

**East Lothian Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan  
April 2023 –March 2025**



**Community Covenant**  
**AN ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT**

**Between**

**EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL**

**EAST LOTHIAN COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP**

**and**

**THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY IN EAST LOTHIAN**

## Introduction

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Action Plan of the East Lothian Armed Forces Covenant Group (ELAFCG). 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. East Lothian Partnership signed the Community Covenant in 2013. In 2021, the Armed Forces Act (2006) was amended to further enshrine the Armed Forces Covenant into law to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing public services. The amendment introduces a duty to have **due regard** to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. This revised Action Plan takes cognisance of this duty and makes specific actions to ensure it is embedded in to all areas of our work.

Other work that has informed this plan is an armed forces community profile and a participation statement that details the lived experiences of the armed forces community in East Lothian. These tell us is that although the armed forces community in East Lothian is small, there are issues that affect armed forces leavers, veterans (and these differ depending on the age of the veteran), and the families of people who are currently serving in the armed forces. These issues including accessing services and specialist support.

ELAFCG has been operational since 2018 and in that time they have completed a wide range of actions including:

- ✓ Successful applications for both the Bronze and Silver Employer Recognition Awards (via the MOD)
- ✓ Delivered a 'Reserve Forces Training and Mobilisation' HR Policy which includes 15 days additional paid leave for employees
- ✓ Set up an ELC Armed Forces Employee Network
- ✓ Granted the Freedom of East Lothian to the Lothian and Borders Yeomanry
- ✓ Promoted the Armed Forces Covenant e-learning module to all ELC staff – with a good uptake
- ✓ Updated the ELC Housing Allocation policy with extra points awarded to veterans
- ✓ Delivered affordable homes in Cockenzie for veterans
- ✓ Completed a Housing Needs Assessment detailing the needs of the local armed forces community
- ✓ Delivered consistent communications about the work of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Armed Forces community to a range of audiences
- ✓ Promoted access to funding available for the armed forces community to schools, and local networks

The priority areas of work for 2023/25 are:

- The progression of the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award application
- Awareness raising of the Armed Forces Duty across the Council and Partnerships
- Developing routes in to education, volunteering and employment for armed forces leavers and their families
- Securing funding to employ a worker to develop the "East Lothian Armed Forces Family Network" (via Volunteer Centre East Lothian)
- To trial a local access to the Veterans 1<sup>st</sup> Point (V1P) service

	Action	Activities	Planned Outcome	Owner	Status
1.	Maintain ELCs Employer's Recognition Scheme - Gold Award status	As further detailed in this action plan	Achievement of the Gold Award will continue to raise awareness of the positive benefits for staff (and potential new employees) of ELCs commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant	Lead: ELAFCG  Partners: ELC HR, Comms, Procurement	Gold Award achieved in June 2023  Review July 2024
<b>Deliver on the Commitments in the Armed Forces Act 2021</b>					
2.	Raise awareness of the duty with relevant Council, Health & Social Care colleagues and external partners	Use the resources available in the <a href="#">Armed Forces Covenant Duty Toolkit</a> to:  Deliver a presentation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East Lothian Partnership (ELP) Governance Group</li> <li>• Elected Members</li> <li>• Integration Joint Board</li> <li>• Senior Management Team</li> </ul> Publish an article in Inform (ELC staff information e-zine)  Share relevant information with Primary and Secondary Schools	ELC and Partnership staff are aware of the new duty and ensure services respond accordingly	Lead: ELC PIP Team  Partners: ELC and H&SCP Comms Teams, Veterans Scotland, ELC Education, VCEL	To be delivered by March 2024
3.	Review the due regard duty on relevant council functions to identify potential gaps / areas to strengthen in local policies, processes and procedures across housing, education and healthcare	Carry out a policy, processes and procedures 'sense check' across council departments	Policy, processes and procedures are fit for purpose to deliver on the due regard duty	Lead: ELAFCG  Partners: H&SCP, ELC	To be delivered by March 2024

4.	Identify potential training needs for frontline council staff working in housing, education and healthcare services in terms of due regard	Promote access to the AFC module for front line staff (as detailed below)	Front line staff are aware of, and respond accordingly to the due regard duty	Lead: ELAFCG  Partners: H&SCP, ELC	To be delivered by March 2024
5.	Promote awareness of services for veterans to front line and other relevant staff, and key partners	Promote the (new) eLearning module <a href="#">The Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty for Customer Facing Staff</a> to ELC and the Health and Social Care Partnership (H&SCP), and to third sector partner organisations  Ongoing monitoring of eLearning module use on a 6 monthly basis	Strategic leaders, e.g Elected Members are briefed and knowledgeable on AFC issues  Front line staff are able to recognise and advise veterans appropriately	Lead: ELC OD Team  Partners: H&SCP, VCEL	Review February 2024
<b>Communications and awareness raising</b>					
6.	Deliver a comprehensive communication plan with relevant Armed Forces Covenant & community information	Refresh and maintain the content of ELCs website to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to key support agencies/organisations</li> <li>• Promotion of the armed forces breakfast clubs</li> <li>• Promotion and supporting of Armed Forces Week and Reservists Day</li> <li>• Events planner with key dates for civic events and activities</li> <li>• Detail on the commitments in the Armed Forces Act 2021 to due regard</li> </ul>	Raise the profile of the armed forces across ELC, in the community and in the media  The armed forces community can access relevant information easily on Housing, Health, Education and Employment, and to wider networks of support/information  This includes social and leisure support	Lead: ELC Comms  Partners: ELAFCG	Ongoing  Requires relevant information to populate website from partners on a frequent basis

