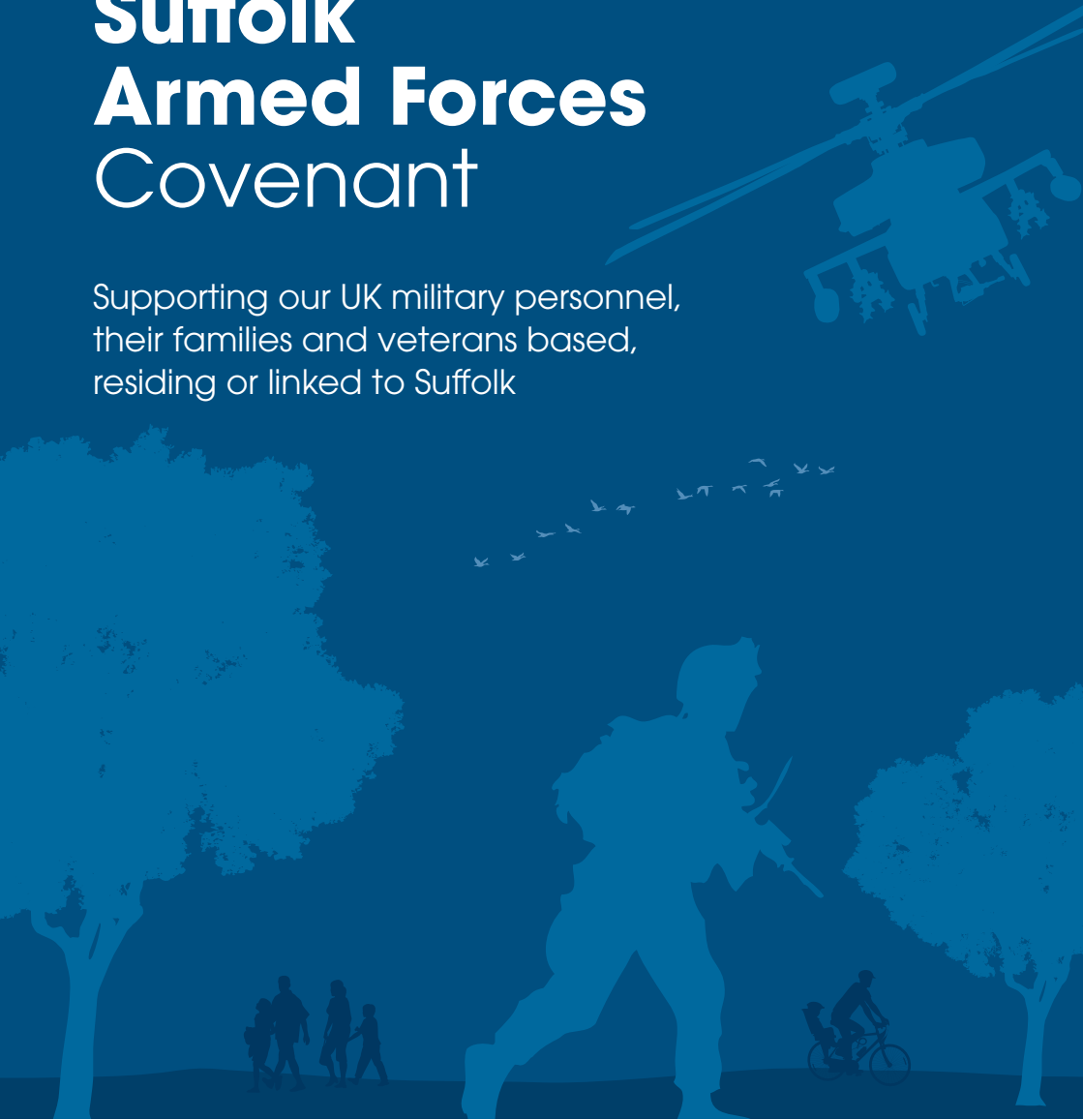


# Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant

Supporting our UK military personnel,  
their families and veterans based,  
residing or linked to Suffolk



Annual Report  
**2022/2023**



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# JOINT FOREWORD/INTRODUCTION

**Lee Holloway (Suffolk Armed Forces Commissioner) and  
Lieutenant Colonel Alice Archer AAC (Military Liaison Lead)**

This year more than ever shows us the growing importance of our Armed Forces, whether they are serving at home or in foreign territories on operations from Europe to the Middle East and wider afield. Just as important are the 30,000 veterans living in Suffolk, for whom in addition to those who currently serve, we are charged with ensuring through the Armed Forces Covenant that they suffer no disadvantage because of their past service to our country.

