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| Meeting: | Grampian NHS Board |
| Meeting date: | Thursday 7 December 2023 |
| Item Number: | 13 |
| Title: | Armed Forces Covenant Duty |
| Responsible Executive/Non-Executive: | Tom Power, Director of People and Culture |
| Report Author: | Alasdair Pattinson. Armed Forces & Veterans Champion |

1 Purpose and recommendations

This is presented to the Board for:

- **Assurance** – to note the information provided in this paper and Appendix and confirm that it provides assurance that NHS Grampian has appropriate actions in place to show due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- **Agreement on future reporting** – agree that future reports will be made to the Staff Governance Committee, with the frequency to be agreed with the Committee and that the Equalities Impact Assessment of the action plan and updates on the equalities issues will be reported to the Population Health Committee when it is completed.

This report relates to a:

- Government policy/directive
- Legal requirement

This aligns to the following NHS Scotland quality ambition(s):

- Person Centred

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

The new Armed Forces Covenant Duty, introduced on 22 November 2022, places a legal responsibility on certain organisations to pay ‘due regard’ to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

‘Due regard’ means that in line with the Duty, organisations will need to consciously consider the unique responsibilities and sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces.

It also aims to negate the potential disadvantages faced by the Armed Forces community when looking to access local services.

The Board is being asked to consider the scope of the Duty as well as its 'due regard' towards the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

In response to the Ministry of Defence Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty an action plan has been developed which sets out an assessment of ongoing and planned Board level activity for assurance.

2.2 Background

2.2.1. The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation that the Armed Forces Community should be treated fairly and face no disadvantage when accessing public and commercial services, with special provision made in appropriate cases for those who have sacrificed the most. The Covenant was established in its current form in 2011 and since then, thousands of different organisations – including businesses, local authorities, universities, and charities – have chosen to sign a pledge to honour the Covenant and support their Armed Forces Community. As a result of this, there have been many examples around the UK of good practice to remove, mitigate, or prevent incidents of disadvantage from occurring.

2.2.2 The Armed Forces Covenant Duty

The Armed Forces Act 2021 amended the Armed Forces Act 2006 to create the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, a legal obligation on specified bodies in all four home nations of the UK. The specified bodies that are subject to the Covenant Duty are bodies responsible for providing local services in the areas of healthcare, education and housing, such as local authorities, governing bodies of schools, and NHS bodies.

The Covenant Duty is designed to raise awareness of the principles of the Covenant, the reasons for it, and in turn improve decision-making in respect of the Armed Forces Community. It requires that decisions about the development and delivery of specific services are made with conscious thought to the needs of those members of the Armed Forces Community within scope.

2.2.3 Due regard

The Duty is about informed decision-making and means that specified bodies should think about and place an appropriate amount of weight on the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when they consider all the factors relevant to how they carry out relevant functions. It is not prescriptive about the actions specified bodies should take in order to comply with their legal obligations, and it does not mandate specific public service delivery outcomes.

2.3 Assessment

2.3.1 Governance

This is a relatively new obligation for public sector organisations and the operational governance and reporting arrangements are still being finalised as the Action Plan is developed. The Executive Lead is the Director of People and Culture and future assurance reporting to the Board will be to the Staff Governance Committee, with the frequency to be agreed by the Committee.

2.3.2 Action Plan

The Duty is not prescriptive about the actions bodies should take in order to promote awareness of the Duty and the issues faced by the Armed Forces Community and there are examples the type of actions that the public bodies might wish to consider adopting. These are based on existing good practice of those bodies already working to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant.

An action plan has been developed in response to the Ministry of Defence Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty which sets out an assessment of ongoing and planned Board level activity for assurance and scrutiny.

In NHS Grampian many of the recognised best practice actions have already been achieved and further actions are in the planning stage. These are described in Table 1 in **Appendix 1**.

Table 2, in **Appendix 1**, describes some specific areas of focus for 2023/24 to further demonstrate our commitment to our Armed Forces Community.

