**Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2024-2026**

The three principles of the UK Armed Forces Covenant are:

1. Acknowledging the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the UK Armed Forces;
2. Working together to mitigate disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services;
3. Understanding that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

*Suffolk’s Armed Forces community: UK Armed Forces Personnel: 2,990 / Service Families: 2,650; Veterans 32,000 (Veterans of working age: 10,500)*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme: Awareness and Communication**  Context: This includes awareness, appreciation and needs of our armed forces community and communicating our intentions and the services that can support them. | | | |
| **Subject** | **Action description** | **Date** | **Lead Person** |
| Governance | The Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant Board is properly represented by statutory bodies, armed forces units and allied services.  Suffolk’s Local Authority Armed Forces Champions are in receipt of a Job Description document.  A 2-yearly annual report is compiled and circulated by Suffolk County Council as lead authority. | Continuous | Lee Holloway (Suffolk Armed Forces Commissioner / Chair of Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant Board) |
| Communication | Establish and sustain a Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant website presence that lists plans, reports, services and contacts. Local Authorities to include copy on their respective websites and sign-post to main portal. | Continuous | Jim Brown and Sian Challan, Suffolk County Council and  Local Authority Armed Forces Champions |
| Awareness and understanding | Council HR Teams to integrate the [Armed Forces E-Learning CPD Modules](https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/about-the-covenant/other-training/) into their staff training online learning platforms: Armed Forces Community, Armed Forces Covenant and The Armed Forces Act.  Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council – integrated; East Suffolk Council – requested modules.  Ipswich Brough Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils? | February 2025 | Local Authority Armed Forces Champions |
| Collaboration | Suffolk Veterans and Families Multi Agency Network (4 meetings (in-person or online per year). Health, Wellbeing, Employment, Community Engagement service providers. | Continuous | Wayne Ward, NSFT and Jim Brown, Suffolk County Council |
| Awareness and Collaboration | Stations to invite Councillors / Armed Forces Champions / Allied Services to annual engagement / liaison meetings or events | Annually | Station Staff Officers/ Station Engagement Officers and Unit Welfare Officers |
| Engagement | Defence Employer Recognition Scheme participation. For all local authorities to become at least Bronze level participants by March 2025 and Silver by December 2026.  Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, East Suffolk Councils – to reapply as either lapsed from participation or not joined the scheme.  West Suffolk Council - Silver | March 2025 and December 2026 | Local Authority Armed Forces Champions |
| Local Authority Policy - addressing disadvantage | Local Authorities to consider addressing disadvantage by committing to the Royal British Legion new covenant ‘[Credit their Service’](https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/things-to-do/campaigns-policy-and-research/campaigns/credit-their-service#:~:text=The%20Royal%20British%20Legion%20launches,thousands%20of%20pounds%20a%20year.) campaign around armed forces welfare / benefits. Some local authorities may have this already in place.  West Suffolk Council, East Suffolk Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, Ipswich Borough Council – policies meet this expectation. | December 2024 | Local Authority Armed Forces Champions |
| Recognition | UK Armed Forces Week is a chance to show the communities support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community: from currently serving troops to Service families, veterans and cadets.  Town Councils / Local Authorities to raise the UK Armed Forces Day flag on the Monday of UK Armed Forces Week (last week in June each year).  On an annual rotation basis, local authorities to liaise with local units and lead the coordination of a late afternoon/early evening mid-week armed forces event (Schedule: 2024- West Suffolk Council; 2025 – Ipswich Borough Council). | Continuous | 2024- West Suffolk Council 2025 – Ipswich Borough Council |
| Awareness | Suffolk Show: Military Village. To coordinate an armed forces community engagement showcase of the Armed Forces in Suffolk at Suffolk’s premier public event. | Continuous | Maj Al Morrison, 6 Regt AAC |
