



Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership

Annual Review Report 2023

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Purpose

To update on progress and local 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. It is facilitated by Herefordshire Council as part of their ongoing commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces community is not disadvantaged when accessing public services. Dedicated topic leads work to an action plan to

address key areas of need within Herefordshire. Each year, it refreshes the action plan and priorities based on identified gaps in provision or where improvements can be made to services and support.

HAFCP would like to thank all their partners and stakeholders for the outstanding work and commitment over the past 12 months. In particular, our military charities who work tirelessly out in the community supporting individuals and families, and also the organisations and businesses who go the extra mile to offer bespoke support and services to our Armed Forces community.

Highlights in 2023

Cllr Barry Durkin, Armed Forces champion for Herefordshire Council stepped down as Chairman of HAFCP having steered the partnership since 2019. His contribution and commitment has been outstanding, not only to the principles of the Covenant but also in raising awareness of its aims to wider audiences. We wish him all the best as he takes over a new Cabinet responsibility but in the knowledge that he will always be an ambassador for us.

We welcome Cllr Peter Stoddart as the new Armed Forces champion and Chairman. As a retired Colonel with a long military career having spent much of his Service based at Hereford Garrison he comes with a wealth of experience and innate understanding of the challenges facing those who struggle to adapt to civilian life.

Cllr Stoddart will officially take over the reins from Cllr Barry Durkin in March 2024.

With a full 12 months of the Covenant Duty now firmly established we have welcomed new strategic engagement with stakeholders that are in scope of the Duty. In particular, our NHS Trusts, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, Primary Care providers, Housing and Schools. To assist with the implementation of the Duty, we undertook a deep-dive into the ONS Census 2021 veteran data so we could better understand the demographic characteristics of our veterans. We now have data on age profiles, where they are living, economic activity and their general health. This analysis has been made public to inform our partners and to evidence new initiatives. For example, the Census data revealed a large concentration of veterans living in the south of the county, in and around Ross-on-Wye. This has led to outreach welfare support, in partnership with Ross Town Council. It also enabled the Primary Care Networks to offer bespoke veteran outreach to improve access to healthcare. [Read the full analysis](#)

In partnership with Worcestershire County Council we developed some additional assets to improve awareness and understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant, thanks to funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, to sustain local delivery of the Covenant. Pocket sized guides have been printed and circulated widely to signpost the Armed Forces community to local and national support. [A short video has been produced to explain the Armed Forces Covenant](#) and what this means for Herefordshire. Finally, an e-learning module has been launched for local authorities and frontline staff to support day to day delivery of the Covenant, including the new Duty. These assets have been approved by the MOD Covenant team and cited as an area of good practice.

Healthcare

Topic lead: **Tim Howson, Vice-chairman**

- The Defence Medical Welfare Service, in partnership with The Wye Valley NHS Trust, have secured funding to continue the Veteran Welfare Officer role based at the county hospital. This is an invaluable resource where the welfare officer can support anyone from an Armed Forces family receiving treatment. They can assess their needs and wellbeing, what they may need on discharge and support them at home. This is a highly valued post, not only for beneficiaries but also for the Trust as it helps to relieve bed blocking and other burdens on the hospital.
- We now have strategic representation with Herefordshire and Worcestershire's Integrated Care Board (ICB) who are responsible for planning and setting funding on health services for the local population.
- Dr Jonathan Leach, former military medic and a GP in Bromsgrove sits on the ICB Board, as well as NHS England as a senior adviser for Armed Forces healthcare. He gave a full briefing on NHS initiatives to the Worcestershire and Herefordshire partnerships earlier in the year and continues to be an outstanding advocate. He is due to speak as our key note speaker at the annual review event in March 2024.
- We maintain good links with GP practices through the Primary Care Networks and Taurus Healthcare. They are undertaking initiatives to address inequalities by going out into community settings and talking to veteran cohorts who may not be accessing healthcare regularly, or registered with a GP. Social prescribers attend regular sessions at Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre and in other veteran groups.
- We are delighted to have made good progress with Adult Social Care teams at Herefordshire Council and now have two Armed Forces champions embedded in those teams who have established reciprocal links with the military charities that offers their clients access specialist support.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Topic lead: **David Thomas, Deputy Associate Director, Primary Care & Community Mental Health**

