

REPORTS OF CABINET CHAMPIONS 2022/23 (2)

ARMED FORCES CABINET CHAMPION

This Annual Report of the Cabinet Champion for Armed Forces, Cllr Nem Thapa, provides an overview of the year which summarises the role and expectations for the year, key activity achieved in 2022/23 and recommendations for 2023/24.

1. ROLE AND PRIORITIES – EXPECTATIONS FOR THE YEAR

- 1.1 The role of the Cabinet Champion for Armed Forces is to promote the objectives of the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Council through local action and by building connections between the Military and civilian communities. The Armed Forces Act 2021 has now brought the Covenant principles into law to help protect military personnel, their close family, and veterans from being disadvantaged due to service life when accessing essential public services like healthcare, education, and housing.

The top priorities this year:

- (1) Work with the Garrison Commander and officers to establish new covenant partnership arrangements in North Hampshire
- (2) Contribute to the programme of joint Military/civilian events in 2022/23 and actively support the events to encourage community cohesion and integration.
- (3) Work with the veterans' hubs in the Borough to encourage attendance and participation of veterans, with a view to supporting other projects like the Repair Café and Men's Sheds
- (4) Work with service families and supporting organisations to encourage engagement with local health and wellbeing services through the Primary Care Network and Clinical Commissioning Group

A full copy of the roles and responsibilities as agreed at the beginning of the year is attached as an Appendix.

2. SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIVITY IN 2022/23

- 2.1 In June 2022, I took part in an Armed Forces Champion partnership event and induction tour of the Aldershot Garrison, together with the Shadow Champion for Armed Forces, Cllr Nadia Martin, and the military champions from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Hart District Council. It was clear that there is a strong interest to work collaboratively across the three districts in North Hampshire to deliver benefits for serving personnel and veterans through covenant partnership arrangements. Joint discussion was held to agree the approach to a proposed Partnership Conference and the potential for working through smaller focus groups in future between conference events.

Covenant Partnership Conference

- 2.2 On 25th November 2022, Cllr Nadia Martin and I participated in the North Hampshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Conference hosted by the Garrison in Aldershot. The event brought together a range of partners from the military and civilian communities working towards the effective delivery of the provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces Act 2021. This included representatives from the Garrison, local authorities, Frimley Park Hospital, Rushmoor Voluntary Services, Citizens Advice Rushmoor, Royal British Legion, SSAFA the Armed Forces Charity and the local MP. The event provided a forum for collective discussion around the Armed Forces Act 2021, with the opportunity to develop network connections, and to identify opportunities to link stakeholders and services.

Community Hub and 'Meet and Greet' Network Meetings

- 2.3 As part of my role to build connections between military and civilian communities, and to support service families I have attended and assisted the quarterly family liaison events held at the Aldershot Garrison Community Hub which bring together a range of welfare and advice organisations to support families, both military and non-military. I have also participated at Network Meet and Greet events at the Hub on a regular basis this year. Each event is held with a different theme with guest speakers on a specialist topic e.g., personal and home safety, and mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.4 Through our support to these events, the Shadow Champion and I have picked up and followed through on a range of casework during the year, in particular linked to housing.

Veterans

- 2.5 This year I have taken steps to find out more about, and develop connections with, the veterans' hubs in Aldershot and Farnborough and to understand the current provision of formal and informal clubs for veterans, which includes the British Legion and several coffee morning style clubs which meet regularly in various venues. I have also initiated a monthly surgery for veterans at the Prospect Community Centre. There is a role for the Champion for Armed Forces to help encourage attendance by veterans, facilitate links between veterans' organisations, and to help facilitate links between veterans' clubs and local support organisations, such as health services, with a view to helping to shape services for veterans in the future.

Events

- 2.6 Throughout the year, the Shadow Champion and I have played a key role in supporting military events which have focused on promoting integration and cohesion. These included:
- Opening of the CESSAC Café at the Garrison Community Hub – June 2022
 - Beating the Retreat at the Aldershot Military Museum – June 2022
 - Armed Forces Day Celebration – June 2022
 - Commonwealth Games, Queens Baton Relay – July 2022

- Bula Festival which focused on the role of the Fijian community – August 2022
- Service Families Christmas Party, supporting regiments while families are away – December 2022
- Community Carol Service – December 2022
- Commemorative event of the 51st Anniversary of the IRA bombing of the Officers' mess in Pennefathers Road in 1972 – February 2023

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

Looking ahead to 2023/24 and building on the work that has been achieved in my first year as Armed Forces Champion, it is recommended that the following actions be incorporated into next year's priorities for the role:

- i) It would be beneficial to have an Armed Forces Champion webpage on the Council's website with signposting and relevant links, informed by information that the Champion has curated through their networks. This would help to embed the work of the Champion within the Council organisation. This could be incorporated into the Council's existing Military Covenant webpage.
- ii) There is an important and meaningful role for the Champion in helping to increase the visibility of the veteran community in the Borough, which can help to facilitate and improve links between veterans and support services. It is recommended to continue to promote and develop connections with, and between, veterans' clubs (including the British Legion and informal breakfast clubs and coffee mornings).
- iii) Continue to support the development of the covenant partnership arrangements for North Hampshire and plans for a community partnership conference in 2023/24.
- iv) Re-examine the criteria and possibility for Rushmoor Borough Council to work towards the Gold Award standard of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.
- v) Support the programme of military community events planned to encourage community cohesion in 2023/24.

Cllr Nem Thapa
Cabinet Champion for Armed Forces 2022/23

**Armed Forces Champion
Roles and Responsibilities**

Purpose: Promote the objectives of the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Council through local action and by building connections between the Military and civilian communities.

Roles:

- (1) Ensure that Council services reflect the principles of the Armed Forces and Military Community Covenants
- (2) Provide a conduit for all parts of the military community, including veterans, who are looking for assistance from the Council
- (3) Understand the needs of the local military community and act as a signpost and interface between the military and the community
- (4) Brief and raise awareness of Council Members and staff on the role of the champion and the objective of the Covenant
- (5) Establish effective lines of communication between military organisations and the Council, to include meetings with Unit Armed Forces Champions
- (6) Support events held by and for the military community
- (7) Report back regularly to the Council, and especially the Cabinet on plans, projects and activities

Champion Priorities in 2022/23

- (1) Work with the Garrison Commander and officers to establish new covenant partnership arrangements in North Hampshire
- (2) Contribute to the programme of joint Military/civilian events in 2022/23 and actively support the events to encourage community cohesion and integration
- (3) Work with the veterans' hubs in the Borough to encourage attendance and participation of veterans, with a view to supporting other projects like the Repair Café and Men's Sheds
- (4) Contribute towards the review of the trial of the Future Accommodation Model in Aldershot and work with the Garrison to ensure the arrangements work effectively
- (5) Work with service families and supporting organisations to encourage engagement with local health and wellbeing services through the Primary Care Network and Clinical Commissioning Group