



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23

CABINET

22ND JUNE 2022

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS – CHRISTIAN HANAGAN IN DISCUSSION WITH THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR MAUREEN WEBBER

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the Council's ongoing support for our Armed Forces and Veteran community and outlines how the Council can increase the commitment to those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, through additional investment in the Armed Forces, including War Memorials.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the wide-ranging support that the Council is currently providing to support our Armed Forces and veterans.
- 2.2 Agree that the Council continues with its commitment to the Armed Forces, through a further £100k programme of investment over the next 5 years.
- 2.3 Agree that the recently appointed Heritage and Ancient Monuments Officer will develop a programme of investment and improvement to War Memorials, as well as providing a key point of contact for the community.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 We owe our Armed Forces community an enormous gratitude for the sacrifices that are and have been made. Under the Armed Forces Covenant Rhondda Cynon

Taf Council pledges to support those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces and their families, and that they should be treated with fairness and respect in the community, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

- 3.2 A continued commitment and investment will allow the Council to further support the Armed Forces community in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has invested significantly to increase the level of support provided to our veterans and was proud to be one of the first Local Authorities in Wales to establish an Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between the civilian community of Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Armed Forces community based in the County Borough. The pledge recognises the dual respect between the Council, its partner agencies, its communities, our Armed Forces personnel (serving and retired) and their families.
- 4.2 In 2019 the Council launched the Veteran's Advice service, which provides free, impartial, dedicated information, advice and support to members of the Armed Forces community within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The service covers a range of areas, including benefits, adult social care, finances, employment, and housing. The service has helped over 600 Veterans and family members in Rhondda Cynon Taf to date.
- 4.3 The Council are also proud to hold the Gold Employer recognition award and have employed a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (AFLO) to ensure the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged in any way by their service. The AFLO provides Covenant awareness sessions to council staff, charities and external organisations and works closely with Armed Forces partners, neighbouring authorities, charities, and veteran groups.
- 4.4 The Council has also introduced a number of benefits to veterans including the waiving of burial and cremation fees, introduced to help the families of those who had served with the Armed Forces. We are the first council in Wales and England to introduce such a scheme. The Council also provides free access to Rhondda Cynon Taf leisure facilities for currently serving personnel and free swimming to any person that has served in the UK Armed Forces.

5. CURRENT SUPPORT

- 5.1 In the past 18 months we have further strengthened our support to the Armed Forces community and the following outlines some of extensive work that has taken place.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council as an Armed Forces Employer

- 5.2 In January 2022 we built on our commitment to raise awareness and advocate the Armed Forces Covenant externally through a new Guaranteed Interview Scheme for service leavers, veterans and reservists. We are committed to working with the

Career Transition Partnership and Forces Families Jobs to support ex-Forces' personnel into employment. All job advertisements now explicitly welcome applications from the ex-Forces' community. The Council recognises the valuable and transferable skills our veterans have gained through time in the Armed Forces and how beneficial these skills can be to us as a Council.

- 5.3 The Council brings together a range of organisations to support the Armed Forces community through the chairing and support of the Partnership Armed Forces Covenant Panel. The Panel brings together 34 statutory, non-statutory and third sector organisations, all with a role in supporting civilian and military communities.
- 5.4 Internally, we have a Cabinet Armed Forces Group, chaired by the Armed Forces Champion and an Armed Forces Staff Network, with staff from across Council Services. The group develops and advocates the services and support the Council provides.

Support to existing staff

- 5.5 The Armed Forces Team undertook the first annual Armed Forces Staff survey in March 2022 and established that there are at least 5 reservists, 31 veterans and 12 spouses/partners of the Armed Forces working within the Council. The team is now linking in with our staff and providing support where necessary. We are holding our first Reservist/Veteran Staff coffee morning on Reservist Day, 22nd June 2022.
- 5.6 The Council has a generous Reserves Policy, celebrates Reserves Day, has held a 'Wear Your Uniform to work' day and reservist recruitment days in the past. We also offer flexibility for CFAV (Cadet Force Adult Volunteers) employees to fit their work in with volunteering and are updating our Reservist Policy to include CFAVs.
- 5.7 All new staff, over 600 to date, undertake a mandatory Armed Forces Covenant briefing at induction.

Support for Veterans

- 5.8 As mentioned above in 4.2 the Council has an established Veterans Advice Service. In addition, the AFLO provides a point of contact to support veterans 24/7.
- 5.9 The Council has helped set up and continues to support and manage a number of Veterans Groups across Rhondda Cynon Taf. These breakfast clubs support over 150 Veterans and their families. The groups provide informal support from the council, charities and employment organisations. The groups also offer a range of activities including walking, allotments, and social trips.

Support for Armed Forces children

- 5.10 School teachers and Armed Forces children are supported by our Regional School Liaison officer who has been in post since September 2019. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council receives over £15,000 each year to support our Armed Forces children in schools. The funding has been used in the past to provide training, advice, and support to teachers and to deliver Forces Fitness Sessions for Service Children.

- 5.11 The Council takes part in Month of the Military child, which highlights the important role military children play in the Armed Forces community. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council continues to recognise this importance, as well as the role military children play in the communities in which they live. As part of the events, the Council hosted Armed Forces Family Fun Fitness Sessions at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park for families and children of Armed Forces personnel who live within the County Borough and neighbouring localities. The Council, along with SSCE Cymru (Supporting Service Children in Education Wales) worked with Forces Fitness to deliver a weekend of family fun.

