



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 an extremely positive event and the Community Covenant does not seek to replace 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?

Over 80 Community Covenants have now been signed, with many more on the way, and we hope that other parts of the UK will also 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 our website – www.mod.uk/covenant. 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?

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 published a 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:

- 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

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. Inclusion in the community is neither dependent on nor limited by strict criteria, nationality, or legal definitions, and it does not confer any legal rights.

How can a Community Covenant be established?

All Local Authorities 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 is signed by the local Armed Forces and Local/Unitary Authorities but may also additionally be signed by charities, volunteer groups and other parties in the local community keen to support the principles of the community Covenant. A template can be downloaded from the Community Covenant webpage at 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 and ensure that the MOD's Armed Forces Covenant Team are provided with a copy. 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 it was announced that £30m of Government funding has been allocated over the next four years to support the Community Covenant scheme. Details of the Grant scheme is published on our website. The intention of this scheme is to support 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 is administered by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of HMG. The scheme considers applications from local groups for practical projects which deliver rapid results and meet the aims of the Scheme. Matched funding will be strongly encouraged. Each application for funding will have to be signed by the Local Authority and local Armed Forces although it may be instigated and run by a local project. Details on how to bid, including the criteria used to release funding for a bid is available on our website. It should be noted that this money is to support Community Covenants and will not be a fixed sum issued to every area that wishes to launch a Community.

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 in 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 contact the MOD's Armed Forces Covenant Team at their e-mail address: 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 varies 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, these are: 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; establishing a dedicated web page for the Armed Forces and publishing local articles provided by the military; An embedded Military Liaison Officer at the County Council Offices, and; work to scope the employment needs and link this with those leaving the Services in terms of numbers and qualification. The Commander 145 Bde is a member of the Oxfordshire Partnership.

Portsmouth is an excellent example of a Unitary Authority establishing their own Community Covenant within an area where there is also 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 is a locally based exercise in Regional Engagement. Its focus is a Governance Board for senior stakeholders from around 30 military and civilian agencies in North Yorkshire and the wider Yorkshire and the Humber region 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 SPCP: Housing, Planning & Sustainable Development; Health; Economic Impact; Children & Young People; Transport; Safety and Security.

In addition to the MCI, North Yorkshire County Council also leads the North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership (NYSP), a well-established forum which engages the voluntary sector and business community in joint activities to promote community wellbeing across the county. The NYSP also offers a ready-made forum for developing the Community Covenant.