



Community Covenant

Armed Forces Community Covenant

Guidance Notes

What is a Community Covenant?

A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level. The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the Service community in their area and nurture understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.

Many people have become involved in supporting the Service community, through Service charities or more recently by participating in Armed Forces Day. They have shown their support in a variety of ways including fundraising, military celebrations and open days, and family fun days. Even simple demonstrations of support, such as displaying the Armed Forces Day window sticker in cars and businesses have had a positive effect and boosted the morale of our Armed Forces community. The Community Covenant scheme aims to build upon this support.

Armed Forces Day is a positive expression of support and the Community Covenant does not replicate it. It does, however, aim to encourage the civilian community to extend their support beyond Armed Forces day throughout the year and on longer term projects that benefit their local community. Armed Forces Day is very much about celebrating the hard work of our Armed Forces, the Community Covenant is about supporting them.

Are any Community Covenants already up and running?

The Community Covenant is being launched in four locations in England – Hampshire, Portsmouth, North Yorkshire and Oxfordshire. In addition Vale of Glamorgan in Wales have decided to launch a Community Covenant, the first in Wales. The Local Authorities in these areas have established, or are establishing, effective relationships with the military community in their area. Further detail of what these areas are doing is provided at the end of this guide and is intended to present some examples of best practice of the Community Covenant in action. These initial launches are very much a ‘first wave’ and we hope that other parts of the UK will be keen to establish and improve relationships between the

local Armed Forces Community and the wider community and get involved with this scheme. It is important to remember that almost every community will have members of the Armed Forces Community living within it, be it Serving members, family members or veterans. We hope, therefore, that areas that do not have a large Serving presence will still be keen to embrace this scheme.

What about the good work already being done in some areas?

The Community Covenant does not seek to replace existing good work already put into place by public service providers, charities, etc but to build upon it. It also provides a mechanism to ensure the Armed Forces community are aware of the support available to them. We hope that those already offering support to the Armed Forces, even if not as a result of the Community Covenant, will be keen to promote this support through the Community Covenant and in particular on the MOD website. The Community Covenant not only aims to encourage new support it provides an opportunity to highlight existing best practice.

How is a Community Covenant different from the Armed Forces Covenant?

Last year the Government recognised the need to do more to ensure that our Armed Forces, veterans and their families have the support they need and are treated with the dignity they deserve. This is why the Government has published a new Covenant as a tri-Service document, the Armed Forces Covenant. The Armed Forces Covenant expresses the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community. It is supported by 'The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow' which sets out the actions currently being taken by central government to support the Armed Forces community as well as future measures, many of which have been set at a national level and are being applied by public service providers across the country and within the Devolved Administrations such as the introduction of a Service childrens' Pupil Premium, a scholarship scheme for bereaved Service children, and extra assistance for veterans' mental health needs.

The Community Covenant complements the Armed Forces Covenant but enables service providers to go beyond the national commitments. It allows for measures to be put in place at a local level to support the Armed Forces. The Community Covenant encourages local communities to develop a relationship with the Service community in their area, this enables support to be tailored according to need. Many Local Authorities already extend support to the Armed Forces beyond the national commitments, for instance some councils offer free access to swimming pools for Serving personnel.

In return there is much the Armed Forces Community can do to support their local communities. The Community Covenant scheme encourages the Armed Forces Community to do their bit to nurture this two-way relationship.

Who can participate in the Community Covenant?

The Community Covenant represents a relationship between the Armed Forces community¹ and any or all of the following:

¹ The Armed Forces Community is defined, for the purposes of the Armed Forces Covenant, as including all those towards whom the Nation has a moral obligation due to Service in HM Armed Forces – see page 4 of The Armed Forces Covenant at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/Personnel/Welfare/ArmedForcesCovenant/TheArmedForcesCovenantDocuments.htm>

- public service providers (this can include Local Authorities, health service providers, etc)
- private industry (such as shops, restaurants, non-public service providers)
- charities
- community groups
- individual members of the public

How can a Community Covenant be established?