| Support to the Armed Forces Community | Stimulate more volunteering from within the Suffolk Armed Forces community: SSAFA In-service committees, Service volunteering, Poppy Appeal Coordinators, SSAFA Suffolk Case Workers, Blind Veterans Home Visitor volunteers etc.  18 June 2024: Engaged Community Action Suffolk and their Volunteering Suffolk platform. Developing project proposal to define workstreams and additional activity costs to develop, organisational / partner engagement and amply listings. | Continuous | Jim Brown (SCC) and Deb Gibson (CAS) |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme: Health and Wellbeing**  Context: Most Armed Forces families will access and receive their healthcare through the NHS. This is also the case for non-mobilised reservists and military veterans.  Context: Service Families. Whilst many armed forces families enjoy healthy lives, the pressures of deployment, periods of separation and social isolation from family and friends can have a negative impact to the health and wellbeing of the family. If service families move home due to a posting in the UK, it is normal for their current place on any NHS waiting lists to be transferred to their new area.  Context: Service Children. Children of service families are exposed to unique experiences, which may include separation from a parent, frequent moving of house or school, caring for a sibling or parent, taking responsibility for the household or sudden deployment of their serving parent to a combat zone, all of which may impact on the way children lead their lives both now and in the future. Health professionals such as health visitors, midwives and school nursing teams working with stakeholders, including social care, early years and education providers, have a crucial role in identifying children of military families. They can work with parents to improve health outcomes, particularly in terms of emotional health and wellbeing.  Context: Veterans. Service in the Armed Forces may result in several physical health and wellbeing conditions, including a. Sensory disorders (such as hearing loss); b. Musculoskeletal injuries such as fractures, dislocations, and other conditions; c. Amputations, wounds, scarring and non-freezing cold injury (NFCI); d. Mental disorders (such as stress, anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or moral injury).  Context: Veterans Families. Supporting / Caring for a veteran who has a physical or mental health need – affected other. | | | |
| **Subject** | **Action description** | **Date** | **Lead Person** |
| Healthcare policy and planning | Armed Forces Act 2021: Armed Forces Healthcare Due Regard.  SNEE ICB (NHS) In-scope: Provision of services, Quality of services, Funding, Co-operation between health bodies and professionals, Functions concerning additional needs that healthcare bodies have a role in delivering.  Suffolk County Council: In-scope: Local authority delivered healthcare services: Sexual Health, Substance Misuse, Health-checks. Suffolk County Council: In-scope: Health Visitors and School Nurses. [The role of health visitors and school nurses: supporting the health and wellbeing of military families](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479525/2903829_PHE_Military_Families_Accessible_v0.2.pdf). |  | NHS SNEE Integrated Care Board, Suffolk County Council |
| Healthcare: Awareness and understanding | Improve awareness of the health and social care needs of the armed forces community.Introduction to the Armed Forces Community for healthcare professionals: The Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans at the University of Chester has produced a [programme](https://www1.chester.ac.uk/introduction-armed-forces-community) comprising six videos to educate nurses and healthcare practitioners to deliver optimum care to military veterans and their families through an understanding and insight into the Armed Forces Community. |  |  |
| Service Families support collaboration | Ensure Service Family’s needs are met.  Establish forums between Stations (Welfare Teams) and local authority and community services can understand Armed Forces Community Needs and that new service families are aware of additional services that may support them or their families. |  |  |
| Service and Veterans Families Support | Grants to support Service and Veterans Families   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | ***Community*** | ***Project Name*** | ***Area covered*** | ***Applicant organisation*** | ***Date awarded*** | ***Grant value*** | ***Grants programme name*** | | Service Families (Children) | Beaumont Early Years Wellbeing Hub | Hadleigh | Beaumont Community Primary School | Feb-24 | £11,000 | Armed Forces Families Fund: Early Years Programme Fund | | Service Families (Children) | Little Flyers Honington    A free, weekly group for families with children under five based on and around the RAF Honington. | RAF Honington | Families Together Suffolk charity  (Formerly Home-Start Mid &  West Suffolk) | Mar-24 | £8,487 | Covenant Fund: Force for Change | | Service Families (Children) | Catch Up, Coffee & Chat    Home-start in Suffolk's Catch up, Coffee and Chat groups for military parents and their children. | Hadleigh | Home-start in Suffolk charity | Mar 24 | £14,766 | Covenant Fund:: Force for Change | | Service and Veterans Families | Front Line Families | pan Suffolk | Suffolk Mind (charity (with Combat2Coffee) | Feb-24 | £95,860 | Covenant Fund Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities | | Service Families | Armed Forces Family Carers Connected | pan Suffolk | Suffolk Family Carers (charity) | Mar-24 | £14,419 | Covenant Fund: Force for Change | |  |  |
