

Communities Scrutiny Panel

| | |
|------------------|--|
| DATE | 26 th February 2026 |
| REPORT OF | Katie Brown, Director of Adults, Housing and Communities |
| SUBJECT | Armed Forces Covenant |
| STATUS | Open |

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The recommendations in this report will support the Council Plan aim of building stronger communities. They will do this by supporting those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, to have good and sustainable homes, live a healthy life, and be part of the town's story of culture and heritage.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the full council meeting on 24 July 2025 there was a Notice of Motion relating to support for delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. Following this, an independent review was commissioned to look at the Council's three roles under the Covenant: convenor, service provider, and employer. This report outlines the findings of the review and recommended next steps.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Members are asked to consider the findings of the review and comment on the recommended next steps.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 The decision of full council on 24 July was as follows:

- **Formal recognition and thanks:**
That this Council formally recognise and place on record its thanks to all that made the 2025 National Armed Forces Day weekend possible.
- **Letter to Secretary of State for Defence:**
That this Council write to the Secretary of State for Defence, John Healey, thanking them for holding the first National Armed Forces Day Event since 2023 in Cleethorpes.
- **Appointment of officer for Armed Forces Covenant:**
That the Head of Paid Service be instructed to hire a full-time, directly employed officer to oversee and develop the Council's delivery of its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and help engagement and collaborative working between local Veteran's groups.
- **Commissioning an external review:**
That an external review be commissioned to review delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and the support available for the armed forces community.

1.2 Following this, to assess the Council's existing delivery framework and performance in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council procured an independent partner. The review was undertaken by the successful provider between November and December 2025. It consisted of three phases: compliance review, critical friend review, and recommendations and roadmap.

1.3 The first phase – the compliance review – showed a compliance RAG rating of green across every area other than local connection, which was given an amber rating. This is because the current social housing allocations policy applies a 5-year limit on local connection exemptions for Armed Forces personnel, which does not fully comply with statutory guidance. The report noted that the council has a consultation underway to remove the time limit, which would ensure full compliance.

1.4 The second phase – the critical friend review – highlighted positive work across 8 of the 12 areas reviewed. This included addressing needs, local partner and stakeholder communication and local authority collaboration. The review highlighted 4 areas to strengthen:

- a) Clarity on who the Armed Forces Champion is and their role.
- b) Dedicated officer time and a named senior officer.
- c) Stronger public comms via an up-to-date webpage.
- d) Stronger internal comms to staff.

1.5 In phase 3 of the review recommendations and a roadmap were formed and shared. This included actions for partners as well as 8 actions for NELC. These align with the areas that the review highlighted as needing to be strengthened:

- a) Clarity on who the Armed Forces Champion is and their role.
 - Recommendation: Draft and formalise a role description for the Armed Forces Champion position.
- b) Dedicated officer time and a named senior officer.
 - Recommendation: Creation of job description providing lead officer time and support to drive forward the commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant.
 - Recommendation: Appointment of a senior officer sponsor for the Armed Forces Covenant, with associated Terms of Reference.
 - Recommendation: Formalise the chairing structure for the Liaison group by assigning the role to an independent party, such as the council sponsor for the Armed Forces Covenant.
- c) Stronger internal comms
 - Recommendation: Introduce clear and more involved sponsor communications from senior council leadership, including the Chief Executive or other senior figures, at key points throughout the year. These messages should highlight the council's internal support for Armed Forces personnel and their families and encourage participation in relevant sessions and initiatives.
 - Recommendation: Communicating the benefits of the Inclusivity and Veterans Group group, highlighting the 'what's in it for me' for members.

- Recommendation: Implement free, optional training packages, covering insights into service life, obligations and challenges, and making them available to all NELC staff and councillors through their L&D platform.
- Recommendation: Introduction of internal intranet site.

Recommended next steps

1.6 It is recommended that Scrutiny:

- Receives this report by way of update on implementation of the motion to full council (July 2025).
- Notes that the Head of Paid Service intends to begin a recruitment for a full time Armed Forces Officer to implement all actions in the report. They would sit in the Housing and Communities Group, with the Assistant Director for Housing and Communities assigned as the new senior responsible officer for the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Be invited to make any recommendations prior to the Head of Paid Service in conjunction with the Director of Adults, Housing and Communities considering this matter further.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

2.1 Risk: dedicated officer time will reduce the risk of the council failing to deliver its statutory duty to implement the Armed Forces Covenant. It will further improve the effectiveness of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership, to improve the service offer for veterans and armed forces families in NEL.

