
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

21 September 2022

North Ayrshire Council

Title: **Armed Forces Covenant Duty**

Purpose: To advise Members of the range of support which the Council currently provides to the serving and veteran community and the ways in which the new Armed Forces Covenant Duty will inform the development of future Council policy and decisions.

Recommendation: The Council is invited to:

- (a) note the current support provided to the Armed Forces and Veterans, as set out at Appendix 2;
- (b) note the new Armed Forces Covenant Duty which comes into effect as a result of the Armed Forces Act 2021; and
- (c) agree that, following publication of the Statutory Guidance in respect of the new Act, a report is submitted to Cabinet on how the Council will respond to its obligations under the new Act.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 A motion passed by the Council at its meeting on 22 June 2022 reiterated North Ayrshire Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant; recognised the contribution and sacrifice made by members of the Armed Forces and their families; and asked officers to examine what more might be done to support the serving and veteran community and to prepare for a new duty under the Armed Forces Act 2021 to give due regard to the Covenant in policy development and decision making.
- 1.2 The Council already provides a range of support to the serving and veteran community of the Armed Forces and, in June 2020, formally renewed its commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant. The Council has also appointed a Veterans Champion, Councillor Jim Montgomerie.
- 1.3 This report details the support currently provided and highlights the new duties associated with the Armed Forces Act 2021. Proposals with regard to how Services will ensure the Council meets its obligations in terms of the Act will be submitted to the Cabinet following publication of the Statutory Guidance.

2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 22 June 2022, the Council considered and unanimously approved the following motion by Councillor Todd Ferguson, seconded by Councillor Inglis:

“That this Council:

1. renews its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, which is based on the premise that those who serve or have served, and their families deserve respect, support and fair treatment. In particular, it states that: “Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.”
2. is proud to be Armed Forces friendly and recognises the enormous contribution and sacrifices that members of the Armed Forces and their families make every day for the safety and security of our country;
3. values the service of all British Armed Forces personnel, past and present, including those from Commonwealth Nations.
4. requests production of a report examining what more North Ayrshire Council can do to support our serving and veteran community across the full range of services we provide and strengthen partnerships with the Armed Forces Community.
5. prepares for the new duty to give due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant in policy development and decision making.”

Current Support

- 2.2 The Council already has a strong record in terms of the support provided to veterans and members of the armed forces:

Armed Forces Covenant

- 2.3 The three Ayrshire Councils, NHS Ayrshire and Arran and other stakeholders have been voluntary signatories of the Armed Forces Community Covenant since it was first introduced in 2012. In June 2020, the Council renewed its commitment to the Covenant and the refreshed Covenant was formally signed on 23 September 2021. The Covenant itself is attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Veterans Champion

- 2.4 At its first meeting of the new Administration, the Cabinet also recognised Veterans as one of the key communities with special interests across North Ayrshire, appointing Councillor Jim Montgomerie to the role of ‘Veterans Champion’, to work with veterans and the Armed Forces to understand their needs and to advocate on their behalf in relation to how services are delivered.

- 2.5 In addition, Councillor Montgomerie is the Council's appointed representative on the Scottish Government's Cross-Party Group on Armed Forces and Veterans Community.

Support from Services

- 2.6 A summary of the range of key supports currently in place across Services of the Council, is set out at Appendix 2. It demonstrates the ways in which Services consider and take account of the particular circumstances of the armed forces and veterans community within North Ayrshire.

The New Armed Forces Covenant Duty

- 2.7 Like North Ayrshire, all councils have already signed the Armed Forces Covenant on a voluntary basis. The Armed Forces Act 2021 further enshrines the Covenant into law and it intended to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing public services. It does not mandate what organisations must do, only that they must consider the Armed Forces community alongside other legal requirements. And it means that decisions about the development and delivery of certain services must be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community.
- 2.7 Specifically, the new Covenant duty, which comes into effect later in 2022 (once the Statutory Guidance supporting it has been approved), will require organisations delivering local services to pay 'due regard' to the Covenant principles when exercising functions in the areas of housing, education and healthcare. 'Due regard' means that organisations in the scope of the Duty, such as the Council, will need to consciously consider:
- (a) the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces;
 - (b) the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service personnel from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces; and
 - (c) the principle that special provision for service personnel may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.
- 2.8 The Duty does not mean that the Armed Forces community will be placed at the 'front of the queue'; but it does mean that their circumstances should receive a fair assessment when their cases are considered. In particular, the following Council services areas are covered by the Act:

Housing Services

- Allocations policy for social housing
- Homelessness
- Disabled Facilities Grants

