

ARMED FORCES COVENANT



ANNUAL REPORT

Foreword

Welcome to the South Gloucestershire Council Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report for 2025/26. This Report provides, 1) an overview of our work delivered during 2025/26 to support the Armed Forces Community; and 2) an overview of our progress against our 2-year Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan.

As Armed Forces Champion, I am delighted that our work in this area continues to go from strength to strength. This is particularly important given the more serious and less predictable challenges we in the United Kingdom face.

In the 12 months since our last annual report, Government has published the Strategic Defence Review which is clear on the need for unity of effort across society and a raising of public awareness of the threats to the UK, how Defence deters and protects against them, and why Defence requires support to strengthen the nation's resilience.

Since our last report, South Gloucestershire Council has received a Silver Award under the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and work has already commenced towards the achievement of the Gold Award criteria. This work is not about awards; it is about working to a set of nationally agreed criteria which support the Armed Forces Community and all of society in order that we in South Gloucestershire make our contribution to national cohesion - which is critical to supporting national security.

The Council is currently 50% of the way through our agreed Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2025-27, and this report shows that 84% of the actions set out in the Plan have already been delivered, with the remaining 16% of the actions on track for successful achievement.

At the end of 2026, a renewed Armed Forces Act will extend our duties as a Council – we welcome these extended duties and have in place a genuine foundation which will ensure we meet them head on.

I am also delighted that once again, the Council is supporting the South Glos Armed Forces Day event which will take place in Page Park, Staple Hill on Saturday 20th June 2026. The event will welcome veterans, serving personnel and their families and we are also delighted to have been supporting Town and Parish Councils locally, as well as local businesses who will be participating in an Armed Forces Covenant Signing Ceremony as part of the event, publicly demonstrating their support for the Armed Forces Community. As part of this, South Gloucestershire Council will also be re-signing our Armed Forces Covenant as a way of publicly reiterating our support for the Armed Forces Community.

Moving forwards, the Council will continue to support the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service and will continue to play a proactive role in the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Strategy for the South West of England.

We will continue without pause, to work with and for the Armed Forces Community across South Gloucestershire and beyond in order to ensure we are consistent in meeting needs and that we proactively support people to achieve positive life outcomes. Indeed, we will continue to work with and for everyone in South Gloucestershire to support unity and cohesion as essential and fundamental components of national security.

If you would like to find out more about our 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 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.

The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011 and in November 2022, The Armed Forces Covenant Duty became 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.



Looking forwards, the 2026 Armed Forces Bill will renew the Armed Forces Act. The Bill will provide the government with an opportunity to renew the contract between the nation and those who serve, strengthen national security and improve conditions of service by placing an emphasis on the welfare of our people.

The Bill expands the existing Armed Forces Covenant Duty to cover a wider range of policy areas (such as Social Care, Childcare and Employment) and brings the UK and devolved governments within scope, alongside local authorities.

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.

South Gloucestershire Council is already doing much towards the forthcoming, renewed Armed Forces Act and our Covenant pledges. This Report provides an overview of the key work and actions that the Council took to support serving personnel and their families as well as veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community during 2025/26. It also provides an overview of our progress against our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2025-27.

**We welcome feedback
on our work and any
aspect of this Report at
all times.**

Highlights of the year

South Gloucestershire Veterans Support Service



In support of Veterans across South Gloucestershire, the Council continues to fund the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service (VSS).

Assistplus and Soldiers, Sailors, and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire, work in partnership to provide this all-encompassing service. Details of the work of this Service are shown on pages 9 & 10 of this report.



Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

In June 2025, the Council received a **Silver Award** from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) under the **Defence Employer Recognition Scheme**¹.