7.	<p>Work with Poppy Scotland to extend their reach by creating/maximising opportunity to collaborate with partners to increase local awareness of their year-round work and its impact and overall connectivity to the Armed Forces Community</p>	<p>3<sup>rd</sup> Sector attendance at and participation in Local Authority Armed Forces Covenant Group meetings</p> <p>8-Weekly networking meetings hosted by Poppy Scotland for those supporting the Armed Forces Community in the East of Scotland</p>	<p>Raise the profile of the services available to the Armed Forces Community across ELC</p> <p>Deliver a more joined-up approach to delivering support to our Armed Forces Community</p>	<p>Lead: Poppy Scotland</p> <p>Partners: ELAFCG</p>	Ongoing
<b>Routes in to Education, Volunteering and Employment</b>					
8.	<p>Work with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to encourage armed forces leavers to access education, volunteering and employment support if they choose to live in East Lothian</p> <p>Capitalise on the employability of local AFC talent by promoting the skills of the armed forces skills in the civilian workforce and community</p>	<p>Partners across the education, local businesses, and voluntary sectors ensure they can skills match from the armed forces to local education and employment opportunities</p> <p>Pathways developed from CTP to local education, volunteering and employment services</p>	<p>Pathways in place to education, volunteering and employment opportunities from the CTP to local organisations and pathways utilised by armed forces leavers</p> <p>Improve recognition amongst local employers of transferable skills</p> <p>Opportunities are available to armed forces leaver to retrain to secure alternative employment</p> <p>Local businesses and organisations are encouraged and supported to employ armed forces leavers</p>	<p>Lead: East Lothian Works</p> <p>Partners: VCEL, CTP, Skills Development Scotland</p> <p>Lead: East Lothian Works</p> <p>Partners: Connected Economy Group</p>	Initiated by September 2023

9.	Continue to support the development of East Lothian Council's Employee Network – Armed Forces Community	<p>The Employee Network continues to inform the development of ELC employment related actions in this plan</p> <p>The Employee Network are utilised as a peer support to new employees who have been in the armed forces</p>	<p>ELC staff who are veterans, cadets or reservist are engaged with the work of the AFC and inform future work</p> <p>Armed forces leavers joining ELC are well supported to sustain their employment</p>	<p>Lead: ELAFGC</p> <p>Partners: ELC HR</p>	Review March 2024
<b>Housing</b>					
					New actions, where relevant, to be added after the Local Housing Strategy is adopted in 2023
<b>Children and Young People</b>					
10.	Explore the needs of children and young people from the armed forces community	<p>Children and young people (and their families/carers) know of, and can access relevant entitlements and supports through schools</p> <p>Engagement with children and families/carers within the AFC informs the development of services to meet their needs</p>	<p>Information is available to parents and carers of children and young people re relevant entitlements and support</p> <p>The 'voice' of children and families/carers within the AFC is heard</p>	<p>Lead: ELC Education</p> <p>Partners: Parent Councils, VCEL (funding dependant)</p>	Initiated by September 2023
11.	Promote the <a href="#">Ministry of Defence Education Support Fund for schools with service children</a>	This programme awards grants to schools to help address additional challenges that children from Armed Forces families may face	Education services are aware of the fund and take a coordinated approach to accessing it for pupils from the armed forces community	Lead: ELC Education	Ongoing  Review September 2023

	<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>				
12.	Reduce health inequalities amongst the veteran population	<p>Explore the potential to use equalities monitoring systems to identify veterans and ensure smooth transitions between services</p> <p>Identify local health inequalities in the armed forces community and agree areas for improvement with the Health and Social Care Partnership (H&amp;SCP)<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>East Lothian’s armed forces community can access appropriate health services as and when needed</p> <p>Identifying East Lothian armed forces community in registering for health services at GPs, and at specialist provisions such as mental health services</p>	<p>Lead: H&amp;SCP</p> <p>Partners: V1P, VCEL</p>	Review March 2024
13.	Improve outcomes for veterans needing health and social care	<p>Seek H&amp;SCP’s consideration of signing the AF Covenant and seeking Employer Recognition status</p> <p>Provide H&amp;SCP GP Link workers with information on the AFC and health entitlements of the AFC through the <a href="#">Armed Forces Covenant Duty Toolkit</a></p> <p>NHSL to provide update on implementation of the AF Commissioners review of healthcare for the AFC/Veterans</p>	<p>East Lothian’s armed forces community can access appropriate health services as and when needed</p>	<p>Lead: H&amp;SCP</p>	Review March 2024
14.	Trial access to V1P services in East Lothian	<p>Explore identification of suitable accommodation within EL that V1P can use to run a monthly clinic for client’s living within EL area</p>	<p>Open to all Veterans living in EL area and who wish to access services at V1P</p>	<p>Lead: V1P</p> <p>Partner: ELC</p>	Review March 2024

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 7, 15 and 16, Scottish Veterans Commissioner’s Health & Wellbeing Report: April 2018

15.	Explore options for external funding to employ a worker to develop the East Lothian Armed Forces Family Network	<p>To carry out research work on the needs of the local armed forces community including the families of armed forces leavers and those still serving</p> <p>To put mechanisms in place to ensure that the armed forces community can access the services they need and that these services are aware of the Armed Forces duty and respond accordingly</p>	The local armed forces community can access the support they need to ensure their lives are not negatively impacted on due to their (or a their partners or spouses) service	<p>Lead: VCEL</p> <p>Partners: H&amp;SCP, ELC</p>	
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