

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

3 MAY 2018

REPORT OF THE ARMED FORCES AND VETERANS' CHAMPIONS

As part of its responsibilities under the Armed Forces Community Covenant, an annual report to Council is required to update members on some of the positive work that has been carried out to support the Armed Forces and their families in the County.

Northumberland County Council (NCC) is regarded as one of the most forward leaning authorities in providing support to serving personnel, reservists, cadets, adult Instructors and their families. We received the MOD Employers Recognition Silver Award in 2015 and have just been nominated for the Gold Award.

Our extremely active Armed Forces Forum has gone from strength to strength over the years. It acts as a mechanism to review the actions taken by the Council and partners to implement the Covenant objectives and provide an opportunity to share best practice. NCC also provides the administrative support for the joint North East Armed Forces Forum on behalf of the 12 North East local authorities. Both forum groups have dedicated remits and wide membership including all services, charities, business links, career transition partnership and many more..

Our frontline services regularly revise their policies and activities to ensure those objectives are met as far as possible. Examples include:

- An inclusive HR Policy offering Reservists and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and Instructors up to 2 weeks additional paid holiday for training.
- A recent survey of all staff has been undertaken to ascertain numbers of employees with a link to the Armed Forces Family.
- A screensaver across all of the Organisation's computers and devices advocates the council's support for Reservists, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and commitment to supporting the Armed Forces Family.
- Anne-Marie Trevelyan (MP) has attended meetings of the NE Armed Forces Forum in her capacity as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Ministers in the Ministry of Defence.
- Our job vacancies carry the Armed Forces Covenant logo and guaranteed interviews are offered to service leavers subject to meeting relevant criteria. Our vacancies are promoted through Careers Transition Partnership.
- We work closely with Town and Parish Councils to promote and

- organise events to promote the Armed Forces.
- A Commemoration Group ensures that significant anniversaries during the WW1 Centenary period, are appropriately marked within the community such as Armed Forces Day, Commemoration of the Somme, RAF 100, Fusiliers' 50 Anniversary, etc
- The Commemoration Group has overseen the placing of VC Paving Stones to mark the birthplace of WW1 VC recipients. Two more are planned this year.
- The Armed Forces Champion attended the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme on the 1st July 2016 by the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and laid a wreath on behalf of the people of Northumberland. He also laid a wreath at the Menin Gate, Ypres 20 October 2017 and will return 20 June 2018 with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.
- NCC is actively involved in the Freedom Parades and ceremonies arranged to support the AF Community. On 22 July, RAF Boulmer will exercise their Freedom and march through Alnwick to mark RAF100.
- Councillors are regular visitors to RAF Boulmer to see the valuable work they do within the community.
- A proposed renewal of the Housing Policy will increase priority for service families.
- Armed Forces covenant bids have allowed Albemarle Barracks and NCC's Children's Centres West to offer weekly 'Learning Together Through Play' sessions, a Mini Mess and other family learning activities.
- NCC currently delivers a bespoke service to support military families who are living at Albemarle Barracks, delivered by the Council's Sure Start Service. The programme now offers achievable, recognised and 'in demand' skills such as numeracy and literacy, paediatric first aid and food hygiene and ensures the service families have the chance to integrate with their civilian communities at an early stage in their children's educational journey.
- The Council's contract for the substance misuse service and the Suicide Prevention Plan identifies the armed forces veterans and their carers as a vulnerable group.
- The Council disregards for benefit assessment purposes, the income received by War Widows and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments.
- Council Tax relief is paid by the MOD to service men who are abroad on operational tours
- The inclusion Manager (Leisure Services) is carrying out work with veterans to offer a pathway to enable them to integrate with their community through sport and exercise.

However by far, the biggest achievement this year has been the appointment of two Outreach Workers, Jonny Harrison in September, and Paul Havelock in February. Following a joint bid, Northumberland and Durham were each awarded £260,000 Covenant Grant support to expand the extremely successful Gateshead and Tyneside Outreach Service into our areas. Each

worker provides a single point of contact for queries / requests to access services from the Armed Forces Community. As part of the service, links will also continue between the Outreach Workers and the Personnel Recovery Centre at Catterick Garrison with a view to effectively supporting those medically discharged from the armed forces and returning to Northumberland.

Since their appointment the Outreach service has dealt with 72 cases, with 19 ongoing and new referrals received every week. Of particular note, they have raised over £7,500 from service charities to help pay for white & brown goods, clear rent arrears (which have prevented eviction), helped 6 homeless veterans find secure accommodation and also provided two mobility scooters with the assistance from The Royal British Legion. They are establishing a monthly Breakfast Club for veterans commencing June 2018.

We are confident that Northumberland and the North East are providing every support possible to our Armed Forces personnel, reservists, cadets, and their families and will continue to do so..

DAVE LEDGER
ARMED FORCES CHAMPION

GORDON CASTLE
VETERAN'S CHAMPION