



Flintshire County Council

Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016/17



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Introduction

I am very pleased to introduce Flintshire County Council's first Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report, setting out the progress we have made since first signing the Covenant in 2013.

During the past 12 months we have accelerated our commitment to the Covenant, refreshing our action plan and extending membership of the Steering Group. I am proud and delighted to report that this has resulted in the Council being awarded the Bronze Award in the Employer Recognition Scheme.

We recognise the important role that the Armed Forces community make to our community and nation and we are committed to ensuring that we recognise their contributions and ensure that those who give the most do not suffer detriment when accessing our services. During the next 12 months we will continue to push forward with our action plan, supporting the Armed Forces Community and raising public awareness of the contributions they make. With the support of the North East Wales Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officer I am confident we will continue to make excellent progress.

**Councillor Andrew Dunbobbin
Armed Forces Champion**



Background

The [Armed Forces 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 a local level.

The purpose of the Flintshire Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Flintshire 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 Flintshire.

The Covenant encourages the integration of Service life into civilian life as well as encouraging members of the armed forces community to help in their local community. Flintshire County Council signed the Covenant in July 2013 and hosted the North Wales Armed Forces Day in June 2013.

There are currently no army barracks in Flintshire, Royal Air Force (RAF) base in Sealand closed in 2006, however, according to research by the Royal British Legion (RBL) Flintshire has the highest number and proportion of veterans in North Wales- 10,440 (21%). A veteran is someone who has served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces and includes people who have served in the Reserves.

This report sets out what we have achieved during the past 12 months and our key priorities for the next 12 months. It is set out under the following headings:

- What we have achieved during 2016/17
- Regional Armed Forces Forum
- Governance
- Next Steps

What we have achieved during 2016/17

Armed Forces Steering Group

We have refreshed the membership and terms of reference of our Armed Forces Steering Group which was originally established in March 2015. Membership of the new Steering Group includes:

- The Ministry of Defence (MOD)
- Royal British Legion (RBL)
- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and their families Association (SSAFA)
- Flintshire County Council (FCC) employees who are veterans
- FCC services including – Benefits Team, Business and Communications Team, Customer Services, Education, Economic Regeneration, Housing, Human Resources, Leisure Services, Social Services.

Councillor Andrew Dunbobbin is the elected member Armed Forces Champion and chairs the Steering Group. The new Regional North East Wales Armed Forces Liaison Officer will also be joining this group.

A copy of the terms of reference and action plan for the Steering Group are attached as Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

Armed Forces Web pages on the Council website

We have dedicated six pages on the Council website promoting our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and providing information for the Armed Forces community.

We provide links to the support provided by other agencies including Welsh Government and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).

Council Priority

We take seriously the commitment we have made to the Armed Forces Covenant and this is demonstrated in the Council's priorities for 2017/18. Under the priority of Modern and Efficient Council, we have agreed that we will:

Ensure our Armed Forces Community and their families are not disadvantaged when accessing Council Services.

We will monitor our achievement through monitoring the achievements of the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan.

A statement was read out during full County Council by the Armed Forces Champion Councillor Andrew Dunbobbin in March 2017 requesting the Council to support RBL's "[Count Them In](#)" campaign. This campaign is asking the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to include questions about serving in the Armed Forces and being members of the Armed Forces community in the Census 2021.

Education

We do not currently collate information to ascertain the numbers of pupils/learners with parent (s) /carer (s) who are serving members of the Armed Forces (AF). Collating this data will be a priority during the next 12 months and will help us understand more about the size of the AF community in Flintshire and their needs.

We will be able to report on this in more detail in our 2017/18 annual report.

Employment

We were very proud to receive the Bronze award in the [Defence Employer Recognition Scheme \(ERS\)](#) awarded by the Ministry of Defence in January 2017. The ERS encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. There are three levels - Bronze, Silver and Gold. The award recognises that we are open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans, cadet instructors and partners of military personnel and that our values are aligned with the Armed Forces Covenant.

Reserves Day

We proudly supported Reserves Day as we recognise the valuable contribution Council employees who are Reservists make to the Armed Forces, our community, our organisation and nation. Reservists give up their spare time to serve in the Reserve Forces, balancing their civilian life with a military career to ensure that should their country need them, they would be ready to serve. We raised the Armed Forces flag outside County Hall in Mold acknowledging our support.

