



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Military Liaison
Annual Report**

2013 – 2014

Foreword

2013-14 has been another positive year of engagement with the military in Oxfordshire. Building on the good work of previous years, following the signing of the Community Covenant in 2011, the council has maintained its strong and positive links with the military at a time when they are experiencing significant change, including the rebasing of units.

The foundations that are in place through the Civilian Military Partnership and its sub groups ensure that there are clear lines of communication and processes to ensure coordination which means that issues are dealt with effectively and efficiently. This has led to the many successes which we are proud to detail in this report.

County Councillors play a key role in engaging and maintaining good relations with the six military bases across the county. The positive feedback we have about their work shows that this role is highly valued by the military. I would like to thank members for their continued support and enthusiasm for this role. For some councillors this is a new area of work that they have embraced wholeheartedly, and it is clear that the military welcome the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences.

Military personnel in Oxfordshire have worked with us on a wide variety of work, including community engagement, education provision, health and wellbeing and infrastructure developments. Without them many of the achievements documented in this report would not have been realised.

We would like to thank the military, in particular, for their assistance at difficult times such as during the flooding in February 2014 when reserve forces were deployed, keeping the roads open, and the county moving.

I would also like to extend my thanks to all the staff who have worked so hard to support the partnership, and in particular to Sarah Jelley from the Chief Executive's Office who acts as our main link and to Jackie Wilderspin from Public Health who has done sterling work in relation to the health needs of service families.

This annual report provides a good opportunity to look back at what has been achieved and to set the direction for the forthcoming year. We are determined to ensure that the good work documented here can continue for years to come.

Joanna Simons
Chief Executive

Introduction

Oxfordshire has a large military presence with more than 10,000 military personnel (October 2013)¹ and almost 5,000 family members living and working in the county.

They are stationed at:

- 1) Bicester Garrison
- 2) RAF Brize Norton
- 3) Abingdon Station
- 4) Shrivenham Station
- 5) Vauxhall Barracks
- 6) RAF Benson



Oxfordshire County Council has a history of support and collaboration with the Armed Forces and since 2011 has been working under the Community Covenant framework to ensure integration between the armed forces community and the local civilian community, providing the necessary services to both.

The military is an important strategic partner for the council, and plays a full part in our Oxfordshire Partnership - which also includes the district and city councils, and organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors - to discuss and act on issues that are important to the people who live in, work in and visit Oxfordshire.

The military community is significant in Oxfordshire: Brize Norton is the largest RAF base in the country; we have a significant army presence; and RAF Benson also hosts navy personnel, meaning we have representatives from across the tri-services. We are aware of the importance of these communities to the success of the county, and have worked hard to understand the challenges faced by them and their families. We are determined to ensure our services meet their needs so that they feel supported and can contribute to a thriving Oxfordshire.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/location-of-all-uk-regular-service-and-civilian-personnel-quarterly-statistics-index>

Oxfordshire Community Covenant

In June 2011 Oxfordshire was the first authority in the country to launch its commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant. The Covenant aims to encourage charities, local authorities, businesses, communities and individuals to work together with the military to offer support that is appropriate to service personnel, service families and children, reservists and veterans in their area. It also offers a more general aspiration of providing mutual support for the two communities and aiding integration.

In the early days of the covenant an action plan was created to ensure the right outcomes were being met. Many of these have now subsequently become 'business as usual' and the question has arisen as to where next? The mechanisms Oxfordshire has in place are in line with national recommendations and we have featured regularly as a 'best practice' authority at conferences and in publications.

Oxfordshire remains committed to the Community Covenant, promoting the aims of the covenant and disseminating best practice, this work is supported by an officer from the Chief Executive's Office.

Armed Forces Champions

The council's Armed Forces Champion is Councillor Ian Hudspeth, the Leader of the Council. In addition, six elected members were appointed as Armed Forces Champions to link with each of the six military bases. These Champions are a vital link between the council and bases and the feedback we have had from the military on their work has been extremely positive. The six Armed Forces Champions are:

Bicester Garrison –	Cllr Tim Hallchurch
RAF Brize Norton –	Cllr Pete Handley
Abingdon Station –	Cllr Sandy Lovatt
Shrivenham –	Cllr Yvonne Constance
Vauxhall Barracks –	Cllr Patrick Greene
RAF Benson –	Cllr Lynda Atkins

Armed Forces champions contribute to maintaining community cohesion between the bases and the local communities. Many of the Champions have used their Councillor Community Budgets to fund projects integrating the two communities. The two case studies below are from a number of projects that have been supported by Councillors:

The Vauxhall Army Barracks in Didcot is the home of the 11EOD RLC Regiment and their families. There is no primary school in the barracks and the Army personnel children attend the nearby Manor Primary School and Lydalls Nursery School. In order to get there they have to cross Foxhall Road (B4493). The installation of a Wig Wag pedestrian crossing at this location has greatly improved the safety for attending school and community events.