All Local Authorities in England are being provided with this guidance and encouraged to establish a Community Covenant in their area. If a Local Authority has not yet established a Community Covenant then other members of the community can encourage them to do so. Not every Local Authority will be able to extend the support they already give to the Armed Forces community whilst budgets are being stretched and reduced, however the establishment of Civil/Military partnerships is an excellent low-cost way to demonstrate support for the Armed Forces community and helps build an understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces. This would ensure that the needs of the Armed Forces community are considered in planning services, such as changes to public transport routes.

Community Covenants may look quite different from one location to another. This is a scheme where one size does not fit all and the nature of the support offered will be determined by both need and capacity. It is expected that most Community Covenants will be led at Local Authority level however Unitary Authorities and individual towns may also wish to have a Community Covenant and this will be supported.

What is the Community Covenant pledge?

The starting point for any Community Covenant is signing the Community Covenant pledge. This document sets out what a Community Covenant seeks to achieve in a particular area and where this will be signed by representatives from all parts of the Community. In most cases the lead signatories will be a senior representatives from the Local Authority and Service community who will be signing on behalf of the Armed Forces Community (although in areas where there isn't a Serving presence the pledge may be signed by those representing the veterans community). A template can be downloaded from the Community Covenant webpage www.mod.uk/covenant

The standard document is a high level statement of support and we encourage Local Authorities to make a copy available on their website once signed. If communities wish to add more detail to their Community Covenant pledge, for instance information relating to the measures of support being implemented, they can do so and this is encouraged.

How can Public Service providers demonstrate support?

Public Service providers are already delivering a number of tailored services for the Service community, set at a national level across Whitehall, intended to ensure members of the Service community do not face disadvantage in accessing school places, healthcare, social housing and so on. Additional support can take a variety of forms and will be determined by the capacity of the Local Authority. Examples of best practice include:

- Establishment of Civil/Military Partnership Boards
- Providing opportunities for the Armed Forces to talk about their experiences on operations
- Support to employment of Service leavers and Service families by drawing together local employers for recruitment fairs (see Hampshire best practice)
- Free/discounted access to leisure facilities and discounts in shops and restaurants
- Armed Forces Involvement within Community Projects

How can businesses demonstrate support?

Support can take a variety of forms and will be determined by the capacity of the business. A number of organisations, large and small, already offer discounts through the Forces Discount scheme (www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk) and businesses may choose to join this existing scheme or create their own. Additional support might take the form of support to employment for the families of Service personnel who can at times find themselves faced with difficulty securing employment when moving to a new location.

How can members of the community demonstrate support?

By promoting activity that integrates the Service community into local life, this will help to make the Service community feel part of the community instead of it simply being somewhere they live for the term of a posting. This might include running youth groups or sports clubs that include Service children, establishing support networks for Service families who often find themselves isolated when Serving partners are on operations, particularly on the more remote bases where public transport is limited. Individuals or community groups can also reach out to the Service community veterans, to encourage inclusion in local activities.

How can the local Armed Forces get involved?

Again, by promoting activity that integrates the Service community into civilian life and by helping the civilian community to develop a better understanding of the Armed Forces. The Community Covenant is intended to be a two-way arrangement and we hope that there will also be opportunities for the Armed Forces to support their local communities in a variety of ways. This might include getting involved in community regeneration projects or taking part in educational and sporting events.

The Community Covenant Grant scheme

On 16 May 2011 the Defence Secretary announced that £30M of central Government funding has been allocated over the next four years to support the Community Covenant. Details of the Grant scheme will be published in due course on our website. However it is likely that the scheme's aims will be defined in terms of supporting projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. It will be administered by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of HMG. The scheme is likely to favour applications for funding from local groups for practical projects which deliver rapid results and meet the aims of the scheme. Applications will have to be submitted jointly by at least two parties to the local Community Covenant: one from the Armed Forces Community (such as a Service unit, a veterans' group, or a families organisation), and one from the wider community (such as a Local Authority or service provider, a commercial organisation, or a private

individual). Details on how to bid, including the criteria to be used in assessing bids, will be developed in the weeks following the launch. It should be noted that the fund will only be open to communities which have adopted a Community Covenant, but that this will not be sufficient in itself – the nature of the project itself will be the key consideration.

