



Rhondda Cynon Taf Armed Forces Covenant Newsletter

Issue: 2 • April 2022



Welcome and Introduction

Hello and welcome to Rhondda Cynon Taf's Armed Forces Covenant Newsletter. Throughout this issue we will be looking at some of the great work that has been completed by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council towards the fulfilment of our commitment to the covenant.

Armed Forces Liaison Officer

My name is Jamie Ireland, and I am the Armed Forces Liaison Officer for Rhondda Cynon Taf. As the Armed Forces Liaison Officer, I am responsible for raising awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces Community in Rhondda Cynon Taf along with promoting and coordinating work to honour the Armed Forces Covenant.

I have worked for Rhondda Cynon Taf Council for over 15 years and in this time I have been fortunate to have worked in and gained significant knowledge and experience of areas including: Housing, Council Tax and Housing Benefits, Adult Social Care and Leisure services.



It is an honour to provide advice and assistance to members of the Armed Forces Community in Cwm Taf, who deserve the very best services and support.

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Mae croeso i chi
gyfathrebu â ni
yn y Gymraeg /
You are welcome
to communicate
with us in Welsh.



Veteran Advice Service

The Veteran Advice Service provides free 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.

Whether you're currently serving in the Armed Forces or have previously served, you and your family can access our service for advice and support.

The Veteran Advice officer attends local Veteran Groups and holds regular Veteran Advice surgeries throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf.

For further information, please contact RCT Veteran Advice Officer Jamie Ireland:

Tel: 07747 485619
(Monday to Friday 8:30am to 17:00pm)
Email: VeteranService@rctcbc.gov.uk
24/7 online referral:
www.rctcbc.gov.uk/veteranadvice



Veteran and Reservist Guaranteed Interview Scheme

RCT Council are proud to hold the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Employer recognition award.

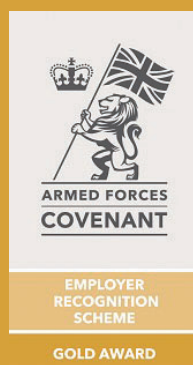
In January 2022 the council strengthened its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant by introducing a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Veterans and Reservists.

This commitment is to guarantee an interview to any veterans or reservists that meet the essential criteria set out in the job profile for roles that are advertised externally.

The Council recognises that veterans and reservists can bring valuable transferable skills, qualities, and benefits. Alongside this new scheme the Council has agreed to advertise relevant jobs on the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) website in addition to normal advertising processes.

For further information regarding our Guaranteed Interview Scheme, please contact the RCT Armed Forces Team.

Tel: 07747485619
(Monday to Friday 8:30am to 17:00pm)
Email: Armedforces@rctcbc.gov.uk



**Proudly
supporting
those
who serve**

#GoldERS2020

Commemoration and Celebration

The past year have seen us undertake a number of celebratory and commemorative activities to mark the Armed Forces community who serve us past, present and future.



Rhondda Cynon Taf Celebrates Month of the Military Child

April is designated as the Month of the Military Child, highlighting 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.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council celebrated Armed Forces 'Month of the Military Child' by hosting Armed Forces Family Fun Fitness Sessions at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park.

Aimed at 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.



Remembering The Fallen

Remembrance Services were held across Rhondda Cynon Taf at the same time, with residents, businesses and local communities all paying their respects to those brave servicemen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Pontypridd Remembrance Sunday Parade and Service.

Pontypridd Remembrance Sunday Parade and Service took place on Sunday, November 14. Organised by the Council, in conjunction with the Royal British Legion and Pontypridd Town Council, the public event was held in Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, Pontypridd, which celebrates its centenary in 2023.

RCT Armed Forces Veterans took part in the Remembrance Parade, lining up behind the official Standards and Standard Bearers. A Two-minute silence was marked at 11am, followed by a Remembrance Service and the laying of poppy wreaths at the War Memorial.



Wales and The Battle of Britain Exhibition

The RAF's official 'Wales and the Battle of Britain Exhibition' was hosted by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council at its Llys Cadwyn building in Pontypridd from Monday 15th November till Saturday 20th November and welcomed over 1500 visitors. It was officially opened on Monday November 15th by Councillor Maureen Webber, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Deputy Leader and Armed Forces Champion, and Air Commodore Wales, Adrian Williams OBE.

