
West Sussex Armed Forces Covenant

- 1** The County Council signed a Military Community Covenant on 26 July 2012 as a sign of its commitment to supporting Armed Forces personnel and former personnel and their families. It later established a Civilian Military Covenant Board, comprising Armed Forces champions from the County Council and borough and district councils in West Sussex, together with representatives from the Armed Forces and Services Charities.
- 2** The County Council achieved Employer Recognition 'Silver Award' status in 2017 in recognition of its achievements in supporting armed forces personnel and ex-personnel. The Council agreed a motion in July 2018 to ask the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities to aim to achieve the 'Gold Award' status for supporting Armed Forces personnel and former personnel and their families. An application has now been made for this award.
- 3** The Cabinet Member, as the Military Champion, has undertaken a significant amount of work in progressing initiatives in support of the Covenant. She has chaired two further meetings of the West Sussex Civilian Military Partnership Board which have enabled closer working. A Community Engagement sub-group met for the first time in November and will be meeting four times a year. Its role is to give some oversight into the range of military events within West Sussex and to provide a level of co-ordination.
- 4** The Military Champion also continued to meet with the Champions and officers from the neighbouring authorities to improve cross-border working with particular regard to the Armed Forces Champions training as part of Forces Connect South East (FCSE), the regional support network for the Covenant work. These cross border meetings will continue as the project progresses.
- 5** With the support of the Chairman, the County Council continues to commemorate significant military events: flying the flag from County buildings during the run-up to Armed Forces Day and making available extensive information on the website about the wartime impact on West Sussex communities. Once again, the Remembrance Day service held at County Hall was well attended and a poppy sculpture was commissioned for County Hall.
- 6** There are welfare issues which continue to arise relating to individuals with a services background and these are responded to in liaison with other partners as necessary. The Military Champion continues to meet regularly with representatives from Baker Barracks at Thorney Island (12 Regiment Royal Artillery).
- 7** The Fire and Rescue Service has recently extended its wellbeing support provision to its staff through partnership with Sapper Support, a charity that provides 24-hour phone line support to veterans and emergency services staff. The phone line is staffed by volunteers who have been trained by Mind, who all have experience of the armed forces or 999 services, so are well-placed to provide support to veterans and emergency services staff who may be suffering from a range of mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

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- 8** A peer mentoring event was held at County Hall on 23 January 2019 which brought together Armed Forces Service Champions from services across the County Council and district and borough council colleagues. They received an update on FCSE. The champions also had an opportunity to network with other champions and were encouraged to download the FCSE app.
 - 9** The FCSE App was launched on 22 January 2019 and up to the end of February it had been downloaded over 600 times. The target for the whole project was only 300 which needed to be achieved by June 2019 so this is fantastic news. This has been promoted further through a County Council press release and through the West Sussex Library e-newsletter.
 - 10** Staff induction at the Council now includes information on the Armed Forces Covenant and more than 270 people have received the training since September 2018. This signposts staff to the e-learning package that is available. In addition to the Armed Forces e-Learning which has been available for some time, a further e-Learning package on mentoring is now available on the Learning and Development Gateway and is also available to district and borough council colleagues.
 - 11** All forms of FCSE training are still being promoted to County Council staff and once the project funding comes to an end it is intended that the Council will still offer four-hour training courses in-house. FCSE has also recognised the importance of working together so there are hopes that the network will continue even once the funding period ends.
 - 12** The County Council established a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Veterans following agreement of a motion by the Council in 2015. Since 2017, 93 people have been interviewed through the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, of whom seven have been hired.

Recommended

That the report be noted.

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Background Papers

None