Reserves Policy

We have introduced a Reserves policy making a commitment to support employees who are Reservists when they are mobilised for duty. This ensures they retain continuous employment status and there is support for their transition back to the workplace following active service. Reservists also receive an additional two weeks annual leave to enable them to attend annual camp, we recognise that the Council benefits from valuable skills they gain and bring back to the workplace.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

Flintshire County Council has introduced a guaranteed interview scheme for Armed Forces veterans. The scheme supports the pledges in the Community Covenant. Veterans can find making the transition to civilian life extremely challenging, particularly in finding and securing lasting employment. The specific aims of the scheme are to:

- Assist veterans in overcoming barriers to finding civilian employment.
- Redress the balance for veteran's re-employment prospects by giving them the chance to improve their transition and resettlement into civilian life.
- Complement the re-employment support provided to veterans leaving the Armed Forces by the Ministry of Defence.

- Contribute to the Councils economic and later life priorities, specifically in relation to developing an appropriately skilled workforce, and ensuring financial security and independence in later life.
- Benefit from the transferable skills and qualities of veterans.

When a veteran applies for a job, they will be able to indicate on the application form their veteran status. A guaranteed interview will be offered to veterans, provided the following criteria are met:

- The Armed Forces were the veterans last long-term employer,
- No more than three years has elapsed since the veteran left the Armed Forces,
- The Veteran meets the essential criteria for the advertised role.

The scheme is not a guaranteed job for veterans, as selection procedures will still ensure that the best candidate for the job is appointed, based on objective criteria in the role profile.

Housing

Veterans face many challenges on leaving the services which can include financial debt, lack of employment opportunities, addiction, mental health problems or relationship breakdowns. The Council works towards the Welsh Government's Housing Pathway for Ex Service Personnel to ensure that veterans are treated fairly, their specific needs are recognised and they are allocated appropriate accommodation.

First Choice Housing, in partnership with Alabaré, has developed supported accommodation and move on schemes for veterans in Wales to help avoid homelessness. Accommodation available for veterans in Flintshire includes:

- Six bed High Support facilities
- Eight bed Low Support facilities

Leisure Services

The Welsh Government fund free swimming for Armed Forces personnel and veterans who reside in Wales, this is available in the following swimming pools in the county: Buckley, Flint, Holywell and Mold during public swimming sessions only. Veterans and armed forces personnel wanting to take advantage of the free swimming initiative must be in possession of an MOD Defence Privilege Card. Those without a card will be unable to access free swimming until they purchase a card from the MOD Defence Discount Service. These cards are available from www.defencediscountservice.co.uk.

Social Care

We promote equipment to help with disability on our Armed Forces pages of the Council website and signpost to other organisations who provide welfare, advice and support to the AF community, including BCUHB.

As required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014), a population needs assessment has been undertaken to identify health, care and support needs for the future. The needs assessment was completed at a regional level for the North Wales local authorities. The findings from the assessment showed that:

- There are an estimated 51,000 veterans living in North Wales, around 9% of the population over 16.
- The number of veterans is predicted to decline over future years to around 22,000 by 2030.
- The majority of veterans are aged 65 and over so in future a greater proportion of the veteran population will be made up of younger people with a more diverse background.
- Around one in five veterans have a long-term illness related to military service, such as musculoskeletal problems, hearing problems and mental illness.

We need more detailed information to understand their needs. Research is currently being undertaken by Glyndŵr University to ascertain the needs of veterans, which will help shape future service provision.

Commemoration and Promotion Events

During the past 12 months we have actively promoted our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant:

- November 2016 – We held a two minute silence on Remembrance Day, inviting our customers to join employees in remembering those who lost their lives in the two world wars and later conflicts.
- January 2017 – we marked Holocaust Memorial Day, with a press release and workforce news item.
- February 2017 – we participated in the North Wales Armed Forces Transition Fair in Wrexham promoting Council services and employment opportunities.
- February 2017- we promoted the Armed Forces Covenant to the Town and Community Councils in Flintshire at the County Forum meeting and asked for them to nominate a representative to attend the Steering Group meetings and to work with the Council to promote the Armed Forces Covenant.

