

CABINET
21 January 2025

Affiliation between Oxfordshire and HMS Diamond

Report by Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) **Agree to forming an affiliation between Oxfordshire and His Majesty's Ship (HMS) 'Diamond'**

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council has been approached by the Royal Navy to propose an affiliation between Oxfordshire and His Majesty's Ship (HMS) Diamond. The proposed affiliation aims to strengthen the bond and support between the Royal Navy and the local community in Oxfordshire by raising awareness of the Royal Navy and specifically of HMS Diamond. Affiliations with ships can take many forms, but all aim to provide mutual benefit. If the affiliation is pursued, a Memorandum of Understanding will be developed to outline the affiliation's intentions and commitments. Oxfordshire has a large armed forces community, and the council has a strong reputation for supporting the military and veteran communities in Oxfordshire. Therefore, it is recommended to build on this reputation by demonstrating our support for the military beyond Oxfordshire's borders through the affiliation with HMS Diamond.

Background

3. In 2024, Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Lord Lieutenancy were approached by the Naval Regional Commander for London and Eastern England, with a proposition to affiliate the county of Oxfordshire with HMS Diamond. The aim of an affiliation would be to strengthen the bond and support between the Royal Navy and the local community in Oxfordshire by raising awareness of the Royal Navy and specifically of the ship.
4. HMS Diamond is one of the Royal Navy's Type 45 destroyers, boasting a displacement of 8,000 tons and a crew of 240 sailors, including a Royal Marines boarding team. The ship's motto, "*Honor Clarissima Gemma*," translates to "Honour is the Brightest Jewel." Beyond her primary role in air defence, HMS Diamond is versatile, capable of performing a wide range of duties, from counter-narcotics operations to providing humanitarian aid. Her most recent operations involved protecting merchant shipping lanes in the Red Sea.

Affiliation

5. Oxfordshire has a sizeable armed forces community and the council has strong reputation for its commitment to the armed forces covenant. As an inland county, the council mostly engages with the RAF and the British Army, as well as local reservists and cadets, with little engagement with the Royal Navy due to Oxfordshire's geography. However, there are a number of local and historical links between Oxfordshire and the Royal Navy. An affiliation with HMS Diamond is an excellent opportunity for the council to engage with and demonstrate support for the Navy.
6. Many Royal Navy ships have affiliations as part of a long-standing tradition that binds their crews to the land via a network of relationships across the United Kingdom. The range of organisations and establishments that are invited to become part of a ship's extended family can encompass cities, hospital trusts, cadet units, army regiments and air force squadrons, as well as venerable city institutions – and in this case, counties. The benefits of affiliation are mutual. An affiliation gives the ship and the ship's company a link to the organisation or place. The affiliation will demonstrate the council's unwavering support to the armed forces, and specifically the Royal Navy from an inland locality.
7. There are examples of existing affiliations between places and ships. HMS Diamond has an existing affiliation with Coventry, Essex recently affiliated with HMS Venturer, and the town of Wantage has an affiliation with HMS Queen Elizabeth. The affiliation between Oxfordshire and HMS Diamond could take various forms, fostering a strong connection between the Royal Navy and the local community.
8. Examples of how the proposed affiliation could manifest include:
 - (a) **Celebrations and Parades:** Organizing events to bring communities together and celebrate the affiliation.
 - (b) **Naming:** Naming buildings, rooms, or assets after affiliated partners.
 - (c) **Granting Freedoms:** Granting HMS Diamond the 'Freedom of Oxfordshire' under s249 Local Government Act 1972.
 - (d) **Visits:** Facilitating visits between affiliated parties to strengthen ties.
 - (e) **Symbolic Gestures:** such as donating items for display or commemoration, such as Coventry's donation of a cross of nails to HMS Diamond.
 - (f) **Services:** Providing services, like Jaguar Land Rover's contribution of leather upholstery and a table for HMS Diamond.
 - (g) **Youth Engagement:** Supporting local cadets (including Oxfordshire's sea cadets in Abingdon, Banbury and Oxford) and engagement with young people.
 - (h) **Careers and Recruitment:** Supporting careers and recruitment outreach and engagement.
 - (i) **Public Display:** Displaying the affiliation publicly, such as visual representations of the ship in public buildings.

- (j) **Communications:** Raising awareness of the affiliation and related activities.

Memorandum of Understanding

- 9. If the council agrees to pursue the affiliation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be developed to outline the affiliation's intentions and details, to be mutually agreed by Oxfordshire County Council and the Royal Navy.
- 10. The MoU's purpose will be to outline the purpose of the affiliation and specifically, the role of Oxfordshire County Council in facilitating the affiliation and relationship with HMS Diamond. It will also outline the process to end the affiliation.
- 11. The MoU will not be a legal agreement, but is intended to serve as a point of reference to the mutual support, understanding and engagement offered by each party.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

- 12. An affiliation with HMS Diamond will demonstrate the council's support and commitment to the wider military community and is an opportunity to work in partnership for the benefit of Oxfordshire beyond the county's borders.
- 13. The affiliation would support the council's ninth strategic priority as an example of partnership working for social benefit: Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.
- 14. It is also anticipated that the affiliation will create engagement and career / skills development opportunities for young people and other groups in Oxfordshire, supporting the council's commitments to young people and future generations.

Financial Implications

- 15. The affiliation itself has no direct budget implications, however events and activities arising from the affiliation may require resource beyond existing capacity and budget. Any costs arising from affiliation-related activities that cannot be met through existing budgets will be subject to senior oversight and existing approval processes. As of October 2024, the ship has entered a period of refit for two years and any major events to commemorate the affiliation would likely not take place until the ship is back in service, in 2026

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

16. The proposed affiliation and Memorandum of Understanding are not legal agreements and are not expected to create any legal liabilities for the council.

Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance
Anita.bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

17. Managing the affiliation and ongoing relationship with HMS Diamond will be delivered within existing resource and capacity, therefore no staffing implications are anticipated with the affiliation.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

18. The affiliation is expected to have a positive impact on our armed forces and veteran communities by demonstrating our support and appreciation for those who serve in the military. There are no negative equalities implications anticipated from the affiliation.

Sustainability Implications

19. There are no sustainability implications arising out of this report.

Risk Management

20. There is the potential for reputational risk among the armed forces communities if an affiliation is not pursued.
21. There are potential risks around public perception of the affiliation, which may be exacerbated by the ship's future deployment and operations in relation to geopolitical issues. However, as the ship is in refit until autumn 2026, this is not an immediate risk. Any public communications around the affiliation will be considered with sensitivity, and any risks will be managed through the council's relationship with HMS Diamond.

Lorna Baxter
Executive Director of Resources and s151 Officer (Deputy Chief Executive)

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Tannah Collier, Policy Officer, 07872805604,
tannah.collier@oxfordshire.gov.uk

January 2025