

Service and support

Every council in the country has now signed up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant – but what does this mean for the lives of our service personnel and their families, and what do councils do differently as a result?



Cllr Shannon Saise-Marshall (Con) is Armed Forces Champion for Runnymede Borough Council

At first, I didn't think that we would have many members of the armed forces needing support in the area, as we don't have a military base within the borough.

However, when I took up the role in July 2015, I was concerned that although we had signed the community covenant in 2013, we didn't have a website setting out what we were doing.

Putting together the website meant that we really had to think about what the community covenant meant and what we were offering. It is a voluntary statement of mutual support between our community and the armed forces locally, including their families, reservists and veterans.

We decided that a key area where we could offer support here in Runnymede was in housing. With the simple inclusion of a tick box within the housing application, we've already had 40 families come forward in the area, who we now know about and can support. Members of the armed forces bring desirable skills, often becoming valuable local key workers, so we want them to live and settle in the area, and become active members of the community.

One of our veterans, who I remember as a local cadet attending our remembrance services, is Matt Fisher, who sadly had to have his foot amputated as a result of injury on active service. He has gone on to inspire us and raise money for charity as part of the team of wounded veterans who walked 1,000 miles across Britain as part of the Walk of Britain expedition. I was able to organise a march out of his town of Chertsey – it's only something small, but it brings the community together and people remember it and identify with it.

For me, part of being an armed forces champion is about championing them in our local community and, although not included in the official community covenant, championing the cadets as an excellent youth organisation, and an important local asset for our young people.



About the covenant

The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a local partnership agreement that brings together charities, local authorities, other public sector organisations, businesses, communities, individuals and the military in a pledge of support between local residents and the armed forces community.

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, met with Mark Lancaster MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Personnel and Veterans, to discuss the best way to understand what is being done to support the community covenant at a local level, and how the LGA can help councils by sharing good practice and facilitating an Armed Forces Community Covenant Champions network.

Mr Lancaster said: "The covenant is not about special treatment; it is about recognising the unique nature of service life – dislocation from family, regular operational postings, increased mobility for personnel and their families – and providing a level playing field, making sure the armed forces community is treated fairly.

"There are some excellent examples of where this is happening across different local authorities and I would like to ensure that this best practice becomes the norm.

"If you're doing something good, tell us about it. This is about creating armed forces champions, so please be the best champion that you can be.

"I am keen to support local authorities in ensuring that the policies they have put in place are understood and working.

"On behalf of service personnel, veterans and their families, thank you for your commitment. It is very much appreciated."



If you'd like to share a story of what you are doing on the community covenant, email info@local.gov.uk

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