

Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership

Annual Review October 2020

Purpose

To update partners on progress and delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant's aims in Herefordshire over the past 12 months.

Background

The Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (HAFCP), is tasked with delivering the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant in Herefordshire. The partnership is made up of representatives from the Armed Forces community together with the public, private, and voluntary sectors. During the past 12 months the partnership has supported a range of actions, projects and initiatives. In 2019, the partnership restructured its reporting process to better reflect its priority areas. Dedicated topic leads seek to address key areas of need within Herefordshire in line with the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Healthcare

Primary Care

- In January, Dr Jonathan Leach, NHS England Associate Director for Armed Forces and Veteran Health, and former military medic, chaired a meeting here to discuss how the Royal College of GPs Veteran Friendly accreditation could be taken forward by the Taurus network. The meeting was attended by Dr Mike Hearne who chairs Taurus
- 9 out of the 22 practices in Taurus are now accredited and have pledged to assist Armed Forces veterans and their families with accessing healthcare in Herefordshire. As with the Wye Valley Trust we hope that more practices will now pick up the work to become accredited
- Taurus has agreed to sign the Armed Forces Covenant
- Ash Winter of the Defence Medical Welfare Service took part in a podcast arranged by the Royal College of GPs to encourage GPs in England to gain Veteran Friendly accreditation
- Mike Smart of the HAFCP is a member of the Royal College of GPs Veteran Friendly working group
- Discussions have taken place about how we can additionally encourage GP practices to sign the covenant in their own right but the partnership see it as a two tier commitment with veteran accreditation as the starting point.

Secondary Care

In 2017, Kate Davis the Director of Armed Forces Health NHS England spoke at a conference in Hereford and inspired us to think about how we could work with the Wye Valley Trust and the Herefordshire GP provider –Taurus. Recently Kate said, “We want Armed Forces families to be able to access NHS services easily in all parts of England. We also want to get care and support for veterans from staff who understand their health and wellbeing needs”. We have been working with the NHS in the County to make this happen:

- We have held meetings with the Chairman of the Wye Valley Trust, Russell Hardy, who has committed the Trust to ensure that it recognises the issues veterans and Armed Forces families face when accessing health care

- COVID-19 lockdown meant that work had to be paused on the work of the Trust to obtain accreditation as a member of the Veterans Hospital Covenant Alliance. We hope that the Trust will pick this up as the situation improves
- The Armed Forces Day flag was flown at the hospital in June, demonstrating the Trust's commitment to the Armed Forces community
- Erica Hermon, the Associate Director Governance at the Trust and a veteran will be speaking at the county's Armed Forces Covenant Annual Review meeting, outlining the Trust's commitment to the Armed Forces community, both as an employer and healthcare provider.
- The Trust have offered to broker any relevant case conferences for military families with children with specific health needs.
- After securing additional funding, the post of Ash Winter, Welfare Officer for the Defence Medical Welfare Service, has been extended for a further two years to continue his work to assist veterans in hospital and help with their return home after treatment

Mental Health

The Herefordshire Veterans and Families Mental Health Network (HVMHN), has continued regular meetings both before and during the pandemic. The Network draws together relevant groups and organisations from the NHS, Herefordshire Council, military and other charities, support groups and specialist services. It aims to ensure the development and improvement of local mental health and similar services for all members of the local Armed Forces community, including family members.

- Mental Health services in the NHS are now delivered by Worcestershire Health and Care Trust (WHCT). Formal amalgamation was on 1 Apr 2020, and the Trust is represented by a consultant psychologist at the HVMHN.
- The first Veterans Mental Health Support Worker has now left the role, after doing excellent work to prove the need and value of specialist help for veterans and family members. In light of her work, the role has now been upgraded in terms of qualifications and experience, and a qualified mental health practitioner has been recruited and will start work shortly. The role is now a core part of the WHCT.

There is widespread agreement that mental health has been impacted adversely by the COVID-19 lockdown. In particular:

- Drug and alcohol addiction have risen nationally, and underlines the need for a veteran specific addiction worker (see below).
- Loneliness is also a major factor with closure of places such as The Veteran Support Centre, First Light Trust and other meeting places.
 - Funding for the Veterans Addiction Project Worker, delivered by "We Are With You", a national charity dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, ended in June 2020. The HVMHN considered this to be vital role and thanks to collaborative working funding has now been secured permanently. Over 65 members of the armed services community have been helped by both face to face personal counselling and remotely over the last 12 months.
 - The Cart Shed at Norton Canon was continuing to deliver vital veterans programmes in their outdoor therapy environment before March 2020, and since then has adapted to keep in touch with veteran clients online. They applied for and received COVID-19 National Lottery funds to continue their work.
 - Excellent work has been done by Veteran Support Centre Manager, Mike Davey and Ash Winter from DMWS to co-ordinate a veteran to veteran volunteering scheme to contact vulnerable lonely veterans. Safe visits were also undertaken where necessary.

