



The Armed Forces Covenant Guide

Transition Individual Planning & Personal Development (IPPD)
Information Sheet 12



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'The Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of services and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those that have given the most.'

The Armed Forces Covenant 2011

Aim

To raise awareness of the [Armed Forces Covenant](#), explaining what it is and offer guidance on its application in order to avoid Service Personnel (SP) and their families having unreasonable expectations which may eventually cause hardship or frustration.

operational tours is not relevant to Local Authorities when determining need.

• SLs should not base their transition strategy on the Armed Forces Covenant.

• The Armed Forces Covenant is constantly evolving so the Armed Forces community should keep themselves updated.

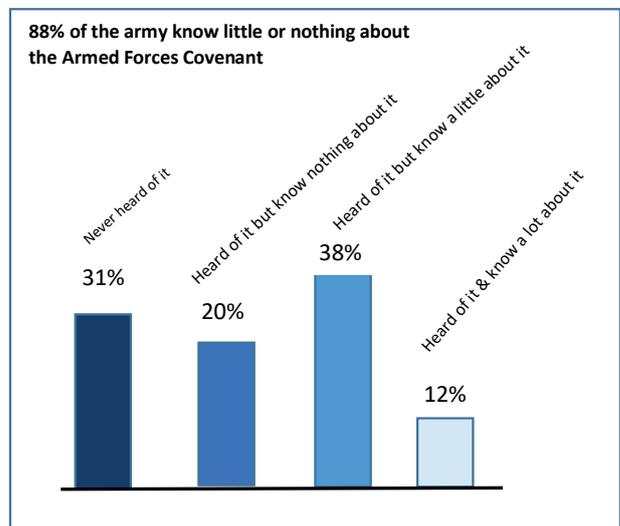
Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant has existed since 2011 but few in the Armed Forces Community are familiar with it. According to the annual Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS), the majority of the Army have not heard or know very little about the Covenant. This suggests that the majority of the Army risks being disadvantaged by local authorities or other service or support providers because they are not aware of society's pledge to the Armed Forces community. It also indicates that this lack of awareness could follow SP as they re-join society as a Veteran.

Some 10,500 families move into SFA each year and another 8000 Service Leavers (SLs) move out of service accommodation on discharge which gives some indication of the scale of mobility and the requirement to engage with Local Authorities and support and service providers annually. Although the Armed Forces Covenant does not guarantee solutions, it does seek to ensure that members of the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged. It is therefore important that all members of the Armed Forces and Veterans community know about the Armed Forces Covenant.

HEADLINES

- **It is a personal responsibility to plan and make provision for your own future and understand how to access public services.**
- **The Armed Forces Covenant seeks to avoid disadvantage – it does not provide an advantage or guarantee solutions.**
- **Local delivery of Covenant policies by Local Authorities and Devolved Administrations may vary, based on the size of the Armed Forces community in the area, the resources available to the council and the demand from the public.**
- **SP/Service Leavers (SLs) should engage with Local Authorities, NHS and schools as early as possible identifying themselves as members of the Armed Forces community and highlighting any specific needs that they might have.**
- **Occupying Service Families Accommodation (SFA) under licence and paying subsidized rent does not entitle SLs to social housing.**
- **Social housing is not a life-style choice and is only allocated after a stringent process which assesses need. In areas of high demand and limited housing resources, the need threshold will be high and the list of applicants can be long. Time on the list does not necessarily increase your chances of being allocated a house.**
- **Homeless families may be initially allocated temporary or emergency accommodation in the form of B&B or multi-occupancy units with a same sex policy which means families can be split up.**
- **Be prepared for a thorough means test of your finances and life style in order to assess your personal need.**
- **A long and distinguished military career with numerous**



The Armed Forces Covenant.

The Covenant honours the moral obligation that society has to its Armed Forces and Service families for their selfless commitment and sacrifice of some of their civilian freedoms in the pursuit of their duties¹. The Covenant acknowledges the respect that it owed to the Armed Forces community and their need for support and fair treatment without disadvantage due to their service. The Covenant has evolved since its creation in 2011 and continues to do so through local and regional initiatives and subsequent sharing of best practice.

