

# Veterans Newsletter NI



Issue #5

February 2026

## In this Edition:

Veterans Awards

Armed Forces  
Covenant Update

Remembrance  
Football Event

Once a Warrior  
Podcast

Roadshows

Veterans  
Organisations  
Updates & More

## A Year of Engagement, Recognition and Progress

It is now just over a year since I took up post as Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner. During that time, we have delivered more than 400 engagements, recorded 18 podcasts, and had countless opportunities to represent the voices of Northern Ireland's veterans. This has included supporting individual queries while continuing to advocate for the veteran community as a whole.

Among the many highlights of the past year was the deeply moving standing ovation for 100 veterans who paraded pitchside during an Act of Remembrance at Windsor Park in November, ahead of the Linfield versus Coleraine match, broadcast live by the BBC.

Witnessing that public recognition of service and sacrifice was truly humbling and a powerful reminder of the respect held for our veterans across society.

Equally meaningful have been the personal interactions with veterans and their families at six veterans' roadshows held across Northern Ireland. These events provided valuable opportunities to listen, connect, and ensure veterans are aware of the support available to them. Hearing first-hand experiences continues to shape and strengthen our work.

Another significant achievement has been sharing the inspirational stories of veterans through our podcast series. With over one million views across 19 released episodes, Once A Warrior – Life Beyond the Uniform has helped raise awareness, improve access to support, and amplify the lived experiences of veterans throughout Northern Ireland.

As we look ahead to 2026, I remain committed to building on the successes of the past year and continuing to be a strong and trusted voice for veterans living in Northern Ireland. Supporting those who have served, and ensuring they receive the recognition, care, and opportunities they deserve, remains at the heart of everything we do.



Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, Mr David Johnstone



# Once a Warrior – Life Beyond the Uniform Approaches First Anniversary



The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's podcast, *Once a Warrior – Life Beyond the Uniform*, is approaching its first anniversary, marking a significant milestone in capturing and sharing the lived experiences of veterans across generations. Since its launch, 22 episodes have been recorded, with 19 released to date and more planned for the future. Over the past year, the podcast has provided a powerful platform for storytelling, allowing veterans to share their personal journeys, operational experiences, and transition to civilian life. Collectively, these stories create an important historical and personal record that will remain accessible for generations to come.

The series has been privileged to feature veterans who have served across conflicts spanning more than 90 years. This includes the remarkable contribution of a Second World War veteran who took part in Operation Market Garden, through to veterans who served in the Falklands, Afghanistan, and Operation Banner here in Northern Ireland. Each story is unique, compelling, and deeply personal, highlighting both the commitment to service and the challenges that can follow.

The podcast also explores the realities of life beyond service, addressing topics such as overcoming life changing injuries, managing mental health, adapting to civilian life, and the innovative ways veterans have found support, including initiatives such as cold water immersion. From accounts of operational service to personal resilience and recovery, the series reflects the extraordinary strength and diversity of the veteran community.

*Once a Warrior – Life Beyond the Uniform* is available to listen to across major podcast platforms, including Amazon, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts. Episodes can also be accessed via the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's website at [www.nivco.co.uk](http://www.nivco.co.uk) and viewed on YouTube.

For further information about the podcast, or if you are a veteran who would like to share your story, please contact the team at [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk).

This unique opportunity to record and preserve the voices and experiences of veterans is not one to be missed.



Mr David Johnstone & UDR Veteran Glen Espie, who came back to the Podcast to complete his story of his two assassination attempts by the IRA.



Combat Medic Tricia Roberts bravely recounts her exceptionally kinetic Afghanistan tour in 2009 in her Podcast – to be released soon.



Retired Lt Col Derek Plews VR, author of recently released *Shamrocks Among the Poppies: Musa Qal'eh 2006* joins the Commissioner to discuss the realities of modern conflict and the importance of honest military history – Podcast to be released soon.

# Veterans Honoured at Special Remembrance Event at Windsor Park

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office, in partnership with Linfield Football Club, was proud to welcome over 100 veterans to a special Remembrance event in recognition of their service at Windsor Park.

The occasion provided a meaningful opportunity to bring together veterans, supporters, and partner organisations for a day centred on gratitude, reflection, and community.

