



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 19 October 2023

Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Raj Mehta - Cabinet Member: Inclusion, Engagement, Equalities & Civic Pride
Lead Director:	Anthea Lowe - Director: Policy & Governance
Service Area:	Policy & Governance
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	SMT – 19 September 2023 Business Briefing – 28 September 2023 Cabinet – 19 October 2023

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- 1.1 Notes the progress made developing the Council's "offer" to the borough's Armed Forces community; and
- 1.2 Endorses the proposed approach to enhancing that offer as set out in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.5 of this report.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide an update on the work that has been taking place around meeting the Council's commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and in support of our Armed Forces community during 2022-2023.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation that those who Serve, or have Served, in the Armed Forces, along with their families, should be treated fairly and face no disadvantage when accessing public and commercial services. In some instances, special provision may be appropriate for those families who have lost loved ones in combat. The Covenant was established in its current form in 2011 and, since then, more than 10,700 different organisations across the UK – including businesses, local authorities, charities, GP Practices and schools – have chosen to sign a pledge to honour the Covenant and support their Armed Forces community. As a result of this, there have been many examples around the UK of good practice to remove, mitigate against, or prevent, disadvantage occurring. Telford & Wrekin Council signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012 and reaffirmed its commitment in May 2020.
- 3.2 In November 2022, the Armed Forces Act 2021 introduced a legal obligation for local authorities to pay due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of education, housing and healthcare. The three core principles of the Covenant are to have due regard for:
- the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by Armed Forces personnel;
 - the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people¹ from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces; and
 - the principle that special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.

The Armed Forces Presence in Telford

- 3.3 The Armed Forces Covenant states that the Armed Forces community includes regular personnel, Reservists, veterans, UK merchant seafaring veterans, their families and the immediate family of Service personnel and veterans who have died, whether or not that death had any connection with their Service. Across the borough, there are no active regular military bases however, we do border RAF Cosford and RAF Shawbury and there are various Reserve and Cadet Units etc. – these are set out below. As at 1st April 2022, there were 190 Serving personnel living in Telford & Wrekin: 40 Officers and 150 Other Ranks.

RESERVE UNITS

Unit	Address
D (Shropshire Yeomanry) Squadron, The Royal Yeomanry	Army Reserve Centre, Bridgeman House, Cavan Drive, Dawley Bank, TF4 2BQ.

¹ The Act defines ‘Service people’ as: members of the regular forces and the Reserve forces; members of British overseas territory forces who are subject to Service law; former members of any of His Majesty’s Forces who are ordinarily resident in the UK; and relevant members of those above.

123 (Telford) Supply Squadron, Royal Logistics Corps	Army Reserve Centre, Territorial House, Trench Road, Trench, TF2 7DX
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CADET UNITS

Sea Cadets – Training Ship Wrekin – Telford Unit	Wellington Road, Donnington, TF2 8AW.
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Shropshire Army Cadet Force (ACF)

Broseley	Cadet Centre, Legges Hill, Broseley Wood, Broseley, TF12 5RD.
No. 83 (St Georges) Squadron	Army Reserve Centre, Territorial House, Trench Road, Trench, TF2 7DX.
No. 1130 (Telford & Wrekin) Squadron	King Street, Wellington, Telford, TF1 1NX.
No. 2379 (Dawley) Squadron	Army Reserve Centre, Territorial House, Trench Road, Trench, TF2 7DX.

Combined Cadet Force

Haberdasher's Adams	High Street, Newport, TF10 7BD.
Wrekin College	Wellington, Telford, TF1 3BH.

