

# Waltham Forest Council

## The Armed Forces Action Plan



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**Councillor**  
**Vicky Ashworth**

**Cabinet Lead for Jobs,  
Social Inclusion  
and Equalities**

## Foreword

I am delighted to present the London Borough of Waltham Forest's Armed Forces Action Plan which reconfirms our commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community.

**The development of the action plan has been a truly collaborative process: it embodies the collective desire of all partners across the voluntary and community sector, public and private organisations, and the council to ensuring Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families, are treated fairly.**

Our Armed Forces community experience unique challenges because of the sacrifices they have made to serve our nation. They demonstrate amazing values of courage, discipline, respect for others and loyalty through their acts of service. I think we can all agree that the unique commitments, contributions, and sacrifices shown by the men and women who serve should never be forgotten.

I am immensely proud and honoured to be the Armed Forces Champion for Waltham Forest Council and look forward to representing and strengthening our connection and bond with the Armed Forces community. My own personal experience and connection to the Armed Forces has enriched me with a unique perspective on the important role they make here in Britain and around the world. I look forward to promoting and maintaining Waltham Forest's commitment to support the Armed Forces, their families and veterans as well as deliver action in collaboration with our partners that has a positive and long-lasting impact.

The commitments set out in this action plan will ensure Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve),

veterans, and their families are supported in all elements of their life, from accessing good quality health support and education opportunities, to getting into and sustaining good employment and accessing help within their community. Through this work, we will ensure veterans, both those serving and transitioning out of the armed forces, and their families are valued and supported to flourish and live great lives here in Waltham Forest.

In Waltham Forest, we are committed to tackling head-on the structural inequalities that may affect residents in our communities including our Armed Forces community. Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: Making a Living Strategy developed with residents and voluntary and community sector groups (VCS), sets out how we will tackle the challenges our residents face when trying to make a living. Across the council we will ensure there is a conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community especially around the development and delivery of council policies and services. I look forward to Waltham Forest council publicly renewing its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and continuing to ensure their service is never forgotten.

I would like to thank partners from across the voluntary and community, private and public sector, and council teams and most importantly our Armed Forces community, who have all helped to bring this action plan to life. I'm excited and reassured that the collective work started will continue to improve the quality of lives giving the Armed Forces community opportunities to live well and thrive.

## Introduction

The British Armed Forces protects the United Kingdom's interests at home and abroad, providing a safe and secure environment in which all British citizens can live and prosper. They take on diverse roles in protecting the UK, preventing conflict, dealing with disasters, combat, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid.

### The British Armed Forces consists of :

The British Army



The Royal Air Force



The Royal Navy



**The Armed Forces Covenant was established in 2011 as a promise by the nation to ensure Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families, are treated fairly. The Covenant recognises that the Armed Forces community make unique sacrifices for us, resulting in specific needs and challenges that need to be addressed. In doing so, we are not unfairly giving special treatment, but simply seeking to ensure they are not disadvantaged in accessing public and commercial services.**

Recent policy changes highlight the importance of a clear plan of action for our Armed Forces community. The London Borough of Waltham Forest signed the original Community Covenant, now known simply as the Armed Forces Covenant, on 29th June 2013, alongside 407 local authorities in mainland Britain and 4 Northern Ireland Councils setting out our commitments as a service provider.

On Sunday 12th November 2023, following the Remembrance Sunday commemorative event, Waltham Forest Council resigned the Armed Forces Covenant. In doing so we have publicly renewed our commitment to veterans, serving personnel and their families.

In the 2021 Census, we received new insight into our Armed Forces community through the inclusion of a question asking if the person had previously served in any UK Armed Forces. We will use these

insights to increase and build our understanding of local need to deliver action that makes a positive difference.

The UK Government enacted the new Armed Forces Act in 2022, which further enshrined the Covenant into law. It imposed a new Armed Forces Covenant Duty, which means that local authorities must have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in the areas of healthcare, education, and housing. This has provided us with an opportunity to reflect on the work we do as a Council to support our Armed Forces community and build upon it.

This action plan reaffirms Waltham Forest's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and sets out key commitments to help better support our local Armed Forces community.



## The context in Waltham Forest

A higher proportion of veterans live in the north of the borough. Enquiries from Veteran's Gateway, a support service where veterans can get help across a number of areas, indicate that housing and health were the most frequent areas of concern from 2019 to 2020 for veterans in the borough.

Waltham Forest has one Reserve Unit, as well as a large active cadet force, with two Army Cadet Force Detachments (in Walthamstow and Chingford), two Air Training Corps Squadrons (in Leyton and Chingford), and two Sea Cadet Units (in Chingford and Clapton).

Veterans make up around **1.1%** of our total borough population, which amounts to **2,475** people.



## Our action

## plan to date

**Waltham Forest has a strong and meaningful connection to the Armed Forces, reflecting its deep respect and appreciation for those who serve and have served the nation. Celebrating and commemorating key military events, including Remembrance Day and Armed Forces Day, has brought our diverse communities together around activities and events that promote the sharing, understanding, and celebrating of the Armed Forces community and their acts of service.**

On 25 May 2023, Councillor Roy Berg was elected Mayor of Waltham Forest for the civic year 2023/24 and will be supporting veterans, ex-service people and their partners and families through fundraising activities.

One of the Mayor of Waltham Forest's first civic events was attending the annual Armed Forces Day Military Parade in Chingford (held on Saturday 26th June 2023) where he was joined by Deputy Lieutenant, Major Jeremy Fern at the parade. Armed Forces Day was first introduced in 2009 and is held annually on the 27th of June providing the nation with a dedicated day for people to show their appreciation for the Armed Forces, both regular, reserve force and cadets. We are proud to show our support in commemorating this special day and work in collaboration to support Military parades and commemorative events that take place across the borough.

As part of the transforming of the Town hall Campus at Fellowship Square, we be creating a high-quality new public realm that will help to bring our diverse communities together. As part of these transformation plans, we will be creating a Commemorative Garden (Queen Elizabeth II) behind the Town Hall along with improvements to the War Memorial to provide a better space for memorial events.

Waltham Forest Council maintains a close and meaningful connection to the Armed Forces community and seeks to improve upon this relationship. Through the resigning of the Armed Forces Covenant and publishing our commitments, via the Armed Force Action plan, we will ensure the contributions and sacrifices of those who serve and have served continue to be remembered and honoured.

**“** *I want to ensure those connected to the armed forces in Waltham Forest, have support, a sense of community and have a space for their voices to be heard.*

**”**

- Councillor Roy Berg,  
Mayor of Waltham Forest.



