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**North East Lincolnshire Armed Forces Covenant Strategy and Action Plan**

**2021 – 2025**

***The Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve and have served in the Armed Forces and their families are treated fairly.***

Ministry of Defence

**Introduction**

***The Armed Forces Covenant***

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly, and 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. Community Covenants complement, at a local level, the Armed Forces Covenant. Local communities are encouraged to support the Armed Forces Community in their area and promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting them.

[The Strategy for our Veterans (2018-2028)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-for-our-veterans) sets the intent for delivery of public services to Veterans across the UK. The consultations that will follow will use the best practice to establish how to make this happen. By 2028, the MODs aim is that every veteran feels even more valued, supported and empowered and, in accordance with the Armed Forces Covenant, will never be disadvantaged.

In our plan, the term veterans has been replaced with armed forces community to aid inclusion.

This plan will be updated on an annual basis and progress reported via the North East Lincolnshire Armed Forces Liaison Group.

1. **Cross-Cutting Factors**

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| **Ref** | **Action/s** | **Timescale** | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **OUTCOME: Collaboration between organisations:** Improved collaboration between organisations offers the Armed Forces Community coherent support | | | | | |
| **1** | Nominate Elected Member with responsibility to oversee Armed Forces Covenant delivery | Completed | Leader | Cllr Ron Shepherd confirmed as Elected Member with Armed Forces Covenant delivery responsibility | **✓** |
| **2** | Identify areas where a more joined up approach would be beneficial and explore potential opportunities for collaboration between partner organisations and the sub-region to support the Armed Forces Covenant delivery in North East Lincolnshire | Ongoing | Armed Forces Champion / 3 Royal Anglian | Officer / member representation agreed and actively engaged in partnership activities, e.g. North East Lincolnshire Armed Forces Liaison Group | **✓** |
| **3** | Consider staff training needs across organisations and explore delivery options | Ongoing | *TF* | 91 participants from 17 organisations, including NELC, have attended ‘The Military Human’ CPD day, facilitated by York St John University.  NELC internal training site hosts ‘Armed Forces Covenant Training’ to understand and apply the principles of the Covenant at a local level. | **✓** |
| **4** | Support the Armed Forces Major Events Team to deliver the Veterans Hive and associated events. The Hive is open to all members of the armed forces, including serving, retired, veterans and reservists. The regular Hive sessions focus on health, wellbeing, re-employment, etc | Ongoing | Armed Forces Major Events Team (AFMET) | Accommodation secured, The Knoll, website development | ✓ |
| **5** | Establish an officer working group to progress covenant actions | September 2021 | *TF* | Some initial discussions with officers have taken place relating to specific delivery and implementation of legislation.  To continue to build on this with meetings 3x a year |  |
| **Ref** | **Action/s** | **Timescale** | **Member / Officer Lead Timescale** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **OUTCOME: Coordination of the Armed Forces Community:** The coordination of the Armed Forces Community provision delivers consistent aims and principles over time and throughout the UK, ensuring the Armed Forces Community, their families and the bereaved are treated fairly compared to the local population | | | | | |
| **6** | Improve access to information for the armed forces community via the NELC website. This includes developing a dedicated Armed Forces web page | Completed | Communications Team | The NELC web page has been updated  The Armed Forces Major Events Team have a new and refreshed website | ✓ |