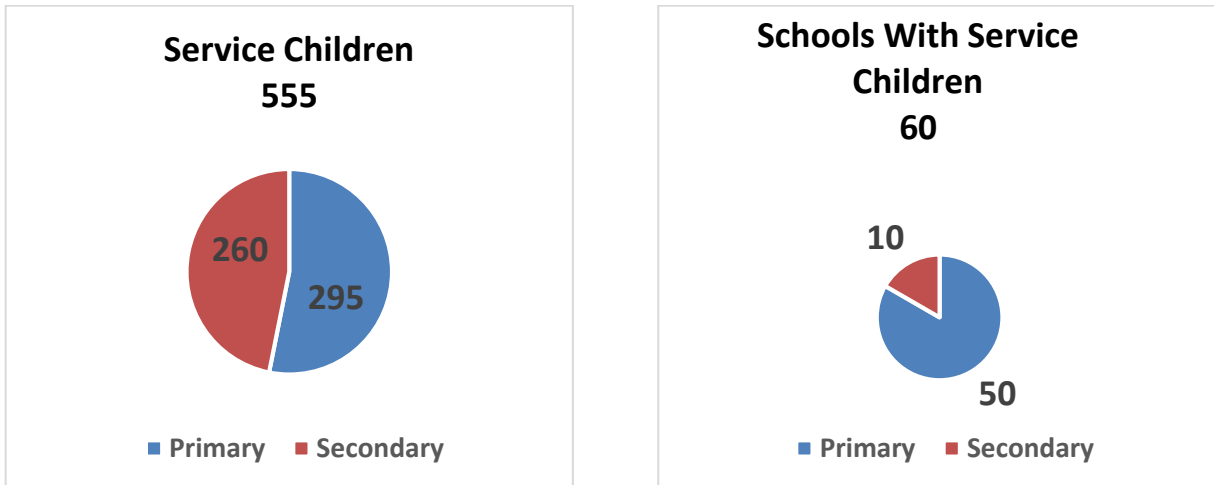
Veterans

- 3.4 The 2021 Census was the first Census to include questions around whether individuals had previously Served in the Armed Forces. At the time of the Census, Telford & Wrekin was home to **8,066** veterans (**5.4%** of usual residents aged 16 and over). This compared to **3.8%** for England and **3.5%** for the West Midlands region. The proportion of the borough's population who had Served in the UK Armed Forces was the third highest in the West Midlands region, behind Herefordshire (**6.1%**) and Shropshire (**5.5%**), and was the 22nd highest of England upper tier local authorities. Muxton & Lilleshall had the greatest proportion of the resident population aged 16 years and over who had previously Served in the UK Armed Forces with **6.3%** of residents. Malinslee MSOA had the smallest proportion with **4.3%** of residents having previously Served.

Armed Forces Families

- 3.5 There are no accurate figures for the number of immediate family members living within the borough however, the estimation is 16,000 to 20,000. According to the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP), there are a total of 555 Service children in the borough with 60 schools having at least one child in attendance whose parent/carer is currently Serving as a regular member of the Armed Forces. Schools receive £335 each year- a Service Pupil Premium (SPP) per Service child

to provide additional support in recognition of the impact of mobility and deployment on their lives – which is a total of £185,925 across the borough. The amount of SPP paid to schools each September is calculated from the number of children registered as Service pupils in the Spring School Census. Parents must notify schools if they wish to identify their child as a Service child to enable the school to claim the Premium. Further information on Service children can be found on the SCiP [Map](#).



4.0 Summary of Progress

Core Infrastructure

- 4.1 There is a strong infrastructure in place to ensure that the Council is meeting its commitments to the Covenant and also, the requirements of the new Covenant Duty. This infrastructure includes an active, and outward facing, Strategic Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board (SAFCPB), which is made up of approximately thirty partners including Armed Forces and non-Armed Forces charities, the NHS, DWP and the private sector. The Board, which is chaired by the Armed Forces Champion and attended by the Cabinet Member with Portfolio responsibility for the Armed Forces Covenant, meets quarterly and provides strategic leadership to improve local delivery of our commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and also, acts as a mechanism for collaboration with our partners.
- 4.2 In 2021, a significant investment was made in the appointment of an Armed Forces Covenant Co-ordinator (AFCC) who acts both on a strategic level advising subject leads on all matters related to the Covenant whilst also handling referrals from our Armed Forces community. In the last twelve months, we have seen a **270%** increase in the number of complex referrals, partly due to the cost of living crisis but also as a result of our successful Outreach programme (more information below). The definition of ‘complex’ is defined as an individual having two or more support needs which often requires a multi-agency approach. The Council also has just completed the recruitment process for a new Armed Forces Outreach Worker (AFOW) – this is fixed term funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund – who will work alongside the AFCC to expand our Armed Forces Outreach service further into the community including at our GP Practices,

community events and local hospital. Further details of our core infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant are at Table 1:

