



## Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership

### Annual Review Report 2024

#### Contents

Purpose.....	1
Background.....	1
Highlights in 2024 .....	2
Health and Wellbeing.....	2
Housing.....	3
Schools & Education .....	3
Criminal Justice.....	4
Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre .....	5
Employer Engagement .....	5
Useful Contacts.....	6

#### Purpose

To update on progress and local delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant in Herefordshire over the past 12 months.

#### Background

The Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (HAFCP), is tasked with delivering the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant in Herefordshire. The partnership is made up of representatives from the Armed Forces community together with the public, private, and voluntary sectors. It is facilitated by Herefordshire Council as part of their ongoing commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces community is not disadvantaged when accessing public services. Dedicated topic leads work to an action plan to address key areas of need within Herefordshire. Each year, it refreshes the action plan and priorities based on identified gaps in provision or where improvements can be made to services and support.

HAFCP would like to thank all their partners and stakeholders for the outstanding work and commitment over the past 12 months. In particular, our military charities who work tirelessly out in the community supporting individuals and families, and also the organisations and businesses who go the extra mile to offer bespoke support and services to our Armed Forces community.

### Highlights in 2024

In March 2024, Cllr Peter Stoddart was appointed Chairman of HAFCP. A retired Colonel with extensive military experience, Cllr Stoddart brings valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals transitioning to civilian life. He also serves as the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services at Herefordshire Council.

The Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre has seen significant growth, expanding from a single part-time staff member to a dedicated team of four, thanks to grants from The National Lottery and the Veterans Foundation. This funding has enhanced the Centre's services, reaching more veterans both at the Centre and in the wider community, supported by over 20 volunteers. In October 2024, the Centre moved to a more visible location in the city, prepared just in time for a Royal visit from HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. This effort was coordinated by the charity's Chairman, Samantha Lewis, with support from local businesses and volunteers.

The Centre maintains strong links with HAFCP and Herefordshire Council, which established the Centre before handing it over to the Trustees in 2021. The unexpected closure of the Firstlight Trust café on Broad Street, Hereford, before Christmas was a significant shock. The café had been a vital social hub and access point for support services. In response, local military charities and community organisations quickly stepped in to assist affected veterans.

This year, we celebrated the contributions of HM Armed Forces with a range of D-Day 80 events across the county, culminating in a main commemoration in Ross-on-Wye. His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant, Mr. Edward Harley, lit a symbolic beacon alongside two D-Day veterans.

Bromyard & Winslow Town Council organised an excellent Armed Forces Day, featuring a marching band and military parade, supported by local Cadet Forces.

### Health and Wellbeing

Topic lead: **Tim Howson**

- Herefordshire Council's Public Health and our local NHS Services published the new [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) to understand the health and wellbeing of Herefordshire. The health and wellbeing of our armed forces community is now identified and included as a group needing to be considered, as policy and funds are allocated.

- In 2024 a sub-group was formed for primary and secondary care providers to come together to agree on some shared goals to improve healthcare outcomes for the Armed Forces community across physical and mental health.
- Thanks to colleagues at Taurus Healthcare we now have a better understanding of numbers of veterans who are coded as such with their GP practice. In 2021, of the 9,600 veterans living in Herefordshire, only 834 had declared their veteran status with the GP. This figure is alarmingly underrepresented, however, thanks to some fantastic initiatives by the Primary Care Networks, mainly through the social prescribers working out in the community, today, this now stands at 1,946, or around 20%. Further investigation will be undertaken to understand the potential causes for the low take-up and to consider further schemes to encourage more veterans to declare their status.
- There has been an increased take-up of veteran men's health screening, thanks to Public Health and NHS colleagues providing sessions in veteran and workplace settings.
- OP COURAGE, the NHS England Veteran Mental Health Service, has established regular clinics at the Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre. This initiative allows veterans to receive specialised mental health support in a more relaxed setting, rather than through remote assessments. This approach not only benefits the veterans by providing a more comfortable environment but also helps in reducing the workload for the service providers.
- The Veteran Mental Health practitioner from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust continues to provide outreach support across Herefordshire, ensuring veterans have access to local mental health services and engaging with rural GP practices. Her regular drop-in sessions at the Veterans Support Centre remain a cornerstone of her work. Recently, she has also established a pain clinic in collaboration with clinical colleagues, benefiting 30 patients. Additionally, she remains actively involved with Café Muse, supporting veterans and family members with dementia.

## Housing

Topic lead: **Tina Woods, Housing Development Officer, Herefordshire Council**

- Herefordshire Council remain committed to enhancing the social housing allocations policy to go beyond the Covenant's legal duty. As a result, all military compensation, including Disabled Facilities Grants, is now waived in financial assessments.
- There is now a more streamlined access to the housing register for Serving families, especially those experiencing marital breakdowns. The Housing team works closely with the Garrison and arranging for families to apply to the social housing register before the 93-day notice to vacate Service Families Accommodation. This enables the housing team to assist families sooner, thereby freeing up Service housing sooner, which is in short supply.
- The strong relationship between the local authority and the Garrison extends into strategic housing, with collaboration on new housing development opportunities involving the MOD.
- Additionally, the housing team conducts monthly sessions at the Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre, providing one-to-one guidance to veterans in need of housing support.

## Schools & Education

Topic lead: **Louise Tanner, Admissions & 14-19 Curriculum Manager, Herefordshire Council**

- The Service Pupil Premium is government funding provided directly to state schools, free schools, and academies across England to support children of Armed Forces personnel. In the current academic year, 930 children received the Service Pupil Premium across 77 schools Herefordshire schools. This funding, totalling around £316,000, helps address the unique needs of Service children.

