

2024



Armed Forces Covenant

A report and actions to ensure Council compliance



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Introduction

South Kesteven District Council’s Armed Forces Covenant responsibilities and activities are focused on two main areas:

- To ensure that all elements of the authority comply with the Armed Forces Act of 2021, with the principal area being housing
- Advocacy and support for defence

The Armed Forces Act conveys a duty 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 South Kesteven District Council to ensure that serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families have the same equality of access to public services as civilians.

This recognises the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces and the fact that for many the return to civilian life can pose problems, including:

- Veterans may find it hard to engage with and trust professionals who have no military background
- Many leaving the military have little lived experience of civilian life
- Veterans take longer on average than others before asking for help.

Census data confirms that there are 8,693 military veterans living in the District - 7.37% of the population aged over 16 - putting South Kesteven seventh on the national league table. This is the second highest number of veterans in any district of Lincolnshire.

Armed Forces initiatives come under the remit of the Council’s Community Engagement team. The Armed Forces officer identifies, develops and delivers engagement events, raising awareness of defence in the district and advocating for serving and ex-military.

The officer also monitors all new announcements of census data including veterans’ characteristics, living arrangements and financial situations - with more information continually emerging.

SKDC continues to honour the principles that resulted in the 2022 award of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS) Gold Award, notably advocacy for defence.

As the only local authority in Lincolnshire to hold the Gold award, the Council continues to take the lead within the Lincolnshire Community Covenant Partnership.

Our Gold award status shows the Council goes over and above in its efforts to support the military community.

Armed Forces activity covers four key areas, each helping to deliver SKDC’s corporate priorities of Connecting Communities, Housing, Enabling Economic Opportunity and Effective Council:

- Compliance
- Heritage
- Advocacy
- Engagement



South Kesteven District Council Armed Forces Covenant contacts

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Armed Forces Officer: Debbie Nicholls
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- Corporate priorities:**
- Effective Council
 - Housing
 - Connecting Communities

Compliance

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

The Armed Forces Officer has worked closely with Paul Drury, a military veteran, since he started his new shared services post, introducing him to key networking groups and helping ensure that he is well informed to help local authority colleagues meet their legislative requirements with consistency on advice and delivery.

The Lincolnshire Community Covenant Partnership is now well established, with 40+ regular attendees at quarterly meetings representing local authorities, health, police, charity sector, military sites and support networks.

SKDC provides the secretariat for meetings.

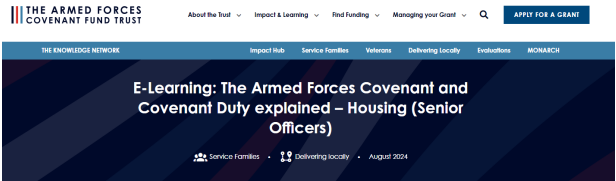
To date the Partnership has delivered an Aims and Objectives document and is developing a directory providing extensive information on support services available to military and former military personnel and families.

The Directory is a step towards the Partnership’s aim of making Lincolnshire ‘defence friendly’.

Armed Forces champions continue to be active across the Council’s workforce including within housing, revenues and benefits and cost of living enquiries should veterans present themselves.

The Armed Forces Officer has helped to keep the council’s housing teams up to date with legislation and new Government actions, notably:

- The Labour Government Homes for Heroes aim to end veteran homelessness
- Removing the former local connection need for all military in perpetuity



E-learning for Senior Housing Officers



Actions to date:

- ✓ Supported the revitalised Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant
- ✓ Supported and worked with the new shared services postholder
- ✓ Co-ordination of new e-learning module
- ✓ Helped develop an Aims and Objectives Document

Actions for 2025:

- AF Covenant re-signing and Covenant aims update
- Work with shared services postholder on charity / organisational guide for a shared website
- Work with shared services postholder to produce a Defence Transition Guide
- Work with Economic Development colleagues to include defence in February Skills Fairs

Corporate objectives:

- Sustainable South Kesteven
- Enabling Economic Opportunity

Heritage

SKDC has been successful in securing £147,550 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund - funding an 18-month ‘Soldiers from the Sky’ project. The project has also drawn £15,000 in match funding from the UKSPF.

It will illustrate the little-known backstories of airborne forces from three nations - Britain, America and Poland - in the district in the build-up D Day and Arnhem.

The bid represents a major opportunity to advocate for defence, building a visitor trail of international importance with a new website, information boards, a smartphone app and a Remembrance art project with schools for 2025.

The trail focuses on delivering economic benefits to the district, promoting visitor sites with airborne links, accommodation and rural retailers.

The Armed Forces Officer is co-ordinating the project with the support of various teams within SKDC and external Stakeholders and partners.

The 80th anniversaries of both D-Day and Arnhem have been marked with events, publicity and literature.