Regional Armed Forces Forum

We are an active member of the Regional Armed Forces Forum; the following organisations are also members:

- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB)
- Barnardo's Family Service
- CAIS
- Ministry of Defence
- Prison Service
- Royal British Legion (RBL)
- Six North Wales local authorities
- Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)
- Welsh Government (WG)

The Regional Armed Forces Forum meets quarterly and shares good practice. The Forum have developed a joint action plan to provide a focus for their work and to be able to monitor progress. To date their achievements include:

- led by Wrexham County Borough Council, successfully secured an MOD grant to fund two Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officers to cover North East and North West Wales; and
- contracting Glyndŵr University to undertake research into the needs of the veterans in North Wales.

Governance

As the Armed Forces Covenant has been identified as a priority in the Council Plan 2017/18, quarterly reports on progress to Chief Officers, Cabinet and relevant Scrutiny Committees. This will ensure we keep focussed on achieving the outcomes set out in our action plan.

The Steering Group will report to the Public Services Board (PSB) (via one of the PSB priority themes) on a quarterly basis.

We will also produce an Annual Report which will be approved by Cabinet and full Council before being published.

Next Steps

The priorities for the Armed Forces Steering Group for 2017/18 are:

- ensure services are capturing information from their customers to identify whether they are from the AF community and analyse this information to identify needs;
- developing Armed Forces “hubs” across the county where the AF community can access specialist support and advice;
- ensure schools are capturing whether pupils are children of serving members of the Armed Forces;
- implement an employee training programme to raise awareness of the needs of the AF community;
- continue to celebrate and commemorate key events recognising the contribution made by the Armed Forces;
- aim to achieve the silver award in the Employers Recognition Scheme; and
- research opportunities to access grants from the government to continue progressing the commitment we have made to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Thank you for reading this report. If you would like to find out more about the Council’s commitment to the Covenant or would like to make any comments on this report please contact:

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Appendix 1 Flintshire County Council – Armed Forces Community Covenant Local Steering Group Terms of Reference



The Armed Forces Community Covenant is designed to complement, at a local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the nation, the government and the armed forces. The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage local communities to support the service community in their area and promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the armed forces community.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation to ensure that those who serve, those who have served, and their families are treated fairly.

For Flintshire County Council and partner organisations, the community covenant presents an opportunity to coordinate support and advice to members of the armed forces community.

For the armed forces community, the community covenant encourages the integration of service life into civilian life and encourages members of the armed forces community to help their local community.

The Flintshire Community Covenant signed in July 2013 by the Royal British Legion, Armed Forces' organisations¹, third sector organisations², NHS Trust, Department for Work and Pensions, Wales Probation, Coleg Cambria and the Council made the commitment to work closely together to ensure support is provided for the armed forces community.

LOCAL STEERING GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE

¹ Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force, Soldiers, Sailors and Armed Forces Association (SSAFA), Reserve Forces' and Cadet's Associations (RFCA),

² Flintshire Local Voluntary Council, North Wales Young Dragons, Citizens' Advice Bureau – Flintshire, Pennaf Housing Association, Wales and West Housing Association.

AIMS

1. To encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Flintshire 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 Flintshire.
2. To foster opportunities for the civilian sector to give help, advice and support to serving and retired members of the Armed Forces and their families in Flintshire by joint dialogue and imaginative exploration of all possibilities.
3. To assist the realignment of service provision to meet the changing needs of the military, their families and veterans, including the Reserves of all three forces.
4. To create a culture wherein Armed Forces organisations in Flintshire can offer support to their local civilian communities.
5. To integrate, where possible, military and civilian activities and events to the mutual benefit of both communities.
6. To explore education, training and employment opportunities for those leaving or about to leave the armed forces, veterans and their families.
7. To further develop, monitor and review the commitments made in the Flintshire Community Covenant Action Plan.

[As stated in existing Covenant

Improve the sharing and recording of information where appropriate to support serving and ex-service Armed Forces members whether Regular or Reserve and their families in Flintshire.

Provide strategic direction and approval for any bids made to the Community Grant.

Champion communication to publicise the work under the Flintshire Armed Forces Community Covenant and to ensure Armed Forces personnel know who to contact for support at a local level.

Receive quarterly progress reports from the sub groups (of Education, Employment and Offending; Health, Wellbeing and Leisure and Housing and Community)]

Membership

To be reviewed:

Governance

The Steering Group will report to the Public Services Board (PSB) (via one of the PSB priority themes) on a quarterly basis. Secretariat support will be provided by the Corporate Business and Communications Executive Office Team.

