

Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2024-25



Foreword

Welcome to the South Gloucestershire Council Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report for 2024/25. This Report provides:

1. An overview of our work delivered during 2024/25 to support the Armed Forces Community.
2. An overview of the key work delivered against our 2-year Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2023-25.
3. A new Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan for 2025-27.

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. This report demonstrates that this Council has made strong progress against our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan for 2023-25 and sets a challenging new Action Plan to be delivered between 2025-27. Taking this approach ensures our work will continue to progress without pause.

I am delighted that in February 2025 the Council ensured that funding for the South Gloucestershire Veterans Support Service is now part of its core budget; this Annual Report provides a range of examples of the important support delivered by the Service.

I am also delighted that the Council achieved a Bronze Award under the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in October 2024. The Scheme acknowledges employers that provide support to the Armed Forces Community and Defence by going above and beyond their Covenant pledges. For the Council, the Scheme means that we scrutinise our own practice against nationally recognised best practice and it challenges us to continuously improve and develop. As part of our commitment to excellence in our employment practices, our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan for 2025-27 commits the Council to achieving the Silver Award.

During the year, we continued to work with partners across the South-West. Together, we produced a South-West wide Strategy to ensure proactive delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across the region; South Gloucestershire Council took a lead role in developing the Health and Wellbeing element of the Strategy. We also further developed our partnership work with both Op NOVA and Op Courage to ensure joined-up support for veterans who are in contact with the justice system and the NHS specialist mental health service. Working in partnership with others is important, as working together we can enhance our overall effectiveness in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

In 2025, we are also looking forward to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event which is supported by the Council, and this year will recognise the 100th Anniversary of the Staple Hill & District branch of the Royal British Legion as well as the 85th Anniversary of the Women's Section of the branch. The event takes place in Page Park, Staple Hill on 21st June.

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. 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 Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011 and 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.

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.

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 Report provides an overview of key actions that the Council took to support serving personnel and their families as well as veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community during 2024/25. It also provides an overview of our progress against our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan as well as presenting a new Action Plan for 2025-27.



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

Highlights of the year



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 South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service (VSS).

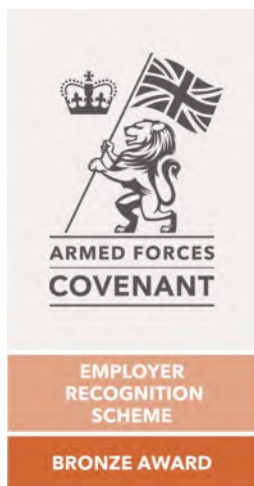
Following the success of the pilot, the Council took a decision February 2025, as part of its budget setting process, to stabilise the fund. Assistplus and Soldiers, Sailors, and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire, therefore, continue to be jointly commissioned to work in partnership to provide the all-encompassing service.



Implementation of our 2023-25 action plan has seen significant successes.

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

The Council operates an **Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan**. This report shows our performance over the 2 year period of the action plan (2023 – 2025) and presents a new action plan for the next 2 year period (2025 – 2027).



During the year, the Council submitted a **successful** application to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for '**Bronze Recognition**' 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. Our action plan for 2025-27 contains actions which work towards our achievement of 'Silver Recognition' under Scheme.

The Council has provided support to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day Committee with a plan to hold an **Armed Forces Day event which will take place on 21st June 2025** in Page Park, Staple Hill. This is an important day, recognising the 100th anniversary of the Staple Hill & District branch of the Royal British Legion, as well as the 85th anniversary of the Women's Section of the branch.



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

South Gloucestershire Council continued as an active member of **Forces Connect South West**². During the year, the partnership adopted a **South-West wide Strategy** to ensure proactive delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across the region. South Gloucestershire Council took a **lead role in developing the Health and Wellbeing element of the Strategy**. Our new action plan for 2025-27 has been designed to ensure it contributes to the delivery of the South-West Strategy.

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.



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.

The Council continued to host 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. **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
- 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 Reserve Cadets Association
- CVS South Gloucestershire



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.