| Veterans – Primary Care | Identifying veterans to improve health outcomes.  Royal College of General Practitioners Veteran Friendly GP practice Accreditation Scheme.  There are 80 GP practices in Suffolk  November 2024: There are now 49 Veteran Friendly accredited GP practices in Suffolk. There has been a sizeable increase in participation from GP Surgeries in Suffolk from November 2023 to April 2024 following various promotion and engagement efforts. The aspiration is for each NHS Primary Care Network to have at least of their GP Surgeries accredited. | Mar 2025 | All, Stephen Heard (Veterans Aware Lead for the East @ NHS Ardent) |
| Veterans – Secondary Care | Identifying veterans to improve health outcomes.  Veteran Aware Hospital Scheme: Ipswich and Lowestoft Hospital who have appointed Armed Forces Hospital Advocates. The Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT) has also become a Veteran Aware Hospital. Promote Op RESTORE provides care and treatment to those with a Service-attributable physical health conditions. |  |  |
| Veterans and Families Mental Health | Develop and sustain statutory services and collaborate with the third sector.  Op COURAGE has been recently commissioned for a further 5-year period. Led by the Essex Partnership University NHS Trust in Colchester, the team works closely with Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust and charity partners St Andrew’s Healthcare, Mental Health Matters, Walking With The Wounded and The Warrior Programme. The Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT) established the Veterans Integrated Service (mental health) and become a Veteran Aware Hospital. Outside with Wire (substance Misuse support)  Vicki Bailey (NSFT) [Vicki.Bailey@nsft.nhs.uk](mailto:Vicki.Bailey@nsft.nhs.uk); Steve Curnow (NSFT) [Steve.Curnow@nsft.nhs.uk](mailto:Steve.Curnow@nsft.nhs.uk) |  | Vicki Bailey (NSFT): Op Courage East: Curnow Stephen (NSFT) |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme: Education, Employment and Training**  Context: Veterans / Ex-Forces / Service Leavers. There are 10,500 veterans of working age living in Suffolk. Annually, 120 UK Armed Forces service personnel make Suffolk their home and aim to establish second careers. The transition for some can prove challenging.  Context: Service Spouses.  • 81% of military spouses are employed but nearly 3 in 5 military spouses/partners experience difficulties finding suitable employment.  • High mobility and separation are significant factors for military spouses/partners in being able to pursue meaningful careers, along with access to affordable childcare.  • The financial need for a dual-income means many highly skilled partners secure lower paid work in order to stay in paid employment.  • There is a negative perception amongst many military spouses/partners around employer attitudes towards them due to their high mobility.  Context: Service Children. In October 2023, 216 schools in Suffolk applied for DfE Service Pupil Premium funding for 1,829 children from service families - this includes children from United States Air Forces families. The 2023 figure is 90 fewer children than in 2022.  Context: April 2024: There are 150 organisations whose head office is based in Suffolk that have signed the Corporate Covenant (businesses, charities, schools) - some also participate in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. | | | |
| **Subject** | **Action description** | **Date** | **Lead Person** |
| Education: Service Children | Armed Forces Act 2021. Research and develop an Education Services Due Regard Action Plan:   * School Admissions, * Transport, * Attendance, * Additional needs support, * Educational attainment and curriculum, * Student wellbeing and * Use of Service children’s Pupil Premium. | In progress  Update February 2025 | Simon Nortcliff, Education Services (CYP), Suffolk County Council |
| Development and Education: Service Children | Raise awareness of additional funding for services or initiatives:  The DfE Service Pupil Premium. Encourage schools to identify children from service families and register them for the DfE SPP to support their pastoral needs on the autumn school census.  The MOD’s Armed Forces Families Fund Early Years Programme for projects which help enhance early childhood education and childcare settings of young children from Armed Forces families.  The MOD’s Education Support Fund (ESF) This programme provides funding to schools to help mitigate the effects of exceptional mobility and/or separation faced by Service children.  Encourage local engagement in the Service Children’s Progression (SCiP) Alliance (East Anglia). Support education practitioners to champion the progression of the children of military personnel, so that they can make informed and confident transitions through further and higher education into thriving adult lives and careers.  Operation Camouflage: 4-day summer sports / activities programme for children and young people from local armed forces families – Initiative is hosted at Rock Barracks, Sutton Heath, Woodbridge and delivered by East Suffolk Council and the Army Welfare Service. | Mid-September each year  Mid-October 2024 | Cllr Mick Fraser and Jim Brown, Suffolk County Council |