Over the past two years I have tried to concentrate on those aspects directly affecting our serving personnel and their families, with varying degrees of success. From the perspective of the veteran community, I find there is a huge amount of help available from a considerable number of providers. However, communication between the various agencies, the councils and members of the public is relatively poor and is something I intend to address in the coming year.

I firmly believe it to be imperative that those organisations large and small, private, public and charitable embed the Covenant in their interactions with the County's Armed Forces community. This approach if combined with effective communication will enhance the work carried out by those of us who are charged with ensuring the County of Suffolk's obligation to uphold the terms of the Covenant continue to be met in full.

Finally, I would like to thank those who unstintingly provide help and assistance whenever asked. The Armed Forces Champions, including those who have left, and those who have recently been appointed, the office of the Lord Lieutenant, and of course Jim Brown without whom I would achieve very little.

**The UK Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. The three principles of the UK Armed Forces Covenant are:**

- to recognise the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the UK Armed Forces;
- that members of the armed forces community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and
- that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured or the bereaved

# DELIVERY STRUCTURE

The Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant Board includes representation from local UK Armed Forces units, military welfare and veteran support agencies, statutory bodies and councillors and council officers.

This report covers the period January 2022 to the end of December 2023.

## Strategic context:

There are a range of identified issues which we seek to understand better and/or take practical action.

The 3-year Suffolk Armed Forces Action Plan ran until the end of 2023 and was structured around four key themes:

1. Health and Wellbeing
2. Education, Employment and Training
3. Housing
4. Community Engagement

# HEADLINES

**Presented by theme, below is a summary of activity that has taken place over the period January 2022 to the end of December 2023.**

## Health and Wellbeing

Understanding and communicating health needs and health inequalities is an essential purpose of the covenant board.

There are currently 40 GP Surgeries in Suffolk that have joined The Royal College of General Practitioners Veteran Friendly GP Surgery Accreditation Scheme - further engagement continues. James Paget Hospital and Ipswich Hospital appointed Armed Forces Advocates and along with the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT), all have become Veteran Aware trusts. This helps identify and refer individuals to additional support, including to Op RESTORE which provides care and treatment to those with service-attributable physical health conditions.



# HEADLINES CONTINUED

In terms of veterans' wellbeing, NSFT's Veterans Integrated Service (VIS) supports individuals and provides a network of support groups which collaborates with allied services such as Outside the Wire who support veterans with substance misuse needs. The VIS activity engagement group marched again at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday – a tall order for some but proud achievement for all. NSFT VIS staff have delivered veterans aware workshops to around 200 members of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams in the last 2 years.

NHS England funded Op Courage - the veteran and family's mental health service - is secure for a further 5 years thanks to The Essex Partnership University (NHS Foundation Trust) who led a regional consortium that includes NSFT, St Andrew's Healthcare, Mental Health Matters and military charities The Warrior Programme and Walking with the Wounded.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust awarded a multi-year grant via their Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme to a consortium led by the Bridge for Heroes charity in Norfolk. Partners included Walking with the Wounded, Combat2Coffee CIC, SSAFA and The Company of Makers. Separately, The Royal Anglian Regiment secured a grant from the Covenant Fund Trust: Afghanistan Fund for their Veterans Reunited engagement project.

The Forces Employment Charity was awarded an NHS England contract to deliver Op Nova which provides support throughout the justice pathway for veterans who are in contact with the justice system. Grants from the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner and more recently from the Suffolk Community Foundation for their Past and Present initiative support this work.

Support to service families by community charities, Families Together Suffolk and Home-Start Suffolk have delivered family support groups, 1-2-1 family support or mother and toddler groups. The challenge of securing continuation funding is ever-present. Suffolk Family Carers (charity) secured further grants to continue their support to family carers in service families and to veteran carers.



# HEADLINES CONTINUED

SSAFA Suffolk supports our armed forces community through a volunteer Branch Executive team and network of Caseworkers that offer face-to-face welfare support and support to Station In-Service Committees. The last two years has included adapting to a new Regional Hub operating model. After 10 years of dedicated leadership, Branch Chairman Lt Col (Retd) Tony Chibnall (RM) stood down and Col Andy Smith (ACF) took over. SSAFA Suffolk does require more volunteers, if you can help in any way, please reach out to their office.



Combat2Coffee has developed partnerships with Suffolk Mind and Ipswich Town Football Club Foundation as part of their outreach engagement organising coffee mornings and breakfasts. Their coffee vans have been increasingly visible at events and venues, including local hospitals, encouraging people to sit down, have a brew and talk about wellbeing and seeking help.



More recently Communities Together East Anglia secured a grant to work with families at Wattisham Flying Station.