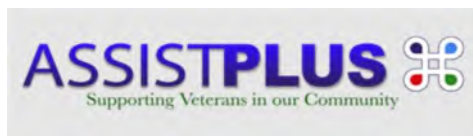
² <https://www.forcesconnectsouthwest.org.uk/>

Support for Veterans

In support of Veterans across South Gloucestershire, the Council has funded the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service (VSS) since 2021. The Council took a decision in February 2025, as part of its budget setting process, to stabilise the fund - this funding, therefore, continues. The service is delivered by Assistplus³ and Soldiers', Sailors', and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire⁴.

Key to this work are the groups' 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 in order that the Council makes continuous improvements to its 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.

Over the course of the fourth year (2024/25) of the Veteran Support Service, the following has been achieved:

- * 84 veterans have been supported, an increase of 1% on the previous year.
- * 164 telephone calls logged, an increase of 59% on the previous year.
- * 36 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held, an increase of 33% on the previous year.
- * 149 face to face meetings have been held, an increase of 217% on the previous year.
- * 26 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities, an increase of 13% on the previous year.

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 South Gloucestershire Veterans Support Service. From the sample of returns the following topics were indicated as those which veterans were particularly approaching for support: Health, Welfare and Debt, and Employment. From returns received, the vast majority rated the service as excellent (90%). 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:

- * Business start up.
- * Collaborating with 2 authorities and 4 organisations to support a homelessness application.
- * Introduction to volunteering, bereavement support, tenancy extension and home efficiency improvements.
- * Benefit checks, applications to charity organisations for white goods, domestic abuse victim support and introductions to volunteering.

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

* *"The support received was life saving".*

* *"It was amazing to see the collaborative work among you guys to get me an accommodation".*

* *"Just want to thank you for your support".*

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

Health

(see pages 10 – 11)

Education

(see pages 12 – 14)

Housing

(see pages 15 – 16)

Employment

(see pages 17 – 18)

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.

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 where they engaged with a number of service personnel and gave out free vape kits to support those who smoked as well as offering signposting for additional support if needed.

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. Introduced in 2024, a new targeted NHS Health Check model has been adopted by GP practices and includes Armed Forces personnel as a priority group with 152 NHS Health Checks delivered to members of the armed forces community.

Sexual health services

Information has not previously been collected by specialist sexual health service providers at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces. The request to capture this information has been fed into the new service provider for consideration.

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 survey has been running every two years. The next survey will run in 2026. The OPS provides important and comprehensive perspectives of children and young people's health behaviours. The OPS includes a question where children can self-report having a family member in the Armed Forces. Information from the most recent survey, OPS 2023, is shown on page 14 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.

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 2024-25, 0.9% (n10) 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 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.

Education

South Gloucestershire is made up of 117 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

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.

Parent Feedback

A parent telephoned the Council to say that they have had to move numerous times, and it is always a stressful time. They communicated that they feel South Gloucestershire is one of the most 'forces friendly' local authorities that they have dealt with and wanted to pass on their thanks.

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 £340 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 2024 schools census, 339 children across the county were identified as 'service children', this number has grown from 299 in 2023 and 277 in 2022. The number of children are spread across the schools as follows:

47	primary schools have less than 5 SPP children (47 in 2023)
5	primary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children (6 in 2023)
1	primary school has between 16 and 49 SSP children (0 in 2023)
1	primary school has more than 50 SPP children (1 in 2023)
7	secondary schools have less than 5 SPP children (6 in 2023)
5	secondary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children (8 in 2023)
4	secondary schools have 16 or more SPP children (1 in 2023)
3	special schools have less than 5 SPP children (1 in 2023)

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 more than 50 children employs a part-time teaching assistant who is part of a military family and so has a particular understanding regarding the difficulties children can face having frequent house and schools moves, or when a parent is away from home for extended periods of time. The support provided to pupil's social, emotional and mental health is evidenced in a [video on the school website](#).

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 6,824 active applications for housing of which 50 are from the Armed Forces Community, registered in the following priority bands: Band A - 9; Band B - 5; Band C - 11; and Registered - 25.

