

COMMUNITY COVENANTS WHAT'S NEXT?



TANGIBLE POLICY CHANGES FOR YOUR
LOCAL AUTHORITY TO IMPLEMENT

Introduction

Community Covenants were launched in spring 2011 and since then, a tremendous amount of progress has been made in local areas right across England, Scotland and Wales. Now it is time to move beyond improving publicity and communications, and consider what tangible policy changes you can implement that will make a meaningful difference to the lives of the Armed Forces community in your local area.

The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant – no

disadvantage as a result of service and special treatment where justified, e.g. in the case of injured personnel or the bereaved – will only become a reality if tangible policy changes are put in place.

We appreciate it is not only local authorities who have a role to play but also the MOD, UK and devolved Governments and the third sector, but as local authorities you are well placed to ensure these changes happen, for the benefit of your local Armed Forces community.

The Legion fully appreciates the financial strain that local authorities and their local partners are currently under, however the policy changes we recommend in this document need not be costly or difficult to implement.



Policy changes

Whilst there are many policy changes that could benefit the Armed Forces community and reduce the effects of disadvantage, we have selected five key changes for you to consider.

If you have already implemented these, or you would like more policy suggestions to explore, please take a look at our 'Best Practice Guide to Community Covenants': <http://bit.ly/CCPGuide>



The guide is full of detailed case studies and examples of positive approaches that local authorities have taken. You may find that what has already worked well in another area may work well for you.

The Legion's top five policy changes



- 1 Make tangible changes to your social housing allocations policy.**
- 2 Fully disregard military compensation payments when means testing for council delivered support.**
- 3 Prioritise Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) applications where the disability is as a result of service in the Armed Forces.**
- 4 Consider the needs of the Armed Forces community in your Joint Strategic Needs Assessment / Single Integrated Plan and via Equality Impact Assessments.**
- 5 Offer a school place to Armed Forces children who apply mid-term, increasing class sizes to accept them where necessary. Ensure that this always happens in practice.**

We encourage you to consider our top five policies and work with the relevant departments within your council to implement them.

We understand that two tier authorities will not be able to implement all of the policies due to certain issues being outside of your remit; however, we would be very grateful if you could raise these with your local district/borough councils or county council, as appropriate.

The detail behind our top five policy changes



1 Make tangible changes to your social housing allocations policy.

Whilst government issued housing guidance has been useful in making some statutory provisions, local authorities still have a fair amount of flexibility. We would like to see you giving additional priority to the Armed Forces community (including bereaved spouses and separated spouses with children) alongside the statutory preference categories. An example of this would be moving this group to the top band for allocations, the approach that Croydon Council has taken, or setting aside a proportion of properties for former members of the Armed Forces under a local lettings policy, the approach that Wandsworth Council has taken.



The detail behind our top five policy changes continued

2 Fully disregard military compensation payments when means testing for council delivered support.

Military compensation payments, including War Disablement Pensions, War Widow's Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments, should be 100% disregarded when means testing for council delivered services such as council tax support, housing benefit (prior to the full roll out of Universal Credit) and adult social care support.

These payments are not an income support payment but are paid as compensation for injury, illness or loss as a result of Service in HM Armed Forces. It is therefore not appropriate, nor a recognition of the former service person's sacrifice or commitment to the nation, to include such compensation payments in calculations for means tested benefits.

3 Prioritise Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) applications where the disability is as a result of service.



DFG applications should be responded to, and processed, in a timely fashion. We have received reports that some of our beneficiaries have to wait for long periods of time for both their initial assessment and their application to be processed. Sheffield City Council prioritises occupational therapy assessments for individuals with injuries sustained as a result of service, which allows those eligible for DFGs to access the support and equipment they need quicker.

We would also like English local authorities to be aware that the Department for Communities and Local Government has special funding available for DFG costs incurred for those in receipt of either an Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award at tariffs 1-8 or a War Pension at 80% plus Constant Attendance Allowance. Contact disabled.facilitiesgrants@communities.gsi.gov.uk for further details.

4 Consider the needs of the Armed Forces community in your Joint Strategic Needs Assessment / Single Integrated Plan and via Equality Impact Assessments.



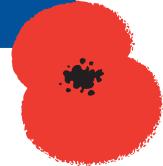
Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) and Single Integrated Plans need to consider the needs of the Armed Forces community and the implications policies may have on them. Equality Impact Assessments may be another avenue to examine the needs of the Armed Forces community. As JSNAs have implications on the commissioning of services locally and the ability of the local authority and local partners to meet need effectively, considering the Armed Forces community as part of this is necessary.

Buckinghamshire County Council's Community Covenant action plan identified that their JSNA did not include a section on the needs of the Armed Forces community. They were able to rectify this and commissioners and council staff are now better able to plan services with the Armed Forces community in mind.

5 Offer a school place to Armed Forces children who apply mid-term, increasing class sizes to accept them, where necessary. Ensure that this always happens in practice.

Current school admissions codes in England and Wales state that all state maintained school admission authorities must allocate a place for an Armed Forces child in advance of their Service family arriving in the area. To help schools accommodate Armed Forces children who apply for places outside of the normal admissions round, state maintained schools in England and Wales are able to increase Key Stage 1 class sizes above their current legal limit of 30 children. This is because Armed Forces children are listed as 'excepted pupils'. Despite such provisions, the Legion is aware that the rules are not always being interpreted and applied consistently, for example where a number of Armed Forces children are moving into an area at the same time. The Legion would like to see the statutory requirements being fully observed by all local authorities.





I  Community Covenants

The graphic consists of a large, thin-lined circle containing the text. A red poppy flower is positioned next to the letter 'I'. Below the 'I' and flower, the words 'Community Covenants' are written in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The circle is surrounded by numerous smaller, scattered red poppy petals.

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