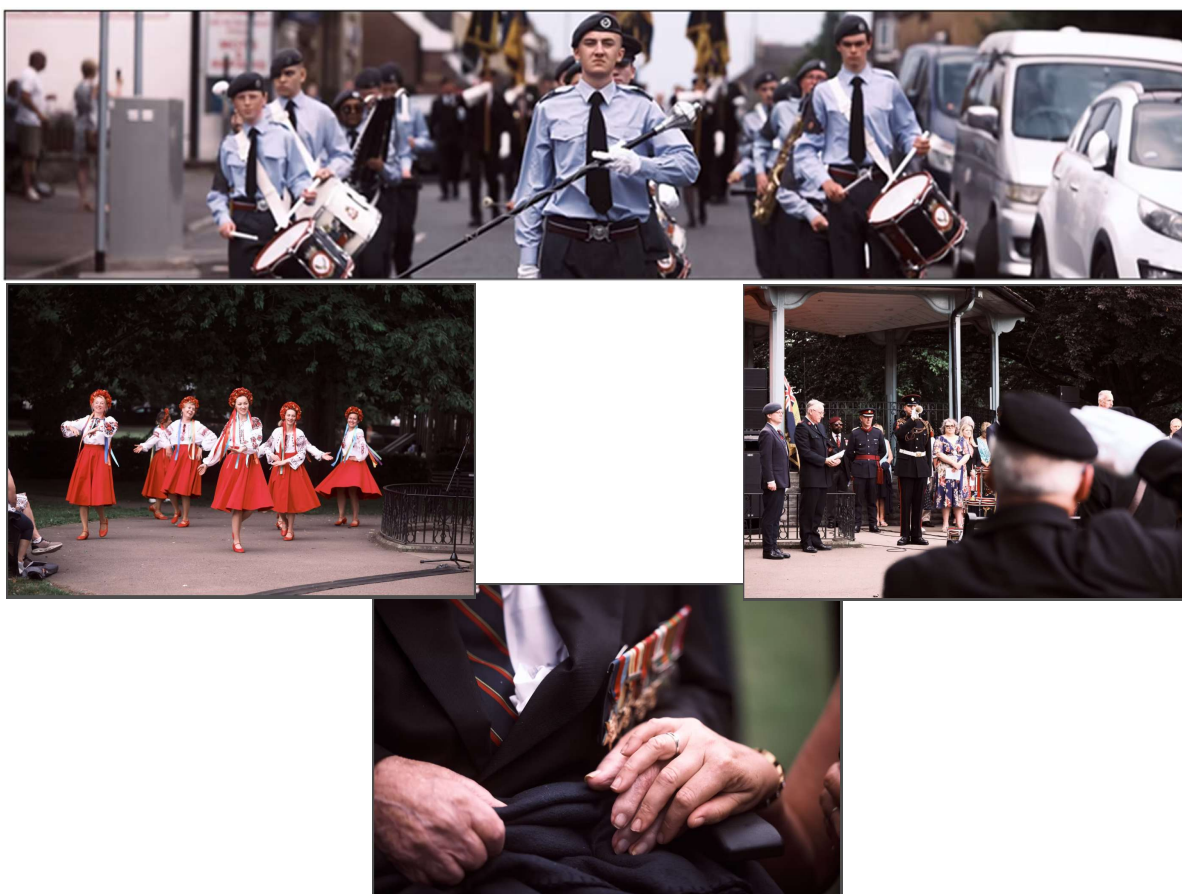
The Scheme acknowledges employers that provide support to the Armed Forces Community and Defence by going above and beyond their Covenant pledges. Moving forwards, the Council will go even further and work towards achieving the Gold Award.



¹ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/organizations/employing-armed-forces-community/>

South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day

The Council continued to provide direct support to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event. On 21st June 2025 the event welcomed over 3,000 visitors, bands, standard bearers, serving members of the Armed Forces, veterans and local dignitaries. The event recognised the 100th anniversary of the Staple Hill & District branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL), as well as the 85th anniversary of the Women's Section of the branch. This important day, honours and celebrates the service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces, past present and future. The Council's support to this event will continue in 2026.



MoD Families Day

In July and August 2025, the Council attended the MoD Abbeywood's 'Families Day' events, providing information concerning Council services including Public Health services and Employability support.



Forces Connect South West

Forces Connect South West² is a partnership of Local Authorities which works together to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant to the military community. The partnership includes Local Authorities across the South West, from Gloucestershire to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, to Dorset and Wiltshire. South Gloucestershire Council continued as an active member of Forces Connect South West in the chairing role during 2025/26.



During the year, the partnership's work to deliver **South-West wide Strategy** to ensure proactive delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across the region continued. In 2026, a key action of the partnership will be working with schools to ensure they are best equipped to meet the need of Service Pupils.