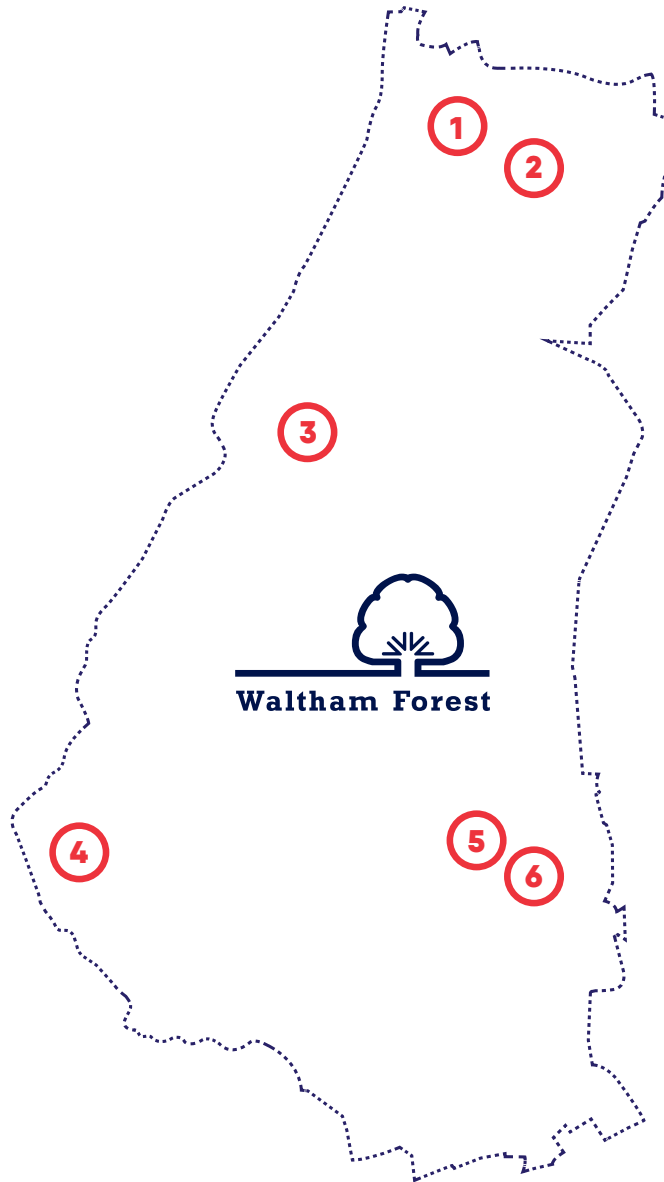
# Borough facts

**4,500** **Number of veterans**

**8** **Service Pupils**

**176** **War Pensioners**

including at least 8 servicing personnel



**6** **Cadet Units**

in Chingford, Walthamstow, Leyton & Clapton

**Royal Corps of Signals**

**68** Signal Squadron  
**71** Signal Regiment

*Borough map of Waltham Forest's military footprint (HQ London District, Ministry of Defence, 2023)*

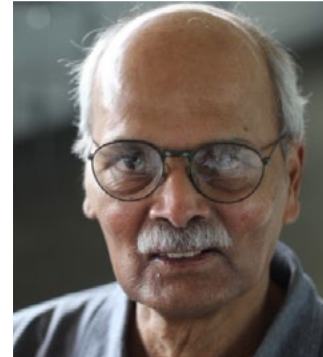


# Co-designing and developing our Armed Forces action plan

**In order to create an impactful action plan that would make a difference it was important to actively involve veterans, people from the Armed Forces community, and organisations that support them from the start.**

The co-design process has given us a greater understanding of the unique challenges they face and enabled the action plan developed to be informed by their insights. As well as gaining a greater appreciation and understanding for their acts of service, we have also sought to create a plan that addresses the issues and concerns they encounter as well as provide appropriate support.

Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families have diverse needs based on their military experience and background and possess first-hand experience of the challenges they face as a result of their service. This includes trying to locate suitable housing following moving to a new borough, obtaining school places for their children, and accessing health care.



**Neil Keskar**

**Veteran:**

Served nine years with the 4th  
Royal Tank Regiment



**Alistair Martin**

**Veteran:**

Served for 13 years in both the  
regular and reserve forces with  
the Royal Anglian Regiment



We set about the co-design process by engaging with veterans who attend the Age UK Lunch Club in association with Leyton Orient Trust. The veterans consulted all agreed that the Waltham Forest Armed Forces Action plan should:

➤ Help raise awareness of the Armed Forces community and the issues that impact them

➤ Remove any barriers that prevent them accessing Council and support services

➤ Support them to adjust to civilian life after serving including putting them in contact with organisations that offer specialised support

➤ Celebrate and commemorate their acts of service

In addition to consulting with veterans and learning more about their first-hand experiences we also engaged with charities and community and voluntary organisations supporting the Armed Forces community. Age UK and the Royal British Legion are both organisations doing amazing work to raise awareness and support the community by offering financial, social, and emotional support to veterans, serving personnel and their families. Discussions with these organisations has offered insights into the military footprint here in Waltham Forest, existing resources and as well as helped to identifying gaps in support.

Co-designing and developing the action plan with veterans and those from the Armed Forces community alongside organisation supporting

them has ensured the action plan is rooted in the needs, experiences, and insights of those it will support. We hope that through the collaborative co-design process we can foster a real sense of community ownership that acknowledges and demonstrates to Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families that their service and contributions are valued beyond their time in the Armed Forces.

We will continue to engage with veterans and those from the Armed Forces community to ensure their expertise and lived experiences continue to shape how the Council respond and support them.

## We'd like to hear from you

We are keen to hear from veterans and members of the Armed Forces community. If you would like to make any suggestions or find out more information about the Waltham Forest Councils Armed Forces Action Plan, [please email](mailto:connectingcommunities@walthamforest.gov.uk)

[connectingcommunities@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:connectingcommunities@walthamforest.gov.uk)



## Key areas of the Armed Forces Action Plan

Through our engagement we have identified eight key areas where we will build on the good work already taking place as well as enhance and strengthen support to the Armed Forces community. This will include identifying and removing barriers they may face in accessing services across the borough, raising awareness of the support available to them, and ensuring they get the same treatment and access to services as the civilian community.

The action plan will deliver against three main priorities that will guide our approach:

- > Increase awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Armed Forces community
- > Strengthening the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant
- > Better partnership working with local organisations to support the Armed Forces Covenant and Action Plan

We recognise that the relationship between the Council and the Armed Forces community is still developing and believe the action plan will help to strengthen and develop our relationship with them over the coming years.

## 8 Key areas





## **Our Commitment:**

**Supporting the Armed Forces community who have chosen to make Waltham Forest their home access quality housing and benefit information.**

Housing is another key area where members of the Armed Forces community can face challenges. The mobility of service life can leave veterans and Armed Forces personnel vulnerable and unstable, while those leaving service can find it difficult to find an affordable home without having secured employment or know which housing related benefits they are entitled to. There is also a real risk of young veterans becoming homeless, as housing charity Stoll's recent '#No Homeless Veterans' campaign has shown. We have several measures already in place to support the Armed Forces community with housing issues and we will continue to proactively implement these to ensure no-one in from the Armed Forces community is disadvantaged because of their service.





## Key commitments

### Identifying veterans and supporting members of the Armed Forces community

Our social housing application form includes a question on whether the applicant is in the Armed Forces or has left the Armed Forces within the last five years. This enables us to prioritise applicants where appropriate and gives us a more accurate picture of the need in our community so that we can better support those individuals and families. We will also look at ways to highlight our commitment to the Covenant and prompt signposting by having specially designed posters in our Housing Customer centres, libraries and on the Council housing webpage.