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 2024/25, 10 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 2024/25, we received no referrals under the statutory duty to refer process from armed forces, or veterans support services and we only took three applications under homelessness legislation from ex-services personnel, one of whom had recently left armed forces accommodation. All three households were able to access settled accommodation. This is from a total of 922 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

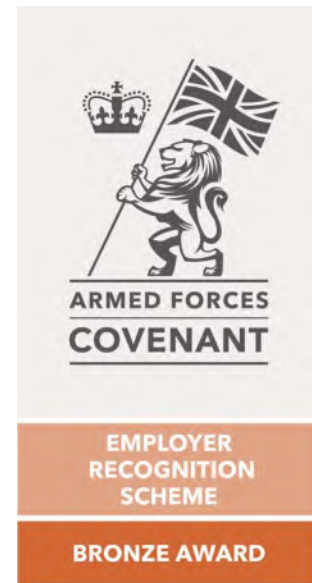
Due to their unique exposure to danger, members of the Armed Forces might suffer injuries which require significant adaptations to their homes when they leave service. Family members who are disabled might also require adaptations to be made to their home when the serving person is moved to a new location. 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 2024/25, 520 homes in South Gloucestershire were adapted through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and Care Act assistance, the highest number on record, and 671 grants were approved, also the highest on record. 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 127 respondents in 2025/25 (Q1-Q3) 11% 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 '**Bronze 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 Support Service

The Community Learning and Support team provide support to residents – including veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community - 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.

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

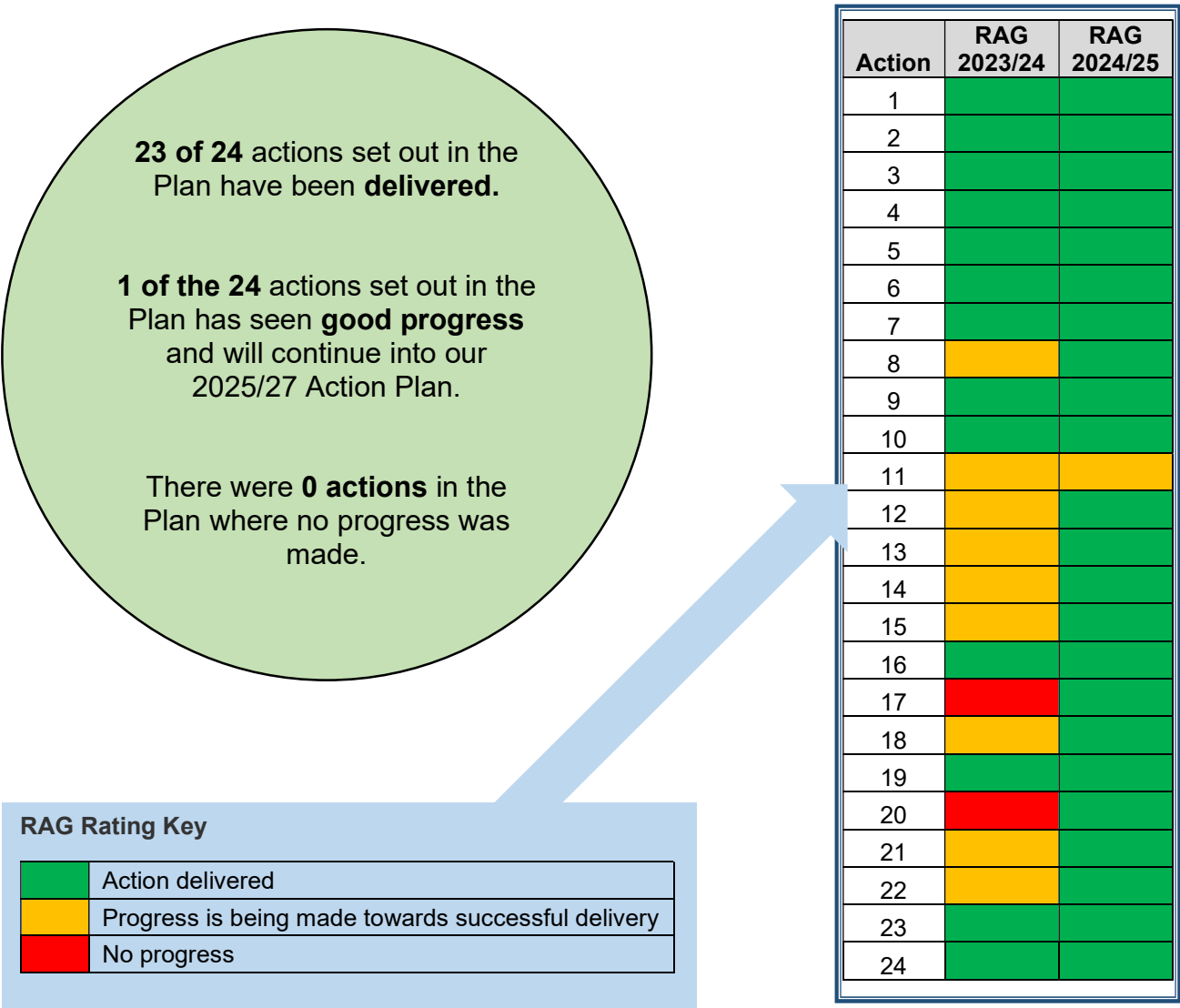
Works4Youth Engaging Potential– is an employment support service for young people aged 16-24. It is a universal service offered to all young people who are seeking support into employment either directly or through further training and development. The service provides one-to-one mentor support which 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.