South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group

The Council continued to host a bi-annual meeting of the **South Gloucestershire 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. **Information sharing across organisations is important** as it ensures that key issues are highlighted and can be acted upon effectively and efficiently.

Armed Forces Covenant Working Group members:

- South Gloucestershire Council
- North Bristol NHS Trust
- Avon Fire and Rescue Service
- BNSSG Integrated Care Board
- 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 Reserves and Cadets Association
- CVS South Gloucestershire
- Age UK South Gloucestershire

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

Partnerships



During the year, the Council has also taken an active role in work to support [Op NOVA](#) across the region. Op NOVA is delivered by the Forces Employment Charity and commissioned by NHS England, providing support for veterans who are in contact with the justice system, enabling them to access the services they need.

Internal Work



Internally, South Gloucestershire Council has continued to run its own **Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group** in order to ensure effective delivery of the Covenant.

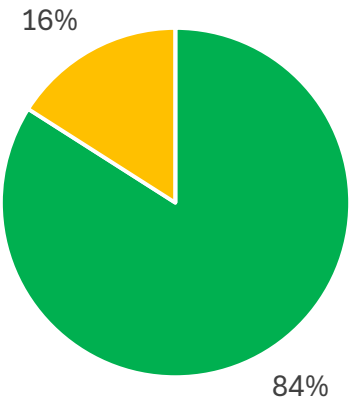
In summer 2024, the Council produced a **Research Paper** focussed on veterans living in South Gloucestershire which is available on the [Armed Forces Community section of our website](#). The Council has continued to use this research in promoting the needs and experiences of the Armed Forces Community to organisations across the district and in ensuring that we target services where they are most needed.

The Council operates an **Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan**. This report shows our performance at the mid-way point of the action plan (2025 – 2027).

Implementation of our 2025-27 action plan has seen significant successes.

Please see the '*Progress and What Next?*' section of this report for full details (page 19).

Chart to show progress against our action plan at the midway point of the plan



Delivered	84%
On Track	16%
No Progress	0%

Support for Veterans

South Gloucestershire Council continues to fund the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service (VSS). The service is delivered by Assistplus³ and Soldiers', Sailors', and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire⁴.

Key to this work is the groups' involvement at a strategic level, providing feedback on experiences and information from the Armed Forces Community when accessing Council services, particularly in the fields of education, healthcare, housing and employment. This provides direct challenge and support in order that the Council makes continuous improvements to its services in support of the Armed Forces Community.

Key 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.

During 2025/26, the following has been achieved:

- * 71 veterans have been supported.
- * 130 telephone calls logged.
- * 36 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held.
- * 89 face to face meetings have been held.
- * 21 veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities.

³ <https://www.assistplus.org.uk/>

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

Support delivered by the Veteran Support Service

Throughout the year, satisfaction surveys were conducted with veterans accessing the services. From the sample of returns the following topics were indicated as those which veterans were particularly approaching for support: Health, Housing and Employment. The majority rated the service as 'excellent' (54%) followed by 'good' (37%). These positive results evidence the continuing and growing need for support and that the service is appropriate to the demand.



Examples of support delivered during the year by the Veteran Support Service include:

- * Training and CV support to gain employment .
- * Collaborating with partners to secure food and clothing.
- * Pension support.
- * Signposting to benefit support for disabilities.

Feedback from people accessing the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service

- * *"Your services are amazing and very much happy with what I received".*

- * *"I would also let my friends know of your service. Two of them also have similar issues with their pension".*

- * *"Peer support group sessions were particularly valuable".*

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

Health

(see pages 12 – 13)

Education

(see pages 14 – 16)

Housing

(see pages 17 – 18)

Employment

(see pages 19 – 20)

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. During 2025-26, a total of 31 service users were recorded with Armed Forces status.

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 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. During the year, the Council's Public Health team also attended the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event in June 2025 where they engaged with several service personnel and gave out free vape kits to support those who smoked, as well as offering signposting for additional support where needed. During 2025/26, a total of 16 service users were recorded with Armed Forces status.

NHS Health Checks

The South Gloucestershire NHS Health Check template 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 NHS Health Check programme in South Gloucestershire uses a targeted delivery model and includes Armed Forces personnel as a priority group. During 2025/26, a total of 85 NHS Health Checks were delivered to those with Armed Forces status.