Decision Making

Decisions will be arrived at by consensus and recorded in the minutes of the Steering Group.

Frequency of meetings

The Steering Group will meet twice yearly or more frequently if required and will be chaired by the Flintshire Armed Forces Champion.

Appendix 2 Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan



To encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Flintshire 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 Flintshire.

	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress
1.1	Identify key Armed Forces events/remembrance days	FM	May 2017	Calendar of events available to Steering Group	Complete
1.2	Develop action plan for each event to ensure that they are commemorated	FM	October 2017	Increased awareness AF and support available to AF community	On-going

1.3	Further develop pages on Council website to promote AFC and encourage support to Armed Forces community	FM	September 2017	AF community can access information easily.	Complete.
1.4	Ensure use of AFC logo on Council publications and promotional material	KA/Graphic Design	December 2017	FCC is promoted as AF friendly and its commitment to the Covenant is visible on all documents and promotional material	Waiting for feedback from WG re the translation of the logo
1.5	Ensure AFC e-learning module is available for all new employees as part of their induction	Corporate Training/Regional AFLO	March 2018	Employees understand the Council's commitment to the AF community and have an awareness of their needs	WLGA have been requested to develop bilingual module for Wales which can be adapted locally
1.6	Develop specific workshops for public facing employees to support them to understand the needs of the AF community	Regional AFLO	March 2018	Council services are aware of and deliver services that meet the needs of the local AF community	To be developed by AFLO when in post

1.7	Flintshire AF events are promoted and supported through the County Forum	FM/KA	October 2017	Town and Community Councils work with the Council to promote AF events	FM attended meeting with County Forum. County Forum to agree a representative to attend FCC Steering Group at their next meeting (October 2017)
To foster opportunities for the civilian sector to give help, advice and support to serving and retired members of the Armed Forces and their families in Flintshire by joint dialogue and imaginative exploration of all possibilities.					
	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress
2.1	To explore the role of FLVC and the Armed Forces Covenant	FM/KA	September 2017	Third sector organisations actively support the AF Covenant	Complete
2.2	To include AFC within criteria for accessing FCC grants	FM/KA	December 2017	Grants provided by the Council support the Council's commitment to AF covenant where applicable. Public money is spent supporting AF community	In progress

2.3	Commitment to AFC included as part of FCC's community benefit clauses within the procurement process	Arwel Staples/Tom Booty/KA	September 2017	<p>Opportunities to support for the AF community are maximised.</p> <p>Public money spent on goods, works and services benefit the AF community.</p> <p>Opportunities to train and employ local veterans are increased.</p>	In progress
2.4	Explore the opportunities to include commitment to AFC within Community Asset Transfers (CAT) and Alternative Delivery Models (ADMS)	KA/FM	March 2018	<p>Increased support for the AF community is available</p> <p>CATs and ADMS meet the needs of the AF community</p>	In progress
To assist the realignment of service provision to meet the changing needs of the military, their families and veterans, including the Reserves of all three forces.					
	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress

3.1	Services nominate a contact for AFC	KA/FM	September 2017	<p>The Steering Group has mechanisms in place to communicate effectively with all services in the Council.</p> <p>There is a “joined-up” approach to support for the AF community across the Council</p>	<p>Service representative:</p> <p>Social Services</p> <p>Customer Services</p> <p>Benefits</p> <p>Leisure</p> <p>Communities First</p> <p>Business Development</p> <p>Corporate Business and Communications</p> <p>HR</p> <p>Education</p>
3.2	Ensure that all services who have customer databases, ask customers at the point of contact with the Council whether they have an AF connection	AF Steering Group/ service representatives	March 2018	Services consistently ask questions about AF connections and capture the data on their customer databases	Education- in progress
3.3	All services to amend equality monitoring questionnaire to include AF	Steering Group/service representatives	January 2018	There is a better understanding of the profile of the AF community in Flintshire and access to and take-	To be started