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Education

- Admissions
- Educational attainment and curriculum
- Child wellbeing
- Transport
- Attendance
- Additional needs support

Health

- Local authority delivered healthcare services, including sexual health services and drug and alcohol misused services
- Co-operation between bodies and professionals

2.9 Appendix 2 demonstrates that the Council is already working hard to recognise and address the particular circumstances of veterans and members of the Armed Forces. The Statutory Guidance to the new Act, which is expected later in the year, will allow officers to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

3. Proposals

3.1 That the Council agrees:

- (a) to note the current support provided to the Armed Forces and Veterans as set out at Appendix 2;
- (b) to note the new Armed Forces Covenant Duty which comes into effect as a result of the Armed Forces Act 2021; and
- (c) that, following publication of the Statutory Guidance in respect of the new Act, a report is submitted to Cabinet on how the Council will respond to its obligations under the new Act.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Human Resources

4.2 There are no additional human resource implications arising from the recommendations in this report."

Legal

4.3 Clause 8 of the Armed Forces Act 2021 sets out the Council's duties with regard to the Armed Forces Covenant. Further information on the implications of the new Duty is provided at Section 2.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 There are no additional equality/socio-economic implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Climate Change and Carbon

- 4.5 There are no climate change and carbon implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 There are no key priority implications arising from this information report.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 There are no community wealth building implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with Services across the Council and with the Veterans Champion.

Aileen Craig
Head of Democratic Services

For further information please contact Melanie Anderson, Senior Manager (Committee and Member Services), on tel: 01294 324131/ melanieanderson@north-ayrshire.gov.uk.

Background Papers

Correspondence in respect of current/planned service provision



AN ARMED FORCES COVENANT

NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHARITABLE
AND VOLUNTARY SECTORS,
THE CIVILIAN COMMUNITY OF NORTH AYRSHIRE

AND

THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY IN NORTH AYRSHIRE

**We, the undersigned, agree to work and act together to
honour the Armed Forces Covenant.**

Signatories

(This page gives examples of the parties who may sign the Armed Forces Covenant. This is an example only and is not limited to the examples given)

Signed:

Name:

Position Held:

Signed on behalf of the Armed Forces Community

Signed:

Name: Ian Clarkson

Position Held: Provost

Signed on behalf of North Ayrshire Council

Date:

Signed:

Name:

Position Held:

Signed on behalf of Armed Forces Charities

Date:

Signed:

Name:

Position Held:

Signed on behalf of the Voluntary Sector

Date:

Signed:

Name:

Position Held:

Signed on behalf of the Business and Commercial Sector

Date:

Signed:

Name:

Position Held:

Signed on behalf of the Primary Care Trust/NHS Body

Date:

Date:

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANTS

1.1 This Armed Forces Covenant is made between:

The serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families working and residing in North Ayrshire

And

North Ayrshire Council

And

The Charitable and Voluntary Sector

And

Other members of the civilian community

SECTION 2: PRINCIPLES OF THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. This Covenant encompasses the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level.

2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is based upon two key principles:

- The Armed Forces community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

2.3 The purpose of this Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in North Ayrshire and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Armed Forces Community, particularly those who have given the most. This includes in-Service and ex-Service personnel their families and widow(er)s in North Ayrshire.

2.4 For North Ayrshire Council and partner organisations, the Community Covenant presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. It also presents an opportunity to build upon existing good work on other initiatives such as the Welfare Pathway.

2.5 For the Armed Forces community, the Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life and encourages members of the Armed Forces community to help their local community.

SECTION 3: OBJECTIVES AND GENERAL INTENTIONS

Aims of the Covenant

3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant defines the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community.

3.2 It aims to encourage all parties within a community to offer support to the local Armed Forces community and make it easier for Service personnel, families and veterans to access the help and support available from the MOD, from statutory providers and from the Charitable and Voluntary Sector. These organisations already work together in partnership at local level.

3.3 The scheme is intended to be a two-way arrangement and the Armed Forces community are encouraged to do as much as they can to support their community and promote activity which integrates the Service community into civilian life.

SECTION 4: Measures

4.1 North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

Ensure tha Veterans are able to access priority care and treatment from mainstream and specialist services via Veteran First Point (Ayrshire & Arran)

4.2 Place – Housing Services

Housing Services are fully committed to working with key partners and stakeholders to ensure the effective delivery of housing advice and support for Armed Forces personnel, service leavers and the veteran community.

