

Oxfordshire's Armed Forces Covenant

A joint publication by Oxfordshire County Council, 11 Brigade and partners





Armed Forces Covenant

between

Oxfordshire County Council, Representatives Of The Business,
Charity And Voluntary Sectors,
The Civilian Community Of Oxfordshire

and

The Armed Forces Community In Oxfordshire



4624 Squadron, RAF Brize Norton
Exercising their freedom of the county
Freedom of the County Parade, Oct 2014

Contents

Introduction	4
What is the Armed Forces Covenant?	5
The Covenant Fund	5
The Armed Forces in Oxfordshire	6
Overview	6
Garrisons, Stations and RAF Bases in Oxfordshire	6
The Armed Forces Covenant in practice	7
Corporate covenant	7
The strategic fit between the Armed Forces and Oxfordshire County Council	8
How the Civilian Military Partnership is structured	9
Links to local communities	10
Monitoring the Armed Forces Covenant	10
What the Covenant has achieved so far	11
Civilian Military Partnership	11
Future Working	13
Who's signed the Oxfordshire Armed Forces Covenant	13

Introduction

The Armed Forces and local communities throughout Oxfordshire have a long and enduring history of support and collaboration, as was seen in the original covenant signed in 2011.

This publication is a further example of our joint working. It has been produced by Oxfordshire County Council, 11 Brigade and partners, and outlines our approach to the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant throughout the County.

It explains how we will deliver the Armed Forces Covenant by detailing the work we have already done and intend to do to ensure the Covenant is a success for the Armed Forces, the County Council and our partners in the public, private and charity sectors.



Armed Forces Covenant signing ceremony, June 2018

What is the Armed Forces Covenant?

Nationally, the Armed Forces Covenant¹ is a promise to those who serve. It says the nation will do all they can to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community are treated fairly and not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives. One way of ensuring this was delivered locally was through the previously named Community Covenant, now known as the Armed Forces Covenant, which covers all aspects of society.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. Its aim is to encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces Community in their area as well as promoting understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces Community.

Since the launch of the Community Covenant in June 2011, every local authority in mainland Great Britain has signed a 'community covenant partnership' with their local Armed Forces and, as a result, we are seeing positive benefits nationwide.

Local support for the Armed Forces Community takes many forms, from initiatives by local authorities to the actions of individuals. It may be through supporting service charities, fundraising, military celebrations and open days, attending parades and offering commercial discounts.

The Covenant is not intended to be a one-way agreement. It also recognises how much the Armed Forces Community can do to help and support the wider civilian Community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.

The Covenant Fund

A Covenant Fund² has been established to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant at a national level. The fund is open to applications for both small and large grants for projects that support the areas of need identified within the Armed Forces Covenant.

Funding priorities are outlined and reviewed as necessary to guide applications for funding. Information about the most up to date priorities can be found on the Covenant Fund webpage³.

