

Policy Committee
13 April 2026



Reading
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| Title | Armed Forces Covenant |
| Purpose of the report | To make a decision |
| Report status | Public report |
| Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report | Louise Duffield |
| Report author | Jill Marston, Policy & Performance Team |
| Lead Councillor | Cllr Emberson, Lead Cllr for Corporate Services & Resources |
| Council priority | Promote more equal communities in Reading |
| Recommendations | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant, with associated pledges.2. Apply for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme silver award. |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report sets out options around the further development of the Armed Forces Covenant, principally its re-signing, which is currently being encouraged by MoD following the updating of the original covenant in 2018, alongside the proposal to apply for the Employer Recognition Scheme silver award, for which we already meet most of the criteria and for which re-signing is a requirement.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise 'that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, including the bereaved, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives'.
- 2.2 Recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces, its two principles are that:
- 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.
- 2.3 As part of the Armed Forces Act 2021, the Government has introduced a new duty on public service providers to take due regard of the Armed Forces community

when writing policy, and making decisions in implementing that policy, in relation to healthcare, education, and housing. It has recently been announced that the legal duty will be extended to apply to central government and to cover a broader range of policy areas (Armed Forces Bill 2026).¹

- 2.4 To support this, the Council will soon launch an improved data collection process to better understand the numbers Armed Forces Reservists within the Council workforce.
- 2.5 For context, according to the 2021 Census, there are almost 3,500 Reading residents who have previously served in the Armed Forces, including a relatively large ex-Gurkha population. At the 2024/25 autumn school census, there were 64 children from Service families in Reading schools. There is currently one known Reservist employed by the Council and one Adult Cadet Force Volunteer.

3. The Proposal

Covenant re-signing

- 3.1 In 2012, there were two types of Armed Forces Covenant which could be signed, a Community Covenant, which recognised an organisation as a provider of services and support, and a Corporate Covenant, which identifies a business as an employer of those from the armed forces community.
- 3.2 The Reading Armed Forces Community Covenant was launched in July 2012, signed by 7 Rifles on behalf of the Armed Forces and a range of other key partners.
- 3.3 The MoD are now encouraging councils to merge these two elements together, recognising that local authorities are both providers of services and employers, and to re-sign the ‘new’ covenant. In signing we would be joining other Berkshire Councils who have now re-signed, with the exception of Wokingham.
- 3.4 The covenant is a voluntary pledge to demonstrate support for the Armed Forces community and for the principles of the covenant. As well as pledging to uphold, and act in accordance with, the basic principles of the covenant, all signatories must also include several specific pledges, which can be tailored to the organisation. Identifying specific pledges for us to make is therefore a pre-requisite for re-signing the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 3.5 Pledges can include continuing with activities that the Council already undertakes but must also include some new activity as well. The proposed pledges are:

Pledges to continue with current activity:

| Pledge | Lead | Current activity |
|--|-------------|-------------------------|
| Appoint an elected Member as Armed Forces Champion to act as a focal point for organising and promoting support for the Armed Forces Community | Policy Team | Currently Cllr Hoskin |

¹ Social care, Childcare, Employment and service in the armed forces, Personal taxation, Welfare benefits, Criminal justice, Immigration, Citizenship, Pensions, Service-related compensation, Transport

| Pledge | Lead | Current activity |
|--|------------------------|--|
| Engage with and support 7 Rifles and the local Armed Forces charities through regular meetings of the Reading Armed Forces Partnership | Policy Team | Six monthly partnership meetings organised and chaired by Armed Forces lead officer |
| Support Reservists by offering them additional days of annual leave in order to carry out their duties. | HR | Reservist policy in place providing for 3 days additional leave |
| Provide training, such as e-learning, for our staff on the Armed Forces Community | Policy Team/OD | Two online courses available on Learning Pool, the second targeted at customer service staff |
| Promote the Armed Forces Covenant and our support for the Armed Forces Community to the wider public | Policy Team/Comms Team | Web page maintained Armed Forces Day and Remembrance events |
| Support or promote Armed Forces events, such as Armed Forces Day/Week, Reserves Day and Remembrance activities | Comms Team | Armed Forces Day and Remembrance events |
| Maintain a dedicated Armed Forces page on our website and signpost members of the Armed Forces Community to available support. | Policy Team | Web page maintained |

