

Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 22/23



Foreword

Welcome to the Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report of South Gloucestershire Council for 2022/23.

South Gloucestershire Council is a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant and has been for many years. This Report provides an overview of work delivered by the Council during 2022/23 to support the Armed Forces Community.

During the year, we welcomed The Armed Forces Covenant Duty a legal obligation requiring decisions about the development and delivery of services in the areas of housing, healthcare, and education, to be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces Community. In South Gloucestershire, our approach goes beyond the statutory requirement, additionally focussing on the area of 'employment'. Our action plan for 2023/25 shown within this Report commits the Council as an employer to work towards the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme so that we demonstrate we lead by example across South Gloucestershire.

Improving outcomes across all aspects of life for the Armed Forces Community is a key priority for me in my role as Armed Forces Champion and as Cabinet Member for Cost of Living, Equalities and Public Health. In doing this, the council is proud to work with a wide range of organisations and partners.

During 2022/23, the Council has continued to fund SSAFA and Assistplus to deliver the Veteran Support Service for South Gloucestershire and I am delighted that feedback from those who have used the Service has been extremely positive. This Service will continue to be funded by the Council during 2023 - 2025.

I am clear that to deliver meaningful services and positive outcomes for the Armed Forces Community, we need to hear from and engage with you on a proactive and ongoing basis. Here, in this Report, we have given a sample of what we have been doing over the last year - and what will be doing going forward - to act on your feedback.

I hope this summary is helpful. If you would like to find out more about this work, or have feedback, please do contact me at any time.



Cllr Alison Evans
Cabinet Member for Cost of Living, Equalities and Public Health

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Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011. It sets out the relationship between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces and recognises that the whole nation has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces and their families, and it establishes how they should expect to be treated.

In November 2022, we welcomed a new requirement – The Armed Forces Covenant Duty – a legal obligation on public bodies to ‘have due regard’ to the principles of the Covenant. It requires decisions about the development and delivery of services in the areas of housing, healthcare, and education, to be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community. In South Gloucestershire, our approach goes beyond the statutory requirement in that the area of ‘Employment’ is also represented within our own internal Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group, ensuring we are proactive in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces community in this area.

During the year, we also revised our Equality Impact Assessment and Analysis (EqIAA) process to ensure that the Armed Forces Covenant is appropriately reflected in council strategies, policies and operational delivery.

The Armed Forces Community includes:

- Regular personnel – Individuals currently serving as members of the Naval Service (including Royal Navy and Royal Marines), Army or Royal Air Force.
- Reservists – Volunteer Reservists, who form the Royal Navy Reserve, Royal Marine Reserve, Territorial Army and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and Regular Reservists who comprise the Royal Fleet Reserve, Army Reserve and Royal Air Force Reserve.
- Veterans – Those who have served for at least a day in the HM Armed Forces, whether as a Regular or a Reservist.
- Families of Regular Personnel, Reservists and Veterans – The immediate family of those within the above categories.
- Bereaved – The immediate family of Service Personnel and Veterans who have died whether or not that death has any connection with the service.

According to the 2021 Census¹, there were 9,498 people aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces in South Gloucestershire; this is 4.0% of the population of South Gloucestershire. This figure is made up of 2.9% who had served in regular UK armed forces, 0.9% in reserve UK armed forces and 0.2% in both the regular and reserve UK armed forces.

The 2021 Census tells us that the South West is the region within England with the highest proportion of veterans (5.6%, 317,000 people).

South Gloucestershire also has a significant number of MoD civil servants; the MoD headquarters in South Gloucestershire at Filton Abbey Wood is one of the region's biggest employers.

There are around 8,500 staff based at the MoD headquarters in South Gloucestershire.