Ahead of the Linfield vs Coleraine fixture, veterans were invited to attend an engaging question and answer session featuring former Northern Ireland international goalkeeper Tommy Wright and former Glasgow Rangers player Marvin Andrews. The session offered veterans and attendees the chance to hear first-hand insights and personal experiences from two highly respected figures within football, contributing to the positive and inclusive atmosphere of the day.



Former Northern Ireland international goalkeeper Tommy Wright and former Glasgow Rangers player Marvin Andrews, take part in a Q&A with NI Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone at Windsor Park - Nov 2025



Above: Members of the Irish Guards and the Irish Guards Association (Ulster Branch) present a cheque to the NI Air Ambulance, alongside Mayor for Belfast City Council, Tracey Kelly and Belfast City Council Veterans Champion James Lawlor.



Veterans attend the Remembrance Football event held in collaboration with the NI veterans Commissioners Office and Linfield Football Club. - Nov 2025

The event also included a charity presentation by members of the Irish Guards Association, who made a donation to the Air Ambulance. The donation was gratefully received by Paul Ross, recognising the vital and life-saving work carried out by the service across Northern Ireland.

A key highlight of the day was the special pitch-side Act of Remembrance, where veterans were honoured for their service and sacrifice. The moving tribute provided a powerful moment of reflection and recognition, particularly significant during the Remembrance period, and served as a reminder of the courage, dedication, and contribution of the veteran community.

The event demonstrated the importance of partnership working in creating opportunities to recognise and support veterans while strengthening connections within the wider community.



Above: Veterans parade pitch side alongside serving members of the Irish Guards for Linfield Football clubs annual act of Remembrance. Veterans received a standing ovation from the spectators present, which was broadcast live on BBC in recognition of their service and sacrifice.

# Commissioner Visits Buick Memorial Primary School to Mark Remembrance



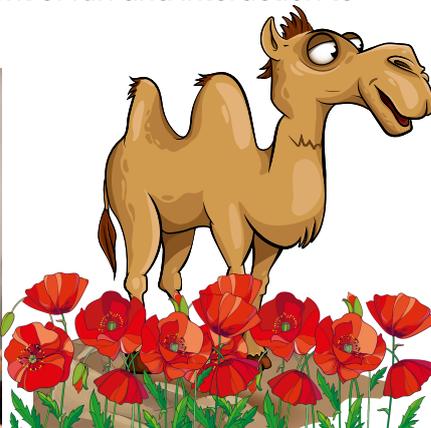
Above: The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office Team, alongside pupils & Principal Miss Peters at Buick Memorial Primary School attend a presentation by NI veterans Commissioner David Johnstone and are presented a framed picture of 'Poppies Through the Ages'

The visit provided an opportunity to reflect on why we wear the poppy and to remember the sacrifices made during times of conflict. This includes not only those who never returned home, but also those who were left behind and those who continue to live with life-changing injuries as a result of their service.

During the visit, pupils showed great enthusiasm and engagement. They were given the opportunity to ask the Commissioner thoughtful and insightful questions about veterans, service life, and the meaning of Remembrance. The pupils also took part in a spot quiz, where they had the chance to win prizes, adding an element of fun and interaction to the session.



Above: Pupils of Buick P.S listen intently to the NI Veterans Commissioner about his time in service and also learn about Remembrance at this special time of year.



Who knew that the Commissioner had a tour mascot of a Camel called Eric during his time on Op TELIC?

A sincere thank you is extended to the pupils, staff, and Principal Miss Peters at Buick Memorial Primary School for their warm welcome and kind hospitality.

Following Remembrance Sunday and ahead of Armistice Day, Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone visited Buick Memorial Primary School in Cullybackey to speak with pupils about the importance of Remembrance.



Above: A pupil of Buick P.S. tries on the Commissioner's old helmet for size during a presentation about Remembrance and the importance of Remembering

A particular highlight of the visit was when the children met Eric the Camel, David's Iraqi mascot, which proved to be extremely popular and helped further engage pupils in learning about service experiences overseas.

Engaging with young people at this important time of year is both a privilege and an honour, helping to ensure the values of remembrance and respect continue to be understood by future generations.

# Armed Forces Covenant Motion Passes at Stormont



Above: A number of MLAs who voted in support of the passing of the Armed Forces Covenant motion on the evening of 4 November 2025, alongside Rachael Harger from NI veterans Commissioner's Office.

