first award of Bronze. One authority had an application in for the 2019 round for a Silver ERS award with the rest unable to progress due to time restraints and changes needing to be made to policies.	Two authorities since the consultation and the training event have received their Bronze ERS award with another going on to apply for Silver. Many of the other authorities will be able to apply for Silver as a result of the expanded action plans in 2020.
5	Mapping	During the consultation it was evidenced that no mapping of the Armed Forces has taken place. This was an area of interest to authorities on how they could easily access this information.	Authorities have stated that mapping is not a priority and do not have the resources available to undertake additional mapping. However, the training referenced some useful national reports and has demonstrated more about the local Armed Forces community and increased awareness about the range of additional needs or disadvantage that the community



			may face. The authorities are accepting that they each do have a local Armed Forces community and gained commitment to implement actions that will support them regardless of more exact information.
6	Resources	All authorities had working websites with Armed Forces information available, some more than others. Nottinghamshire authorities rely on the County Council's website for the most up to date information.	Authorities have looked at their websites and made additions and changes accordingly. They have built this into their action plans as an action point as information changes quickly.
7	Employment of Armed Forces community	No authority has any procedure in place to identify if their staff have a connection to the Armed Forces. All authorities except for one are aware they employ staff with an Armed Forces background.	Two authorities have already introduced a buddy scheme for employees to get together and support other members of staff with an Armed Forces connection.
8	Careers Transition Partnership (CTP)	This was an area which needs to be addressed as most authorities did not have a relationship with CTP, nor were they aware of what services CTP or REFA could offer.	Five authorities since the training have begun to partner with CTP. A couple more are in their infancy and are incorporating it as an action moving forward. One authority has also registered for the new Forces Families job site.
9	Additional funding	Awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund but lack of capacity and local needs not mapped to apply for funding.	A greater awareness of funding available, including that partner organisations such as the voluntary sector could apply for it to increase provision in the local area. A couple of authorities are now promoting this on their websites.
10	Local Armed Forces community	Authorities had strong links with their communities including Age UK's Joining Forces and local breakfast clubs.	Following the training, authorities have sought out their local community services and have begun building networks as an additional source of support for the Armed



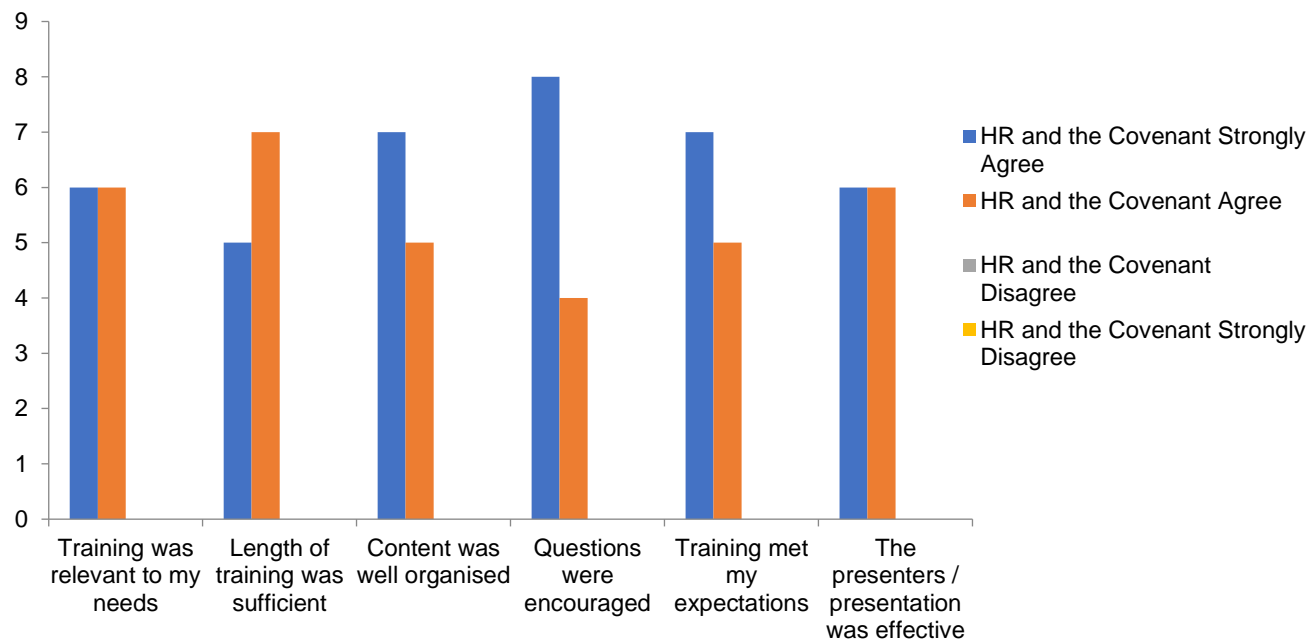
			Forces. One authority has asked CMR to advertise an Armed Forces community event since the training.
11	Relationship with local reserve units	Few authorities did not have relationships with their local reserve and cadet units. Others engaged through the local civil military boards.	One authority has sought out their local reserve unit and begun to build community links.
12	Authority's aspirations	Authorities are keen to progress their ERS awards, but without senior management support to make changes to policies there will be little movement. Armed Forces Covenant is not a priority in the everyday job role of the Covenant officer and has resulted in a lack of commitment and motivation by some councils.	Authorities report to being re-enthused in their role as Covenant leads. They have been able to make some quick wins since the training event where they can or where other departments need to lead. This has led to a halt in progression as detailed in the ERS and policies section.
13	Armed Forces Covenant leads	All authorities have a lead officer with Covenant delivery as part of their role. All authorities felt supported by their elected members in the Champion role.	CMR has supported one authority to effectively induct their new Armed Forces Champion into their role and have also taken the opportunity to ask if any of their newly elected councillors have an Armed Forces background.