¹ https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/static/a71773e8f33a61c10fbcaf22ecb54ec7/Census2021-Briefing-Note-03_UK-Armed-forces-veterans.pdf

Census 2021 information

Population aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces 2021, WoE local authorities

	Previously served in regular UK armed forces		Previously served in reserve UK armed forces		Previously served in both regular and reserve UK armed forces		Has previously served in any UK armed forces	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
South Gloucestershire	6,970	2.9%	2,124	0.9%	404	0.2%	9,498	4.0%
North Somerset	7,426	4.2%	1,593	0.9%	424	0.2%	9,443	5.3%
Bath & NE Somerset	4,341	2.7%	1,274	0.8%	243	0.2%	5,858	3.6%
Bristol	6,450	1.7%	2,623	0.7%	418	0.1%	9,491	2.4%
England & Wales	1,413,296	2.9%	360,770	0.7%	79,046	0.2%	1,853,112	3.8%

The whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

This is South Gloucestershire Council's second Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report; it provides an overview of key actions that the council takes to support serving personnel and their families as well as veterans. It also provides a plan for the key actions we will take moving forwards to meet our legal obligations.



We welcome feedback on this plan and any aspect of this Report. at all times.

South Gloucestershire Council is an active member of **Forces Connect South West**² which

Forces Connect South West is a regional partnership that aims to improve services and support to the military community. It is comprised of organisations from the four pillars, which are:

1. Public Authority bodies – Councils, NHS, Police, Ambulance and Fire.
2. The Ministry of Defence – regular and reserve units of the RN, RM, Army and RAF.
3. Military Charity and support organisations.
4. Business, commerce and industry.

is a local authority initiative that supports the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant to the military community across the South West of England through effective partnerships. Forces Connect South West brings together public authority bodies, the MOD, military charities and support agencies, and business to develop effective relationships and deliver support of the Covenant in a coherent manner.

The Council hosts a bi-annual meeting of the **Armed Forces Covenant Working Group**, which brings together political leadership, council officers, wider public sector partners and representatives of voluntary and veterans' services organisations.

The meeting is an information sharing forum that supports joint working and ensures the Armed Forces Covenant has a high priority in the work of the council. For many years one of the bi-annual meetings has coincided with a flag raising ceremony organised by the Royal British Legion to mark Armed Forces Day.

Armed Forces Covenant Working Group members:

- South Gloucestershire Council
- North Bristol NHS Trust
- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Avon and Somerset Constabulary
- Royal British Legion (RBL)
- MoD Southwest HQ Engagement Team
- SSAFA
- Assistplus
- Veteran Advisory Pension Committee (VAPC)
- Abbeywood Hive
- Developing Health and Independence
- RAF Families Federation
- Wessex Reserve Cadets Association
- CVS South Gloucestershire

Internally, South Gloucestershire Council runs its own **Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group** bringing together the areas of:

- education,
 - public health,
 - housing, and
 - employment
- in order to ensure effective delivery of the Covenant.

The Group runs a [webpage](#) as part of the main South Gloucestershire Council website where a wide range of information is available.



² <https://www.forcesconnectsouthwest.org.uk/>

Support for Veterans

In February 2021, in support of Veterans across South Gloucestershire, the council agreed to fund a two-year pilot project to develop and build a support service for Veterans in South Gloucestershire. This is known as the Veteran Support Service (VSS). Following the success of the pilot, Cabinet took a decision in February 2023, as part of its budget setting process, to continue to fund the VSS for a further 2 years (2023 – 2025).

Assistplus³ and Soldiers', Sailors', and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire⁴ therefore, continue to be jointly commissioned to work in partnership to provide the all-encompassing service. Key to this is their involvement at a strategic level, providing feedback on experiences and information from the armed forces community when accessing Council services specifically in the fields of education, healthcare, housing and employment. This provides direct challenge and support to the continuous improvement of council services.

Other service aspects delivered by the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service include:



- Casework and home visiting service for specialist support and advice.
- Peer Support meetings with the option to invite key speakers on topics relevant and appropriate to the participants needs and requests.
- Advice service accessed by virtual means, telephone, email and face to face.



³ <https://www.assistplus.org.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/bristol-south-gloucestershire>

Over the course of the second year of the Veteran Support Service, the following has achieved:

- * 87 Veterans have been supported (increase of 61% on year one).
- * 106 telephone calls logged (increase of 61% on year one).
- * 45 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held, (increase of 25% on year one).
- * 49 face to face meetings have been held, (increase of 104% on year one).
- * 14 Peer support group sessions have been held (increase of 56% on year one).
- * 15 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities (increase of 36% on year one).