In January 2013 the Abingdon Sea Cadets were informed their safety boat was unfit for purpose. The boat is essential to the Sea Cadets as without appropriate safety cover much of the waterborne training (sailing, rowing and power-boating) would not be able to take place. Through fundraising the group were able to purchase a new boat and a contribution from the local councillor has been put towards the new engine.

Civilian Military Partnership

In order to provide a strategic oversight over countywide work with the military, a Civilian Military Partnership meets twice yearly. Representatives include senior members of the County Council Management Team and the Armed Forces. The Partnership provides direction, monitors progress and develops an effective dialogue at the most senior level between the military and council. In addition to this there are sub groups for Health & Wellbeing and Education.

The partnership has been instrumental in changing the schools admission process, allowing for in-year transfers, making life easier for military families coming into the county. The Service Pupil Premium is being used in the schools to better integrate service children into existing year groups. This is particularly important for raising the achievement levels amongst service children. The relevant schools now have close working relationships with the bases and a named contact in most cases.

In the past, Carterton Community College has experienced problems with vacant pupil places. To address the issue a task group was established in April 2013 and working with the school improvement service, military and the school, they bid for MOD funding to cover the resulting funding gap. It has recently been announced that the bid was successful.

Health and Wellbeing Sub Group

The Armed Forces Health and Wellbeing Board was established to address the health needs of the armed forces community. The aim of the group is to promote information sharing and facilitate working relationships between the NHS, Public Health, and medical and welfare services on the Army and Royal Air Force bases in Oxfordshire.

The group have run several campaigns including smoking cessation and alcohol awareness, with positive results. For example, smoking cessation appears to be better than the national trend, with 80% continuation reported at 12 weeks in some bases.

The 2013 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identified the health and wellbeing needs of the military personnel and their families as an area of need, the group are using this evidence to influence NHS commissioners to ensure that military personnel are not disadvantaged when health services are designed and delivered.

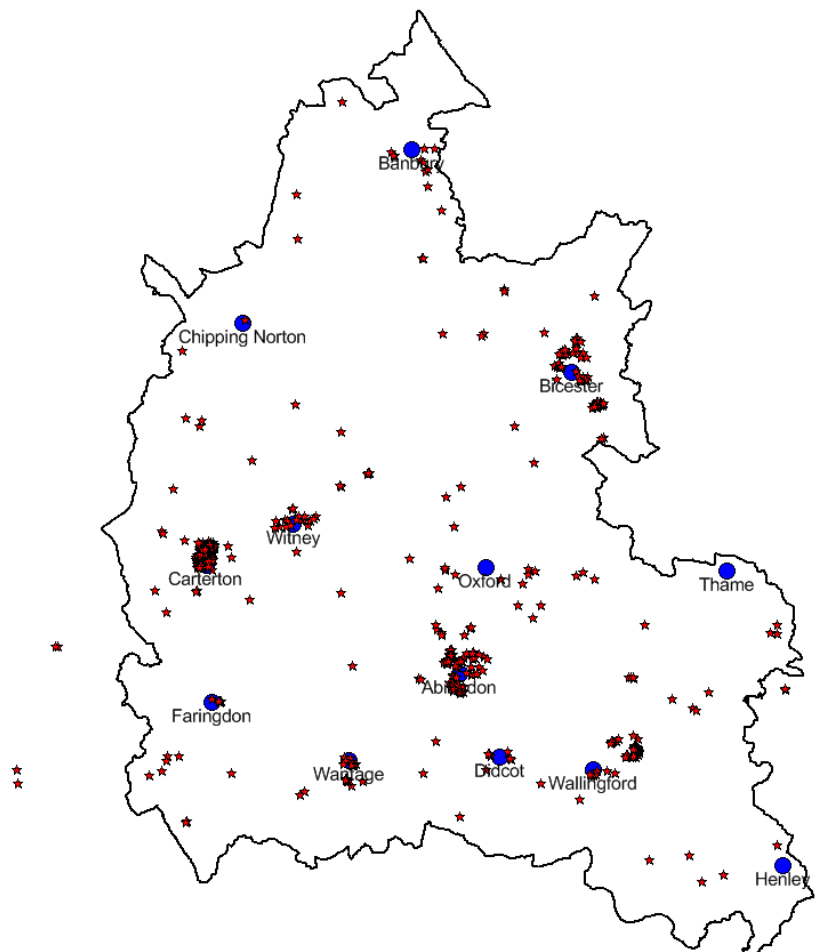
The Health and Wellbeing group is also working in collaboration with Oxfordshire Mind on 'Looking after Ourselves', a project to improve the mental health, well-being

and social integration of spouses and partners of service personnel. The project is being set up in 5 locations and aims to work with 75 people. It is being funded through the Armed Forces Covenant (LIBOR) Fund, a fund established from the fines levied on banks.