2.3.3 Quality/ Patient Care

Reservists, veterans, and Service families normally receive healthcare via the NHS, while veterans also have access to some dedicated and bespoke support services. People in the Armed Forces Community mostly have similar levels of health to the general population, though some veterans have particular healthcare needs arising from Service.

A range of behaviours and actions proposed within the Duty can result in a better healthcare experience for our Armed Forces Community.

2.3.4 Workforce

Healthcare professionals might not fully understand the health conditions that can arise from Service, or they might not have experience of treating them. Healthcare

professionals might also be unaware of the services provided for the Armed Forces Community by the NHS, local authorities and third sector. These issues can result in members of the Armed Forces Community not being able to access healthcare, or the right kind of healthcare. Ensuring healthcare staff have an awareness of the healthcare services available, and that they and their establishments signpost the Armed Forces Community to these services, can lead to improved health outcomes.

2.3.5 Financial

All associated activity is incorporated into existing revenue budgets. No additional funding is available.

2.3.6 Risk Assessment/Management

An assessment of resources required to meet the legal duty will be completed in 2023/24.

2.3.7 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

Fulfilling our obligations as per the Armed Forces Covenant Duty means we are tackling the disadvantages that lead to inequalities amongst the Armed Forces Community.

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as referenced in the action plan and it is proposed that this be reported to the Population Health Committee when completed.

2.3.8 Route to the Meeting

This is the first report on this subject. Future assurance reporting will be to the Staff Governance Committee and the Population Health Committee in respect of the equalities issues on a cycle to be agreed with each committee.

2.4 Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- **Assurance** – to note the information provided in this paper and Appendix and confirm that it provides assurance that NHS Grampian has appropriate actions in place to show due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- **Agreement on future reporting** – agree that future reports will be made to the Staff Governance Committee, with the frequency to be agreed with the Committee and that the Equalities Impact Assessment of the action plan and update assurance reports on the equalities issues will be reported to the Population Health Committee when it is completed.

3 Appendix/List of appendices

The following appendix is included with this report:

Appendix 1 – How bodies can raise awareness of Armed Forces issues

- Table 1: NHS Grampian Best Practice Action Plan
- Table 2. NHS Grampian areas of specific focus for 2023/24

APPENDIX 1- How bodies can raise awareness of Armed Forces issues

Table 1. NHS Grampian Best Practice Action Plan

| Theme | Best Practice Action | NHS Grampian Current Status | 2023/24 Planned Actions |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| Appointing Individuals | <p>Appointing a dedicated officer, staff group, or other lead person, who can advise on and co-ordinate Armed Forces issues across the whole organisation.</p> <p>Promoting a single point of contact within the organisation that members of the Armed Forces Community can contact if they require assistance or advice.</p> | NHS Grampian Armed Forces & Veterans Champion (AFVC) in place. | Development of an Armed Forces Ambassador Group |
| Communication & Engagement | <p>Organising and/or attending regular meetings with Armed Forces representatives, charities, public sector representatives, the local Armed Forces presence, Armed Forces Covenant networks, and/or organisation champion(s).</p> <p>Establishing and/or attending local partnership boards to collaborate with other similar organisations, sharing best practice and information.</p> <p>Providing a web page or material with key information and links for</p> | <p>AFVC attends and participates in regular meetings with Moray and Aberdeenshire Armed Forces and Veterans Groups. Armed Forces, Charity and public sector AFVC representation is in place.</p> <p>AFVC attend monthly meeting of the NHS Scotland NHS Boards AFVC Network where best practice updates are shared, issues of mutual interest, challenges, and policy priorities are cascaded.</p> <p>Our Armed Forces Covenant pledge, Employer Recognition</p> | <p>Continuously update information for public and staff in relation to Armed Forces matters.</p> <p>Introduce regular updates on activities relating to the Armed Forces Covenant Duty to the NHS Board and other relevant committees.</p> <p>Establish clear lines of support in relation to the research agenda.</p> <p>Support the roll-out of Armed Forces training materials to frontline staff - e-learning modules on the covenant duty;</p> |