Additional pledges:

| Pledge | Lead |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Extend the guaranteed interview scheme to include Veterans seeking employment | HR |
| 2. Offer additional paid annual leave to Cadet Force Adult Volunteers to help them carry out their training requirement (as we already do for Reservists) | HR |
| 3. Use the covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme logos in our communications and marketing | Comms Team |

- 3.6 Though there is a small resource implication regarding additional pledge 2, this is likely to be very minimal as we currently have one known Cadet Force Adult Volunteer. This minimal indirect cost will be borne within the service employing the individual. There is no financial impact.
- 3.7 Should the Council wish to proceed with this proposal, the current Time Off for Public Duties, Jury Service and Employing Reservists Policy will require revision to align with the new commitments.
- 3.8 The re-signing is an opportunity to promote the Council's commitment via a signing event. Defence Relationship Management, who work with organisations on the Armed Forces Covenant, can help with organising this at the Council's premises or elsewhere. Alternatively, the template can be submitted with no ceremony.

MoD Employer Recognition Scheme silver award

- 3.9 The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme recognises a signatory's commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community through its bronze, silver and gold awards. The Council achieved the bronze award in 2018. Within Berkshire, Slough and Wokingham are planning to apply for silver; West Berkshire and Bracknell have gained silver, and Windsor & Maidenhead have gold.
- 3.10 If the Council wanted to work towards an application for the silver award, the application window closes in late April 2026. Re-signing the Armed Forces Covenant (or the commitment to do so) is a pre-requisite for applying for the silver award.
- 3.11 Currently we meet most of the required criteria for the silver award. The table below sets out the silver criteria and additional requirements:

| Criteria | What already doing | Proposed new activity |
|--|---|--|
| ESSENTIAL | | |
| ERS Bronze Award status and have held it with sufficient time to have put in place the necessary essential policies. | Bronze achieved 2018 | No further action |
| Proactively demonstrate that Service personnel and Armed Forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes. | Demonstrated by: Flexible working policy, policy around time off for public duties & reserve duties, recruitment and selection policy | Extending the guaranteed interview scheme to include veterans seeking employment. |
| Actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards the Armed Forces community. | Reserves policy available on intranet | Use the covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme logos in our communications and marketing. Do more to promote this amongst staff using existing channels and communications resources e.g. Team Reading newsletter |
| Support active Reservists by: 1. Having policy in place to support mobilisations | Already included in the reserves policy | No further action |
| 2. Demonstrating support to their training by providing at least 5 days additional annual leave (ideally paid). | Currently we have 3 days | Extend to 5 days (currently we have 1 reservist) |
| A proactive relationship with their DRM (ie Defence Relationship Management contact) | In place | No further action |
| The employer must allow flexibility for employees who are Cadet Force Adult Volunteers to fit their working hours in with their volunteering. | Covered by time off for public duties policy and flexible working policy | Offer additional paid annual leave to Cadet Force Adult Volunteers to help them carry out their training requirement (as we already do for Reservists). |

| Criteria | What already doing | Proposed new activity |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| DESIRABLE | | |
| Employ at least one individual from the Armed Forces community¹. | We have 1 Reservist and 1 Adult Cadet Force Volunteer (as far as we know) | No further action |
| Employer should scope opportunities to support the Cadet movement (e.g. sponsorship, supporting the development of cadets' wider skills to enhance their future opportunities; or providing employment advice and guidance) | | No further action |
| Hosting a Reserve recruiting event on their premises in partnership with a local Reserve Unit or Military Command recruiting teams. | | No further action |

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 Supporting the Armed Forces community in Reading will contribute towards the Council's priority to 'Promote more equal communities in Reading' by helping to ensure that service leavers and veterans are not disadvantaged.
- 4.2 This work also helps to 'Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children' by supporting the health and wellbeing of Veterans in the community.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 Not applicable to this report.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1 Not applicable to this report.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 Consideration of the Armed Forces community is included in the Council's Equality Impact Assessment, along with the protected characteristics.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Council's legal duty is set out at 2.3 above.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are minimal financial implications, as set out in paras 3.6 and 3.11.

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1 Re-signing the Armed Forces Covenant would take place in summer 2026. Application for the silver award would take place by April 2026.

11. Appendices

- 11.1 None