

Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2023-24



Foreword

Welcome to the South Gloucestershire Council Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report for 2023/24. This Report provides an overview of work delivered by the council during 2023/24 to support the Armed Forces Community.

I am delighted that the Council has continued to fund the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service; this Annual Report provides a range of examples of the important support delivered by the service.

I am also delighted that we are publishing a Research Paper exploring the veteran population in South Gloucestershire. The Paper is based on Census data as well as feedback from organisations, groups and individuals. Its key purpose is to raise awareness and influence actions across the district that will support the Armed Forces Community.

During the year, we continued to work with partners across the South-West. Together, we commenced work to produce 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 - an important contribution as we know that this is one of the key areas for which veterans approach services for support.

At the 'halfway point' of our 2-year Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan, we have delivered 54% of our stated actions and an additional 38% of our actions are well underway. 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. We have a strong foundation in place for action, and next year we will bring forward a new action plan to ensure our work continues to progress without pause.

To deliver meaningful services and positive outcomes we will continue to work with partners, organisations, groups and individuals so that we have the best feedback upon which to take successful actions in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community. 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

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

This is South Gloucestershire Council’s third Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report; it provides an overview of key actions that the council takes to support serving personnel and their families as well as veterans. It also provides an overview of our progress against our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan.



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

Highlights of the year

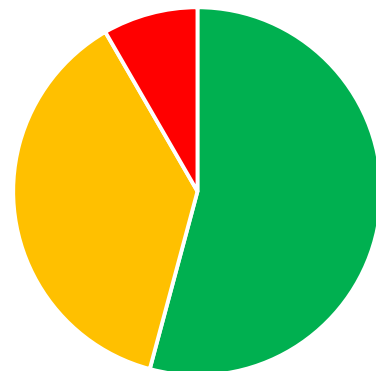
The council has funded the **South Gloucestershire Veteran’s Support Service (VSS)** for the last 2 years. Following the success of this service, Cabinet took a decision in February 2023, as part of its budget setting process, to continue to fund the VSS for a further 2 years (2023 – 2025).



At the ‘halfway point’ of **the council’s 2 year action plan**:

- 54% of the Plan has been delivered;
- 38% of the Plan has seen actions taken already and progress is being made towards successful delivery;
- 8% of the Plan has yet to commence (although plans are in place for action commencement).

See the ‘Progress and What Next?’ section of this report for details.



In South Gloucestershire, our approach goes beyond the statutory requirement in that we recognise the area of ‘Employment’ in our work in order that we are proactive in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces community in this area.

During the year, the council submitted an 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. 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 to excellence in our employment practices.



During the year, 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 intention of the Paper is to provide a set of information to individuals and organisations across South Gloucestershire that will be helpful in understanding key issues and influence actions across the district that will support the Armed Forces Community and reduce experience of inequalities.

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 commenced work to produce 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**. This is an important contribution as we know that mental health and wellbeing is one of the key reasons why armed forces veterans approach services for support.

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.

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. For many years one of the bi-annual meetings has coincided with a flag raising ceremony organised by the Royal British Legion to mark Armed Forces Week.

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

Internally, South Gloucestershire Council has continued to run its own **Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group** in order to ensure effective delivery of the Covenant. The Group continues to run a [webpage](#) as part of the main South Gloucestershire Council website and **monitors progress against the council’s own Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan** - this report provides a summary of our progress to date.



The council has provided support to the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Day Committee with a plan to hold an **Armed Forces Day event in June 2024**. This is an important day and June of 2024 is the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings.

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

Support for Veterans

In February 2021, in support of Veterans across South Gloucestershire, the council agreed to fund a two-year pilot project to develop and build a support service for Veterans in South Gloucestershire.

This is known as the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service (VSS). Following the success of the first 2 years, Cabinet took a decision in February 2023, as part of its budget setting process, to continue to fund the VSS for a further 2 years (2023 – 2025).

Assistplus³ and Soldiers', Sailors', and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire⁴, therefore, continue to be jointly commissioned to work in partnership to provide this all-encompassing service.