Evaluation from the event

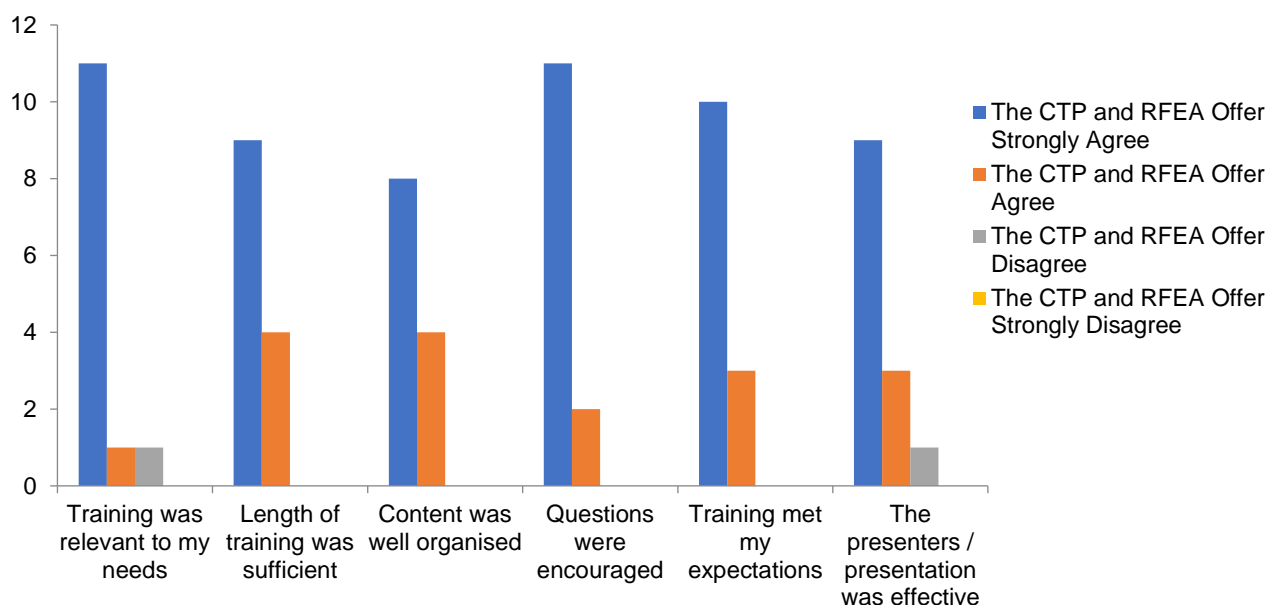
Data Analysis of Evaluation Forms

13 of 15 delegate evaluation forms received scoring the event on average 4 out of 5.

