
Armed Forces Covenant update

Full Council

Date of Full Council: 29 September 2022

Lead director/officer: Miranda Cannon

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: 0.2

1. Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the ongoing work that the Council does in support of the Armed Forces community and to provide an overview of future plans including how we propose to respond to recent legislation which places new duties on local authorities in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant.

2. Recommended actions

Full Council are recommended to:

- Agree the report and action plan at Appendix A as a reflection of the Council's ongoing commitment to the Armed Forces community; and
- Support the ongoing work to raise awareness of our Covenant commitments and to support the Council in working with the Armed Forces Community and meeting the requirements of the new legal duties placed upon education, health and housing services.

3. Background

The Armed Forces Covenant sets out the relationship between the nation, the state and the armed forces and it establishes how they should expect to be treated. Leicester City Council re-signed our Armed Forces Covenant on 23 June 2018. The overall aim of the Covenant nationally is about removing disadvantages so armed service personnel, past and present, get the same treatment and access to services as the civilian community.

In delivering on our Armed Forces commitments we consider the Armed Forces community to include:

- Serving personnel (Army, Navy, RAF)
- Veterans (a veteran is defined nationally as anyone who has served for at least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces, either Regular or Reserve Forces or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations).
- Adult Cadet Force Leaders
- Reservists
- Spouses and families of serving personnel, reservists and veterans

The Council has an Armed Forces Member Champion, Councillor Vi Dempster and a Senior Officer Champion, Miranda Cannon and the work we do is supported by officers

within the Delivery, Communications and Political Governance Division who meet quarterly to discuss current activity and proposed actions.

The Council also holds a silver award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS). This scheme focuses on what organisations can do as employers to pledge, demonstrate and advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, including alignment with the Armed Forces Covenant. Whilst the ERS is designed primarily to recognise private sector support, public sector organisations such as the emergency services, local authorities, NHS trusts and executive agencies are also eligible to be recognised and many, like us, locally have done so.

A key challenge in this area of work has always been identifying the size and nature of the Armed Forces population locally, particularly the veteran community. As a Council we hold pockets of information that provide some insight, for example we know that in 2021:

- The school census across city schools identified 29 children who were eligible for the service pupil premium
- There were 21 registered service voters on the Electoral register
- There were 155 veterans from Leicestershire in HM Prisons

This information provides a very partial picture which suggests a comparatively small population locally of those in service but provides no insight into the wider veteran community. However, the 2021 census included a question which enabled former Armed Forces personnel to identify themselves as veterans for the first time. It is anticipated that this data will provide a better understanding going forward of the ex-Armed Forces community within each local area and this data is likely to be published in late 2022 / early 2023.

A further national development in 2021 was the passing of the Armed Forces Bill 2021. This Act introduces a statutory duty on certain public bodies to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when carrying out specific functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. Work has been undertaken on statutory guidance and a draft Statutory Instrument (SI) has now been laid in Parliament to enact this. If Parliament approves the SI, the minister will then be able to sign the SI into law, and two weeks later the new Covenant Duty will come into legal force. There is no confirmed date as yet for this. There will be a transition period to provide organisations with sufficient time to prepare to meet this duty. We will be required to meet this new duty as will schools across the city along with other public sector housing, healthcare and education providers.

Locally the Council works closely with 7th Infantry Brigade and HQ East - 'The Desert Rats'. The Brigade comprises both Regular and Reserve units and is the Army regional point of contact for the 12 counties of the East Midlands and the East of England. The Brigade's work locally includes engagement with employers in support of reservist activity and with community groups and organisations including schools. In relation to the Navy and RAF we maintain links with RAF Wittering and HMS Sherwood particularly through over civic events and we are looking to further strengthen and build on these links going forward.

4. Detailed report

The Council continues to actively work in support of our Armed Forces Covenant commitments. Our work is co-ordinated via an action plan designed to deliver against three main priorities:

- Increase awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant
- Strengthen the council's commitment to the Covenant
- Work in partnership with other local organisations to support the Covenant

The report below sets out some of the key areas of work undertaken over the last two years. An updated draft action plan is included at Appendix A which sets out the intended areas of focus of our continued work for the next 12 to 18 months.

