

Rhondda Cynon Taf Armed Forces Covenant Newsletter

Issue: 3 • November 2023



Welcome and Introduction

Hello and welcome to the Rhondda Cynon Taf Armed Forces Covenant newsletter. In this issue we will dive into some of the fantastic work completed by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council throughout the past year in fulfilment of our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

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



RHONDDA CYNON TAF



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

This guarantees 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



Commemoration and Celebration

The past year has 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



A fantastic day was had celebrating 'Month of the Military Child' for service children and their families who live in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This event was held to celebrate our service children and their unique experiences. The session was conducted at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, Pontypridd in partnership with SSCE Cymru, Forces Fitness, and Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC with a total of 75 children in attendance. The two sessions offered fun and engaging activities that allowed service children from across Rhondda Cynon Taf the opportunity to meet with other service children in the area.



Remembering The Fallen

Remembrance Services were held across Rhondda Cynon Taf, 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 12. 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 celebrated its centenary this year. Armed Forces representatives, official standards, standard bearers, veterans and local cadet and scout groups took part in the Remembrance Parade. A two-minute silence was marked at 11am, followed by a Remembrance Service and the laying of poppy wreaths at the War Memorial.



Armed Forces Day

This year across Rhondda Cynon Taf we have been flying the flag to mark key events in the UK Armed Forces calendar including Armed Forces Day, Month of the Military Child, Merchant Navy Day, and the Kings Coronation. Many flag raising ceremonies included members from local veteran support groups and school children. These events have been used to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant. Participants who attended the events have received Armed Forces Covenant merchandise, Armed Forces directories, Armed Forces Covenant child-friendly goodie bags, and Covenant information leaflets.”



5th Welch War Memorial Event (100-year Anniversary)

In 2023 we celebrated the regimental war memorial, standing for a hundred years and recently honoured in a ceremony led by the Royal British Legion with support from the RCT Armed Forces team. Over 100 people attended the service, followed by a buffet at the Army Reserve Centre in Pontypridd. The event was a meaningful tribute to a century of remembrance and unity.

Cinema Evening with the Valley Veterans

To celebrate bonfire night, Valley Veterans hosted a cinema night, encouraging all local veterans to join. The event took place at the Ton Pentre Community Centre, the regular meeting place for the Valley Veterans group. Throughout the evening there was a screening of a popular movie, accompanied by delicious food and refreshments, further strengthening the bonds within our veteran community. This event was held to help and give a safe space to our veterans who may suffer with PTSD and find this night particularly challenging.



Pop's Birthday

One of the oldest Armed Forces veterans in Wales and the oldest in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Gordon “Pop” White celebrated his 100th birthday this year surrounded by family, friends and former Servicemen and women at a special event held in Rhydyfelin Community Centre. Members of the Armed Forces Veterans Group and special guests presented him with special gifts as everyone enjoyed a singalong of wartime songs, accompanied by a pianist.



Aberdare Cenotaph Event

On Sunday June 25th, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council in collaboration with Aberdare Comrades Association successfully marked the 100th Anniversary of Aberdare Cenotaph. The day began with a parade through Aberdare, followed by a service at the Cenotaph featuring the insightful words of guest speaker Roy Noble. Post-service, Library Square (Green Street) came alive with performances by Tylorstown Band, Dare to Sing, Cwmbach Male Voice Choir, and Cwmdare Voices. Councillor Webber, Deputy Leader and Armed Forces Champion, expressed gratitude for the collaborative effort, encouraging the community's participation in this meaningful event.

Southeast Wales - Poppy Appeal Launch 2023

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council were pleased to host the Southeast Wales Poppy Appeal launch 2023 which took place at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park on Saturday 28th October. The service was led by the Royal British Legion, and over 150 members of the Armed Forces community and public attended to show their support for the official launch.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council support the Royal British Legion every year, encouraging people to wear a poppy in tribute to the countless men and women who sacrificed so much to serve our country. The Council continue to celebrate the contribution of every member of the Armed Forces who have stepped up to defend our way of life and continue to do so today. In 2023 the council recruited a dedicated Memorials Officer and invested funds to ensure our memorials and cenotaphs are kept at the highest standards.



Poppy Appeal

In November, RCT cabinet members, along with dedicated RBL members, frontline council staff, and veterans volunteered to collect money for the poppy appeal. This coordinated approach reflects the Council's commitment to supporting the RBL. Research Apprentice Harley Foster said, "It was a heart-warming experience to see the generosity of the public first hand and engage with them on a different level."



Celebration



RCT Gold Award

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council proudly retains its Armed Forces Covenant Gold Employer Recognition. The Ministry of Defence's prestigious Gold Award recognises the Council's ongoing support for the Armed Forces community.

The Council's support goes beyond words, with initiatives like an Armed Forces Staff Network and a successful Veteran's Advice Service, offering free, impartial support. The granting of Freedom of the County Borough to MOD St Athan and the Royal Air Force further cements the Council's profound connection with the Armed Forces.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council stands as a shining example of a community that honours and supports its Armed Forces, embodying the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Welsh Veterans Award

It was a triumphant night for RCT at the Welsh Veteran Awards 2023. Gareth Pennell (RBL) received the prestigious Silver for Lifetime Achievement award, while Paul Bromwell (Valley Veterans) was granted both the Community Award and the Role Model of the Year Award. Ruth Birch (Served and Proud) earned well-deserved recognition as the winner of the Inspiration of the Year Award, and Nigel Locke (Valley Veterans) was awarded the Silver for Volunteer of the Year. These accolades reflect the outstanding contributions of individuals who exemplify dedication, inspiration, and service within our community.

