

## Draft North Yorkshire Council Armed Forces Covenant Policy



PROUDLY  
SUPPORTING  
THOSE WHO  
SERVE.



1 April 2023

## North Yorkshire Council Armed Forces Covenant Policy A plan to embed the Covenant within our organisation

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## **Our Armed Forces Covenant Pledge**

An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom

His Majesty's Government

– And –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown

And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, 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.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

### **Our Vision**

North Yorkshire will aim to be one of the best places in the country for the Armed Forces community to gain equal access to local services, fairly, respectfully and without disadvantage.

## **Our Responsibilities**

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve, or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly, respectfully, and in some cases, with special consideration.

The Armed Forces Act 2021 enshrines the Covenant into law, to help prevent serving armed forces personnel, military veterans and their families from being disadvantaged when accessing commercial and public services.

One key feature of the Act is a new statutory duty on specified persons or bodies, including councils, to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant, when exercising certain housing, education or healthcare functions (excluding social care).

The Secretary of State for Defence has now commenced the due regard duty and issued statutory guidance that sets out the expectations required from the council and others when discharging these functions.

## **Our Military Community**

The armed forces have been rooted in North Yorkshire for more than 100 years and the county is proud of its military connections. Today, the military footprint in North Yorkshire includes Catterick Garrison, one of the largest military establishments in the UK, with sites at Ripon, Dishforth and Topcliffe; the Army Foundation College at Harrogate; and Royal Air Force has stations at Leeming, Fylingdales, Staxton Wold and Menwith Hill.

Currently, North Yorkshire has 10,770 armed services personnel, with the Army accounting for the large majority of these (84%). Almost three quarters of the total Army population in North Yorkshire (74%) is situated in Richmondshire and a further one in five (20.1%) are based in Harrogate. There are 1,690 Royal Air Force personnel in North Yorkshire, which accounts for 15.7% of the total armed forces population. Most RAF personnel (94.1%) are based in Hambleton and a small minority (5.9%) are in Ryedale.

In addition to the large number of serving armed forces personnel, the county has some of the largest concentrations of military veterans in the country. The latest Census data (ONS, 2021) shows North Yorkshire has 29,831 Armed Forces Veterans. Richmondshire has the highest proportion of Armed Forces Veterans in North Yorkshire at 9.5% (3,962) and third highest in England and Wales. The proportion of veterans in Richmondshire is more than double the national average figure, which is 3.8%. Harrogate has the highest number of Armed Forces Veterans in North Yorkshire with 7,076 (5.2%).

Added to this, there are 3,707 service pupils attending schools in North Yorkshire. Half of all service children in North Yorkshire (50.1%) attend schools situated in

Richmondshire. Approximately one in five service pupils (21.3%) attend schools in Hambleton and almost one in five (18.6%) attend schools in Harrogate.

## **Our Commitment**

North Yorkshire was one of the first places in the UK to have an Armed Forces Covenant in place. The first signatories signed the Covenant at a ceremony at Catterick Garrison in 2011. Many other organisations have signed the Covenant since then.

This purposefully short policy provides a vision and a framework for the new North Yorkshire Council and its partners to reset their collective commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant in North Yorkshire.

Alongside local government reorganisation, the new statutory due regard duty presents a timely opportunity for North Yorkshire Council to consolidate the good work already undertaken within the county and set out the steps it will take to meet the duty going forward.

This is the ideal time to build on our work with partners and to re-establish a renewed collective commitment to our work with the Armed Forces community.

## **Our Aims**

We welcome our new responsibilities under the new duty and will aim to:

- Raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant with partners, staff and customers; and embed awareness of the unique nature of the armed forces and its role in the UK within our organisational structures
- Improve the experience of armed forces customers who access council services; and evidence this within our organisation
- Strengthen relationships with the armed forces community, civilian community and key partners; and renew our collective commitment to the Covenant

## **Our Objectives (for meeting our responsibilities)**

We also set the following objectives to help us fulfil our responsibilities – we and our wider partners will:

- Provide the armed forces community with equal access to Local Authority education services, including admissions, attainment, wellbeing, transport, attendance, additional needs support (including SEND and EHCP), and use of Service Pupil Premium funding.
- Provide the armed forces community with equal access to Local Authority housing services, including the council's allocations policy for social housing, tenancy strategies, homelessness, and disabled facilities grants.

- Provide the armed forces community with equal access to Local Authority commissioned healthcare services, including Sexual Health Services and Drug and Alcohol Services.
- Provide additional help and guidance for working-age veterans, to support in matching their transferable skills and abilities to education, training and employment opportunities (not within scope of statutory duty).
- Understand our compliance regarding the new due-regard duty and embed this understanding within and across our organisational structures, systems and processes.
- Simplify the process for the armed forces community to understand, access and navigate the education, housing and health care system within North Yorkshire Council.
- Ask the question, have you served (and do you still serve, as a reservist?) when customers access relevant council services and record this information on the relevant system – ensuring our due diligence regarding proof of service and respecting the decision of those who might wish not to declare this.
- Include the armed forces community as one of the factors we consider within our equality impact assessments to ensure the armed forces community is considered and not disadvantaged in the development, resourcing and delivery of all council policies, strategies, and plans.
- Set out an action plan to show how we will implement and resource the Armed Forces Covenant Policy and its key aims and objectives.
- Set up a monitoring regime and complete a timely review of progress.
- Appoint a Member Armed Forces Community Champion and a named senior officer to promote the Armed Forces Covenant Policy.