

CABINET

**COUNCILLOR SOPHIE PORTER
DEPUTY LEADER AND HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES & ACTIVE LIVES
PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

21 APRIL 2025

REPORT NO. ED2605

KEY DECISION: YES

ARMED FORCES DAY NATIONAL EVENT 2026 - UPDATE

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report updates Cabinet on progress with planning for the Armed Forces Day National Event 2026 and sets out the revised budget position required to ensure the event is delivered safely and successfully.

Rushmoor Borough Council, working in partnership with the Ministry of Defence and local stakeholders, has secured the opportunity to host this prestigious national occasion, bringing significant economic, social and community benefits to the borough.

Cabinet considered a report (No. PG2541: *Proposal to Accept a Government Grant*) in November 2025 and accepted the opportunity to host the event. It agreed to underwrite the cost and approved proposals for seeking sponsorship to cover the costs of running the event.

As planning has progressed, a clearer understanding has been reached on the scale, security and specialist infrastructure required to deliver an event of national significance to the expected standard. This has resulted in an updated budget that more accurately reflects the operational, safety and logistical demands involved.

Considerable commercial sponsorship and in-kind support have already been secured, with further opportunities being actively pursued. However, at the time of writing, there is a funding gap between current income and expenditure.

Cabinet is recommended to:

- Note the current financial position and agree to underwrite the current budget gap of £243,250 to be funded from any remaining balances in the events budget, community recovery fund and the stability and resilience reserve.
- Approves the proposals for seeking additional commercial income to cover the remaining costs and close the budget gap.
- Cabinet will be informed of the projected net cost as the project progresses and a formal request for any additional funding will be made before it is committed, including how this will be funded.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Following a successful bid, Rushmoor Borough Council was selected to host the Armed Forces Day National Event, working in close partnership with the Ministry of Defence, Army Headquarters South East, Aldershot Garrison as well as public-sector and community stakeholders.
- 1.2. Delivering the event is a significant undertaking. It is larger and more complex than any event currently organised by the Council. It requires additional resources, specialist expertise, and strong collaboration with local, regional and national partners to ensure a safe and successful event.
- 1.3. As preparations have progressed, a clearer and more detailed understanding has been reached of the requirements necessary to deliver a safe, well-managed and high-quality national event. This has been shaped by the Event Director with the support of events management specialists.
- 1.4. The report therefore seeks Cabinet's approval of the financial approach and next steps to enable continued planning and delivery.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The offer to host the Armed Forces Day National Event in June 2026 was set out in Cabinet Report No. PG2541 *Proposal to Accept a Government Grant* in November 2025. Cabinet accepted the opportunity to host the event, agreed to underwrite the cost and approved proposals for seeking sponsorship to cover the costs of running the event.

3. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

General

- 3.1. The event programme includes a weekend of activity as well as events and activities leading up to the event. The main events will be hosted on Queens Parade and along Queens Avenue in Aldershot.
- 3.2. The opportunity to host the 2026 event represents a unique and high-profile opportunity for Rushmoor. It is likely to attract tens of thousands of visitors across the weekend and attract considerable media coverage raising the profile of the borough.
- 3.3. The programme is intended to deliver on the submitted proposal as agreed by the MOD. This includes a high-quality, inclusive programme of activity that celebrates the Armed Forces community, supports national and local partners, and meets the expectations of a nationally designated Armed Forces Day event, while also reflecting Rushmoor's unique military heritage and community links.
- 3.4. As well as supporting key council priorities, the event is likely to generate economic benefits from the visitors attracted to the borough and boost the local economy both in the short term (during the event) but also in the

medium-long term for visitors encouraged to visit the borough by increasing its profile.

Resource and expertise

- 3.5. Given the scale, profile and multi-faceted nature of the event, external project management and support has been secured. This includes an Event Director, with experience in running previous Armed Forces Day events and other military themed activities. Support has also been secured from an event management company – Richmond Event Management Ltd – with experience of delivering events at scale, again including previous Armed Forces Day events.

Budget forecasts

- 3.6. In hosting the event the aim is to deliver a cost neutral show, with the resource needed to run the event secured from grants and commercial sponsorship. To guide the process, a package of sponsorship opportunities has been developed. This sets out a range of opportunities for businesses to support the event ranging from 'Platinum' (£100,000) to 'Bronze' (£20,000).
- 3.7. Using this framework, considerable commercial sponsorship has been secured to date with Platinum support from Farnborough-based QinetiQ and local business BAE as well as significant contributions from other local businesses. Current income is set out in Annex 1.
- 3.8. The council is very grateful to those businesses that have so far agreed to directly support the event.
- 3.9. As planning has progressed and the scale, security requirements, and logistical needs of the Armed Forces Day National Event have become clearer, the projected budget has been revised. See Annex 1.
- 3.10. The updated estimate reflects the infrastructure and safety measures required to deliver an event of this national significance to the expected standard. The revised budget includes assumptions on the following:
 - 3.10.1. Event management: external expertise
 - 3.10.2. Infrastructure: fencing, barriers, utilities, toilets and other costs
 - 3.10.3. Security: staff and CCTV
 - 3.10.4. Traffic: traffic management, signage and parking
 - 3.10.5. Venue: includes venue hire costs which could be mitigated
 - 3.10.6. Comms and PR: a range of activities
 - 3.10.7. Stage and AV: includes lighting and site PA system
 - 3.10.8. Ticketing: includes staff at key entrances
 - 3.10.9. Sunday Entertainment: includes some confirmed items (some costs included in stage and AV).
- 3.11. Several of these costs clearly relate to the considerable security and logistical costs associated with running a national event.