Satisfaction surveys gained from a sample of 42 Veterans demonstrated that the majority of Veterans felt happier, less anxious and less isolated as a result of the support they received. Most support was given in regard to the areas of Employment and Housing. The service was rated good overall. These positive results evidence the need for support and that the service is appropriate to the need.

Examples of support delivered by the Veteran Support Service include:

Referring to South Gloucestershire Council Occupational Therapy team for equipment to help with daily living - leading to reduction in loneliness and isolation as well as an increase in independence.

Referrals from South Gloucestershire Social Services to help improve living conditions with funding from military charities.

Working with the Royal British Legion to provide support with household finances for Veterans with serious health issues.

Helping Veterans to write CVs and to apply for and to gain employment.

The following sections of this report provide specific information relevant to the key areas of:

Health

(see pages 10 – 11)

Education

(see pages 12 – 13)

Housing

(see pages 14 – 15)

Employment

(see page 16)

Health

The Public Health and Wellbeing Division of South Gloucestershire Council commission and provide a range of services to support people with their health and wellbeing. Below is some information about how these services interact with the Armed Forces Community.

One You South Gloucestershire (including adult healthy weight referrals)

Armed forces status is collected at the point of referral, identifying whether a service user is, or has previously been, a member of the Armed Forces. Where Armed Forces status is identified, the One You South Gloucestershire team will provide information on Assistplus and SSAFA and complete an additional onward referral where appropriate. As part of the recommissioning and/or redesign of the healthy lifestyle and wellbeing service and its associated offers planned for 2023/24, members of the Armed Forces community will be contacted in order to help identify their specific needs and to seek their opinions on the development of this service.

Smokefree Services

Armed forces status is collected at the point of referral, identifying whether a service user is, or has previously been, a member of the Armed Forces. Where Armed Forces status is identified, Smokefree Practitioners will provide information on Assistplus and SSAFA, and complete an additional onward referral where appropriate. The importance of collecting this equalities monitoring information and signposting onto associated services is included as part of the core training offer to new Practitioners and is reinforced during update sessions for all Smokefree staff. Commissioned Smokefree services in South Gloucestershire are contracted until March 2024, and before future recommissioning and/or redesign, members of the Armed Forces community will be contacted to help identify their specific needs and to seek their opinions on the development of this service.

NHS Health Checks

The South Gloucestershire NHS Health Check template has recently been updated, and now collects information on whether a patient is, or has previously been, a member of the Armed Forces. Where Armed Forces status is identified, NHS Health Check Practitioners will provide information on Assistplus and SSAFA and complete an additional onward referral where appropriate. The importance of collecting equalities monitoring information and signposting onto associated services is included in the 2023/24 training programme and reinforced with Practitioners during annual update sessions. South Gloucestershire General Practices (GP's) are currently commissioned to deliver the NHS Health Check programme until March 2024, and we will continue to work with them to scope further opportunities to meet the specific needs of the Armed Forces community and their high-risk counterparts during this period.

Sexual health services

Information is not yet collected by specialist sexual health service providers at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces. As part of the recommissioning of sexual health services, people from the Armed Forces Community will be contacted specifically to ask their opinions on the development of services to best support their needs. The requirement to collect this data will be made mandatory in the next contract starting 2025.

The current provider of sexual health services across BNSSG is implementing a better system for collecting data across the different IT platforms across the different sub-contracted partners. Commissioners across BNSSG regularly challenge the provider to improve data collection, but it is currently limited by the IT platform (Millcare) used to collect patient information.

Children and Young People

The Public Health Healthy Foundations programme aims to lead and advocate for children's health and wellbeing in South Gloucestershire. To ensure our work is informed at a strategic level by the voice of the child, we commission a regular health and wellbeing online pupil survey (OPS). The OPS provides an important and comprehensive picture how children and young people in South Gloucestershire behave and what they really think about a range of health-related issues. This includes questions where children can self-report having a family member in the Armed Forces.

