



2023 Annual Report

Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent

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Introduction

As Chairman of Kent and Medway CMPB, I am really pleased and proud of all the successes that have been achieved across Kent. It has been a very eventful year with so much happening!

I would highlight the really successful 9th Annual Kent & Medway Armed Forces Covenant Conference in Gravesend with top speakers and a record attendance of 180+ representatives including the Lord-Lieutenant of Kent. This was followed by a brilliant Reserves Day at Kent County Council HQ in Maidstone supported by 3PWRR, 36RE and 579 EOD. All played a prominent role and spoke really well. But the icing on the cake was no doubt for me the Freedom Debate at Full Council followed by their Freedom March by HMS Kent in Maidstone the next day lead by the HM The King's Massed Band of the Royal Marines with 6,500 people including many school children lining the streets of Maidstone in late September. Indeed, I will never forget those two stand-out days.



Here in Kent, we are most fortunate to enjoy excellent working relationships with 36 Royal Engineers and especially its Commanding Officer - Lt Col Ryan Castro; 1 Royal School of Mechanical Engineering and Lt Col Guy Cheesman - Commanding Officer and 2 Royal Gurkha Regiment and its Commanding Officer - Lt Col Nicholas Moran and of course, Col David Kenny - Commander, HQ SE as well as with Lt Col Peter Ellis from SERFCA.

We also work closely with 3 Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and its Commanding Officer - Lt Col Nathan Horsman and with 579 Field Squadron (EOD) and Major Duncan Wood. These are excellent and fruitful partnerships which really underline the fact that Kent is very much a Military county, widely respected by the Ministry of Defence.

As Chairman of Kent County Council, I have been privileged to get out and about in the County and meet many people. One of the undoubted benefits of being Chairman is that I am automatically Chairman of Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board and I must say that it has been one of the most enjoyable parts of the role as I attend and participate in so many Military activities and am really getting to know and to understand the Military. It has made me 'armed forces aware' and given me the confidence to represent them and

their interests at the highest level of Government. I am also grateful for the trust that they have put in me and also for the advice that I receive from our officer here at County Hall.

With four months left, I continue to be filled with pride and with all that has been achieved to date including Kent CC having its Employers Recognition Gold Award recently revalidated. It is a privileged role that I have played in working closely with all our partners and now especially HMS Kent. Our partners like me stand committed to ensure that no member of the armed forces community is disadvantaged because of their service. If anything, all our partners and our Board Members are now even more aware of the ultimate sacrifice that our armed forces are prepared to pay to keep Britain and Kent in particular safe and free.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary Cal', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board



The Kent & Medway CMPB is now chaired by Cllr Gary Cooke - KCC Chairman and its new Vice-Chair is Cllr Vince Maple Leader of Medway and their Lead AFC. The

Board membership has been further strengthened by the new membership of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner; the Chief Executive of Kent Fire & Rescue; the Chief Executive of the RBLI, Richard Lavendar from the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and the Dean of Rochester Cathedral.



At the 21 February 2023 meeting, the Kent & Medway CMPB said goodbye to Cllr Lesley Game the outgoing chairman of Kent County Council. As well as Lt Col Tim Petransky - and welcomed Lt Col Nathan Horsman who took over from Lt Col Tim Petransky as new CO of 3PWRR.

The Kent & Medway CMPB continues to oversee the implementation of the Covenant and meets twice a year under the chairmanship of the KCC Chairman with the Leader and AFC of Medway Council appointed as vice-chair, supported by Task Groups covering the following themes:

- Health and wellbeing
- Children and Youth
- Employment and Skills
- Recognise and Remember
- Unit Welfare Officers - a Joint Task Group involving KCC and Medway Lead Officers

On the 21 February 2023 the Kent & Medway CMPB - endorsed Kent & Medway CMPB's Strategic Aims under four key headings:

- I. Increase visibility of the Armed Forces Community to the civilian population
- II. Continue to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant plus the new legislation.
- III. Raise awareness amongst schools of the specific needs of service children and their families.
- IV. Support and promote recruitment of volunteers, Regulars and Reservists.

