

Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Act 2021 amended the Armed Forces Act 2006 to create the following legal obligation on specified bodies in all four home nations of the UK. The duties came into force on the 22nd of November 2022.

When a specified body exercises a relevant function, it must have due regard to:

- (a) the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces;
- (b) the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces, and
- (c) the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.

The Duty applies to members of the regular forces and the reserve forces; members of British overseas territory forces who are subject to Service law, former members of any of His Majesty's forces who are ordinarily resident in the UK and relevant family members.

The specified bodies who need to demonstrate due regard to the Covenant includes:

- Local authorities and local authority landlords
- Integration authorities, Health Boards, Special Health Boards, and the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service
- Persons or bodies whose help is requested under section 23 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

The Duty must be complied with when a specified body develops, implements and/or reviews a relevant policy, or makes decisions on its delivery of relevant services. In real terms this means that we need to be able to demonstrate:

- Due regard to the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces.
- Due regard to the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.
- Due regard to the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.

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Specified bodies can demonstrate 'due regard' by having mechanisms are in place that prompt decision-makers to assess how their decision might on those who are currently or have previously served and maintaining records of this consideration.

ABERDEEN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP		
Potential vulnerability to be addressed through the Covenant	Current state	Next steps
Understanding the healthcare needs of the local Armed Forces Community		
Understanding local need in order to plan the provision of healthcare services	There are long standing good relationships between NHS Grampian (NHSG) and the Armed Forces in Grampian.	Meet with NHS Grampian to ensure full awareness and compliance with the Covenant, and that due recognition be given to the principle of special provision in some circumstances.
Identifying service users from the Armed Forces Community	Expected to be identified through existing relationships.	Ensure compliance via NHS Grampian. Any potentially identified persons or issues can be raised directly by Armed Forces to NHSG via Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership (ACHSCP).
Healthcare professionals' knowledge of healthcare issues relevant to the Armed Forces Community	Good awareness of mental and physical health issues that may be experienced by Armed Forces within NHSG.	Offer to meet bi annually with Armed Forces representative to resolve any outstanding issues.
Provision of services		
Priority treatment	NHS Grampian working to comply with all Scottish Government treatment guarantees	Check Covenant compliance with NHS Grampian.
Waiting lists to start treatment		Offer to meet bi annually with Armed Forces representative to resolve any outstanding issues.

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Waiting lists to resume treatment		Offer to meet bi annually with Armed Forces representative to resolve any outstanding issues.
Reassessments	Current situation. Any reassessment of armed forces staff will be as per clinical requirements.	
Local variability in healthcare services	Current situation. Grampian aim would be to have little variability of service provision across Grampian and Armed Forces population. Any anomalies should be highlighted.	
Relationship with healthcare professionals	There are strong local relationships between NHS Grampian and the Armed Forces	
Provision of tailored services		
Planning and funding		
Co-operation between bodies and professionals		

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL
EDUCATION SERVICE

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Potential vulnerability to be addressed through the Covenant	Current state	Next steps
Identifying Service Children	<p>Schools have an awareness of current service children, but less oversight of veterans unless parents have disclosed this.</p> <p>So far as the education of children and young people is concerned a requirement to have “due regard” already exists in Scotland through the provisions in the Education (Scotland) Act, 2016. Sections 3A and 3B of that Act imposes a duty of “due regard” on Scottish Ministers and education authorities to reduce inequalities of outcome for all pupils. This by default also includes those pupils from families with an armed forces background.</p>	<p>Amend yearly school data capture forms, to accurately identify those parents and carers who are impacted by the Covenant.</p> <p>To be completed by December 2023 (requested from Seemis)</p>
Admissions	<p>Schools have been briefed on the need for timely admission arrangements for those covered by the Covenant.</p> <p>Officers place siblings together in local schools wherever possible.</p> <p>The school application process does not currently identify service families. As a result, there currently isn't a mechanism to track the time taken from school application to school placement</p>	<p>Reflect the Covenant as Admissions guidance is amended.</p> <p>To be completed by October 2023 (requested from Digitalfirst)</p> <p>Amend the school admissions form and SEEMIS fields to enable live data collection and more comprehensive monitoring</p> <p>To be completed by October 2023 & December 2023 respectively – as above)</p>
Educational attainment and curriculum	<p>Secondary school staff have been briefed on the need to give due regard to the continuation of secondary courses wherever possible.</p> <p>School Improvement Plans already support a school's work to improve the outcomes of particular groups although there is no specific reference to armed forces families in Local Authority guidance.</p>	<p>Amend Local Authority guidance to reflect the need to consider this group where children impacted by the Covenant are in attendance.</p> <p>To be completed by October 2023</p>
Wellbeing	<p>That children and young people of Armed Forces families receive the support they need to address barriers to participation, learning and achievement; promote positive</p>	<p>Strengthen arrangements further by offering those covered by the Covenant</p>