Services to families, for example: Active Play, the Home Safety Equipment Scheme and provision of Healthy Start vitamins have updated monitoring on referral forms to include information about whether family members are part of the Armed Forces Community. The most recent survey, OPS2023, will have data ready for analysis by August 2023.

Drug and alcohol services

Information is collected at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces and an additional onward referral to Assistplus and SSAFA would be completed as appropriate. The Service Manager is linked into the council's Armed Forces Covenant Group to ensure that there are suitable pathways into drug and alcohol treatment for those that require it. As part of the recommissioning of drug and alcohol services, people from the Armed Forces Community will be contacted specifically to ask their opinions on the development of drug and alcohol services to best support their needs.

The above information consistently refers to 'data monitoring requirements'. This is an important piece of work as raised by the Ministry of Defence and the Office for Veterans' Affairs who have released guidance⁵. Referred to as 'Harmonisation', this is the process of making statistics and data more comparable, consistent, and coherent to make sure they can be compared effectively across different data collections in the Government Statistical Service (GSS). Harmonisation produces more useful statistics that give a greater level of understanding about a topic. The implementation by South Gloucestershire Council of data monitoring requirements for its services which cover the Armed Forces Community not only ensures that we know as much information as possible about who is (and is not) accessing services, it allows us to ensure that adequate resource is apportioned to meet the extent of need across the Armed Forces Community.

Education

South Gloucestershire is made up of 116 mainstream and special schools.

South Gloucestershire Local Authority continues to have a range of statutory duties to champion the needs of vulnerable learners including maintaining education, health and care plans, educating those who are excluded from school, monitoring and tracking those who are missing education, fulfilling safeguarding and equalities duties, to name a few. There are greater levels of accountability in relation to the effectiveness of maintained schools which are under Local Authority control but there is also significant partnership and collaborative work with academies.

School admissions

South Gloucestershire Council recognises the particular needs of children of the Armed Forces Community. The Council ensures that the needs of these children are taken into account by:

- adhering to the School Admission Code that allows children of UK service personnel to be permitted exceptions to the Infant Class Size rule, when admitted outside the normal admissions round.
- allocating a school place in advance if the application is accompanied by an official government letter which declares a relocation date and a Unit postal address or quartering address.
- accepting a Unit postal address, or, if appropriate, a quartering area address (the address of the closest house in the relevant quartering area), for applications from service personnel in the absence of a new home postal address. A quartering address will be used only where the housing authorities confirm in writing that a house will be offered in the area.
- accepting a late application from UK service personnel as 'on time' where a notification of posting has been received after the closing date and before the date of exchange of information with other admission authorities.
- considering an application on the criterion of 'local sibling' where another child in the family has been offered a place at the preferred school and the Unit postal address or quartering address is within the Area of Prime Responsibility for the preferred school.
- wherever possible, children of UK service personnel will be offered a place at the preferred local school but taking into account the admission number for the school.

Additional needs support

Service children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) will go through the assessment process to see how best we can meet their needs and decide if they require an educational health and care plan (EHCP). Panels meet weekly throughout the academic year offering equitable access to assessments for children of UK service personnel.

Service pupil premium payments

Eligible schools receive the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) so that they can support the pastoral needs of service children, the current amount is £310 per eligible child. Schools have flexibility over how they use the SPP, as they are best placed to understand and respond to the specific needs of those pupils for whom the funding has been allocated. Funding can be spent on providing a variety of means of support such as counselling provision and academic support. In our next annual report, we will provide examples of how SSP is used in South Gloucestershire Schools and its impact.

Eligible schools are identified in the autumn term census. In the 2022 schools census, 277 children across the county were identified as 'service children', 171 attend maintained schools and 106 attend an academy school.

In respect of the 171 pupils attending maintained schools, the spread is across 48 different schools, as follows:

- 1 maintained secondary school has between 5 and 15 SPP children
- 1 maintained special school has less than 5 SPP children
- 44 maintained primary schools have less than 5 SPP children
- 6 maintained primary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children
- 1 maintained primary school has more than 50 SPP children

Details of spending are held by each individual school and the maintained school with more than 50 children employs a part time teaching assistant for 2 mornings per week to support the social, emotional and mental health of their service children. The school reports that all their service children are at the expected level of attainment or above.