The Battle of Britain, the largest air battle ever recorded, was one of the most pivotal and iconic moments in the history of this country. It marked a turning point of the Second World War when Britain stood alone against Hitler's seemingly unstoppable military power.

Air Commodore Adrian Williams OBE, Air Officer Wales, the senior RAF officer in Wales, said:

"I am delighted that the Wales and the Battle of Britain 80th Anniversary Exhibition is in Pontypridd, telling the Battle of Britain story from a Welsh perspective, which has never been told before."

Supporting National Merchant Navy Day

The Council was proud to show its support for National Merchant Navy Day (Friday, September 3, 2021), 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 is the official flag of the British Merchant Marine (or Fleet) and was proudly flown at the Council's Llys Cadwyn building in Pontypridd on September 3rd.



Rhydyfelin

Rhydyfelin Community Group created a cascading waterfall of poppies, flanked by the silhouettes representing the Fallen of the First and Second World Wars. The works were created to mark Armistice Day 2021 and displayed outside Rhydyfelin Community Centre. The silhouettes were the creation of retired labourer Michael Mottram.

Mr Mottram, 65, of Rhydyfelin, who himself served with the Army Reserve (Territorial Army) in the 1970s, attends the regular Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs that are held at Rhydyfelin Community Centre, bringing together veterans of all ages for an informal social gathering, supported by the Council's own Armed Forces Veterans Service.



Celebration



Rhondda Veteran Awarded the 2021 Armed Forces in Wales Covenant Award

The 2021 Armed Forces Covenant Award in Wales was awarded to Chief Executive and Founder of Valley Veterans Paul Bromwell at Cardiff City Football Stadium. Paul founded Valley Veterans 13 years ago to provide veterans with a platform to socialise and seek advice, with sessions taking place every Thursday at 10am in the Ton Pentre Community Hub, Rhondda Valley. Through Valley Veterans, Paul Bromwell has been successful in supporting veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder through Equine Therapy.

In addition to the Armed Forces in Wales Covenant Award, Paul has also been honoured at the inaugural Aneurin Bevan People's NHS Awards where he received the Aneurin Bevan Community Award in recognition of his work in Rhondda Cynon Taf, supporting the Armed Forces community.



Discounted Leisure for Life access and FREE swimming. For all members of the Armed Forces Community.

If you have an Armed Forces Discount Card, you can enjoy free swimming, swimming lessons and aquatics classes at Leisure for Life centres.

Discount card holders also qualify for the Corporate Leisure for Life membership, which offers unlimited access to the gym, swimming, fitness classes and indoor sports across 12 leisure centres for just £28.50 a month. (You can also add a second person to your membership and they can also pay just £28.50 a month membership).

Find out more at www.rctcbc.gov.uk/leisure or visit your local Leisure for Life centre.

Keeping Our Veterans Connected

The Council continues to build upon its ongoing relationship with the Armed Forces community, past and present, by making mobile tablets available to veterans to allow them to access vital services and keep in touch with each other. As part of the funding, 80 mobile tablets were purchased and have been distributed throughout the Veteran Community. This fantastic project on behalf of the Council, in conjunction with Vale of Glamorgan Council, has been made possible following a successful bid for funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: Forces for Change programme. The tablets were donated by Centerprise International.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust supports the Armed Forces Covenant by delivering funding programmes that create real change to Armed Forces communities across the UK.

The mobile tablets will help Armed Forces veterans stay in touch with family and friends and also enable them to access online support services. Members of local veteran groups, including Valley Veterans, Ton Pentre and Taff Ely, Rhydyfelin, and Cynon Valley, can hire the tablets at any time, free-of-charge, through the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Service.



Penrhiwceiber War Memorial

The Council has returned Penrhiwceiber War Memorial to its former glory as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to its Armed Forces community. The focal point of the community for many years, the Penrhiwceiber War Memorial, a Grade II listed building by Cadw, also serves as the village clock, but in recent years its condition had deteriorated and the clock no longer worked. The Council has undertaken a major restoration project which has seen the clock working again, as well as enhancing the monument and surrounding area. Made up of stone from the old Aberdare Canal, the monument commemorates the residents of Penrhiwceiber who died in action during the First World War (1914-18), the Second World War (1939-45) and the Korean War (1950-53). The castellated tower, with circular clock faces set on the structure, also includes inscribed brass panels commemorating the Fallen from the village. The restoration of Penrhiwceiber War Memorial has been co-ordinated between ward members, the Council and its Armed Forces Veteran Service.

