



Borough of Telford and Wrekin
Cabinet 6 January 2026
Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Paul Davis – Cabinet Member: Communities & Civic Pride
Lead Director:	Anthea Lowe - Director: Policy & Governance
Service Area:	Policy & Governance
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	SMT – 2/12/2025 Business Briefing - 11/12/2025

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- 1.1 Notes the progress made in delivering the Council's "offer" to the borough's Armed Forces community and particularly, the opening of the Christopher Turley Armed Forces Community Hub; and
- 1.2 Approves £55,000 funding to drive and enhance the Council's armed forces covenant offer.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The Council has made a clear, sustained, commitment to support the Borough's armed forces community. This report provides an update on the work undertaken during 2025/26 to:-
 - Support our Armed Forces community within the Borough;
 - Meet the Council's commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant; and

- Further develop the offer made by Telford & Wrekin Council, and partners, to support our Armed Forces Community and those with an armed forces connection.

3.0 Background

3.1 In 2012, as part of its early commitment to our Armed Forces Community, Telford & Wrekin Council was one of the first in the UK to sign the Armed Forces Community Covenants (as it was then known). Since then, significant progress has been made in the delivery of our commitments to the Covenant. Through the development of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership, and that work that it undertakes, a total of 163 organisations and businesses within the Borough have signed the Covenant. Numbers of signatories are reported at a county-level and, the geographical county of Shropshire has one of the highest numbers within the West Midlands region.

3.2 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. The Council has gone further and has committed to supporting the Armed Forces Community in the widest sense. This comprises:-

- Serving personnel;
- Veterans;
- Reservists;
- Cadet Forces; and
- Family members of all of the above.

Summary of Progress

3.3 In 2021, a significant investment was made by the Council in the appointment of an Armed Forces Partnership Officer 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.

3.4 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. At present, the Armed Forces Outreach programme exceeds 55 hours each month (excluding any activities or opening hours at the new Hub) and includes, amongst other things:-

- Armed Forces Community Cafes – these are funded by Telford & Wrekin Council who commission Telford Mind to deliver them. They are also supported by some of the Town & Parish Councils – meet the 1st & 3rd Wednesday of each month in **Donnington** and the 2nd & 4th Monday of each month in **Dawley**.
- Models for Heroes (M4H) – the room hire is funded by the Telford & Wrekin Councillors' Pride Fund or by the relevant Parish Council – meet the 1st & 3rd Tuesday in **Leegomery**, the 2nd & 4th Tuesday in **St. Georges** and the 1st & 3rd Wednesday in **Sutton Hill**. 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. A further M4H is shortly going to open in Wellington library.
- Veterans' & Spouses' Craft & Sewing Group which meets the 2nd & 4th Friday afternoon of each month in **Donnington**.
- Armed Forces Community Art Lessons take place each Thursday in **Donnington**.
- The following Armed Forces Drop-In Sessions meet monthly:
 - **Stirchley** – 1st Thursday.
 - **Newport Library** – last Wednesday.
 - Priorslee House, **Priorslee** – last Friday.
 - **Lawley Community Hub** – 3rd Friday.
- Armed Forces Community & Ex-Emergency Services Personnel Brunch at the Horsehay Village Golf Club on the last Sunday of each month.

3.5 The following extracts are from two recent testimonials from regular attendees:

1. *"Whilst my disabilities will never go away I now have a purpose in the community, a new set of friends and something to look forward to each week. The Models for Heroes Groups and Art Classes have been positive in embracing what I can do rather than focus on what I can't. Per Ardua.¹"*
2. *"Modelling can be a very isolating hobby. It was for me as I did it in isolation and although I love what it does, for me I was lonely. Sometimes we get involved outside of our modelling activities such as Smallwoods and we had a group day at Cosford which was excellent, we are already planning our next trip out as a group. This of course builds friendship and camaraderie, and I would count all who I have met in these endeavours friends for life.*

I have met some amazing people from within the Council without whose ongoing support in these difficult times, starting these groups would have been impossible. To sum up I would say that Models for Heroes saved my life at a time when I felt quite vulnerable and that it is an honour for me to give something back to the charity."

3.6 Since 2019, the Council has held an annual Armed Forces Day celebration event for Armed Forces' families and residents supporting and recognising the contribution of our Armed Forces community. This year's event, the seventh of its kind, marked the culmination of a week of celebrations when the public were encouraged to show their support and appreciation for our Armed Forces including

¹ The complete phrase, "Per ardua ad astra," is the official motto for the RAF and other Commonwealth Air Forces. It signifies that achieving great things is possible through hard work and overcoming adversity.

local Cadet Units who take part. The Event is delivered with input and attendance from all our local and national Armed Forces Charities, signatories to the Covenant and Defence Industry partners. This year's attendance was around 5,000 people and it was widely supported by partners and residents.

