



Armed Forces Engagement

An annual update report



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Our work and vision for the future

South Kesteven District Council is a proud holder of the prestigious Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award recognising exceptional levels of advocacy and support for the Armed Forces.

It's an accolade awarded by the Ministry of Defence to less than 900 organisations within the UK.

The Council employs a dedicated Armed Forces Officer, supported by an elected member Armed Forces Champion, and has designated officers delivering specialist support within the revenues and benefits, cost of living and housing teams.

Its Gold Award status has already encouraged SKDC to be ambitious in its support for the military community with further plans in the pipeline.

External military engagement sits alongside specific legal requirements under the council's long-standing signature to the Armed Forces Covenant - now enshrined in law under the Armed Forces Act.

The Act came into full force in November 2022. It conveys a duty requiring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, suffer no disadvantage because of their service.

It requires in-scope organisations such as SKDC to help serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families have the same equality of access to public services as civilians, recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces.

Census data confirms 8693 military veterans live in the district (7.37% of the population aged over 16), putting it seventh on the national league table and adding weight to the council's responsibilities to support veterans.

Armed Forces initiatives come under the remit of the council's Community Engagement team, which monitors all new announcements of census data including veterans' characteristics, living arrangements and financial situations - with more information expected in 2024.

The three specific duties under the new Armed Forces Act relate to housing, education and health; the primary responsibility for SKDC being housing, and the need to consider that:

- Veterans may find it hard to engage with and trust professionals who have no military background
- Veterans take longer on average than others before asking for help.

The Council's Armed Forces actions and responsibilities can be divided into four key areas - all helping to deliver its Corporate Objectives:

- Armed Forces Act
- Commemorating heritage
- Advocacy
- Engagement



South Kesteven District Council Armed Forces Covenant contacts

Armed Forces Officer: Debbie Nicholls
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Armed Forces Champion: Cllr Richard Dixon-Warren
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- Effective Council
- Housing

Armed Forces Act

South Kesteven District Council, along with all Armed Forces Covenant signatories, will shortly be audited on performance and compliance after the first full year of the Armed Forces Act.

This will be done via the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee, reporting directly to the Defence Minister.

The Armed Forces Officer has helped to ensure that council duties on housing are recognised with robust processes on service delivery. Specific considerations relating to our service delivery include:

- Armed Forces Act requirements are reflected in the Council’s ‘people first’ housing allocations policy.
- Anyone applying to join the housing register is asked whether they have served,
- The Act requires that anyone leaving the military can apply for housing anywhere in the country, so an applicant can claim exemption from the normal restrictions
- Lincolnshire’s homeless strategy recognises that the location of work can establish eligibility, rather than being identified by their last military base

Across other Lincolnshire authorities, however, there are potentially service delivery gaps between councils and important sectors of their local population: military and ex-military, their families and children.

The Council is therefore co-funding a shared Armed Forces Officer for Lincolnshire, along with continuing its specific commitment of a dedicated Armed Forces Officer for South Kesteven.

The new post will ensure that district authority colleagues meet the requirements of the Armed Forces Covenant and that advice and delivery to the county’s defence community

More specifically, SKDC has been at the forefront of reconvening the Lincolnshire Community Covenant Partnership to engage partners in support for defence and assist with pan-Lincolnshire compliance.



Armed Forces Champion chairing county partnership

OpFORTITUDE



Specialist officers engaging with veterans

Actions to date:

- ✓ All staff now have access to Armed Forces e-learning modules
- ✓ Housing officers have access to Op FORTITUDE - a centralised Covenant Trust-funded referral pathway from housing association Riverside which aims to end veteran homelessness - www.riverside.org.uk/
- ✓ Armed Forces champions are now established in housing and revenues and benefits, backed by the cost of living team
- ✓ Amed Forces Champion is chairing the re-convened Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership

Actions going forward:

- Work with Armed Forces Outreach Service to improve the lives of ex-military locally - armedforcesoutreachservice.org
- Ensure new starters are aware of SKDC’s Armed Forces commitments
- Work to support the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant
- Support and work with the new shared services postholder
- Explore pan-Lincolnshire potential to provide Veterans Housing

Corporate objectives:

- Sustainable South Kesteven
- Enabling Economic Opportunity

Commemorating Heritage

Our recognition and celebration of the district’s military heritage and key wartime milestones was looked on extremely favourably in the council’s application for the DERS Gold Award – all part of our advocacy role to engage the public with defence.