Key to this is 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 can make 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 third year of the Veteran Support Service, the following has been achieved:

- * 83 Veterans have been supported, an increase of 54% on year one.
- * 103 telephone calls logged, an increase of 56% on year one.
- * 36 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held, mirroring year one activities.
- * 47 face to face meetings have been held, which is an increase of 95% on year one.
- * 30 Peer support group sessions have been held, an increase of 233% on year one.
- * 23 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities, an increase of 109% on year one.

³ <https://www.assistplus.org.uk/>

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

Examples of support delivered by the Veteran Support Service

- * Working with South Gloucestershire Council Education team to gain school places for children after relocating.
- * Helping to improve loneliness and anxiety through visits to the veteran support hub and support from the Royal British Legion, Bradley Stoke.
- * Support to gain grant funding to finance a deposit for a local authority provided property, furniture, equipment and carpets and mentoring to work towards gaining employment.
- * Gaining funding from national charities to install a stairlift to increase personal independence .
- * Support to reduce digital exclusion through the provision of a smartphone which has led to improved access to finding employment opportunities.
- * Arranging for foodbank and food voucher support from various charities to help a family with cost-of-living support.



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

"Entirely happy with the support I have received"

"I was happy with the outcomes achieved with my caseworker"

"Thank you for your support both in person and over the phone. I was a bit worried when I was referred to Assistplus by the NHS support nurse. But after speaking to a fellow veteran, I was more happier than before"

"I just want to thank you for assisting me with my CV update. I'm starting my new job in few days' time and look forward to volunteering for Assistplus to help others also"

South Gloucestershire Veterans' Support Service – Example Case Studies

A veteran experiencing physical and mental health issues since their transition from the armed forces resulted in the breakdown of their family situation and the accrual of significant priority debt leading to a precipitous domestic situation.

The SSAFA caseworker provided significant support for the client including accessing a variety of support services and also signposted the client to retraining opportunities, which are provided for veterans by the local authority.

SAFFA also facilitated access to significant grant funding for the veteran, which has been able to fund public transport travel passes to help with a return to employment, white goods for the domestic environment, specialist medical equipment needed to ameliorate a chronic medical condition and also funded the purchase of essential IT equipment to facilitate retraining. In addition, grant funding has also been accessed to write down the client's priority debt and has allowed them the opportunity to benefit from a fresh start in life.

A veteran approached having struggled significantly since transition to civilian life and had recently suffered a loss of their domestic situation and loss of contact with their children. This led to periods of homelessness and the loss of their most recent period of employment.

SSAFA provided immediate assistance to ameliorate the situation including the provision of emergency grocery funding to support the client's basic food needs.

SAFFA helped to secure a housing association apartment and has worked with other military aid charities to secure funding for the purchase of essential white goods for the veteran's new home, as well as funding carpeting for the premise.

The veteran is now fully rebuilding their life and is confident that they will soon be able to reinitiate contact with their estranged family, as well as returning to meaningful employment in the very near future.

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

Health

(see pages 11 - 12)

Education

(see pages 11 - 12)

Housing

(see pages 11 - 12)

Employment

(see pages 11 - 12)

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.

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.

Sexual health services

Information is not yet collected by specialist sexual health service providers at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces. Commissioners of the new specialist sexual health contract, starting 2025, will be requested to collect this information wherever possible.

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 and currently runs every two years. 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. The most recent survey, OPS 2023, has data ready for analysis.

Services to families, for example: Active Play, the Home Safety Equipment Scheme and provision of Healthy Start vitamins have updated monitoring on referral forms to include information about whether family members are part of the Armed Forces Community.

Drug and alcohol services

Information is collected at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces and an additional onward referral to Assistplus and SSAFA would be completed as appropriate. The Service Manager is linked into the council's Armed Forces Covenant Group to ensure that there are suitable pathways into drug and alcohol treatment for those that require it.