- Herefordshire & Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust continue to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to support Armed Forces mental health. They were awarded ERS Silver this year as a forces-friendly employer as well as their overall commitment to improve access to their services.
- The Trust continues to fund a dedicated veteran mental health practitioner. She plays a vital role at Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre by offering advice, guidance and pathways into mental health services. More recently, she has been meeting up with veterans in other parts of the county as well as working with GP practices in rural areas. She also attends the veteran choir and Café Muse at the Courtyard, supporting veterans with dementia.
- Café Muse, an initiative of Orchestra of the Swan continue to deliver their dementia sessions through music every Wednesday at the Courtyard theatre. The sessions attract over 30 beneficiaries a week and is a highly regarded programme. We were delighted to hear they have secured funding to continue this work.
- Turning Point, Herefordshire's Substance Misuse Service continue to offer a dedicated pathway for Armed Forces clients. They report a rise in their caseload, however, they are collaborating with the Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre, other military charities and NHS Services.

Housing

Topic lead: **Tina Woods, Housing Development Officer, Herefordshire Council**

- Housing needs continues to be a critical issue. Those leaving the Armed Forces sometimes face particular challenges, and our strategic housing team at Herefordshire council have been working hard to capture more accurate data on the social housing waiting lists. In 2023, there were 26 veterans and or their families on the housing register. However, our Housing teams are aware this may not be accurate. Herefordshire Council is due to recommission the housing software shortly that should provide an opportunity to improve capture of data and identification.
- 2023, saw a reduction on the numbers of veterans sleeping rough in Herefordshire compared to previous years. However, we are conscious that not all will answer the question honestly, due to a sense of pride.
- Furthermore, we cannot rule out the number of veterans who are homeless, yet “sofa surfing” which can be more of a hidden concern.
- The new Covenant Duty has been fully adopted into the revised housing allocation policy by Herefordshire Council. This means that veterans seeking social housing are given a higher priority on the waiting list, according to the Duty and that special consideration will be given to those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved.
- Nodens mews, the veteran self-build in Leominster had several vacancies last year with new veterans moving in. This is an outstanding legacy of this project, with Herefordshire Council ensuring that any new vacancies are offered to the veteran community rather than going into the main housing stock.
- Herefordshire Council’s Strategic Housing team have excellent links with the Garrison Welfare Team and Housing Officer, and have been able to provide housing where there has been a marital breakdown or facing eviction from SFA accommodation.

Schools & Education

Topic lead: **Louise Tanner, Admissions & 14-19 Curriculum Manager, Herefordshire Council**

Representatives from Children & Families Directorate, the Garrison, schools and third sector partners continue to meet termly. Good relationships have developed to support education and improve outcomes for children of Service personnel.

- **Service Pupil Premium (SPP)**
The take-up of service pupil premium numbers reduced slightly in 2023. The table indicates the year-on-year numbers of military children attracting the SPP in Herefordshire schools.

Financial Year	Number Service Children	SPP per Child	Total Herefordshire Schools
01/04/2023 – 01/04/2024	944	£335	£316,240
01/04/2022 – 31/03/2023	1144	£320	£366,080
01/04/2021 – 31/03/2022	1138	£310	£352,780
01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021	1110	£310	£341,000
01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020	1032	£300	£309,600
01/04/2018 -31/03/2019	1019	£300	£305,700
01/04/2017 - 31/03/2018	906	£300	£271,800
01/04/2016 – 31/03/2017	902	£300	£270,600

- SPP is funding paid directly to state-funded schools and academies across England to support Service children. The annual rate increased this year to £335 per child which goes direct to the schools for children in Reception to Year 11. The funding enables schools to offer pastoral activities to help mitigate the impact of military life on Service children.
- In 2023, 944 children in Herefordshire were in receipt of SPP located across 82 schools in the county. However, it is worth noting that SPP does not cover children who are in further education, (16 +) or those attending private schools.
- In March, schools were invited to an event hosted by the Garrison to look at new ways of supporting their Service children through the SPP funding, using the [Thriving Lives Toolkit](#) that offers a range of resources to support mental health and wellbeing. This event was well attended by local schools.
- St Mary's School at Credenhill secured 12 months funding from The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to employ a dedicated pastoral and safeguarding lead for their Service children. The role offers emotional support to children who may have worries about a parent being away, bereavement, having to leave friends or make new ones. It is hoped that funding continues and it is rolled out to other schools with large cohorts of Service children.
- Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) continues to be a challenge for military families, particularly those who have recently been posted to the Hereford. Herefordshire Council works hard to aid the transition to local SEND support, however, funding gaps and matching local resources to the needs of the child remain a concern, particularly children with complex needs.
- We are encouraging schools to sign-up to the Armed Forces Covenant as forces-friendly employers and as part of their community commitment to support the local Armed Forces community.