Further research has now identified new and unique local WW2 history, separate to but complementing that of Lincolnshire’s Bomber Command label and the work of Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire.

Our new focus is on South Kesteven’s local links with allied airborne forces from Britain, America and Poland. This has now been developed by a Council-coordinated research group of specialists into a new visitor trail: the Airborne Forces Heritage Trail with potential to deliver economic benefits from heritage tourism.

The trail has the potential to deliver economic benefits from heritage tourism visitors.

A trail feasibility study was conducted by the Arnhem 1944 Fellowship in April 2023, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Council is submitting a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in January 2024.

The trail is supported by the Council’s Corporate Management Team and secured £15,000 of match funding from UK SPF Board towards an HLF bid.

Actions to date:

- ✓ BBC filming at an SKDC-organised exhibition at St Vincent’s Hall - Bomber Command 5 Group HQ for 80th anniversary of 617 Squadron’s Dams Raid
- ✓ In separate 80th anniversary commemorations, SKDC co-ordinated PR and special invitations to watch a Lancaster fly-past at St Vincent’s
- ✓ SKDC designed and organised unveiling in Barkston Church of an information board showing the history of RAF Barkston Heath
- ✓ Attendance 156 Parachute Battalion. Reunion RAF Saltby
- ✓ A Council-commissioned art installation of poppy cascades and wartime silhouettes enhanced Grantham’s Remembrance commemorations
- ✓ SKDC funded 1,000 maroon tulips - matching the symbolic Parachute Regiment colours colour theme - for key airborne-related sites as Airborne Tulip Memorials



Naval veteran Joan Briggs salutes Remembrance silhouettes and poppies



Airborne Tulip Memorial planting at St Vincents Church in Caythorpe

Actions going forward

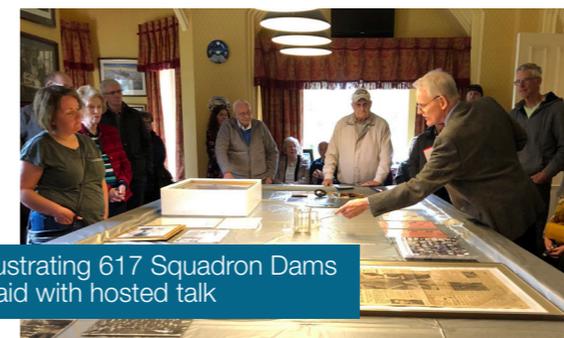
- Celebration of D-Day and Arnhem 80th anniversary commemorations in 2024
- 216 Signals Parachute Squadron on their 2024 commemorations at Caythorpe
- 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment service at Stoke Rochford
- Army Benevolent Fund Arnhem Commemoration at St Wulfram’s Church in Grantham
- Development of the Airborne Forces Heritage Trail as income generating visitor attraction
- Development of Remembrance poppy activities to develop international links
- Celebrate flowering of Airborne Tulip Memorials scale and scope



Operation Sustainer – upskilling opportunities for food sector



Illustrating military heritage at Barkston Church



Illustrating 617 Squadron Dams Raid with hosted talk

Advocacy

Gold Award status confers a duty on holders to advocate for the defence community.

In its widest sense this includes public displays of council support, such as our flag raising and Remembrance activities, plus helping neighbouring local authorities to ensure their own compliance with the duty.

SKDC supported Armed Forces Week in June 2023 with a series of articles. A press release with an open invitation to join local cadet groups achieved regional radio coverage.

Lincolnshire's Community Covenant Partnership is seen as critical in advocating support for defence across its 40-plus representatives representing diverse sectors including health and education.

Direct engagement with the MOD Armed Forces Covenant team at the 'Covenant in the Community Annual Conference' in Newcastle resulted in the Head of the MOD Covenant team Patrick O'Brien speaking at the reconvened Partnership meeting in November.