The recent passing of a motion at Stormont on 4 November 2025, supporting service leavers, veterans, and their families through the Armed Forces Covenant represents an important and positive development for the Armed Forces community in Northern Ireland.

The Armed Forces Covenant is founded on the principle that those who serve, or have served, along with their families, should not face disadvantage as a result of their service. The motion reinforces the ongoing commitment to fairness, recognition, and ensuring that members of the Armed Forces community are treated with respect and understanding across society.

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone, has welcomed this development, describing it as a significant step forward in strengthening support for veterans, service leavers, and their families. The Commissioner has also highlighted the importance of ensuring that the contribution and role of the Armed Forces within Northern Ireland continues to be accurately and positively represented.

Following the motion, contact has been established with relevant government departments and key stakeholders. Work is now underway to progress commitments relating to the Armed Forces Covenant, with ongoing discussions focused on how its principles can be most effectively implemented within a Northern Ireland context. This collaborative engagement aims to ensure that support mechanisms reflect the specific needs and circumstances of the local Armed Forces community.

Recognition has also been given to those who supported and brought forward the motion, including veterans Paul Frew MLA (DUP) and Andy Allen MLA (UUP), alongside Paula Bradshaw MLA (Alliance) and Timothy Gaston MLA (TUV). MLA Johnny Buckley was also acknowledged for his instrumental role in initiating the process that led to the successful vote.

The passing of the motion marks a constructive and encouraging step towards enhancing support, recognition, and understanding for veterans, service leavers, and their families across Northern Ireland.



Above: Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone alongside Paula Bradshaw MLA & Stewart Dickson MLA - Alliance, who supported the Armed Forces Covenant Motion being carried forward.



Above: Timothy Gaston MLA (TUV), Paul Frew MLA (DUP), Andy Allan MLA (UUP) and Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone who came together to support the Armed Forces Covenant motion on the evening of 4 November 2025.

# Festive Craft Day with Blind Veterans UK at Portavogie Hub

In December, the Thrive Together Veteran Hub at Harbour House, Portavogie, was delighted to host Blind Veterans UK for a festive Christmas Craft Day. Veterans travelled from Belfast by minibus and were joined by friends and supporters from the Defence Garden Scheme.

Upon arrival, guests received a warm welcome with tea and shortbread, providing a relaxed and friendly start to the day. Participants then took part in Blind Veterans UK's national creative project, creating decorative Christmas bauble mosaics. The activity encouraged creativity, social connection and festive enjoyment, with each participant producing a unique decoration to take home.

Following the craft session, attendees enjoyed a traditional three-course festive lunch, allowing further opportunity for socialising and celebration. The event was a thoroughly enjoyable and inclusive day for all involved and was very well received by the Blind Veterans UK Northern Ireland contingent.



Blind Veterans UK volunteer assisting a blind veteran to make a Christmas bauble.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to Beyond the Battlefield for their support in helping to deliver this activity in Portavogie. Their contribution played a vital role in making the event possible.

We look forward to continuing to provide inclusive and enhanced experiences for our blind veterans living in Northern Ireland.



Blind Veterans hearing about the services available at Portavogie Veterans Hub from Bobby Gillespie



## Rebuilding lives after sight loss

If you would like to contact Blind Veterans UK to find out more or become involved, please:

Email: [supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk)  
or

Tel: 0300 111 2233



# Northern Ireland: Inspiring Determination and Community Support

Blesma Northern Ireland continues to be inspired by the resilience, dedication and generosity demonstrated by its members and their families. Two recent examples highlight the strength of our community and the positive difference being made across Northern Ireland.

Blesma member David Gillespie is currently undergoing rehabilitation at the amputee rehabilitation centre as he prepares to receive his first artificial limb. The rehabilitation process is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary journey, requiring both physical and emotional resilience. Throughout his time as an inpatient, David has shown exceptional determination and motivation, driven by his goal of maximising his independence and embracing the next stage of his recovery.

David has approached each milestone with positivity, celebrating the small but significant victories achieved along the way. His attitude reflects the strength and perseverance that is so often demonstrated by members of the Armed Forces community as they adapt to life following limb loss.



Fiona Morrison, BLESMA NI Case worker is photographed visiting Blesma member, David Gillespie, at the Amputee Rehabilitation Centre, as he was preparing for his first artificial limb.

