

# Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 21/22



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## Foreword

Welcome to the first Annual Armed Forces Covenant Report of South Gloucestershire Council.

South Gloucestershire Council is a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant and has been for many years. As a veteran myself, I know the challenges veterans face in the community. 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 Public Health and Equality of Opportunity. In doing this, the council is proud to work with a wide range of organisations and partners.

During 2021/22, the council funded Assistplus and SSAFA to deliver a new Veteran Support Service for South Gloucestershire and I am delighted that feedback from those who have used the service has been extremely positive. This service will continue in the forthcoming year.

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

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



**Cllr Franklin Owusu-Antwi OStG**  
**Cabinet Member for Public Health and Equality of Opportunity**

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## Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant sets out the relationship between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. It recognises that the whole nation has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces and their families, and it establishes how they should expect to be treated. It considers the Armed Forces Community to include Regular Personnel, Reservists, Veterans, families of these and the bereaved.

South Gloucestershire is an area with above average military presence. Figures published by the Defence Public Health Unit<sup>1</sup> show South Gloucestershire as having the 4<sup>th</sup> largest proportion of Regular Forces and MOD civil servants in England as a percentage of the area's population.

The MoD headquarters in South Gloucestershire at Filton Abbey Wood was opened by the Queen in July 1996 - and is one of the region's biggest employers with around 8,500 staff based at the site.

The MoD headquarters building won Green Building of the Year in 1997, Best Out of Town Building (British Council for Offices) and was second in the RICS Efficient Building Awards.

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 Government describes the Armed Forces Covenant as “*an enduring Covenant between the people of the United Kingdom, Her majesty's Government and all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown and their families*”.

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 takes to support serving personnel and their families as well as veterans.

South Gloucestershire Council is an active member of Forces Connect South West<sup>2</sup> which is a local authority initiative that supports the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant to the military community across the South West of England through effective partnerships. Forces Connect South West brings together public authority bodies, the MOD, military charities and support agencies, and business to develop effective relationships and deliver support of the Covenant in a coherent manner.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/1.17%20LAs%20Mythbuster%20resource\\_v06.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/1.17%20LAs%20Mythbuster%20resource_v06.pdf)

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

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

The meeting is an information sharing forum that supports joint working and ensures the Armed Forces Covenant has a high priority in the work of the council. For many years one of the bi-annual meetings has coincided with a flag raising ceremony organised by the Royal British Legion to mark Armed Forces Day. This valued ceremony was not possible in the last two years due to COVID restrictions but is being restored in June 2022.

Armed Forces Covenant Working Group members:

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

Internally, South Gloucestershire Council runs its own Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group bringing together the areas of education, public health, housing and employment in order to ensure effective delivery of the Covenant. The Group runs a webpage as part of the main South Gloucestershire Council website where a wide range of information is available<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/i-am/i-am-in-the-armed-forces/>

## New Support for Veterans

In February 2021, in support of Veterans across South Gloucestershire, the council agreed to fund a two-year pilot project. The aim of the project is to engage local organisations with experience in the field and relevant contacts, to develop and build a support service for Veterans in South Gloucestershire. This is known as the Veteran Support Service (VSS).

Assistplus<sup>4</sup> and Soldiers', Sailors', and Airforce Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire<sup>5</sup> were jointly commissioned to work in partnership to provide an all-encompassing service. Services delivered by Assistplus and SSAFA Bristol and South Gloucestershire are:

- 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 when appropriate in accordance with current COVID-19 guidance moving to face to face.

In addition, these organisations are involved at a strategic level with the council, providing feedback on experiences and information from the Armed Forces Community when accessing Council services specifically in the fields of education, healthcare, housing and employment. This provides direct challenge and support to the continuous improvement of council services.

Feedback gained from a sample of 32 Veterans demonstrated that the majority of Veterans felt happier, less anxious and less isolated as a result of the support they received. The service was rated 'Excellent' overall.