Restoration included repairing the clock and the cleaning of the dial faces in order for it to function properly, along with the specialist cleaning of the brass panels and surrounding stonework and architecture. There are also plans in place to site commemorative street furniture in the vicinity such as seating and litter bins, along with a memorial planter at the foot of the clock tower and a general cleansing of the surrounding location.



Armed Forces Park Project

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Armed Forces Park Project launched in the Spring of 2022.

This fantastic new project provides all member of the Armed Forces Community with a summer pack with activities including, tree planting and gardening workshops, park walks and guided meditation, Armed Forces family lido swimming sessions and much more.

For further information regarding our Armed Forces Park Project please contact RCT Armed Forces Team

Tel: **07747485619**

(Monday to Friday 8:30am to 17:00pm)

Email: **Armedforces@rctcbc.gov.uk**



Veterans' burial fees

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council continues to waiver Burial and cremation fees for veterans, servicemen and servicewomen. The scheme was introduced to help the families of those who had served with the armed services. We are pleased to be the first council in Wales and England to introduce such a scheme which has been welcomed by veterans. The UK government funds funerals for anyone who has lost their life while active in military service, but charges for burials and cremation fees of Veterans are still made. Applying for this scheme couldn't be easier, just inform the funeral director who will take care of everything for you.

Veteran Support Groups

Valley Veterans

Valley Veterans is a veteran-led organisation based in the heart of the Rhondda Valley. Founded over 10 years ago as an informal support group for Veterans with PTSD, Valley Veterans is now a vibrant hub with more than 140 active participants. Current organised activities include a weekly breakfast club that is hosted in the Ton Pentre Community Centre and attracts up to 60 veterans every Thursday 10:00am till 12:00pm. Valley Veterans also provides daily equine activities at the adjacent yard that attract up to a dozen regular participants.

Website: **www.valleyveterans.org/**

Email: **enquiries@valleyveterans.org**

Phone: **07733896128**

Taff Ely Veterans

Taff Ely Veteran Group meets 10:00am till 12:00pm every Wednesday at Rhydyfelin Community Centre, Pontypridd. All members of the Armed Forces Community and retired members of the emergency services (Blue Light) are welcome to join us for a chat, breakfast roll and hot drink. We work with Armed Forces charities and Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Veteran Advice service to provide free advice and support to all our members. Our group offers a range of activities including walking, allotments, and social trips.

Phone: **07913355911**

<https://www.facebook.com/TaffElyVeteranGroup>

Cynon Valley Veterans

Cynon Valley Veterans group meets 10:00am till 12:00pm every Monday at Darran Las Community Centre, Mountain ash. All members of the Armed Forces Community are welcome to join us. The group is run by Veterans for Veterans. Various Armed Forces charities attend our group to provide support to our members. The group is supported by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Veteran Advice Service, who provide free advice and support to members of the Armed Forces Community.

Phone: **07960411039**

Falkland's 40th Anniversary 2022

The Council is supporting a number of services in 2022 on the 40th Anniversary of the Falklands War, including a service in Ynysangahrad park at 11am on the 8th June 2022.

The 1982 conflict, which began 40 years ago, lasted for 10 weeks and resulted in the deaths of more than 900 people. The Argentine invasion of the British-held Falkland islands led to the deaths of 255 British military personnel, three islanders and 649 Argentine soldiers during the 74-day conflict.

Falklands Veteran Plants Memorial Tree

Falklands veteran Phil Adkins and members of the Aberdare branch of the Royal Welsh Comrades Association will be planting a tree in the Cynon Valley Combined Services Memorial Garden to mark the 40th anniversary of the conflict that claimed so many lives.

The Cynon Valley Combined Services Memorial Garden has been created where people can sit and reflect upon the sacrifices service personnel have made, not only during wartime, but also during peacetime. The Garden brings enjoyment to the community as well as serving as an historical reminder of past wars, conflicts and deeds. The Aberdare branch of the Royal Welsh Comrades Association worked closely with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and the Pen-y-Cymoedd Wind Farm Fund to create a respectful, relaxing space for everyone. The project cemented the Council's continuing commitment to support the Armed Forces, past and present.

<https://www.cvmemorial.org/>



Falklands Veteran Now Helps Others in Civilian Life

Some 40 years on from the Falklands Conflict, Paul Bromwell still vividly remembers his time in the South Atlantic, especially the day he lost 48 Comrades and friends during one incident. Now Chief Executive of the Valley Veterans, Mr Bromwell works closely with the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Service to help and support those who need it the most.