Education Sub Group

The DfE School Census (2013) for schools in Oxfordshire showed that there were 2,470 children in the county whose parents or carers are registered as currently in the armed forces. The map below shows the location of the children in grant maintained schools. This figure represents 2.8% of the statutory school age population in the county.

Location of known Service Children in Oxfordshire Maintained Schools (Academies no longer identify service children)



Attainment for service children in the county is marginally below the Oxfordshire and national averages. In May 2011 Ofsted produced a report on the needs of service children with a number of recommendations directed at schools. The report identified the distinct needs of service children can be better understood through prompt assessment and improving transfers of children and records between schools. The report also recommended that local authorities re-evaluate their admissions

processes to ensure they take appropriate account of requests from Service families for school places.

Oxfordshire become the first local authority to change their admissions policy making it easier for Service families' children to secure school places by using base addresses prior to postings.

The education sub group formed in 2014, following the Army's rebasing plans announcement, and will continue its work looking at the implications of the rebasing as long as is needed. The group includes representatives from Oxfordshire County Council, the military and schools, and also invites specialists as required.

Military Fund

In 2013/14 the council allocated a budget of £100,000 to support the Armed Forces Community in Oxfordshire. The Civilian Military Partnership agreed the projects below:

Abingdon Station	Bespoke Climbing Wall
Bicester Garrison	Refurbishment of Sports Facilities
RAF Benson	Refurbishment of two welfare facilities
RAF Brize Norton	BFBS radio station
Shrivenham Defence Academy	Refurbishment of two welfare houses Watchfield School – Funding for pupils with English as an Additional Language Shrivenham School – ICT to support children who are in transit Faringdon School – ICT for Saturday School
Oxford University Training Corps Cadets	Sports facilities and equipment Sports and camping equipment

These are a few examples of the positive responses from bases after the project evaluation:

Abingdon Station

The climbing wall facility in Abingdon Station consists of a bespoke multi-wall construction based on climbing and abseiling towers with access points, waiting and instructor areas and designed for operation by youth organisations with their own qualified supervisors within the community (eg the Scouts) as well as providing more challenging routes of 6-9 metres in height for more advanced climbers amongst some 1500 military personnel based in Abingdon.

Bicester Garrison

St Georges Barracks is an isolated location with approx 300 single soldiers living permanently and up to 3000 per annum staying for in excess of a 6 week timeframe. There is a lack of facilities to keep the soldiers busy and

active during downtime. Previously unusable, squash courts, tennis courts and changing rooms have been refurbished . Large numbers of soldiers now utilise this facility on a daily basis.

RAF Brize Norton

It is somewhat of a coup for RAF Brize Norton to have a BFBS radio station partially funded by this allocation. The remaining 6 stations in the UK are all located at Army Units. We are therefore the only RAF Station to have such a facility. Being the largest Station in the RAF and commensurately having the largest community (approximately 6000 personnel on Station and 1100 families living in the region) to be able to communicate what is going on at Brize and within the Oxfordshire community is a real asset.

Community Covenant Grant Scheme

The Community Covenant Grant Scheme was launched by the MOD in 2011 to support the core aims of the Community Covenant. It is a £30m fund available over four years for community projects seeking to achieve integration between civilian and military communities. The county council are represented at the local grant panel and on a rotation for the regional panel.

Oxfordshire has been successful in securing significant additional funding to the county in the past, and this year is no exception. Nine projects have been approved totalling £350k.

Folly Park View	£8,250	Information packs for families and community events
Carterton Community Cricket Partnership	£33,750	Construction of two lane outdoor cricket facilities creating improved integration
Services Employment and Enterprise Network CIC	£68,208	Sustainable employment for spouses and partners of Armed Forces personnel
Soldiers of Oxford, Conflict and County (SOFO)	£120,000	Furnish permanent galleries and associated programme of activities
Oxford United Youth and Community Sports Partnership	£10,000	Two one week long Holiday Football Courses and four Integration Days bring together military children and local children
South Central Ambulance Service	£39,886.13	Four-Wheel Drive Rapid Response Vehicle to provide lifesaving medical cover with quick response times during inclement weather
Chilton D-Day Commemoration & Village Festival	£4,885	The focus of the 2014 Festival is to commemorate the 70 th Anniversary of the D-Day landings
Shrivenham School	£27,500	Construction of an all-weather flood lit multi-use gaming area for use by the school and local community

Larkmead School	£37,500	Provision of a multi-use games area for use by the school and the local community
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Many of the projects that have been awarded funding this year are still in progress so the case study below highlights the successful outcomes from a previous funding round.