Financial Year	Number Service Children	SPP per Child	Total Herefordshire Schools
01/04/2024 - 31/03/2025	930	£340	£316,000
01/04/2023 – 31/03/2024	944	£335	£316,240
01/04/2022 – 31/03/2023	1144	£320	£366,080
01/04/2021 – 31/03/2022	1138	£310	£352,780
01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021	1110	£310	£341,000
01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020	1032	£300	£309,600
01/04/2018 - 31/03/2019	1019	£300	£305,700
01/04/2017 - 31/03/2018	906	£300	£271,800
01/04/2016 – 31/03/2017	902	£300	£270,600

- However, 2024 presented challenges for Service pupils moving into the county mid-year, particularly at secondary level schools in the city where some class years had reached capacity. Consequently, the local authority had to offer places and transport to schools in other parts of the county for some children. The Admissions team at the council, with their strong understanding of the disruptions faced by military families, worked hard to resolve school placements.
- Herefordshire Council announced an additional £4.23 million in government funding to invest in schools and facilities, enhancing access to learning for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This funding aims to expand existing SEND provision in schools and increase capacity and facilities at special schools in the county. Recognising the particular challenges faced by military children due to frequent relocations, this investment is expected to benefit military families as well.
- The shortage of Early Years places in Herefordshire remains a significant challenge for all families, particularly for military spouses who often lack nearby family support networks. This situation can prevent spouses from returning to work or managing the costs of nursery places. However, Greenview Nursery, an award-winning independent nursery in Credenhill, recently expanded its provision by opening a new site south of the city, close to family accommodation. While spaces are limited, the Early Years team at the council continues to work closely with the local military to address these challenges.

## Criminal Justice

### Topic lead: YSS: Remember Veterans

- According to the Ministry of Defence, in 2023 approximately 3.6% of prisoners in England and Wales are veterans, equating to roughly 1,825 individuals. However, many believe this figure could be higher due to veterans not being identified or declared within the criminal justice system. Locally, West Mercia Police report that around 6% of all arrests involve individuals who declare their veteran background. While not all of these individuals will be charged or

imprisoned, it is crucial to ensure they receive appropriate support at the right time and for the Police and related agencies to understand the needs of veterans.

- Herefordshire is fortunate to have two outstanding organisations that provide one-to-one support for veterans. YSS Remember Veterans works closely with custody suites across West Mercia and Probation, while Op Nova, a national programme commissioned by the NHS, assists veterans in addressing housing issues, debt, mental health challenges, and substance misuse, aiming to reduce reoffending.
- The criminal justice system is complex, involving a suite of agencies from pre-arrest to post-prison stages, including police, courts, law firms, magistrates, prisons, probation, and specialist mental health support. Initiated by the Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre, a working group has formed comprising key stakeholders across the criminal justice system. This group aims to improve veteran identification and signposting, particularly at the arrest and bail stages, and to ensure timely awareness of veteran status during sentencing. The Hereford Bench, Assistant Police Crime Commissioner, and the High Sheriff have been instrumental in this process.

### Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre

Topic Lead: **Samantha Lewis, Chair of Herefordshire Veteran Support Centre**

- Over the past 12 months, the charity has grown significantly, thanks to successful grants from the National Lottery and the Veterans Foundation. The Centre now has 4 members of staff and over 20 volunteers.
- The Centre is now open five days a week, offering an extended range of initiatives, including outreach services in Ross-on-Wye. A dedicated team of volunteers supports the staff, assisting veterans and their families and directing them to appropriate services. The outreach work has made significant strides in reaching veterans and families, particularly in rural areas and in healthcare settings.
- The Centre hosts weekly or monthly sessions: for carers, the Department for Work and Pensions, a chronic pain clinic, a substance misuse clinic, and various peer support groups and social gatherings. It continues to be a vital resource for charity partners, providing a space for them to meet with clients and beneficiaries. In total, 45 different organisations utilise the Centre.
- Last autumn, the Centre relocated to 100 Widemarsh Street, enhancing its visibility and providing more functional spaces.
- As well as Royal endorsement with a visit from HRH Duke of Edinburgh who officially opened the new venue in October, the charity has now gained its first Patron, Mrs Victoria Harley.

### Employer Engagement

Topic Lead, **Kate La Barre, Armed Forces Covenant Officer, Herefordshire Council**

- Last year, we welcomed 22 businesses and organisations as new signatories bringing our total to 152. These local employers and organisations have pledged to become forces-friendly employers, joining over 12,500 organisations nationally.
- At NMITE's Military 2 Business event last year, seven new employers signed the Covenant for the first time, showcasing their commitment.

- Herefordshire's Employer Recognition Scheme Awards (ERS) continues to grow as our forces-friendly employers go above and beyond with their commitments, with 74 now in receipt of ERS Bronze, 17 ERS Silver, and 7 ERS Gold Awards
- Last year, we were delighted that Leominster Town Council was awarded ERS Gold, one of the town councils in the UK to achieve this.

### Useful Contacts

**Councillor Peter Stoddart**

Chair, Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership  
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**Air Cdre (Retired) Tim Howson**

Vice-Chair, Herefordshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership and Chair of SSAFA Herefordshire  
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For more information on Herefordshire's Armed Forces Covenant visit  
[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/armedforces](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/armedforces)