In respect of the 106 pupils attending an academy school, the spread is across 21 different schools, as follows:

- 5 primary academies have less than 5 SPP children
- 2 special schools have less than 5 SPP children
- 6 secondary academies have less than 5 SPP children
- 6 secondary academies have between 5 and 15 SPP children
- 2 secondary academies have 16 or more SPP children

Home to school transport

No special provision is made under the home to school transport policy for service children as none is deemed necessary at this time. This is kept under review and individual circumstances are taken into account.

Wellbeing

As previously stated, the Public Health Division of the Council conducts a regular health and wellbeing online pupil survey (OPS). The survey includes questions where children can self-report having a family member in the Armed Forces. In turn, this allows for the identification of issues which may be specific to the children of service personnel. Where issues are identified, actions to address them are built into the ongoing Education, Learning and Skills Division's Equality in Education Action Plan.

Housing

The Council delivers a range of activities and services providing housing advice and assistance for those in housing need, including:

- Working to prevent homelessness
- Providing temporary accommodation for statutorily accepted homeless households
- Operating a housing register and lettings to permanent social housing
- Providing housing support
- Adapting homes for disabled or elderly residents in South Gloucestershire
- Enabling the building of new, affordable homes
- Providing a range of support and advice to private landlords, tenants, and homeowners in South Gloucestershire
- Providing housing options for those who we have a corporate responsibility for such as looked after children.

The Council does not have its own housing stock. It works jointly with local organisations and residents; they include registered housing providers of social housing (housing associations), voluntary and community groups, developers, planning agents, private landlords and their agents, government organisations, and where appropriate, neighbouring councils.

Allocations policy for social housing

By law every local housing authority has to have a rehousing policy that sets out who can apply for housing, how those applications are prioritised and how lettings to all available properties will be operated. Housing associations are required to apply this policy when letting their properties. There are elements of that law that apply only to members, or former members, of the regular armed forces, their bereaved spouses/civil partners (due to service) and seriously injured reservists where this is linked to their service. These elements are that those groups can apply to any housing register regardless of local connection criteria that may apply to any other applicant, and also that where those applicants have an urgent need for housing, they must be given the highest priority.

South Gloucestershire Councils rehousing policy, known as HomeChoice, fully complies with all the legal requirements. Applications are placed into one of four priority bandings, A, B, C and Registered, with A being the highest priority and Registered being the lowest, i.e those who are assessed as being already suitably housed. For information, at time of writing there are a total of 4,326 active applications for housing of which 49 are from the Armed Forces Community, in the following priority bands: Band A – 1; Band B – 4; Band C – 6; and Registered – 38.

Available properties are publicly advertised and housing applicants are able to 'bid' – i.e. express an interest – in properties they are interested in. Bids are placed on the shortlist in order of priority banding and time waiting. When advertising ends, it is the housing association that considers the shortlist of bidders in the order they appear.

Homelessness

In South Gloucestershire, approaches as homeless are rare amongst the ex-services community. During 2022/23, we received no referrals under the statutory duty to refer process from armed forces, or veterans support services and we only took 4 applications under homelessness legislation from ex-services personnel, one of whom had been discharged from the forces on medical grounds. All four households were supported to access-settled accommodation. This is from a total of 751 homeless applications. The Council's website contains a page specifically covering housing options for those who are leaving the armed forces, including information about homelessness.

Disabled facilities grants

Due to their unique exposure to danger, members of the Armed Forces might suffer injuries which require significant adaptations to their homes when they leave service. Family members who are disabled might also require adaptations to be made to their home when the serving person is moved to a new location. A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a means tested grant designed to help meet the costs of adaptations to a property for a disabled occupant. Applications for DFG's are managed by the Councils Private Sector Housing Team (PSHT).