Equally inspiring is the outstanding contribution made by Blesma widow Mabel Logan. Mabel dedicates countless hours throughout the year knitting hats to raise funds in support of Blesma. Her generosity extends far beyond fundraising, as she also knits hats, scarves and gloves for individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as blankets for premature babies requiring additional warmth and care.

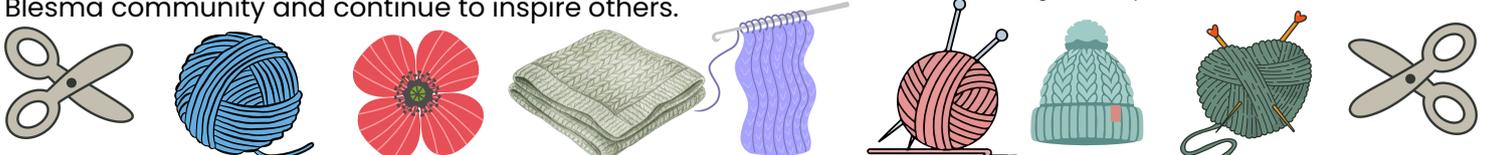
Last year, Mabel undertook the remarkable task of knitting hundreds of poppies, which were used as part of a remembrance display at a local war memorial. Her work not only supports important causes but also helps preserve the spirit of remembrance within the community.

These two case studies represent the meaningful engagement and support that continues to take place across Northern Ireland. They highlight how members and families connected to Blesma support one another in different but equally powerful ways – one striving towards independent living through rehabilitation, and the other using creative expression to provide comfort, support and remembrance for those in need.

Blesma Northern Ireland is immensely proud of David and Mabel. Their dedication, compassion and forward-looking outlook exemplify the values of the Blesma community and continue to inspire others.



Above: BLESMA widow, Mabel Logan, with a selection of her knitted hats and items that she creates throughout the year to raise funds for BLESMA.



Brooke House is privileged to be the lead partner for Thrive Together, funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund. The initiative is to launch Veterans' Places Pathways across Northern Ireland providing services and support locally.

The aim of the project is to build on making longer term changes and investment in infrastructure across the Province to ensure sustainability past the end point of the additional funding, to empower Veterans and their families to be able to build stronger futures by creating sustainable connections to interlinked organisations. This will give autonomy of veteran's service delivery in Northern Ireland and enhance access to support via regional and nationwide organisation collaboration.

For Veterans and their families this means

- An evolving nationwide network of physical and mental health support
- Military charities and other organisations working together to ensure there are easy to access and joined-up pathways both into and out of services, statutory and non-statutory.
- An open door with a warm welcome to activities that promote wellbeing such as, therapeutic interventions, sporting or artistic endeavours, or those of a horticultural nature which all encourage personal interactions and increase overall wellbeing.

We are proud that we have developed new Veteran Hubs in Kilkeel, Londonderry, Portadown and Portavogie, working closely with MAPS Omagh in mentoring these Hubs into success. The hubs are safe spaces to build trust and confidence in the community based in neutral and discreet locations. We are currently liaising with Veteran Champions and other Veteran Organisations to establish new Hubs in different locations.

We encourage you to reach out to Brooke House if you live in or nearby any of the above locations and we can provide you with further information on the organisation and what services they can provide on your doorstep.

## Hub contact Info:

**Brooke House Health & Wellbeing Centre - Fermanagh**  
Tel: 028 8953 1223  
Email: [info@brookehouse.co.uk](mailto:info@brookehouse.co.uk)

**Regenerate Veterans Group - Portadown**  
Tel: 078 5828 6909  
Email: [regenerateveterans@outlook.com](mailto:regenerateveterans@outlook.com)

**Mournes Veterans Hub - Kilkeel**  
Email: [mourneveteranshub@gmail.com](mailto:mourneveteranshub@gmail.com)

**Harbour House Veterans Hub - Portavogie**  
Tel: 028 9122 8389  
Email: [info@beyondthebattlefield.org](mailto:info@beyondthebattlefield.org)

**MAPS Veterans Hub - Omagh**  
Tel: 028 2824 5459  
Email: [mapsthive@hotmail.com](mailto:mapsthive@hotmail.com)

**Londonderry Veterans Hub (via Brooke House)**  
Tel: 028 8953 1223  
Email: [info@brookehouse.co.uk](mailto:info@brookehouse.co.uk)