9th Kent and Medway Armed Forces Covenant Conference



Our 9th Annual Armed Forces Covenant Conference was held on 6 June 2023 at Gravesham Borough Council with 180+ representatives attending. The theme was 'Joining Up' and it was opened by The Lady Colgrain - Lord-Lieutenant of Kent with keynote speakers including Cdre Rob Bellfield - Naval Commander - Eastern and London Region and Col

David Kenny (Cdr - HQ SE). The most hard-hitting speech came from a Military Spouse who gave a powerful testimony in an online video.

HMS Kent - Freedom Debate & Freedom march



On the 21 September 2023, at a Full Meeting, Kent County Council voted to grant HMS Kent (Type 23 Duke class frigate) the Freedom of Kent. The ship's Commander was also present for this historic vote.

A ceremonial march past was held in Maidstone to commemorate the historic HMS Freedom of Kent occasion on 22 September 2023 with 6,000 people including school children lining the entire route.



HM The King's Massed Band of The Royal Marines participated in the march, which also commemorated the 34th anniversary to the day of the tragic loss of 11 Royal Marines at Deal. 6,000+ people lined the streets in Maidstone, and it made Regional News with both the Commanding Officer and Kent CC Chairman being interviewed live on BBC SE TV Regional News -and Radio Kent.

MoD Employer Recognition Awards Scheme



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

GOLD AWARD 2023

Proudly supporting those who serve.

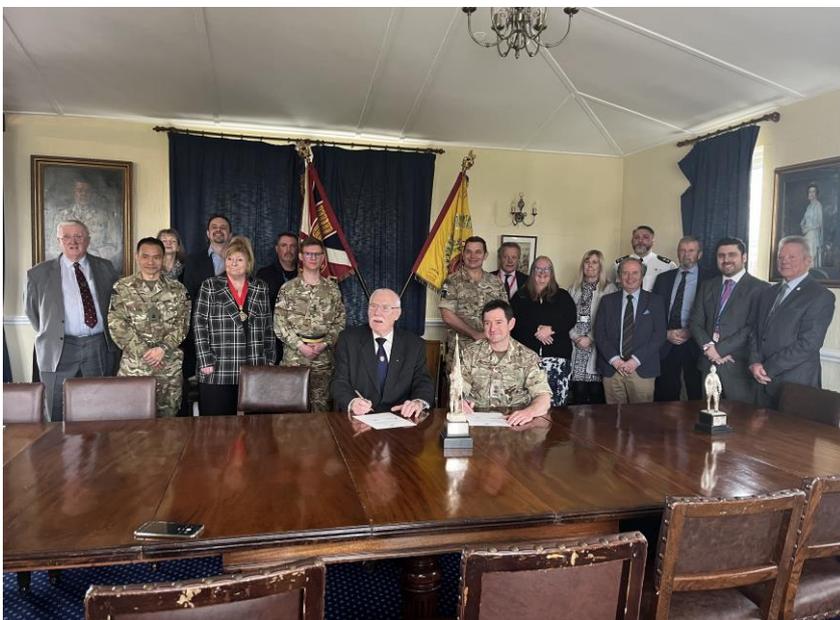
Kent and Medway are still performing outstandingly well under the scheme. On the 23 October 2023, Kent County Council received official notification that it had successfully retained its MoD Employer Recognition Scheme Gold

Award following a rigorous re-validation process. KCC has been very much at the forefront in supporting and mentoring Councils and other bodies such as Kent FRS and Kent Police wishing to apply for MoD Employers Recognition Gold Awards in 2023 as 'military friendly' employers of choice. The Kent & Medway Covenant Lead Officer is pleased to advise that both Canterbury City Council and FM Conway were awarded Gold and Thanet District Council was awarded Silver.

SILVER & GOLD ERS AWARD HOLDERS - (INCLUDING DRM)		
Organisation	Date Awarded	Award Level
Absolute Military	2022	Gold
Armoured Engineering Ltd	2023	Silver
BJF Group	2022	Silver
Canterbury City Council	2023	Gold
Challenger Troop	2018	Silver
Dover District Council	2020	Gold
EC Safety Solutions Limited	2023	Silver
FM Conway Ltd	2023	Gold
Folkestone and Hythe District Council	2021	Gold
Forces Family Finance	2020	Silver
Gravesham Borough Council	2021	Silver
Henderson Facilities Management Ltd	2023	Silver
InvictaK9	2021	Silver
Joint Security Services Ltd	2023	Gold
Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust	2023	Silver
Kent County Council	2018 & 2023	Gold
Kent Fire and Rescue Service	2020	Gold

Kent and Medway NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust	2023	Silver
Kent Police	2022	Gold
Laing O'Rourke	R2022	Gold
Lifesaver First Aid Services	2022	Silver
Medway Council	2020	Gold
Medway NHS Foundation Trust	2019	Silver
MKC Training Services Ltd	2023	Gold
MTS Cleansing Services Limited	R2022	Silver
NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board	2022	Gold
NPC Tree Surgery	2021	Silver
Pantera Group	2021	Silver
Priority Freight	2018	Silver
Royal British Legion Industries Ltd	2020	Gold
Royal Engineers Central Charitable Trust (RECCT)	2022	Gold
Saga Group Plc	2018	Silver
Securitem Consultancy Ltd	2023	Silver
Thanet District Council	2023	Silver
The Education and Skills Partnership LTD	2021	Silver
The Rift Group	2020	Gold
The Royal Engineers Association	2023	Silver
Vistry Group (formally Bovis Homes Ltd)	2019	Gold

Armed Forces Covenant signing



Following the Kent & Medway CMPB meeting on 21 February 2023, Canterbury City Council re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant at the 3rd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment Leros Barracks.

On 11 May 2023, Kent Fire & Rescue Service was proud to renew its pledge to support the government's Armed Forces Covenant. The agreement was co-signed by Lieutenant Colonel Ryan Castro - Commanding Officer of the Royal Engineers, who was joined by Major Ben McGauley (Task Force Commander) and Regimental Sergeant Major, Andrew Hurren.

As part of the Royal Engineers annual memorial service on Sunday 17 September 2023, the Armed Forces Covenant was signed by outgoing Chief Royal Engineer Lt Gen Tyrone Urch on behalf of the Tri-Services, the Bishop of Rochester - The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs and the Dean of Rochester Cathedral - The Very Revd Dr Philip Hesketh DL in the presence of Lady Colgrain at Rochester Cathedral.

The Armed Forces Act 2021 and Covenant Legislation

The Armed Forces Act 2021 and Covenant Legislation having had a smooth passage through the House of Lords resulted in new Statutory Guidelines being published. To remind Members of Kent P&R Committee - as public bodies, Local Authorities now need to show 'due regard' when considering applications from Service Personnel seeking School Admissions, Housing Accommodation and Healthcare.



KCC and Medway are well placed to handle such requests as they already do it as it is "the right thing to do" without the need for any new legislation. A view reinforced by the MoD Covenant Lead at the Kent CC Armed Forces Conference in Gravesham. The plan was to 'tighten up' the Armed Forces Covenant having had it enshrined in law - by Statutory Guidelines with Employment, Naturalisation and Social Benefits next for consideration. One recommendation already coming through is that the Armed Forces Community should also be trained along with frontline staff on what the Armed Forces Covenant does and does not do in support of them. 'Managing expectations' has become even more important with an increase in demand from regular and ex-service personnel seeking the best school or one of the best houses in their local area across Kent.

A delegation from Kent attended the National Armed Forces Covenant Conference in September 2023. The theme for the day was 'Preventing Disadvantage' affecting the Armed Forces Community. The conference brought together delegates from Central Government, Devolved Administrations, Local Government, Charities, Housing, Education and Health sectors, to discuss issues, share ideas and build partnerships. Breakout sessions discussed practical ideas to tackle disadvantage faced by the Armed Forces Community, when accessing Housing, Health and Education services.