Having served in the Welsh Guards during the Falklands Conflict 40 years ago, he is all too aware of the serious effects of returning to civilian life once leaving the Armed Forces. Living in the Rhondda, Mr Bromwell says he had no professional help available to him when he returned from the Falklands in 1982 and has since suffered with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following his time in the Armed Forces.

Paul, a recipient of the inaugural Aneurin Bevan People's NHS Award, said: "Being a veteran living in Rhondda Cynon Taf, I feel so lucky today to have the support of the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Service. It's comforting to know that us veterans have such amazing support behind us."

Daughter Of Falklands Veteran Remembers Her Father

The daughter of a Falklands Conflict soldier who was killed during the bombing of the Sir Galahad 40 years ago has dedicated her life to keeping his memory alive.

Katie Gibby, of Rhondda, was just five months old when her father Mark Gibby, of the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, went off to battle in 1982. He never returned home. Mark Gibby was one of the 48 men, most of them Welsh Guards, killed when Argentine jets attacked the ship on June 8, 1982.



Although she has no personal memories of her father, Katie, a mother-of-two, has suffered with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and is grateful to the support she receives from the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Service and the Valley Veterans group.

Katie said: "I have always been passionate about anything associated with the Armed Forces and I am so proud of my father, who gave his life for his country and for the people of the Falkland Islands on that fateful day. He was only 22-years-old.

"All of my life I have gone through a rollercoaster of emotions and grief, even though I didn't really know my father – it is a different type of grieving. But the Valley Veterans and the Council's Armed Forces Veterans Service have been a huge support to me.

"When I was growing up, I felt very angry that my father was suddenly taken away from me forever, thousands of miles away from home. Now I am an adult and a parent myself, I can see that he gave his life in the pursuit of the freedom of so many people. I am so proud of Guardsman Mark Gibby and the great sacrifice he made."

Guardsman Mark Gibby sailed from Southampton on May 12, 1982, weeks after his 22nd birthday, arriving in the Falklands on May 25. A total of 48 men aboard the Sir Galahad died in Bluff Cove on Tuesday, June 8, 1982, 32 of whom were Welsh Guards. Many more were injured. The destruction of the Sir Galahad by Skyhawk jets came just six days before the end of the Falklands War.



Covenant Advice and Awareness

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC offer Armed Forces Covenant Awareness packages which can be tailored to your organisation.

Our Covenant awareness sessions help raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant. Support by employers to the Armed Forces community can take different shapes: it can be policies and projects that support their own employees who are members of the Armed Forces community, such as setting up support networks for any reservists or veterans or offering additional paid leave for reservists; it can be policies and projects that help the wider Armed Forces community, such as working with the Career Transition Partnership to find greater positions for service leavers, employing and supporting Service spouses and partners or offering a discount to members of the Armed Forces community.

For further information please contact: Jamie Ireland - Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officer
email: Armedforces@rctcbc.gov.uk
Tel: 07747485619



Let's Talk Armed Forces

Are you currently serving in the Armed Forces, a Veteran or a member of the public? We would like to hear from you! Your feedback is paramount to help us continue to support the Armed Forces community in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Complete our Armed Forces Survey by visiting:
www.lets-talk.rctcbc.gov.uk/lets-talk-armed-forces

Armed Forces Day 2022

Armed Forces Day takes place Saturday 18th June 2022, 11:00 am to 4:00 pm in Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, Pontypridd. This is the seventh annual Armed Forces Day event that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council have organised.

This is a one-day event with FREE admission. The event comprises of a number of elements which begin with a parade within the perimeter of the park grounds and will include a number of Military Representatives, Cadets, Standard Bearers, and a Marching Band, followed by the 'Raising of the Flag' service.

The day will also include a 'Fun Day' element for all the family. Attractions/offers this year will include a funfair, music stage with war time themed music, walkabout entertainment, climbing wall, trailer cave, tank, information stalls and much more.

For further information Please contact Rhondda Cynon Taf Events Team:

Tel: 01443 424123

Email: events@rctcbc.gov.uk

Supporting Armed Forces Staff

The Council has an Armed Forces Staff Network, with staff from across Council Services. The group develops and shares best practice and helps with the support the Council provides to the armed forces community. All new staff, over 600 to date, undertake a mandatory Armed Forces Covenant briefing at induction.