# Give Someone the Gift of Time



## By Becoming a Befriender

**We are seeking Volunteers across Northern Ireland to make a positive impact in the lives of lonely and isolated veterans by completing one or more of the following tasks:**

- **Driving (to hospital appointments)**
- **Telephone calls or home Visits**
- **Nursing Home Visits**
- **Peer support to face a difficult challenge**
- **Support to re-integrate and socialise in the community**

***All befrienders will receive full training, support and a mileage allowance.***

**To volunteer, or for further information, please contact Brooke House on 028 89531223**

# Celebrating the 4th Northern Ireland Veteran Awards



Above: Air Marshal Sean Reynolds, joins NI Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone and winners of this years Northern Ireland Veteran Awards at the Crowne Plaza, Belfast – Oct 2025. A huge congratulations to all those nominated and those who won in their categories.

The fourth Northern Ireland Veteran Awards took place last Thursday at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Belfast, 16 October 2025, recognising the exceptional contributions of the veteran, reserve, and cadet communities across Northern Ireland. The annual awards continue to shine a spotlight on the dedication, resilience, and community spirit demonstrated by members of the Armed Forces family who go above and beyond to support others.

The evening brought together individuals, organisations, and supporters from across the Armed Forces community to celebrate outstanding achievements. From Role Model of the Year to Community Champion and the Channing Day Inspiration of the Year Award, proudly sponsored by the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office since the awards began in 2021, the event recognised those who make a meaningful and lasting difference within their communities.

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office remains proud to support the awards and the important work they highlight, acknowledging the inspiring efforts of veterans and organisations throughout the region.

A special thank you was extended to Jason Gillard and Weir Events for delivering another exceptional evening. Their continued commitment, professionalism, and enthusiasm have ensured the event remains a highlight within the Armed Forces community calendar.



Above: Jay Millar winner of this years Inspiration of the year Veterans award, Far left: MAPS & Margot Hetherington winner of Volunteer of the Year Award, Centre: Deloitte employees who achieved a high commendation in their category of Employer of the Year Award.



## 2025 Northern Ireland Veteran Awards Recipients

- **Lifetime Achievement Award: (In honour of Kerry McFadden-Newman)** Major (Retired) Phillip Morrison MBE BEM
- **Business Leader of the Year:** (Supported by G4S) Daryl Patterson, Owner of Smoked BBQ, Carryduff.
- **Veteran Business of the Year** (supported by Black Alpha): Kieran Kelly of UBLOQUITY.
- **Channing Day Inspiration of the Year Award :** (Supported by the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioners Office): Jay Millar, Jays Barber Club
- **Judges Recognition Award:** (Supported by Thales) Miss Yvonne Mulholland for her work with SSAFA and the Red Cross
- **Veteran Group of the Year** (Supported by G4S): Reading Force
- **Volunteer of the Year:** (Supported by Walking With the Wounded) Margot Hetherington MBE, Co-founder of MAPS (Military and Police Support)
- **Reservist of the Year:** (Supported by 38 (Irish) Brigade) Ricky Young, 2Bn Royal Irish Regiment
- **Employer of the Year** (Supported by Forces Employment Charity): Bloomfield Shopping Centre and Retail Park
- **Fundraiser of the Year** (Supported by Cherton Secure): Stephen Scarborough having raised more than £905,000 over the years.
- **Health and Wellbeing Award** (Supported by Inspire): Brookehouse Health and Wellbeing Centre
- **Cadet Instructor of the Year:** (Supported by Connect Through Service) Lieutenant Johny Wallace, former Royal Military Police soldier injured in Afghanistan, now supporting training and development within the Armed Forces community
- **Community Champion of the Year** (Supported by Thales): Michael Donaldson, recognised for his tireless support for veterans and their families through crisis intervention, mental health advocacy, mentoring, and building safe and supportive environments
- **Role Model of the Year:** (Supported by Reid Black Solicitors) Major (Retired) Phillip Morrison MBE BEM
- **Charity Partner for this years Awards** - Walking With The Wounded. An amazing £6,100 was raised on the evening.



Above: Phillip Morrison MBE BEM receives a Lifetime Achievement award from the sister of Kerry McFadden-Newman.  
Above-Centre: Stephen Scarborough receives his Fundraiser of the Year award from Graham Given of Cherton Secure.  
Right: Emily Thompson who was highly commended in her category of Reservist of the Year.