Table 1: Core Infrastructure in Place to Deliver Our Commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant

Individuals	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Raj Mehta – Cabinet responsibility for the Armed Forces Covenant. • Cllr Chris Turley – Armed Forces Champion. • Dean Sargeant – Chair of the Armed Forces Staff Network. • Cindy Mason-Morris – Armed Forces Covenant Co-ordinator. • TBC Armed Forces Out-reach worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outward facing Strategic Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board. • Member of the Shropshire Armed Forces Operations Group which supports members of the Armed Forces to access services and support that is best suited to their needs through a collaborative approach. • Armed Forces Staff Network
Communication	Vision & Commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated webpages providing key information and links for our Armed Forces community. • An Enquiry Form link on our website which forwards any enquiries/requests for support directly to the Armed Forces Covenant mailbox. • A Telford & Wrekin Armed Forces Community Facebook Group. • Training for all frontline staff on the Armed Forces Covenant. • Regular briefings, by the AFCC, to staff and external partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In July 2023, the Cabinet approved recommendations that the Council treats Armed Forces service in the same way as protected characteristics contained in the Equality Act 2010 as part of our obligation to reduce, limit and remove disadvantage to our Armed Forces community. • Regular policy reviews. • Enthusiasm and commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of our Armed Forces community.

4.3 Having delivered a first event in 2019, the Council now hold an annual Armed Forces Day celebration event for Armed Forces’ families and local residents supporting and recognising the contribution of our Armed Forces community. The event includes lots of family entertainment and activities, representation from the Armed Forces and Armed Forces charities as well as promoting multi agency support e.g. recruitment, Armed Forces Covenant outreach and wellbeing services. Each year, a very popular full-day Veterans’ Café, is delivered by Telford Mind and the Armed Forces Covenant Co-ordinator and the number of veterans, seeking support, increases year on year.

- 4.4 The first meeting of the council's Armed Forces Staff Network, chaired by Director Neighbourhood & Enforcement, took place in March 2023 with membership open to veterans, Reservists, Cadet Volunteers, family members and staff who had an interest in championing awareness of equality for our Armed Forces community and acting as an ally. The overarching aim of the Staff Network is to positively support and influence the future of our employees, our communities and our local businesses and organisations to make a real difference with regards to our commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and equality and diversity. The Network has an agreed Terms of Reference, with good attendance and a recent Task & Finish Group has been established with the aim of further supporting Armed Forces' spouses both within the workplace and community.

Armed Forces' Outreach

- 4.5 Our Armed Forces Outreach provision is designed to provide help and support to all our Serving personnel, veterans and their families and we work closely with Services charities and other organisations such as Age UK, Citizens Advice and Telford Mind. One of our most recent, and significant successes, has been the launch of the Veterans' Cafes which provide an opportunity to offer an early intervention service to those who are experiencing poor emotional wellbeing and mental health. The Cafes, which meet twice a month in Dawley and once a month in Madeley, are delivered by Telford Mind, and are available on a drop-in basis and to date, there have been around 400 attendees. The aim is to fill the void caused by isolation and detachment after Service and also provide a platform for social interaction and camaraderie. The Cafes are positively changing the lives of veterans and family members and attendance numbers continue to grow. Some testimonials are provided below.