Paul Bromwell of Rhondda Valley Receives Points of Light Award for Pioneering Veteran Support through Valley Veterans

Former Welsh Guardsman and Falkland Islands campaign veteran, Paul Bromwell, founder of 'Valley Veterans,' has been honored with the Points of Light Award. Over the past 16 years, Paul has transformed his struggle with PTSD into a beacon of support, offering equine and horticultural activities that enhance the mental and physical well-being of veterans. 'Valley Veterans' has evolved into a thriving community hub, connecting veterans, fostering practical skills, and guiding towards mental health services. Paul's dedication and impact shine bright in this well-deserved recognition..

Projects

Served and Proud LGBTQ+ Veterans Support Group

This is a joint project between Rhondda Cynon Taf and Cardiff Councils. The project was launched at the beginning of this year at Cardiff Castle and recently at Ynysangharad War Memorial park, Pontypridd. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council was pleased to welcome Hannah Blythyn MS who is the Lead on policy in relation to the Armed Forces in Wales and Veterans.

The group is going from strength to strength. Armed Forces Liaison Officers will continue to promote the groups with an aim of reaching members who were affected by the 'gay ban'. Members of the group gave evidence to the recent LGBT Veterans Independent Review which has given a better understanding of the experiences and impacts had on members.

Recently the Served and Proud groups took part in the Pride Cymru parade in Cardiff with 'Fighting with Pride' to honour and celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, as well as to raise awareness in society so that people can break free from the stigma and biases that surround them.



Digitalisation Project

The War Memorials Digitalisation Project was officially launched in October 2023. Since then, committed volunteers have been diligently researching all the names listed on our war memorials, providing each with crucial details such as service numbers and grave locations.

You can explore the evolving database on our heritage website, a testament to the dedication to preserving and sharing the legacies of those commemorated.

We held a small event to discuss with potential volunteers in the Rhondda Heritage Park; the Mayor, the Deputy Leader and other councillors attended as well as some of our Valley Veterans volunteers.

For further information and to volunteer please contact Rhiannon Seymour:
Rhiannon.Seymour@rctcbc.gov.uk

War memorial cleaning

With the support of RCT Council, a dedicated group of volunteers, primarily from Valley Veterans, has undertaken the important task of cleaning three war memorials within the RCT area. The memorials that have already been cleaned are located in Tonypany, Penygraig Park, and Blaenrhondda. This ongoing effort is part of a comprehensive initiative aimed at cleaning and maintaining war memorials throughout RCT. The commitment to this annual memorial's maintenance check reflects a deep sense of respect and gratitude for the sacrifices made by those commemorated, ensuring that their memory is preserved with the utmost care and dedication.



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

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 daily 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

The Armed Forces Liaison Officer has a key presence at Veteran Socialising and Support groups within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Over the years we have aimed to have a support group each day of the week, giving veterans wider support access and helping reduce social isolation. Many of the groups are well attended and provide much needed advice and support to veterans across Cwm Taf. The Armed Forces Liaison Officer attends the following groups across Cwm Taf to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and provide advice and support if required by members:

Monday 10am

Cynon Valley Veterans, Darren Las Community Centre, Mountain Ash

Monday 12pm

Served and Proud LGBTQ+ Veteran Group, Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, Pontypridd (every fortnight)

Tuesday 10am

Merthyr Valley Veterans, Merthyr Labour Club, Merthyr Tydfil

Wednesday 10am

Taf Ely Veterans, Library Court, Rhydyfelin, Pontypridd

Wednesday 10am

Valley Veterans (form completion and support), Ton Pentre Community Centre, Ton Pentre

Thursday 10am

Valley Veterans Group, Ton Pentre Community Centre, Ton Pentre

Friday 10am

Woody's Lodge, starting soon in Llantrisant (launch date to be confirmed)

Saturday 10:30am

Woody's Lodge, Bowls Pavilion, Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, Pontypridd

Veterans Lunch

The Cwm Taf Armed Forces Liaison Officer has joined up with the Lighthouse Project in Tonyrefail to provide veterans and their partners with a free lunch once a month. The Veteran and Partners lunch has continued to grow since it was launched in June 2023 and has become very popular with the Armed Forces Community in Cwm Taf, providing a monthly opportunity to come together and chat while enjoying home cooked meals.



Veterans' Burial Fees

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council continues to waive 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.

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



Ydych chi erioed wedi gwasanaethu yn Lluoedd Arfog y DU fel Milwr Rheolaidd, Wrth Gefn neu drwy Wasanaeth Cenedlaethol?

Have you ever served in the UK Armed Forces as a Regular, Reservist or through National Service?

Rhowch wybod i'ch practis meddygol.

Efallai y bydd gennych hawl i gael triniaeth â blaenoriaeth.

Please let your medical practice know.

You may be eligible for priority treatment.

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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.

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



**Ellis Regan –
Regional School Liaison Officer**

Ellis is passionate about ensuring that all children should have equal opportunities in education to fulfil their potential. Ellis feels strongly that children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) should have an equal voice and as part of her qualification, Ellis conducted a study surrounding the exploration of attitudes towards the inclusion and integration of children with ALN in mainstream schools. Ellis wholeheartedly believes that if all children receive the support they need, both academically and pastorally, they will be able to thrive and succeed in education and beyond. Ellis believes this holistic approach can make a real difference to the experiences of all children. Ellis is passionate about increasing the understanding of Service children's experiences in schools and education settings across South Wales and works closely with those educators to support them in embedding good practice.

You can get in touch with Ellis on 07385 389569 or via email Ellis.Regan@rctcbc.gov.uk