- At a national level, NHS High Intensity Service for veterans has been announced by NHS England. This is currently being trialed elsewhere in England, and is designed to co-ordinate mental health care for veterans who experience periods of crisis and may require admission to inpatient services or who may require a more bespoke offering, such as placements in specialist / niche services. The emphasis is that this service will be available quickly and locally, and is addition to services already available. This reflects the principles of the HVMHN, and is positive news. We look forward to early adoption here in 2021.

Housing

HAFCP plays an important role to ensure that local housing needs are improved for the Armed Forces community in Herefordshire. Work is underway to better understand the housing landscape with regular metrics from HomePoint, who oversee Herefordshire’s housing register, and to provide more transparent information on accessing social housing for the Armed Forces.

- The veteran self-build project based in Leominster is due to be completed by early 2021 on land transferred from Herefordshire Council to Stonewater Housing. Nine veterans, a number who were homeless, have been working alongside developers, Harpers, supported by homeless charity, Alabare. A total of 19 homes have been built. The veterans have obtained construction qualifications whilst building their own homes, with the remaining to be advertised through HomePoint and Stonewater specifically for the Armed Forces community.
- Working in partnership with the Buchanan Trust, Herefordshire Council have provided grant funding to match funds received from Home England to enable the development of 4 additional dwellings for veterans. The Trust offers rural housing and training & work experience for veterans on their farm estate at Bosbury.
- Herefordshire’s Housing Allocations Policy was updated in June 2020. The new policy makes access to the waiting list for the Armed Forces community more accessible and in line with the Armed Forces Covenant guidance.

Schools & Education

Representatives from Children & Families Directorate and from the local Garrison HIVE (military families’ information support unit) continue to meet and good relationships have developed through the year to support the education and improve outcomes for the children of service personnel.

Service Pupil Premium (SPP)

The take up of service pupil premium has increased again in this financial year by a further 69 pupils. The SSP has been promoted within communication to all schools by Herefordshire Council and by the HIVE on the camp.

Financial Year	Number Service Children	SPP per Child	Total Herefordshire Schools
01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021	1098	£310	£340,380
01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020	1029	£300	£308,700
01/04/2018 – 31/03/2019	1015	£300	£304,500
01/04/2017 – 31/03/2018	905	£300	£271,500
01/04/2016 – 31/03/2017	901	£300	£270,300

MOD Education Support Fund

This was promoted by Herefordshire Council to schools. Two schools in Herefordshire have applied and a supporting statement was provided by the Garrison Welfare Office for one of the applications. The fund aims to help schools mitigate the effects of mobility and/or deployment of service communities.

School Admissions

Herefordshire Council follows the School Admissions Code for all school admissions including the following extract which relates to the children of service personnel:

For families of service personnel with a confirmed posting to their area, or crown servants returning from overseas to live in that area, admission authorities must:

- Allocate a place in advance of the family arriving in the area provided the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date and a Unit postal address or quartering area address when considering the application against their oversubscription criteria. This must include accepting a Unit postal address or quartering area address for a service child. Admission authorities must not refuse a service child a place because the family does not currently live in the area, or reserve blocks of places for these children;
- Ensure that arrangements in their area support the Government’s commitment to removing disadvantage for service children. Arrangements must be appropriate for the area and be described in the local authority’s composite prospectus.

Service children with Special Educational Needs & Disability

- School age children with special educational needs transferring into the local authority with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are managed well. There have been times when access to specialist provision has been an issue due to provision already being over-subscribed.
- Pre-school children with special educational needs moving into the area, accessing childcare and a package of support can be challenging for families particularly if there is no existing statutory EHCP.
- The Children’s Education Advisory Service (part of the MOD’s Directorate Children and Young People), has assisted two service families with pre-school children to apply for EHCPs when they have arrived in county without them. The appropriate support and provision for the child can then be accessed as soon as possible.
- This is an area where the development of further close working between the Early Years SEND service and CEAS would be beneficial.