The keynote speech was delivered by the Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families. Following a question raised by Canon Bruinvels the Armed Forces Covenant Minister agreed that 'employment' and the difficulty in finding employment for military spouses should be included moving forward.

Events

During the past 12 months, there was an excellent Freedom march in Rochester lead by Lt Col Nathan HORSMAN - CO 3PWRR and a highly successful Armed Forces Day in Chatham with similar events including AFD Flag Raisings with County Hall being one such high profile example across Kent. Finally, Kent commemorated



all those who lost their lives with both the Kent Poppy Launch event at County Hall Maidstone on 27 October 2023 and then on Armistice Day and at Remembrance Sunday services.

Brompton Barracks hosted the annual Royal Engineers Communities Games in 2023. On 21 October 2023 1RSME ran an event with Medway Council and with Challenger Troop in attendance.

Cllr Oliver Richardson and Canon Peter Bruinvels attended the very successful Kent Army Cadet Force Annual Camp on St Martin's Plain, Folkestone. Reporting back how impressed they both were by the confidence/maturity shown by so many cadets and also by the number of cadets who wanted to become Regulars. Over

500 members of Kent ACF enjoyed a wide variety of activities from fieldcraft-first aid, navigation-water sports.



On 16 August 2023 a Memorial Ceremony, to mark the 80th anniversary of the passing of the RAF Belgian WW2 pilot, the aristocrat Baron Jean de Selys Longchamps DFC, who is buried in Minster cemetery. A service was held in the cemetery with more than 130 guests including, 15 members of the de Selys family, Princess Delphine the half-sister of King Philippe of Belgium and daughter of former King Albert II. Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kent James Ryeland, members of the 609 squadron, Wings of Memory Belgium, French biographer Marc Audrit, representatives from Commonwealth

War Graves Commission, Kent County Council, Thanet District Council, Royal British Legion groups from across Thanet, ATC from Manston and 6 standard bearers. The event also included an F-16 fly past, flying low over the cemetery, was carried out by 349 Sqn, the Belgian Air Component.



A very successful Kent Reserves Day was held in September 2023 at County Hall Maidstone, with keynote addresses by The Lady Colgrain and Major Duncan Woods (2 i/c 579 Field Sqn). The day was very well supported by Reservists and CFAVs including staff members from both KCC and Medway. Thanks go to 3PWRR, 36RE and 579 Field Sqn and Lt Col Peter Ellis and the SERFCA Engagement Team.



The Lord-Lieutenant's Awards Night was held on 9 November 2023. So many awards were given both to Reservists and to Cadet Adult Volunteers who had shown many years of dedicated service supporting cadets across Kent. There are now 8 new Lord-Lieutenant cadets. The challenge remains to find another service child suitably qualified for the role.

Training



A very successful Armed Forces Awareness Training Session was held for current and newly Elected Councillor Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Lead Officers, was held at 36 RE HQ Invicta Park Barracks on 5 December 2023, with 27 attending including both the KCC Chairman and Vice Chairman along with Brigadier Andrew Word DL and chair of SERFCA Kent.

Kent CC through its Covenant Lead Officer supports all its Councils, including their Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Lead Officers which includes attending Civil-Military Partnership Panels such as Dover and Medway. Following the successful training through the Forces Connect SE undertaken in Medway, Canterbury and Dover Council last year and with the Forces Connect grant ending, the Kent CC Covenant Lead Officer is ensuring that

many more front line and contact centre staff, as well as, Adult Social Care Staff will be trained, along with middle managers and other senior staff.

Armed Forces Champions

There has been a major turnover of Armed Forces Champions following the May 2023 Local Elections.