Externally funded projects

- 5.12 The Council continues to be successful in obtaining funding from a variety of sources to enable us to deliver specific projects for veterans. This has included Covenant funding to deliver First Aid Mental health training to veterans, Armed Forces volunteers, charity staff and Council employees who work with the Armed Forces Community. We are continuing the work with the Andy's Man Club charity to provide mediation workshops to members of the Armed Forces Community who have a diagnoses of mental health conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and anxiety.
- 5.13 In 2021, through a successful bid for Armed Forces Covenant funding, we launched our Veterans Connected project which enabled veterans to stay connected with family, friends, and to access online support services through digital technology with the aim of reducing social isolation. As part of the funding, 80 mobile tablets were purchased and have been distributed throughout the veteran community. Members of the local veteran groups, including Valley Veterans, Ton Pentre and Taff Ely, Rhydyfelin, and Cynon Valley are able hire the tablets at any time, free of charge, through the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Service.

Celebrating our Armed Forces

- 5.14 In 2021 during the Covid pandemic, the Council had a smaller than usual Armed Forces Day flag raising ceremony at Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd. On June 18th 2022, Armed Forces Day will once again be back with capacity crowds, including a parade, service and family fun day.
- 5.15 In September 2021, for the first time, the Council was proud to show its support for National Merchant Navy Day, commemorating the 40,000 seafarers, many from our County Borough, who died whilst serving in the Merchant Navy during the Second World War. The Red Ensign, the official flag of the British Merchant Marine (or Fleet) was proudly flown at the Council's Llys Cadwyn building in Pontypridd.
- 5.16 In November 2021 the Council hosted the RAF's official 'Wales and the Battle of Britain Exhibition' in Llys Cadwyn in Pontypridd and welcomed over 1500 visitors. The exhibition was officially opened by Councillor Maureen Webber and Air Commodore Wales, Adrian Williams OBE. The Wales and the Battle of Britain 80th Anniversary Exhibition told the story from a Welsh perspective for the first time.

6. WAR MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS

- 6.1 During the last 18 months the Armed Forces Team has worked closely with Councillors, local community groups and the Highways Dept. on a number of war memorial projects that have included a range of improvement works and maintenance. In addition, the team provided a range of support to the community in Cwmparc on the opening of their new war memorial.
- 6.2 The maintenance works have included the following:
- Penrhiwceiber Clock Tower - A major restoration project, that involved fixing the 4 clock faces and the memorial being restored to its former glory. The monument was cleaned along with the inscribed brass panels, commemorating the fallen from the village of Penrhiwceiber. To complement the restoration, commemorative street furniture was also installed in the vicinity.
 - Mountain Ash War Memorial – Improvement to the footpaths leading up to the war memorial, as well as installing a number of WW1 benches and litter bins
 - Ynysangharad Park War Memorial - Installation of WW1 street furniture.
 - Cynon War Memorial Gardens – The Council is supporting the installation of an information lectern on the site of the memorial garden, working with the Cynon Memorial Garden Committee.
- 6.3 The Armed Forces Team has delivered on the above improvement works, working closely with our highway colleagues, and has provided a key point of contact for all War Memorial queries over the last 18 months.
- 6.4 The Council has recently appointed a Heritage and Ancient Monuments Officer, who is in the process of cataloguing the condition of all ancient monuments, including War Memorials, in liaison with CADW.
- 6.5 The Armed Forces Team will now work closely with the new Officer, who will deliver the condition report of all the War Memorials across Rhondda Cynon Taf and develop a programme of investment and improvement over the next 5 years.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/ SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required with regard to this report.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no Welsh Language Implications with regards to this report.

9. CONSULTATION/ INVOLVEMENT

- 9.1 The Council continually engages with Veterans, the Armed Forces community and a range of organisations that support them, as well as internally with staff. A dedicated project has been set up on Let's Talk – [Let's Talk Armed Forces](#).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Resources of £100k to fund the 5 year programme of investment and improvement have already been identified and set aside.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 12.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is proud to be one of the first Local Authorities in Wales to establish an Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between the civilian community of Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Armed Forces Community based in the County Borough. The pledge recognises the dual respect between the Council, its partner agencies, its communities and our Armed Forces Personnel (serving and retired) and their families.

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has invested significantly to provide a high level of support to our Armed Forces community and was proud to be one of the first Local Authorities in Wales to establish an Armed Forces Covenant. The Council holds a Defence Employer Recognition Gold Award and is well recognised as an organisation that supports the Armed forces and our Veterans.
- 13.2 This report has outlined some of the ongoing and wide-ranging support the Council provides to the Armed Forces Community in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Armed Forces Team would like to continue to build on the progress that has been made and further increase our support to the Armed Forces community, to show our gratitude for the sacrifices that are and have been made.
- 13.3 The Council's Commitment to the Armed Forces community can be enhanced by increasing investment over the next 5 years, and by working closely with the recently appointed Heritage and Ancient Monuments Officer who will provide a programme of investment and improvement to War Memorials, as well as providing a key point of contact for the community.