### Preventing homelessness within our Armed Forces community

Finding good quality homes can be a challenge to those due to leave the Armed Forces or who have already left. Our Preventions and Assessment team will try to identify housing problems at the earliest opportunity to help prevent homelessness. The Preventions and Assessments team can help create a personal housing plan that will consist of information from VCS organisations that can assist with rent deposits and provide additional housing advice.

### Local connection exemption

We will continue to ensure that those who have left the Regular Armed Forces within the last five years are exempt from the normal residency requirement that people should have lived in the borough for five years to join the Council's housing register to apply for social housing. This also covers bereaved spouses of service personnel living in Ministry of Defence accommodation, and current and former service personnel who are suffering from serious illness, disability or injury arising from their service.

### Prioritisation in our housing allocation scheme

Our current housing allocation scheme enables any veteran who qualifies for Band 2 on the housing waiting list to automatically be upgraded to Band 1, reducing the time needed for the veteran to secure social housing. We will ensure this is promoted with partner organisations supporting veterans within Waltham Forest as well as on our dedicated webpage.

### Veterans' Nomination Scheme

Housing charity Stoll provides affordable housing to veterans through the Veteran's Nomination Scheme. This is done in partnership with Housing Associations and social landlords, and Councils are able to sign up to the scheme to support nominations to provide permanent social housing for veterans. Waltham Forest already takes part in this scheme and has agreed to accept two nominations a year and will continue to do so.

### Referring veterans for Op FORTITUDE housing scheme

We are working with Op FORTITUDE, a newly established dedicated referral pathway and national hub for single homeless veterans, including those sleeping on the streets, to access specialist supported accommodation. Our Preventions and Assessments team have been made aware of this offer and will actively promote the service to veterans and partner organisations.





## Housing related benefits and exemptions

### Housing benefit claims

- › The level of an award of housing benefit is determined, in part, by comparing the number of people living in the property in any particular week to the number of bedrooms. A dependent child or a non-dependant of the claimant partner will continue to be treated as an occupant for these purposes for so long as they are a member of the armed forces away on operations.
- › The Discretionary Housing Payment and Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Scheme make specific reference to the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure decision makers are aware of the Council's responsibility with regard to veterans and serving members of the armed forces.
- › The Council has used its discretion to disregard the maximum amount permissible by law for people, or people whose partners, are in receipt of a War Pension or War Disablement Pension when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit.

### Benefit Cap

The Benefit Cap is an overall limit on the total amount of certain state benefits a person may receive and is applied by reducing an award of housing benefit. A claimant is excluded from the benefit cap if they are in receipt of any of the following or if payment has been suspended because the person in receipt of it is in hospital or a similar institution.

- › War pensions
- › Armed forces independence payment

### Rent assessments

Certain people receiving Housing Benefit have their rent assessed by the Rent Officer for the purposes of calculating their entitlement to housing benefit. This assessment generally changes every time the number of occupants changes. This will not be the case where a son, daughter, step-son or step-daughter of the claimant who is the claimant's non-dependant becomes or ceases to be a member of the armed forces away on operations.

### Disabled Facilities Grant

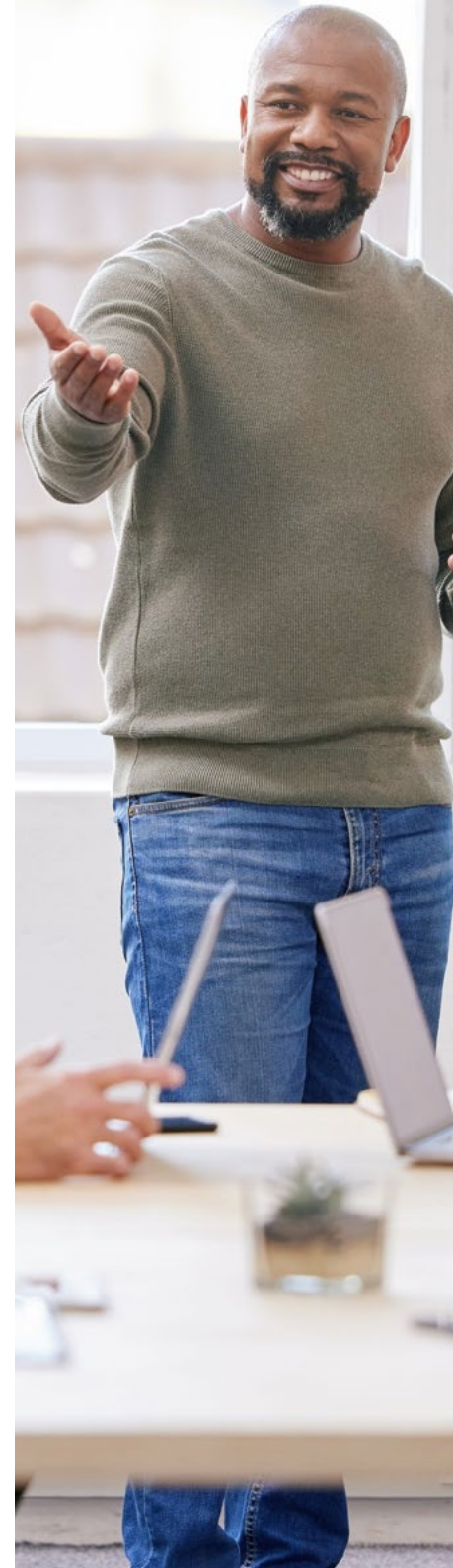
- › We want to ensure veterans and those who have suffered injuries as a result of service are able to live as long as possible within their homes. Disabled Facilities Grants is a form of financial assistance of up to £30,000 means tested grant that enables homeowners or tenants (private and Housing Association) to have adaptations to their homes, to give them greater freedom of movement and access to essential facilities within their home.
- › We will continue to raise awareness and promote Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) amongst veterans and the Armed Forces community, both directly through resident-facing Council services and via our partners to ensure those eligible are able to access and claim eligible support. As a council we will continue to disregard 100% of War Disability pension when means testing for home adaptations and modifications support, which includes additional considerations for those who are in "special employment" such as the Territorial and Army Volunteer Reserve or other forces. Through the Armed Forces Action Plan we are also committed to further exploring the possibility of disregarding military compensation as income when means testing for DFGs.



## **Our commitment:**

**Develop and promote employment opportunities for the Armed Forces community so they can thrive and live well in Waltham Forest.**

Many people in the Armed Forces community are able to lead successful careers – be it reservists who are balancing their training duties with their jobs, or veterans who have had to find new careers after leaving the military. However, for some, breaking into the mainstream labour market can be a difficult experience, due to lacking the skills and confidence needed to secure alternative employment. We will proactively reach out to the Armed Forces community to ensure they are aware of the wealth of support on offer in the borough.





## Key commitments

### Supporting the Armed Forces community to access Jobcentre plus services and welfare benefit advice

We will work in partnership with Jobcentre Plus in Waltham Forest to ensure Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families have access to employment opportunities and benefit advice. This will include promoting the Jobcentre Plus's Work and Health Programme for Armed Force personnel who are transitioning out of the Armed Forces and feel they would benefit from intensive, tailored employment support to find work and retraining opportunities. We will also share welfare benefit advice to ensure the Armed Forces community are aware of their entitlement i.e. National Insurance Credits, Maternity Allowances for spouses and wounded, injured and sickness benefits.