Sexual health services

Information has not previously been collected by specialist sexual health service providers at triage stage in respect of whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces. During the year, this has been raised and fed into the new service provider in order that we can monitor uptake of these important services and take actions in support of the Armed Forces Community as appropriate.

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 work is informed at a strategic level by the voice of the child, a health and wellbeing online pupil survey (OPS) is commissioned. The OPS provides important and comprehensive perspectives of children and young people's health behaviours, and includes a question where children can self-report having a family member in the Armed Forces – this allows us to monitor any issues arising which may be specific to Service Pupils.

The survey has been running every two to three years, with the most recent one carried out January to March 2026. Data from this survey will be available in the Autumn of 2026 and will be reported in our next annual report. Information from the most recent survey, OPS 2023, is shown on pages 15 & 16 of this report.

Services to families, for example, 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 – in turn, this allows us to proactively identify the needs and experiences of the military community.

Drug and alcohol services

Our adult Drug and Alcohol treatment services are required to complete the National Drug Treatment Monitoring Service minimum dataset for clients entering treatment. Within the dataset providers have the ability to record the information collected at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces. For the year 2025-26, 1.6% (n9) of those accessing treatment services in South Gloucestershire described themselves as veterans. In addition, under 'housing status', providers can record the option of 'other - accommodation tied to job (including Armed Forces)'. Services endeavour to collect as much information as possible about who is (and is not) accessing services, to ensure that adequate resource is apportioned to meet the extent of need across the Armed Forces Community. Where members of the Armed Forces Community are identified, an additional onward referral to Assistplus and SSAFA is 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.

Education

South Gloucestershire is made up of 117 mainstream and special schools.

South Gloucestershire Council 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 Local Authority maintained schools but there is also significant partnership and collaborative work with academies.

During 2026/27, South Gloucestershire Council will be leading on a survey of schools across the South West of England to understand more about how schools meet the needs of Service Pupils and their families. Following this, work will be conducted with Forces Connect South West to support schools to ensure they are best equipped to meet the needs of Service Pupils.

School admissions

The 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 £350 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.

Eligible schools are identified in the autumn term census. In the 2025 schools census, 312 children across the county were identified as 'service children', this number has fallen since 2024 when the number was 339, but remains greater than the previous two years- 299 in 2023 and 277 in 2022. The number of children are spread across South Gloucestershire schools as follows:

47	primary schools have less than 5 SPP children (47 in 2024)
5	primary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children (5 in 2024)
1	primary school has between 16 and 49 SSP children (1 in 2024)
0	primary school has more than 50 SPP children (1 in 2024)
6	secondary schools have less than 5 SPP children (7 in 2024)
5	secondary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children (5 in 2024)
4	secondary schools have 16 or more SPP children (4 in 2024)
3	special schools have less than 5 SPP children (3 in 2024)

Details of spending are held by each individual school. Many schools use their funding to employ a trained support worker to provide pastoral support to the children and help them to mark important days, for example Remembrance Day and Armed Forces Day.

The primary school with the greatest number of service children (47) employs a part-time teaching assistant dedicated to support them. Service children often experience frequent home and school moves, additionally a parent could be away from home for extended periods of time; the additional emotional and mental health support they receive from the staff member supports them during these periods. The school also holds a weekly 'Play Rangers' club for service children to attend where they can share experiences and bond.

Wellbeing

The Public Health and Wellbeing Division of the Council conducts a health and wellbeing online pupil survey (OPS). The survey takes place every 2 years and includes a question where children can self-report that one or both of their parents are in the Armed Forces. This allows for comparison between the children of service personnel and their peers. Where inequalities in outcomes or experiences are identified, actions to address them are built into the ongoing Education, Learning and Skills Division's Equality in Education Action Plan.

The survey is available to pupils in years 4 to 13 (age range 8-18).

The latest 2023 survey shows that 217 children out of the 11,826 respondents who answered the specific demographic question indicated that one or both of their parents are in the Armed Forces.

A snapshot of the responses from children of service personnel to questions about school experience are shown below:

194 children of service personnel responded to the statement: *"how do you feel about being at school: I worry about going to school"*. Of these 55.2% selected the response option "Strongly disagree" or "Disagree". This was statistically similar to the 51.4% figure for all South Gloucestershire pupils.

