

SOUTH WEST REGION ARMED FORCES COVENANT CHAMPIONS CONFERENCE

POST CONFERENCE REPORT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank all who attended the first South West Armed Forces Covenant Champions Conference in Tidworth on Fri 30 Nov 18. It was quite something to have such an audience representing the whole spectrum of organisations with an interest in our collective delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. Also, a huge thank you to the guest Speakers for their time and contributions on their current initiatives and the resources that are available to the South West (SW) Region.

Before I summarise the result of the Conference, I would like to restate how this SW Regional Project supports each of our partner Local Authorities (LA). Although the Project is a regional effort, its objectives are framed to help the partner LAs to discharge their own Covenant responsibility. The Project seeks to help the SW LAs provide a consistently good experience for the military community. The military community spans the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, the Army, and the Royal Air Force. The Covenant's beneficiaries are Regulars, Reservists, Veterans and their immediate families.

For the Project to do this, I need to consider the following.

The Region. Responsibility for delivering the Covenant lies with each county LA, not the SW Region. The requirement that each LA has to meet in order to deliver the Covenant differs dramatically across the SW Region. The adoption of a regional identity is intended only to act as a loose umbrella for our coordinated effort; it will not change the responsibility of each LA to deliver the Covenant. This means that the county LAs must be the 'supported' element and that the SW Region must be the 'supporting' element.

Resourcing. Resource is critical to deliver the Covenant. Individual LA capacity to deliver the Covenant will vary in accordance with their need and the policy of each Leader of the LA. The Region's provision of a package of support will need to take account of the available resource of funding and/or staff in each LA.

Regional Executive. The need for, and benefit of, an Executive forum needs to be assessed and confirmed before we establish it. We will need to consider whether our desired effect can be achieved without creating some Executive structure. The benefit of shared data and best practice depends mainly on effective communication across the Region; whether this effective communication needs an Executive forum needs to be decided. A meeting of key partners will be called to consider any reservations or concerns prior to deciding whether to form an Executive forum/board, and if so, its terms of reference.

Meeting the Project's Aim and Achieving its Outcomes

The aim of the SW Regional Project is to improve delivery of the Covenant by LAs. The following explains how the proposals described in the Conference will help achieve the desired outcomes of the Project.

Aim. To ensure that reservists, veterans, and members of their immediate families who need help are known, and that public, private and non-service voluntary and community sector organisations give appropriate support. The Project has a secondary aim of identifying root causes of the need and recommending preventative measures.

Outcomes. The Project has six desired outcomes.

- **Understanding** - Enhanced local understanding of the military community and better contribution to LA Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) through better identification of those who receive additional support and what their needs are. The needs assessment comprised action set research undertaken with Shared Intelligence. The Shared Intelligence Report provides a current state for LAs to build on to develop this understanding. The Shared Intelligence Report will be issued in December 2018.
- **Awareness** – Upskilled LA front-line staff, better able to meet their military community's needs. A training and awareness could include provision of the e-Module and a face-to-face training package for LA Members, Armed Forces Covenant Champions and LA staff.

- **Network** - An accredited Forces-friendly national network of champions, supplemented by options for developing a Forces Friendly Quality Mark. A draft set of criteria has been produced with Plymouth City Council and will be further developed with the SW Regional partnership and the MOD Covenant Team.
- **Collaboration** – Engaged and committed public authorities, providers, private and third sector organisations, working collaboratively with LAs for the benefit of the SW Regional military community. The Regional Executive will consider coordination between key partners.
- **Film** – A wider understanding of healthcare staffs in NHS Foundation Trusts, Community Hospitals and General Practice Staff, including better identification and understanding of the needs of spouses of current serving, veterans and their families. A film can be widely used to complement other training.
- **Web Portal** - Consistent access, support and prevention mechanisms across the SW Region, underpinned by a SW web portal. The offer of access to the Map of Needs and the Veterans Gateway through the SW portal provides an opportunity to deliver a common resource while retaining Regional and county level control.

Conference Outputs

The aim of the Conference was to gather those leading delivery of the Covenant by LA partners and, along with military, charity and voluntary organisations, to update them on the Project and agree a way ahead.

The intent behind the five proposals at the Conference was to develop a consensus on the way ahead. To move forward, we need to gather the right organisations at the appropriate level to consider any reservations or concerns with the proposals.

The voting for each of the proposals was as follows.

a.	Adopt a regional identity - Forces Connect South West	For 70%
b.	Deliver Training	For 86%
c.	Agree in Principle to a Forces Friendly Quality Mark	For 72%
d.	Scope in principle the creation of a South West Region Covenant Executive	For 77%
e.	Implement Asking the Question	For 93%
f.	Launch Forces Connect South West	For 80%

Next Steps

I believe the next steps should be as follows.

Call a Meeting to Consider a SW Regional Executive. Agree key partners to invite and coordinate a date and location.

Draft an Agenda. Draft an agenda and invite comments. Partner organisations will be invited to volunteer to chair this initial meeting, or recommend who should do so. The meeting will consider the five proposals.

I am aware that the Conference voting cannot be binding and I recognise that the Project must accommodate each LA's requirements, resources and preferences. However, the Conference did provide some consensus that the proposals are sound in principle. However, I know that our work now is to turn principle into practice.

The SW Project's proposals, and the response of those who attended the Conference, were successful in progressing us toward a more collaborative approach to delivering the Covenant. The SW Project and the regional overview and resource which it represents looks forward to supporting LA partners in delivering the Covenant consistently well to those who serve and have served.