### Supporting our Armed Forces community to access employment - Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service

Finding a well-paid job after leaving the Armed Forces can be challenging especially if you don't know where to access employment information. Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families have many transferrable skills that can be used to help them secure new employment. We will support those from the Armed Force community to access good quality employment, learning and training opportunities.

Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service is our direct provider of adult education and work-based training and are committed to engaging local people in lifelong learning. We will work with The Adult Learning Service to:

- › Actively promote the uptake of the service and exciting opportunities that will support the Armed Forces community to access good quality jobs
- › Support Armed Force personnel getting ready to leave service by giving them access to employability skills training so they are supported and prepared to enter the mainstream labour market
- › Promote further education, learning and training opportunities including creative courses, accounting and finance and essential digital skills for those looking to retrain in a new industry
- › Referrals to appropriate providers on subjects they want and need such as the HGV Academy and Accounting programme
- › Offer training sessions on CV writing and interview skills
- › Access to family learning courses – great opportunity for families to learn together



## Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Armed Forces Veterans and Service Leavers

People leaving the Armed Forces often find it challenging to transition to civilian life and the world of work. As one of the largest employers in the borough we want to lead by example and are proud to participate in the Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Armed Forces Veterans and Service Leavers. The scheme will give them the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths beyond the initial application stage and be automatically invited to interview if the essential criteria defined in the relevant job description are met. Applicants would need to declare they have served in the Armed Forces when requested in order to be considered. The scheme is not a guaranteed job and selection procedures will ensure the best candidate is appointed, based on the objective criteria in the job description. As a first step to gaining civilian employment, veterans will often be keen to receive feedback on how they have performed at interview. Recruiting Managers will ensure they provide feedback to individuals who have taken part in the interview process should the individual request it. We will also ensure reasonable interview adjustments are made available for Armed Forces Veterans and Service Leavers with physical and or mental health conditions including:

- › A British Sign Language interpreter.
- › Assistance if the test is on a computer, such as a larger screen, software, or a person to read for you.
- › More time to complete assessments.
- › Asking for interview questions in advance.

### Promoting bespoke

#### Community Learning courses

- › In addition to promoting employment, learning, and training opportunities where there is sufficient demand the Adult Learning Service are able to run bespoke community learning sessions. We will liaise with members from the Armed Forces community and Partner organisations to raise awareness of this offer. Where this offer is taken up, we will support in organising this at the groups chosen venue within the borough.

### Collecting key data on our

#### Armed Forces community

- › At present, the only data that we capture on the enrolment form for our Adult Learning Service is the data we are legally required to collect. We will go one step further by 'asking the question' on our enrolment form for the

- › 2023/24 academic year, on whether someone is a veteran, reservist, or has previously served in the UK Armed Forces (regular or reserve), to get a better idea of the need in our borough. This will enable us to tailor our offer to the community more effectively.

### Promoting apprenticeships

#### and Armed Forces employment schemes

- › Apprenticeships allow those in work to earn as they learn for courses that meet certain standards. This is particularly helpful for Armed Forces personnel who may want to re-train for new roles outside of the Armed Forces. For most employers the cost of training will be met by Government funding through an application-based Apprenticeships Levy. We will support Armed forces personnel and their families to access a wide range of local apprenticeship opportunities by promoting our Apprenticeship page on our dedicated Armed Forces webpage and with partner organisations.
- › We will also promote Armed Force specific employment organisations including Forces Employment Charity who provide life-long, life-changing job opportunities, support and training to service leavers, veterans, reservists and their families.





## **Our commitment:**

**Promote the health, wellbeing and welfare support available to veterans and the Armed Forces community in Waltham Forest in order to raise awareness and improve understanding of issues specific to them amongst health care professionals.**

The mobile nature of service life, as well as the difficulties of transitioning into civilian life following service, can pose significant health challenges for veterans and those from the Armed Forces community in our borough. The realities of service life often leave people at a higher risk of developing certain physical and mental health issues. There can be a lack of awareness of the vulnerability of this community within the council as well as externally by local health providers. Our key aim is to improve how we assess the needs of this community and raise awareness of these issues in the local health sector.





## Key commitments

### Promoting the councils

#### Health and Wellbeing offer

We will use our comms channels to promote the council's and partners health and wellbeing offer to the Armed Forces community including Free Swimming for veterans. In partnership with Better Leisure Waltham Forest veterans, current and former Armed Forces personnel can swim at the borough's leisure centres for free. A valid pay & play membership will be required. We will ensure this offer is promoted amongst key partners to encourage wider take up of the offer within our Armed Forces community. Please visit swimming in Waltham Forest for more information

### Adult Health and

#### Wellbeing service

Our Adult Health and Wellbeing Service aim to keep adults safe, well and connected by providing early-stage support when difficulties start to arise. The service is for anyone aged over 18 years old living in Waltham Forest who maybe experiencing a range of needs and issues including money problems, feeling isolated, unemployment, ill-health, low mood, and addictions. Link workers can help residents with:

- › Identify personal strengths, goals and needs
- › Access information, advice, and support
- › Build their own support network
- › Find practical ways to resolve problems
- › Help them become involved members of their local community

We understand that veterans, Armed Forces personnel and their families may require additional support in adjusting to life following service. Link workers have experience in supporting veterans and those from the Armed Forces community with mental health issues, PTSD, financial management, social isolation, housing as well as food & nutrition. To ensure Link workers continue the great work they already do within the Armed Forces community we have made the Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff e-learning module available for them to complete. The e-learning module will equip and empower them with the knowledge and understanding to better respond to the diverse support needs found within the community.

We will promote the Adult Health and Wellbeing service on our dedicated Armed Forces webpage on the council website as well as with organisations supporting the Armed Forces community in Waltham Forest.



## Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The Council's previous Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) in 2018/19 analysed the needs of veterans. A key issue that was raised included ex-servicemen being less likely to report their health condition than the general population. Veterans were also reported as having a higher chance of suffering from musculoskeletal and sensory problems, and depression. We will update our veteran specific JSNA in our next round of assessment and widen the scope of challenges and needs that we explore in relation to this group.

## Improving health outcomes within the Armed Forces community

In December 2022 the Marmot Institute published a local report about the health inequalities affecting our residents. The report identified life expectancy gaps of up to 7 years between the North and South of the borough and the impact health outcomes have on the everyday lives of residents accessing housing, jobs, and education. We will act on the report's recommendations and work with VCS organisations supporting the Armed Forces community to provide preventative health support and reach the community earlier. This will include joining forces with health and

social prescribers based in GP practices to identify new ways to reach those from the Armed Forces community.

## Encouraging data-sharing

We will review how frontline staff, including Social workers and Housing Officers, currently record and share data to help shape an improved and more effective approach to reporting when someone is in the Armed Forces. This will help us better capture who needs support in the borough and ensure we can sign post to the relevant VCS and partner organisation.

## Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation scheme

We will work in partnership with the North-East London Integrated Care Board to raise awareness of the Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation scheme. We will also look into using a GP monthly learning slot to promote this.

