

## **Delivering Better Outcomes**

### **Northumberland County Council Armed Forces Support**

Northumberland County Council (NCC) is now recognised as one of the most forward leaning AF authorities within the NE, if not the country, proactively supporting the AF Community. It has an active Forum with a wide ranging membership network of voluntary and charitable associations as well as representatives of all services, veterans and service families, businesses and the local MP. The Council policies recognise the responsibilities under the Armed Forces Community Covenant signed in 2012 and have been revised to produce better outcomes for our Armed Forces family. The Council currently employs ex-service personnel, Reservists and Adult Cadet Instructors and has dedicated HR policies in place which offer support to those employees with the offer of 'special' paid leave up to 2 weeks for training requirements. The Council also supports the effective mobilisation and reintegration of staff who return from periods of deployment and is actively seeking to increase its Reservist numbers across the Council. The Council adopted the e-learning package for Armed Forces awareness for all staff but also all Councillors in order to equip them with the knowledge and awareness necessary for supporting the Armed Forces community within their service or within the members' Wards. All job vacancies now carry the Armed Forces Covenant logo and NCC offer guaranteed interviews to all Armed Forces personnel or veterans if they meet the initial criteria.

Its partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust promotes the Armed Forces Attachment Programme Step into Health which offers work shadow placements across the two organisations with the view of force leavers acquiring appropriate employment once they leave.

Since 2012 NCC has employed a dedicated AF Champion who is a pro-active supporter of the Covenant, being ex-forces himself, a dedicated support officer and a Veteran's Champion (ex RAF). There is a dedicated website and a team of officers representing each Council service who attend the Forum and are fully aware of the Covenant principles. A successful Covenant Grant allowed the appointment of two Outreach Workers in Northumberland following the extremely successful Tyneside AF Outreach Service. After the grant funding ends in September 2019, these appointments will become Council staff. Since their recent appointment, the Outreach service has had remarkable outcomes - they have dealt with 213 referrals, of these 176 are ex-service personnel (veterans) and 37 are in the process of leaving the armed forces. Also, they have raised £41,887.75 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. The Breakfast Club opened in June 2018 and is extremely well supported.

NCC have taken the lead role in supporting the North East Armed Forces Forum (previously supported by Association of North East Councils) and is working with partner local authorities, Charities, Voluntary Services and the services themselves to ensure a consistent support approach across the region in delivering the aims and objectives of the Covenant.

The Armed Forces Team received Northumberland County Council Excellence Respect and Compassion Award in September.

The authority was awarded the MOD Silver Award in 2015 and recently was awarded the Gold Award by Prince Edward (November 2018) for its support to the Armed Forces.

More examples of best practice:

**Public Health:**

- NCC's contract for the substance misuse service identifies the armed forces veterans and their carers as a vulnerable group who should be prioritised within the service
- NCC's Suicide Prevention Plan identifies the armed forces veterans as being a vulnerable group.
- Targeted sexual screening and sexual health awareness at one of our barracks.

**Children's Services:**

- Provision of a mini mess at Albemarle Barracks following a successful Community Grant Bid in 2006 which has been decorated with the help of soldiers.

**Leisure:**

- Active Northumberland have agreed to offer discounts for access to Gym and Swimming in for serving personnel on leave in order to retain their fitness. We are also investigating physio/ rehabilitation sessions for Armed Forces personnel recovering from injury at our Council gyms.
- The Inclusion Manager at Active Northumberland engages with veterans to offer a pathway to enable their integration into their community through sport and exercise.

**Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support**

- The Council has a discretion under the legislation to disregard for benefit assessment purposes the income received by War Widows and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments.

**Council Tax:**

- Army families that have their own property that is empty and they live in MOD property receive a 50% reduction in liability.
- Council Tax relief is paid by the MOD to service men who are abroad on operational tours

**Housing:**

- NCC Housing allocations Policy has been changed to provide additional priority for AF personnel and veterans

- The policy regarding the provision of temporary and emergency accommodation has been changed

**Employability:**

- NCC Community Regeneration Manager provides support to individuals wishing to set up small businesses and advises on employability issues. He also advises on potential bids for Community Covenant Grants.

**Adult Learning:**

- NCC have a number of qualification routes and training to help individuals with employability skills.

**Statements of support from employees:**

“I am an officer in the Army Reserves and have found my employer, Northumberland County Council, to be very supportive, always allowing time off each year to attend my unit’s Annual Training Period. I have a significant commitment to the Reserves and the additional paid leave I receive allows me to balance my time between work, the Army Reserve and my family.”

**Captain Fifth Fusiliers  
Senior Accountant NCC**

“Recent changes at Northumberland County Council have allowed me to receive additional leave entitlement in order to carry out my role within the Army Cadet Force. This support from NCC has been a massive benefit in allowing me to train with the ACF and to bring developed skills back into my day job. The changes demonstrate the recognition that NCC has for those serving in the cadet forces.”