The Northern Ireland Veteran Awards continue to highlight the extraordinary work taking place across the Armed Forces community. The dedication, compassion, and leadership demonstrated by nominees and award recipients alike serve as a powerful reminder of the positive impact veterans and service personnel continue to make throughout society.

Congratulations were extended to all nominees, commendation recipients, and winners for their outstanding achievements. The continued success of these awards reflects the strength, unity, and enduring contribution of the Armed Forces community in Northern Ireland.

We look forward to continuing its support for this important event and to recognising the remarkable achievements of the Armed Forces community in the years ahead.

## Supporting Veterans Through Community Connection – Help for Heroes Initiatives

Help for Heroes continues to deliver impactful programmes across Northern Ireland, providing valuable opportunities for veterans and their families to connect, engage in wellbeing activities, and access ongoing support.

In October, the Community Sports Series event at Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre brought veterans together for a day focused on health, wellbeing, and camaraderie. The event offered a welcoming and supportive environment where participants could try a variety of accessible sports and activities, encouraging both physical and mental wellbeing while strengthening connections within the Armed Forces community.

Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone, attended the event and welcomed the opportunity to engage directly with veterans and the Help for Heroes team. The day highlighted the importance of creating inclusive and relaxed spaces where veterans can build friendships, explore new interests, and access support services in an informal setting. The event was widely praised for its organisation and positive atmosphere, reflecting the dedication of the Help for Heroes team and volunteers involved in its delivery.

In addition to sporting initiatives, Help for Heroes continues to foster community connections through its Community Development Cafés, which take place monthly across several locations including Antrim, Banbridge, Bangor, Belfast, Fivemiletown, and Lisburn. These cafés provide a relaxed and friendly space where veterans and their families can meet others from the Armed Forces community, share experiences, and learn about support and opportunities available locally.

The Commissioner recently had the opportunity to visit one of the Belfast Community Development Cafés, where he met both new and familiar faces and observed first-hand the strong sense of community and support that these gatherings provide. Initiatives such as these play an important role in tackling social isolation while encouraging peer support and engagement within the veteran community.

Help for Heroes continues to deliver meaningful and accessible programmes that recognise the importance of community, wellbeing, and ongoing support for veterans and their families across Northern Ireland.

For further information about Help for Heroes Community Development Cafés or upcoming activities, please contact:

☎ Alex: 075 8090 1317  
☎ Glenn: 07484 026 991

Right: Calling in on one of Help for Heroes Community Cafés – for more information about upcoming events give Alex or Glen from the Help for Heroes team a call.



Above: Participant's in the Help for Heroes Community Sports series including Mayor of Ards & North Down Cllr Gillian McCollum & Veterans Champion Trevor Cummings.

Below: The Help for Heroes team who organised and ran this inclusive event.



# Celebrating 107 Remarkable Years – Birthday Honours for WWII Veteran Norman Irwin

A truly special celebration took place recently in Coleraine as family, friends, and members of the Armed Forces community gathered to mark the 107th birthday of Second World War veteran Norman Irwin BEM.

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone, had the honour of attending the celebrations alongside the Lord Lieutenant for County Londonderry, members of the REME Association, and Norman's family, including his proud grandson. The occasion was filled with warmth, appreciation, and reflection as those present celebrated Norman's extraordinary life and service.

Norman served with distinction in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) during the Second World War, demonstrating exceptional dedication and courage during one of the most challenging periods in modern history. His service stands as a lasting testament to the commitment and sacrifice shown by so many members of the Armed Forces generation.

The celebrations also included attendance from the Veterans Champion for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Councillor Dawn Huggins, reflecting the strong local support and recognition for Norman's contribution and legacy.

It has been a particularly significant year for Norman. Earlier this year, he was recognised as the oldest recipient on the King's Birthday Honours List, receiving the British Empire Medal (BEM) in recognition of his service and contribution. In September, he was formally presented with his medal by The Princess Royal, Princess Anne, marking a proud and memorable moment for Norman and his family.

Norman's remarkable life story continues to inspire generations, serving as a powerful reminder of the resilience, dedication, and service of the Armed Forces community. Celebrating such milestones provides an opportunity not only to honour individual achievements but also to reflect on the wider legacy of those who have served.

Warmest wishes were extended to Norman for continued health, happiness, and many more cherished memories as he celebrated this incredible milestone.