## Check in and Chat befriending referral service

We recognise the sacrifices made by our veterans and their unique needs following their time serving. We will actively promote our Befriending service – Checkin and Chat to veterans using our dedicated webpage, partners and with frontline council officers to ensure they are connected with

the companionship and support they deserve whilst enhancing their wellbeing and quality of life. Referrals can be made by emailing [checkin@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:checkin@walthamforest.gov.uk)

## Promoting sport and physical activity related programmes and initiatives

Waltham Forest is home to many parks and open spaces that everyone can enjoy. Being physically active has been shown to be great for raising self esteem and improving mental wellbeing. Using our existing comms channels, including our partners, we will promote the use of our parks, public open facilities and community centre activities including our Feel Good Walks. Walking provides a great way to get daily exercise, meet new people and explore the boroughs green spaces. Our Feel-Good Walks are suitable for anyone to join and are free.

We will also work with partner organisations to co-design a veterans and Armed Forces community walking route where members can explore the borough together as well as meet new people from the community. This would be a great opportunity to help foster good relations between different groups as well as raise the profile of the Armed Forces community in Waltham Forest and increase learning and understanding with non-armed forces communities.



## **Our commitment:**

**Ensuring children and young people from service families are supported to realise their educational potential as they move through the education system here in Waltham Forest.**

Many children will experience some of the knock-on effects of the challenges faced by their service parents/ carers. This can include being moved at short notice to another borough because of service requirements, causing disruption to the child's education. Schools are not always aware of these issues and the ways that they can support children. Minimising disruption to children's education and increasing awareness of service children's needs will be the focus of our action around education.







## Key commitments

### Admission Arrangement for Infant, Primary and Secondary schools

Our Admission Arrangement for Infant, Primary and Secondary schools enable residents, with exceptional circumstances, who are applying for school places to be prioritised on the waiting list. This gives them a higher chance of being accepted at their chosen school where there is a vacancy. We already have due regard for service families when allocating school places, especially in-year admissions, and will continue to proactively raise awareness and promote the needs of this group to schools when it comes to fulfilling their admissions needs.

### 'LATE FOR GOOD REASON' APPLICATIONS

Service families can often miss school admission deadlines due to circumstances such as having to move at short notice after the school year has started or clashes with military commitments. To support our Armed Forces community, we will promote the 'Late for Good Reason' school applications scheme. The scheme account for exceptional circumstances when school applications are received after the stated deadline and will continue to be considered as

good reasons for late applications. Where the School Admissions Service agrees that there are exceptional circumstances, late applications are treated as being on time and will not be disadvantaged.

### Local connection exemption

We understand that service families can be moved at short notice and therefore may not be able to prove a local connection to Waltham Forest. In this circumstance we will continue to implement our local connection exemption for families of service personnel with a confirmed posting or returning from overseas. The scheme allows service families to apply for and be allocated school places in advance of arriving where there is proof that they will soon be residing in the borough. For service families who know they will be moved to the borough but have no fixed address to return to, they place a unit or quartering address as the child's home address which will be used when considering the application against the oversubscription criteria of their preferred schools.

### Raising awareness within the Local Education Sector in Waltham Forest

The Hub is a key communication tool for schools, which provides school staff, childcare providers and others involved in the local education sector with key information, news, and the opportunity to collaborate with one another. We will utilise the Hub to circulate information about the Armed Forces Covenant and action plan with education professionals, including promoting the Thriving Lives Toolkit, a practical resource helping schools provide support to service children, produced by the Service Children's Progression Alliance.

We will also ensure schools are aware of The Service Pupil Premium (SPP) and are claiming all that they are entitled to. The SSP was first introduced in 2011 in recognition of the specific challenges children from service families may face when accessing the education system. Any state schools, academies or free schools in England who have children of service families in school years reception to year 11 can receive the SSP funding (currently worth £335 per service child) to assist in providing additional support that service children may need who meet the eligibility criteria.



## **Our commitment:**

**Supporting those within our workforce who may be Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans or the spouse or partner to have a great experience at Waltham Forest council.**

We recognise the important role we play as a Council in leading by example as an employer. To raise awareness of Armed Forces issues in the wider community effectively, we need to look internally at what we are doing to support our own staff and encourage people from the Armed Forces community to join our organisation. By building momentum around these issues in our own organisation, we can influence other employers in the borough and support them in developing their own forces-friendly policies and practices.





## Key commitments

### Giving voice to our staff part of the Armed Forces community

We will use our internal workforce data to identify staff members who are part of the Armed Forces community, including those who may have a spouse or partner who served or are currently serving. We will liaise and allow them to lead on how they would best like to be represented at the council, whether that be through an internal staff network or another way. Once they have identified how they would like to be represented we will offer them support to achieve this.

### Collecting key data on staff who are part of the Armed Forces community

As part of the Council's transition to its new HR information system, Oracle Cloud, the Council will now enable staff to disclose that they are part of the Armed Forces community. We want to lead by example by becoming a radically more inclusive and equitable place to work, where our people feel safe to bring their most authentic selves to work. Capturing this information will enable us to identify potential barriers that may impact staff members who are part of the Armed

Forces community, as well as ensure their acts of service do not prevent them from experiencing equal opportunities and support to develop and progress.

### Promoting recruitment opportunities

The Council is committed to enhancing employment opportunities for the Armed Forces community. We will explore ways in which we can improve and promote the Council's recruitment offer in order to widen the pool of applications received from Armed Forces personnel, reservists, and veterans. This will include advertising roles on external job boards including Jobs Go Public and the Ministry of Defences Career Transition Partnership (CTP) Right Job website as well as ensuring the Armed Forces Logo is attached to current vacancies.

### Supporting staff who serve with time off for service

As a council we actively support employees who choose to be members of the Reserve Forces (reservists) by accommodating their training and deployment where practical. Employees may

request up to two weeks' time off at full pay, subject to reasonable notice being given as well as consideration to the needs of the service. We will also encourage any reservists to participate in Reserves Day with additional leave to carry out training.

### Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme enables employers such as Local Authorities to publicly demonstrate that they are Armed Forces friendly. By publicly pledging their commitment to being an inclusive employer, the scheme helps employers raise awareness of the Armed Forces community. Only signatories of the new Armed Forces Covenant can apply to the scheme. As a Council we will be self-nominating our organisation to the scheme's bronze award category following the re-signing of the covenant in November 2023. We will then review the work and progress made against this action plan before considering reapplying to become a silver and gold organisation.



## **Our commitment:**

**We will create opportunities for our diverse communities to come together to learn and celebrate the contribution the Armed Forces community make. This will include actively promoting cultural opportunities and offers available within Waltham Forest that increase their sense of appreciation and form stronger connections within our community.**

In 2019, Waltham Forest was the Mayor of London's first ever London Borough of Culture with cultural events and activities taking place all year round, helping to showcase our boroughs creativity and vibrancy. Culture has the power to transform communities and bring people closer together something we want to harness when it comes to our Armed Forces community. We are proud to work with VCS organisations to show case the rich diversity that can be found in our corner of London and will seek out opportunities to ensure those from the Armed Forces community can participate and access our arts and cultural venues in Waltham Forest.