| **7** | Continue to support NELC services and partner agencies to promote services, information, events etc aimed at or of benefit to the armed forces community (to include work with the VCS on the interface with the Community Wellbeing Hub) | Ongoing | Communications Team | Some partnership campaigns supported across our communication channels including DiscoverNEL, website, intranet and social media accounts | ✓ |
| **Ref** | **Action/s** | **Timescale** | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **OUTCOME: Data on the Armed Forces Community:** Enhanced collection, use and analysis of data across the public, private and charitable sectors to build an evidence base to effectively identify and address the needs of the Armed Forces Community | | | | | |
| **8** | Complete a Needs Assessment and update to support data intelligence on veteran community. Support analysis of Census 2021 work data | First draft completed | NELC – Public Health | Presented to full PH Team, no changes made. Final draft now complete and in a PDF format. Will be published by NELDO early September 2021 |  |
| **9** | Establish current position for recording of Armed Forces Community status (‘ask the question’) across partner organisations and identify areas for improvement (Making Every Contact Count) | Ongoing | *TF* / Partners / Stakeholders | Encouraging all those who deal with customers to ‘ask the question’ in conjunction with online learning in enabling understanding around the Armed Forces Community (see Action 3) |  |
| **10** | Carry out an Armed Forces Community Survey or engagement exercise in North East Lincolnshire to establish needs | Completed | Registrars and Civic Services Team Manager | Public consultation completed on draft Action Plan for consideration and feedback.  Results collated and shared with NEL AF Liaison Group  Consider frequency of repeating | ✓ |
| **11** | Establish whether there is a need for data sharing protocol between potential Delivery Group partner organisations, and if agreed, develop as necessary | September 2022 | NEL AF Liaison Group | What would be shared?  How would it be protected?  What would it be shared for? |  |
| **12** | Commit to internal mapping of NELC services to establish the current level of awareness of the Covenant and current data available. | March 2022 | *TF* |  |  |
| **Ref** | **Action/s** | **Timescale** | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **OUTCOME: Public perception and understanding:** the UK population value the Armed Forces Community and their diverse experiences and culture | | | | | |
| **13** | Promote the work / raise the profile of the NEL AF Liaison Group throughout individual partner organisations and residents of North East Lincolnshire (e.g. publish action plan and any relevant minutes on NELC website, use of social media) | March 2022 | NEL AF Liaison Group / *TF* | Liaison Group has been established |  |
| **14** | Explore options for promoting/measuring awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and ways in which the Armed Forces Community can be supported locally | Ongoing | AFMET |  |  |
| Actions 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 contribute to this outcome | | | | | |
| **Ref** | **Action/s** | **Timescale** | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **OUTCOME: Recognition of the Armed Forces Community:** The Armed Forces Community feel that their service and experience is recognised and valued by society | | | | | |
| **15** | Consider invitation to a representative/s to attend the NEL AF Liaison Group on behalf of the Armed Forces and Veteran Breakfast Clubs in North East Lincolnshire to share their views and help identify ways in which the group can support veterans to feel their service and experience is recognised and valued | June 2022 | AFMET / NEL AF Liaison Group |  |  |
| **16** | Continue to act as an advocate for events which raise awareness of the Armed Forces Community, e.g. Remembrance Sunday, Armed Forces Day, Reserves Day | Ongoing | AFMET / Civic Office |  | **✓** |
| **17** | Honour decorated service personnel and the wider remembrance of the sacrifices made by local residents, e.g. Legion d’Honneur, Victoria Cross etc. Receptions | Ongoing | AFMET / Civic Office | Build on events already undertaken and to commence events once Covid-19 allows to do so | **✓** |

