



Ashfield District Council – Case Study

The starting point in Ashfield District Council's journey to implementing improvements under the Armed Forces Covenant

In November 2018, Ashfield, along with all the local authorities across Nottinghamshire, re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant at a ceremony at Southwell Minster. Gillian is the Officer with lead responsibility for the Covenant at Ashfield District Council and the re-signing refreshed her commitment to it and senior management are supportive.

Her biggest challenge was that, (like many other lead Officers who take this on as part of a much wider substantive role), she didn't know where to start. In her words she was "lost in a sea of mist". She had attended a couple of the Civil Military Partnership Board meetings and felt out of her depth in terms of military jargon and knowing what was expected of her in this role. She had been involved in some civic events such as Remembrance and answered a couple of Freedom of Information requests. Even with her personal military background, she struggled to get started and identify what she could do that would have a tangible outcome for people covered under the Covenant.

What changed following the pre-training consultation?

Gillian describes the timing of the 'Bringing the Armed Forces Covenant to Life' event invitation as perfect. During the initial consultation exercise, the Charnwood, Melton & Rushcliffe (CMR) partnership facilitator identified that Ashfield hadn't yet applied for the Bronze Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) award but would be able to demonstrate that they met the criteria to do so. They also hadn't yet developed an action plan to deliver on the Covenant within the Authority and so the facilitator suggested some short- and medium-term actions that the training package would support. By the day of the training event, Ashfield had achieved the Bronze Award.

What did Ashfield District Council take from the event?

Ashfield District Council have been keen to adopt as much of the learning and resources as possible from the training day and associated delegate resource pack. Gillian immediately started to use the template action plan and cross-referenced policy templates and resources to add the detail needed within the Authority's first Covenant action plan to make positive changes for the Armed Forces community and ensure that they face no disadvantage when accessing Ashfield's services. It was quickly identified that many of the actions correspond with and sit well within their Health and Wellbeing Plan which helped the Covenant Action Plan to be embedded into well recognised existing structures. Gillian describes the delegate resource pack as being "like a bible to me".





During the training day, Ashfield District Council were able to network with the Ministry of Defence East Midlands Director and the Careers Transition Partnership/RFEA along with colleagues from other authorities who were all at different stages in delivering on the Covenant pledges.



Quick wins achieved after the training event

Ashfield swiftly implemented several actions including introducing new policies, gaining increased visibility and buy-in to the Armed Forces Covenant agenda and developed a relationship with Defence Relationship Management (DRM). The CMR facilitator supported communication with the DRM Director and supported Ashfield to demonstrate that a raft of new initiatives had been put in place which they described in their application to the Silver Employer Recognition Scheme Awards. During this application process Gillian has been able to make key relationships both within the Council and the wider military community. Ashfield District Council are supportive of their new Veterans' Breakfast Club, have made links with Age UK's Forces Friends coordinator and initiated relationships with local reservist units.

The training and consultation have given Gillian the confidence to talk about the Armed Forces Covenant at every opportunity through her working day. This has included team meetings, networks she is involved in and authority funded projects to encourage services to 'Ask the Question' and make them more aware of the support available and promote the Armed Forces Covenant. Through this engagement Gillian regularly receives enquiries where a service user has an Armed Forces background about what the authority can do to support or where they are able to signpost on to, if the support required for the identified need doesn't sit within the original organisation. This has included housing enquiries, homelessness issues referred by an external partner service and links to housing projects within the area.

The Authority's website is continually being improved and updated with information applicable to the Armed Forces, an example being that the local leisure centre is now offering discounts to members of the Armed Forces community. The event has





provided Ashfield and Gillian a network of people to turn to and a keenness to deliver what she can with the resources available to her.

This round of local elections brought about changes within their elected members with a new Councillor being selected as an Armed Forces Champion with a named deputy to support. Since this appointment the Champion has been able to attend his first Civil Military Partnership Board, supported by Gillian who is more involved within the meeting itself and feels confident and supported with the knowledge she has gained.

Ashfield District Council have a shared HR department which is managed with a neighbouring authority who unfortunately did not attend the event. However, communication between the authorities is progressing with a focus on recruitment, looking at partnering with the Careers Transition Partnership and the new Forces Families programme. Reservists' annual leave is built into their annual leave policies and work will commence soon to develop a specific Reservist policy.

Ashfield District Council have moved on significantly in the last few months with regards to the implementation of their pledges under the Armed Forces Covenant. They have recently received notification of being awarded the Silver Employer Recognition Scheme Award. The interview between the CMR Facilitator and Gillian that has been used to compile this case study concluded with Gillian asking, "what do we need to do to achieve Gold?". Something tells us the relationship between the CMR Covenant Team and Ashfield District Council will be ongoing!