## Key commitments

### Enjoying our new Soho theatre

Soho theatre will be opening Soho Theatre Walthamstow their second home in the heart of Waltham Forest featuring a glorious 1,000 seat venue hosting a varied programme including UK and international comedy, theatre, and cabaret. To ensure an inclusive offer for all our residents, 10,000 low-cost tickets will be made available to the local community, including those from the Armed Forces community (on a first come first served basis). We will also promote any volunteering and employment opportunities available in the new Soho theatre on our dedicated webpage and with partners to ensure any one from the Armed Forces community interested can apply.

### Providing opportunities to come together and share culture

› Being able to have a space to come together and socialise is important for our Armed Forces community. Socialising with people with similar and different experiences can be a great opportunity to meet new friends, learn more about Waltham Forest and

access support services the community may not be aware of. We want to facilitate the communities coming together by offering VCS organisations supporting the Armed Forces community with discounted meeting room spaces including at the William Morris Gallery and across our libraries. A list of available meeting room spaces will be published on our dedicated Armed Forces webpage and promoted on our partners comms channels.

› Waltham Forest is a hub of creativity and was the Mayor of London's first ever London Borough of Culture. We are proud to have Fellowship Square, our free public space at the heart of Waltham Forest, that encourages our diverse communities to come together to share culture. All our residents are invited to use it as a place to bring people together and celebrate the diversity of our borough. We will actively publish and share community events taking place at Fellowship Square with our Armed Forces community as well as encourage partners and VCS organisations to apply for our Fellowship Square Arts and Culture Grants.

### Promoting volunteering and giving of time

› The giving of one's time is one of the 5 ways to wellbeing and can be great opportunity to connect with other people, share positive experiences and build a sense of belonging and self-worth. It is also a great opportunity to learn more about the local community whilst doing small acts of kindness. We will promote the Legends of the Forest programme on our dedicated Armed Forces webpage as well as partners comms channels.

› We will work with partner organisations such as Age UK and the Royal British Legion to promote their volunteering opportunities as well as co-design volunteering opportunities for those in the Armed Forces community to participate in. This will include co-designing a Feel-Good Walking route led by Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families.





## **Our commitment:**

**Ensuring the needs of the Armed Forces community are championed by raising awareness and promoting support available that enables them to live well and thrive in Waltham Forest.**

There are varied levels of understanding and knowledge of the needs and challenges the Armed Forces community in Waltham Forest encounter both within and outside the council. With no dedicated online resource, it can be difficult to access clear and updated information even amongst the Armed Forces community itself. This can lead to a lack of understanding of the Covenant and missed opportunities to address the challenges and barriers they may experience both in adjusting to civilian life as well as accessing important information and services.





## Key commitments

### Raising Resident Awareness

Raising resident awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and community here in Waltham Forest will help to promote understanding and awareness of issues and challenges affecting them. We want to make it easy for the Armed Forces community to locate information on support available from both the council, charities, and VCS organisations.

### Webpage on the Armed Forces

#### Covenant and community in

#### Waltham Forest

We will create an easy to navigate, comprehensive new webpage dedicated to the Armed Forces on our Council website. The webpage will act as a key hub of useful information for our local community, with dedicated tabs for different topics such as:

- › Information about the Covenant, including our commitments as a Council
- › Our local military footprint
- › Support services for the Armed Forces community (both local and national, across areas such as health, housing, and employment)
- › The webpage will be launched in November 2023 to align with the launch of the Armed Forces action plan and re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant on Remembrance Sunday and be part of our wider communications launch.

### Print, social and web

#### media communication

- › We will feature articles in both our internal and external communication channels including print, social and web media to promote our action plan and raise awareness of the Armed Forces community.
- › We will continue to mark key military commemorative events, such as Armed Forces, Armistice, and Remembrance Day, via our social media channels, as well as use these occasions to publicise the available support to the community and signpost them to our new webpage.



# Promoting benefits and concessions available to the Armed Forces community

Armed Forces personnel, veterans, and their families may not be aware of the different kinds of financial help available to them. This often means that they miss out on claiming benefits and concessions that can help reduce financial pressures they may be experiencing. We will ensure when calculating locally administered benefits i.e. council tax support and housing benefit, that Armed Forces military compensation is not viewed as normal income. In addition, we will support members from the Armed Forces to access financial support they are entitled to including:

- > Universal Credit
- > Child Benefit
- > Council tax support – exemptions for those living in service accommodation and second home council tax reductions.
- > Housing benefit
- > Statutory Sick Pay
- > Armed Forces Independence Payment
- > Personal Independence Payment
- > Sure Start Maternity Grant
- > Jobseekers Allowance
- > Tax credits

## Supporting the Armed Force community through cost-of-living challenges

The cost-of-living crisis is impacting people across the country including here in Waltham Forest, with higher prices placing huge pressures on household budgets. As a council we have invested £4 million in our cost-of-living response and made a wide range of financial support and advice available including:

- > Support in your local neighbourhood
- > Money
- > Food
- > Energy bills
- > Help for families
- > Health and wellbeing
- > Skills and employment

We will actively promote the cost-of-living support available to our Armed Forces community on our dedicated Armed Forces webpage as well as promote and provide visibility of discounts and exemptions available from the council, charities, and the voluntary and community sector organisations.

## Raising Staff Awareness

Our staff are the eyes and ears within the community and through their day-to-day work often come into contact with those from the Armed Forces community. We will equip and empower council officers with information and knowledge to help make a positive difference.

## E-learning training on raising awareness of the Armed Forces community

- > To help increase organisational awareness of Armed Forces issues, we will upload The Armed Forces Covenant for Frontline Staff in statutory and voluntary organisations e-learning module. The module was developed by the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Covenant partnership and aims to increase understanding, explain the commitment of the Armed Forces Covenant and how it can be honoured and implemented within the community. It aims to increase understanding on how the principles of the covenant can be applied. Staff will be encouraged to complete the modules through internal comms and promoting at service team meetings.



- › We will increase organisational awareness of the Armed Forces community and the issues they face by promoting our new webpage to staff. We will utilise comm channels such as our internal e-newsletters as well as encourage staff to share the webpage with colleagues, members of the Armed Forces and the wider community.
- › We will also promote and raise awareness of service children's educational needs by circulating information and articles within our schools. The information will increase awareness amongst our education staff and encourage schools to identify and support pupils who may come from a service family.
- › The census 2021 has given us a greater understanding of the military footprint here in Waltham Forest and we are determined to increase this knowledge further. Members of the Armed Forces community will not automatically identify themselves as such, especially if they are in difficulties. We will encourage and support council staff to 'ask the question: Are you, or have you been, a member of the Armed Forces or are you a dependent of someone who is?'
- › This opens up the discussion so that council staff can appreciate some of the issues they may be facing. It will also open up the range of agencies that they may be able to refer them to as well as learn more about their needs and experiences, so we are better able to respond

to them. However, some people may not wish to identify themselves as ex-Armed Forces and in those instances will respect their decision not to self-declare.

### **Council All-staff briefing sessions**

- › Our all-staff briefings are a chance for council staff to showcase the work that they are doing to an audience wider than their immediate teams. We will ensure that our Armed Forces Champion presents at one of these briefings to increase staff awareness of the Covenant to help build internal momentum around Armed Forces issues.

