



# THE EDINBURGH PARTNERSHIP

## Edinburgh Community Covenant – Progress Report

### 1. Executive Summary

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The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Board on the delivery of the Armed Forces Community Covenant (AFCC) in Edinburgh since the last Report dated June 2018 and to seek the Board's approval for the planned activities for the year ahead.

### 2. Recommendations

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#### 2.1 The Board is recommended to:

- i. endorse the future planned activities to support the continued delivery of the AFCC in Edinburgh.

### 3. Main Report

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- 3.1 The Edinburgh Partnership Board signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant on 12 March 2012 along with the MOD, Veterans Scotland and the Department for Work and Pensions. These signatories represent the wide range of stakeholders that have agreed to support the aims of the Covenant. In addition, on 5 March 2019 the City of Edinburgh Council signed the Covenant in Business. The signing of both Covenants has marked a step change in how the military community within Edinburgh interacts with and participates in community life within Scotland's Capital City. Covenant Partners meet 2-3 times per year and activity is guided by a Covenant Plan. The whole Covenant structure is underpinned by strong working relationships.

#### Overview

- 3.2 With half of the reporting period spent in the shadow of COVID, the Armed Forces Covenant has rightly taken a lower profile since March 2020. There has, however, been some real progress and we have kept the network alive virtually thanks to pre-existing, strong, and positive relationships across the Partnership. Commander Edinburgh Garrison has engaged wherever the city community interfaces with Armed Forces and Veterans interests; he has attended the Edinburgh Partnership (EP) meetings, the Local Outcomes Improvement Programme (LOIP), SW Edinburgh locality partnership meetings and, until Mar 20, had started a rotation between Colinton and Firhill Community Council meetings.

## Operational Activities

- 3.3 We are proud that personnel from all three services, Regular and Reservist, have supported the Scottish Government, NHS Lothian, and the Scottish Ambulance Service in Edinburgh during the pandemic, in a wide variety of roles from mobile testing teams to ambulance drivers and vaccinators (Operation RESCRIPT) – this support continues. The Army’s support to COP 26 (Operation URRAM) was coordinated from Redford Barracks. Overseas deployments have continued throughout the pandemic, with 2 SCOTS concluding one of the last Afghan deployments in early 2021.

## Structural Change.

- 3.4 HQ 51 Infantry Brigade and HQ Scotland moved from Stirling to Edinburgh in March 2021 which, combined with that HQ’s re-rolling to focus it on the ‘Firm Base’ in Scotland, may change the way Covenant engagement is conducted in the City in future. The RN has established a new 1\* Regional Command appointment (Brigadier Andy Muddiman Royal Marines), who will act as the Navy’s interface between national and local authorities in Scotland. The ongoing ‘Integrated Review’ will sustain current troop levels in Lothian Region, but 3 RIFLES is now scheduled to be replaced in Dreghorn Barracks by 1 R IRISH from 2027. Redford Barracks remains scheduled for closure and any changes to current closure dates (2025) still have to be confirmed.

## Covenant Relationships.

- 3.5 In addition to engagement activity through community planning and partnerships and noting that detailed progress is covered elsewhere in this report, the Armed Forces’ focus in Edinburgh for the Covenant is on:
- 3.5.1 **Schools.** We are closely and routinely engaged with our Garrison Schools to ensure that the impact of service life, particularly transition to the Scottish educational system, is understood by families and can be supported appropriately by schools. We have supported these schools with access to the MOD’s Education Support Fund.
- 3.5.2 **Developing the Young Workforce.** We have been working with Developing the Young Workforce’s Schools Coordinators to deliver a range of meta-skills and STEM-based activities to the 11-16 age group in Edinburgh schools (James Gillespie; Firhill and Liberton High Schools in 2020/21) and in Edinburgh College through our Youth Development Teams.
- 3.5.3 **Education and Skills Development.** We have a close working relationship with Edinburgh Napier University. They are part of the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework project (along with Skills Development Scotland and MoD) to correspond military skills to the Scottish education system and this project is invaluable. In addition, we



are working with Edinburgh Napier University and Edinburgh College to improve the service community's access to learning: in particular, service people and their spouses need a better pathway to map their existing qualifications onto existing HE and FE courses and there has to be sufficient flexibility to accommodate service demands which make planning for a routine very difficult.

