

Council support to Hillingdon Armed Forces Community Covenant Report for the Social Services, Housing and Public Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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1. How many ex servicemen and women are there in the Borough?

There is very limited public information available on the size of the Armed Forces community. The national Census does not include questions relating to prior service in the Armed Forces. The exact number of ex-service men and women living in Hillingdon is not known, though Hillingdon has a reasonable idea of the numbers who are employed at RAF Northolt.

UK research carried out by the Royal British Legion and Forces in Mind Trust in 2014¹ found the following:

- There are around 6.2 million people within the ex-Service community in the UK.
- Nearly half of the adult ex-Service community are over the age of 75.
- Around 630,000 members of the adult ex-Service community are likely to be experiencing problems getting around outside the home.
- Large numbers (around 720,000) experience problems with self-care, including exhaustion and pain or difficulty looking after themselves. Mobility and self-care difficulties peak among those aged 75 or over.
- Depression affects around 480,000 members of the adult ex-Service community, around 370,000 report feeling lonely, and around 350,000 are recently bereaved.

The research also found that ex-service men and women are more likely to experience certain problems:

- Veterans aged 16-64 are more likely than the general population of the same age to report a long term illness that limits their activities (24% vs 13%).
- Working age veterans report living with a number of conditions, including depression (10% vs 6%), back problems (14% vs 7%), problems with their arms (9% vs 5%), legs or feet (15% vs 7%), difficulty hearing (6% vs 2%) and difficulty seeing (5% vs 1%), at a higher rate than the general population of the same age.
- Those of working-age (between 16 and 64) are less likely to be employed than the general population aged 16-64 (60% vs 73%), more likely to be unemployed (8% vs 5%) and more likely to be economically inactive (32% vs 22%).

¹ <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/public-policy-and-research/the-uk-ex-service-community-a-household-survey/>

- Altogether around 700,000 members of the working age ex-Service community (aged 16-64) are currently not in work.

One approach to quantifying the numbers of ex-service personnel that has been taken in some public service organisations has been to include a specific question to ask service users whether or not they have served or are serving in the armed forces. A number of Councils cited by the Royal British Legion have been able to compile data by, for example, asking a question of everyone using the main reception and customer contact centre, or by including a specific question in equalities monitoring forms.²

2. How is the covenant working to support those men and women?

Hillingdon Council recognises the disadvantage that Service personnel often face in accessing public services, and has responded to this by including an exception to the usual 10 year residency requirement and providing additional priority in the Social Housing Allocation Policy.³

Within the national School Admissions Code, admissions authorities must follow prescribed arrangements. This includes allocating a school place in advance of a child moving to the area when supporting information has been provided to evidence that a move will take place.

The Council has also set up a dedicated web page on admissions for forces families to draw attention to the national 2012 Schools Admissions Code, which introduced provisions intended to ensure that children of UK service personnel are not disadvantaged when applying for schools as a result of being posted at various locations. The provisions do not give automatic priority to service children over other children or guarantee that service children will get a place at a particular school.

3. Does the Council work with the armed forces to ensure older people/ex servicemen/women are involved in events and services available within the Borough?

The London Borough of Hillingdon was proud to sign the Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2012. The Council appointed Councillor Douglas Mills, Cabinet Member for Community, Commerce and Regeneration as its Armed Forces

² Best Practice Guide to Community Covenants, Royal British Legion, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/community-covenants/>

³ <https://modgov.hillingdon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MIId=2611&Ver=4>
Part I - Members, Public and Press

Champion, supported by a senior level Partnership Board and backed by an officer who acts as the contact point for the Community Covenant.

The Partnership Board remains in existence and Members agreed that they would meet if there were matters requiring discussion.

We are proud to maintain strong links with RAF Northolt in our borough. Northolt is now in its centenary year as a military flying station, and is home to the largest concentration of service personnel in London (across all three armed forces). We have been delighted to be party to several successful applications to the community covenant grant scheme to help build stronger links between residents and armed forces personnel.

We support the Public Open Days at the Base which are helping to build links with our schools and community groups. During the 2014 Open Day two youth orchestras and the Hayes Schools Community Choir took part. As part of their Centenary celebrations RAF Northolt personnel paraded through Uxbridge to exercise their Freedom of the Borough. The Homecoming Parade we organised for 63 Squadron when they returned from an Afghanistan deployment was attended by in excess of 20,000 people.

The Council arranges regular annual fishing days for armed forces personnel returning from operational deployments, to provide opportunities to relax with their families. These popular events are continued during the summer months, working with youth projects at RAF Northolt.

This helps us build links not only with armed forces families but also with volunteers who support the activity. We also ensure that all personnel who live on the base are issued with a Hillingdon First card which gives them access to a range of discounts in the Borough leisure facilities and car parks. We also provided the RAF Cadets with a new minibus.

We have built strong links with the RAF Music Service as Northolt is home to the Central Band of the RAF. The Central Band is a key partner with the Hillingdon Music Service and they have performed concerts and workshops for our music students and visited many schools across the Borough to promote musical excellence. This partnership includes providing use of the Winston Churchill Hall in Ruislip free of charge for RAF charity concerts.

The Council has invested £6m to build a new Education and Visitor Centre at the historic Battle of Britain Bunker on the former RAF Uxbridge site. This will provide first-class visitor and conference facilities from Spring 2018 at the site where Sir Winston Churchill witnessed events on 15 September 1940, the most significant day of the Battle of Britain.

Hillingdon is one of the first Local Authorities in the country and was among the first London Boroughs to gain a Silver Award under the Government's Employer

Recognition Scheme, in recognition of the excellent support that we give to our Reservists. The award was successfully renewed in December 2017.

We celebrate Armed Forces Day annually and have previously held a series of special events including flag raising ceremonies, veterans' tea parties, and a public band concert. Our Borough Reservists all support Uniform to Work Day each year.

We are particularly proud of our links with veterans groups and charities. The Council has supported our local Normandy Veterans to make several trips to the Normandy beaches and all have been awarded the Civic Medal of the Borough in recognition of their wartime contributions. The Council also assisted several Normandy Veterans with applications to be awarded the Legion D'Honneur by the French Government. We have provided our local Gurkha community, many of whom have served with British armed forces, with dedicated space at one of our cemeteries.

The Council also supports the work of the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee and has jointly funded the cleaning of the Grade 2 Polish War Memorial in conjunction with the Polish Embassy. An annual ceremony at the Memorial has grown in importance year on year.

We actively support Remembrance Sunday events in all of our major town centres and hold a Two Minute Silence Ceremony on the Civic Centre Forecourt on 11 November each year. This includes the launch of maroon rockets across the Borough to signify the start and finish of the silence. In addition we have cleaned and restored all of the War Memorials in the Borough. Updated records of all the Borough's war memorials are in preparation.

The Council arranged a number of events to mark the centenary of the start of WW1. We laid two commemorative VC plaques in Harefield at the war memorial and have dedicated the village green as a 'centenary field' to preserve the area in perpetuity. We also compiled a detailed record of the background behind every named individual on WW1 war memorials in Hillingdon, publishing the results as a book 'We will remember them' displayed in each of our rebuilt and refurbished libraries and available free of charge to the families of those who gave their lives. Our Library Service also held over 100 WW1 events including the creation of a replica trench in one of the Libraries.