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

Education

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

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

School admissions

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

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

Additional needs support

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

Service pupil premium payments

Eligible schools receive the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) so that they can support the pastoral needs of service children, the current amount is £335 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 2023 schools census, 299 children across the county were identified as 'service children', this number is slightly up from 2022 with 277 children. A number of schools that have children who attract SPP have converted to academy status since 2022 and more are set to convert before the next census, therefore the information provided here is no longer split between maintained and academy schools.

- 47 primary schools have less than 5 SPP children (49 in 2022)
- 6 primary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children (6 in 2022)
- 1 primary school has more than 50 SPP children (1 in 2022)
- 6 secondary schools have less than 5 SPP children (6 in 2022)
- 8 secondary schools have between 5 and 15 SPP children (7 in 2022)
- 1 secondary school has 16 or more SPP children (2 in 2022)
- 1 special school has less than 5 SPP children (3 in 2022)

Details of spending are held by each individual school. The primary school with more than 50 children employs a part time teaching assistant for 2 mornings per week to support the social, emotional and mental health of their service children.

Home to school transport

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

Wellbeing

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).

In the 2023 survey 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 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 local connection criteria that may apply to any other applicant and also that where those applicants have an urgent need for housing, they must be given the highest priority.

South Gloucestershire 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 5,166 active applications for housing of which 39 are from the Armed Forces Community, registered in the following priority bands: Band A - 6; Band B - 4; Band C - 6; and Registered - 23.

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 2023/24, 9 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 2023/24, 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 supported to access settled accommodation. This is from a total of 924 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 2023/24, 503 homes in South Gloucestershire were adapted through Disabled Facilities Grants and Care Act assistance, the highest number on record, and 606 grants were approved, also the highest on record. As part of the customer satisfaction and outcomes survey for DFG and Care Act provision 2023-24:- of the 132 responses, 9.5% 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 submitted an 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. 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 to excellence 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 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.

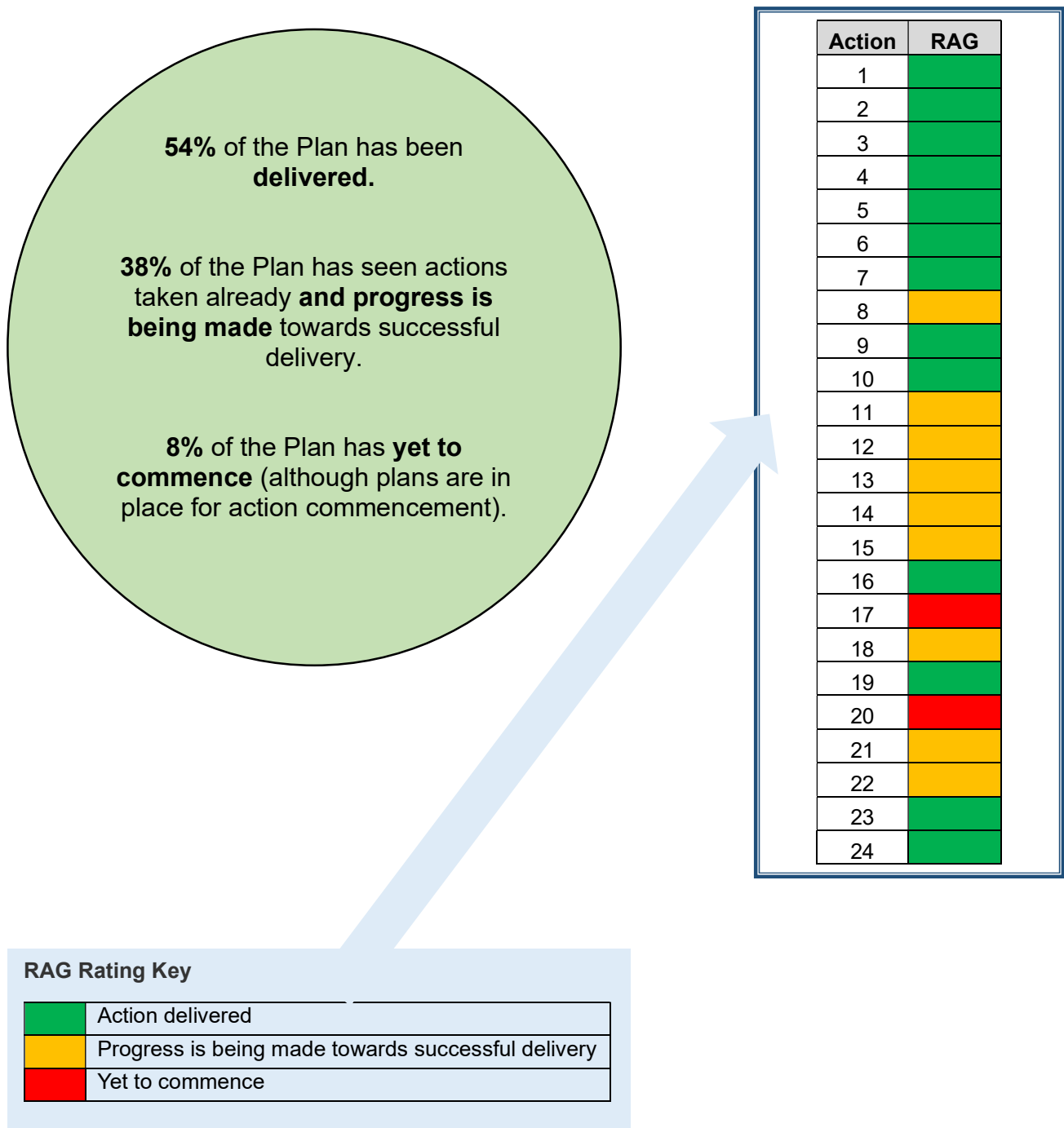
WE Work for Everyone – is an employment support service for young people and adults aged 16 plus who have a self-identified or diagnosed disability, Learning Difficulty or Autism that is a barrier to finding work. Working on a 1:1 basis with our Employment Navigators individuals who are residents of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