4.1 Workforce

Within our HR system we have a section where employees can complete a personal profile providing information in relation to the protected characteristics. We have now included in that profile the ability for employees to declare if they are any of the following:

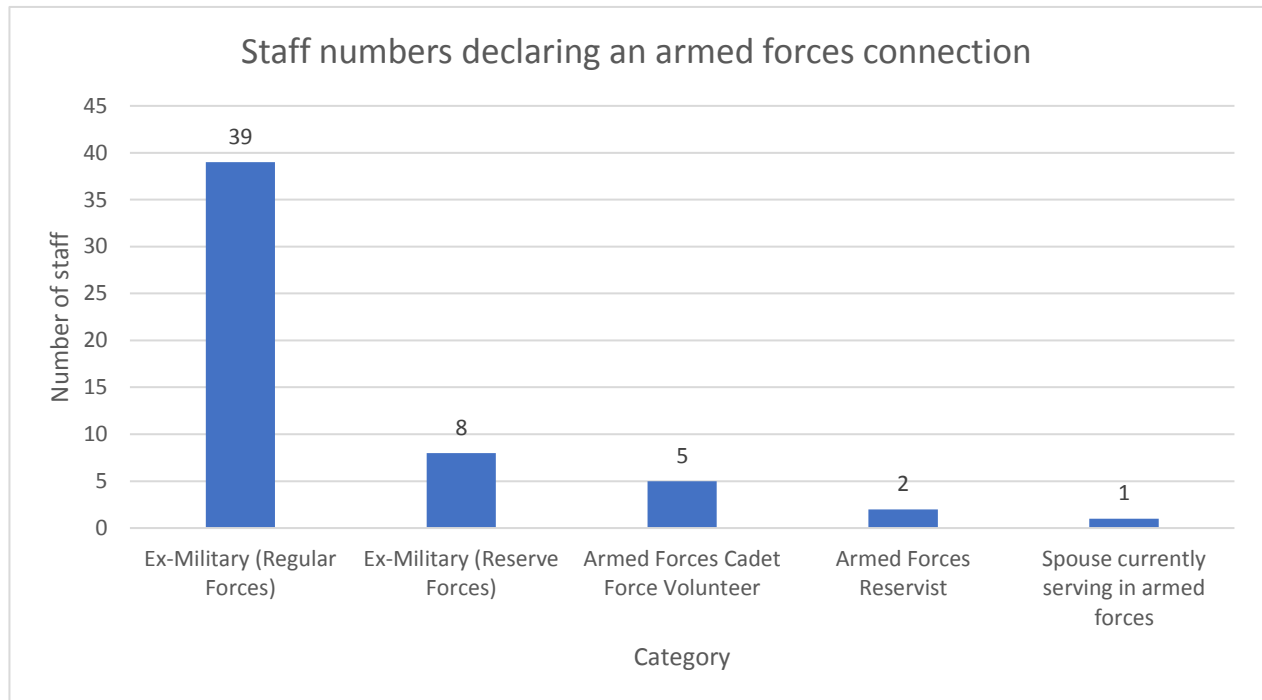
- Ex-Military (Regular Forces)
- Ex-Military (Reserve Forces)
- Armed Forces Cadet Force volunteer
- Armed Forces Reservist
- Spouse currently serving in armed forces

The table below shows the percentage of the workforce who have completed a declaration against each category.

| | Declared | Not declared |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| Ex-Military (Regular Forces) | 53% | 47% |
| Ex-Military (Reserve Forces) | 41% | 59% |
| Armed Forces Cadet Force Volunteer | 41% | 59% |
| Armed Forces Reservist | 41% | 59% |
| Spouse currently serving in armed forces | 41% | 59% |

We will continue to work with both HR and Communications to promote this to staff and to encourage them to declare any Armed Forces connections and to explain how this may benefit both them and the Council.

Of those who have declared there are 55 staff with an Armed Forces connection as at 13th September 2022, with the breakdown shown in the chart below:



In relation to recruitment, we have a guaranteed interview scheme for veterans. Under this scheme, we guarantee to give an interview as long as the individual meets the following criteria:

- Their last full-time employer was one of the British armed forces
- They left the armed forces less than three years ago
- They have the essential skills for the job
- They tell us that they are an armed forces veteran when applying.