- 3.5.4 **Employers.** We have collaborated with the LP, C of EC, and Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce employer outreach activity. The focus of our employer engagement has been to persuade employers to commit to or advance their commitment to the Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme.
- 3.5.5 **Veterans.** Edinburgh's veterans' community is substantial and its character, age-range and the needs of its members is extremely diverse. Our focus is on ensuring that the transition from military to civilian life is smooth and positive, and on ensuring that Edinburgh employers and society appreciate the very real value that the vast majority of service leavers can add to the community and business here. For the vulnerable few who need support, we want to ensure that links between MOD institutions (Defence Transition Service and Vets UK Welfare Service) and the City's veterans' support networks (for example, NHS Lothian's Veterans' 1st Point (V1P) and Department for Work and Pensions) and service charities and housing associations are well developed; we are also focused, through initiatives like the successful AF Covenant e-Learning package, on ensuring that those on the 'front line' of social and healthcare support know how to connect with advice and support for vulnerable serving and ex-serving members of the AF Community and their families.
- 3.5.6 **Estate.** Some of our estate is heavily used and much valued by the local community. We have reviewed our contractor support to keep access to Covenanter's Wood in Colinton open and safe for the local community and have supported Oxfords Youth Football Team with access to Redford sports pitches when existing facilities were closed during COVID.

### **Lothian Armed Forces and Veterans Group (LAFVG).**

- 3.6 In addition to the City of Edinburgh council Covenant Partnership and the Edinburgh partnership, we wish to exploit the opportunities offered by the LAFVG as a forum for Lothian Local Authority Covenant leads, NHS Lothian, Edinburgh Napier and respective AF and veterans support institutions to identify AF/veteran community needs, to support Covenant initiatives and to share best practice. The cessation in Oct 20 of the Lothian Armed Forces and Veterans Project (LAFVP), which served as a proactive secretariat for the LAFVG, may limit ambition, but an embryonic LAFVG Covenant Video project to supplement the e-Learning package indicates that the LAFVG continues to be useful.



## **Delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant in Edinburgh**

### **3.7 Routine Business**

- 3.7.1 A minimum of 2 Edinburgh Armed Forces Group meetings per year, which have continued virtually during the last 18 months
- 3.7.2 A Covenant Action Plan to guide work in this area has been updated
- 3.7.3 Review of role and membership of EAFG has been undertaken
- 3.7.4 MOD formal participation in the Edinburgh Partnership Board continued
- 3.7.5 Active participation in the Lothian Armed Forces and Veterans Group (LAFVG)
- 3.7.6 Availability of up-to-date information targeted to the Armed Forces community on City of Edinburgh Council website with links to housing, health, education, and employment
- 3.7.7 Continued promotion and roll out of the Armed Forces Covenant e-Learning package to City of Edinburgh Council staff
- 3.7.8 Promotion of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund to partners and the local community.

3.8 Activities during Report period around the themes of Delivering the Armed Forces Covenant, Housing, Health and Social Care, Education and Training and Employment. The Board is invited to note that work to progress some of the planned activities in the last 18 months has been delayed due to Coronavirus.

### **Delivering the Armed Forces Covenant**

- 3.9 City of Edinburgh Council undertook line management of the personnel employed in the LAFVP team and management of the associated budget. The Project extended twice in the last 2 years. There is a small budget underspend and approval has been received from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to divert these funds to a project that will update the e-learning training. A significant contribution was made by the Council Officer supporting the Covenant in the evaluation of the LAFVP which was undertaken by Napier University.
- 3.10 The Council Officer participated in a focus group discussion on the Armed Forces Covenant legislation that is due to be introduced in 2022. Partners have been kept up to date and had an opportunity to comment on this
- 3.11 Significant work undertaken by the Council to support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant was recognised by the award of a Gold Employer Recognition Scheme award in 2019
- 3.12 The MOD has continued to participate in a range of Community Engagement activities across the city



## Housing

- 3.13 In 2019 a housing options brief was delivered to MOD personnel and third sector organisations that support the transition of Service personnel
- 3.14 Combined Veterans housing register with Edindex was delayed due to impact of Covid-19 pandemic. Veterans Scotland, Veterans Housing and Housing Options Scotland have been contacted to rescope project in December 2021.
- 3.15 Progress recent commitment from the Edindex board (the Council and Edinburgh-based Housing Associations) to support nominations for up to 15 new build homes per year to disabled veterans, using the “Community within a Community” model. Five new veterans’ homes at Canonmills are due to be completed in January 2022. Edinburgh’s forward programme of affordable housing was approved by Housing, Homelessness and Fair Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 in the [Strategic Housing Investment Plan \(SHIP\) 2022-27](#). The SHIP will be reviewed for future veterans housing opportunities in Jan/Feb 2022.