Area	Armed Forces Champions	Contact email
Kent County Council Deputy AFC	Cllr Oliver Richardson Cllr Derek Crow-Brown	Oliver.Richardson@kent.gov.uk ; Derek.crow-brown@kent.gov.uk ;
Covenant Lead	Canon Peter Bruinvels CC	Peter.Bruinvels@kent.gov.uk ;
Officer	Tim Woolmer	Tim.Woolmer@kent.gov.uk ;
Medway Council Lead AFC	Cllr Vince Maple	vince.maple@medway.gov.uk ;
Ashford BC	Cllr Peter Feacey	Peter.feacey@ashford.gov.uk ;
Canterbury CC	Cllr Pip Hazleton	Pip.hazleton@councillor.canterbury.gov.uk
Dartford BC	Cllr Peter Whapshott	Peter.whapshott@dartford.gov.uk ;
Dover DC	Cllr Gordon Cowan	cllr-gordon.cowan@dover.gov.uk ;
Folkestone & Hythe DC	Cllr Jim Martin	Jim.martin@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk ;
Gravesham BC	Cllr Peter Scollard	Peter.scollard@gravesham.gov.uk ;
Maidstone BC	Cllr Lottie Parfitt-Reid	LottieParfittReid@maidstone.gov.uk ;
Sevenoaks DC	Cllr Larry Abraham	Cllr.abraham@sevenoaks.gov.uk ;
Swale BC	Cllr Richard Palmer	richardpalmer@swale.gov.uk ;
Thanet DC	Cllr Helen Whitehead	Cllr-helen.whitehead@thanet.gov.uk ;
Tonbridge & Malling BC (Joint AFCs)	Cllr Steve Hammond Cllr Dave Davis	Steve.hammond@tmbc.gov.uk ; Dave.davis@tmbc.gov.uk ;
Tunbridge Wells BC	Cllr Paul Roberts	paul.roberts@tunbridgewells.gov.uk ;

Armed Forces Veterans Hubs

During the past 12 months, an increasing need for new Veterans Hubs and Drop-in centres has been identified with many Ex-Service and Veterans experiencing loneliness and depression. Veterans Hubs in Kent and Medway are based in:

- Ramsgate
- Sittingbourne
- Sheerness
- Faversham
- Canterbury
- Chatham
- Gillingham
- Ashford
- Tonbridge
- Dartford
- Romney Marsh
- Folkestone Sports Centre
- Shorncliffe Barracks
- Cheriton (Nepalese Community)

The Nepalese Community Centre exclusively in Cheriton, Shorncliffe - continues to do well and is especially important because KCC played a part in supporting the local Nepalese Community taking on a lease from KCC to open and run the Community Centre, which is part of Cheriton Library. This Nepalese Community Centre is also supported by Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

Forces Connect APP



This free resource is going from strength to strength across the UK 24/7, with over 22,000 downloads and 32 Regions signed up from Cumbria to Cornwall with the Royal Navy planning to have it on their Welfare Portal and the Welsh Devolved Government taking it en bloc. The Forces Connect App was first developed in Kent!

Kent Fire and Rescue Service have installed the Forces Connect SE APP on all operational mobile phones and in the fire engines. Kent Police have also installed the Forces Connect SE APP on all Kent Police Operational mobile phones.

Census 2021: UK Armed Forces Veterans

Following the publication of the 2021 Census figures, we now know that there were 1,853,112 people in England and Wales reporting that they had previously served in the UK Armed Forces (3.8% of usual residents aged 16 years and over).

- Medway: 8529
- Thanet: 5,765
- Dover: 5,710
- Maidstone: 5,664
- Canterbury: 5,217
- Dartford: 2,328

Table 1: Residents who have previously served in the UK armed forces

	Usual residents aged 16+	Number previously served in UK armed forces	Percentage previously served in UK armed forces
2021 Census: UK Armed forces veterans			
England & Wales	48,566,373	1,853,112	3.8%
South East	7,554,580	317,082	4.2%
Kent	1,276,567	52,545	4.1%
Ashford	106,771	4,962	4.6%
Canterbury	132,774	5,217	3.9%
Dartford	90,698	2,328	2.6%
Dover	96,131	5,710	5.9%
Folkestone & Hythe	91,555	5,211	5.7%
Gravesham	84,555	2,351	2.8%
Maidstone	142,136	5,664	4.0%
Sevenoaks	96,603	3,344	3.5%
Swale	121,998	4,773	3.9%
Thanet	115,414	5,765	5.0%
Tonbridge & Malling	105,526	4,023	3.8%
Tunbridge Wells	92,403	3,194	3.5%
Medway Unitary Authority	222,757	8,529	3.8%

