



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

5 December 2024

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
Report Author:	Jon Power – Policy, Insight, Partnerships & Elections Service Delivery Manager
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	SMT – 5 November 2024 Business Briefing – 21 November 2024 Cabinet – 5 December 2024

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;
- 1.2 Endorses the proposed restructure of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board; and,
- 1.3 Approves the £10,000 funding for the Armed Forces community cafes for the next two years.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide an update on the work to meet the Council's commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and in support of our Armed Forces community during 2023-2024.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge that acknowledges and understands that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society that they serve. 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 their functions in respect of education, housing and healthcare.
- 3.2 Telford & Wrekin Council signed one of the first Armed Forces Community Covenants (as it was then known) in the UK in 2012 and since this date, significant progress has been made in the delivery of our commitments to the Covenant. There is currently a strong infrastructure in place including an outward facing Strategic Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board (SAFCPB), which is made up of approximately sixty partners (this has doubled in the last twelve months) including Armed Forces and non-Armed Forces charities, the NHS, DWP and the private sector.

Summary of Progress

- 4.1 In 2021, a significant investment was made by the Council in the appointment of an Armed Forces Partnership Officer (AFPO) 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. This has led to a significant year on year increase of complex referrals that we receive primarily from our Adult Social Care Practitioners, partner organisations and Borough Councillors. The definition of 'complex' is defined as an individual having two or more support needs which often requires a multi-agency approach.
- 4.2 Having delivered a first event in 2019, the Council continues to 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. This year's event was held on the Sunday of Armed Forces Week, in June, and included family entertainment and activities, representation from the Armed Forces and Armed Forces charities as well as the promotion of multi-agency support e.g. recruitment, Armed Forces Covenant outreach and wellbeing services.
- 4.3 Our Armed Forces Staff Network, which was established in 2023, is chaired by the Director: Prosperity & Investment, continues to meet regularly and membership now stands at twenty employees. The Network is open to veterans, Reservists, Cadet Volunteers, family members and staff who have 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 making a real difference with regards to our commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and equality and diversity. At a recent meeting, the Network agreed to invite employees from within our educational establishments as

we are aware of a significant number of spouses and veterans working within our schools.

Armed Forces' Outreach

- 4.4 In 2023, the Council employed a fixed-term Armed Forces Outreach Worker which was funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund (AFCTF) however, the grant expired on the 30th October 2024. In July 2024, we employed an Armed Forces Volunteer Co-ordinator (fixed term for 12 months and funded by the AFCTF) who will manage a team of volunteers (from our Armed Forces community) bringing first-hand knowledge, understanding of, and empathy to, the needs of this community.
- 4.5 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 continued to broaden our outreach activities through closer multi-agency partnership working, across the borough, to reach as many individuals as possible:
- Bake & Banter Sessions are meeting weekly from the 5th October to the 14th December 2024 at the Telford Interfaith Council.
 - Models for Heroes (M4H) Group meets the 1st & 3rd 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 the 2nd & 4th Friday afternoon of each month at Strickland House in Wellington.
 - Armed Forces Community Art Lessons, for six weeks, launched on the 14th November 2024 at the Hub, Donnington.
 - An Armed Forces Community Drop-In Session, on the 1st Thursday of each month, at the Sambrook Centre in Stirchley.
- 4.6 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 our Town & Parish Councils, Age UK, Citizens Advice and Telford Mind. One of our most recent, and significant, successes has been the introduction of Veterans' Cafes, delivered by Telford Mind, and supported by Great Dawley Town Council, Madeley Town Council and Donnington & Muxton Parish Council. These Cafés meet twice a month in Dawley and once a month in Madeley and Donnington. The Cafes are available on a drop-in basis and to date, there have been over 1,000 attendances.
- 4.7 The aim of these Cafes is to fill the void caused by isolation and detachment after service and also to provide a platform for social interaction and camaraderie. The

Cafes are positively changing the lives of veterans and family members with attendance numbers continuing to grow in Dawley and Donnington. Attendance numbers, however, remain low in Madeley.