Criminal Justice

Topic lead: YSS: Remember Veterans / West Mercia Police

- We have established good links with Herefordshire's Safer Neighborhood Teams and given briefings at Hereford and Leominster Police Stations. We were able to provide them with greater insight and understanding about the local Armed Forces community and the support available to them. The talks went down well and we hope to talk to first responder teams and custody suites in the near future.
- On an operational basis, Herefordshire veterans in the justice system are supported by two programmes: YSS Remember Veterans provide one-to-one support to any veteran who is in the system, or are at risk of being arrested. It receives regular funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and from West Mercia's Police and Crime Commissioner. The Link worker is aligned closely to custody suites, where it receives the majority of its referrals.
- Op Nova, is a new national programme commissioned by NHS England. They work across England with veterans that have been in contact with the criminal justice system to tackle housing problems, debt, mental health issues and drug or alcohol misuse, while also reducing re-offending. It is managed by the Forces Employment Charity and works closely with Op Courage, NHS England's veteran mental health programme.
- In 2023, veterans represented around 6% of all arrests in Herefordshire. Most common arrests: assault-including common and actual bodily harm, driving offences-drink & drug related and harassment.
- Posters and support leaflets have been distributed to Herefordshire Police, probation and in the Magistrates courts.

Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre

Topic Lead: **Tracy Ricketts, Head of Corporate Grants & Programmes, Herefordshire Council**

The centre has seen a busy and increased footfall over the past 12 months. Working closely with the military charities and other service providers, the centre manager is able to provide a one-stop shop and streamline the level of support an individual or family member may need. Whilst the HVSC gained charitable status in December 2020, Herefordshire Council continues to offer back office support and applications to grants. The charity is ably overseen by an ambitious team of Trustees and management group. Many local companies sponsor the Centre through funding and giving up their time, and the growing team of volunteers has enabled more beneficiaries being supported.

- Sean Gane, the Centre Manager will see an average of 40 individuals a week at the Centre. Some will walk in off the streets, others will return for on-going support. He has an innate understanding of their needs and can quickly get them the support they might need or encourage them to come along to the weekly group sessions.
- Regular sessions include: Weekly Brunches, monthly surgeries with the DWP, Citizens Advice Bureau, Help for Heroes, and healthcare checks with Social Prescribers.
- More specialist sessions are held with Turning Point (Substance Misuse Service) and the Veteran Mental Health practitioner.
- The Trustees are working hard to increase opening times from 3 days to 5 days a week, with funding applications currently in place.

Business & Wider Covenant

Topic Lead, **Kate La Barre, Armed Forces Covenant Officer, Herefordshire Council**

- Last year we welcomed 26 new businesses and organisations who signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2023 with our tally now standing at 134 in total. With more organisations in the pipeline, Herefordshire continues to be an exemplar to the region, working in close partnership with our MOD employer engagement colleagues based at West Midlands, RFCA. They have arranged a number of public signing events this year, offering newly signed organisations the opportunity to have their pledges counter-signed by a uniformed MOD representative.
- NMITE hosted an outstanding Military to Business event during Armed Forces Week at their brand new campus in Rotherwas. The event attracted 42 forces-friendly employers all offering employment and training opportunities to a large footfall of veterans and service leavers who turned up on the day. This annual event, organised by Samantha Lewis from NMITE grows every year to much acclaim.
- Each year, our employers go the extra mile and apply for the MOD's Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS). Herefordshire's ERS medal haul now stands at: 62 Bronze, 15 Silver and 6 Gold award holders. Congratulations to all recipients last year.
- Armed Forces Week 2023 was hosted by the city, in partnership with the Armed Forces Week committee, Chaired by the Rifles County Colonel, Andy Taylor. A week-long programme of events successfully ran across the county.
- An outstanding Coronation Cadet Review took place in Hereford to celebrate our Cadet Forces in front large crowds. Over 300 young people took part from the Sea Cadets, RAF Cadets, Army Cadets and Combined Cadets who paraded in front of His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant, Edward Harley, senior civic leaders and members of the Armed Forces. They were accompanied by RAF Cosford Volunteer Band and we were all treated to a fly-past from a Hurricane from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.
- Armed Forces Day 2024 will be hosted by Bromyard and Winslow Town Council.

Useful Contacts

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For more information on Herefordshire' Armed Forces Covenant visit
www.herefordshire.gov.uk/armedforces