



## Armed Forces Covenant Briefing Note

The following provides an overview of the support provided by the Council under the Armed Forces Covenant and Act.

### Background

In February 2012 Cotswold District Council, alongside other Gloucestershire local authorities, NHS, police, and representatives from the voluntary sector signed the Local Armed Forces Community Covenant. In January 2022 the Council renewed its commitment.

### Our Commitment

*“We confirm that we, when exercising certain aspects of our public functions, will have due regard to the three principles of the Armed Forces Covenant as required under the Armed Forces Act 2021:*

- 1. the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces;*
- 2. the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces, and;*
- 3. the principle that special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces”.*

### The Duty & Relevant Functions

When the Covenant was introduced in 2012, it was a voluntary commitment, but one which sparked change, through new practice and project. The Armed Forces Act 2021 goes further, by creating a Covenant Duty. The Duty is about informed decision-making, and means that specified bodies should think about and place an appropriate amount of weight on the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when they consider all the factors relevant to how they carry out ‘relevant functions’.

The ‘relevant functions’ are certain statutory functions in the fields of healthcare, education and housing. Of these the most relevant to District Council is the housing function, which is further broken down to encompass the following functions: allocations policy for social housing; tenancy strategies (England only); homelessness; and disabled facilities grants.

The Act is not prescriptive about the actions specified bodies should take in order to comply with their legal obligations, and it does not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes (Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance).

## Support by Cotswold District Council

### HOUSING FUNCTION: Lettings policy and Homelessness

Recognition of the Covenant is reflected both within the Council’s Homeseeker Plus choice-based letting policy and in the Council’s approach to Homelessness.

**The HomeseekerPlus Policy** recognises that members of the armed forces do not have the same ability as others to create a local connection to areas where they may wish to live. The Policy therefore applies additional qualification criteria for members of the Armed Forces Communities.

Local connection will also be awarded to divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service

personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.

The Council's **Homelessness function**, follows the Homelessness Code of Guidance (2018) which addresses former members of the armed forces who find themselves as homeless or threatened with homelessness and recommends the approach that Local Authorities should take.

**Liaison with military bases:** The Housing Team have close links with the military bases within the district and work with the MOD to source accommodation for those leaving the armed forces (and their spouses or partners in the event of the death of a servicing member or a relationship breakdown) to prevent homelessness from occurring.

**Gloucestershire Veterans Housing:** The housing team also attends the county veterans meetings.

## **ADDITIONAL RECOGNITION and SUPPORT**

The Council undertakes other activity not formally required through the Act, but recognises the spirit of the legislation and the ethos of the Gloucestershire Covenant. By way of illustration, the Council recognises Armed Forces Day, Armistice, and other civic expressions of respect for armed forces service.

The Council participates in the **Gloucestershire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership**, convened by Gloucestershire County Council. This partnership agreed on a number of principles which guide its work acting as a liaison point between civic and military representatives.

### **Pledge to support reservists:**

The Council and Publica as employers have pledged their support for employees who are members of or those wishing to join the Reserve Forces and/or Volunteer Emergency Services and acknowledges the training undertaken by Reservists and Volunteers enables them to develop skills and abilities that are of benefit to both the individual and the organisation.

There is also a commitment to granting additional paid leave to employees who are Reservists and/or Volunteers specifically to enable them to attend their annual camp and/or training days throughout the year.