194 children of service personnel responded to the statement: *"how do you feel about being at school: At least one teacher or trusted adult cares about me at this school"*. Of these 69.1% selected the response option "Strongly agree" or "Agree". This was statistically similar to the 69.4% figure for all South Gloucestershire pupils.

195 children of service personnel responded to the statement: *"How do you feel about being at school: I feel like I belong in this school"*. Of these 50.8% selected the response option "Strongly agree" or "Agree". This was statistically similar to the 52.1% figure for all South Gloucestershire pupils

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 homeless households owed a statutory accommodation duty.
- Operating a housing register and lettings service to access permanent social housing.
- Providing housing related floating 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 must 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. Legislation states that those groups can apply to any housing register regardless of any local connection criteria that may apply to any other applicant. In addition, where those applicants have an urgent need for housing, they must be given the highest priority.

On 18th December 2024, Government amended the legislation linked to the application of local connection criteria. Whereas previously, legislation stated that armed forces personnel need only be exempt from local connection rules during the five years following discharge from the armed forces, the five-year timeframe has now been removed.

The Council's Lettings policy does not apply a time limit, so it already complies with this amendment.

South Gloucestershire Council's rehousing policy, known as HomeChoice, fully complies with all relevant 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 the time of writing, there are a total of 7,496 active applications for housing of which 66 are from the Armed Forces Community, registered in the following priority bands: Band A - 7; Band B - 10; Band C - 11; and Registered - 38.

Available properties are publicly advertised weekly and housing applicants can 'bid' (express an interest) in properties they are interested in. The system automatically creates a shortlist based on priority banding and time waiting. When advertising ends, it is the housing association that considers the shortlist of bidders in the order they appear.

During 2025/26, 11 properties were let to members of the Armed Forces Community.

Homelessness

In South Gloucestershire, approaches as homeless are rare amongst the ex-services community. During 2025/26, we received no referrals under the statutory duty to refer process from armed forces, or veterans support services and we only took two applications under homelessness legislation from ex-services personnel. We supported one household to access social housing and our work with the other household is ongoing. This is from a total of 974 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/ Care Act Assistance

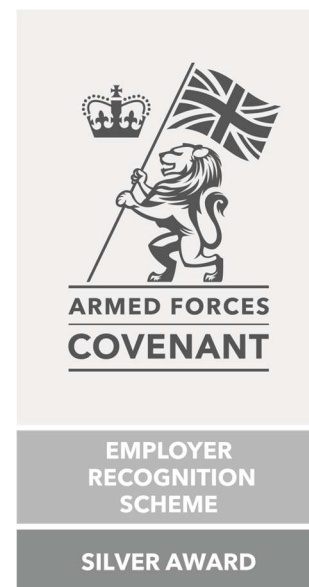
Due to their unique exposure to danger, members of the Armed Forces might suffer injuries which require significant adaptations to their homes when they leave service. Family members who are disabled might also require adaptations to be made to their home when the serving person is moved to a new location. 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 Council's Private Sector Housing Team (PSH).

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 PSH 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 to the Occupational Therapy team for assessment of need before being referred to PSH to administer.

In 2025/26, 572 homes in South Gloucestershire were adapted through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and Care Act assistance, and 719 grants were approved, both higher than last year's figures, demonstrating increasing demand for adaptations and continued strong delivery. As part of the customer satisfaction and outcomes survey for DFG and Care Act provision, data is collected to gain insights into the number of customers who have served in the Armed Forces. Out of 61 respondents in 2025/26 (Q1) 13% of customers confirmed they had served in the Armed Forces.

Employment

South Gloucestershire Council aims to be proactive in our work in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces community in the area of 'Employment'. During the year, the Council was successful in its application to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for **'Silver Recognition' under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme**⁵. The Scheme acknowledges employers that provide support to the Armed Forces Community and Defence by going above and beyond their Covenant pledges. The Council operates a suite of policies which are positive towards the Armed Forces Community (including Reservists and Cadets). For the council, the Scheme supports us in scrutinising our own practice against nationally recognised best practice and challenges us to continuously improve and develop. It also supports us in demonstrating to the public – especially the Armed Forces Community - our commitment in our employment practices.