Tip: The principle of the Armed Forces Covenant will not change but its application across the country will vary so it is important that the Armed Forces community keep up to date on the Covenant and how it is being applied in areas of interest to SP.

¹Regular moves, disrupted schooling, periods of separation within the family and high levels of stress and anxiety.

Local Authorities or Councils

Councils will usually ensure the intent of the Covenant is reflected in existing policies rather than through providing targeted provision and support to AF community. A council may be influenced by the presence of the Armed Forces in their area but may not necessarily know the size of the local veterans' community unless they have asked for specific help. Councils are increasingly asking whether citizens have served in order to better understand the size of the Armed Forces and veterans' community.

All members of the Armed Forces community are encouraged to identify themselves to the local authorities so they can apply the Covenant appropriately. Local Authorities with a strong military presence may have a Veterans Champion, Covenant Champions or Lead Officer. There are areas in the UK that have a limited military presence but are a strong recruiting base which means strong military family ties are retained which increases the chance of veterans returning 'home' on completion of their service. Local Authorities welcome advance notice of cases that require additional support.

All local authorities have now signed the Armed Forces Covenant, however be aware that, as in the Armed Forces, it can take time to get the message on new policies and initiatives out to all parts of the organisation. So not all local authority officers and employees will necessarily be aware and trained in the application of the Covenant pledges. In a survey of council Chief Executives 55% of respondents confirmed they had mechanisms and processes to brief their public-facing staff on the Covenant. ['Our Community – Our Covenant' LGA /FIMT report 2017].

Tip: When engaging with local authorities and support and service providers, understand the council's obligations to the Armed Forces Community and identify yourself as being a member.

There is a limit on what local authorities and public service providers can do. Have realistic expectations and be aware of the following:

- The Local Authority exists to provide community support and services to the public and additional support to the minority with specific needs.
- The Local Authority is there to support those with the greatest need within the constraints of the resources available.
- Be aware of difference between 'Want' and 'Need':
 - Want is a desire or wishing for something
 - Need is a necessity or an essential requirement.
- Need will be quantified and then prioritised.
- Need will be fulfilled, or support or services allocated within the resources available therefore need may be assessed and

recognised but may not be resolved immediately.

- Being registered and held on a council database does not necessarily mean that your priority will increase over time. Most councils do not run a list or a queuing system.
- Long military service or time spent on operations is irrelevant to local authorities.

Prepare yourself. The Armed Forces community need to be aware that the Local Government Association (LGA) believe that the MOD and each member of the Armed Forces have a part to play and expect Service leavers to be well prepared to face the challenges of civilian life.

Tip: Plan and prepare your transition into civilian life. Don't leave and hope for the best!

Local Connection: By law, local authorities in England have to exclude the following from the normal requirement for a local connection to the local authority's district:

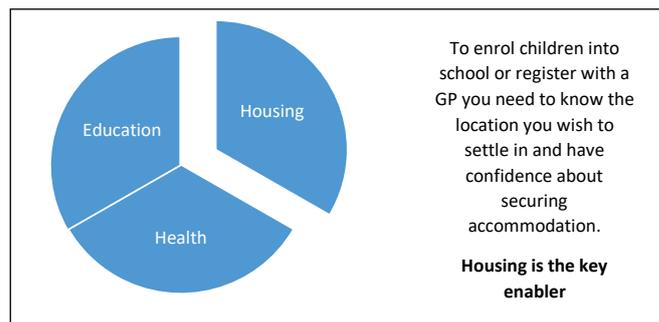
- (a) serving members of the Armed Forces
 - (b) former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years after discharge
 - (c) bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner (where the death was attributable to their service)
 - (d) serving or former members of the Reserve Forces suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability sustained as a result of their service
- Statutory guidance for councils on the allocation of social housing is published on the Department for Communities and Local Government's website here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/allocation-of-accommodation-guidance-for-localhousing-authorities-in-england> Our Community – Our Covenant

Application of the Covenant

The principle of the over-arching Covenant is simple, but local delivery of Covenant policies by Local Authorities and Devolved Administrations may vary based on the size of the Armed Forces community in the area, the resources available to the council, and the demand from the public

Tip: Always seek specific information on the Covenant and the support and services provided by the devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) as they will vary.