The Council is also signed up to promote relevant job opportunities on the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) website. CTP provides resettlement services for those leaving the Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and Marines, and operates as an intermediary service for employers wishing to hire Service leavers. We also signpost jobs on the Forces Friendly Jobs website who support the spouses and families of those serving in the Armed Forces to access employment.

Since November 2021 (when detailed recording commenced in the HR system) we have had 79 applicants declare a military connection with 15 made an offer/appointed making an overall success rate of 19%. The breakdown is shown in the table below.

| Recruitment | Applied | Offered / Appointed | Success rate |
|---|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Ex-Military (Regular Forces) | 41 | 6 | 15% |
| Ex-Military (Reserve Forces) | 10 | 2 | 20% |
| Armed Forces Cadet Force Volunteer | 12 | 4 | 33% |
| Armed Forces Reservist | 5 | 1 | 20% |

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Spouse currently serving armed forces | 11 | 2 | 18% |
| Total | 79 | 15 | 19% |

**Note: one candidate who had a currently serving spouse subsequently declined the job offer*

Whilst at the current time there are comparatively small numbers of employees with an Armed Forces connection, we will be looking further at how we can engage and support them for example through the possibility of developing a staff network or forum who we can also use to support the Council's wider work relating to the Armed Forces community.

We are also currently reviewing and updating our training offer in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant and this will sit alongside the embedding of the new duty (see section 4.5 below).

4.2 Partnership working

The Council continues to work actively with partners from the public sector, military and voluntary and community sector in relation to the Armed Forces. The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance continues to Co-Chair the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Civil and Military Partnership Board. This Board does not have any formal powers or decision making role but it meets quarterly to bring together partners from across LLR to share knowledge around the issues facing the Armed Forces Community both nationally and locally, to share details of local projects and initiatives and to help partners understand the range of support available for the Armed Forces community and particularly veterans, including via formally commissioned services in the NHS and through the wide range of local charities and organisations such as The Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes, SSAFA and Walking with the Wounded. The Board continues to be well attended and receives a range of useful information and updates about national and local activity for example the meeting in February 2022 included presentations on the NHS Op Courage veterans' mental health service, the Defence Medical Welfare Service Veterans' Places, Pathways, and People Programme, an update on 7th Brigade's current community-based activity, and the meeting in June 2022 included updates from Turning Point on veterans engagement and a session on understanding the new duty. Through the Board we have also supported the development of a list of local key contacts and networks to help individual organisations to better respond to enquiries from the Armed Forces Community and to signpost individuals to appropriate organisations.

4.3 Support to the Armed Forces Community

The Council maintains a range of key information on the corporate website for the Armed Forces Community at [Armed Forces Covenant \(leicester.gov.uk\)](https://www.leicester.gov.uk/armed-forces-covenant) and this includes details of a generic contact email address which is AFCovenant@leicester.gov.uk. This email address receives a small number of enquiries most often general enquiries from organisations involved in working with the Armed Forces Community, as well as occasional enquiries from individuals seeking support.

The Council has recently joined the Forces Connect app and provided a range of information about local services for inclusion in the app. The Forces Connect mobile app is free and is designed to signpost veterans, armed forces personnel and their families to support and advice in their local area across a range of services. The information is updated monthly, there are no charges or adverts and individuals do not need to enter any

personal data. It is reported that currently over nine thousand members of the armed forces community from across the UK are using the app. We will continue to ensure we provide updated information on local services to support the app. To download the app, search "Forces Connect" in Apple's App Store or the Google Play Store.