Armed Forces personnel and veterans are given additional support and consideration to ensure they are not disadvantaged when applying for housing. When their date of discharge is confirmed, applicants are entitled to an additional 150 points up to 12 months before or after discharge. The aim of this enhanced priority is to ensure that applicants receive an offer of housing and prevent the possibility of them becoming homeless.

4.3 Communities – Connected Communities

Connected Communities help and support local community organisations including many branches of the Royal British Legion. Support varies depending on their different needs.

Connected Communities continues to be respectful of significant dates and commemorative events and how the activities on these days helps the Armed Forces community. Many generic services are accessed frequently by veterans - the Mens Shed initiative being the most relevant to date.

4.4 Democratic Service – Committee and Member Services

Committee and Member Services provide support to Armed Forces Day events and Remembrance Services and Parades. Administrative support is also given to the Provost in his role as the Council's Veteran Champion.

4.5 KA Leisure

KA Leisure currently afford members of the Armed Forces and Veterans the access plus rate, their concessionary rate, for both memberships and casual use.

CONTACT PERSONNEL AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

MOD Armed Forces Covenant Team

Email address: covenant-mailbox@mod.gov.uk
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In-Service representative(s)

Contact Name:
Title:
Telephone:
Address:

North Ayrshire Council

Contact Name:
Title:
Telephone:
Fax:
Address:

Charities

Contact Name:
Title:
Telephone:
Address:

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of
the Crown

And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

Current Support for Veterans and the Armed Forces

North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

North Ayrshire HSCP as Lead Partnership for Mental Health is fully engaged with the Scottish Government to positively shape the future of both national and local delivery for the implementation of the national Veteran's Mental Health and Wellbeing Action plan and is a member of the national Veteran's Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board, which has been established to create a new national service providing visible, consistent and timely mental health and wellbeing services of high quality to support veterans in Scotland, combining equity of access with a rapid response to evidenced need.

North Ayrshire HSCP as Lead for Mental health services in Ayrshire and Arran also hosts the National Combat Stress contract and continue to work with Scottish Government and Combat stress to shape the future model of delivery as part of the national mental health and wellbeing action plan.

Veterans First Point

Veterans First Point (Ayrshire & Arran) has been delivering welfare and specialist mental health services to veterans and their family members since March 2017, helping them with the move from military to civilian life. Since that time, they have supported 910 veterans to seek help with housing, support with gaining employment and accessing psychological treatment for mental health difficulties.

Veterans First Point acts as a single point of entry for veterans to access other services both in the third sector and statutory services. Veterans can access the one stop shop, where their needs are reviewed, and the specific services required are identified and accessed with the support of the veteran peer support worker / clinical staff. This service model is unique within Ayrshire. The location of the service was carefully chosen and is in a shop front in the centre of Irvine, providing easy access.

The development of the Veterans First Point demonstrates the commitment of North Ayrshire IJB to the Armed Forces Covenant, through ensuring that veterans are able to access priority care and treatment from mainstream and specialist services. It is reaching those it needs to, demonstrated by high self-referral rates and the demographics of those using the service in the short time it has been opened.

Place

Housing Services

In North Ayrshire, Armed Forces personnel and veterans are given additional support and consideration to ensure they are not disadvantaged when applying for housing. When their date of discharge is confirmed, applicants are entitled to an additional 150 points up to 12 months before or after discharge. The aim of this enhanced priority is to ensure that applicants receive an offer of housing and prevent the possibility of them becoming homeless.

If a member of the Armed Forces, a service leaver or veteran has a health condition or disability, including a mental health condition, the accessible housing assessment process can apply. This assessment considers activities of daily living, progressive conditions, if an applicant's home can be reasonably adapted and if a move of home will significantly improve mental health symptoms. All assessments are carried out by a qualified Occupational Therapist. Those who have been previously assessed have experienced a wide range of health conditions including PTSD, other mental health conditions and physical disabilities. This assessment process can result in offers of housing and where relevant, a smooth transition to civilian life despite often complex needs.

The North Ayrshire Housing Register (NAHR) website has a link to the leaflet "A Scottish Housing Guide for people leaving the Armed Forces". The advice signposts applicants to the Veterans First Point in Irvine. Housing Services work closely with Veterans First Point and hold a surgery each month in their local facility to allow applicants who are currently serving or veterans/service leavers to discuss their housing options and housing prospects in more detail.

Following the launch of the Veterans First Point, staff employed by NAHR landlords were trained on housing options advice for service personnel. This approach was recommended in the Scottish Veterans Commissioner report. North Ayrshire Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant was included in the training programme to help frontline housing staff understand the principles of the Covenant and the Council's policy on housing support for the armed forces community.