- 3.12. Some items need to be interrogated further and could change in response to event safety requirements. This includes the costs of policing the event. This will be confirmed in liaison with the Police and other agencies.
- 3.13. There is likely to be support provided in kind which might reduce some of the event costs including venue costs. There is considerable support in kind being provided by Army Headquarters South East and Aldershot Garrison.
- 3.14. There is currently a gap between income and expenditure. A range of approaches are being actively pursued to secure further commercial sponsorship and reduce the residual funding gap:
 - 3.14.1. Ongoing targeted approaches to businesses, building on existing Council, partner and stakeholder relationships.
 - 3.14.2. Working with the Ministry of Defence's Defence Relationship Management team to engage key national businesses with an interest in supporting Armed Forces Day events.
 - 3.14.3. Working in partnership with SSAFA (charity partner for the event) to access and engage their established corporate partner network.
- 3.15. Income will also be secured by charging traders at the event.
- 3.16. Managing expenditure to ensure value for money: The project team will apply strong financial controls, use competitive procurement where appropriate, and regularly monitor spend against budget. Costs will be challenged to ensure they are necessary, proportionate and represent best value, with opportunities for in-kind support and shared resources actively pursued.
- 3.17. The National Armed Forces Day Member Working Group, meeting monthly between now and June 2026, will monitor the budget and budget variances.

Alternative options

- 3.18. **Withdrawing from holding the event:** This option was discussed and discounted by the National Armed Forces Day Member Working Group, which noted the considerable reputational risk associated with withdrawal, given that Cabinet has already accepted the opportunity to host the event.
- 3.19. **Scale back the event:** The programme and scale of the event only includes activities identified in the approved bid, with the exception of the proposed 'Schools Day' on Friday 26 June. This element of the event has a relatively marginal cost.

Consultation

- 3.20. The budget has been developed in consultation with external support from event management specialists.

4. IMPLICATIONS (of proposed course of action)

Risks

- 4.1. Delivering a national-scale event presents a number of risks, primarily associated with security, finance, operational delivery and reputation. These risks increase in complexity due to the size of the event, expected visitor numbers and the involvement of national partners, including the Ministry of Defence.
- 4.2. Recent world events in the Middle East have highlighted the potential for military assets to become unavailable at short notice due to operational requirements. This risk will be mitigated through the use of non-operational assets and the involvement of personnel who are not in active service e.g. cadets.
- 4.3. There is a financial risk that costs may increase further or that anticipated commercial sponsorship and income levels are not fully realised. This risk is being mitigated by financial controls, active sponsorship engagement, and regular budget monitoring through the project governance structure. Any material budget variances will be reported and addressed in advance of commitments being made.
- 4.4. The National Armed Forces Day Member Working Group will monitor the project risk register including financial risks.

Legal Implications

- 4.5. There are no specific legal implications arising from the content of this report.

Financial and Resource Implications:

- 4.6. The current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by Council on 26 February 2026 did not include any provision for the costs of the Armed Forces Day event. The current MTFS projections are that there are insufficient funds to support the Council over the coming four-year period. Therefore, if additional funds from the Council are required to support this event, the Council will be worsening the overall financial projections.
- 4.7. Additional savings will need to be sought to mitigate the impact of the Council financially supporting this event.

Equalities Impact Implications

- 4.8. An Equalities Impact Assessment screener completed for Report No. PG2541 found mostly positive impacts, with any negative impacts to be mitigated by designing the event to be inclusive and accessible for all, engaging all sections of the community and celebrating the diversity of Rushmoor's communities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1. Hosting the Armed Forces Day National Event 2026 presents a significant opportunity for Rushmoor to celebrate its proud military history, showcase its communities, and attract national attention. It is also a significant undertaking for a small borough and needs to be resourced appropriately.
- 5.2. External expertise has determined the resources needed to deliver a safe and successful event. Whilst considerable external funding has been received there is currently a gap between the income and expenditure.

LIST OF APPENDICES/ANNEXES:

Annex 1: Budget summary income and expenditure

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

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ANNEX 1

Budget summary- Forecast income and expenditure (As at 7 April 2026)

Income forecast (07/04/2026)	
QinetiQ Platinum Sponsorship	£100,000
BAE Platinum Sponsorship	£100,000
Farnborough Airport Silver Sponsorship	£40,000
Aspire/KBR Gold Sponsorship	£60,000
SiXworks Bronze Sponsorship (to be invoiced)	£20,000
MOD Grant	£50,000
Arts Council (Direct Award) Grant (TBC)*	£50,000
Trader Income (estimate)	£25,000
	£445,000

*Arts Council Grant (£100,000) for legacy projects not included.

Expenditure forecast (07/04/2026)	
Event Management	£71,450
Infrastructure	£216,000
Security	£87,500
Traffic	£90,000
Venue	£27,500
Comms & PR	£4,000
Stage & AV	£140,000
Ticketing	£40,000
Sunday Entertainment	£1,800
	£678,250