2.2 Data protection: There are no specific data protection issues that will be introduced through the review's recommendations. The new Armed Forces Officer will be expected to comply with all council processes around the processing and protection of data.

2.3 Equalities: There will be a direct positive impact on current and former members of the Armed Forces. There are also likely positive impacts on all protected groups and on NE Lincs priority groups which include carers, children looked after and care leavers and people who face deprivation. This is due to increased capacity via the new officer to work with council teams and officers to ensure support is in place for serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

There are potential positive reputational implications for the Council resulting from a) the decision to recruit a full time Armed Forces Officer and b) to have the new Armed Forces Officer lead on the implementation of the recommendations in the review. It shows commitment from the Council to supporting serving and former members of the Armed Forces through the Armed Forces Covenant, and to adopting a culture of continuous improvement in how it does this. We will work with the Council's communications service on all comms-related actions identified in the report to ensure we are publicising the support provided to serving and former

members of the Armed Forces in North East Lincolnshire.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The new Armed Forces Officer role will be funded from the transformation reserve in the first year. Once the role profile and associated costs are fully established, the longer-term funding options will be considered as part of the annual budget setting process.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

Children and young people of serving and former members of the Armed Forces will be positively impacted by the proposals. Having dedicated officer time to engage with partner organisations and council teams on the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant should improve support for members and their families in the borough.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no expected impact on climate change, nature recovery and the environment.

7. PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND MARMOT IMPLICATIONS

There is a potential positive impact from the proposal on public health, health inequalities and Marmot. We know that people who serve or have served in the Armed Forces can experience health impacts – both physical and mental. Ensuring we have dedicated resource to work with partners to bolster support for the community is an important part of supporting with any health needs. The Covenant outlines particular focus on health, education, housing, employment and financial services - all are important wider determinants of health. Additional resource and communication on this area should therefore support all 8 Marmot Principles:

1. Give every child the best start in life
2. Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
3. Create fair employment and good work for all
4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
7. Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes
8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The new Armed Forces Officer role will be funded from the transformation reserve

in the first year. Once the role profile and associated costs are fully established, the longer-term funding options will be considered as part of the annual budget setting process. The costs associated with the role will be incorporated within the Housing service area budget envelope and monitored within the established budget monitoring process.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant legal implications arising from this report.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

Specific HR advice will be provided in respect of remuneration levels, process, and contractual arrangements in accordance with the recommendations in this report and to comply with the Council's Constitution, legislation and the Council's policies and procedures.

11. WARD IMPLICATIONS

Residents across all wards will be equally affected; support offered is borough-wide.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Attached slide pack on the review.

13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Charlotte Dring, Assistant Director Housing and Communities

KATIE BROWN,
DIRECTOR OF ADULTS, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Armed Forces Covenant Review

Introduction

At a full council meeting on 24 July 2025 there was a Notice of Motion relating to support for delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. To assess the Council's existing delivery framework and performance in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant the Council procured an independent partner. The review was undertaken by the successful provider between November and December 2025. The delivery of the project was split into 3 phases, with employment, housing, and education in scope.

Phase 1: Compliance Review

- Document gathering and review
- Evidence mapping
- RAG

Phase 2: Critical Friend Review

- Workshops
- Benchmarking
- Gap analysis

Phase 3: Recommendations and Roadmap

- Prioritisation
- Action Plan (including high-level roadmap)

Phase 1: Compliance review

Phase 1, the compliance review, involved identifying statutory duties, defining compliance requirements, reviewing council documentation, validating through stakeholder engagement, assessing compliance status and determining next steps to compliance.

| Ref ID | RAG |
|--|-------|
| Housing - Identifying service users | Green |
| Housing - Equal Access | Green |
| Housing - Preferential Access | Green |
| Housing - Local Connection | Amber |
| Housing - Disabled Facilities Grants | Green |
| | |
| Education - Standards | Green |
| Education - In year application | Green |
| Education - Identifying Service Children | Green |
| Education - Additional funding | Green |
| Education - Standards | Green |
| Education - Additional language support | Green |
| Education - School Transport | Green |
| | |
| Employer - Equality | Green |
| Employer - Flexible Working | Green |
| Employer - Reservists | Green |

Note: Green = fully compliant, amber = partially compliant and red = not compliant.

Findings: the only area not to have a green rating was local connection, which was given an amber rating. This is because the current social housing allocations policy applies a 5-year limit on local connection exemptions for Armed Forces personnel, which does not fully comply with statutory guidance. The council have a consultation underway to remove the time limit, which would ensure full compliance.