4.8 Recent feedback received about the Cafes includes:

“I felt isolated before coming here. Now I have met like-minded people and made new friends”.

“It’s like another family. We all have something in common”.

“Helpful information about other services and activities for veterans”.

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, which also formally recognised the Council’s continued support to our Armed Forces community, is granted for a five year period and so expires in 2025 with work ongoing, through the Armed Forces Staff Network, to ensure a successful renewal.

4.10 A key focus of our Armed Forces Covenant commitment is to support local businesses and organisations to sign up in support of our Armed Forces community. To date, and since 2011, **151** organisations, across Telford & Wrekin have signed – **35** 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. It should be noted that these figures do not include organisations that serve our residents but have their Headquarters outside of the borough e.g. Shropshire Fire Service, Shrewsbury & Telford Hospitals Trust (SaTH) etc.

5.0 Moving Forward

Armed Forces Community Hub

5.1 It has become apparent that, across the borough, we are creating a network in which our veterans, and their families, can share their experiences and not only access support but also offer it to others. Real friendships continue to be formed and individuals, for example, are offering lifts to others not just to the events but also to hospital appointments etc. Not only have we managed to tap into a wealth of experience on the part of those involved but also, camaraderie, which is vital to the health and wellbeing of this community. This is thanks, in no small part, to the support that we are receiving from our partners, Borough Councillors and Town & Parish Councils.

5.2 To maintain this success, it is proposed that the borough, and our Armed Forces community, would benefit greatly from having an accessible, and multi-purpose, Armed Forces Community Hub offering a safe environment with a single point of focus for Armed Forces personnel, service leavers, veterans and their

families/dependents. This would be the next phase in the evolution of support to our Armed Forces community whilst ensuring its sustainability. The Hub would provide timely, ongoing and appropriate support/signposting using a multi-disciplined approach of joined up working whilst promoting high levels of engagement, increased confidence, resilience and well-being and the facilitation of skills transfer back into the community.

5.3 The Hub will focus on working with veterans to stabilise their lives where this is needed and support them back into work (where appropriate) resulting in real job outcomes and improving their quality of life. The Hub will also provide quicker referral routes/access to specialist services including Veterans UK, SSAFA, the NHS Veterans' Mental Health Services, Combat Stress and the Veteran's Gateway. Assistance with claims to DWP Benefits, Homelessness/Housing Advice, Drug and Alcohol Services, War Pensions and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme will be available. A wrap-around service in a single location will result in less travel, less form filling, less referral appointments and a truly in-depth service that meets most of the client's needs.

5.4 Key features and benefits of the Hub will include:

- An easily accessible location in the heart of the community.
- A partnership approach. Working together with military services and charities will result in a person-centred approach with bespoke support from charities and organisations ensuring that their services are not duplicated.
- A social space where clients can attend various activities and meet other like-minded individuals resulting in reduced isolation and increased integration with their peers.
- A community focused local service with local connections and opportunities and a defined objective of transferring veteran's and service leaver's skills back into the community e.g. employment, volunteering or other meaningful occupation.
- Access to advice and information surgeries. A safe and non-judgemental environment which instils a feeling of trust regardless of background and where veterans are happy to engage.

5.5 The concept of a Veterans' Hub is a hugely successful one that has been evolving at least since the Falklands Conflict and has gained momentum since the UK's involvement in the Middle East and during the decades since. The Association of Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC) represents and links Veterans' Drop-Ins across the UK and they refer to this as a "movement led largely by veterans for veterans". Successful examples, to date, include the Herefordshire Veterans Support Centre, the Wigan Armed Forces Community HQ and the Pontefract 5 Towns Veterans Support Hub CIC.

5.6 The successful establishment of the Hub will be achieved by working together with our residents, Armed Forces Covenant partners and other valued organisations to collectively deliver the best that we can for our Armed Forces community truly demonstrating the Co-operative values that provide the framework for how we work as a Council. It is, therefore, proposed that the Hub will be delivered through the formation of a Community Interest Community (CIC) or through partnership with an existing CIC or registered charity. A newly formed

CIC will be governed by a board of Trustees including our existing Armed Forces Covenant partners.