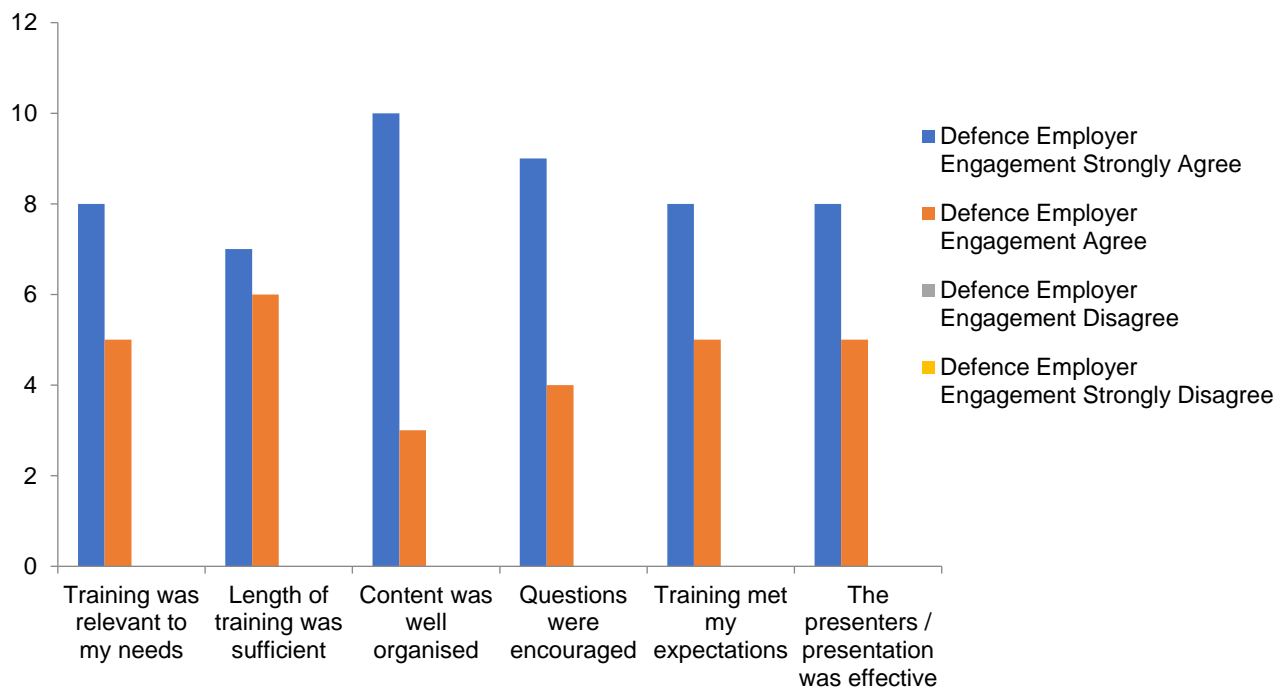
Session 1: *Unlocking the potential of your Armed Forces community workforce*