2021 Census - TS071 - Previously served in the UK armed forces

The Office for National Statistics (ONS), Table presented by Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

A full report is available on the Kent County Council website [2021 Census - Veterans \(kent.gov.uk\)](https://www.kent.gov.uk/2021-census-veterans)

Looking to 2024

Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board's

Strategic Aims:

Promoting, publicising and co-ordinating events that increase the visibility of the Armed Forces Community to the civilian population:

- By holding the 10th Annual Armed Forces Covenant contribute to achieving this aim on 4 June 2024 at 1RSME - Brompton Barracks, Chatham.
- By building on the granting of the Freedom of the County to HMS Kent.
- Hold twice-yearly meetings with Task Force Commanders, Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Lead Officers.
- Recognise & Remember Task Group: publicise the military events calendar (including veterans' activities) in conjunction with the Lieutenancy Officer to commemorate D-Day 80 and to celebrate Armed Forces Day 2024 and Kent Reservists Day on 10 September 2024 and well as commemorating Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday 2024 and encourage KCC Members to support all the local events.
- The Children & Youth Task Group to continue to raise awareness of military life and the impact for families amongst schools with only a few service children.

Continue to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant amongst public sector staff, and making it easier for the Armed Forces Community to access information, advice and support:

- Build on the legacy of Forces Connect SE, ensuring the work is embedded and built upon through regular in-person training and e-learning.
- Encourage the wider use of the Forces Connect App.
- Encourage Unit Welfare Officers to be more proactive in ensuring the armed forces community understand what the Covenant is (and what it is not) and how they are being supported across Kent.

Raising awareness amongst schools of the specific needs of service children and their families, including the Gurkha families:

- Children & Youth Task Group - range of actions identified.
- Consider holding a network event next Autumn for staff who teach service children.

Maintaining a focus on how the most vulnerable within the Armed Forces Community can be supported to access what they need to thrive in their future civilian life:

- Improve identification of those veterans who have greatest needs, via networking across public services and the voluntary sector and improving signposting to support vulnerable people post Covid-19 lock-down which continues to provide a strong platform upon which to build.
- Increase signposting and support for financial and debt management services - and again, Kent Together and Refer Kent provides a basis for this.

Maintaining a strong focus on Recruitment, Staffing and Training on ex-service personnel:

- Support and promote the benefits of recruiting of Armed Forces Reservists and Military Spouses.
- Continue to monitor Kent CCs HR Policy to ensure that KCC remains 'Military friendly' and does now offer Guaranteed Interviews to appropriately qualified ex-service personnel and Veterans, as well as offering mentoring.
- Ensure that KCC continues to offer Armed Forces Awareness Training, especially to Adult Social Care Staff.
- Consider conducting another Councillor and Staff Survey at KCC in late 2024/25 on whether they served and any links with the Armed Forces.
- Build on the successful Revalidation of KCC's Employers Recognition Gold Award which was received in October 2023.
- Develop a proposal for a Kent-wide campaign to encourage more Adult Volunteers for the Cadets, and case workers for the military charities (including targeting retired veterans).
- The Employment & Skills Task Group to take a lead in promoting the benefits of employing Reservists to the Private Sector and Cadets as Apprentices in conjunction with SERFCA.
- Plan and promote Kent Reservists Day 2024.
- Make the most of the benefits of being an Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award holder by sending KCC staff on the Sandhurst / Longmoor Leadership Challenge training and developing the feedback groups to be part of KCC Civil-Military Peer Support Panel.
- Work closely with local partners and the Military to ensure bids for Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund remain of the highest quality, maximising income into the County.

End