Action Plan progress and what next?

The following chart provides an overview of progress against the Council’s 2 year Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2023-25.



Appendix 2 of this report presents our next 2-year Action Plan for 2025-27.

Appendix 1

Action Plan 2023 – 25 – review

The following shows progress against the Council's 2023/25 action plan using a 'RAG rating' approach:

RAG Rating Key

	Action delivered
	Progress is being made towards successful delivery
	No progress

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
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 new EqlAA process.	<p>The Council has adopted a Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024 – 2028. 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.</p> <p>The Council's Equality Impact Assessment and Analysis (EqIAA) process is way of identifying issues and barriers faced by communities <u>and</u> identifying actions to address them. The EqIAA process specifically recognises the Armed Forces Community – and this has been specifically promoted across all areas of Council activity.</p> <p>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 'Bronze Recognition' under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in October 2024.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
<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>	<p>2. Continuation of support for the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service.</p>	<p>In February 2025, as part of its budget setting process, the Council took a decision to stabilise funding for the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service. As a result, funding continues for this important Service.</p>
	<p>3. Continuation of support for South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.</p>	<p>South Gloucestershire Council has continued to support and work in partnership with Forces Connect South West. Through this work, the Council took a lead role in developing the Health and Wellbeing element of a new Armed Forces Covenant Strategy for the South West region.</p>
	<p>4. Organise 2 meetings per year of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group.</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>5. Organise an annual flag raising ceremony at the Council's Badminton Road Offices to mark Armed Forces Day.</p>	<p>The Flag Raising Ceremony took place on 13th June 2023 and 17th June 2024. Both were followed by a meeting of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. The next annual Flag Raising Ceremony is arranged for 17th June 2025.</p>
	<p>6. Organise 4 meetings per year of the Council's internal Armed Forces Covenant Officers Group.</p>	<p>Quarterly meetings consistently take place and during 2024, an additional workshop took place in respect of ensuring the proactive delivery of this action plan.</p>
	<p>7. Produce an Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report.</p>	<p>Our Annual Armed Forces Covenant Reports are published on our website.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
<p>Ensure that our leadership approach clearly communicates the commitment to being an advocate for the Armed Forces Community. 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 	<p>8. Briefing the Council's Senior Leadership Team, Councillors and local MPs.</p>	<p>Using our "Veterans Living in South Gloucestershire Research Paper" as a backdrop, the council's Senior Leadership Team was briefed in February 2024.</p> <p>Councillors have also received a briefing regarding veterans living in South Gloucestershire, the work of the council and its partners.</p>
	<p>9. Briefing Service Directors to ensure delivery of the Covenant Duty requirements and implementation of the strategy as shown above.</p>	<p>Service Directors across the Council have received briefings in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant and briefings have linked to our "Veterans Living in South Gloucestershire Research Paper" in order to ensure a local context and clear relevance to work across the Council.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>Officers making up the Council's Armed Forces Covenant Working Group deliver regular updates to their teams to raise awareness of the Covenant and the work of the Council and partners.</p> <p>For example, the South Gloucestershire Adult Mental Health Partnership received a presentation from Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP) on specialist mental health services for Veterans. Partners benefited from understanding AWP's approach and the new service offer available - Operation Courage Integrated Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service. This will enable system partners to signpost appropriately to these services.</p>
	<p>11. Liaise with the MoD Abbey Wood to deliver communications regarding our services across their workforce.</p>	<p>The MoD are part of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group.</p> <p>We have rated this action as 'amber' as we intend to further develop our relationship with the MoD Abbey Wood and as such, have continued this action into our new 2025/27 Covenant Action Plan - there are further opportunities to work together with the MoD to ensure enhanced work to deliver the Covenant.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	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	<p>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 accessing services.</p> <p>The Council has also committed to continue funding the Veteran's Support Service as part of its core budget.</p>