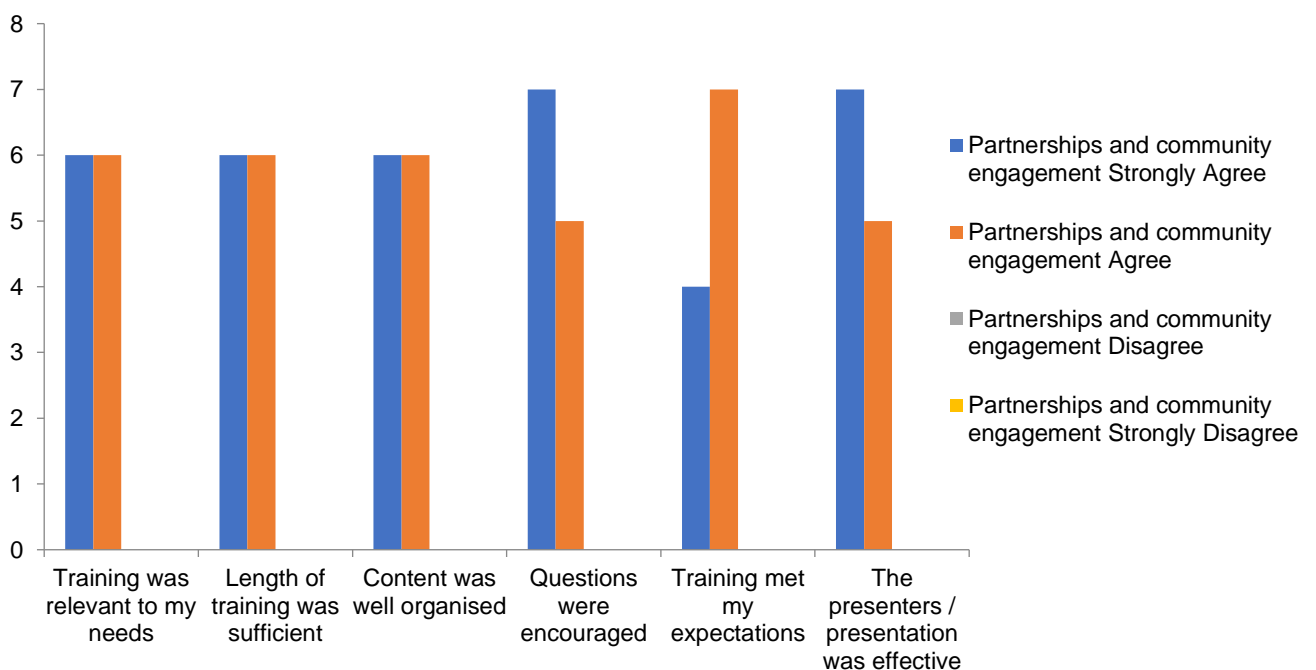
Session 2: *Partnering with the Careers Transition Partnership and the Forces Employment Charity (RFEA)*



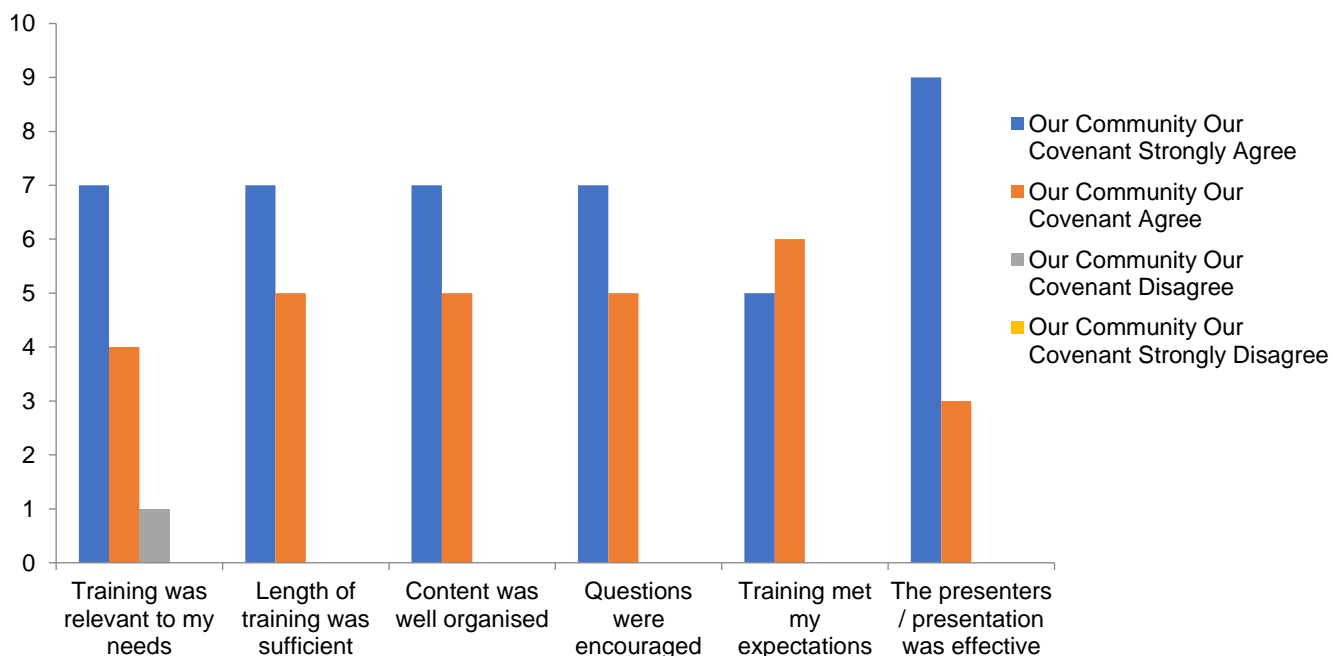
Session 3: *Reservist, Who, What and Why?*