Where the person has accessed housing via the HomeChoice service, the need for adaptations is assessed as part of their housing application and referrals made as appropriate to the PSHT for any DFG application that is needed. This is recorded on the HomeChoice re-housing system. Otherwise all other applications for a DFG are direct. In 2020/21, 305 homes in South Gloucestershire were adapted through Disabled Facilities Grants – at present, the DFG application relates to the criteria for adaptations and funding and does not record whether the person is a member of the Armed Forces Community – the Council's data monitoring requirements will address this so that accurate records are kept moving forwards.

Tenancy Strategies

Local housing authorities in England are required to publish a strategy setting out the matters to which the registered providers of social housing (housing associations) in its district are to have regard to when letting their properties. South Gloucestershire Council and its housing partners adopted a Strategic Tenancy Policy (STP) in April 2012 covering this⁵.

In addition, the Service Level Agreement between the Council and each of its social landlords sets out that the Councils re-housing policy will be applied in lets to properties that the Council has nomination rights to.

⁵ <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/homechoice/>

Employment

The Council directly provides a range of support for residents to both gain and to progress within employment through its Community Learning and Skills Team. It also works with several partners, including the National Careers Service, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, training organisations, other employers and third sector partners to support individuals to access the support they need to secure and develop within their employment opportunities. The Council's Community Learning and Skills Team are in contact with Assistplus, SSAFA and other local groups who support veterans to ensure that they are aware of the support and services that are available free for veterans and their families to access including both employment support services and learning and skills development programmes. These are set out below and anecdotal evidence confirms positive access to the programmes from the Armed Forces Community.

Support is available through the following programmes:

Community Learning – offers a range of learning opportunities to adults aged 19+. These include courses and, in some cases, qualifications to support employability, English, mathematics, digital skills and computing, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), family learning, wellbeing and a suite of courses to support individuals into work. The accredited employability and into work courses provide both specific and general employability skills and knowledge. For example, 'Starting a Business' and 'Get that Interview' to 'Health and Safety for Delivery Drivers' and 'Level 1 Office Admin Skills'. Courses are free of charge if the eligibility criteria are met and, in most cases, they are met. Courses are delivered in local community venues across South Gloucestershire to ensure ease of access within the local community. The Community Learning transition coach is also available to provide progression support for individuals including into volunteering and employment.

Works4Youth – is an employment support service for young people aged 16-24. It is a universal service offered to all young people who are seeking support into employment either directly or through further training and development. The service provides one-to-one mentor support which is tailored to the young person's needs supporting them to set goals, identify and take the key actions needed to secure their goals. Alongside the support of an employability mentor, it provides workshops to both engage and support young people to build their confidence and resilience as well as equip them with the skills that employers are looking for.

WE Work for Everyone – is an employment support service for young people and adults aged 16 plus who have a self-identified or diagnosed disability, Learning Difficulty or Autism that is a barrier to finding work. Working on a 1:1 basis with our Employment Navigators individuals who are residents of South Gloucestershire gain access to support to grow their confidence and skills to enter work.

Future Bright – provides career progression coaching for those aged 18 plus who are in work. A dedicated career coach supports individuals on a 1:1 basis to create a personalised action plan and to secure its outcomes. The programme also supports individuals to access the training and support they need to develop their skills and confidence to enable them to progress.

What Next?

The following shows our action plan moving forwards:

Action Plan 2023 – 25

	Objectives	Actions
Strategy	To proactively fulfil our obligations and commitment to the Armed Forces Community by knowing, understanding and taking action on the issues and barriers they face, and to measure and publicly report our progress.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure the Armed Forces Covenant is appropriately reflected in council strategies, policies and operational delivery by ensuring full implementation of our new EqIAA process.
Structure	<p>Active involvement in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership. – South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. – Internal Armed Forces Covenant Officers Group made up of managers in the Covenant Duty areas. – Continuation of the Council's Covenant 'Champions' – Exec. member, Director and Officer. <p>Active relationships with South Glos Veteran's Support Service (SSAFA and Assistplus) with the council corporately and amongst teams – especially the Housing, Health, Education and Adult Education & Employment teams.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Continuation of support for the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service. 3. Continuation of support for South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership. 4. Organise 2 meetings per year of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. 5. Organise an annual flag raising ceremony at the Council's Badminton Road Offices to mark Armed Forces Day. 6. Organise 4 meetings per year of the council's internal Armed Forces Covenant Officers Group. 7. Produce an Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report.

