

**Public
Key Decision**

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Signing of the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant
Meeting/Date:	O&S (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) – 5th March 2026 Cabinet – 17th March 2026
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Councillor for Place- (Councillor Sarah Conboy)
Report by:	Community Development Officer, Community Services –People Team (Amanda Turner)
Ward(s) affected:	All Ward(s)

Executive Summary:

This report seeks approval to establish and sign the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant. The Armed Forces Covenant is a national pledge that ensures serving personnel, veterans, and their families are treated fairly and do not experience disadvantage when accessing public services. The Covenant is underpinned by the Armed Forces Act 2021, which places a statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to Covenant principles in key service areas, including housing.

Signing the Armed Forces Covenant is important to ensure that the Council's commitments reflect current legislation, best practice, and local delivery arrangements, and to demonstrate continued support to the Armed Forces community within Huntingdonshire. The Covenant will provide clarity on how the Council embeds Covenant principles across policy, service delivery, and employment practices, and will align the Council with neighbouring authorities and countywide partnership arrangements.

Huntingdonshire District Council is a signatory to the 2011 shared Community Covenant; however, the statutory duty introduced by the Armed Forces Act 2021, includes evolving expectations from the Ministry of Defence and Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA), and the Council's role within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.

There are no direct financial implications arising from establishing the Armed Forces Covenant. The primary risks relate to capacity and consistency of delivery, which will be mitigated through proportionate pledges, partnership

working, and officer oversight. Should any costs be anticipated in the future, Cabinet will be asked to review and sign off on such on a case-by-case basis.

Cabinet is asked to approve the Armed Forces Covenant and support its adoption and publication.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet/Committee is

RECOMMENDED to:

- a) Approve the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant, superseding the previous Covenant.
- b) Agree that the Council continues to embed Armed Forces Covenant principles across relevant policies, services, and employment practices, where appropriate and proportionate.
- c) Agree that a member of Senior Leadership acts as strategic sponsor, and that the Council's appointed Armed Forces Champion acts as Chair of the Armed Forces Covenant Working Group, to support effective coordination and governance.
- d) Agree that an annual progress report on delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel to provide assurance, transparency and ongoing oversight.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to sign the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and alignment with current best practice.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This report is necessary to ensure that Huntingdonshire District Council remains compliant with the statutory duties introduced by the Armed Forces Act 2021 and aligned with evolving national expectations. It also provides the foundation for implementing a series of proportionate, voluntary pledges across relevant service areas, ensuring the Council keeps pace with current best practice and demonstrates a clear, up-to-date commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community.

3. ROLE OF CABINET

- 3.1 To support effective governance and organisational ownership of the Armed Forces Covenant, the following is proposed, subject to capacity and agreement:
- 3.2 That a member of Senior Leadership acts as strategic sponsor, and that the Council's appointed Armed Forces Champion acts as Chair of the Council's Armed Forces Covenant Working Group.
- 3.3 The Armed Forces Champion will provide Member oversight and support cross-directorate engagement through the Working Group to ensure relevant services can embed Covenant principles where appropriate.
- 3.4 That Heads of Service support cross-directorate engagement to help ensure relevant services (e.g. Housing, HR, Customer Services, Communities) can embed Covenant principles where appropriate.
- 3.5 That proportionate officer time is supported to coordinate activity, maintain partnerships, and represent the Council within countywide Armed Forces Covenant arrangements.
- 3.6 That Cabinet provides visible leadership endorsement of the Covenant to reinforce its importance internally and externally.

4. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 4.1 Option 1 – Do nothing: This option would risk misalignment with current legislation and best practice and would not clearly demonstrate compliance with the Armed Forces Act 2021.
- 4.2 Option 2 – Sign the Armed Forces Covenant (recommended): This option reflects statutory duties, local delivery arrangements, and partnership working. Ensuring compliance, clarity, and continued support for the Armed Forces community.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 5th March 2026.
- 5.2 Councillor Bywater thanked the Officer for sharing the report with him prior to it being brought through the democratic process and stated his strong support for the proposal to establish and formally adopt the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant. He reflected on his experiences as a former serviceman and believed that such a Covenant was vitally important to enable the Council to do everything possible to support the district's Armed Forces communities. He stated that the covenant represented a clear and meaningful commitment to ensure the fair treatment of Service Personnel, veterans and their families and for them to not be disadvantaged when accessing public services. Aligning the Council's approach with the statutory duties set out in the Armed Forces Act was in his view timely and necessary. He welcomed the clarity that the Covenant would bring and felt that it was essential that this be embedded across Council policies and aligned with neighbouring authorities. He was reassured by the Senior Leadership commitment detailed within the report as well as the commitment to report back regularly to Overview and Scrutiny and noted the accountability and transparency this would provide. He was fully in support of the proposal. Councillor Pitt echoed the comments of Councillor Bywater and deferred to his expertise on the subject and the knowledge of the Officers within the Council.
- 5.3 It was clarified to the Panel, following a comment from Councillor Shaw that the Working Group mentioned within the report would be made up of service area leads as identified by Heads of Service and that this group will meet quarterly. It was further noted that an Armed Forces Board would be established as a cross County group and would also meet regularly.
- 5.4 In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, it was clarified that staff training would be available and accessible for all Council staff through the Council's Learning and Development programme.
- 5.5 In conclusion, Councillor Hunt stated that he felt the report co-defined the things which the Council already did and that the comments of Councillor Bywater in support of the proposal greatly reassured him that this was the right thing to do.
- 5.6 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

6. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 6.1 Capacity risk: There is a risk that service pressures may limit the ability to deliver all commitments. This will be mitigated by proportionate pledges and use of enabling language such as "where possible" and "encourage".

- 6.2 Reputational risk: Failure to sign the Covenant could undermine confidence among the Armed Forces community and partners. Establishing and signing the Covenant mitigates this risk.

7. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOWING APPROVAL FROM CABINET:

- 7.1 Subject to approval, the Armed Forces Covenant will be signed and published.
- 7.2 Officers will ensure relevant policies and guidance reflect Covenant principles and will continue engagement through countywide partnership arrangements.
- 7.3 Following Cabinet approval on 17 March 2026, the Council will undertake the required due diligence process with the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA), anticipated to take approximately eight weeks.
- 7.4 Upon completion of the due diligence process, an Armed Forces Covenant Working Group will be formally scheduled to coordinate delivery of the Action Plan and support cross-service implementation.
- 7.5 A formal signing ceremony will be arranged following completion of due diligence and establishment of the Working Group, anticipated to take place in May 2026.

8. LINK TO HUNTINGDONSHIRE FUTURES, THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

[*\(See Corporate Plan\)*](#)[*\(See Huntingdonshire Futures\)*](#)

- 8A.1 The Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy is the Council's long-term vision to 2050, developed through extensive engagement with residents, businesses and partners. It sets out five transformational journeys: Pride in Place, Inclusive Economy, Health Embedded, Environmental Innovation and Travel Transformed, underpinned by a commitment to partnership and collective ambition.
- 8A.2 Huntingdonshire has a significant Armed Forces presence, including RAF Wyton and RAF Alconbury, alongside defence-sector employers. The Armed Forces Covenant aligns strongly with the Place Strategy by ensuring service personnel, veterans and their families are supported to integrate, thrive and contribute to the district's future.
- 8A.3 The Covenant supports the Place Strategy journeys as follows:
- Pride in Place– Supporting community cohesion and integration for Armed Forces families who may experience mobility and relocation challenges.

- Inclusive Economy– Enabling veterans and service leavers to transition into local employment sectors including engineering, logistics, digital and security, strengthening the district’s skills base.
- Health Embedded– Supporting equitable access to services and recognising the specific health and wellbeing considerations associated with military life.
- Environmental Innovation– Aligning with the Armed Forces’ commitment to Net Zero 2050 through partnership on sustainable estates, infrastructure and innovation.
- Travel Transformed– Supporting improved connectivity between bases, towns, education and healthcare provision, benefiting operational and family life.

8.A4 Establishing the Covenant therefore supports not only statutory compliance but also the Council’s long-term placemaking ambitions and partnership approach.

8B STRATEGIC CONTEXT – DEFENCE FOOTPRINT IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

8B.1 Huntingdonshire has a strong and growing Armed Forces footprint, centred on RAF Wyton and RAF Alconbury, with associated defence-sector employers contributing significantly to the local economy.