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	<p>mental health and wellbeing; benefit from the development of high-quality education which is sustained; and achieve their full potential through established GIRFEC arrangements.</p> <p>Training has been delivered to Head Teachers.</p>	<p>a GIRFEC meeting on at least a yearly basis. To be completed by October 2023</p> <p>Develop a short professional learning film on the needs of those covered by the Covenant for dissemination to staff. To be completed by March 2024</p>
School transport considerations	<p>In Scotland, children and young people who are 5-21 years old, are eligible for a card giving free bus travel (from 31 January 2022). Children under 5 years old already travel for free on buses and don't need a card. Provided the child is living in Scotland and has proof of person (proving name and age), proof of residence and proof of photograph, all required to be verified as part of the application, they are eligible for the free bus travel. To apply for the cards, proof of residence in Scotland is needed. A letter from the child's school/college/university is one of the options and might be the most straight forward for an Armed Forces family.</p>	<p>Amend Local Authority guidance to reflect the need for school leaders to prioritise the writing of a letter to act as proof of residency.</p> <p>To be completed by October 2023</p>
Attendance	<p>Absence from school, whatever the cause, disrupts learning. It is important that parents encourage their children and young people to attend school and that parents arrange family holidays during the holiday period wherever possible. School leaders already have a mechanism to record family holidays outwith the school holiday period as authorised absence where absolutely necessary.</p>	<p>Monitor the attendance of those covered by the Covenant at school and Local Authority level.</p> <p>To be completed by termly monitoring in place by January 2024</p>
Additional needs support	<p>A range of services to support those with additional support needs is currently available. However, there is no way of tracking access to services for those covered by the Covenant.</p>	<p>Add an additional field into the Request for Assistance process.</p> <p>To be completed by October 2023</p>
Identified Education Lead for the Covenant	<p>An Education Authority lead is already in place.</p> <p>No specific information is available to families regarding the provision of education for Armed Forced families</p>	<p>Include next steps in the National Improvement Framework Plan for 2023/24. To be completed by Sept 2023 Develop information for Armed Forces Families and include it on the city Armed Forces pages.</p>

		To be completed by March 2024
HOUSING SERVICES		
Potential vulnerability to be addressed through the Covenant	Current state	Next steps
Identifying Service Users from the Armed Forces Community	This is currently identified at the Housing application stage as a question in the application.	Housing will need to revisit how we identify current tenants who are from the armed forces community.
Allocations policy for social housing	<p>Armed Forces Personnel leaving full time regular service will be classified as having urgent housing need as set out in our Allocation Policy.</p> <p>Armed Forces personnel</p> <p>We will ensure up to 1% of our Council new build houses are offered to those leaving the armed forces. With up to a further 0.5% being adapted for those injured in service. Applications from service personnel who are planning to leave the armed forces who wish to be housed in one of the Council's new social housing developments only, will be given priority status and placed on the Urgent List and awarded a medium priority 56 days before they are due to leave the forces.</p> <p>They will be made one reasonable offer of accommodation under this priority. Where a reasonable offer is made and subsequently refused, the priority will be removed. If applicants wish to add other housing choices such as house types and areas out with the new build properties, their housing application can also be placed on the waiting list, and they will be awarded points in accordance with their housing needs as per the criteria in this policy.</p>	<p>We have had 18 applications from this group in 2021/22 and 16 in 2022/23. Currently we have 7 live applicants among this group, therefore the 1% target will be difficult to achieve for all new developments.</p>
Availability of suitable social housing	<p>We have let 1.1% of our new builds at Auchmill Road (2022) and 1.4% of our new builds at Wellheads Avenue (2022)</p> <p>We have not yet met the target at our Summerhill Development which is still being let.</p>	

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Communication with Service families														
Homelessness	<p>This is recorded in homeless applications and is a relatively small number of applications.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>In service 5 or More Years Ago</th> <th>In Service Less than 5 Years Ago</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>9</td> <td>34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>2</td> <td>26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>5</td> <td>28</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		In service 5 or More Years Ago	In Service Less than 5 Years Ago	2022/23	9	34	2021/22	2	26	2020/21	5	28	
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Disabled Facilities Grants	This is not currently recorded specifically for people from the Armed Forces Community.													

CORPORATE NEXT STEPS

The Council has pledged to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant and has a devoted webpage. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/people-and-communities/our-support-armed-forces>. The Lord Provost is the Armed Forces and Veterans Champion. In order to strengthen our response, we will now:

- Continue to develop our webpages with content as this action plan is implemented.
- Undertake a population needs assessment as part of our Local Outcome Improvement Planning cycle.
- Reflect the need for due regard in the Council policy and strategy guidance.
- Communicate the improvements we are making regularly through our social media channels.
- Update our Integrated Impact Assessment to reflect the Covenant.