3.7 To recognise their conspicuous and dedicated service to the Borough, at a special meeting of Telford & Wrekin Council on Thursday 15 May, councillors voted unanimously to recognise D (Shropshire Yeomanry) Squadron, who are based at the Army Reserve Centre in Dawley, with Freedom of the Borough.



Shropshire Yeomanry receiving the Freedom of the Borough

The Christopher Turley Armed Forces Community Hub

3.8 Following an extensive consultation exercise in January and February 2025, including fifteen face-to-face events across the borough and an online survey, there was a soft launch of the new Christopher Turley Armed Forces Community Hub on the 14th July 2025. This was followed by the official opening on the 24th October 2025. The Hub provides a community space for serving armed forces personnel, veterans and their families, offering tailored support and services in a welcoming environment.



The Chris Turley Armed Forces Hub being officially opened by his son Andy.

3.9 The Hub has been developed in partnership with Great Dawley Town Council and Telford Mind and is currently open from 10AM to 3PM on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Special events are held throughout the year including a very successful Festive Breakfast which took place on Saturday 22nd November 2025. This event was attended by around 100 people and included members of our armed forces community who had not, previously, visited any of the other services provided by the Council or its partners. In developing the Hub's programme other events are already planned for January and February 2026 as well as for Easter. A key focus from January will be the provision of specialist advice from Council and partner services as "drop in sessions" at the Hub. This will include sessions on, for example, education and skills, housing support, and Family Hubs.



The Festive Breakfast

3.10 An application has been made to create a Community Interest Company (CIC) which will provide governance for the Hub going forward with the shadow board now in place. A key next step is to recruit a Hub Manager to take the lead role in further developing the Hub and oversee a programme of events tailored to meet the needs of the armed forces community. Cabinet are asked to approve one-off in-year funding in the sum of £8,750 and to recommend that Full Council approves one-off funding of £35,000 which will be match funded by Great Dawley Town Council for salary and on costs of this role.

3.11 Whilst the initial funding for this post is sought from Telford & Wrekin Council and Great Dawley Town Council, work is underway to bid for funding from a number of national funds so that the CIC becomes self-funded and is sustainable for the long-term.

3.12 In the first quarter of 2026, work will also commence in creating a volunteer programme for the Hub to help deliver a range of activities. Further, we are looking to connect with other similar endeavours from across the country and undertake a joint visit to the National Arboretum later in the year.

Armed Forces Outreach & Referrals

3.13 Since 2023, the Council has employed a fixed-term Armed Forces Outreach Worker initially funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund for 12 months. This post includes responsibility for running the Armed Forces Volunteer Scheme, which consists of a team of eight volunteers (from our Armed Forces community), who bring first-hand knowledge, understanding of, and empathy to, the needs of our serving personnel, veterans and family members. The funding for the Armed Forces Outreach Worker (fifteen hours per week) is due to end mid-June 2026.

3.14 Referrals for our Armed Forces community (approximately, 30+ each month) arrive from a variety of sources including Adult Social Care, the NHS including Op Courage (Veterans' Mental Health Service) and the Shrewsbury & Telford Health Trust, local service providers, schools and, of course via self-referral, often from attendees at our Outreach events or via social media pages. When individuals present in crisis, our referral casework focuses on rapid, co-ordinated support to stabilize the situation and address immediate needs. We work closely with other areas of the Council e.g. Adult Social Care, Telford Crisis Support etc., and trusted partners including mental health services providers and Service charities to ensure timely interventions. Each case is handled with sensitivity and urgency, prioritising safety and wellbeing while maintaining clear communication with the individual and relevant agencies.

3.15 Beyond the immediate response, we place a strong emphasis on long-term recovery and resilience. Members of the Armed Forces community may often go in and out of crisis because their challenges can be influenced by multiple triggers including social isolation, mental health fluctuations, housing instability etc. Because these factors can change over time, an individual who appears stable may later face a new trigger that pushes them back into crisis and it is quite common for support to be required for several years and to be ongoing. For our Armed Forces community, proactive engagement and long-term support are essential – helping veterans build resilience and connections.

3.16 By fostering collaboration between statutory services, charities, and community organisations, we can build a comprehensive support framework that addresses both current challenges and future wellbeing. However, complex cases can take up a considerable amount of resources including staffing hours over an extended period. It is therefore recommended that a budget allocation of £15,000, for all staffing costs, is approved to transition the current fixed-term Armed Forces Outreach Co-ordinator post into a permanent position. Making the post permanent will safeguard the expertise and relationships already established and enhance stability, ensuring that our Armed Forces community receive consistent, high-quality support as part of our commitment under the Armed Forces Covenant. .