The Common Housing Register Manager is the main point of contact for all enquiries relating to housing register applications, accessible housing assessments, housing options and general advice for Armed Forces veterans and service leavers. This ensures consistency of service delivery across all landlords and that all housing staff are supported and have appropriate training to meet the housing and support needs of the Armed Forces community and their families.

Housing Services are fully committed to working with key partners and stakeholders to ensure the effective delivery of housing advice and support for Armed Forces personnel, service leavers and the veteran community.

Employability

In North Ayrshire, Armed Forces personnel and veterans are given additional employability support and consideration to ensure they are not disadvantaged when applying for employment opportunities.

Veterans are a priority group and are offered enhanced service provision from the North Ayrshire Employability Pipeline. There is recognition vocational training may be required to transfer military qualification and experience to match essential criteria for local employment and this offer is available to all veterans.

We have established links with local veteran groups and share information on opportunities as well as providing access to facilities within the employability hubs and recruitment events.

To further support the commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant we will appoint an Armed Forces Employability Champion to maintain and enhance the support offered.

We will reference within our forthcoming SPF investment plan that Armed Forces personnel are a priority group.

Communities

Education

Schools and centres are aware of the children and young people and ensure that appropriate planning is in place to meet their needs. The Service also promotes links to ADES Forces Children's Education website [Project name/focus \(education.gov.scot\)](#) and encourages school participation in Armed Forces events where schools have representatives of the forces in their community.

Service improvements are planned to improve practice in supporting the families of armed forces in North Ayrshire by using and reporting on the following areas of challenge:

- Do we know who are our learners from Armed Forces Families – including regular, reserve and veterans?
- How do we know we are supporting our learners from Armed Forces Families effectively?
- What learning can we take from the practice examples to help our school to improve support for children from Armed Forces Families?
- How will we measure the impact of improvement?

Work is being done to produce a handbook for the families of Armed forces to include:

- Early Years and Childcare
- School education: The Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications
- Additional Support Needs Section
- Providing information and links to Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS)
- Provide links to the ADES children of forces website

Connected Communities

Connected Communities help and support local community organisations including many branches of the Royal British Legion. Support varies depending on their different needs. Given the different factors that impact on the health and well-being of veterans, those in active service or those recently left, the services delivered and supported by Connected Communities help alleviate some of the daily challenges faced by these men and women.

Connected Communities offers a range of generic and inclusive services through libraries, community halls and centres and community organisations like Men's Sheds. Other provision includes the community support hubs, food larders, support for fuel poverty, work in community engagement hubs for older people, and mental health and wellbeing initiatives. This includes over £800k distributed in North Ayrshire by lead partner third sector interface Arran Community and Voluntary Service from North Ayrshire Council and the Scottish Government's Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund in 2021, and further funding is available in 2022. The Community Investment Fund and local grant funding can be accessed by armed services/veterans' groups for community initiatives.

The close working partnership which Connected Communities developed with the local branches of the Royal British Legions during the period 2014–18, as the start and end of WW1 was commemorated, opens opportunities for new initiatives. Partnership working continued through the Legacy Fund and the development of a WW1 Heritage Trail to respectfully commemorate and highlight the contributions of local people and local places of significance to WW1. The veterans were at the heart of these developments.

The partners applied successfully to the Covenant Fund and set up Ground Force at Eglinton Country Park. This is a horticultural therapy group working with veterans and their families. Families of men and women currently serving in the armed forces are included in the Ground Force project. They are an integral part of the veteran community and covered by the Covenant. The horticultural therapy work was selected as it is a healing process for these who were bereaved or suffering the impacts of conflict. Although it is not the traditional approach to medicalised therapy, the feedback from participants show that it is effective and is contributing to family wellbeing and healing.

There is a lot of learning which can be shared from the experiences of partnership with Ground Force. The model could be lifted and applied in other areas such as art, wellbeing, walking groups, etc., as well as supporting partners, like KA Leisure, to set up their own initiatives. There are opportunities through mental health and wellbeing funding, local grants or Community Investment Funding for further therapeutic health and wellbeing activities targeted at service and veterans' families. Officers will explore this with KA Leisure.

Connected Communities continues to be respectful of significant dates and commemorative events and how the activities on these days help the Armed Forces community.

Democratic Services

Committee and Member Services

Committee and Member Services provide support to Armed Forces Day events and Remembrance Services and Parades. Administrative support is available to the Council's new Veterans Champion, Councillor Montgomerie.

KA Leisure

KA Leisure affords members of the Armed Forces and Veterans the access plus rate, their concessionary rate, for both memberships and casual use.