The Armed Forces Officer is also working with Economic Development colleagues to explore opportunities offered by the Lincolnshire Defence and Security Cluster, now approved by Government as one of only three in the UK, and the Defence and Security Accelerator.

Collectively they offer opportunities for local company growth through access to valuable product development funding and potential new Ministry of Defence contracts.



SKDC Chairman Cllr Gloria Johnson inspects Reserves at Prince William of Gloucester (PWOG) Barracks in November 2023

2023 - 2024

- ✓ Attendance at a Grantham Veterans Open Day with SKDC champions
- ✓ Armed Forces Week; a programme of PR and events
- ✓ Remembrance commemorations
- ✓ Flag raising
- ✓ New Defence Friendly Employers Guide for distribution to employers of Reservists graduating from PWOG Barracks



2024 -

- Develop upskilling potential between food businesses and Grantham-based 167 Catering Support Regiment RLC (Army Reserve)
- Encourage local businesses to access and hire skilled ex-military
- Explore business development opportunities with economic development team
- Promote product development funding opportunities with the Defence and Security Accelerator



Armed Forces Day flag raising helps SKDC to advocate defence



Council Cadet Force Adult Volunteer Drew Palmer also acts as a champion in the Housing Team

Engagement

Given the need to keep abreast of best practice and new initiatives, the Armed Forces Officer engages at county, regional and national levels to ensure that SKDC is updated.

The national Covenant Leads Officer Group delivers quarterly updates on new initiatives, such as:

- Milton Keynes University Hospital ‘Veteran Aware’ Gold Award initiative (disseminated to Lincolnshire NHS Hospitals Trust - Lincolnshire’s newest Gold Award)
- Meetings with Riverside Housing Association, administering Op Fortitude Veterans Housing Helpline and Support Network to help SKDC tackle homelessness of ex-military

The forum has also enabled supply to SKDC of free Covenant funded e-learning modules on all aspects of the Armed Forces, accessible from the council’s Learner Management System.

In Lincolnshire, two-monthly meetings of charity Every-One’s Veterans and Families Wellbeing network invites key presenters and send out weekly news updates on news.

SKDC is also now working more closely with AF Officers from North Kesteven and City of Lincoln as a driving force for wider engagement.

Monthly meetings with Army representatives at PWOG discuss and deliver mutually beneficial engagement events such as the Civic Leaders Reception, delivering opportunities for key speakers on a range of subjects.

Actions to date:

- ✓ Armed Forces Covenant in the Community Annual Conference in Newcastle with the theme ‘Preventing Disadvantage’
- ✓ Regional Officers Group includes representatives from Essex, Herts, Kent, Beds, Suffolk, Leics, Norfolk, Northants
- ✓ PWOG Civic Leaders Reception
- ✓ Chairman inspecting troops at Pass Off Parade
- ✓ Engagement with PWOG for poppy making workshops for Remembrance



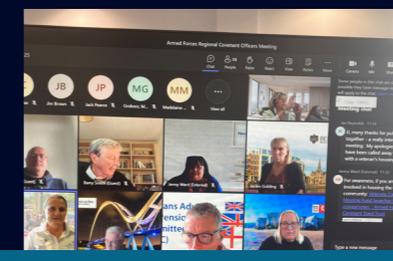
Civic Leaders Reception engagement event for business and community leaders at PWOG

Actions going forward:

- Identify new veterans’ community engagement pathways
- Identify new engagement opportunities with PWOG
- Encourage local businesses’ Reserve recruitment
- Encourage internal SKDC Reservists recruitment
- New ‘behind the wire’ PWOG Veterans Breakfast
- Develop ‘Walkshops’ (wellbeing talks and walks) wellbeing activities for veterans
- Work with Just Detect UK – Grantham based charity to identify new detecting sites



Army joins poppy cascade workshop for remembrance



Sharing regional best practice



Close engagement with PWOG



Defence Minister Dr Andrew Murrison at Newcastle Armed Forces Conference

Contact Details

Alternative formats are available on request:
audio, large print and Braille

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