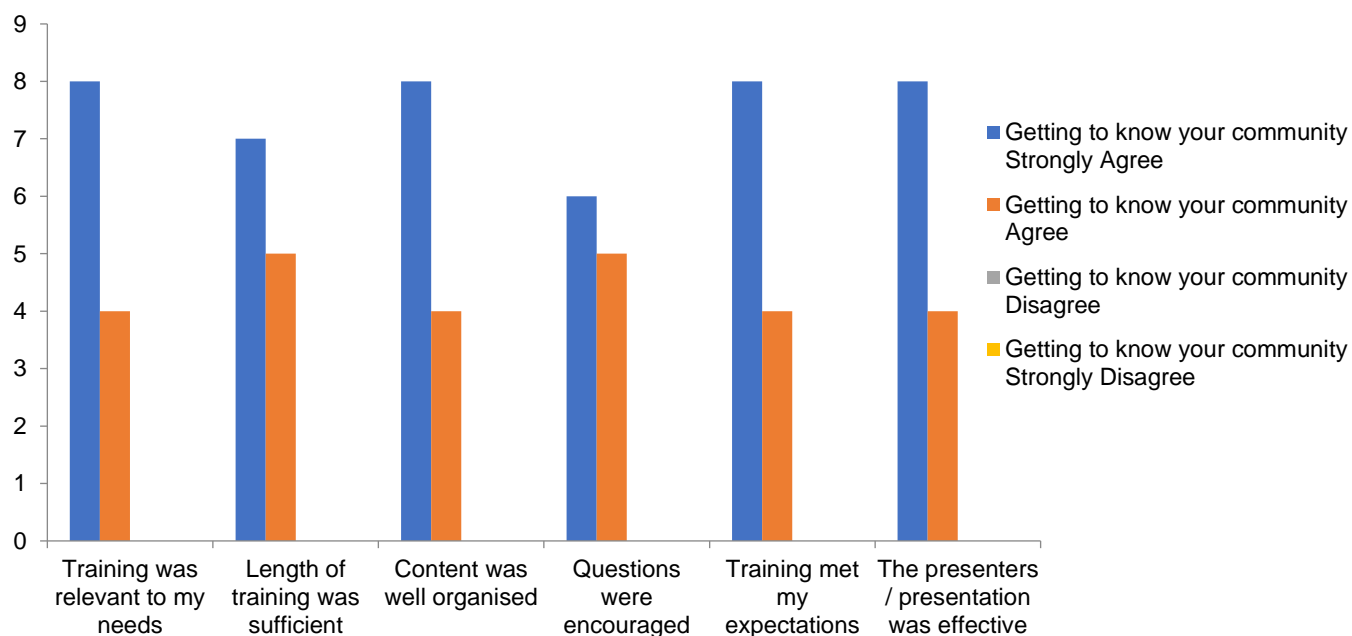
Session 4: *Community partnerships*



Session 6: Our Community Our Covenant



Session 7: Your local Armed Forces Community – who are they?



A selection of comments from evaluation forms

An excellent training event with useful tips and contacts made.

The pack looks very useful and well put together

Want to make sure that HR are engaged with CTP & RFEA.

So much could be achieved. Time / capacity is our enemy.