## Education, Employment and Training

Following the implementation of the Armed Forces Act 2021, Suffolk County Council developed its Armed Forces Education Due Regard Action Plan which investigates school admissions, home to school transport and education attainment amongst others. Recent Suffolk schools' data reports that schools claimed DfE Service Pupil Premium funding for 1,938 children from service families – that equates to £335 per pupil.

Grant funding from the MoD's Armed Forces Families Fund included an Early Years Programme grant to Sandlings Childcare Centre towards outdoor classrooms and more recently from the Pupil Support Programme a grant to Sandlings Primary School to develop a Reading Hub. This same fund awarded a large grant to Beaumont School to create a Hadleigh Schools Emotional Wellbeing Hub to support service children.

Operation Camouflage is an award-winning summer youth activity programme joint venture between East Suffolk Council and the Army Welfare Service. Over the last two years it received funding from the Covenant Fund, the Army Benevolent Fund, and the East Suffolk Holiday Activity Fund. During activities children and young people from service families have integrated with those from local non-military families.



# HEADLINES CONTINUED

RAF Honington hosted the regional final of the annual Engineering UK Schools Robotics Challenge competition aimed at stimulating interest in STEM subjects and careers. School children from 6 schools across the eastern region were supported by Station STEM Ambassadors.

Finding the capacity to consistently promote the plethora of employment support initiatives to local service spouses, service leavers and veterans can prove challenging. The support available through The Forces Employment Charity, Tech-Vets, Walking with the Wounded, The Poppy Factory, and also community service providers can be surprising.

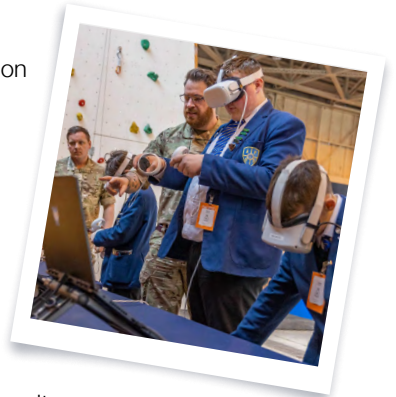
As it has become more established, awareness and engagement with the DWP Armed Forces Champion to support veterans and service spouses is delivering some real tangible results and bodes well for future reach and engagement.

Sappers from 51 Parachute Squadron have been supporting the Sutton Hoo Ship's Company in Woodbridge. Soldiers are using their trade skills to assist in the reconstruction of the 90ft Anglo-Saxon ship.

Barista employability skills and training through Combat2Coffee has been enhanced through their new roastery in Ipswich which provides volunteering opportunities. At HMP Highpoint in West Suffolk, C2C provide training to some of the residents and supervise the running of the Visitor Coffee Shop.

Suffolk County Council helped staff at HMP Warren Hill raise funds for their veterans in custody group to design and build their own war memorial which was proudly unveiled to community partners. The project delivered some valuable skills development and a sense of purpose.

The Suffolk Armed Forces Business Network (LinkedIn) now has 240 members and some practical outcomes have been achieved. There is more potential in improving connectivity between service leavers, spouses, veterans in business and allies.



# HEADLINES CONTINUED

## Community Engagement

The Suffolk Lieutenancy led the county on the passing of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and proclamation of His Majesty King Charles III.

As we put the pandemic behind us, local units took the opportunity to march in their affiliated towns. On separate occasions, 3 Regiment Army Air Corps and RAF Honington who were joined by elements of 28 Engineer Regiment (C-CBRN) exercised their Freedom of Bury St Edmunds. 4 Regiment Army Air Corps marched through Ipswich - this coincided with Suffolk Day and UK Armed Forces Week. In Woodbridge, 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment were joined by members of 70 Gurkha Field Squadron for their town parade - welcome to Suffolk! The Sappers held a Community Open Day the following day.



In partnership with East Anglia Reserve Forces & Cadets Association, 6 Regiment Army Air Corps coordinated an employer's breakfast engagement event at Wattisham Flying Station. Over 80 local employers attended. There are now 137 organisations in Suffolk that have signed the Armed Forces Covenant - some also participate in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

During Armed Forces Week, local councils took it in turns to lead events in Hadleigh and Woodbridge where local armed forces units paraded. Communities in Lowestoft and Haverhill once again marked UK Armed Forces Day.

6 Regiment Army Air Corps again led on the Suffolk Show Military Village where serving armed forces units are showcased alongside services that support veterans and families.

Utilising a Covenant Fund grant, Suffolk County Council commissioned the Rural Coffee Caravan charity to coordinate Veterans and Families Lunch events. The first in partnership with Combat2Coffee at their café in Bury St Edmunds and the other with the Lord Kitchener's Memorial Holiday Centre in Lowestoft.