- 5.7 Funding will be provided from both public donations and grants from existing organisations such as the Veterans Foundation which has established a substantial grants programme to support registered charities and other not-for profit organisations in providing assistance to those in need among Serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans, and their immediate families. The Foundation gives priority to charities and organisations who can demonstrate that they are directly involved in the provision of support to the Armed Forces community. Grants of up to a maximum of £30,000 are available for one year or a multi-year grant for up to three years (e.g., £10,000 per year over three years). Furthermore, grants of up to a maximum of £75,000 are available for the exclusive use of salary costs over a three-year period, with the maximum annual grant being £25,000 (e.g., £25,000 per year over three years).
- 5.8 Following agreement in principle for the establishment of an Armed Forces Community Hub, a comprehensive consultation exercise will be conducted with our Armed Forces community through face-to-face events and an online survey. The aim of the consultation will be to further identify an understanding of veterans, their identities and needs and the value they bring. We will also seek to gather information on existing services whilst evaluating their effectiveness to ensure a holistic approach through partnership working.

Restructure of the Strategic Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board

- 5.9 The Telford & Wrekin Strategic Armed Forces Partnership Board, since it was formed in 2017, has achieved a considerable amount for our Armed Forces community including an extensive Armed Forces Outreach & Support programme. The Partnership has also overseen the production of the first Telford & Wrekin Joint Armed Forces Strategic Needs Assessment, the establishment of a dedicated Armed Forces Partnership Team at Telford & Wrekin Council and a significant increase of local Covenant signatories including working with local GP Practices to support them in becoming Veteran Friendly Accredited through the Royal College of General Practitioner Scheme.
- 5.10 The Partnership Board has continued to increase in numbers and now stands at sixty plus and, with the introduction of the recent Armed Forces Act, this would appear to be an opportune time to restructure the existing Partnership Board structure. The attached draft Proposal, at Appendix A, aims to continue the momentum that has been achieved whilst also ensuring an appropriate scrutiny and core infrastructure is in place which will be able to adapt to the needs of our Armed Forces community. The draft Proposal has allocated existing and new partners to different Delivery Boards/Groups and full consultation is taking place with Partners. To date, responses from Board members have been fully in favour of the proposals and understand the need for the changes.

Relaunch of the Veterans' Café

- 5.11 Since the launch of the Veterans' Cafes (initially known as Calm Cafes for Veterans) in January 2022, they have continued to grow from strength to strength attracting Service personnel, veterans and family members in both Dawley and

Donnington. However, the number of veterans attending the monthly Café at Madeley remains quite low despite support from Madeley Town Council and the Borough Councillors. It is therefore proposed that an alternative Armed Forces Outreach support is offered through regular attendance at the Live Well Hub which meets weekly at the Madeley Library inside the Anstice. This will enable us, through partnership working, to better support our Armed Forces community whilst also finding a stronger sense of connection across the ward.

- 5.12 Currently, the Veterans' Cafes are funded through one-off funding that was approved by Cabinet in March 2022 for a two year period. The costs associated with delivery of the Cafes have been more conservative than originally anticipated and so there are some funds remaining. It is expected that this will enable the ongoing funding of the Veterans' Cafes until March 2025. Approval is sought for additional funding of £10,000 over a two year period to enable the ongoing delivery of the Cafes. The average cost of holding one Café event is £150. Taking this approach, the provision of one-off funding will enable work on the delivery of the Hub mentioned at para 5.1 to 5.8 above to take place before undertaking a wholesale review of our Armed Forces offer across the Borough.

6.0 Alternative Options

- 6.1 The Council could choose not to approve the proposals 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 Without the funding and proposals set out within this report, the Council cannot maintain its current service provision to the Armed Forces Community or meet future need if our ambition to deliver an Armed Forces Community Hub is not developed.

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
 - Everyone benefits from a thriving economy

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The Armed Forces volunteer co-ordinator post will be funded from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund (AFCTF). The additional funding of £10k recommended in this report will be met from one offs.

