



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL ARMED FORCES WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of the virtual Armed Forces Working Group held on Thursday, 30 September 2021 at 9.30 am.

County Borough Councillors - Armed Forces Working Group Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Webber (Chair)

Councillor S Bradwick Councillor G Caple
Councillor M Tegg

Officers in attendance

Mr C Davies, Armed Forces Covenant Lead
Mr J Ireland, Armed Forces Liaison Officer
Mr P Cushion, Head of Employee Relations

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all Members and Officers to the meeting and noted that an apology for absence had been received from County Borough Councillor J. Harries.

The Chair informed Members of a change in the role of Armed Forces Covenant Lead introducing Mr Chris Davies to Committee and thanking him for his support and enthusiasm so far. The Chair also thanks the previous Lead Ms Melanie Warburton for her contribution and dedication to the role.

2 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Armed Forces Working Group held on 18th October 2019.

3 Update from the Armed Forces Liaison Officer

With the aid of a Power Point presentation, the Armed Forces Liaison Officer provided Members with an update on the Veterans Advice Service. He provided background information into the purpose of the Veterans Advice Service detailing it's aim to treat veterans fairly, raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant, provide support and advice for veterans in Rhondda Cynon Taf and work towards the Council maintaining the Gold employer recognition award. He informed Members that as part of the work to contribute to raising awareness all new staff to the Council receive Armed Forces Covenant awareness training which to date has been completed by over 600 staff and there are also public covenant awareness sessions available.

He continued to outline the key support that is essential to enabling the service to provide assistance to veterans and noted the support from Cabinet Members is vital and unique to Rhondda Cynon Taf and he thanked Members for this. Another area of support covered was raising awareness. The Officer praised the good relationship held with the Council's Press team as a key support in the aim of raising awareness of the service and noted the recent national press

coverage which had also had a positive effect. Details were also provided of the newsletter that is produced to raise awareness of the service. He also referenced the support from Customer Care and the use of the CRM system to record and monitor data as a key tool when compiling funding bid applications.

The Officer also outlined the details of the Veterans Groups supported by the service informing Members of the recently formed Taf Ely Veterans Group and the success this had seen so far with numbers attending. Details were also provided of recent projects undertaken by the service including the provision of laptops to aid running the groups and the procurement of 80 tablets following a successful Covenant grant bid with the aim of tackling isolation amongst veterans. Members were informed the tablets, part of the 'Veterans Connected' project would be available to hire free of charge.

Members were also informed of recent events that had taken place including a scaled back ceremony to mark Armed Forces Day 2021 including flag raising and a family Forces Fitness day. Also, Merchant Navy Day was marked on 3rd September 2021 which was the first time the flag had been raised for this occasion. The Officer acknowledged the key contribution and sacrifice members of the Merchant Navy had made and informed Members of the intention to continue marking this day going forward.

The Officer also shared with Members the current data held showing that 88% of those who have engaged with the service to date are male with the majority in the age rang 61-70 (80%). He acknowledged that this is an area he is keen to work on engaging with younger veterans. Members also received examples of recent feedback from veterans engaged with the service highlighting the benefits they felt from having a point of contact and place of support.

Lastly, Members were taken through what the next steps are for the service including details of upcoming events including a cinema evening on 5th November and working towards retaining the Gold Employer recognition award. He concluded by sharing the upcoming plan to circulate an Armed Forces survey to help build a database of veterans and capture views to enable the service to provide the support and referrals where necessary.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the comprehensive presentation and thanked him for his work, adding that the feedback received was a testament to the hard work and support provided. It was noted that the newsletter that is produced should be circulated to Members. Members of the Committee praised the work being carried out in supporting veterans in Rhondda Cynon Taf with one Member querying the link between leaving the Armed Forces and being signposted to services such as Veterans Advice. The Armed Forces Liaison Officer outlined the complexities of obtaining such data directly from the Ministry of Defence but confirmed that this is an area of focus and a further aim of the upcoming survey to enable to service to capture relevant data and aim to engage with veterans before crisis point.

Members of the Committee shared personal experiences of friends and family members leaving the Armed Forces and the Chair concluded by emphasising the importance of having community-based services in order to engage at an early stage with veterans requiring support.

The Armed Forces Covenant Lead presented Members with a draft report titled 'Improving the Council's recruitment process for the Armed Forces community.' He advised Members of the report being presented to Cabinet on the 4th October in respect of options that could improve the Council's recruitment process, so as to make it easier for the Armed Forces Community and veterans to overcome barriers to civilian employment. The main proposal outlined in the report is for the introduction of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Armed Forces service leavers, reservists and veterans if they meet the vacancy essential criteria.

Members were advised the scheme would benefit veterans and armed forces leavers by helping them overcome the barriers to employment post service and helping to reduce the potential health and wellbeing impacts of long-term unemployment. Additionally, the Council would benefit from a wider selection of candidates who meet the essential criteria and who may have a large number of transferrable skills.

The Head Of Employee Relations continued to present the report, advising Members of the details of the scheme. He informed Members that a robust impact assessment had been undertaken as it was acknowledged that at present a large number of the group this scheme would apply to would be white males. Members were advised this had been taken into consideration and felt that due to the Ministry of Defences enhanced campaigns to recruit a diverse group of people that the scheme would not adversely impact any group long term.

Members were invited to provide their comments on the proposed scheme. All Members were greatly enthusiastic at the proposal noting that it would be a great tool in providing confidence to veterans to apply for jobs with the Council. Members acknowledged the wide range of transferable skills held by veterans and noted that these would only serve to benefit the Council. It was also noted that by introducing such a scheme it could influence other local employers to also follow the Council's lead.

One Member queried whether the scheme would be applicable to education and School Governor roles. The Head Of Employee Relations informed Members that whilst Schools have their own discretion over recruitment policies, if agreed by Cabinet, the Council would certainly ensure to make schools aware of its recommendation and details of the policy.

The Armed Forces Working Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the report provided in appendix A and provide comment as appropriate on the intended scheme.
2. To provide Members feedback for presentation to the Cabinet prior to their consideration of the item.

5 **Let's Talk Armed Forces**

The Armed Forces Covenant Lead provided Members with a demonstration of a new engagement tool currently utilised by the Council to consult with residents and the wider public on a range of issues. He shared the details of a project targeted at the Armed Forces community titled 'Let's Talk Armed Forces'. [Let's Talk Armed Forces | Let's Talk RCTCBC](#)

Members were shown the site and informed of the range of engagement tools available to add to the site to provide an engaging and interactive page including videos, surveys, quick polls and stories. He informed Members the aim of the page is to build a database and provide key data required to enable the service to expand on the support it currently provides. Members were shown a video of a current attendee at one Veterans Group outlining their experience of engaging with the service and the benefits they feel they have gained as a result.

Members were positive about the site and the opportunities to engage with the wider armed forces community. Members felt the page was a key tool to raise awareness of the service.

The Chair concluded by thanking the Officer for the demonstration and welcoming Members to provide feedback during the course of the engagement project.

This meeting closed at 10.30 am

**Cllr M Webber
Chair.**