	13. Create a Directory of contacts with calendar of activities/events in partnership with SAAFA and Assistplus.	A directory of contacts has been created with details of events in order to ensure 'the right information gets to the right people'.
	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.	<p>We know that the areas set out in the Armed Forces Covenant are priority areas for the Community (Health, Housing and Education). We have also added Employment as a key priority for South Gloucestershire. We record service outcomes across most areas of work (see above sections of the Annual Report) and take proactive opportunities to find out more in order that our actions closely respond to Community need.</p> <p>We have worked closely with partners across the South West of England to develop the South West Armed Forces Strategy, directly developing the Health & Wellbeing objectives of the Strategy.</p> <p>During 2024/25, we have also developed our working relationship with Op NOVA and Op Courage.</p> <p>In addition, our new Covenant Action Plan for 2025/27 has been subject to scrutiny of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group and has been developed as a result of our ongoing work to engage with the Armed Forces Community.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	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.	The Council achieved 'Bronze Recognition' under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in October 2024.
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.	16. Sharing national and SSAFA and Assistplus data and insights across Council areas which deliver in the Covenant areas.	Officers making up the Council's Armed Forces Covenant Working Group deliver regular updates to their teams in order to raise awareness of data and insights in order to inform and the work of Council teams.
	17. Armed Forces Officer Group to deliver 2 articles per year for the Council's 'Managers Need to Know' publication.	We have ensured direct engagement with managers across the Council in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant, our duties, responsibilities and work to deliver for the Armed Forces Community. This has included articles in the Council 'Managers Need to Know' publication, face-to-face workshops, and dissemination of the findings of our Research paper into Veterans Living in South Gloucestershire.
	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.	<p>Regular information sessions occur in Council teams, including the teams stated within this objective. For example, the Community Learning and Skills Service raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant at regular team meetings and as part its annual tutor training day.</p> <p>The Council has also made training courses available to all staff covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness of the Armed Forces community & the Armed Forces Covenant. • The Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty for Customer Facing Staff.

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	19. Ensure that data and case studies from Assistplus and SSAFA are shared as regular agenda items across Council teams.	Officers making up the Council's Armed Forces Covenant Working Group deliver regular updates, including data and case studies to their teams in order to raise awareness of the Covenant and the work of the Council and partners.
	20. Deliver annual updates at the Council's Leadership Forum with case studies of good practice.	We have ensured direct engagement with both our Leadership Forum and all managers across the Council in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant, our duties, responsibilities and work to deliver for the Community. This has included articles in the Council 'Managers Need to Know' publication, face-to-face workshops, and dissemination of the findings of our Research paper into Veterans Living in South Gloucestershire.
Ensuring increased knowledge across our staff of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, responsibilities and issues to be tackled.	21. Implementation of South West Partnership E-Learning opportunities for relevant staff.	The Council has made the following training courses available via its Training & Development portal to all staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness of the Armed Forces community & the Armed Forces Covenant. • The Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty for Customer Facing 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.	Information was shared with Forces Connect South West regarding benchmarking the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service. All partners provided positive feedback in respect of the reach and outcomes of the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service. Our partnership work has also ensured that information for staff on issues/barriers and effective solutions has been shared, ensuring heightened awareness across our teams as well as effective approaches and solutions that can be taken to meeting the diverse needs of the Armed Forces Community.

