

Annual Report of Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership

Chair of Committee: Councillor Henry Hobhouse

Local Members and Divisions affected: ALL

Executive Director: Chris Hall, Executive Director for Community, Place and Economy

Executive Summary

This report updates Council on the work of the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant (SAFC) Partnership since the last Annual Report to Somerset Council in September 2024.

This report is for information.

The purpose of the SAFC Partnership is to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Somerset. Somerset Council (SC) leads and provides light-touch support to the Partnership.

The Covenant is a government initiative designed to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged by their service compared to members of the civilian community. Delivery of the Covenant is aimed at four groups of beneficiaries: regulars; reservists; veterans; and their immediate families.

In late 2022 the Armed Forces Act changed the status of the Covenant from 'a promise from the nation' to having the force of law – a statutory duty. The Act requires those providing certain public services, including local government and NHS bodies, to have 'due regard' to the principles of the Covenant.

Background and purpose of report

1. Somerset County Council along with Somerset's District Councils pledged support for the Covenant in February 2012. This commitment was reaffirmed by Somerset Council during Armed Forces Week in June 2023.
2. Officer support for the SAFC Partnership is provided by Jeff Brown, Service Manager, Stronger Communities and Kirsty Conger, Stronger Communities Officer, in the Strategic Partnerships service.
3. In May 2022, following the local election, Councillor Henry Hobhouse was appointed by the Leader as Armed Forces Champion and Chair of the SAFC Partnership. He is supported by two local Armed Forces Champions – councillors Andy Kendall and Lucy Trimnell.

National Developments

4. **Legislation - The Armed Forces Act.** The Armed Forces Act came into force in late 2022 and changed the status of the Covenant from 'a promise from the nation' to having the force of law – a statutory duty. In July 2025, the government announced that the Statutory Duty would be extended to include:
 - Housing
 - Education
 - Healthcare
 - Social care
 - Childcare
 - Employment and service in the armed forces
 - Personal taxation
 - Welfare benefits
 - Criminal justice
 - Immigration
 - Citizenship
 - Pensions
 - Service-related compensation
 - Transport

Further details including a consultation will be launched in the coming months to help clarify how the extension will be implemented and when it will come into force.

5. **Valour: Veterans Support.** The government has announced the development of Valour, a UK support network for the Armed Forces community. Pilots are currently underway in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Yorkshire, and South Yorkshire. The learning from the pilots will then shape the national roll-out. As these initiatives develop, it's vital that they complement support services already available in Somerset, which

are better developed than many areas thanks to NHS Somerset's commitment and investment.

6. **Armed Forces Veteran ID Cards Digital Update.** A new digital service launched in early 2024 to enable veterans who left the Armed Forces prior to December 2018 to verify their veteran status and receive a Veteran Card by post. In October 2025 the digital version of the Veterans ID card launched
7. To apply for a Veteran ID card visit: [Apply for an HM Armed Forces Veteran Card - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-an-hm-armed-forces-veteran-card)

Somerset Activities

8. **Raising the Armed Forces Day flag.** In a show of support for the Armed Forces, the Armed Forces Day flag was raised at County Hall on Friday 20th June. The event was hosted by Chair of Somerset Council, Cllr Mike Best and Mayor of Taunton, Cllr Martin Straus. The flag was raised by representatives from HMS Somerset. Flags were flown at Somerset Council's main offices leading up to National Armed Forces Day on Saturday, 28th June.
9. **VE and VJ Day 80th Anniversary.** A series of events took place throughout the county to observe the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ Day. At County Hall, on Thursday 8th May, the VE Day 80 flag was raised in a joint ceremony with Taunton Town Council, and a ceremony was held on Friday 15th August to mark VJ Day.
10. **SAFC Partnership annual conference.** On Tuesday 4th November, the annual Somerset Armed Forces Partnership Conference brought together 120 people representing organisations which support the Armed Forces Community in Somerset. The event was jointly organised by Somerset Council and NHS Somerset ICB with sponsorship from Kier. As well as providing opportunities for organisations to network, the conference gave updates on national initiatives including the Female Veterans' Transformation Programme and Valour. It also showcased local projects such as the Armed Forces Outreach Hubs, SASP JumpStart programme for service children and The Sir Donald Gosling Lookout at RNAS Yeovilton. The Conference was opened by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant Brigadier Nigel Beacom.
11. **Homelessness and Housing.** This year has seen the development of improved links between housing teams and the Chair of the Partnership. This has resulted in better understanding of the needs of the armed forces community and led to improved outcomes. Cllr Hobhouse is grateful to the housing and homelessness teams for their support.
12. **Adult Social Care.** Adult Social Care has recorded Veteran status since 2021/22. Current open cases with a Veteran classification represent 0.24% of open cases. As the timetable for the expansion of the Armed Forces Statutory Duty becomes clearer the team will work with Adult Social Care to understand the impacts of the Duty and how data can enable more effective targeting and support to the veteran community.
13. **Partnership updates.** A main effort of the SAFC Partnership is to enable communication with and between members of the Partnership. For many years we have produced quarterly updates as comprehensive sources of useful information with links to further information. This year we worked with

the web team to develop a sign-up form to join the mailing list. To be added to the mailing list for the updates, please visit:

<https://service.somerset.gov.uk/somerset-armed-forces-partnership-newsletter-sign-up>

14. **Veterans' Guaranteed Interview Scheme.** Somerset County Council launched the Veterans' Guaranteed Interview Scheme during Armed Forces Week 2021. The scheme offers a veteran who has left the Armed Forces in the last five years – and their partner – a guaranteed interview with the authority if they meet the essential criteria for the role. The scheme remains in place following the development of Somerset Council. In the year July 2024 – July 2025 the Council received just over 270 applications through this route. While some are still in process, 22 people have been employed through the scheme.
15. **Armed Forces Employee Network.** The Armed Forces Employee Network supports colleagues across the organisation that have a connection to the Armed Forces Community. The network was launched in 2019. There is ongoing work across the authority to develop the employee networks and we continue to promote to staff to increase awareness. To support this year's RBL Poppy Appeal an Armed Forces Drop-in session took place on Thursday 6th November. Attended by many local organisations that support the Armed Forces Community, the event gave Members, council staff and network members an opportunity to find out more about the support available.
16. **Armed Forces Day Events** Highly successful Armed Forces Day events were held in Bridgwater and Taunton this year. The Bridgwater event was organised by the local Royal British Legion branch while the Taunton event – which has a countywide reach – was organised through a dedicated social enterprise. Each attracted a great deal of interest and raised the profile of the AF Community and the many organisations which provide support. The events also celebrated the armed forces' contribution to Somerset.

Health

17. **Armed Forces Hubs in Somerset.** Funded by NHS Somerset the Armed Forces Hubs are open to all members of the Armed Forces community including those serving, their families and veterans. The hubs provide information and advice to help members of the armed forces community navigate the system and find the services and support they need. One hub is at Arc in Taunton alongside the military homeless service and the other is in the rural setting of ARK at Egwood. The service continues to develop and there are now four Armed Forces Link workers. Since their launch the hubs have received 165 referrals.
18. To access support via the hubs visit [Armed Forces - NHS Somerset ICB](#) or contact your GP, health coach or village agent.
19. **Armed Forces Outreach Service.** To extend the reach of the hubs an outreach service pilot was launched last year. The success of the pilot has led to the development of ten locations now delivering an outreach service. Details of upcoming sessions can be viewed at: [Armed Forces Outreach Service - NHS Somerset ICB](#). Outreach service delivery is funded through a

combination of charitable grants, building on the core capacity funded through NHS Somerset

20. **GPs Veteran Friendly Accreditation.** All Somerset's GP Practices are now accredited by the Royal College of GPs as Veteran Friendly. Please encourage your contacts to let their surgery know if they are a military veteran.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

21. Continued support for The Armed Forces Covenant Partnership's work supports delivery of the Council Plan priorities:
- **Fairer, Healthier, Caring Somerset** – minimises disadvantage in accessing health, housing, and social care; improves mental health and wellbeing.
 - **Resilient Economy** – promotes employment, skills, and housing stability for veterans and families, strengthening economic resilience.
 - **Inclusive Communities** – builds cohesion through engagement, events and support networks, fostering belonging and reducing isolation.
 - **Strong Governance & Partnerships** – embeds Armed Forces Covenant principles into service design, statutory duty compliance and cross-sector collaboration.

Other options considered

22. The Council has a duty to give due regard to the needs of the Armed Forces community and has a stated ambition to work in partnership to meet the needs of Somerset's resident. No other options were therefore considered.

Key considerations for the Council

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

23. This report has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee.

Consultation and feedback

24. The Armed Forces Covenant Partnership engages with its members through regular meetings and the annual conference, and responds to feedback around the topics under discussion, the development of new services and how best support can be provided to stakeholders and members of the armed forces community.

Risk Implications

There are no risk implications in Council accepting this report

Financial Implications

25. The Partnership is supported through the Strategic Partnerships revenue budget. There are no additional financial implications as result of members receiving this report.

Legal and Procurement Implications

26. The legislative framework and the legal implications are set out in the body of this report.
27. There are no legal or procurement implications in Council accepting this report.

HR / Workforce Implications

28. There are no HR or workforce implications in Council accepting this report.

Equalities Implications

29. Military veteran status is an adopted characteristic in Somerset, and the Council has a Duty to pay due regard to the needs of the military community in provision of certain services. The council's support for the Partnership has a positive equalities impact.

Community Safety Implications

30. There are no community safety implications in Council accepting this report

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

31. There are no climate change or sustainability implications in Council accepting this report

Health and Safety Implications

32. There are no health and safety implications in Council accepting this report

Health and Wellbeing Implications

33. There are no health and wellbeing implications in Council accepting this report

Social Value

34. There are no social value implications in Council accepting this report

Background Papers

35. None

Appendices

- None

Report assurance

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Governance Implications	Scott Wooldridge	1/12/2025
Legal Implications	Kehinde Awojobi	1/12/2025
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	2/12/2025
Workforce (*)	Dawn Bettridge	n/a
Asset Management (*)	John Kulasek	n/a
Executive Director – Community, Place & Economy	Chris Hall	5/11/2025
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Theo Butt Philip	5/12/2025
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	List local members	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	Cllr Sue Osborne	24/11/2025
Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	Gill Slocombe	28/11/2025