### **Members' briefing to Councillors**

- › We will update our members in briefings on the Armed Forces Covenant and information they can pass on to constituents who are part of the Armed Forces community.

### **Internal steering group**

- › To ensure we are committed and making progress against our action plan we will be holding an annual steering group meeting with key internal council services. The meetings will enable service areas to share learning, identify good practice as well as identify opportunities to enhance and strengthen the way we work and assist the Armed Forces community.

### **Raising Partner Awareness**

- › Promoting partners support offer to the Armed Forces Community.

- › We will promote the amazing work partner organisations are doing to assist the Armed Forces community. This will include promoting their services on our dedicated council Armed Forces webpage.
- › We will also showcase the work they do via our monthly Community Partnership Network meetings by hosting a joint session so community groups working with residents, are aware of their service offers to the Armed Forces community.





## **Our commitment:**

**Supporting our Voluntary and Community sector to continue the amazing work they do with supporting the Armed Forces community.**

Charities and voluntary and community Sector (VCS) organisations can play a significant role in reaching residents that the council are not always able to. We will increase our engagement with relevant partners to ensure we utilise the unique links with members of the Armed Forces that our partners may have. We will also ensure the Council publicly showcases its commitment to the Armed Forces by commemorating and celebrating key dates in the Armed Forces calendar, including Armed Forces, Armistice and Remembrance Day.







## Key commitments

### Increasing engagement with partners from charities and VCS organisations

Charities and VCS organisations such as Age UK are already working hard to support our local Armed Forces community. The Mayor of Waltham Forest recognised this in his recent visit to Leyton Orient Football Trust, who host a monthly Veterans Lunch Club in partnership with Age UK Waltham Forest. To build on these foundations, we will increase our engagement with organisations and initiatives that work closely with veterans and Armed Forces personnel. We will ensure organisations are kept informed on council support services and funding opportunities to support community projects right across the borough as well as in Fellowship Square Town Hall complex. We will encourage these organisations to share relevant information with their service users, signpost them to further support and support these groups to develop and grow their activities and operations through training.

### Support and Community Services Directory

Our new Support and Community Services Directory is live, featuring an interactive map detailing over 150 local council and community services that residents can turn to for advice, support, and activities and events. We will invite organisations who support our local Armed Forces community to be a part of our directory. This will ensure that more serving and ex-serving personnel, and their families, are able to access the tailored support that they need.

### Re-signing the new Armed Forces Covenant

In 2013, Waltham Forest Council signed the Community Covenant, now known simply as the Armed Forces Covenant. The new Covenant considers the Councils' roles as both an employer and service provider. We will be publicly renewing our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant by re-signing the new Covenant on Remembrance Sunday (12th November) at a re-signing ceremony following the Remembrance Ceremony, with key military dignitaries and members of the Armed Forces community invited to witness.

### Waltham Forest Armed Forces Partnership Board

We are proud of the work our partners and VCS organisations do to support Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families here in Waltham Forest. To ensure we are holding ourselves to account and oversee our commitment to the Armed Forces covenant and action plan we will set up a Waltham Forest Armed Forces Partnership Board. The group will be chaired by Councillor Vicky Ashworth, Armed Forces Champion for Waltham Forest council and be held once a quarter. The group will include a broad range of people from both the Armed Forces and organisations that support the Armed Forces community who will meet to identify, build, and strengthen the action plan as well as identify areas where improvement and better joined up working can occur.

The first meeting is scheduled to take place in November 2023 following the formal launch of the Waltham Forest Armed Forces Action plan and re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant.



## **Celebrating Armed Forces commemorative events**

The Council will continue to celebrate Armed Forces commemorative events through its annual flag raisings and event facilitation. Our annual flag raising calendar contains the dates of several military holidays. On Armistice Day (observed every year since 1919) we lower the flag and observe a two-minute silence at 11am. On Remembrance Sunday, we hold a civic ceremony by the war memorial and have helped facilitate local Royal British Legion parades. We will continue to offer a package of support to ensure that Remembrance Sunday, alongside other military holidays, continue to be celebrated.

## **Supporting our young Armed Forces personnel**

The Army Cadet Force (ACF) is one of the UK's largest voluntary youth organisations for 12 to 18-year-olds who represent the future of our Armed Forces. In 2017 the Whipps Cross Joint Cadet Centre opened and was one of the first of three east London sites. The Cadet Centre is home to 35 Cadet detachment (Inns of Court and City Yeomanry, ACF and 12F Squadron (Walthamstow & Leyton) RAF Air Cadets and will enable the Army and Air Force Cadets at the base to work side by side in shared,

purpose-built facilities. The building represents an investment in the character and values of the young people who will use them, helping to widen the opportunities and experiences they gain. With great pride and gratitude, the council will continue to acknowledge, celebrate, and show support for the remarkable achievements of our young Cadets by attending annual commemorative events to honour their dedication and accomplishments.

## **Updating our War Memorial**

As part of the second phase of development of our Fellowship Square Town Hall complex, we will improve our existing war memorial to provide a higher-quality space for memorial events. This will enable us to celebrate key military holidays with staff and residents in a dedicated space that honours the contribution of our past and present Armed Forces. We will also promote War Memorials across the borough through our dedicated Armed Forces webpage and with partner organisations.

## **Engaging the business community embed the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.**

We will engage with the business community to encourage them to consider ways they can embed the principles of the Armed Forces covenant within their organisations. This will include:

- › Signing the Armed Forces Covenant and committing to ensuring that no member of the Armed Forces community suffers a commercial disadvantage because of their service.
- › Sharing information on the Armed Forces Covenant and ways they can support veterans and peoples from the Armed Forces community.
- › Encouraging businesses to promote their job opportunities with the Career Transition Partnership and Forces Families Jobs and by advertising through 'service-friendly'
- › Agencies, military charities and publications.
- › Offer discounts on goods and services to members of the Armed Forces community – particularly in relation to services that are relevant, such as legal services, insurance, and financial advice.