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.

Community Learning and Skills Service (CLaSS)

The Community Learning and Skills Service provides support to South Glos. residents through the following programmes (data shows that veterans are taking up these services):

Adult Community Learning (ACL) – 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

⁵ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/organizations/employing-armed-forces-community/>

Learning transition coach is also available to provide progression support for individuals including into volunteering and employment or alternative employability support services. In the last academic year, ACL worked with 3 learners who chose to tell us that they were Armed Forces Veterans.

Skills Connect – Our umbrella service to accessing employability support, Skills Connect is the front door to information, advice and guidance for employment and skills. People generally come through this front door in order to access our other support programmes. Whether someone is unemployed or in work, they may be able to receive 1-2-1 Employability and Skills Mentoring for up to 6 months. Career Coaching for those in work is tailored to suit the individual's situation, with the level of support determined by their income and benefits status. Alongside their Mentors/Coaches, participants create a personalised action plan to secure their 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.

At initial assessment, participants are asked whether they are military or ex-military. Within the reporting year of April 2025 to March 2026, Skills Connect has supported 8 residents who have declared this; 7 of which were in work at the time of sign up for support.

Works4Youth: Engaging Potential – is an employment support service for young people aged 16-19 who are NEET and who are seeking support into employment either directly or through further training and development. The service provides 1-2-1 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. Works4Youth mentors also provide early, targeted support to Year 9 and 10 students identified as at risk of disengagement, offering personalised guidance, engagement activities, and progression planning to build confidence, resilience, and clear pathways into post-16 education, employment, or training.

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

Youth Guarantee – This trailblazer supports young people aged 18-21 years old who are NEET, and prioritises young people with SEND and SEMH, but without an EHCP. The core programme offers 1-2-1 employability and skills mentoring, a supported work placement, as well as personalised wrap around support, which can include a free bus pass, Maths and English tuition SEMH support to overcome barriers.

International Communities Employment Programme (ICEP) – is an employment support service for Refugees and Resettled Communities, mainly under UKRS, ARAP and now ARP. Free 1-2-1 Employability and Skills Mentoring alongside the option of additional ESOL classes, Conversation Clubs, Career Insights Workshops and Employment Workshops. Some who join this programme have served in the forces in their own country, or alongside our Armed Forces. Light touch support can also be offered to migrants who require support that cater to the experience and knowledge of ICEP mentors, and of whom may not have recourse to public funds, and therefore unable to access the provisions listed above.

Action Plan progress

The following provides an overview of progress **at the midway point (March 2026)** against the Council's 2 year Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2025-27.



Action Plan 2025/2027 – progress review

Objectives	Actions (we will)	Progress
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.	1. Ensure the Armed Forces Covenant is appropriately reflected in Council strategies, policies and operational delivery by ensuring full implementation of our EqlAA process.	The Council has adopted a Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024 – 2028⁶. This Plan sets out a series of objectives aimed at reducing inequalities - the Plan specifically includes objectives aimed at reducing barriers experienced by the Armed Forces Community. The Council's Equality Impact Assessment and Analysis (EqlAA) process is way of identifying issues and barriers faced by communities and identifying actions to address them. The EqlAA process specifically recognises the Armed Forces Community – and this has been specifically promoted across all areas of Council activity. As an employer, the Council operates a suite of policies which are positive towards the Armed Forces Community (including Reservists and Cadets) and was successful in achieving 'Silver Recognition' under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in June 2025.
	2. Conduct regular monitoring of our policy compliance.	The Council conducts regular monitoring of compliance with policy and this specifically includes the monitoring the impact of our policies and procedures for the Armed Forces Community.
To ensure that the Council is actively involved with partner organisations in order to ensure	3. Continue our support for the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service.	The Council took a decision in February 2025, as part of its budget setting process, to stabilise the fund - this funding, therefore, continues as an ongoing service that is funded by the Council.

