

[News story: Durham Armed Forces Forum: better supporting a talented and complex veteran community](#)

Photo of attendees at the Durham Armed Forces Forum. Photo: Michael Potts. All rights reserved

VAPC NEs Michael Potts attended the Durham Armed Forces Forum as the board's representative. This forum was held at Durham County Council's headquarters and was chaired by Gordon Elliot, the Council's Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement. The forum was supported by:

- Ian Hunter Smart, the Councils' Voluntary & Community Sector Officer
- Councillor Lucy Hovvels MBE
- Councillor Jane Brown, the Council's Armed Forces Champion

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion were in attendance and made a meaningful contribution to the forum's work.

This lively event drew 23 attendees from the NHS, Royal Navy, army, police, service charities, social housing groups, rehabilitation service, social housing, and veterans.

For the VAPC NE the Durham events are a vital part in the VAPC's ongoing mission to improve the understanding of the needs of the veteran and armed forces community and how best practice can be spread and veteran support be better delivered.

The forum explored issues relating to new ways to support veterans within the criminal justice system. The new Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company, a non-profitmaking company, outlined their work to develop local contacts to help them maximise their veteran support services.

Lt Col Nathan Teale, 8th Battalion the Rifles, made a presentation on the work they are doing to en-gage veterans. The Battalion is the newest in the army being formed on the 1 November 2017 and is undergoing rapid expansion locally. They are keen to encourage veterans to join the Battalion seeing them as a valuable pool of talent which brings with them the experience needed to help with their mission.

Equally important are the links to the local community and the local regimental associations which are seen key to the Battalion's culture and memory. They form a vital part in preserving the proud and long history of the Durham Light Infantry, an illustrious predecessor of the 8th Battalion.

For the VAPC NE this understanding of the value of veterans as 'history keepers' and as an active, experienced group has been something they have pushed for many years.

TrueView Spouses Employment Project, a Finchale project funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund, discussed their mission to help spouses and dependents of working age of serving military personnel and hard to reach people find employment, gain UK recognised qualifications for those with foreign qualifications, and to support people looking to improve their circumstances.

The new Armed Forces Outreach Service, a Local Authority Partnership, made a presentation. Made up of Durham, Northumbria, and Tyneside Councils, this service seeks to be 'holistic' in providing help and advice to veterans. They actively engage with veterans, and soon to be veterans, to provide them with the help they need. They started in November 2017 but since then they have provided mental health referrals, rehoused veterans, provided supported accommodation, helped pay off debts and council tax arrears, and have provided goods to set up home. This innovative and wide ranging scheme actively seeks to help and support veterans in an inclusive and engaging way

For the VAPC NE the Durham Armed Forces Forum is an important way to understand what support and help is out there for the armed forces community and to share that knowledge to the wider community. With the support of the Forum members new and innovative ways to support veterans and the wider armed forces community were explored and developed.

The VAPC NE has spent years promoting the idea that veterans are not a problem. Veterans are of any age and have the experience, talent, and interests to make a valuable contribution to their community. The Forum understood this multifaceted nature of the armed forces community and was a valuable move towards a more integrated way to empower and to help the total armed forces community.