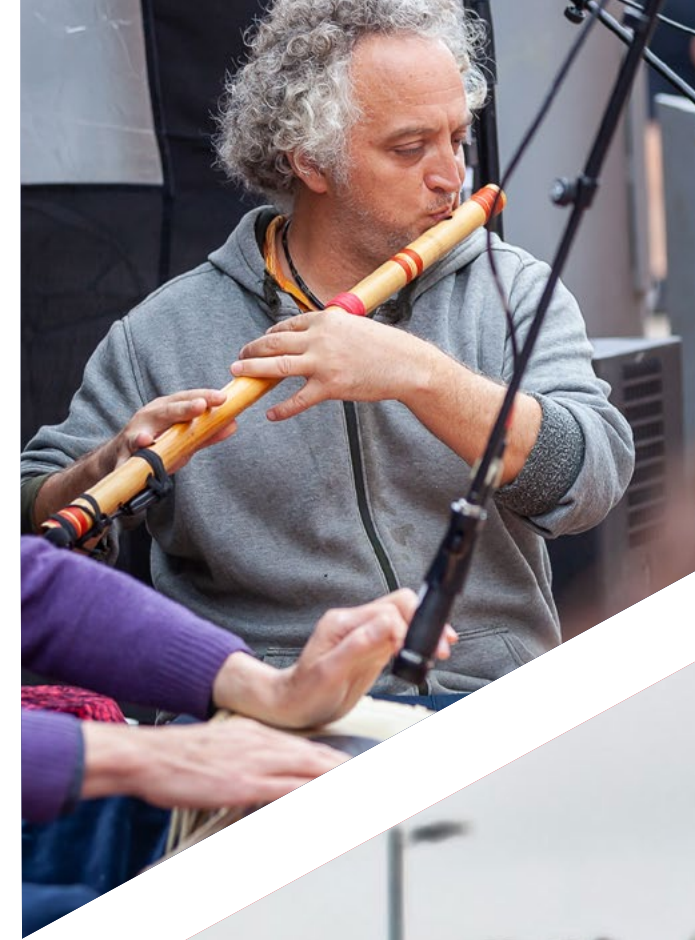


## Supporting Afghan citizens who assisted the UK Armed Forces

- › Waltham Forest has a long history of accepting refugees fleeing persecution or conflict. We are proud of the diversity within our borough and will continue to make it a welcoming place for people who want to make Waltham Forest their home. In December 2022 a motion was passed at full council to join the City of Sanctuary network and apply to be recognised as an official Borough of Sanctuary. This will see us join other local authorities in offering a safe refuge for refugees arriving to the UK as well as commit to working with those with lived experiences, community and voluntary sector organisations and businesses to display the principles of the City of Sanctuary movement.
- › Afghan citizens who assisted the UK Armed Forces often face stress, trauma and hardship and require support for their physical and emotional needs as they rebuild their lives in the UK. Our Resettlement team are supporting refugees to successful transition to life in Waltham Forest including offering a support package covering housing, education, health, advocacy support as well as accessing ESOL course for adults and empowering families to become independent. To learn more about the Resettlement support for refugees please email [connectingcommunities@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:connectingcommunities@walthamforest.gov.uk)

## Increasing community engagement with our Armed Forces community

- › We will utilise our Community Engagement Officers, who communicate and build partnerships with our external partners, to develop relationships with organisations such as the Royal British Legion (RBL) to help increase knowledge of our offer in the community. We will regularly inform organisations of our ongoing offer, as well as new opportunities, so that they can signpost members of the Armed Forces community to relevant services through their channels.



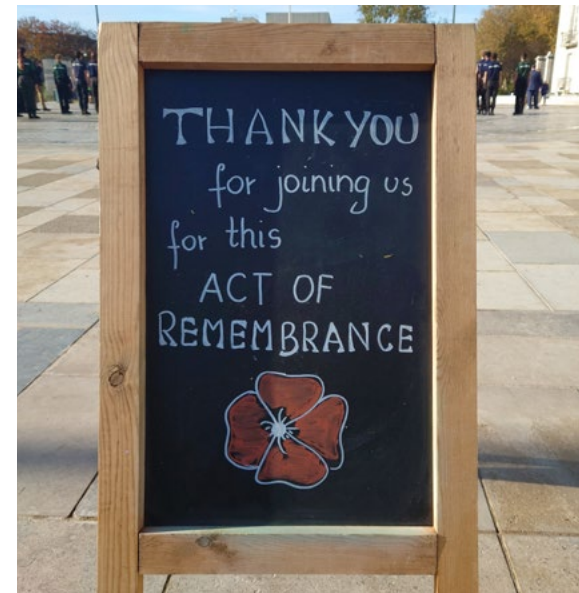
# Delivering our Armed Forces Action Plan

**This plan presents the first steps towards better supporting our local Armed Forces community here in Waltham Forest. It formalises our commitment to building on our current approach and to fulfilling the obligations of the Community Covenant we signed in 2013.**

Our plan outlines eight key areas in which the Armed Forces community requires support and where we can really make a difference in our approach as a council. Those areas are Communication and Awareness Raising, Education, Health and Wellbeing, Culture, Finding a Carer, Having a home, Being a Responsible Employer and Community and Partnership.

Many of these areas are already carrying out good work to support the Armed Forces community and we will ensure this work continues to be strengthened through the actions outlined in our plan. The key outcomes of this will be an increased awareness of the Armed Forces community and its needs both within and outside of the council, better assessment of Armed Force's needs, clearer signposting to support for the community, and more partnership working with internal and external stakeholders.

These actions will guide the approach taken to ensuring Armed Forces personnel (whether regular or reserve), veterans, and their families, are treated fairly. We will hold ourselves to account by actively reviewing and monitoring the progress we make against the action plan as well as adapt our approach accordingly. We will actively seek opportunities to capture feedback from our Armed Forces community, external partners, and organisations as well as through quarterly check-ins between our Armed Forces Champion and key external partners such as the Royal British Legion and Headquarters London District (LONDIST) from the Ministry of Defence. We will also feed Armed Forces considerations into our internal quarterly Equalities Board, which ensures that the Council addresses and acts on key equality, diversity, and inclusion



challenges as an employer and in service delivery. Furthermore, we will organise periodic internal stakeholder group meetings to ensure all relevant service areas are delivering against the commitments outline within the action plan.

Holding ourselves and others accountable will enable momentum to be built up around the Armed Forces community and the issues they encounter. It is through working together, with a coherent and unified approach that will help ensure Waltham Forest is on track to strengthen its commitment to our Local Armed Forces community.



# Summary of Waltham Forest Councils commitment

## Communication and awareness raising



- Comprehensive new webpage
- Increasing external comms e.g. social media campaign, article in Council newspaper
- Raising staff awareness through internal comms (YourNews, all-staff briefing)

## Communities and Partnership



- Increase engagement with RBL, Age UK and other organisations supporting the Armed Forces community
- Support and Community Services Directory
- Continue to facilitate key military commemorative events
- Re-sign the new Covenant – organise ceremony with MoD to re-affirm commitment

## Having a home



- Continue identifying armed forces through social housing application form question
- Continue local connection exemptions, prioritisation
- Taking part in Veteran's Homeless Nomination Scheme
- Promoting Housing benefit, exemptions and grants available

## Lifelong learning and finding a career



- Signposting to Adult Learning Service, working with local job centres
- Collecting key data through enrolment forms
- Community engagement and bespoke Community Learning courses

## Health and wellbeing



- JSNA (previous accounted for veterans' needs and make sure future ones go into more detail)
- Review of and research into local health providers, how we use data
- Raising awareness of issues and schemes e.g. GP accreditation through Monthly Learning Time

## Education



- Continue local connection exemptions, Social and Medical places, Late for Good Reason applications
- Raising awareness in local education sector through key channels such as The Hub, article in newsletter

## Being a responsible employer



- Informal staff network to enable employees to connect
- Review HR data collection and continuing to ask the question on whether they have served
- Publicising access to existing opportunities e.g. education and upskilling
- Sign up to Defence Employer Recognition Scheme once Covenant re-signed

## Culture



- Enjoying our New SoHo theatre – discounted tickers
- Providing opportunities to come together and share culture





ARMED FORCES  
COVENANT



Waltham Forest