8B.2 The presence of the Armed Forces community brings both opportunity and responsibility. Service personnel and their families contribute to economic growth, community life and skills development. However, the nature of military service can create challenges linked to mobility, housing, employment transitions and access to services.

8B.3 Signing the Armed Forces Covenant ensures the Council recognises this strategic context and formalises its commitment to partnership working with the Ministry of Defence, the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.

8B.4 The Covenant provides a framework to support:

- Estate and land-use planning discussions around defence sites
- Alignment of skills and employment pathways for service leavers
- Partnership engagement in climate and infrastructure initiatives
- Enhancing Huntingdonshire’s attractiveness for recruitment and retention of service personnel

8B.5 This strengthens the Council’s role as a proactive place leader, working collaboratively to support both national defence priorities and local community wellbeing.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The Covenant has been informed by national guidance, partnership working across Cambridgeshire, and officer engagement.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Armed Forces Act 2021 places a statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in housing-related functions. Signing the Covenant ensures compliance with this legal requirement.
- 10.2 It is also important to note that the forthcoming Armed Forces Bill 2026 is expected to extend this duty to additional service areas, including:
- Childcare
 - Employment and service in the Armed Forces
 - Personal taxation
 - Welfare benefits
 - Criminal justice
 - Immigration
 - Citizenship
 - Pensions
 - Service-related compensation
 - Transport

Further details on these proposed extensions can be found in the official guidance here:

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/covenant-legal-duty/armedforces-covenant-duty-toolkit/the-armed-forces-covenant-legal-dutyextension-what-it-means-for-armed-forces-families/>

11. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from establishing the Armed Forces Covenant. The primary risks relate to capacity and consistency of delivery, which will be mitigated through proportionate pledges, partnership working, and officer oversight. Should any costs be anticipated in the future, Cabinet will be asked to review and sign off on such on a case-by-case basis

12. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None identified.

13. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 None identified.

14. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 Equalities: The Armed Forces community may experience disadvantage linked to mobility and service life. The Covenant supports fair access to services and positive equalities outcomes.

15. SUPPORT AND ADVICE OFFERED TO MEMBERS

- 15.1 Officers will provide proportionate advice and support to Members in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant, including:
- 15.2 Briefing Members on statutory duties under the Armed Forces Act 2021 and relevant developments.
- 15.3 Providing guidance and training, where appropriate, on how Covenant principles may be considered within casework involving serving personnel, veterans, and Armed Forces families.
- 15.4 Supporting Members with enquiries from residents connected to the Armed Forces community by signposting to appropriate internal services or external partners.
- 15.5 Providing briefing material for meetings, events, or public engagements involving Armed Forces-related matters.
- 15.6 Supporting ward-level engagement where Members wish to promote Covenant activity locally.

16. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 16.1 Establishing and signing the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant ensures compliance with the statutory duties set out in the Armed Forces Act 2021 and anticipates the proposed extension of those duties through forthcoming legislation.
- 16.2 The Covenant formalises the Council's commitment to ensuring that serving personnel, veterans and Armed Forces families are not disadvantaged when accessing services, and that due regard is consistently embedded within relevant policy and operational decision-making.
- 16.3 Huntingdonshire has a significant Armed Forces and defence-sector presence, including RAF Wyton and RAF Alconbury. The Covenant recognises this strategic context and reinforces the Council's role as a place leader working collaboratively with defence partners, the Ministry of Defence and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.
- 16.4 Signing the Covenant strengthens alignment with Huntingdonshire Futures and the Corporate Plan by supporting inclusive communities, workforce transition, economic resilience and long-term placemaking objectives.

- 16.5 The recommended approach provides clarity of governance through strategic sponsorship and a coordinated working group, ensuring proportionate delivery, oversight and partnership engagement.
- 16.6 Failure to establish an updated Covenant would risk reputational impact, reduced partnership influence and misalignment with evolving national expectations. Approval therefore ensures the Council demonstrates visible leadership, statutory compliance and continued support for the Armed Forces community within Huntingdonshire.

17. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 - Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Armed Forces Act 2021](#)
- [Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Covenant guidance](#)
- [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Armed Forces Covenant Partnership documentation](#)

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