Really interesting about service children. Reinvigorating an office group including these services important.

Thank you for an excellent, information and very helpful event. Come away feeling more confident, better connected and enthused.

Mapping – summary info, would have liked an idea of questions appreciate time against us

Personal perspective of reservists really brought to life the reality. Gave a face to what it means to be a reservist.

An extremely useful event. Gave me lots of pointers for making improvements locally and developing further connections. Background material and resources is much appreciated.

Defence Employer Engagement – really made me think!



Post event feedback

“Just wanted to thank you for an excellent day yesterday. One of the most enjoyable and useful training sessions, the day was well thought out and extremely useful. Much appreciated and we will be making good use of the resources provided too.”

Sarah

“Thank you very much for inviting Nottingham Trent to the event yesterday. It was thoroughly enjoyable and insightful – I’ve certainly come away with lots of ideas and actions. Super organised day too!”

Rachel

“Thank you so much for inviting me yesterday, I found it really useful. I hope my little story got the message across about asking the question, it the one statement I make repeatedly.”

Sue, The Royal British Legion

“Yesterday was informative and inspiring. Many practical, worthwhile ideas to take forward in a reasonable timescale, which I look forward to putting into place. It must have taken you forever and given you lots of headaches to prepare all the materials and other practical arrangements. It is very much appreciated.”

Matthew

“I just wanted to say thank you for letting me be a part of yesterday’s fantastic event. I hope you are still ‘flying high’ this morning!!! There was so much positive energy and determination to go away and ‘do’ things I think it will definitely change lives.”

Michelle, Covenant Officer for Rutland, Harborough and South Kesteven

“Thanks again for a really excellent day at Rushcliffe.”

Stephen, Bassetlaw District Council

“In all of my excitement yesterday, I walked away with my completed Evaluation Form. Please find a scan of it attached. For your information, I am currently checking with our HR Section regarding ease of achieving the Employer Recognition Silver Award criteria. Thanks again for your support and assistance.”

Gillian

Conclusions and observations

Bringing the Armed Forces Covenant to life event has refreshed the commitment within local authorities to the Armed Forces community. There have been a range of quick wins achieved in the three months since the training event, covering a variety of focuses within the Covenant pledges. Officers attending the event report that they feel supported and have begun to develop networking opportunities to expand the work further and tackle some of the longer-term actions and changes. Attendees have continued to reference the content of the training event at Civil Military Partnership Boards during the agenda items and the update sections.





Delegate packs are being utilised regularly. Regular contact is being sought with the CMR project by delegates for advice and guidance when required.

A case study has been completed with Ashfield District Council to demonstrate their journey from the start to the present (see attached).

CMR have witnessed Covenant leads carrying around their training resource packs to multi-agency meetings as a point of reference for further information, demonstrating the practical and applicable nature of the contents. Whilst speaking to the authorities as part of this final consultation phase of the event package, what has been evident is that Covenant leads are sharing information and have begun to develop working relationships to support their work with the Armed Forces.

Covenant leads are moving away from the more traditional civic ceremonies work, attendance at which has formally been a tried and tested way of showing support for the Armed Forces community whilst not necessarily leading to tangible changes or outcomes for them. Attendees are now increasingly leaving the lead on the civic work with the departments responsible for implementing events and focusing instead on a more targeted work programme where the support the Covenant can deliver demonstrable positive outcomes. The training event has led to new and strengthened partnerships and support to charities which are the grass roots of supporting veterans. The changes noted demonstrate increased knowledge and confidence in how local authorities and universities can support the Armed Forces community.

For more information please contact:

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Ashfield District Council – Case Study

The starting point in Ashfield District Council's journey to implementing improvements under the Armed Forces Covenant

In November 2018, Ashfield, along with all the local authorities across Nottinghamshire, re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant at a ceremony at Southwell Minster. Gillian is the Officer with lead responsibility for the Covenant at Ashfield District Council and the re-signing refreshed her commitment to it and senior management are supportive.