We conduct an annual Armed Forces Staff survey to establish what support we can provide to staff who are veterans or current reservists. The 2022 survey identified that the Council has 5 Reservists and 31 veterans and we also had feedback from 12 spouses/partners.

We have a generous Reserves Policy and celebrate Reserves Day each year, in 2022 we are planning our first staff coffee morning to bring together our reservists and veterans.

What it's like working in RCT?



Karen Spencer

Principal Officer - Business, Training,
Quality Assurance & Risk Management
Current Reservist with The 157 (Welsh) Regiment RLC

Being a Reservist requires personal sacrifice in terms of time, and commitment. I cannot express enough how much I truly value the support of my employer RCTCBC who demonstrates their support to the Armed Forces Community in many ways, notably in the provision of an additional 10 days leave which all Reservists can benefit from; this not only makes the training easier to attend, but reduces the impact on our families. I am really proud of RCTCBC as my Employer; they truly go the extra mile to recognise us as Reservists.

I learned a lot about leadership during my time in the Royal Navy. During this time I became aware of those who lead by example and those who wanted to 'tell' you what to do. It made me think that I wanted to be the former.

Many of the skills I learnt during this time I have been able to bring to civilian life. RCT council have always been supportive of veterans and are always looking at new ways of engaging and supporting their former military staff.

After 14 years working for RCT council I can say without doubt they are totally supportive of their veterans.



Andy Phillips

Communities for Work+ team manager.
Former – R01(G) radio operator, Royal Navy

Who Can Help?

We have a number of dedicated officers working across RCT to support the Armed Forces community in varying roles dependent on the needs of the individual these officers include the following people:



Councillor Maureen Webber - Deputy Leader and Armed Forces Champion

"I am extremely passionate about supporting our Armed Forces community, both past and present, and of course their families who do so much for them. I continue to represent our

Armed Forces community at the highest levels, and work to assist the community in any way necessary. As a Council, we have worked hard to ensure that we are doing all we can to help our Armed Forces community here in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Council continues to support the Armed Forces community through a range of events throughout the year, with our Armed Forces Day annual event the largest of these. This year we will be planning a number of events to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Falkland's to pay respect to those that lost their lives. I am proud of the work Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is doing to support our Armed Forces community, and I'm looking forward to what we can achieve in the future"



Christopher Davies - Lead Officer Armed Forces Covenant/ Corporate Policy & Consultation Manager

Chris's role is to ensure that the Council fulfils its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant throughout the delivery of services across the Council. Chris works closely with the Armed Forces Champion on identifying areas of priority and need. We have enhanced communication links with service areas to ensure that Armed Forces matters are routinely considered within the delivery of services. Since his time in post Chris has identified grant opportunities to improve the support that we provide to the Armed Forces Community. Chris is looking forward to bringing a wide ranging public engagement experience to the position, ensuring that the Armed Forces community continues to be supported by the Council and becomes a key stakeholder in all our involvement activity.

Jamie Ireland – Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer / Veteran Advice Officer

The main role of the Armed Forces Liaison Officer is to ensure that delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant is strengthened within Rhondda Cynon Taf. This can range from training staff, engaging with local veteran groups and many other organisations.

During his time in post Jamie has established a vast network of contacts within the Armed Forces community and acts as a key link between the Council and the community, both on a local and national level.

If you would like further information about the Armed Forces Covenant and how RCT are supporting our forces please contact Jamie Ireland on: 07747485619 or via email Jamie.L.Ireland@rctcbc.gov.uk



Armed Forces Covenant Training Package

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council offer Virtual Armed Forces Covenant training packages which can be tailored to your organisation please contact: Jamie Ireland - Regional Armed Forces Covenant Officer email: Armedforces@rctcbc.gov.uk Tel: **07747485619**

Why not take part in e-learning that has been developed by WLGA. It will help you understand and apply the principles of the Covenant at a local level. It also provides sources of further information and support. www.covenantwales.wales/e-learning/

Sign the Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant represents a promise by the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly.

The Armed Forces Covenant can be signed by; Businesses of all sizes, Charitable organisations, and Public sector organisations. By becoming a forces friendly employer you can benefit from the wide range of unique skills and experiences that reservists and veterans can bring to your organisation. Employing armed forces community members can help diversify the talent in your workforce.

For more information visit: www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk