



Armed Forces Annual Report 2021/22



Foreword

I am delighted to present Buckinghamshire Council's first annual report on our work to deliver our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. We have an estimated veteran population of around 28,000 within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, in addition to 3,550 serving military personnel. When taking into account spouses and family members, as well as reservists and cadets, the true number of Buckinghamshire residents who are part of the armed forces community is far higher and makes up a significant proportion of the overall population.

Having been appointed as the Armed Forces Champion in May 2021, and as Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Civilian Military Partnership Board, I have been amazed by the shared commitment across the county to supporting our armed forces community. I strongly believe that our serving military personnel, reservists, cadets and their families deserve our recognition, thanks and support and should not be disadvantaged in any way by their service to their country.

Buckinghamshire Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant as a new authority in July 2020. This was a statement of our continued commitment to supporting our armed forces community in the county, following on from the work that our legacy councils had done.



Following the Council's initial pandemic response, we reconvened meetings of the Buckinghamshire Civilian Military Partnership Board in July 2021. One year on, now is an opportune moment to reflect on the work that we and our fantastic partner organisations have done over the past 12 months and to highlight some of our achievements.

Although Covid has continued to have an influence on events and activities over the past year, I was delighted to attend Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Sunday events in person as well as visit the two RAF bases we have in the county. I would like to thank all our partners for their tireless commitment to supporting our armed forces community over the past year and look forward to achieving more successes in the coming 12 months.

Cllr Mimi Harker OBE – Armed Forces Champion

The Armed Forces Covenant

“A promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.”

The Covenant’s twin underlying principles are 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.

The armed forces community is defined in the covenant as all those towards whom the nation has a moral obligation due to service in HM Armed Forces. This includes regular personnel, reservists, and veterans as well as their family members.

In the last 12 months, the Armed Forces Act 2021 was passed which enshrines the Armed Forces Covenant duty into law.

The new covenant duty places an obligation on relevant bodies when exercising certain aspects of their public functions to have due regard to the Covenant principles, in particular when developing policy or making decisions in relation to housing, healthcare, and education. The Armed Forces Act 2021 will come into effect in Autumn 2022.

When Buckinghamshire Council re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant in July 2020 we committed to pledges in the following areas:

- a. Healthcare
- b. Education
- c. Housing
- d. Remembrance
- e. Mobility and Deployment
- f. Transition
- g. Social Isolation and Sense of Community
- h. Employment and Employers



A link to the Armed Forces Covenant can be found on our **Council website**.

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.



Buckinghamshire Council is proud to be a Silver Award holder.

Our pledge of support for reservist employees includes:

- Up to 2 weeks of paid leave each year to attend military training camp (pro-rata for part-time staff).
- A flexible working policy to assist with military commitments.
- Management support in preparation for, during and after mobilisation.
- Access to an Occupational Health service, an employee support line, and a confidential counselling service.
- Eligibility for sickness absence pay in line with terms and conditions.
- Eligibility for maternity, paternity and adoption leave in line with terms and conditions.
- The Council will encourage the reservist to keep in contact at a social level with friends and colleagues from their workplace during periods of mobilisation.

Outcomes from our work in 2021/22



Reconvened the Civilian Military Partnership Board

In July 2021, the Buckinghamshire Civilian-Military Partnership Board (CMPB) was re-established following the creation of the new unitary Council. The board has representatives from over 20 organisations including Buckinghamshire Council, the South East Reserve Force and Cadet Association (SE RFCA), RAF High Wycombe, RAF Halton, 11th Infantry Brigade and Headquarters South East, The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA), The Royal British Legion (RBL), Ministry of Defence, Royal Navy, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), NHS, Bucks Fire & Rescue, Thames Valley Police (TVP) and other key charities and organisations supporting our the armed forces. The role of the board is to foster closer working between the local authority, the military and partner agencies to support the armed forces community within Buckinghamshire. The board meets on a quarterly basis at the Council's main offices in Aylesbury.

Creation of Task & Finish Groups

The CMPB established four task & finish subgroups in July 2021, each tasked to deliver on a priority area of work related to the Council's Armed Forces Covenant pledges and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The four groups are:

- Veteran's clubs/hubs and drop-ins
- NEETs & Cadets
- Events & Activities
- Going for Gold

Events and Activities

Aim: To identify suitable opportunities and activities (local, regional, or national) to recognise and remember the commitments and sacrifices of our armed forces personnel and their families, both past and present, across Buckinghamshire. This group is made up of representatives from Buckinghamshire Council.

Veterans' clubs/hubs and drop-ins

Aim: To explore setting up new veterans' clubs, hubs, and drop-in sessions for Buckinghamshire's armed forces community, or expand existing offerings. This group is chaired by Bucks Fire & Rescue and is made up of representatives from Buckinghamshire Council, NHS, DWP, and Bucks New University.

In September 2021 the first drop-in centre was established at Marlow Fire Station running on the last Thursday morning of the month. The drop-in centre provides a quiet space for the armed forces community to access vital services which are tailored to their needs. Over the last 6 months, the drop-in session in Marlow has been going strength to strength. A second drop-in centre has been set up at Aylesbury Fire Station, with the first session having taken place in June 2022.

NEETs and Cadets

Aim: To explore opportunities through the cadet force for young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET. This group is chaired by SERFCA and is made up of representatives from Buckinghamshire Council, TVP, DWP, and Bucks Fire & Rescue.

The task & finish group has been reviewing literature and is conducting research into the factors which may increase people's chances of being NEETs. This work will help the group to target the right audience with cadet opportunities. The task & finish group are looking to arrange discussions with national government as this aligns with parts of levelling up the agenda. A video/short film is currently in early production which will promote the benefits of being part of the cadets, showcasing personal stories from former and current cadets in Buckinghamshire.

Going for Gold

Aim: To support Buckinghamshire Council to develop and implement a plan that will enable the Council to apply for a Gold award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, demonstrating our role as an exemplary employer within the local authority sector; advocating support for the defence and armed forces community to partners, suppliers, and customers, with tangible positive results. This group is chaired by SERFCA and is made up of representatives from Buckinghamshire Council, RAF Benevolent Fund and Bucks New University (awarded Gold in August 2021).

The task and finish group have aided Buckinghamshire Council to devise an action plan to ensure that we go above and beyond our Covenant pledges. The action plan will support Buckinghamshire Council's aim to become a gold status Council.

Engagement with our partners

The CMPB provides an opportunity to bring partner organisations from around the County and beyond together on a quarterly basis in person to discuss issues affecting the Armed Forces community.

The Armed Forces Champion alongside officers visited RAF High Wycombe in September 2021 and RAF Halton in October 2021, to gain a better understanding of our military sites within the county, what activities they deliver and the challenges they face. The Chairman of the Council, Armed Forces Champion and officers also attended the SERFCA Armed Forces Briefing at RAF Benson in June 2022.

Remembrance and Recognition

The Council ran Reserves, Armed Forces, and Merchant Navy Days flag flying events, which the Armed Forces Champion attended as a representative alongside members of the armed forces community, The Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Chairman, Leader, and senior Council staff.

The Chairman of the Council led a remembrance service in Aylesbury's Market Square on 14 November 2021 with representatives from the Army, RAF, Royal British Legion, veterans, and community organisations including the Scouts, Brownies and Army Cadets.

Aligning and Refreshing Council Policies

Buckinghamshire Council aligned the former legacy councils' reservist and volunteer leave policies up to the highest offering for all staff. The Guaranteed Interview Scheme was also introduced for all currently serving or former armed forces personnel including reservists. This scheme ensures that any serving or former armed forces personnel are guaranteed an interview for any role that they apply for within the Council, provided they meet the minimum criteria for the role.

Engaging Council Staff

Internal webpages have been refreshed to promote the support the Council offers to staff, as well as signposting to external organisations such as Op Courage.

In December 2021 a staff forum was held to gauge interest and explore options to support staff who are part of the armed forces community. As a result of feedback received, we are establishing an Armed Forces Staff Network as a forum to enable staff to share experiences with peers and support each other. A first meeting of the network is due to take place in September 2022.

As part of Armed Forces Week in June 2022, a tea-break talk was held where staff were given an opportunity to find out about the Covenant and how the Council supports our armed forces community, as well as hearing from two staff members who had served in the military about their personal experiences. The talk was attended by over 100 staff and has been made available on the Council's internal intranet.



Supporting Our Armed Forces Tea Break Talk - 23 June 2022

Watch Later Share

Personal Experiences – Mick Harris & David Knowles



Armed Forces Staff Forum

- Remembrance Sunday is always a poignant date in the calendar. As an organisation, we remain fully committed to supporting our staff from the Armed Forces community
- We will be holding a staff forum in December which will explore the development of a staff network to support veterans, reservists, and the families of those serving



For more information or to get involved, email armedforces@buckinghamshire.gov.uk by Tuesday 30 November



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL



Collaboration
a year of collaboration

MORE VIDEOS



Moving Forward

Moving into 2022-23, our aim is to further embed the armed forces Covenant into the culture of the Council and build upon the foundation and achievements that have been made over the last 12 months.

Our action plan will drive the next stage of development in partnership with our partner organisations, Council staff and the wider armed forces community, seeking to further ensure that we are an armed forces friendly employer and that we meet our obligations to our armed forces community in Buckinghamshire under the Covenant.

