

Armed Forces Covenant Member Champion

Report for Annual EDDC Council 2022

Establishing the role

The main thrust of the Armed Forces Covenant is that no ex-military person or members of their family should - in any way - be disadvantaged.

Following my appointment as Armed Forces Champion my task was to establish the parameters of the role. My instinct was that I must find out what the council is doing in supporting ex-service men and women.

To achieve that aim I asked officers to provide an audit of exactly where EDDC is now (Housing Benefits, Recruitment). Thanks to John Golding and Joanne Avery the answers to those questions revealed:

- To date EDDC has not held records of which employees are ex-service nor does it ask the question of job applicants as it is not relevant to the job application and there is no lawful basis for an applicant to provide that information.
- Recently a BCR has been raised with STRATA for a change to be made to the Council Tax Reduction form so it will be possible to identify all ex-service personnel in future applications.
- A specific reference to the council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant is now included in the Equalities Policy.
- During the Housing application process the question is asked by Devon Home Choice and to date there are 154 ex-service personnel in EDDC managed housing.

Whilst records to date have been sketchy my feeling is that the Housing and Benefits teams have dealt with every applicant in a fair and even handed manner. Whilst specific information on ex-service men and women was not generally held, there was no evidence or intention of disadvantage to any individual.

Following further conversations with John Golding and the Lead Councillor for Supporting People at DCC it was felt that having an elected member maintaining a watching brief and meeting the relevant officers regularly, would actively encourage EDDC's compliance with the Armed Forces Covenant.

This has continued over the last two years via Zoom as the COVID pandemic prevented face to face meetings.

Privately I have been involved with a group of ex-service men and women who meet weekly in Budleigh. The group has some 15 members who have all been severely affected by physical, mental or emotional trauma resulting from their time in the services. The group has no external funding and meets as a self-supporting peer group providing companionship, light hearted fun and outings.

For this fund raising has been essential and my thanks go to local charities, the Town Council and the Budleigh Branch of the Royal British Legion who have been active in giving funds.

Further applications to EDDC's Small Community Grants are also in process.

Contacts at both DCC and with other Champions in the County have been established to identify 'best practice' and ensure this Council can be seen to be in the bracket.

My thanks to officers for their support and I would reassure members that anyone who applies for support with Housing or Welfare Benefits is receiving caring and even handed treatment from East Devon District Council.

Cllr. Alan Dent
Armed Forces Covenant Champion
East Devon District Council
May 2022