The service will continue to develop and evolve over the course of 2022/23 to ensure that Veterans across South Gloucestershire continue to receive the support they need.

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

Health	Education	Housing	Employment
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Over the course of the first year of the project when the Covid pandemic has impacted on communities and services, the service has achieved:

- 54 Veterans have been supported
- 66 telephone calls have been logged
- 36 virtual 1:1 meeting has been held
- 24 face to face meetings have been held
- 9 peer support group sessions have been held
- 11 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.assistplus.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/bristol-south-gloucestershire>

## 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 weight management 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, Healthy Lifestyle Coordinators will provide information on Assistplus and SSAFA, and complete an additional onward referral where appropriate. As part of any recommissioning and/or redesign of the healthy lifestyle service and its associated offers, members of the Armed Forces Community will be contacted in order to help identify their specific needs and to seek their opinions on the development of this service.

### **Smokefree Services**

Armed forces status is collected at the point of referral, identifying whether a service user is, or has previously been, a member of the Armed Forces. Where Armed Forces status is identified, Practitioners will provide information on Assistplus and SSAFA and do an additional onward referral where appropriate. The importance of collecting this information and signposting to services will be included in training opportunities and reinforced during update sessions for all staff. Commissioned Smokefree services in South Gloucestershire are contracted until March 2023, and before future recommissioning and/or redesign, members of the Armed Forces Community will be contacted to help identify their specific needs and to seek their opinions on the development of this service.

### **NHS Health Checks**

A planned update to the South Gloucestershire NHS Health Check template is scheduled for June 2022, and will collect information on whether a patient is, or has previously been, a member of the Armed Forces. Where Armed Forces status is identified, Practitioners will provide information on Assistplus and SSAFA and do an additional onward referral where appropriate. The importance of collecting this information and signposting to services will be included in the 2022/23 training programme and reinforced with Practitioners during update sessions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, NHS health checks were stepped back in many practices nationally as recognition that services needed to prioritise vaccinations and treatment and care of COVID-19 patients. As part of our NHS Health Check programme restoration efforts post the pandemic, we will speak to providers to scope further opportunities to meet the specific needs of the Armed Forces Community.

### **Sexual health services**

Information is not yet collected by specialist sexual health service providers at triage stage on whether someone is, or has been, a member of the Armed Forces. As part of the recommissioning of sexual health services, people from the Armed Forces Community will be contacted specifically to ask their opinions on the development of services to best support their needs. The data monitoring requirements for any provider delivering sexual health services will be implemented to include this data collection requirement.

The current provider of sexual health services across BNSSG are just starting to prioritise a better system for collecting their data across the different platforms and partners. It will be explored with commissioning colleagues across BNSSG and the provider in the hope that this information can start to be collected during the current contract, rather than waiting for the reprocurement.

### **Children and Young People**

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

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

### **Drug and alcohol services**

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

The above information consistently refers to 'data monitoring requirements'. This is an important piece of work as raised by the Ministry of Defence and the Office for Veterans' Affairs who released guidance<sup>6</sup> in March 2022. 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.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/harmonised-standard-for-previous-uk-armed-forces-service/>



# Education

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

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

## **School admissions**

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

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

## **Additional needs support**

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

### **Service pupil premium payments**

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

Eligible schools are identified in the autumn term census. In the 2021 schools census, 284 children across the county were identified as 'service children', 178 attend maintained schools and 106 attend an academy school.

In respect of the 178 pupils attending maintained schools, the spread is across 48 different schools, as follows:

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

Details of spending are held by each individual school and the maintained school with more than 50 children employs a part time teaching assistant 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**

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

# Housing

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

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

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

## **Allocations policy for social housing**

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

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

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

## **Homelessness**

In South Gloucestershire, approaches as homeless are rare amongst the ex-services community. During 2021/22, we received no referrals under the statutory duty to refer process from armed forces, or veterans support services and we only took 1 application under homelessness legislation from ex-services personnel, who was housed into settled accommodation. This is from a total of 864 homeless applications. The Council's website contains a page specifically covering housing options for those who are leaving the armed forces, including information about homelessness.