3.17 Recently, we have also committed to attending the new Live Well Hubs that meet twice a month in Donnington and to run a fortnightly Outreach Stand at the Princess Royal Hospital. Our Armed Forces Outreach continues to successfully provide help and support to all our Armed Forces community and we work closely with the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Services charities, Telford Mind and other organisations such as our Town & Parish Councils, Age UK and Citizens Advice. Each month, attendance averages at between 200 to 250.

3.18 The Council's Armed Forces Outreach programme goes well beyond the minimum Covenant obligations that many other local authorities deliver. Our events regularly attract veterans etc. from across the whole of the West Midlands. We work closely with, and support, our Veterans' Breakfast Clubs, the Royal British Legion clubs, Newport Navy Club and other Service charities that are operating across the borough. We are able to ensure that seamless support is in place which creates a joined-up system aimed at making sure no individual falls through the cracks. By

removing duplication, and ensuring clear communication between service providers, veterans and their families receive timely, tailored assistance that respects their service and meets their unique needs. This approach not only improves outcomes but also reinforces the Armed Forces Covenant commitment to fair treatment and lasting support.

3.19 At present, there is no ongoing budget allocation for the above Armed Forces Outreach – the exception being the Armed Forces Community Cafes. We are therefore seeking an allocation of £5,000 per annum to strengthen these activities which continue to play a vital role in engaging veterans, reservists and their families across the borough. This budget will enable us to deliver targeted events and partnership initiatives that promote the Armed Forces Covenant and ensure accessible support for those who have served etc. The investment will help build trust, increase engagement, and create lasting connections between the Armed Forces community and local services, ultimately fostering resilience and inclusion and bridging the gap between military and civilian life.

Armed Forces Staff Network

3.20 Our Armed Forces Staff Network, which was established in 2023 and is chaired by the Director: Prosperity & Investment, continues to meet regularly and membership now stands at twenty plus 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.

3.21 During the last twelve months, the Network has played a major role in promoting the recent Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Restorative measures (together with the LGBTQ+ Employee Group) which were introduced in recognition of the impact of historic law prohibiting same-sex sexual activity, and the policy prohibiting LGBT Service personnel from serving in HM Armed Forces. Our Network has also worked collaboratively with the Disability Employee Group to raise awareness of disabilities amongst our veteran residents and employees. The Network also assisted with the revalidation of the Council's Defence Employer Recognition Gold Award.

Advocacy

3.22 A key focus of our Armed Forces Covenant commitment is to support local businesses and organisations in demonstrating their support to our Armed Forces community including signing the Covenant. To date, 165 organisations, across Telford & Wrekin have signed the Covenant – 14 of these signatories have taken place in the last 12 months. We regularly receive 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 have Headquarters outside of the borough e.g. Shropshire Fire Service,

Shrewsbury & Telford Hospitals Trust (SaTH) etc. The MOD have stated that “advocacy for the Covenant is in the DNA of Telford & Wrekin Council”.

3.23 The Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation Scheme supports Practices to deliver the best possible care and treatment for veterans who have served in the UK Armed Forces and their families. The Scheme helps GP practices to identify, code and support their veteran patients, which is important as the healthcare needs of veterans can be different to the general population. Since the launch of the Scheme, we have worked with NHS partners, and directly with GP Practice Managers, and to date, all but three across the borough have gained the accreditation. A recent survey has shown that veterans are far more likely to seek medical help if they know their GP practice is veteran friendly, and we have seen first-hand the benefits to our Armed Forces community.

3.24 The recently launched Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF) is designed for use in residential settings for older people and it supports care providers in identifying veterans and their partners in order to meet their wellbeing needs effectively. The VFF helps to address social isolation amongst veterans, and partners, by creating a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Undertaking the Framework requires care homes to evidence strong links with their local communities including local authorities, Service charities and military organisations etc.

3.25 In July 2025, Priorslee House (HC One) and Hatton Court were the first two care providers, in the borough, to gain accreditation to the Framework. We have worked closely with both homes prior to this date in support of their accreditation and we currently run a monthly Armed Forces Drop-In Session at Priorslee House and Hatton Court regularly bring their veterans to our modelling groups and craft & sewing sessions. In turn, our veterans regularly attend events at both care homes and we have seen strong friendships develop.

Revalidation of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS) Gold Award

3.26 In 2020, the Council was awarded the DERS Gold Award which has to be revalidated every five years. The process for revalidation was significantly different from the original nomination, however, the Council is now in a considerably stronger position in demonstrating that we go above and beyond in supporting those who serve or have served and their families. The Gold Award still remains the highest badge of honour for employers who support the Armed Forces community and uphold the Armed Forces Covenant.