For the majority of the Armed Forces community there are three aspects of support which are routinely important: Education, NHS and Social Housing. The Armed Forces supports the soldier and the State supports and administers to the needs of spouses and dependents. This is most apparent when spouses and dependents register with a NHS GP practice and enrol children into local schools. To be able to do this you need the location you are moving to and an address. If accommodation has not been found or SFA not allocated an assignment order will usually suffice



Housing

There is a commonly held myth amongst SP that because they pay 'rent' for SLAM or SFA² they have an automatic right and priority for social housing when they become civilians. This is not correct and the Armed Forces Covenant will not change this. It is the personal responsibility of every Service leaver to secure their own accommodation when they are discharged. This requires them to understand their housing options and make adequate financial provision to achieve this. Housing information is available from the Joint Services Housing Advice Office ([JSHAO](#))

Social housing³ is limited and is allocated to those with greatest need based on a means test (a detailed assessment of personal finances, vulnerabilities and special needs). Not having a place to sleep on its own is not necessarily sufficient justification to be allocated social housing. The 'no disadvantage' principle enshrined in the Armed Forces Covenant will most likely enable a SL to register interest for social housing with a LA due to



the local connection waiver now in place. The applicant will then be means tested. SP and SLs will be expected to have behaved responsibly and be open and honest in their dealings with Local Authorities particularly regarding means

testing. Points to note:

- If you have savings above a certain threshold set locally you will be expected to find accommodation privately.
- Savings including compensation payments and gratuities make individuals ineligible for social housing.
- Drawing a military pension will make an individual ineligible.
- Clearing long standing debt or gifting money to family members is considered to be a personal choice and perceived to be making oneself intentionally homeless.
- Local Authorities expect citizens to secure their own accommodation and then manage their debt. Clearing debt and then not being able to secure a home is deemed to be self-inflicted homelessness and will not result in being allocated social housing.
- Medical Discharge settlements should not be taken into account in means tests, however LAs can choose to ignore this.
- Urgent homeless cases may often be given temporary accommodation in the form of Bed & Breakfast establishments or multi-occupancy units. These may have a single sex policy which will result in families being accommodated separately i.e. mothers with daughters and fathers with sons. The reality is that the occupants within these facilities may face significant challenges including mental health issues, anti-social behaviour or dependency on drugs or alcohol.



On average **few** SLs are assessed to have sufficient need to be allocated social housing. It is also important to note that applicants registered on the list may not necessarily advance up the list over time as there may always be others with greater need than you. Social housing provides a degree of security for tenants. Generally, the cost of social housing is approximately 80% of the local private rental market with the usual utility bills to be paid in addition.

²The military pay accommodation charges for Single Living Accommodation & Service Families Accommodation.

³Accommodation allocated by a local authority from their own housing stock or in partnership with Housing Associations.

Health

In the past SLs have not identified themselves to GP Practices during their registration or administrative staff have not understood the significance of this information. The role of Covenant is now a part of curriculum for all GPs nationally and is tested in Royal College of General Practitioners membership exam. However, this does not necessarily mean this information is enshrined in GP practices' processes and procedures.



Transition from Army Medical Services to NHS. The vast majority of SP are medically administered by their unit Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) who routinely support 650 soldiers who tend to be young, fit and healthy. There are daily sick parades and waiting times for follow-up appointments are usually short. If medication is prescribed SP can usually wait for their prescription to be dispensed from the pharmacy. More serious conditions are referred to the NHS under a fast-track arrangement. Rehabilitation treatment and physiotherapy is largely available on demand. This high level of medical support is designed to maintain operational capability and military effectiveness.