The Euston Estate hosted the Not Forgotten Association Summer Garden Party. More recently Lady Clare Countess of Euston, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk and the Suffolk Lieutenancy office have been awarding the new medals to nuclear test veterans who made a unique contribution to the UK's security.



# HEADLINES CONTINUED

Combat2Coffee develops their Medals4Matches Remembrance initiative with Ipswich Town Football Club who donate tickets to members of the local armed forces community – no doubt other football clubs will follow.

The unveiling of a memorial to honour Kurt Glauber was made possible by researchers Andrew Beal, Helen Ely and the Ipswich War Memorial Project. Kurt was of Austrian Jewish decent and sought refuge in the UK just prior to the Second World War. Settling in Ipswich he later became a British Spy but was killed on operations in his home city of Vienna.



A few days before remembrance Sunday, a mural of Private Aaron McClure was unveiled at Westbourne Academy in Ipswich. Aaron was an Ipswich boy and joined the British Army (Royal Anglians) but was sadly Killed in Action in Afghanistan in 2007.

There are now twelve Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs across Suffolk. Led by a band of willing volunteers, these informal groups are a great way to meet other veterans living in local communities.

The Royal British Legion Suffolk County branch led or supported remembrance activities across the county. The Poppy Appeal isn't just around remembrance, it's a 12-month campaign. In 2021 – 2022 Suffolk raised £703,000 and this increased to £750,00 in 2022-2023. There is however a need for more Poppy Appeal Organisers (volunteers).

Finally, congratulations to Ash and Caroline Ashworth and the team at the Lord Kitchener's Memorial Holiday Centre in Lowestoft who were recently awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce in Lowestoft and Waveney Business Awards.



# HEADLINES CONTINUED

## Housing

In addition to local authorities updating of their lettings policies in preparation of the Armed Forces Act 2021, they are developing a Housing Due Regard Action Plan to take into consideration other in-scope measures. This includes improved awareness such as Front-Line Staff completing Armed Forces E-Learning Modules and being aware of and communicating support services to their housing tenants who are members of the armed forces community.

More recently, Op Fortitude has been launched which is dedicated referral pathway for homeless veterans and is funded by the Office for Veterans Affairs. Run by social housing provider Riverside Group, the housing hotline will give homeless veterans a single point of contact to get them the help they need via housing providers, charities and local authorities.

Starting from March 2024, the MoD will begin introducing a New Accommodation Offer for our Armed Forces. Some of the changes will happen immediately, while others may only affect service personnel when they are assigned to a new role or at the end of the three-year transition period to a new role or at the end of the three-year transition period.



# ENGAGEMENT

**The UK Armed Forces Covenant.** Businesses, charitable, and public sector organisations of all sizes who wish to support the armed forces community can sign the covenant. You make your own promises on how you will demonstrate your support.

The covenant should be signed by someone in authority who will make sure that these promises are implemented, this could be the CEO or HR Director. It could also be co-signed by a member of the armed forces.

**Defence Employer Recognition Scheme** acknowledges employers who have provided exceptional support to the armed forces community and defence by going above and beyond their covenant pledges.

The scheme recognises the different levels of commitment provided by employers. This allows the Ministry of Defence to publicly thank and honour those organisations for their support. You can nominate yourself for a bronze award. Silver and gold awards are bestowed to organisations meeting specific criteria.



# GET INVOLVED

An impressive number of organisations and individuals already support the military community, however, if you are planning something unique or you want to share your ideas, please drop the Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant office an email: [militarycovenant@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:militarycovenant@suffolk.gov.uk)



# Key Contacts

| Organisation   | Telephone Number |
|--|------------------|
| Wattisham Flying Station - Welfare                   | 0300 163 0986    |
| MoD Woodbridge Station – Welfare                     | 01394 421134     |
| RAF Honington - HIVE Information Service             | 01359 268610     |
| Samaritans   | 116 123          |
| Op Courage (Veterans and Families Wellbeing Service) | 0300 034 9991    |
| Combat Stress (Helpline)                             | 0800 138 1619    |
| Veterans' Gateway                                    | 0808 802 1212    |
| Veterans UK (Helpline)                               | 0808 1914 218    |
| SSAFA (The Armed Forces charity)                     | 0800 260 6767    |
| The Royal British Legion (RBL)                       | 0808 802 8080    |
| Royal Navy Benevolent Trust (RNBT)                   | 02392 690112     |
| The Army Benevolent Fund (East Anglia office)        | 01206 817 105    |
| Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF)              | 0300 102 1919    |



**Please visit the website for more information:**

[www.suffolkmilitarycovenant.org.uk](http://www.suffolkmilitarycovenant.org.uk)