



COMMUNITY



Oldham Council

Going for Gold: Oldham's Cooperative Commitment to the Armed Forces Community

Here in Oldham, we're incredibly proud to be a co-operative borough. It's not just a label – it's a way of working and is part of our cultural DNA. It's about fairness, people helping each other, and ensuring everyone has a voice. So when we signed the Armed Forces Covenant, we didn't want it to be just a statement on paper. We wanted it to be something real, something that changed lives.

We know that people who've served in the Armed Forces often face extra challenges—whether it's finding the right job, accessing healthcare, or just adjusting to a new way of life. Sometimes, those challenges are made harder because people don't quite understand what military life is like. We wanted to change that.

The first step was listening. We spoke with veterans and their families here in Oldham to hear about their experiences – what had worked, what hadn't, and what could be better. Their stories shaped everything that followed. We set up an Armed Forces Board that brings people together: the NHS, housing, employment services, local charities, and most importantly, the Armed Forces community themselves. This wasn't about top-down policy development – it was about sitting around the table and figuring it out together.

We also made sure the Covenant had champions behind it. One of our councillors took on the role of Armed Forces Champion, and we brought in a lead officer within the council to keep things moving. Together, they've helped keep the Covenant visible, making sure it's not forgotten among all the other pressures local government faces.

Over time, we've worked to make our support offer more joined-up. Veterans don't always shout about who they are, so we've focused on raising awareness with our staff – helping them spot the signs and connect people to the right support. We've looked at how services link up, how we signpost help, and how we make the system easier to navigate.



Oldham Council Reaffirms Support for Armed Forces Community

This cooperative, people-first approach is something we try to apply across everything we do in Oldham. One powerful example is our work on the Poverty Truth Commission. We believe that the people who are most affected by an issue are the ones who best understand it – so we've brought together residents with lived experience of poverty to work alongside decision-makers. It's not always comfortable, but it's honest, and it's changing how we design services and make decisions. That same spirit of co-production runs through our Armed Forces work, where veterans aren't just consulted – they're shaping the system from the inside out.

This isn't just about the Council doing more – it's about the whole borough getting involved. We've encouraged local businesses to sign the Covenant and think about how they can be more forces-friendly, whether that's through recruitment, flexible working for reservists, or just creating a more welcoming environment. And we've connected this work to our bigger goals around inclusion, neighbourhood working, and growing a fairer economy.

In 2022, we were really proud to be awarded Silver in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. It felt like a milestone – an acknowledgement that we were heading in the right direction. But we're not stopping there. We're now going for Gold!

To get there, we have had to dig deeper. We're reviewing our policies, thinking about how we support reservists, and finding new ways to embed Armed Forces awareness into everything we do. We're not just ticking boxes – we're building something lasting.

And already, we can see it's making a difference. Veterans in Oldham have told us they feel more supported, and more people now know where to turn when they need help. Local services are working more closely together. Staff feel more confident having those conversations. And maybe most importantly, we're seeing veterans taking on leadership roles in this work – shaping decisions, challenging us, and helping build a stronger system for the future.

What's next? We're keeping the momentum going – sharing what we've learned across Greater Manchester, supporting other councils, and growing our local network of forces-friendly employers. We're aiming high, but it's not about awards for us. It's about people. It's about making sure Oldham is a place where those who've served – and their families – feel seen, valued, and supported.

That's the Oldham way: doing things together, doing things with pride, and always looking out for one another.

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