



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ARMED FORCES STEERING GROUP COMMITTEE

29 SEPTEMBER 2022

TITLE OF REPORT: ARMED FORCES & VETERANS ADVICE SERVICE UPDATE

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report provides an update on the work undertaken by the Council's Armed Forces Team in 2022.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report and the accompanying presentation by the Armed Forces Liaison Officer (AFLO).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To inform the Working Group of the activity taking place and allow the group to comment and question the AFLO.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council are proud to be one of the first Local Authorities in Wales to sign the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012, by signing the Armed Forces Covenant the Council pledges that:

- The Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases for those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved

- 4.2 The pledge recognises the dual respect between the Council, its partner agencies, its communities, our Armed Forces personnel (serving and retired) and their families.

5. Armed Forces Projects

5.1 Veterans Connected

The Veterans Connected project provides mobile tablets to Armed Forces veterans enabling them to stay in touch with family and friends and access online support services. Members of local veteran groups, including Valley Veterans, Ton Pentre and Taff Ely, Rhydyfelin, and Cynon Valley groups, all of whom can hire the tablets at any time, free-of-charge, through the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Advice Service. Since the project launched in 2021 over 70 Veterans have loaned tablets and 27 have received digital basic skill training.

5.2 Armed Forces Community Wellbeing Project

Rhondda Cynon Taf Armed Forces Team were successful in obtaining £10,000 from the Armed Forces Covenant to deliver Mental Health and Wellbeing workshops to the Armed Forces Community. The Armed Forces Community Wellbeing Project is a suite of workshops, focusing on mindfulness, communication, and mindset. The aim of the project is to improve wellbeing, reduce loneliness, improve quality of life and establish an understanding community that knows how to support one another.

5.3 Served and Proud LGBTQ+ Veteran Support

Rhondda Cynon Taf have linked with neighbouring council authorities to deliver support to Veterans who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. The project is due to launch in October 2022 and will provide Veteran Advice and support through breakfast and socialising groups. We are pleased to announce that we will be working with Fighting for Pride who are a support charity for Veterans who are part of the LGBTQ+ Community.

6. Staff Engagement and Employee Support

- 6.1 The Council are proud to have revalidated its Gold Employer recognition award in July 2022. The Award recognises the support provided to our Council Employees. The Council dedicated Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (AFLO) is employed to ensure the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged in any way by their service and this include our Council staff. 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.

- 6.2 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. On Reservist Day 22nd June 2022 we are held our first Reservist/Veteran Staff coffee morning, which was well received and the next get tother takes place in October.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 All new staff, over 600 to date, undertake a mandatory Armed Forces Covenant briefing at induction.
- 6.5 Reservist staff employee Karen Spencer was nominated by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council for the Welsh Veterans Awards 'Reservist of the Year 2022' as a result Karen achieved 1st position and was awarded Reservist of the Year 2022. Karen Spencer is now our Armed Forces Champion and has played a key role in assisting with the Armed Forces staff engagement.

7. Veteran Advice Service

- 7.1 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 1000 Veterans and family members in Rhondda Cynon Taf to date.
- 7.2 To date 1200 referrals have been received to the service, 91% are male, 72% served in the British Army. 42% of referrals have originated from the Veteran support groups, such as Valley Veterans and Taf Ely Veteran Group. Further information will be presented at the meeting.

8. Support for our Veteran Community

- 8.1 As mentioned above in 7.1 the Council has an established Veterans Advice Service. In addition, the AFLO provides a point of contact to support veterans 24/7.

- 8.2 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.

9. Support for Armed Forces children

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.

10. WAR MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS

- 10.1 During the last 2 years 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.
- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 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. 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

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1 There is no consultation required for this report.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 13.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 14.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's constitution.

15. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

- 15.1 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.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council aims 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.
- 16.2 This report and accompanying presentation has outlined some of the ongoing and wide-ranging support the Council provides to the Armed Forces Community in Rhondda Cynon Taf.