Air Play

Air Play was awarded £130,000 as part of a wider project to deliver a play park promoting integration between civilian and military families in Carterton. The selected site sits between RAF Brize Norton and a residential area of Carterton. The design was specifically chosen to reflect the proximity to and close links with the RAF. Both military and civilian children from the local youth club were involved in the design to give a sense of ownership.



Artists Impression



Official Opening

'Airplay really is a Big Society project, making a strong contribution to building a better, healthier society in Oxfordshire and elsewhere - and crucially relieving pressure on RAF mums and dads, at home and on the front line.'
Paul Hughesdon, Director of Welfare and Policy at the RAF Benevolent Fund

'The new Airplay Park is a great achievement. It shows that the RAF isn't just about people who work there but about the families, including non-forces families. It's great that this new park will benefit the whole community. If I was to describe Airplay in three words they would have to be: enjoyable, memorable and amazing.' Patrick Button, 16 (service child)

Events

Armed Forces Day 2013

The County Council are pleased to support Armed Forces Day and 2013 was no different. The change of venue to the Castle Complex proved popular, allowing for more military personnel and better public access. The event was organised by the County Council's Chairman's Office, with the flag raising followed by the Chairman's reception in County Hall.



Transition Events

23 Pioneer Regiment based in Bicester saw many military personnel facing redundancy at the start of 2013. Through engagement with the Business and Skills team at the county council a series of events were jointly planned with Bicester Garrison to prepare personnel for moving into civilian life:

- Pre-redundancy development weeks – these included CV building as well as coaching and briefings, including job searching, employment advice, housing advice, independent financial advice, education and resettlement support, and budgeting.
- Employer events – targeted employers were invited to an informal networking session to meet those service personnel being made redundant to discuss careers and opportunities in their organisation.
- 23 Pioneers: Families Day July 2013 – approximately 50 service personnel and family members attended the day which covered employment advice, housing advice, independent financial advice, education and resettlement support, school transfer information and budgeting.

'To have had so many briefings, mock interviews, a CV all in the bag before the announcement has given many the opportunity to move forward into civilian life with confidence. It is, I believe, the primary factor in our relatively high app:non-app ratio. At the last count 250 of my soldiers have benefitted' Lt Col David Clouston

Repatriations

Repatriations of military personnel have been coming through RAF Brize Norton since September 2011, this year there have been seven personnel repatriated.

Oxfordshire County Council works very closely with the MoD, personnel at RAF Brize Norton, West Oxfordshire District Council, Thames Valley Police, Carterton Town Council and Brize Norton Parish Council to manage repatriations when they occur.

A memorial garden was created at Norton Way in 2011 to act as a focal point for the public to pay their respects once the cortege had left the base. This was funded jointly by Oxfordshire County Council and West Oxfordshire District Council

Highways staff ensure that necessary road arrangements occur smoothly and attend all repatriations. The coroner's service is a key part of the post-mortem process with deceased military personnel being transported to the John Radcliffe Hospital.

The Council's customer services team formally notifies local people via the council's website when repatriation is due and liaises closely with the MoD on detail.

The Chairman and leader of the county council attend repatriations when possible, as do local county councillors.

Plans for 2014/15

The council already have plans in place for 2014/15 including some focussed work on reservists around Reserves in the Future Force: 2020 white paper working with the military to increase the number of reservists. Reinforcing our support to reservists will see increased activity as an employer of reservists and encouraging others to reap the benefits of employing reservists.

Several events are being planned including Armed Forces Day 2014, Freedom of the County for 4624 Squadron from Brize Norton and a launch of the Corporate Covenant in September 2014. The Corporate Covenant is an opportunity to demonstrate community leadership, bringing together public sector and businesses to show their support to the military in Oxfordshire.

Conclusion

The council has faced a number of challenges this year, not least of which was passing a difficult budget in the face of dramatically reduced funding from central government. Despite these challenges the county council has continued its commitment to the Armed Forces in Oxfordshire and the Community Covenant whilst maintaining its national profile as a 'best practice' authority.

With over 10,000 serving personnel in the county it is vital to maintain links with the bases ensuring the provision of services to serving personnel and families. Many of the successes are based on shared strategic needs between the council and the MOD. Oxfordshire has been hugely successful in securing funding under the community covenant grant scheme to deliver local projects aiming to improve integration.

The county council are pleased to support the Armed Forces in Oxfordshire and recognises the value and diversity that they bring to Oxfordshire and at a local level to the communities where they are based.