**KEY THEMES**

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| **Ref** | **Action/s** | | **Timescale** | | **Member / Officer Lead** | | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **KEY THEME 1: COMMUNITY AND RELATIONSHIPS: The Armed Forces Community are able to build healthy relationships and integrate into their local communities** | | | | | | | | |
| Actions across the plan contribute to this theme | | | | | | | | |
| **KEY THEME 2: EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND SKILLS:** **The Armed Forces Community enter appropriate employment and can continue to enhance their careers throughout their working lives** | | | | | | | | |
| **Ref** | | **Action/s** | | **Timescale** | | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **18** | | Attain the Gold Award in the Ministry of Defence’s Employer Recognition Scheme | | July 2021 | | Registrars and Civic Services Manager | Awarded – 16th July 2021 | **✓** |
| **19** | | Consider how the Armed Forces Community can be supported with employment and skills training after two-year period when CTP support ends.  Consider if Armed Forces resident is entitled to Universal Credit and if so, liaise with the Jobcentre Armed Forces Champion to ensure they receive all additional help possible | | September 2023 | | AFMET / Strategic Lead Skills and Employability | **Sept 2021** – Armed Forces Champion in situ at Jobcentre and DWP have signed AF Covenant.  Claim form for UC asks if claimant has served.  Employers in NEL willing to take on service personnel and are matched, others may benefit from support through Disability Employment Advisors (NELC)  Education Development Trust provide national assistance supporting service personnel or veterans in finding work or to access learning. |  |
| **KEY THEME 3: FINANCE AND DEBT: The Armed Forces Community leave the Armed Forces with sufficient financial education, awareness and skills to be financially self-supporting and resilient** | | | | | | | | |
| **Ref** | | **Action/s** | | **Timescale** | | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| Actions 4, 6, 7, contribute to this outcome | | | | | | | | |
| **20** | | Signposting to workshops that are held at The Hive, for specific advice and assistance from agencies | | Ongoing | | AFMET | Continued delivery of support and engagement functions | **✓** |
| **21** | | Improved financial skills, debt management and benefit advice and support | | Ongoing | | AFMET / Agencies from The Hive | Continued delivery of support and engagement functions | **✓** |
| **KEY THEME 4: HEALTH AND WELLBEING: All the Armed Forces Community enjoy a state of positive physical and mental health and wellbeing, enabling them to contribute to wider aspects of society** | | | | | | | | |
| **22** | | GP practices encouraged to sign up as Armed Forces / Military Veteran aware | | 50% by March 2023 | | *TF* / NEL AF Liaison Group | Support the work to encourage further GP surgeries in North East Lincolnshire to register as Armed Forces / Military Veteran Aware |  |
| **23** | | Self-identification of Armed Forces Community Status | | Ongoing | | *TF* / AFMET | Explore options for further promoting the importance of self-identifying as a member of the Armed Forces Community when accessing healthcare |  |
| **24** | | Outline and promote the different services and support available in North East Lincolnshire to support the Armed Forces Community with physical and mental health and wellbeing | | Ongoing | | AFMET | Continued delivery of support and engagement function | **✓** |
| **25** | | To support NLaG action plan further to their Veteran Aware accreditation from the VCHA | | Ongoing | | NEL AF Liaison Group | NLaG NHS Trust achieved Veteran Friendly status in June 2021 | **✓** |
| **26** | | To support NLaG to achieve DERS Silver Award | | July 2022 | | NLaG / NELC / AFMET |  |  |
| **KEY THEME 5: MAKING A HOME IN CIVILIAN SOCIETY: The Armed Forces Community have a secure place to live either through buying, renting or social housing** | | | | | | | | |
| **Ref** | | **Action/s** | | **Timescale** | | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **27** | | Implement the Local Lettings Policy developed in partnership by NELC and Lincolnshire Housing Partnership, which includes various exclusions to local residency requirements and priority for armed forces applicants applying on the Council’s housing register (Home Choice Lincs) | | Ongoing | | AMFET / Home Options Manager | Continue with policy | **✓** |
| **KEY THEME 6: THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY AND THE LAW: The Armed Forces Community leave the Armed Forces with the resilience and awareness to remain law-abiding citizens** | | | | | | | | |
| **Ref** | | **Action/s** | | **Timescale** | | **Member / Officer Lead** | **Progress** | **RAG Rating** |
| **28** | | Continue working with Project Nova, Humberside Police and Probation Service to identify needs, support available and what more needs to be done to support this cohort of the Armed Forces Community  Actions to be agreed | | Ongoing  January 2022 | | AMFET / Project Nova / Humberside Police |  |  |
| **29** | | Promote awareness of the services available to support the Armed Forces Community within or at risk of entering the criminal justice system | | Ongoing | | AFMET / Project Nova / Humberside Police |  |  |

**FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

**Action 2** \* Agree and oversee the Action Plan and update regularly

\* Organise quarterly meetings of the NEL AF Liaison Group at different venues

\* Seek agenda items for the NEL AF Liaison Group

**Action 4 \*** Record statistics to determine success criteria and effectively monitor results:

- number of armed forces community members accessing The Hive within each category

- number of activities / workshops

- number of service users helped

**Action 5** \* Organise regular NELC Officer Group meetings

\* Update NELC policies and procedures and raise awareness of possible Armed Forces disadvantage in understanding / accessing advice and support

**Actions 6 & 7** \* Development of a communications plan and better use of social media

\* Elected Members regularly updated and links are developed with civilian communities

\* Promotion of existing e-learning available

**Action 9 &23** \* Work with partners to identify opportunities to ‘ask the question’ and record Armed Forces data

**Action 14** \* Advocacy work to commence to increase the number of businesses / organisations that are signed up to the Covenant

\* Advocacy work to ensure that AFC signatories are meeting their pledges

\* Advocacy work to continue to encourage / support businesses / organisations to achieve the bronze, silver or gold AFC Employer Recognition

Scheme awards

**Action 17** \* Develop a calendar of key dates in the military calendar to ensure they are commemorated / celebrated

**Action 18** \* Closer engagement with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to boost skills and experience

**Action 22 \*** Establish the benefits of being Veteran Aware and to encourage other surgeries to adopt the practices