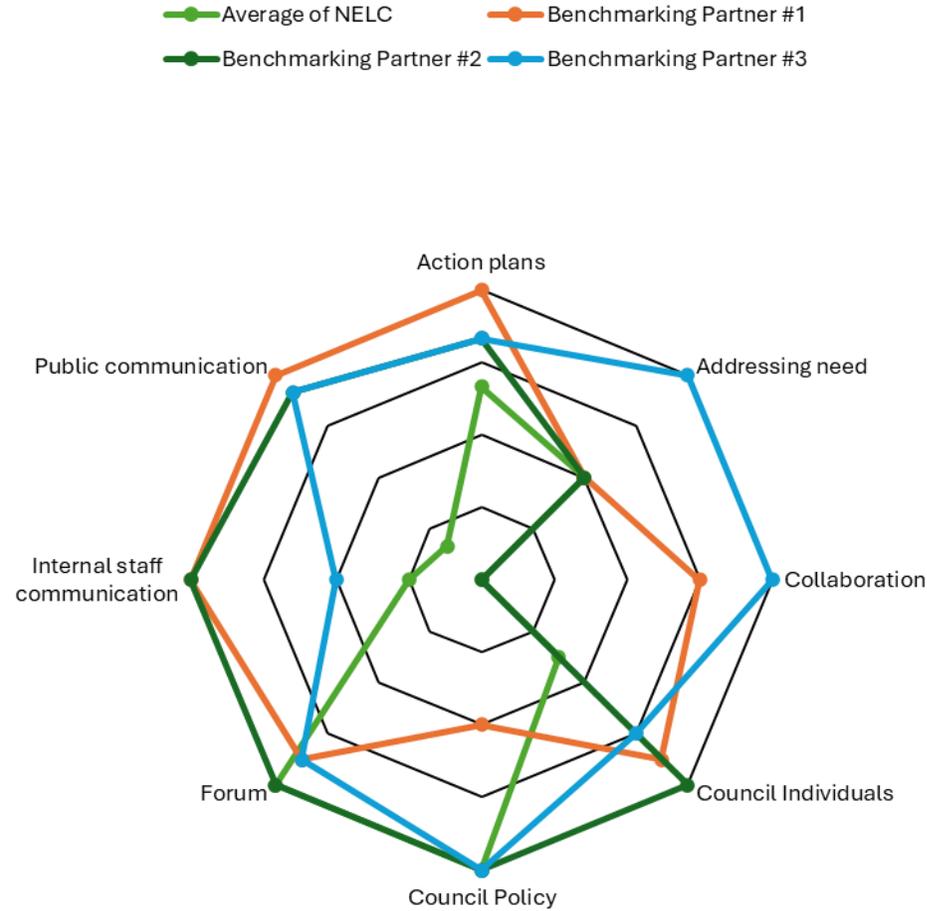
Phase 2: Critical Friend Review (1/2)

Phase 2, the critical friend review, used a workshop methodology to bring together stakeholders to gain multiple perspectives, understand challenges and barriers faced by the Armed Forces community, and co-design practical recommendations for improvement.

| Armed Forces Champion | Officers | AFC presence and needs | Addressing needs |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × No clear job description. × Confusion around who the council AF Champion is. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × No senior officer has been identified. × No dedicated time or resource has been allocated to this. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some areas of the council have a good understanding of the AF, however, there is room for improvement in some key departments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some referral routes are in place, for example, collaborating with partners. × Actions are not evenly distributed between council and third-party organisations. |
| Action planning and impact monitoring | Future direction | Public communication | Internal communication |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Action plan clearly outlines key areas to be looked at. ✓ Action plans are reviewed at each Covenant meeting and reported on the website. × There is no process for action planning, this just happens at the first session of each year. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In 2023 the council reaffirmed the commitment to the Armed Forces Community. × No shared understanding of what successful implementation looks like. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NELC host a webpage that shares the overall commitment to the covenant and its action plan. × Webpage lacks up to date information including public statements, news, events and contact details. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NELC implement relevant policies to help Armed Forces Community working for the council, i.e. the Inclusivity and Belonging Group. These can be found on the internal intranet site. × Minimal training is provided to staff on how to handle AF Community queries. |
| Local partner and stakeholder communication | Forum/Partnership coordinating | Local authority collaboration | Relationships |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Covenant group meets 2/3 times a year and publishes action plans on the NELC website. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Membership for the covenant forum reflects the recommended attendees. ✓ Action report is monitored at each meeting. × More could be done to distribute actions outside of the council. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Collaboration between NELC and Lincolnshire Group. × Further collaboration could be beneficial, including collaboration with local town and parish councils. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NELC collaborates with different charities well, enabling funding for grants, building accessing and pointing people in the right direction. |

Phase 2: Critical Friend Review (2/2)

The findings were benchmarked against results from 3 other councils.



