

This briefing is for information on the Armed Forces Covenant. Please ask the policy team if you would like more information.

WHAT IS IT? The Covenant is a framework to ensure the Armed Forces Community does not experience disadvantage as a result of their job.

WHAT POWER DOES IT HAVE? The Covenant is a guiding framework, but the Armed Forces Covenant Duty did recently introduce legal footing for some public bodies.

WHAT DOES THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT DUTY COVER? It covers housing, education and healthcare and it means due regard must be given to the Armed Forces Community.

WHAT IS "DUE REGARD"? Due Regard means that certain public bodies must be mindful of the Covenant when carrying out their duties, especially in the areas listed above.

WHAT IS A "SPECIAL PROVISION"? A special provision is an action that goes beyond simply removing disadvantages and may be justified when the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces Community are high. These are bespoke actions taken to overcome disadvantage.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ARMED FORCES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE? The Covenant is useful for the young people we help as it is about how they should be treated as children from forces families. The Covenant applies to serving and veteran families, not just the serving or ex-serving person.

BACKGROUND: The Armed Forces Covenant is between the Armed Forces Community (Serving Personnel including Reservists, Families, Veterans and the bereaved), The Government (Ministry of Defence, UK Government, Devolved Governments) and the Nation (Civil Society, private organisations, and individuals)¹. The full Covenant can be found online at [The Armed Forces Covenant \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk).

It states the whole nation has a moral obligation to the Armed Forces community and that they should face no disadvantage because of their service.² It was established in 2011.

It is a framework and does not offer specific solutions to the issues the Armed Forces Community may encounter.

It was designed to try and prevent disadvantages from serving in the Armed Forces and recognise the unique sacrifices made by those who are serving in the armed forces, their families, and veterans. The unique sacrifices include geographic mobility, danger, separation, service law and rights, unfamiliarity with civilian life, hours of work and stress. These sacrifices can be applied to the serving persons families during and after service.

The Covenant covers many areas within its scope. Areas particularly important for families are healthcare, education, housing, deployment, family life, transition, and support after service.

¹ [the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

² [The Armed Forces Covenant \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS: The Armed Forces Covenant Duty is a legal obligation on certain public bodies to pay due regard to the Covenant.³ This Duty has been introduced because of the Armed Forces Act 2021. “Due regard” has currently been untested in courts, so it is not entirely clear what the boundaries of this are. That said, in this context ‘due regard’ is generally considered to mean that these certain public bodies must consider the content of the Covenant when exercising their day-to-day duties, using this to inform their practice.

The public bodies who are included in the Duty are responsible for healthcare, housing, and education.

- **Healthcare:** In healthcare, the NHS and Ministry of Defence Medical Services are the main providers of care. Local authorities who deliver social care and other forms of care are also included. Some challenges include accessing healthcare, service family re-location, delays in receiving treatment and more. Identification of veterans is also an issue.
- **Education:** In education, the Local Authority oversees delivering education. Children of service personnel often experience an interrupted education due to re-location. This can affect children socially and create mental wellbeing issues if support is not being provided. There can also be delays to children with additional support needs receiving support. Identifying children in armed forces families is important to implementing policies to support them.
- **Housing:** In housing, local authorities are responsible for housing ex-service personnel and the MoD may house current serving personnel. The Armed Forces community may have a lack of knowledge on local housing systems, not a sufficient “local connection,” not being prioritised, requiring adaptations to housing and reluctance to engage with housing services.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS: These public bodies are meant to remove any disadvantages that arise because of service. A special provision is an action that goes beyond simply removing disadvantages and may be justified when the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces Community are high such as an injured veteran or a bereaved partner and family. These actions are bespoke to the Armed Forces community and are not offered to the general public. This is not to give the Armed Forces community special treatment, but to rather mitigate a significant disadvantage faced by the service person or their family because of their service.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ARMED FORCES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?: The Armed Forces Covenant also applies children and young people in armed forces and veteran families. Children and young people should know about the Covenant in order to understand if the public bodies they interact with are paying due regard to it.

Children and young people may experience a disadvantage due to their parent’s service due to high mobility and experiencing an interrupted education. Education and healthcare are the areas that children and young people are more likely to experience disadvantage themselves as their parent’s are more likely to handle housing. It is important that parent’s also know about the Covenant so that they can advocate for their children or alongside them.

³ [Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114143/armed-forces-covenant-duty-statutory-guidance.pdf)