⁶ <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/static/5aed2bddea503ee043a106435d6253af/Tackling-inequalities-action-plan-24-28-web.pdf>

Objectives	Actions (we will)	Progress
most effective delivery of our obligations and commitment to the Armed Forces Community. Partners include: - South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership. - South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. - Work with Avon and Somerset Police and the NHS to support delivery of Op NOVA and Op Courage. - 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. - 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.	4. Continue our support for and active involvement with the South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (Forces Connect South West).	The Council has continued in the chairing role of Forces Connect South West. In 2026, South Gloucestershire Council will be taking the lead role in conducting a survey of schools across the South West of England to understand more about how schools meet the needs of Service Pupils and their families. Following this, work will be conducted with Forces Connect South West to support schools to ensure they are best equipped to meet the needs of Service Pupils.
	5. Ensure active involvement in Op NOVA and Op Courage to support the provision of services for veterans who are in contact with the justice system and NHS mental health services.	The Council has continued its involvement with both Avon & Somerset Police and the NHS in respect of jointly working together to deliver Op NOVA and Op Courage.
	6. Organise 2 meetings per year of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group.	These important meetings consistently take place, one of which coincides with the annual Armed Forces Day Flag Raising Ceremony. These meetings ensure that those organisations working with and for the Armed Forces Community in South Gloucestershire come together to share information and work jointly together to maximise effectiveness across the area in supporting the Armed Forces Community.
	7. Organise an annual flag raising ceremony at the Council's Badminton Road Offices to mark Armed Forces Week.	The Flag Raising Ceremony took place on 17 th June 2025 and was followed by a meeting of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. The next flag raising ceremony will take place on 16 th June 2026.
	8. Provide support to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day Committee in respect of delivering an Armed Forces Day event in South Gloucestershire.	During 2025/26, the Council continued to be an active member on the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day Committee and provided funding and practical support to the event. This will continue in 2026/27.

Objectives	Actions (we will)	Progress
	9. Organise 4 meetings per year of the Council's internal Armed Forces Covenant Officers Group.	Quarterly meetings consistently take place. They focus on ensuring the proactive delivery of this action plan and the ongoing development of the Council's work to support and serve the Armed Forces Community.
	10. Promote the Armed Forces Covenant to Town and Parish Councils across South Gloucestershire.	During the year, the Council delivered a presentation with follow-up information to the Town & Parish Council Forum. Following this, all Town & Parish Councils have been contacted to take part in an Armed Forces Covenant signing ceremony as part of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event on 20 th June 2026.
	11. Work in partnership with specialist Veterans support organisations in South Gloucestershire to ensure they are highly equipped to provide information, advice and guidance to veterans in respect of a full range of health and wellbeing matters.	The Council has continued to work with the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service to ensure that they can signpost the 'right issues to the right teams' within the Council in order to provide efficient support to veterans and members of the wider Armed Forces Community accessing services. The Council also continues funding the Veteran's Support Service as part of its core budget.
To ensure continued knowledge building across our staff of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, responsibilities and issues to be tackled.	12. Brief the Council's Senior Leadership Team, Service Directors, Councillors and local MPs to ensure effective delivery of the Covenant Duty requirements and implementation of the South West Armed Forces Covenant strategy.	A number of briefings have taken place during the year. Key outcomes of these include an increased awareness of the needs of the Armed Forces Community across Council service areas as well as a commitment to working towards the achievement of the Gold standard of the MoD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

Objectives	Actions (we will)	Progress
	13. 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. In support of this, we will implement a set of e-learning modules aimed at front-line staff who engage with individuals and families on a regular basis, as well as those in leadership roles. The e-learning modules provides an overview of the unique challenges of Service life, and how staff can help support the Armed Forces community and helps staff understand and apply the principles of the Covenant at a local level.	The Council has made the following training courses available via its Training & Development portal to all staff: a) The Armed Forces Covenant Induction e-module; b) The Armed Forces Covenant for Customer Facing Staff e-module; c) The Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty Explained - Housing - Senior Officers e-module; d) The Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty Explained - Health - Senior Officers e-module.
	14. Deliver annual updates for Council staff with case studies of good practice and ensure that data and case studies from Assistplus and SSAFA are shared as regular agenda items across Council teams.	A programme of internal communications for staff is planned to take place between April and July 2026.
To ensure ongoing engagement with the Armed Forces Community in order to ensure that the voice of the community influences positive developments in meeting needs.	15. Liaise with the MoD Abbey Wood, SAAFA and Assist Plus, to ensure continued relationship building with the Armed Forces Community so that information on services and support 'gets to the right people'.	On 26 th July and 1 st August 2025, the Council attended the MoD's 'Families Day' events in order to engage with people across the Armed Forces Community. Council services represented included a range of Public Health services, adult education and the Council HR and employment team.
	16. Produce an Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report.	The Council continues to produce an Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report. These are available via the Council's website pages as well as in a range of formats – hard copies are available at the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event.
	17. Attend and support the annual South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event in order to visibly engage with the Armed Forces Community.	The Council continued to provide direct support to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event. On 21st June 2025 the event welcomed over 3,000 visitors, bands, standard bearers, serving members of the Armed Forces, veterans and local dignitaries. This support will continue.