Phase 3: Recommendations and roadmap (1/3)

Alongside actions that partners agreed to during the review (e.g. contributing to a shared action plan), there were 8 actions identified for NELC.

| Theme | Observation | Recommendations |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Council Individuals | The team at NELC has done a great job leading the Armed Forces Covenant, however, this is done on top of their existing responsibilities and therefore time is not specifically allocated to resource this. | 1. Creation of job description providing lead officer time and support to drive forward the commitments to Armed Forces Covenant. |
| Internal staff communication | Internal communications about the Armed Forces Covenant are primarily shared from the Armed Forces group on the council's internal collaboration/social media site. While this approach works well for targeted engagement, it limits overall visibility and wider staff involvement, as there is not the same visibility. Attempts to raise awareness through existing channels have not achieved the desired impact, and feedback suggests that communications from senior leadership would carry greater influence. | 2. Introduce clear and more involved sponsor communications from senior council leadership, including the Chief Executive or other senior figures, at key points throughout the year. These messages should highlight the council's internal support for Armed Forces personnel and their families and encourage participation in relevant sessions and initiatives. |
| Council Individuals | The Armed Forces Covenant is being driven primarily at the operational level, but this limits the impact and awareness of the armed forces community. | 3. Appointment of a senior officer sponsor for Armed Forces Covenant, with associated Terms of Reference. |
| Internal staff communication | People not currently engaging with Inclusivity and Veterans Group as they're unaware of the benefits of the group. | 4. Communicating the benefits of the group, highlighting the 'what's in it for me' for members |

Phase 3: Recommendations and roadmap (2/3)

| Theme | Observation | Recommendations |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Council Individuals | The Armed Forces Champion role currently lacks a formalised description, which can lead to ambiguity around responsibilities, expectations, and accountability. | 5. Draft and formalise a role description for the Armed Forces Champion position |
| Forum | The current chairing arrangement for Liaison Group meetings is shared. While this provides continuity, it lacks clarity and may dilute accountability. | 6. Formalise the chairing structure by assigning the role to an independent party, such as the council sponsor for the AFC. This will ensure clear leadership and consistent governance. |
| Internal staff communication | Currently, there is no optional training available to staff through the Learning and Development platform that provides insights into service life, obligations, and challenges faced by the Armed Forces community. This limits awareness and understanding across the organisation. | 7. Implement free, optional training packages, covering insights into service life, obligations and challenges, and making them available to all NELC staff and councillors through their L&D platform. |
| Internal staff communication | There is limited internal information available to NELC employees around the Armed Forces Community, outside of the external pages and the guidance on the Civilian Work Attachments, this limits the overall awareness of staff of the Armed Forces Community. | 8. Introduction of internal intranet site to cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the Armed Forces Covenant is • Available training resources • How staff members can support their colleagues in the armed forces • Success stories • Communicate the help and facilities that are available to NELC employees who are associated with the Armed Forces • Contact details for departmental champions |

Phase 3: Recommendations and roadmap (3/3)

Quick wins

- ❑ Council individuals: Senior sponsor, Armed Forces champion role description, lead officer time
- ❑ Forum: Minute taking
- ❑ Internal staff communication: Sponsor communications
- ❑ Public communication: Meeting minutes and Armed Forces Covenant updates

Strengthening delivery

- ❑ Internal staff communication: Veterans group, internal training, intranet site
- ❑ Public communication: Directory of support organisations, success stories, website support links
- ❑ Forum: Chairing arrangements
- ❑ Addressing need: Briefing GP practices

Sustaining impact

- ❑ Internal staff communication: Frontline staff process, database, Armed Forces Covenant awareness at induction, mandatory training
- ❑ Addressing need: SCiP toolkit, veteran-friendly clusters, planning for Armed Forces community
- ❑ Action plans: Distribution of actions with partners, action planning process
- ❑ Collaboration: Other local authorities, town and parish councils
- ❑ Internal staff and public communication: Visibility and collaboration with partner
- ❑ Council policy: Scrutiny panel
- ❑ Council individuals: Departmental AFC champions