¹ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covenant-fund>

The Armed Forces in Oxfordshire

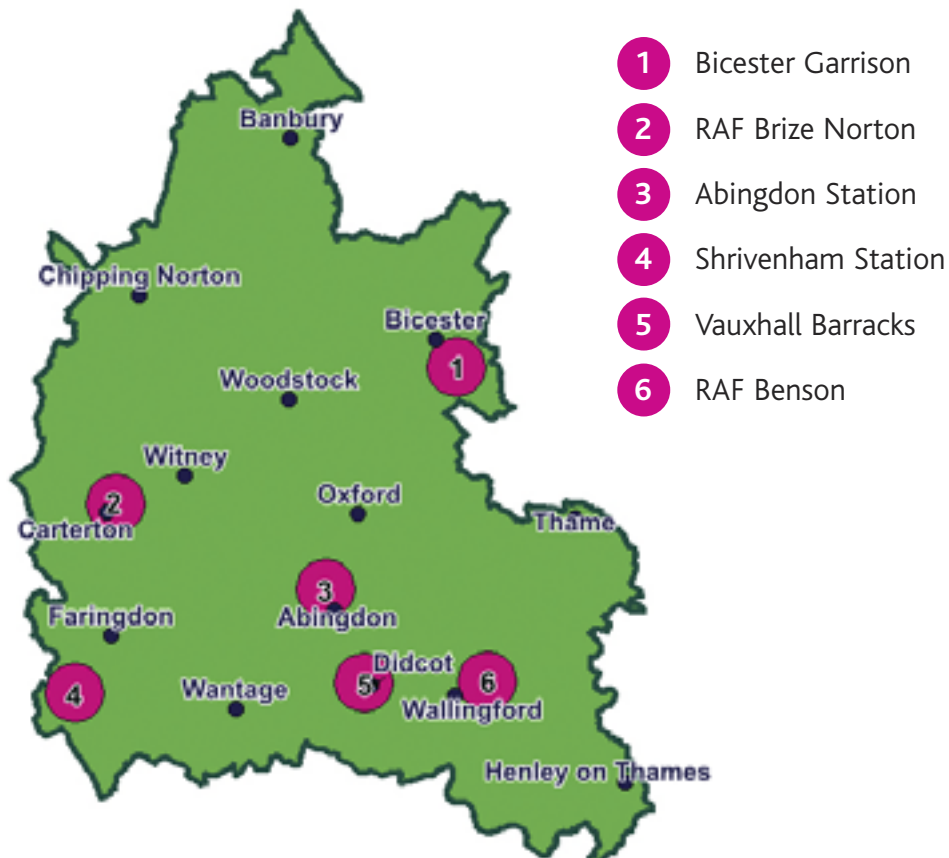
Overview

We are immensely proud of the relationship our Armed Forces have with local communities throughout Oxfordshire, as well as the work we have done and will continue to undertake in support of Service personnel, their families and Veterans. Oxfordshire has a large military presence; the total number of Service personnel based in the County is now in the order of 11,000 since the expansion of RAF Brize Norton. The County Council has long recognised the economic and social impact of the Armed Forces and has built strong collaborative links with its garrisons, stations and RAF bases, the Regional Army Brigade, Service charities, Veteran Associations, Cadet and Reserve units.

Like all public-sector organisations, the Armed Forces are subject to significant change. In Oxfordshire, we were lucky to have RAF Brize Norton (which has expanded and become the UK's primary RAF station), RAF Benson and Abingdon & Bicester Garrisons (the logistic hubs for the movement of the army's equipment and vehicles throughout the UK) and the acclaimed Shrivenham Defence Academy. These changes, although increasing demands on schools, health facilities and housing, are also providing jobs, shared facilities, and significant income to local economies.

Oxfordshire is richer for the unique opportunities the Armed Forces bring to the County. Through the Covenant local and Armed Forces communities are able to work more closely and innovatively.

Garrisons, Stations and RAF Bases in Oxfordshire



The Armed Forces Covenant in practice

Oxfordshire County Council was the first local authority in the country to launch its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant on the 20th June 2011⁴. The then named Community Covenant aimed to encourage charities, local authorities, businesses, communities and individuals to work together with the military to offer support that is appropriate to Service personnel, Service families, Reservists and Veterans. Support is also offered through Thames Valley Police and local health services.

The Army, Navy and RAF were all party to the original Covenant which also included the County Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxford City Council, Service charities, Veterans Associations, the Health Authority, Police and Voluntary Sector as well as the Private Sector through the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. This updated and refreshed publication demonstrates our ongoing commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and reflects changes since 2011 at national brigade and local levels.

The Oxfordshire Covenant is not limited to the work between the County Council and the Armed Forces. It endeavours to capture the significant work that is carried out by other organisations in the County, the private sector, charities and individuals. The covenant is monitored by the Civilian Military Partnership⁵.

Corporate covenant

In September 2014 Oxfordshire County Council, along with a number of local employers, signed the Corporate Covenant. The Corporate Covenant complements the Armed Forces Covenant and is designed as a platform where businesses and charitable organisations can express their support and commit to how they will provide that support.

Businesses and charitable organisations who wish to participate are asked to pledge their support for two key principles:

- No member of the Armed Forces should ever face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen;
- In some circumstances, special treatment may be appropriate, especially for the injured or bereaved.

⁴ Letter from the Prime Minister to the leader of Oxfordshire County Council www.number10.gov.uk/news/community-covenant-scheme-launched-in-oxfordshire/

⁵ Details of the Oxfordshire Civilian / Military Partnership are available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/armedforces

The strategic fit between the Armed Forces and Oxfordshire County Council

With the move to a single Armed Forces Covenant covering both the principles and priorities of the Community Covenant and the Corporate Covenant, Oxfordshire are keen to continue to develop and improve these relationships.

The core strategies of 11 Brigade and Oxfordshire County Council are complementary and supportive of the collaborative work that the Armed Forces Covenant aims to achieve.

Going forward 11 Infantry Brigade South East Headquarters will uphold the covenant with Oxfordshire County Council and ensure that those who serve, those who have served and their families are treated fairly.

Oxfordshire County Council's strategic direction, values and principles outline the following priorities:

- Thriving communities;
- Thriving people; and
- Thriving economy

The Oxfordshire Covenant endeavours to support these mutual objectives and develop solutions that benefit Oxfordshire and the Armed Forces communities.

The Oxfordshire Armed Forces Covenant aims to deliver the four themes set out in the government's Covenant guidelines updated in November 2017:



Structure of the Civilian Military Partnership

We have established strong links between the Armed Forces in Oxfordshire and the County Council, strengthened by the signing of the 2011 Community Covenant. The formal working relationships that support the Civilian Military Partnership (CMP) are illustrated graphically at Fig 1.