**Sgt, Northumbria ACF.  
Youth Participation Worker NCC**

**Press release: Council’s gold award for its support of Armed Forces**

Northumberland County Council has been recognised as one of the best in the UK for supporting members of the Armed Forces.

The authority has been awarded a gold award by the Ministry of Defence in its 2018 Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme.

The scheme rewards and recognises UK employers and organisations that show outstanding support to the armed forces community.

Northumberland County Councillor, Dave Ledger, Armed Forces Champion said:

“ We are immensely proud to receive this prestigious award. Northumberland County Council works tirelessly to ensure that the objectives of the Armed Forces Covenant are implemented and promoted and that our Armed Forces Community are fully supported through our policies and procedures, whether serving personnel, reservists, cadets, adult instructors, veterans or military families. We recognise the transferable skills our armed forces community possess and the benefits of partnership working and are delighted that our work has been recognised by this esteemed award.

Councillor Gordon Castle, Armed Forces Veterans Champion, said: “This prestigious award shows that the county council really does mean business when it comes to helping forces veterans, young and old. As a retired RAF officer myself I can testify at first hand how difficult it can be for some members of the armed forces to adapt to the outside world when they have been used to life in uniform. The forces demand excellence in all operational matters and even the ultimate sacrifice at times of conflict. It is absolutely proper that we do all within our power to ensure that society welcomes those that looked after it. I congratulate the council officers, in particular Jackie Roll, and all those members of our forum who have brought about this award - it is a just recognition of their hard work.”

MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan is the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Armed Forces. She said:

“ I am so proud of the council for receiving this award, which is well deserved. The armed forces covenant is a key national issue which I have championed ever since arriving in Parliament in 2015. There is more to do, and I would encourage all Northumbrian employers, large or small, to consider how they can be part of the armed forces covenant family. We owe a duty to all those men and women and all their families, who put their lives on the line for our safety, prosperity and security. Huge congratulations to Northumberland County Council for their amazing, and continuing, efforts”.

## **Supporting comments from Tri-Service Units:**

### **Army**

I co-chair the Northumberland County Council (NCC) Armed Forces Forum (AFF) and have direct sight over the many very positive and wide-ranging NCC Covenant supporting initiatives. I have no doubt that the NCC is an exemplar: a forward leaning and strong advocate for the Covenant supporting the entire Armed Forces Family: the cadet movement, Regular and Reserve soldiers, Veterans and their families.

The leadership, empathy and support from the NCC, their Armed Forces Champion and Lead officer is directly attributable to the ongoing success of a well-supported, vibrant AFForum. More widely the NCC has proactively helped local Military units within Northumberland to integrate within their communities through Covenant grants, bonds of friendship, youth activities, and dependents education courses. The successful NCC inspired Covenant application for two Outreach Workers for Northumberland is further example of resolve and determination to support the whole Armed Forces Community. And this is all set against a battle rhythm of annual events such as; the Armed Forces Day flag raising celebration, the annual Blue Light dinner, participation in Ex EXECUTIVE STRETCH and support to Freedom Parades and ceremonies.

Commanding Officer The Queen's Own Yeomanry

### **Royal Navy**

As a member of Northumberland Armed Forces Forum, I have been continually impressed by the inclusive attitude of staff and members. The county of Northumberland hosts both army and Royal Air Force establishments and stations but there is no naval port nor naval establishment within the county boundaries. Nevertheless, the lack of any naval establishment does not deter the support offered to members and families of the naval service and by that I include the Royal Marines. The north of England is responsible for approximately one third of all Royal Navy recruits and therefore it is hardly surprising that a reported 12% of all service families reside in the north-east. Northumberland county AFF practices an 'all of one family' approach to service families and veterans alike and it is heartening that members of the Royal Navy Association and Royal Navy and Royal Marines Welfare (RNRMW) are invited to attend the meetings not as an exception but as a rule. I am confident that were Northumberland County approached by a member, Veteran or family member of the Royal Navy or Royal Marines requesting assistance, they would be treated with the utmost respect, in confidence and be provided with the best service that the AFF and its members could provide.

Royal Navy Regional Liaison Officer

## **Royal Air Force**

Exceptionally forward leaning in their support to and representation of Royal Air Force Boulmer, Northumberland County Council (NCC) embodies the Armed Forces Covenant. Inclusive of the needs of the Whole Force, NCC strives for and achieves excellence in their efforts to fuse the activity of local authority, charity and business for the benefit of Regular, Reserve, Veteran, Cadet and, significantly, service families resident in Northumberland. We, at Boulmer, do not take this commitment lightly, advocating our experience in Northumberland as best practice to colleagues across the UK.

We take assurance in NCCs demonstrable commitment to working in partnership with Boulmer, and comfort in the knowledge that NCC is configured to remove any challenge or barrier that may hinder the transition from Regular service. For Royal Air Force Boulmer, NCC is already at Gold standard.

Rgds

Squadron Leader Royal Air Force Boulmer