| Development and Education: Service Children | Grants to Support Additional Service Provision   |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | *Project Name* | *Area covered* | *Applicant organisation* | *Date awarded* | *Grant value* | *Grants programme name* | | WACC outside play area improvement project | Wattisham | Wattisham Airfield Childcare Centre | Feb-24 | £20,000 | Armed Forces Families Fund: Early Years Programme Fund | |  |  |
| Unemployment and Welfare | Welfare support.  The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance. Engage nominated DWP Armed Forces Champions and Employment Support programmes to better identify DWP claimants (disability, Job Seekers) and engage with Armed Forces charities delivering employment, advice, guidance, and training. Communicate DWP benefits programmes to Unit Welfare Teams and service families. | Continuous | Steve Bradley, DWP |
| Employment | Communicate local employment opportunities  Secure tech link between Suffolk Jobs Direct Platform (public sector jobs) to Right Job (service leavers resettlement jobs portal) and the Forces Employment Charity jobs portal.  Forces Families Jobs Portal – linked September 2024.  November 2024: New provider, Reed in Partnership will deliver of the Career Transition Partnership do tech feeds into their jobs board will be renewed / pipeline request. | March 2025 | Jack Barber and Jon Hall (Suffolk County Council HR Team) |
| Employment and Networking | Maximise awareness of employment and training opportunities and networking.  Promote employment and training support schemes from the local community and armed forces community service sector. Engage cross sector service providers to collaborate and maximise opportunities and outcomes for individuals. Champion allies – local industry, Covenant / Defence Employer Recognition scheme business. |  | Jim Brown, Suffolk County Council; |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme: Housing**  Scope: | | | |
| **Subject** | **Action description** | **Date** | **Lead Person** |
| Reducing Disadvantage | Armed Forces Act 2021: Due Regard Action Plan  Borough / District Council’s in Suffolk updated their lettings policy which reflects the requirements of the Armed Forces Bill (to be Act). \*An amendment to the policy was approved by all Suffolk Local Authorities in the Gateway to Homechoice Partnership and Home-Link which went live on 1st August 2022.  Local Authority: Due Regard Housing Action Plan to cover:   * Allocations policy for social housing * Homelessness * Disabled Facilities grants * Tenancy strategies |  | Local Authority Armed Forces Champions |
| Communication | Improve awareness of services to Council / Social Housing tenants and housing support staff. Develop Veterans and Families Service Support factsheet for tenants of Council and Social Housing and champion Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant portal. | September 2024 | Jim Brown, Suffolk County Council |
| Homelessness | Promote dedicated veterans homeless support scheme. Riverside Housing commissioned to deliver [Op Fortitude](https://www.riverside.org.uk/care-and-support/veterans/opfortitude/) (veterans homeless support initiative). |  |  |

February / March 2024 announcements:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Project Name*** | ***Area covered*** | ***Applicant organisation*** | ***Date awarded*** | ***Grant value*** | ***Grants programme name*** |
| **Beaumont Early Years Wellbeing Hub** | Hadleigh | Beaumont Community Primary School | Feb-24 | £11,000 | Armed Forces Families Fund: Early Years Programme Fund |
| **WACC outside play area improvement project** | Mid Suffolk | Wattisham Airfield Childcare Centre | Feb-24 | £20,000 | Armed Forces Families Fund: Early Years Programme Fund |
| **Military Family Support Navigation Project** | pan Suffolk | Home Start in Suffolk (charity) | Feb-24 | £94,398 | Covenant Fund Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities |
| **Front Line Families** | pan Suffolk | Suffolk Mind (charity (with Combat2Coffee) | Feb-24 | £95,860 | Covenant Fund Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities |
| **Armed Forces Family Carers Connected** | pan Suffolk | Suffolk Family Carers (charity) | Mar-24 | £14,419 | Covenant Fund:: Force for Change |
| **Little Flyers Honington**    A free, weekly group for families with children under five based on and around the RAF Honington. | RAF Honington | Families Together Suffolk charity  (Formerly Home-Start Mid &  West Suffolk) | Mar-24 | £8,487 | Covenant Fund:: Force for Change |
| **Catch Up, Coffee & Chat**    Home-start in Suffolk's Catch up, Coffee and Chat groups for military parents and their children. | To be advised | Home-start in Suffolk charity | Mar 24 | £14,766 | Covenant Fund:: Force for Change |
| **TOTAL** |  |  |  | **£258,930** |  |