"Really good way of meeting new friends, also for those who are lonely. Mind do a really good job and the meetings are helpful to those who need help and can put them in the contact with other associations who can assist. Especially with the Royal British Legion and others within the military community (Veterans). A really friendly team and we always look forward to the meetings". **VETERAN A.**

"Due to my ongoing anxiety and depression issues, I tried to kill myself at Xmas and Mind stepped in with social prescriber from the medical practice. Hence more social isolation. Visiting the Veterans café in Dawley, has helped me "survive" shall we say. Now life is not what it was. My wife is an alcoholic and both my adult sons are still at home which is worrying to me. Thank you". **VETERAN B.**

- 4.6 There remains a reluctance from our Armed Forces community to ask for help. The Armed Forces have a strong culture of looking after their own, borne out of the nature of Service and reinforced by values and standards which expect selfless commitment and loyalty in relation to the team. Living and working closely together can blur boundaries between personal and professional life. In this environment, identifying issues and/or asking for help can have wider reaching implications. This reinforces a reluctance to ask for help that can often extend into civilian life post-Service and can result in unnecessary escalation of issues and, in some instances, avoidable tragedy. To this end, over the last twelve months, we

have broadened our Outreach activities through partnership working, across the borough to reach as many individuals as possible:

- Veterans' Cafes at Dawley and Madeley and soon to launch in Donnington.
- Models for Heroes (M4H) Group meets the first and third Tuesday afternoon of each month at Leegomery – the room hire is funded by the Councillors' Pride Fund. M4H supports former and current members of the Armed Forces & Emergency Service by promoting the use of model making as a therapeutic and meaningful activity.
- Veterans' & Spouses' Craft & Sewing Group meets monthly at Strickland House.
- Veterans Football Club meets every Wednesday evening at AFC Telford United and is delivered by Allsports Coaches Coaching Academy (ACCA).
- Two weekly Tab & Talk Sessions for veterans and family members – delivered by ACCA.

4.7 In addition to the above, since April 2019, and under the Leisure Concession Scheme, Serving Armed Forces personnel and veterans are entitled to a discounted rate of £1 for a swim during public sessions (unless covered by a free swimming initiative) and at least, 40% off non-instructed activities and at least, 15% off instructed activities and membership. Various additional offers for our Armed Forces community are also made available over the Armed Forces weekend including discounted family ice skating and free family sessions.

4.8 The Telford Veterans' Trail was developed from an initial idea first suggested by a local veteran in 2018 and was opened by HM the Queen Consort in 2023 having been developed in partnership with Telford & Wrekin Council and their contractors: Balfour Beatty and IdVerde. The Trail creates a dedicated space to celebrate, remember and recognise our local Armed Forces' veterans through the laying of dedication plaques. Veterans, Serving personnel and their loved ones can create a last tribute for Service to their country.

Advocacy

4.9 In 2020, the Council received the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS) Gold Award demonstrating that the Council is an exemplar employer advocating support to defence people issues, to partner organisations and customers. The Award also formally recognised the Council's continued support to our Armed Forces community. More recently, the Ministry of Defence stated:

"Telford & Wrekin Council have got it cracked! They have reached a position where advocacy has become part of their DNA, not only through supply chain advocacy but also mentoring as they are supporting Great Dawley Town Council to develop their advocacy and also mentoring Telford Mind to the DERS Silver Award. That is truly exemplar behaviour!"

4.10 A key focus of our Armed Forces Covenant commitment is to support local businesses and organisations to also sign up in support of our Armed Forces community. To date, **126** organisations, across Telford & Wrekin have signed – **45**

of these signatories have taken place in the last 12 months. Amongst 27 Town & Parish Councils, a total of 26 have also signed the Covenant. We are constantly receiving feedback about how these organisations have benefited greatly from being able to build a reputation as being Forces-friendly – at a time when public support for our Armed Forces is at an all-time high.

- 4.11 Earlier this year, we supported Great Dawley Town Council in launching the UK's first Armed Forces Friendly High Street following a mass Covenant Signing Event when all the High Street shops signed up to support their local Armed Forces community. The shops all have stickers in their windows saying that they are Armed Forces friendly and further work is ongoing to identify where they are able to offer discounts to this community. This initiative is now being rolled out across the borough.