New collaboration with the universities of Oxford and Lincoln, plus military organisations, delivered a three-day Digging Market Garden archaeological excavation at Fulbeck Manor, a key site for British First Airborne in 1944.

Volunteers discovered WW2 memorabilia and proved the value of and interest in excavating sites with military heritage.

Actions to date:

- ✓ D-Day commemoration at RAF Saltby with visiting American military personnel
- ✓ Launch of Soldiers from the Sky project in August
- ✓ Airborne Tulip Memorials - 2,400 bulbs planted across the district
- ✓ Support for 156 Parachute Brigade Reunion RAF Saltby
- ✓ Attendance at Visitor Economy networking event promoting the airborne trail

Actions for 2025:

- VE and VJ Day commemorations
- Delivery of the Soldiers from the Sky project
- Work with tourism colleagues to support visitor sites in promotion of a new visitor trail
- Attendance at British Tourism and Travel Show - March 2025
- Celebrate flowering of Airborne Tulip Memorials



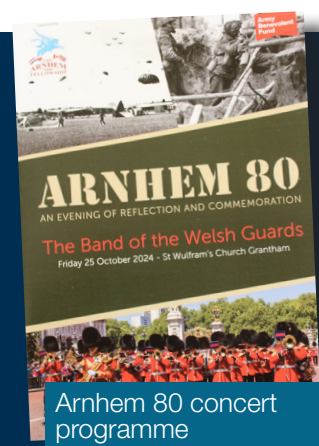
Authentic American jeeps on display at Saltby D-Day commemoration



Digging Market Garden participants celebrate event conclusion



Tulip planting at Wyndham Park with Street Scene



Arnhem 80 concert programme



Soldiers From The Sky Launch at Fulbeck Manor



Corporate objectives:

- Effective Council
- Enabling Economic opportunities

Advocacy

South Kesteven District Council was awarded Gold Award status in 2022, with renewal due in 2027, conferring 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.

It also allows SKDC to share good ideas and initiatives with neighbouring local authorities.

SKDC supported Armed Forces Week in June with a series of articles, including

a spotlight on the numerous veterans employed in the council's Street Scene and Waste and Recycling teams.

Ex-military also play key roles in our CCTV monitoring, economic development and property teams.

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



Cllr Johnson (centre) with David and Shelley Bathgate, Lt Col Duncan Lowe (standing right) and Army colleagues



Royal British Legion collection of Remembrance wreaths and crosses



The Amazing True Story of Flight Lieutenant John Henry Smythe

Actions to date:

- ✓ Partnered with Army Benevolent Fund to deliver Arnhem 80 concert
- ✓ Armed Forces Week; a programme of PR and events
- ✓ Remembrance commemorations
- ✓ Highlighted ethnically diverse troops' wartime service – Black History month

Actions for 2025:

- Jobs board for Grantham HIVE information channel, shared nationally
- Heritage Trail information boards
- Commemorative events
- Poppies on Pebbles schools Remembrance programme



Former military now serving the council

Engagement

The Armed Forces Officer continues to engage at county, regional and national levels to keep the Council abreast of best practice and new initiatives.

Monthly meetings with Army representatives at Prince William of Gloucester Barracks discuss and deliver mutually beneficial engagement events such as the Chairman's charity cheque presentation to Military versus Cancer.

Military commemorations were flagged up as potential activities for applicants to the SK Community Fund.

The Armed Forces Officer regularly supplies information on veteran and serving military updates to the Grantham

HIVE, Prince William of Gloucester Barracks information channel shared across all UK military sites.

The Amed Forces Officer organised senior military attendance from the Life Guards, Capt Reginald Wyndham's Regiment, at the 100th anniversary of Wyndham Park's naming in his honour.

The Hive information pack contains SKDC's cost of living and debt advice documents produced by the council's staff Armed Forces champions.

Council champions from housing, revenues and benefits and cost of living attended the Veterans and Families event, a valuable networking and advice forum.



Centenary naming ceremony in Wyndham Park



D-Day Darlings funded by SK Community Fund to sing at Caythorpe's 216 Parachute Signals reunion

Actions to date:

- ✓ Prince William of Gloucester monthly engagement meeting
- ✓ SKDC Chairman inspecting troops at Pass Off Parade
- ✓ Co-ordinated military presence at Wyndham Park 100 year naming centenary
- ✓ Use of poppy falls for Remembrance memorial and service

Actions for 2025:

- Engage volunteers in Soldiers from the Sky programme activities
- Develop 'Walkshops' (wellbeing talks and walks) for SKDC ex-military employees
- Explore future opportunities for community archaeology digs



Cllr Paul Fellows inspecting Reserves at Prince William of Gloucester Barracks



SKDC representation on Veterans Support Day



Veterans Support Day in October 2024

Contact Details

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

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