## Education and Training

- 3.16 We work closely with Edinburgh Napier University as they are a dedicated supporter of the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant having fulfilled their covenant pledges and continuing to build on their commitment to the armed forces community each year. Their support in the areas of research, education and public engagement is demonstrated through the many projects they are involved in internally and externally for the benefit of the armed forces community, for example;
  - 3.16.1 Research – delivering a two year Forces in Mind Trust funded project specifically looking at the transition process in Scotland with regards to housing, health and wellbeing, education and employment. They are also involved in a research project looking at the support in place for military children in Scotland.
  - 3.16.2 Education - close working with CTP to deliver educational opportunities workshops to those transitioning from service, close working with MoD to allow those in active service to undertake FE and HE opportunities and reviewing their own internal offering to be more “forces friendly”
  - 3.16.3 Public Engagement – they work closely with the PRC to promote education as a viable option, they engage with Colinton Primary School on outreach initiatives and they support a number of charities such as Rock2Recovery with their service delivery Poverty Commission and Citizens Basic Income Group – Garrison and Veterans charities included in distribution on communication

## Employment

- 3.17 Successful Business Breakfast in October 2021 targeted towards employers that have not signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant in Business



## **Health and Social Care**

3.18 LAFVP brief on the Armed Forces Covenant to clinical leads.

## **Funding Opportunities.**

3.19 Details of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund and the MOD Education Support Fund have been widely shared within the Council area. A small number of schools within the Edinburgh Council area were successful in applying for a total of £284,000 from the MOD Education Support Fund since 2018. Successful Covenant Fund projects in the Edinburgh area include:

3.19.1 Funding towards the Colinton Timeline project (installation of new ornamental, steel railings/interpretive panels)

3.19.2 A contribution to the Colinton Tunnel project

3.19.3 Firrhill High School – Study Group – with Children 1<sup>st</sup> Project Worker

3.19.4 Edinburgh & Lothian Greenspace Trust - Dreghorn Nursery Outdoor Activities

## **Future Planned Activities.**

3.20 Continued collaboration to update the e-learning which will include LAFVP evaluation feedback

3.21 Continued partnership working with the Lothian local authorities and other stakeholders through the LAFVG

3.22 Raise awareness of the Covenant in Business to the partners of the EPB and using the 'Capitalising on Military Talent' booklet to raise awareness of the employability of Armed Forces Veterans

3.23 Further Housing Options briefs

3.24 Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant legislation in 2022

## **Conclusion**

3.25 I am aware that many representatives have changed since the last report and may not appreciate why Covenant commitments are so important for helping our community overcome the disadvantages of service life. When one talks of the Covenant, there is a tendency to think immediately of veterans. Vulnerable ex-service people certainly need Edinburgh society's support, but the impact of service life on the serving community and their families must not be overlooked: our service commitments make routine and predictability difficult; we must move frequently if we are to have a meaningful family life; accessing facilities and opportunities that normal households take for granted is often difficult; the disadvantages are often obscure and all too often tolerated phlegmatically by our people. If the COVID pandemic has rightly focused our support and attention on the healthcare services, our people have also been heavily committed to sustain



and support them, in some cases deploying away from home for months at a time.

3.26 Looking to 2022 and beyond, my ask of the Edinburgh Partnership, on behalf of Edinburgh's Armed Forces and Veterans' community, is quite simple, please:

3.26.1 encourage staff on the interface of public service to develop their understanding of the service community and veterans through the Covenant e-Learning package (and, when they are available, the supporting video packages) and to ask their customers whether they or their partner is or has served in the military;

3.26.2 commit your institution to the Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme or advance it to the next level; and,

3.26.3 where we bring specific Covenant challenges to your attention, please work with us to address them.

3.27 I am enormously grateful to the Edinburgh Partnership for the goodwill and commitment its members have shown to the Covenant during this challenging reporting period.

#### 4. Contact

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