10.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 10.1 Under the Armed Forces Act 2021, the Council has a legal duty to ensure that it considers armed forces service when delivering some of its statutory functions. Whilst not directly related to the provisions of the Armed Forces Act, the proposals

contained in this report provide an innovative way to address and discharge some of those duties.

10.2 Advice will be provided on an ongoing basis in respect of the proposals contained in this report and specific legal implications relating to the individual proposals will be provided at the appropriate time.

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 and the Council's commitment to treat military service as a protected characteristic.

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 Appendix A: Draft Proposal for the New Telford & Wrekin Armed Forces Covenant Delivery Structure.

17.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	29/10/2024	29/10/2024	RP
Finance	29/10/2024	31/10/2024	AEM

TELFORD & WREKIN ARMED FORCES COVENANT
DELIVERY STRUCTURE- DRAFT PROPOSAL

Strategic Armed Forces Covenant Delivery Board (SAFCDB)

The purpose of the SAFCDB will be to give strategic direction to the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across Telford & Wrekin. The Board will meet quarterly and receive updates from the sub-groups. The Board will be responsible for delivering, and monitoring, an Action Plan which will build on the work that has already taken place and set clear actions for the collaborative delivery of services to support our Armed Forces community and fulfil our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. The Board will further produce an annual report to Telford & Wrekin Council's Cabinet and Senior Management Team.

CHAIR: T&WC Armed Forces Champion (elected member)	West Midlands Reserve Forces & Cadets Association Regional Employment Engagement Director
T&WC Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Armed Forces Covenant	Army Centre HQ – SO2 at Venning Barracks, Donnington.
T&WC Policy & Development Manager	T&WC Housing
Telford Mind	T&WC Education
Royal British Legion	Defence Transition Service
SSAFA	Age UK
WM Police	DWP
Shrewsbury & Telford Health Trust	Wrekin Housing Group
<i>NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board*</i>	T&WC Armed Forces Partnership Officer

Partnership Group

The Partnership Group will be made up of valued organisations and local businesses that have signed the Armed Forces Covenant. The Group will be responsible for delivering and monitoring a range of programmes that support our Armed Forces community. Meetings will be held twice a year where attendees will have the opportunity to share ideas and network. Membership will be sufficiently flexible to enable further interested parties to attend on an ad hoc basis.

<i>Service Family Federations*</i>	YSS
<i>Representative from the High Sherriff Office*</i>	TACT/Branches
<i>Representative from the Shropshire Lord Lieutenant Office*</i>	Telford Interfaith Council
<i>Shropshire Fire & Rescue*</i>	KiP/Stay
Samaritans	Combat Stress
Citizens Advice	Walking With The Wounded
<i>RAF Association*</i>	Red Cross
Allsports Coaches Coaching Academy	Forces Employment Charity
<i>Shropshire Association of Local Councils*</i>	Pertemps
Telford & Wrekin CVS	RBSL
Citizens Advice	Central HIVE (Army)
Shropshire Chamber of Commerce	Home Instead
HIVE RAF Cosford	Help for Heroes
<i>Existing Covenant signatories across the borough*</i>	<i>Telford College*</i>
Lanyon Bowdler	Home Instead
Wolverhampton University	Energize STW
Fodens Solicitors	T&WC Armed Forces Partnership Officer

Armed Forces Outreach Steering Group

The Outreach Steering Group will develop and progress the delivery of the Telford & Wrekin Armed Forces Outreach programme. The Group will meet quarterly/twice a year, to be decided by attendees, and will also oversee the delivery of the Telford & Wrekin Armed Forces & Veterans Forum which will meet quarterly around the borough to seek the views of our Armed Forces community etc.

Telford Mind	Leegomery Community Centre
Great Dawley Town Council	Armed Forces Outreach Project Volunteers
Madeley Town Council	T&WC Volunteer Co-ordinator
Donnington & Muxton Parish Council	T&WC Armed Forces Partnership Officer
Allsports Coaches Coaching Academy	Independent Living Centre
Smallwoods	Newport Navy Club
Newport Town Council	Oakengates Town Council
Telford & Wrekin Breakfast Clubs	