Objectives	Actions (we will)	Progress
Continue to develop our own practices as an employer and service provider whilst positively contributing to the South West Armed Forces Strategy.	18. Formally apply for Silver recognition under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme to develop and progress our employment practices and demonstrate leadership in delivery of the Covenant across South Gloucestershire.	The Council was awarded Silver recognition under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in June 2025.
	19. Engage with schools to communicate and encourage good practice in best utilisation of Service Pupil Premium.	During 2026/27, South Gloucestershire Council will be leading on a survey of schools across the South West of England to understand more about how schools meet the needs of Service Pupils and their families. Following this, work will be conducted with Forces Connect South West to support schools to ensure they are best equipped to meet the needs of Service Pupils.
	20. Conduct a review of our Housing and Homelessness reduction strategies and policies to ensure best practice.	During 2025/26, we completed a housing needs assessment to help us understand the number of people vulnerable to or currently experiencing a form of homelessness in South Gloucestershire. This information will help develop an updated Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, which we aim to complete during 2026/27 – this Strategy will include robust consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces Community.
	21. Implement the National Armed Forces Covenant module covering Housing to appropriate staff and encourage other partners e.g. housing associations, to undertake training.	This has been implemented and is available to all staff as part of the Council's training offer.
	22. Review our Armed Forces status data collected through housing and homelessness teams and services and share data with system partners.	Our HomeChoice system is used to record data relating to, - The council's statutory homeless function. - Our housing register & lettings process for people who wish to move to social housing. The system allows us to record and report on current & former armed forces personnel, who approach the council for housing support.

Objectives	Actions (we will)	Progress
	23. Work in partnership with the South West Armed Forces Committee to promote an increase the number of accredited Veteran Friendly GP Practices across the South West of England (the Veteran Friendly Practices accreditation scheme is run by the Royal College of General Practitioners in partnership with NHS England).	During 2026/27, the Director of Public Health for South Gloucestershire will be writing to all GP Practices to promote and encourage participation in the Veteran Friendly Practices accreditation scheme.
	24. Promote smoking cessation amongst Veterans	The Council's smokefree service collects Armed forces status at the point of referral and Practitioners 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 as part of the core training offer to new Practitioners and is reinforced during update sessions for all Smokefree staff. During the year, the Council's Public Health team also attended the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event in June 2025 where they engaged with service personnel and gave out free vape kits to support those who smoked, as well as offering signposting for additional support where needed. During 2025/26, a total of 16 service users were recorded with Armed Forces status.
	25. Promote access to and take-up of NHS Health Checks to Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community	The NHS Health Check programme in South Gloucestershire uses a targeted delivery model and includes Armed Forces personnel as a priority group. During 2025/26, a total of 85 NHS Health Checks were delivered to those with Armed Forces status.

Council partnership working

- * South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group
- * Forces Connect South West
- * South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day
- * Op NOVA
- * Op Courage

Council Action Plan 2025-27

- * 84% complete at the halfway point.
- * The remaining 16% is on track for delivery by the end of the 2-year Plan.

South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service

Funded by South Gloucestershire Council.

During 2025/26:

- * 71 veterans supported.
- * 130 telephone calls logged.
- * 36 virtual 1:1 meetings held.
- * 89 face-to-face meetings held.

Service delivered by SSAFA and Assist Plus.

Overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Health, Housing and Employment - the three most common areas which veterans sought support for.

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

Silver recognition achieved - June 2025.

Commitment to immediately commence work towards Gold recognition.