Top: A rare celebration of a 107<sup>th</sup> birthday! REME Regimental Association members and dignitaries convene to wish Norman Irwin BEM a very happy 107<sup>th</sup> birthday on 17 November 2025. Above: Lord Lieutenant for Londonderry and NI Veterans Commissioner present Norman with a framed picture of poppies through the ages. Left: Veterans Champion for Causeway Coast & Glens council Dawn Huggins chats and congratulates Norman on this remarkable moment.



# Employment Opportunities and Support for Veterans & Service Leavers in Northern Ireland

Veterans and service leavers across Northern Ireland continue to benefit from dedicated employment support through initiatives such as the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) Employment Fair held annually at Titanic Belfast. The event took place in October 2025 and is scheduled to return at a similar time in 2026, continuing to provide valuable opportunities for members of the Armed Forces community to connect with employers from a wide range of local industries.

Employment fairs and support programmes provide veterans with the opportunity to engage directly with organisations that recognise and value the unique qualities developed during military service. Many local industries are actively seeking individuals with the experience, professionalism, and adaptability that veterans bring to the workplace.

Veterans possess a wide range of highly transferable skills, including strong discipline, an exceptional work ethic, leadership experience, problem-solving ability, and the capacity to work effectively as part of a team. These attributes are highly regarded across sectors such as engineering, security, logistics, manufacturing, public services, and project management, making veterans a valuable asset to employers throughout Northern Ireland.

The Career Transition Partnership works in close collaboration with the Forces Employment Charity, both of which remain committed to supporting veterans, service leavers, and their families in securing employment, accessing training opportunities, and successfully transitioning into civilian careers. Their services include career guidance, CV support, training programmes, and direct links with employers who are actively recruiting from the Armed Forces community.

Engagement between veterans and local employers not only helps individuals secure rewarding careers but also strengthens workforce development across Northern Ireland by introducing experienced, motivated, and reliable employees into key sectors. Veterans seeking further information about employment opportunities and transition support can contact:

Career Transition Partnership (CTP)

[www.ctp.org.uk](http://www.ctp.org.uk)

[ctp@ctp.org.uk](mailto:ctp@ctp.org.uk)

0203 162 4410



Local company Harland and Wolfe in attendance at the CTP Employment Fair in Belfast Oct 2025

Forces Employment Charity

[www.forcesemployment.org.uk](http://www.forcesemployment.org.uk)

These organisations continue to play a vital role in supporting veterans as they build successful and fulfilling careers beyond military service.



Some of the companies in attendance at the CTP Employment Fair in Belfast Oct 2025



Service Leavers, veterans and companies are connected at the CTP Careers Fair in Belfast - October 2025.

# Veterans Roadshows

## Return for 2026

Following the continued success of previous years, the Northern Ireland Veterans Roadshows will return in 2026, offering veterans and their families further opportunities to access support, information, and community connection across Northern Ireland.

Building on the strong engagement and positive feedback received during the 2025 programme and earlier roadshows, the 2026 series will once again visit council areas throughout Northern Ireland. The first event will take place in Ballymena on 19 February 2026, with additional locations scheduled throughout the year.

The roadshows are designed to provide veterans with direct access to a wide range of organisations offering support services. These events create an opportunity for attendees to ask questions, explore available services, and establish connections with organisations that can provide assistance across areas such as health and wellbeing, employment, housing, and welfare support.

Each event also provides a welcoming and safe environment where veterans can reconnect with former colleagues and friends, share experiences, and build new support networks. A complimentary lunch will be provided, encouraging attendees to take time to engage with organisations and fellow veterans in a relaxed and supportive setting.



The roadshows are delivered in collaboration with Veterans Champions from local council areas alongside the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office. This partnership approach helps ensure that veterans across all regions have access to information, reassurance, and support where it is needed most.

The continued success of the roadshows is made possible through the dedication and cooperation of the many organisations and charities that participate in and support these events. Their ongoing commitment plays a vital role in ensuring that veterans and their families can easily access the help and guidance available to them.

Veterans who would like to find out more about upcoming roadshows and event locations are encouraged to follow the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office social media channels, particularly the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner Facebook page.

Registration for events can be completed online at:

[www.nivco.co.uk](http://www.nivco.co.uk)

For further information or queries, please contact:

[commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk)

07971 833160

The 2026 roadshows aim to continue providing accessible, supportive, and informative spaces for veterans across Northern Ireland, ensuring they remain connected to the services and communities available to support them.