Fig 1. Key Groups, personalities and meetings



The CMP is jointly chaired by the County Council and the Brigadier of 11 Brigade. The CMP provides an opportunity for tri service participation driving strategic direction, monitoring progress and creating a cohort of civil/military liaisons delivering a dynamic outcome focused partnership.

In summary, 11 Brigade work with the County Council and strategic partners on issues that may affect all Service personnel (Army, RAF, the Naval Service) and their families across the county, for example health, employment, education, and housing. This work also includes the requirements of veterans and reservists. The five garrisons and stations work with the relevant City, District, Town and Parish councils and local communities to address matters affecting their local area, for example creation of shared play areas, local planning strategies or economic growth.

Links to local communities

The CMP aims to encourage and support the community voice through work already underway or considering new plans or activities. For example, the expansion of RAF Brize Norton saw a significant impact to local communities not only in the demand for services such as schools, health facilities and housing but also increased pressures to infrastructure systems such as roads and local traffic. In such instances, the CMP welcomes and encourages feedback from the local communities impacted to help influence and inform any action taken.

Individual communities are encouraged to voice their ideas, thoughts and concerns through their local Councillor who will raise the comments with the appropriate military liaison representative. CMP meetings are an opportunity to discuss these issues in the presence of representatives from both the civilian and military communities ensuring a mutually beneficial solution.

Oxfordshire's commitment to the Covenant

Pledges to the Armed Forces Covenant are voluntary and individual to each organising signing. In the case of the County Council we have endeavoured to explain, in the next section, what the pledges have and will achieve in order to assess how successful the Covenant is.

What the Covenant has achieved so far

To enable the Armed Forces Covenant to achieve the objectives set out at a national level the Council and Military have committed to providing senior leadership time and involvement. Some of the major service charities are also joining and bringing a helpful reminder of life after a service career. Some service personnel find transition challenging and this is exacerbated when leaving occurs, whether by injury or other circumstances, earlier than planned.

Civilian Military Partnership

The CMP is one way of ensuring a commitment is maintained across all partners, building strong local relationships. Having these strong local relationships has meant that covenant issues are few and quickly resolved.

The CMP has also provided an opportunity to work with service leavers and businesses to help them resettle into civilian life in Oxfordshire.

As an extension to the CMP, Oxfordshire hosts a Veterans Forum for Local Authorities, Military and Service Charities, featuring high profile speakers and attendance from the Lord Lieutenant and MP's.

Oxfordshire have been particularly successful in attracting grant funding for a variety of projects supporting civilian military integration. In particular, children of service families receive support to help them settle and integrate into their new local community.

Annually Oxfordshire show their support to the Armed Forces with the Flag Raising ceremony ahead of Armed Forces Day. This is always well attended and the people of Oxfordshire are immensely proud of the role the military play.

However, it is not always all about civic engagement. The military also provide an essential role in the community when emergency support is needed. For example, the military community provided vital support to Fire and Rescue and district councils during and after the 2013 floods that impacted Oxfordshire.

And finally, we should not forget the important role the county has played in the repatriation of fallen service personnel.



The Sensory Garden project at Carswell Community Primary School is a good example of how the grant funding has been used.

The garden brought together 5 communities - the school itself (children, parents, carers and staff), the local residential population, the local Christian Churches, local businesses and the local army base at Dalton Barracks, from where approximately one third of the schools population come from. A team of army personnel were one of the first groups on the site, removing concrete and preparing the ground for subsequent community digs.

It is intended that groups of children in the school will use the garden for varying purposes, including children with special educational needs and children whose parents are away on active service who may need some respite.



Future Working

The County Council, 11 Brigade and partners continue to demonstrate their support for the Covenant and act as champions to encourage partners and businesses to do the same. We will continue to be at the forefront of Civil Military collaboration and help others to develop their strategies.

We will continue to encourage others to support the military in our communities including service personnel, veterans and reservists.

Since 2011 a number of sub-groups have focussed on the issues that are most important to Oxfordshire's Armed Forces community, including the initial delivery of the action plan. Over time, these have developed into the sub-groups shown in figure 2 below:

Fig 2: Sub-groups



Recognise and Remember is a Countywide thematic group focussed on commemorations and celebrations. The remaining two sub groups are 'place based' and look at education, growth, skills and economy in those areas of Oxfordshire.

All of these sub groups focus on maintaining best practice and supporting new initiatives.

The CMP will continue to develop its communications strategy including producing the partnership newsletter and seeking out new ways to engage with partners and interested parties.

Who's signed the Oxfordshire Armed Forces Covenant

Signatories to the Oxfordshire Community Covenant can be found on the Armed Forces pages of the Oxfordshire County Council website⁶.

⁶ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/communitycovenant>