3.27 Areas that required further development to secure the revalidation, and which has been delivered, included:

- The creation and introduction of a new Reserves Mobilisation Framework which sets out the rights and responsibilities of Reservists and their employers when the Reservist is called up for service (mobilisation) and when they return to work e.g. accrual of leave.
- In addition to the West Midlands Jobs Platform, all job vacancies are now advertised on the Forces Families Jobs website and selected vacancies on the Career Transition Partnership website.

- Update and revision of several policies including the Recruitment & Selection Guidance, Reserve Forces Guidance Note and the Equal Opportunities Charter.
- Introduction of a new system on MyView to capture data of existing staff who have an Armed Forces connection.

3.28 The announcement of the revalidation application, and whether or not the Council has been successful, is expected in March/April 2026.

4.0 **Moving Forward**

Extension to the Armed Forces Covenant Duty

4.1 5The Armed Forces Covenant core principles were enshrined in law in the UK through the Armed Forces Act 2011. Since 2022, the legal duty to give due regard to the needs of the Armed Forces community has applied to local authorities, state funded schools and NHS bodies in their delivery of housing, education and healthcare. This Government made a manifesto commitment to implement the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law to strengthen support for the Armed Forces community and renew the contract with those who serve and have served.

4.2 The extended Covenant Legal Duty, to be introduced in 2026, will remain as a duty of due regard to Covenant principles but will increase the scope of those obliged to follow the duty and cover more policy areas. Each policy area covered will also be much broader. The extension of the Legal Duty will encompass all UK Government Departments and Devolved Governments, across the following policy areas: Housing, Education, Healthcare, Social Care, Childcare, Employment & Service in the Armed Forces, Personal Taxation, Welfare Benefits, Criminal Justice, Immigration, Citizenship, Pensions, Transport and Service-Related Compensations.

4.3 The broad approach taken with the new Legal Duty will place the Armed Forces community at the heart of decision making. Ensuring they are woven into the fabric of our policy decisions marking a step closer to delivering the nations promise to ensure the Armed Forces community does not face service-related disadvantage. The MOD is currently working on producing training materials, webinar training sessions, downloadable resources and updated statutory guidance. These will help organisations comply with their legal obligations. Within the Council, we continue to work closely with the MOD, and other local authorities, including highlighting our best practices and successes.

Operation VALOUR

4.4 Operation VALOUR, launched in May 2025, is a UK Government initiative backed by £50 million to create a coordinated national support network for veterans and their families. Its primary goal is to end the fragmented “postcode lottery” of services by establishing VALOUR-recognised centres as one-stop hubs for housing, health, employment, and welfare. The programme will link regional Field

Officers with councils, charities, and service providers, while a central VALOUR HQ will oversee training, quality assurance, and data-driven planning.

4.5 The initial phase, which will run from **2025 to 2028**, will focus on housing, mental health, employment, and welfare support. Future plans include expanding the network to cover the wider Armed Forces community, aligning with the Armed Forces Covenant. By integrating services and using data to identify gaps, VALOUR will aim to deliver consistent, accessible support and measurable improvements in veterans' wellbeing across the UK.

Royal British Legion's Credit Their Service Campaign

4.6 The Royal British Legion's *Credit Their Service* campaign is one which asks public sector organisations to discount any service-based benefits to be disregarded when accessing other benefits that are means-tested.

4.7 Whilst the Council already disregards the majority of service-related benefits where permitted, it is recognised that more can be done in relation to Service Invaliding Pension (SIP) – this is paid when an individual is retired from the military on the grounds of ill-health or injury but where that injury or illness has not been as a result of their service. Therefore, the Council intends to consult on a proposal that, for the purpose of council Tax support, the SIP should also be disregarded.

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 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.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 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.

7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 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

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 The costs associated with the Armed Forces Outreach Co-ordinator and Armed Forces Hub Manager would need to be considered within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as there is no budget provision in 2025/26. These costs

total £55k and if approved by Cabinet will be built into the MTFS for 2026/27 to 2029/30 to be approved by Full Council on 26 February 2026. There is a small commitment for the Armed Forces Hub Manager in 2025/26 of £8.75k that would need to be met from existing resources.

8.2 Other cost implications included in the report such as the Community Cafes and West Midlands Jobs Platform are funded from existing budgets.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

9.1 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.

9.2 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.

10.0 Ward Implications

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

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1 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.

Equality and Diversity Implications

11.2 The proposed approach in this report is focussed on addressing the barriers faced by the Armed Forces community playing their full role in society. The commitment to do so 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.

12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

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

13.0 15.0 Background Papers

13.1 None.

14.0 16.0 Appendices

14.1 None.

15.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	25/11/2025	27/11/2025	AL
Finance	28/11/2025	1/12/2025	MB