As of the end of year 1, i.e. halfway through the action plan:



Action Plan 2023 – 25 – progress and what next

The following shows progress against the action plan using a ‘RAG rating’ approach and gives information regarding plans for the forthcoming year:

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
<p>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.</p>	<p>1. Ensure the Armed Forces Covenant is appropriately reflected in council strategies, policies and operational delivery by ensuring full implementation of our new EqIAA process.</p>	<p>During 2023/24, the council adopted a new Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024 – 2028. This Plan sets out a series of objectives aimed at reducing inequalities and 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 and identifying actions to address them. The EqIAA process recognises the Armed Forces Community.</p>
<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</p>	<p>2. Continuation of support for the South Gloucestershire Veteran’s Support Service.</p> <p>3. Continuation of support for South West Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.</p> <p>4. Organise 2 meetings per year of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group.</p>	<p>Funding to continue the service was agreed by Cabinet in February 2024 for a further 2 years.</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>These important meetings have taken place, one of which coincided with the Armed Forces Day Flag Raising Ceremony.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
<p>and Assistplus) with the council corporately and amongst teams – especially the Housing, Health, Education and Adult Education & Employment teams.</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 was followed by a meeting of the South Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. The next annual Flag Raising Ceremony is arranged for 17th June 2024.</p>
	<p>6. Organise 4 meetings per year of the council's internal Armed Forces Covenant Officers Group.</p>	<p>Quarterly meetings took place during the year and 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 second Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report was adopted in June 2023 and this, our third Report is to be adopted in June 2024.</p>
<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 Research Paper as a backdrop, the council's Senior Leadership Team were briefed in February 2024.</p> <p>We plan to brief Councillors and local MPs during 2024.</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 have received briefings in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant. We plan to deliver regular updates and E-Learning for both Service Directors and staff and will use our Research Paper as a backdrop to this.</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, in January 2024 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>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	11. Liaise with the MoD Abbey Wood to deliver communications regarding our services across their workforce.	This work is planned for 2024 – 2025.
	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 worked 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>During 2024 – 2025, teams from within the council will attend information sessions for Veterans in order to promote information and services which provide support.</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 and during 2024 – 2025, the calendar of events will be implemented in order to ensure 'the right information gets to the right people'.