Her biggest challenge was that, (like many other lead Officers who take this on as part of a much wider substantive role), she didn't know where to start. In her words she was "lost in a sea of mist". She had attended a couple of the Civil Military Partnership Board meetings and felt out of her depth in terms of military jargon and knowing what was expected of her in this role. She had been involved in some civic events such as Remembrance and answered a couple of Freedom of Information requests. Even with her personal military background, she struggled to get started and identify what she could do that would have a tangible outcome for people covered under the Covenant.

What changed following the pre-training consultation?

Gillian describes the timing of the 'Bringing the Armed Forces Covenant to Life' event invitation as perfect. During the initial consultation exercise, the Charnwood, Melton & Rushcliffe (CMR) partnership facilitator identified that Ashfield hadn't yet applied for the Bronze Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) award but would be able to demonstrate that they met the criteria to do so. They also hadn't yet developed an action plan to deliver on the Covenant within the Authority and so the facilitator suggested some short- and medium-term actions that the training package would support. By the day of the training event, Ashfield had achieved the Bronze Award.

What did Ashfield District Council take from the event?

Ashfield District Council have been keen to adopt as much of the learning and resources as possible from the training day and associated delegate resource pack. Gillian immediately started to use the template action plan and cross-referenced policy templates and resources to add the detail needed within the Authority's first Covenant action plan to make positive changes for the Armed Forces community and ensure that they face no disadvantage when accessing Ashfield's services. It was quickly identified that many of the actions correspond with and sit well within their Health and Wellbeing Plan which helped the Covenant Action Plan to be embedded into well recognised existing structures. Gillian describes the delegate resource pack as being "like a bible to me".



During the training day, Ashfield District Council were able to network with the Ministry of Defence East Midlands Director and the Careers Transition Partnership/RFEA along with colleagues from other authorities who were all at different stages in delivering on the Covenant pledges.



Quick wins achieved after the training event

Ashfield swiftly implemented several actions including introducing new policies, gaining increased visibility and buy-in to the Armed Forces Covenant agenda and developed a relationship with Defence Relationship Management (DRM). The CMR facilitator supported communication with the DRM Director and supported Ashfield to demonstrate that a raft of new initiatives had been put in place which they described in their application to the Silver Employer Recognition Scheme Awards. During this application process Gillian has been able to make key relationships both within the Council and the wider military community. Ashfield District Council are supportive of their new Veterans' Breakfast Club, have made links with Age UK's Forces Friends coordinator and initiated relationships with local reservist units.

The training and consultation have given Gillian the confidence to talk about the Armed Forces Covenant at every opportunity through her working day. This has included team meetings, networks she is involved in and authority funded projects to encourage services to 'Ask the Question' and make them more aware of the support available and promote the Armed Forces Covenant. Through this engagement Gillian regularly receives enquiries where a service user has an Armed Forces background about what the authority can do to support or where they are able to signpost on to, if the support required for the identified need doesn't sit within the original organisation. This has included housing enquiries, homelessness issues referred by an external partner service and links to housing projects within the area.

The Authority's website is continually being improved and updated with information applicable to the Armed Forces, an example being that the local leisure centre is now offering discounts to members of the Armed Forces community. The event has



provided Ashfield and Gillian a network of people to turn to and a keenness to deliver what she can with the resources available to her.

This round of local elections brought about changes within their elected members with a new Councillor being selected as an Armed Forces Champion with a named deputy to support. Since this appointment the Champion has been able to attend his first Civil Military Partnership Board, supported by Gillian who is more involved within the meeting itself and feels confident and supported with the knowledge she has gained.

Ashfield District Council have a shared HR department which is managed with a neighbouring authority who unfortunately did not attend the event. However, communication between the authorities is progressing with a focus on recruitment, looking at partnering with the Careers Transition Partnership and the new Forces Families programme. Reservists' annual leave is built into their annual leave policies and work will commence soon to develop a specific Reservist policy.

Ashfield District Council have moved on significantly in the last few months with regards to the implementation of their pledges under the Armed Forces Covenant. They have recently received notification of being awarded the Silver Employer Recognition Scheme Award. The interview between the CMR Facilitator and Gillian that has been used to compile this case study concluded with Gillian asking, "what do we need to do to achieve Gold?". Something tells us the relationship between the CMR Covenant Team and Ashfield District Council will be ongoing!