	Objectives	Actions
Leadership style and cultural qualities	<p>Ensure that our leadership approach clearly communicates the commitment to being an advocate for the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>Embedding Equality Strategy across the council:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Know the issues/barriers 2) Take action on the issues/barriers 3) Measure progress 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Briefing the Council's Senior Leadership Team, Councillors and local MPs. 9. Briefing Service Directors to ensure delivery of the Covenant Duty requirements and implementation of the strategy as shown above. 10. Raise awareness amongst staff of the key barriers faced by the Armed Forces Community, the actions being taken to address them and expectations of staff in delivering against the barriers. 11. Liaise with the MoD Abbey Wood to deliver communications regarding our services across their workforce. 12. Continued relationship building with the Armed Forces Community so that information on services and support 'gets to the right people'. Officers will deliver information sessions at SAAFA and Assist Plus venues and will also encourage other organisations to share information e.g. ICB 13. Create a Directory of contacts with calendar of activities/events in partnership with SAAFA and Assistplus. 14. Working in partnership with the Armed Forces Community, develop a set of priorities based on the key feedback of the Armed Forces Community and deliver actions to address them e.g. employability support, and provide data on an annual basis in respect of service outcomes delivered for the Armed Forces Community. 15. Formally apply for Bronze recognition under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme as a foundation from which to develop and ensure our employment practices demonstrate leadership in delivery of the Covenant across South Gloucestershire.

	Objectives	Actions
Communication	Communications to managers and their teams across the council in respect of issues/barriers faced by the Armed Forces Community and solutions/approaches for adoption and implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Sharing national and SSAFA and Assistplus data and insights across council areas which deliver in the Covenant areas. 17. Armed Forces Officer Group to deliver 2 articles per year for the Council's 'Managers Need to Know' publication. 18. Deliver information sessions for our One Stop Shop staff, Social Workers, Education and Skills teams, schools, Housing teams on the key barriers faced and actions to address them in their work. 19. Ensure that data and case studies from Assistplus and SSAFA are shared as regular agenda items across council teams. 20. Deliver annual updates at the Council's Leadership Forum with case studies of good practice.
Skills	Ensuring increased knowledge across our staff of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, responsibilities and issues to be tackled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Implementation of South West Partnership E-Learning opportunities for relevant staff. 22. Liaise with the South West Armed Forces Partnership (Forces Connect South West) to benchmark our Veteran's Support Service and to liaise with the South West outreach officer to deliver 'training for trainers' style sessions with our staff on issues/barriers and effective solutions; allowing attendees to disseminate across their teams.
Monitoring	Ensuring fit for purpose and consistently implemented Customer Monitoring Policy and Equality Impact Assessment and Analysis (EqIAA) Policy. SGC Equality Framework is in place and sets out manager responsibilities for delivery against the Armed Forces Duty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23. Regular monitoring of policy compliance. 24. To ensure that signposting information (used by SSAFA, Assistplus and our own staff e.g. social workers) is up-to-date and includes Armed Forces Community Support.

Key Stats

South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service

Funded by South Gloucestershire Council.

- 87 Veterans supported in 22/23 - an increase of 61%;
- 49 face to face meetings held in 22/23 - an increase of 104%;
- 14 Peer support group sessions held in 22/23 - an increase of 56%.

Service delivered by SSAFA and Assist Plus.

Veterans reported being **happier, less anxious** and **less isolated** as a result of the support they received.

Veterans rated the service as '**Good**' overall.

Council Action Plan 2023 – 25

24 Actions identified, with progress reporting annually.

Employment

4 employment support programmes.

Housing

49 members of the Armed Forces Community applying for housing in 22/23.

Council membership

- * Armed Forces Covenant Working Group
- * Forces Connect South West
- * Council Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group

Population

4.0% of the population of South Gloucestershire (9,498 persons) have previously served in any UK Armed Forces.

Education

277 service children attending schools across South Gloucestershire.