				up of services	
3.4	To amend and monitor customer comments and complaints to capture AF community	Ian McLaren (IMc) / RJ	December 2017	There is a better understanding of the satisfaction level of the AF community with Council Services and services which do meet needs.	To be started
3.5	Monitor, analyse and review complaints/comments to identify any trends to inform service improvements	IMc/RJ	March 2018	There is a better understanding of the satisfaction level of the AF community with Council Services and services which do meet needs	To be started
3.6	To review data to identify services used by AF community	Steering Group/service representatives	March 2018	To gain an understanding of the profile of the AF community in Flintshire, their needs and the take-up of services.	To be started
3.7	Audit and suggest amendments to Corporate and service portfolio policies to	Regional AFLO	December 2018	Services are able to meet the needs of the AF community	To start following appointment of AFLO

	reflect AFC				
3.8	Establish base line of services that are AF community friendly	Regional AFLO/ service representatives	December 2018	List of AF community friendly services available. Action plan in place to ensure all services are AF community friendly	In progress
3.9	Support Housing to embed Housing pathway for AFC	Regional AFLO	September 2018	Housing officers understand the needs of AFC Housing information is accessible for AFC Accommodation needs of veterans are met	In progress
To create a culture wherein Armed Forces organisations in Flintshire can offer support to their local civilian communities.					
	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress
4.1	Create a framework to promote opportunities for Council related and sponsored events	Cptn NT/GM/PK/FM/KA/Gwenno	October 2018	AF volunteers participate in Council events.	FLVC now member of group and will help take this action forward alongside Regional

	using AF volunteers	Jones (GJ)		AF volunteers support local communities	AFLO
4.2	Promote FLVC on the Armed Forces pages of website	FM	May 2017	Increased number of AF Community become volunteers	Complete
4.3	AFC to provide Flintshire County Council (FCC) with information that can be promoted on the website	Cptn NT/GM/PK	December 2017	An increased range of up to date information for the AFC is available on the website	To be started
4.4	Develop AFC Volunteer network	Regional AFLO	March 2019	A sustainable network of AFC volunteers is in place and is actively involved in supporting veterans	To start when AFLO is in post
To integrate, where possible, military and civilian activities and events to the mutual benefit of both communities.					
	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress
5.1	Develop annual communications plan	FM/KA	December 2017	Co-ordinated messages cascaded within the county and Council	Complete

				Collaborative working to avoid duplication and make best use of resources	
5.2	Implement training programme for public facing employees	AFLO	March 2018	Employees understand the needs of the AF community	In progress
5.3	Promote the Veterans Discount Card	Cptn NT/PK/GM/MD	December 2017	Increased number of veterans apply for the discount card Increased number of businesses apply to be registered.	In progress- promoted through Council website
5.4	Review potential for Council discretionary services to apply to be registered	Service representatives	December 2017	Some Council services apply to be registered to accept the discount card	To be started
To explore education, training and employment opportunities for those leaving or about to leave the armed forces, veterans and their families.					

	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress
6.1	Review organisations offering opportunities to the AF community, veterans and their families	Regional AFLO	December 2017	A list of organisations and services they offer is available	List already started
6.2	Promote these organisations on the website	FM	January 2018	Information is easily accessed. Increased take-up of these services.	Known information is currently available on the website
6.3	Create opportunities for drop-in centres/hubs for AF community and veterans	Regional AFLO/Cheryl Marland (CM)/PF/MD/FM	April 2018	AF community can access information and support in AF friendly environment AF Hubs available in each Town centre Hubs are sustainable and supported by all agencies	Initial meeting held with Jason Palmer, Conwy CBC
6.4	To produce periodic monitoring reports to FCC Chief Officer	FM/KA	First report due September 2017	COT are informed and up to date with	Complete

	Team (COT) identifying areas for improvement and further action			progress. Barriers to progress are removed	
6.5	Complete an annual report to Cabinet and Corporate Resources and Overview Committee providing an overview of progress	FM/KA	First report April 2018	Elected members are reassured that the Council is committed to the AF Covenant. Elected members support the Council's commitment to the AF Covenant	Complete
Explore Funding Opportunities and Community Projects					
	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcome/Output	Progress
7.1	Identify grants available to support the work of the AFC	FM/KA/ Regional AFLO	September 2017	List of grants available	Complete
7.2	Scope projects to support applications and submit	FM/KA/	March 2018	Applications for grants are submitted	In progress

	applications for relevant grants	Regional AFLO		Grant applications are successful A number of initiatives within the county are supported by grants	
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