

Armed Forces Honorary Member Champion Report 2025/26

Introduction

I am pleased to present this report as the Armed Forces Honorary Member Champion for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

In February 2018, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) signed the Armed Forces Covenant, formally pledging support to members of the Armed Forces community. The Armed Forces Covenant recognises that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, along with their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve.

RBFRS was revalidated recently and continues to hold the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Award, the highest award available, reflecting the Service's sustained commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community.

Throughout 2025–26, work has continued to demonstrate this commitment, supported by the RBFRS Armed Forces Lead Officer, Paul Brooks, who is former armed forces, alongside officers and Members across the Service and Fire Authority. Progress and key activity during the year are outlined below.

Review of the Year

Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Re-validation

Led by the RBFRS lead officer, we were delighted to gain re-validation of the coveted AFC ERS Gold Award in December 2025 for a further five years. This accomplishment required significant effort and dedication from a small team, such as implementing policies that support the armed forces, actively backing the South East Reserve Forces and Cadet Association (SERFCA) at various events in the southeast, and being strong proponents of the AFC and ERS. In recognition of this,

DCFO Mark Arkwell, as CFO (Des) represented RBFERS at an ERS Gold luncheon at RMAS in March 2026.

Royal County of Berkshire Civilian Military Partnership Board (RCBCMPB)

RBFA and RBFERS have continued to fully support the Royal County of Berkshire Civilian Military Partnership Board (RCBCMPB) at both officer and Member level during 2025–26. Meetings have taken place at venues including the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), alongside interim meetings held virtually.

The Board exists to build upon the strong working relationships between the six Berkshire unitary authorities, RBFERS, civilian agencies and the military community. During the year, the partnership reaffirmed its collective commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community across Berkshire. Councillor Knowles of RBWM continues to act as Chair of the Board.

The Lead Officers Group remains in place to support the work of the RCBCMPB, with the RBFERS lead officer continuing to contribute actively.

Armed Forces Veterans' Hubs

As part of RBFA's ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community, RBFERS has continued to host Armed Forces Veterans' Hub events at fire stations across the county.

These events provide veterans with an opportunity to meet, connect, and engage with organisations offering advice and support. During the reporting period, four hub events were held at Maidenhead, Bracknell, Whitley Wood and Newbury Fire Stations.

As previous years. initial attendance was lower than we would have liked, but interest and engagement increased as the year progressed. Attendance by supporting organisations also grew, including representation from, inter alia, the Royal British Legion, SERFCA, NHS Combat Stress, Help for Heroes, Models for Heroes and local authorities. Notably, the Royal Chelsea Hospital Outreach Group joined the event at Newbury with several Chelsea Pensioners attending, along with

the Mayor of Newbury and MP for Newbury. As these relationships continue to develop, further improvements in attendance and visibility are anticipated.

Armed Forces Week

Armed Forces Week was supported across RBFRS and the Fire Authority during June 2025. Communications officers shared daily content throughout the week to demonstrate the Service's ongoing support for the Armed Forces community.

Members of RBFA and RBFRS officers were encouraged to attend and support events held across Berkshire, helping to raise awareness and visibility of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Commemorative Events

Throughout 2025–26, RBFRS and Fire Authority Members attended a range of local commemorative events in remembrance of Armed Forces personnel past and present who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

This included attendance at Remembrance Day services across the county and the significant commemorations marking the 80th anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day.

Lord-Lieutenant's Awards Ceremony

Paul Brooks attended His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire Award awards Ceremony held at the RMAS in October 2025. Sponsored by SERFCA, the ceremony recognises individuals from the reserve and cadet forces who exemplify the volunteer ethos and contribute positively to their local communities.

Looking Ahead

RBFA and RBFRS will continue to demonstrate its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and to supporting serving personnel, veterans and their families through the following priorities:

Sustainment of ERS Gold

The Service will continue to work closely with SERFCA and other armed forces related agencies to sustain the principles of the ERS Gold Award.

Royal County of Berkshire Civilian Military Partnership Board

RBFRS will remain an active partner of the RCBCMPB, supporting collaborative work to improve outcomes for the Armed Forces community across Berkshire.

Armed Forces Veterans' Hub Events

Veterans' Hub events will continue, with planned delivery at Maidenhead, Bracknell and Newbury Fire Stations.

Commemorative Events

The Service and Fire Authority will continue to mark key national and local commemorative dates, including Armed Forces Week and Armistice Day.

Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Armed Forces Honorary Member Champion