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| | <p>members of the Armed Forces Community</p> <p>A clear statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the organisation in terms of support.</p> <p>A mechanism for reporting actions and achievements.</p> <p>A mechanism for prompting further research.</p> <p>Training frontline staff.</p> | <p>Scheme status, contact information for the AFVC, and links to relevant information is available on our internet and intranet pages.</p> <p>AVFC engages with and attends multiple awareness raising events; Engagement event with RAF Lossiemouth and Senior MOD Leadership regarding Childcare challenges in Moray Regional Covenant Duty webinars NHS and the Armed Forces Conference Informing Scotland – National Gathering RAF Lossiemouth Employer Visit Aberdeenshire Veterans Group Moray Armed Forces Covenant Group Engagement event at Kinloss Barracks 39 Engineers Regiment Lossie Fest – annual friends and family day Armed Forces Day – marked alongside Moray Council CEO, AFVC, Cllr representatives, and Warrant Officers from RAF Lossiemouth and Kinloss Barracks. Meeting with Scottish Government Armed Forces Commissioner and Moray Council AFVC</p> | <p>General Practice Armed Forces Recognition Scheme.</p> <p>Await Joint Group guidance for secondary care and support once published.</p> <p>Proactive reporting/recording of AFVC activity to be published on website.</p> |
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| | | Army Engagement Event - Aberdeen | |
| Collaboration | <p>Sharing awareness, data and good practice on the Armed Forces Community within the organisation and other similar organisations.</p> <p>Requesting more information from organisations who have dealt with the Armed Forces Community before.</p> | <p>In 2023, NHSG AFVC supported Moray Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise in an exercise to establish the economic impact of the defence presence in health and care settings in Moray by developing an Armed Forces survey for Moray based employees.</p> <p>Active collaboration with local authorities to understand the healthcare needs of the local/regional Armed Forces Community is ongoing.</p> <p>Support provided to NHS Highland after closure of medical centre services at Fort George Barracks. Promoting/Marketing visit to RAF Waddington for prospective relocation of service personnel and families to RAF Lossiemouth. Established links with Chambers of Commerce – opportunities for Armed Forces advocacy with local businesses and partners. Supporting Forces charities promotion in our hospital settings. Supporting x2 RAF Lossiemouth partner/spouses with employment opportunities working with RAF</p> | <p>Expand Defence Presence survey across NHS Grampian.</p> <p>Strengthen links with Chambers of Commerce – opportunities for Armed Forces advocacy with local businesses and partners.</p> |

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| | | <p>Communications and Engagement Officer (Registered Nurse & Dispensing Optician)</p> <p>Attended Veterans Over 50 event at Aberdeen Jobcentre with DWS</p> | |
| Research | <p>Understanding the make-up of the Armed Forces Community in the local area.</p> <p>Identifying gaps in knowledge.</p> <p>Consulting online information and tools, such as the Veterans' Gateway or the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's Knowledge Network.</p> <p>Conducting a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on the needs of the local Armed Forces Community and, where possible, anticipate the needs of those moving into the local area.</p> <p>Collecting and analysing data on the local Armed Forces Community, including by asking service users about their Armed Forces status.</p> <p>Engaging regularly with service end-users who are members of the Armed Forces Community.</p> | <p>As above.</p> <p>AFVC has issued Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans Health Joint Group best practice guidelines on the Identification of Veterans in Primary Care to all practices.</p> <p>Anticipated outcomes are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of consistent coding • Encourage veterans to declare their veteran status • Ensure that veteran status is highlighted on any onward referrals • Strengthen links with third sector veteran organisations <p>Engagement with service end-users is currently achieved through reactive case management activity.</p> | <p>Establish clear lines of support in relation to the research agenda.</p> <p>Review and analyse data captured in General Practice and outcome status further to the issued best practice guidelines.</p> <p>Explore options for a service-users forum to capture lived-experiences of the Armed Forces Community accessing healthcare across the region.</p> |