Next steps

The Ministry of Defence is encouraging the Armed Forces Community to get involved with the scheme and take a proactive approach to forge links with the Local Authority in their area. Initiating a Community Covenant may result from an approach from the Local Authority to a local Service unit or station; equally the Local Authority may be approached by the Armed Forces community in their area. Many Local Authorities will be aware of the Service establishments in their area which can, in most cases, act as a first point of contact to initiate this work. However Local Authorities who wish to establish a Community Covenant and are unsure of who to contact should send an e-mail to: covenant-mailbox@mod.uk.

Examples of best practice

The 145 (South) Brigade Civilian Military Partnership (CMP) is a programme of closer working with a broad range of local authorities across both Hampshire and Oxfordshire. The processes of governance implemented in each of these counties vary a little from each other, however there are strong and enduring links with the relevant county council management structures and other bodies such as the NHS. The aim of the programme is to share information, co-ordinate strategy and to work in partnership in areas where there is mutual benefit. Five broad themes have been agreed: Education, Children and Young People; Economy and Skills; Health and Wellbeing; Environment and Infrastructure; Safer and Stronger Communities. Activities are then focused on projects which address need in each of these areas.

All the participants in the CMP recognise the unique needs of the Armed Forces, their families and dependents, Reservists and Veterans; and work to address these. The CMP draws together a range of groups including the private sector, the third sector, Service charities, the MOD and the public sector; the partnership work is also conducted across all of the Services. By working together across a range of projects for example the Welfare Pathway pilot in Hampshire and improved links with the NHS in Oxfordshire, it is possible to share knowledge, skills and potentially resources for the betterment of the military and civilian populations. Hampshire County Council are also engaged in the well-established Hampshire Economic Partnership with the local business community, which provides an existing route to engage commercial organisations in support of the Community Covenant.

Oxfordshire County Council have implemented a number of specific measures including the establishment of a dedicated web page for the Armed Forces and for publishing local articles provided by the military; an embedded Military Liaison Officer at the County Council Offices; and work to scope employment needs of those leaving the Services in terms of numbers and qualifications. Commander 145 Bde is a member of the Oxfordshire Partnership.

Portsmouth is an example of a Unitary Authority establishing their own Community Covenant within an area where there will also be a county-led Community Covenant. The city is home to a large Service presence, mainly from the Royal Navy. The Council is

responsible for a number of services and can therefore influence changes to public service delivery within the city. The City Council is establishing a Civil/Military partnership group which will draw together representatives from key areas within the council, such as health, housing and education, and the group will also include representatives from the Navy and the Naval Families Federation.

The North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration (MCI) Project in 15 (NE) Brigade area is a programme of closer working with local authorities and other service providers across the North Yorkshire area, similar to the 145 (South) Brigade CMP. The focus for the MCI Project is a Governance Board for senior stakeholders from around 30 military and civilian agencies in North Yorkshire which meets to share information and co-ordinate strategies in areas of mutual benefit. It seeks to present a more united front in dealings with central government. The Board agreed to work in six broad areas that cover many of the strategic issues featured in the Service Personnel Command Paper (SPCP), published in 2008: Housing, Planning & Sustainable Development; Health; Economic Impact; Children & Young People; Transport; Safety and Security. As a result activity can be focused on areas which have needs to be addressed. The Board has embraced the transition towards the Armed Forces Covenant and contributed to consultation on the SPCP.

In addition to the MCI, North Yorkshire County Council and partners have well-established forums engaging the voluntary sector and business community which provide a ready-made forum for developing the Community Covenant.

All the participants in the MCI Project recognise the unique needs of the Armed Forces community and the economic benefit they bring to the area.