Employment & Training

Employment

The Employment sector has been significantly disrupted due to the current climate living with COVID-19, painting a potentially bleak picture. Businesses from different sectors have been forced to operate differently. Inside the military with Service Leavers (SLs), a lot of movement was frozen and where possible, personnel have been retained or extended in post; but the inevitability of leaving the services for those SLs’ still looms.

Businesses are re-configuring, re-structuring and adjusting to the ‘new norm’. This has and may sadly see more businesses collapse and cause further unemployment, but equally there will be some providing great opportunities, where preparation and training will no doubt be key to meet the demand of those job roles.

- Within Herefordshire we rely on local businesses and the charity sector to inform us regarding potential job opportunities.

- We have also been working with partners including, RBL, The Cart Shed, Building Better Opportunities, Forces Family Federation, and YSS.
- A variety of jobs and training opportunities have been shared across the local Armed Forces network including Traffic Marshalls for COVID-19 testing across the region, and to support local farming, picking of fruit and vegetables.

Training

Training has been hit hard due to COVID-19, where there was a huge pause and setbacks during lockdown. Businesses who provide this training have had to reconfigure their services to potentially deliver services digitally or limited face to face, meeting strict COVID-19 guidelines. This has been achieved with training from key local organisations taking a lead in this support:

- NMITE: They have been working hard pre, during, after lockdown in providing continued support for our SLs. They have been providing CPD F2F and digital Workshops, which has included:
 - 2 x 2 day Brand of You Courses
 - 1 x 1 day Website Design Course
 - 2 x 2 day Business Start-Up Courses
 - 1 x 1 day CV & Social Media course
 - They have also been supporting progress to professional memberships associated with Engineering and Communications sector to provide civilian recognition of military experience
 - Hosting a local Military to Business Event for Armed Forces Week, postponed until 2021
- Hereford & Worcester Group Training Association (HWGTA): Another keen advocate of supporting our local military community is:
 - Back open for business after lockdown under strict COVID-19 guidelines and providing Face to Face delivery.
 - Supporting AF community with their relevant courses. Just conducted a teaching qualification for both partners and those SLs.
 - Now ELCAS approved (The MOD's Enhanced Learning Credits Services)
- Additional online training support: During lockdown a list of digital/online training resources (many free), have been distributed widely to both SLs and the veteran community.
- We continue to have good links to Herefordshire's Business Solutions Centre who oversee the Unsung Hero programme for business start-ups for the Armed Forces community.
- We are looking forward to the opening of the new Cyber Quarter as a new facility for start-ups in the defence and security sector.

Veteran Support Centre (VSC)

- The VSC opened in Nov 2019 thanks to generous help from the local community both in terms of goods and voluntary services. It was due for a formal opening in March 2020 where all supporters were due to be thanked – now postponed.
- Based in West Street, Hereford, it offers a friendly street level drop-in with flexible and accessible spaces for meetings and workshops. Currently closed to the public but due to re-open under COVID conditions on an appointment only basis.
- Mike Davey, the VSC Manager works closely with military charities and a range of local service providers to help people find the right kind of support to meet their needs.

- At the start of the pandemic the Centre co-ordinated a 20 strong volunteer group recruited from the armed forces community to support our most vulnerable veterans. In partnership with DMWS, over 60 veterans received regular door-step checks and supplies.
- Herefordshire Council successfully applied for pilot funding to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund to fund the project. The Council will continue to oversee the Centre for the next few months whilst a team of trustees establish the Centre as an independent and sustainable charity.
- Future funding is continuing to be identified and applied for to ensure sustainability of this Centre.

Business & Wider Covenant

- Over 70 Herefordshire based businesses now signed up to the Covenant with more on the way.
- Herefordshire Council, NMITE and SPECTRA achieved ERS Gold.
- In 2019, the annual review event was extended to the business community and attended by over 40 organisations.
- Regular round-ups and bulletins now going out monthly to over 200 recipients.
- Ross on Wye and Ledbury Town Councils signed the Covenant this summer to support our community engagement.
- Presented at a briefing event for the new Lord Lieutenant for Herefordshire.
- Welcomed and briefed the new High Sheriff for Herefordshire.
- Developed a virtual Armed Forces Awareness programme in partnership with the DMWS – for frontline teams.
- New stakeholders engaged including, DWP, CarersLink and Social Prescribers based at GP practices.
- VE /VJ Day social media campaign and county tributes.
- Armed Forces Week Events: Social distancing flag raising event at Suvla Barracks and at the County Hospital.

Useful Contacts

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