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| <p>Vision</p> | <p>Having an action plan that is regularly monitored and reviewed.</p> <p>Conducting regular policy reviews</p> | <p>Action Plan now in place.</p> | <p>Action Plan progress to be monitored by NHS Board Use Covenant Legal Duty Toolkit to help determine when scenarios should be covered by the Legal Duty.</p> <p>Consider the introduction of an additional step in our policy review processes to determine if the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are being considered and met e.g. in both the development and implementation of guidelines and policies</p> |
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Table 2. NHS Grampian areas of specific focus for 2023/24

| Theme | Action | NHS Grampian Current Status | 2023/24 Planned Actions |
|------------|--|---|--|
| Values | Pledge, demonstrate and advocate support to defence and the Armed Forces Community as an employer organisation via the Employer Recognition Scheme | <p>Silver Award Status achieved</p> <p>Signed the Armed Forces Covenant</p> <p>Existing relationship with Regional Employer Engagement Director (REED)</p> <p>Demonstrates forces-friendly credentials in recruitment and selection processes. Engaged with Career Transition Partnership (CTP) in the recruitment of service leavers and have registered for the Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) portal</p> <p>Positive policies towards defence issues. E.g. internally publicised and positive human resources policy on Reserves</p> <p>the employer has demonstrated support to mobilisations and has a framework in place that provides at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid, to the Reservist employee the employer must not have been the subject of any negative public relations or media activity</p> | <p>Going for Gold Status</p> <p>The employer must be an exemplar within their market sector, advocating support to defence people issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers with tangible positive results. E.g. demonstrate proactive steps/activity and clear success in encouraging partner organisations and their supply chain to engage with and sign the AFC, or mentor others in progressing through the ERS.</p> <p>Work is ongoing with our nominated REED and partners to identify actions that can support this.</p> <p>Gold Award Nomination process is open January 9 - 13 March 2024.</p> |
| Employment | Support the aims and objectives of the Supporting Armed Forces Employment (SAFE) programme - | AFVC has engaged with programme director. | Ambassadorial activities to include volunteering for one (or more) of the following: promotional case studies, |

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| | <p>recruiting from the Armed Forces Community.</p> <p>Support the aims and objectives of the Armed Forces Ambassador Programme.</p> | <p>A meeting is being arranged with DP&C, Workforce Planning Lead, Training and Development and Recruitment team.</p> <p>Employees from an Armed Forces background (service leavers, veterans, reservists, spouses/partners and dependants) are being identified.</p> <p>NHS Grampian has engaged with Civvy Street and Pathfinder which are military resettlement/ recruitment agencies to promote employment opportunities to the Armed Forces Community.</p> | <p>photographs and short videos, attending awareness sessions and workshops or Armed Forces job fairs, acting as a contact person for their profession for occasional enquiries from prospective applicants from the Armed Forces Community.</p> |
| Veterans Mental Health | <p>Implementations of the Veterans Mental Health & Wellbeing Action Plan - published in December 2021 detailed three distinct principles in the delivery of a national approach to veteran mental health support:</p> <p>1 Veterans will have equal access to mental health and wellbeing services, regardless of where they</p> <p>2 Veterans should be able to access the right help at the right time.</p> <p>3 NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Local Authorities and the Third Sector should be appropriately supported to meet the needs of veterans and develop and deliver Veteran</p> | <p>Meeting with Lead of Implementation Team and NHS Grampian Mental Health leadership in March 2023.</p> <p>Ongoing discussions via NHS Scotland AFVC Network.</p> <p>Implementation Plan is currently in draft, pending approval from Board and ministers.</p> | <p>Continue to engage with the work of the Implementation Team and Mental Health teams to understand pathway and resource implications for NHS Grampian.</p> |

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| | Mental Health and Wellbeing services. | | |
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