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	<p>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>	<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. For example, 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 regular health and wellbeing online pupil survey (OPS) is conducted. The OPS provides an important and comprehensive picture of how children and young people in South Gloucestershire behave and what they really think about a range of health-related issues. This includes questions where children can self-report having a family member in the Armed Forces. This enables analysis to be conducted in respect of children of Regular Personnel, Reservists and Veterans to identify issues and barriers and plan actions in response.</p> <p>In addition, during 2024 – 2025, teams from within the council will attend information sessions for Veterans run by the South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service in order to gain key feedback from local members of the Armed Forces Community which will in-turn enhance the action planning process.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>The council submitted an application to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for 'Bronze Recognition' under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in early 2024.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
<p>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.</p>	<p>16. Sharing national and SSAFA and Assistplus data and insights across council areas which deliver in the Covenant areas.</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>17. Armed Forces Officer Group to deliver 2 articles per year for the Council's 'Managers Need to Know' publication.</p>	<p>The Group has not delivered 2 articles for the Council's 'Managers Need to Know' publication during 2023 – 2024. However, it is noted that the council's Senior Leadership Team and Service Directors have been briefed and Officers making up the council's Armed Forces Covenant Working Group deliver regular updates to their teams in order to raise awareness of the Covenant and the work of the council.</p> <p>2 articles for the Council's 'Managers Need to Know' publication will be delivered during 2024 – 2025.</p>
	<p>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>	<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>During 2024 – 2025, we plan to work with the South West Armed Forces outreach officer (see below objective) to enhance and continuously develop our work to ensure that teams across the council continuously enhance their awareness of issues/barriers faced by the Armed Forces Community and solutions/approaches for adoption and implementation.</p>
	<p>19. Ensure that data and case studies from Assistplus and SSAFA are shared as regular agenda items across council teams.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	20. Deliver annual updates at the Council's Leadership Forum with case studies of good practice.	<p>The council's Leadership Forum has not received an update in 2023 – 2024. However, it is noted that the council's Senior Leadership Team and Service Directors have been briefed and Officers making up the council's Armed Forces Covenant Working Group deliver regular updates to their teams in order to raise awareness of the Covenant and the work of the council.</p> <p>Our plan is to use the Research Paper developed as a backdrop for a 2024 – 2025 Leadership Forum session. This will mean the ability to contextualise 'the South Gloucestershire picture' with clarity and ensure a valuable session that is focussed on action as well as information.</p>
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.	This is planned for implementation during 2024 – 2025.
	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.	<p>A conversation was held 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 VSS.</p> <p>During 2024 – 2025, we plan to implement work with the South West outreach officer in South Gloucestershire.</p>
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.	<p>Monitoring of compliance takes place on a 6-monthly basis and is reported the council's Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>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 to monitor and develop our approach.</p>

Objectives	Actions	Progress and plans for year 2 of the Action Plan
	<p>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.</p>	<p>The council runs a webpage that is up-to-date and available to all in respect of Armed Forces Community support.</p>

Key Stats

South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service

Funded by South Gloucestershire Council.

- 83 Veterans have been supported, an increase of 54% on year one.
- 103 telephone calls logged, an increase of 56% on year one.
- 36 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held, mirroring year one activities.
- 47 face to face meetings have been held, which is an increase of 95% on year one.
- 30 Peer support group sessions have been held, an increase of 233% on year one.
- 23 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities, an increase of 109% on year one.

Service delivered by SSAFA and Assist Plus.

Feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

Health and **housing** are the two most common areas veterans are seeking support for.

Housing

9.5% of customers receiving a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) or Care Act assistance confirmed they had served in the Armed Forces.

Employment

83.1% of working aged veterans (16-64) in South Gloucestershire are in employment.

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'.

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.

Council membership

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

Council Action Plan

- * **54%** of 2-year action plan delivered by the halfway point.
- * **38%** of the action plan, already making sound progress.