

Armed Forces Covenant Report 2025

Introduction

This report details the work and achievements by Torbay Council over the past 12 months as well as the ongoing efforts and future aspirations.

Highlights and Achievements

MoD Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Awards

This year has seen a collective Torbay Council and SWISCo HR team spearhead a Task and Finish group with the aim of submitting a strong application for the ERS Silver Award backed up by quality evidence. Particular mention must be made of the outstanding Armed Forces Recognition Policy that was developed and published as a direct result of HRs good work and puts us as an organisation in very good stead for the future. The policy establishes a framework for mobilised Reservists, guaranteed job interviews for veterans who meet the essential criteria as well as reaffirming paid leave for Reservists and Adult Cadet Instructors who deploy on Annual Camp.

As a result of the work conducted by the task and finish group, Torbay Council have been awarded the ERS Silver Award which will be received at a ceremony in Exeter by Cllr Mark Spacagna and Matthew Fairclough-Kay, Director of Corporate Services.

We have an aspiration to apply for the ERS Gold award in the near future and will be submitting an application when able to do so.

SWISCo signed the Armed Forces Covenant

In October last year following consultation with our Lead for the Armed Forces Covenant, SWISCo signed the Covenant in a ceremony at the Paignton Army Reserve Centre and have nominated one of their veterans as their Armed Forces Champion. This has led to greater engagement between our respective veteran communities which was evidenced during VE day when SWISCo hosted a celebration lunch to mark the event.

Brixham Town Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant

As part of our pledge to support the Armed Forces Covenant we have been advocating the Covenant to local organisations, as a result, Brixham Town Council have signed the Covenant and other local businesses have also expressed an interest in signing the Covenant.

Mayoral Cadets

Once again, this year we have recruited several Mayoral Cadets who have accompanied our Civic Mayor and Deputy Mayor at civic engagements. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank last year's Mayoral Cadets and wish them all the best for the future in their military careers as all 3 have joined His Majesty's Armed Forces as Regular Serving Personnel.

Armed Forces Community Network

Last October saw the establishment of the Torbay Council Armed Forces Community Network as part of our staff networks initiative. The group is chaired by our Lead for Armed Forces Covenant and include all members of the Armed Forces Community across both Torbay Council and SWISCo, they meet monthly and have circa 30 members in the network.

Southwest Forces Connect

The Lead for the Armed Forces Covenant has been nominated to the position of Vice Chair of the Forces Connect Southwest, which is the Southwest Armed Forces Covenant Working Group. This is a quarterly meeting between the LAs across the Southwest to discuss strategy, share best practise and advise the Southwest Armed Forces Covenant Board accordingly.

Local Engagement

Engagement with the local Armed Forces community has increased with regular engagements attended by either our Armed Forces Champion or our Lead for the Armed Forces Covenant, where possible both have attended. This includes VE Day celebrations, local military services and commemorations as well as Armed Forces Day which have all been immensely supported by our Members and senior council officers alike.

Webpage Updates

Our Armed Forces webpage has been updated and continues to be as we forge better links with support organisations and other military communities across Torbay and beyond. Following a productive meeting with branch members of the Torquay and Paignton Royal British Legion (RBL) branches, a mutual decision was reached whereby in order to better support our military community a banner will be commissioned and will signpost those in our Armed Forces Community who need support, to our webpage where the details of local and national support groups are held. This banner will be displayed in a prominent location adjacent to the Rifles Garden on The King's Drive.

Public Consultation

A public consultation was launched in December 2024 and closed in February 2025; we had a total of 220 respondents. The report is due for delivery in October; key themes that have been drawn from the survey so far are:

- Homelessness and healthcare concerns were raised multiple times.
- Whilst the majority of veterans who responded indicated they don't need support; the majority of respondents who require support have significant healthcare issues, complex PTSD being but one example.

- There is a need for a more coherent, accessible support for veterans, particularly for the older generations, this also applies to their families.
- There is more work required to improve the understanding of the Covenant across all sectors.

Risks

The council is committed to supporting the Armed Forces Community and further consideration is needed as to the officer capacity required to lead on the delivery of this agenda.

Central government have recently announced the legal duty under the Armed Forces Act 2021 is due to be expanded almost fourfold from the areas of Housing, Education and Healthcare to:

- Housing
- Healthcare
- Education
- Employment
- Social care
- Childcare
- Personal taxation
- Welfare benefits
- Criminal justice
- Immigration
- Citizenship
- Pensions
- Service-related compensation
- Transport

Whilst most of the topics mentioned will have a limited impact on our services, we won't know what those impacts will be until further information has been published by central government.

Summary

We have continued to strive to uphold and improve our commitments both under our legal duty and our pledges within our Armed Forces Covenant. The good work that has taken place thus far has been recognised nationally with our ERS Silver Award, which recognises we are moving in the right direction.

We are in a good position, with effective steps being taken to improve our commitments, both to our employees who are members of the Armed Forces Community and to the wider community across Torbay. However, there is still more to do and we will strive to build upon our successes year on year.