## **Disabled facilities grants**

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

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

## **Tenancy Strategies**

Local housing authorities in England are required to publish a strategy setting out the matters to which the registered providers of social housing (housing associations) in its district are to have regard to when letting their properties. South Gloucestershire Council and its housing partners adopted a Strategic Tenancy Policy (STP) in April 2012 covering this<sup>7</sup>.

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

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/homechoice/>

## Employment

The Council directly provides a range of support for residents to both gain and to progress within employment through its Community Learning and Skills Team. It also works with several partners, including the National Careers Service, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, training organisations, other employers and third sector partners to support individuals to access the support they need to secure and develop within their employment opportunities. The Council's Community Learning and Skills Team are in contact with Assistplus, SSAFA and other local groups who support veterans to ensure that they are aware of the support and services that are available free for veterans and their families to access including both employment support services and learning and skills development programmes. These are set out below and although at present specific data is not collected in relation to Armed Forces Community engagement, anecdotal evidence confirms positive access to the programmes set out below.

Support is available through the following programmes:

1. **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.
2. **Works4Youth** – is an employment support service for young people aged 16-24. It is a universal service offered to all young people who are seeking support into employment either directly or through further training and development. The service provides one-to-one mentor support which is tailored to the young person's needs supporting them to set goals, identify and take the key actions needed to secure their goals. Alongside the support of an employability mentor, it provides workshops to both engage and support young people to build their confidence and resilience as well as equip them with the skills that employers are looking for.
3. **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.
4. **Future Bright** – provides career progression coaching for those aged 18 plus who are in work. A dedicated career coach supports individuals on a 1:1 basis to create a personalised action plan and to secure its outcomes. The programme also supports individuals to access the training and support they need to develop their skills and confidence to enable them to progress.

## What Next?

The Veteran Support Service funded by South Gloucestershire Council and delivered by Assistplus and SSAFA is proving to be a positive success being rated as 'Excellent' by Veterans. During the 2022/23 year, the service will be continued and reviewed with a view to its continued funding and development into the future.

It will be important during the 2022/23 year, that the council's monitoring of the experiences and outcomes of the Armed Forces Community, including their children, is enhanced to meet the guidance published by the Ministry of Defence and the Office for Veterans' Affairs. South Gloucestershire Council already has a comprehensive monitoring policy which includes the collection of this data and therefore, the key action to be taken is to ensure the practical implementation of this policy across all appropriate service areas.

The council's proactive involvement with Forces Connect South West and its own internal Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group will continue as these provide opportunities for learning as well as the routes needed for the practical implementation of support that meets the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

During 2022/23, we will review the available options for implementing a programme of e-learning modules for our staff in order to enhance staff knowledge of the Covenant the Armed Forces Act and the work of South Gloucestershire Council.

South Gloucestershire Council welcomes the Armed Forces Act 2021. Our approach goes beyond the statutory requirement in that the area of 'Employment' is also represented within our own internal Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group. We will seek to continue and strengthen this approach so that positive attention is given to employment opportunities and training for the Armed Forces Community in our area.

# Key Stats

## Personnel in South Gloucestershire (as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020)

Military Personnel - 1,300  
Civilian Personnel – 11,030

## MoD headquarters in South Gloucestershire at Filton Abbey Wood

Opened by the Queen in July 1996  
Circa. 8,500 staff

## South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service

Funded by South Gloucestershire Council;  
54 veterans supported in 21/22;  
Service delivered by SSAFA and Assist Plus

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

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

## Housing

49 members of the Armed Forces Community applying for housing in 21/22

## Education

284 service children attending schools across South Gloucestershire

## Council membership

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

## Employment

4 employment support programmes



[forcesconnectsouthwest.org.uk](http://forcesconnectsouthwest.org.uk)