Since early 2020 the Council has been supporting the Armed Forces Generalship Programme in conjunction with Sandhurst Military Academy and 7th Brigade. Our support has involved the development of a day's programme of visits and events for several groups of senior Armed Forces Leaders who are on the Sandhurst Generalship Programme which prepares them for the most senior roles across the Armed Forces. The focus of the day's programme is to provide insight into the challenges facing local communities and the work of public sector and voluntary sector organisations in responding to those. This has included an opening presentation by the City Mayor, visits and presentations to a range of Council Services in areas such as Homelessness, Revenues and Customer Support, Adult Social Care and Community Safety plus others visits including to local schools, Neighbourhood Policing Units, Leicester Royal Infirmary, a multi-faith visit and discussion, Leicester City in the Community, and a foodbank. The programme has been a major undertaking and has been run three times in February 2020, October 2021 and February 2022. Previously no city has been asked to run this more than twice but the breadth of the programme offered by us in Leicester and the insights it has provided has led to a request to host three times and we have been asked and have agreed to host again in 2023.

Councillor Dempster has led on a project to allocate an allotment in Beaumont Leys for use by veterans and has co-ordinated with officers, additional support to ensure veterans involved in this project have the necessary tools and equipment to take on and manage the allotment. A key aim of this being to support the mental health and wellbeing of veterans.

4.4 Events

The Council continues to deliver a number of important events each year in support of the Armed Forces. This includes Armed Forces Day which takes place on the last Saturday each June. Armed Forces Day celebrations this year commenced on Monday 20 June when the Armed Forces Day flag was raised at the Town Hall and the Armed Forces Day service and parade took place on Saturday 25th June. Normally the service takes place at Leicester Cathedral and is followed by a parade through the city centre. However due to the current works at the Cathedral, for the first time the service was held outdoors this year in Green Dragon Square, as a publically accessible event open to anyone to attend and with a public parade held prior to the service. The new format was very well received and offered a greater opportunity for public engagement and we will be exploring how we can build on this as a model for this event in future.

The Council also delivers the annual Remembrance Day Service at the War Memorial in Victoria Park in November each year. During the pandemic activity moved online but the Service returned to the Park in November 2021.

In 2020 the Council also undertook a range of activities to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day and the 75th Anniversary of VE Day. This included digital activities (due to the pandemic) such as a virtual Cathedral service. Leicester's museums also hosted two exhibitions:

- *Finding the Fallen, VE75 – A Pilgrim’s Journey of Remembrance*, at Leicester Museum and Gallery exploring the artist Loz Atkinson’s memories of her great grandfather Arthur Pinder, who died along with his crew when their Halifax Bomber crashed in the Second World War.
- Newarke Houses Museum and Gardens commemorated VJ Day with an exhibition entitled *VJ 75 – Leicestershire Prisoners of War in the Far East 1941-45*.

The Council also supported the installation of a memorial stone in Peace Walk, near Leicester’s Arch of Remembrance in Victoria Park, commemorating those who were taken prisoner in the Far East during the Second World War, and held a ceremony to dedicate the stone in August 2021. The stone was commissioned by local members of the charity Children and Families of Far East Prisoners of War (COFEPOW), following a campaign to erect a memorial for those who fought, died or were made prisoners of war in the Far East, as well as those who returned home and continued to suffer as a result of their treatment in captivity.

4.5 Understanding and embedding the new duty

The new duty to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant is not dissimilar to the requirements of the public sector equality duty. Within the Council’s existing equality impact assessment (EIA) tool we have for a number of years already included ex-Armed Forces as another group which services are encouraged to consider. Our approach therefore is to further rework our EIA process and tools to ensure the new duty relating to the Armed Forces community is fully reflected. This will be done once the new statutory guidance is finalised and formally published and further details are provided with regard to the transition period.

Appendix A sets out areas of proposed activity for the next 12 – 18 months to continue to build on these achievements.

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance. Ext 37 4101

5.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Kamal Adatia, City Barrister. Ext 37 1401

5.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities (including the local authority and schools), have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and

those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The work detailed in the report will support the Armed Forces Community from a range of protected characteristics and would help to support their integration into society. By including the duty to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant into the Equality Impact Assessment process we will ensure that it is integrated into a process that works well for the PSED and hence ensure it well adopted corporately. The release of the statutory guidance will be pivotal in considering the next steps and the implications.

Kalvaran Sandhu, Equalities Manager. Ext 37 6344

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant Climate Emergency implications arising from this report.

Duncan Bell, Climate Change Manager. Ext. 37 2249

6. Background information and other papers:

7. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A – Armed Forces Covenant action plan