# NI Veteran & Family Support

This list does not include all services available in Northern Ireland, please contact the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioners Office for further information of available veteran services.

## Local Veteran Support

Veteran Welfare Service NI  
**E: [dbsafvs-vws-ni@mod.gov.uk](mailto:dbsafvs-vws-ni@mod.gov.uk)**  
**Tel: 02890 420145**

Northern Ireland Veterans  
Commissioner's Office  
**E: [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 02825 483169**

Andy Allen Veteran Support NI  
**[www.aavsn.com](http://www.aavsn.com)**  
**Tel: 02890 747071**

Decorum NI  
**[www.decorumni.co.uk](http://www.decorumni.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 02891 457565**

Ely Centre  
**[www.elycentre.com](http://www.elycentre.com)**  
**Tel: 02866 320977**

Military & Police Support  
West Tyrone (MAPS)  
**[www.mapswesttyrone.org.uk](http://www.mapswesttyrone.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02882 245459**

MUVE - Mid-Ulster Victims  
Empowerment  
**[www.muve.org.uk](http://www.muve.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02886 763349**

Serving & Ex Serving Womens  
Network  
**E: [jen@cw-ni.co.uk](mailto:jen@cw-ni.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 07740580123**

South East Fermanagh  
Foundation  
**[www.seff.org.uk](http://www.seff.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02867 723884**

South & East Tyrone Welfare  
Support  
**Email: [setw@btconnect.com](mailto:setw@btconnect.com)**  
**Tel: 028 8772 6152**

RAFA Contact Centre:  
**0800 018 2361**  
NI Region:  
**Wg Cdr N Williams**  
**07739 191958**

Regenerate Veterans Group  
**Email: [regenerateveterans@outlook.com](mailto:regenerateveterans@outlook.com)**

## Veteran Health & Wellbeing

Beyond the Battlefield  
**[www.beyondthebattlefield.org](http://www.beyondthebattlefield.org)**  
**Tel: 02891 228389**

BLESMA -  
The Limbless Charity  
**[www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)**  
**Tel: 0131 2262910**

Brooke House  
**[www.brookehouse.co.uk](http://www.brookehouse.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 02889 531223**

Combat Stress  
**[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02890 269990**

Defence Medical Welfare  
Service NI (Veterans)  
**E: [referralsNI@dmws.org.uk](mailto:referralsNI@dmws.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 0800 999 3697**

Help for Heroes  
**[www.helpforheroes.org.uk](http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 0300 3039888**

Inspire wellbeing  
**[www.inspirewellbeing.org](http://www.inspirewellbeing.org)**  
**Tel: 02890 328474**

Royal British Legion  
**[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 0808 802808**

Walking With The Wounded  
**[walkingwiththewounded.org.uk](http://walkingwiththewounded.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 01263 863900**

## Benevolence Funding & Finance

Army Benevolent Fund  
**[www.thesoldierscharity.org](http://www.thesoldierscharity.org)**  
**Tel: 02892 678112**

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund  
**[www.rafbf.org](http://www.rafbf.org)**  
**Tel: 03001 021919**

Royal Navy &  
Royal Marines Charity  
**[www.rnrma.org.uk](http://www.rnrma.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02393 871520**

SSAFA -  
The Armed Forces Charity  
**[www.ssafa.org.uk](http://www.ssafa.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02890 327740**

UDR Benevolent Fund  
**[www.udrbenfund.org.uk](http://www.udrbenfund.org.uk)**  
**Email: [info@udrbenfund.org.uk](mailto:info@udrbenfund.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 07720 677838**

Make the Call  
**[www.nidirect.gov.uk/makethecall](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/makethecall)**  
**Tel: 0800 2321271**

## Pensions

Forces Pension Society  
**[www.forcespensionsociety.org](http://www.forcespensionsociety.org)**  
**Tel: 02078 209988**

Veterans UK  
**[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)**  
**Tel: 0808 1914218**

## Jobs/Training

Forces Employment Charity  
**E: [a.sturgenor@forcesemployment.org.uk](mailto:a.sturgenor@forcesemployment.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 07805 725242**

## Legal Support

Reid Black Solicitors  
**[www.reidblack.com](http://www.reidblack.com)**  
**Tel: 02895 922744**