5.0 Moving Forward

- 5.1 Building on lessons learnt from our previous and ongoing projects - pilot of Veteran Hubs, Veterans' Cafes and Armed Forces Outreach Worker - we have a wealth of knowledge and an opportunity to reach our Armed Forces community in a different way. The Council will continue to support Service personnel through these services and with demonstrable positive outcomes such as mental health support and improved social interaction.
- 5.2 However, the percentage of our Armed Forces community that require assistance (often urgent assistance at times) is increasing and, moving forward, we are working with Communities, Customer and Commercial Services to recruit veteran volunteers to enable us to reach even greater numbers. This will provide the opportunity to build on established links with other organisations who support veterans and to attend venues where veterans already meet. We have identified with our local hospital that there is an urgent requirement to have an Armed Forces Outreach Service within the Hospital to support inpatients and to work with staff to ensure a safe discharge into the community. In turn, these volunteer roles for our veterans will greatly assist with their mental health & wellbeing.
- 5.3 We have recently applied for a £15K grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to employ a Veterans' Volunteer Co-ordinator to work alongside the Armed Forces Covenant Co-ordinator and Armed Forces Outreach Worker and they will play a key role in delivering a customer focussed and responsive provision at locations where we have identified the greatest needs exists e.g. where our largest cohorts of veterans and family members exist. The grant will also cover the cost of laptops, phones and travel expenses for the volunteers. At the time of the 2021 Census, 45.1% of our veterans were aged 65+ years and we regularly receive referrals from residential homes for veterans who have become isolated etc.
- 5.4 We will initially recruit a team of 12 volunteers, from our veteran community, who will bring first-hand knowledge, understanding of & empathy with the needs of our Armed Forces community. These volunteers will be passionate about supporting other veterans who may require company and support. The Co-ordinator will raise public awareness of both the need for, and the role of, volunteering whilst promoting the Outreach Service, its volunteer efforts and its accomplishments.

The volunteers will work with those leaving the Armed Forces, veterans, Reservists and their families to provide support, advice and signposting.

- 5.5 We will continue to expand the scope of the veteran cafés run by Mind where funding is secured. We are currently working with ward Councillors for Donnington to secure funding for new locations in that ward.

6.0 Alternative Options

- 6.1 The Council could chose not to implement the service developments described in this report. However, this will increase unmet need within the Armed Forces community and potentially increase demand on acute services of both the Council and its partners.

7.0 Key Risks

- 7.1 It is essential that the Council continues to develop its approach to support the Armed Forces community. Without this development, it is apparent those that most require it will not receive the support they require.

8.0 Council Priorities

- 8.1 The proposals set out in this report supports the following Council priority:
- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community
 - All neighbourhoods are a great place to live

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The Armed Forces Covenant Co-Ordinator is funded from base budget with the Outreach Worker being funded from a one off grant of £18k. There is also one off funding of £22k available to support the Calm Cafes being run across the borough. As detailed in paragraph 4.9 the grant bid of £15k, if successful, will need to meet the costs of the Veteran's Volunteer Co-Ordinator as well as costs associated with the volunteers. Support provided to the Armed Forces community will need to be met from within existing resources available to the Council.

10.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 10.1 To improve accessibility for current Armed Forces personnel, veterans, Reservists and their families, the Armed Forces Act 2021 was introduced. The Act places a legal responsibility on bodies such as local authorities to pay due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant Duty when exercising certain statutory functions. This involves recognising and understanding the obligations and sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces, the removal or reduction of barriers and inequalities they may face and consideration of specialised provision in order to ensure equitable and inclusive services.
- 10.2 The proposals contained in this report, together with the decision to treat Armed Forces personnel in the same way as those with protected characteristics under

the Equality Act 2010, complies with the Council's legal duty contained in the Act to reduce inequalities faced by the armed forces community.

11.0 Ward Implications

11.1 The proposed developments set out in this report will have positive impact for the armed forces community across the borough.

12.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

12.1 The proposed approach to supporting the borough's Armed Forces community aims to:

- support the mental wellbeing of veterans and their families;
- ensure that barriers to services by the families of those currently Serving or veterans and their families are removed.

13.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

13.1 The proposed approach in this report is focussed on addressing the barriers faced by the Armed Forces community playing their full role in society. In addition to this report, this commitment is articulated in the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 to 2026.

14.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

14.1 There are no direct climate change and environmental implications from this report

15.0 Background Papers

15.1 None

16.0 Appendices

16.1 None

17.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	18/09/2023	18/09/2023	ACL
Finance	18/09/2023	18/09/2023	MLB