A SL can register with the NHS six months in advance of discharge. It is essential that individuals identify themselves as 'Veterans' when they register as this makes referral for



treatments easier when they result from their military service. Newly discharged veterans need to understand that the medical support available from the NHS GP practices will be different to what they have been used to. A GP will routinely administer some 1000 individuals including infants, the old and the frail

often with serious and complex conditions. The service provided by the NHS will be of a high standard but SLs should understand the differences between the two systems and have reasonable expectations:

- No sick parade.
- Appointments are usually made by telephone on a queuing system which may take some time or via their website.
- Lead times for appointments can be 1 – 3 weeks.
- Appointments are generally for 10 minutes only.
- Prescriptions can take 1 – 3 days and medication can take a further 2 days to collect.
- Occupational treatment. There is routinely a long waiting list to start physiotherapy treatments.
- The Armed Forces community can transfer their place to a new waiting list in a different location due to an assignment. However, each NHS Trust works within budgetary constraints and may impose restrictions on some treatments which results in personal disadvantage.

Veterans are entitled to priority access to NHS care (including hospital, primary or community care) for conditions associated to their time within the armed forces (service-related). However this is always subject to clinical need and does not entitle you to be treated ahead of someone with a higher clinical need. If the NHS is unaware of their obligations to you as a result of the Armed Forces Covenant, you should contact the local health care commissioners or the local authority Armed Forces or Veterans Champion.

Priority access / not preferential treatment. Being entitled to priority treatment but not benefitting from preferential treatment can be confusing. It is likely that your condition will be administered as a priority in that it should not be constrained by standard waiting times but medical procedures will be scheduled based on clinical need. Your priority treatment is based on your medical condition being service related. Do not assume that your GP understands the physical or mental demands of Service life so be prepared to provide detailed information in support of your condition.

Education



Service Pupil Premium. Some schools are extremely proactive in sourcing income streams whilst others, usually the smaller schools with a small administrative staff may not be. The Department of Education continues to provide [Service Pupil Premium \(SPP\)](#) funding to Service pupils amounting to £300 per year designed to enable the school to address the pastoral needs of Service children who move frequently or have a parent absent on duty. Pupils are eligible to SSP if they have a parent currently serving or if they have been registered as a child from a Service family in any year since 2011. It is important that parents register their children with their school so SPP can be claimed. Do not assume it will be done on your behalf.

Schools admissions. Securing school places outside of the normal admissions cycle can be very challenging. Guidance and advice is available from the Department of Children and Young People through the [Children Education Advice Service](#).

Please note that the Covenant will not guarantee that Service children get their first choice of school or be spared the inconvenience of children from the same family allocated places in different schools.

Common Transfer File. The transitory nature of Service life requires Service pupils to move between schools which can be disruptive. To minimise this disruption the quality of information on Service pupils will be improved and transferred between schools in a Common Transfer File. From September 2017 in England a Common Transfer File has identified Service children and the support they require when moving between schools

A Guide to Service Families – UK Education Systems. A general guide to UK education systems for Service families is at: [Guide to Service families UK education systems](#)

Problems with the Covenant?

If you believe a Local Authority of support or service provider is not honouring their Covenant obligations you should say so and confirm this in an email. This allows issues to be addressed in the first instant at the lowest level. If the matter remains unresolved you should refer the matter to the Local Authority's Armed Forces or Veterans' Champion – although not all LAs will have one. Access support and advice through:

Education: Directorate Children & Young People (DCYP) of which the Children's Education Advisory Service ([CEAS](#)) is a part:
Health: [NHS Choices](#) MOD: If the matter cannot be resolved you are encourage to provide the details to the MOD who will consolidate information in order to highlight anomalies, themes and trends and provide evidence for further discussions regarding the application of the Armed Forces Covenant with LAs and support and service providers or raise the matter with ministers or government departments. The MOD's email address is Covenant-Mailbox@mod.gov.uk.

Sources

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<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/3760/6>

<http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/safety/armedforces/package-of-support/?lang=en>

<http://www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk/veteran/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-service-housing-advice-office-jshao>

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