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
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.	23. Regular monitoring of policy compliance.	Monitoring of compliance takes place on a 6-monthly basis and is reported the Council's Senior Leadership Team. The results of this show that even outside of the Covenant areas of Health, Housing, Education and Employment, Council officers are considering the impacts of Council work for the Armed Forces Community. We intend to continue this approach as part of our 'Business as Usual'.
	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.	The Council runs a webpage that is up-to-date and available to all in respect of Armed Forces Community support.

Appendix 2

Our new Action Plan for 2025 – 27

Objectives	Actions (we will)
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.
	2. Conduct regular monitoring of our policy compliance.
To ensure that the Council is actively involved with partner organisations in order to ensure most effective delivery of our obligations and commitment to the Armed Forces Community. Partners include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 – 	3. Continue our support for the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service.
	4. Continue our support for and active involvement with the South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (Forces Connect South West).
	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.
	6. Organise 2 meetings per year of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group.
	7. Organise an annual flag raising ceremony at the Council's Badminton Road Offices to mark Armed Forces Week.
	8. Provide support to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day Committee in respect of delivering an Armed Forces Day event in South Gloucestershire.
	9. Organise 4 meetings per year of the Council's internal Armed Forces Covenant Officers Group.
	10. Promote the Armed Forces Covenant to Town and Parish Councils across South Gloucestershire.

Objectives	Actions (we will)
especially the Housing, Health, Education and Adult Education & Employment teams.	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.
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.
	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.
	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.
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'.
	16. Produce an Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report.
	17. Attend and support the annual South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day event in order to visibly engage with the Armed Forces Community.
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.
	19. Engage with schools to communicate and encourage good practice in best utilisation of Service Pupil Premium.

Objectives	Actions (we will)
	20. Conduct a review of our Housing and Homelessness reduction strategies and policies to ensure best practice.
	21. Implement the National Armed Forces Covenant module covering Housing to appropriate staff and encourage other partners e.g. housing associations, to undertake training.
	22. Review our Armed Forces status data collected through housing and homelessness teams and services and share data with system partners.
	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).
	24. Promote smoking cessation amongst Veterans
	25. Promote access to and take-up of NHS Health Checks to Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community

Key Stats

South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service

Funded by South Gloucestershire Council.

- * 84 veterans supported during 2024/25, an increase of 1% on the previous year.
- * 164 telephone calls logged during 2024/25, an increase of 59% on the previous year.
- * 36 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held during 2024/25, an increase of 33% on the previous year.
- * 149 face to face meetings have been held during 2024/25, an increase of 217% on the previous year.
- * 26 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities, an increase of 13% on the previous year

Service delivered by SSAFA and Assist Plus.

Feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

Health, Welfare & Debt and **Employment** were the three most common areas veterans sought support for.

Housing

11% of customers receiving a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) or Care Act assistance during 2024/25 confirmed they had served in the Armed Forces.

Employment

In October 2024, the Council achieved the **Bronze Award** under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

Health

30.6% of veterans in South Gloucestershire are disabled under the Equality Act, and **34.2%** self-reported as being in 'not good health'.

Council partnership working

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

Council Action Plan

- * Achievements made against **100% of actions** in the Council's 2023-25 Action Plan.
- * **New action plan for 2025-27** to guide our continued work to support the Armed Forces Community.

Population – Census 2021

In South Gloucestershire, the number of veterans stood at 9,498, this is 4% of the total population aged 16 years and over.

28.4% (2,629) of veteran households in South Gloucestershire are single family households where all residents are aged 66 years or older.

Almost **55%** of all veterans in South Gloucestershire are aged 65 years or older, which is 33 percentage points greater than the figure for non-veterans.

42% of Veterans in South Gloucestershire are aged 75 or over.