

**March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

## **South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust joins the ranks of armed forces' supporters**



South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust is now officially a forces-friendly employer.

The Trust has joined its partner in the South Tyneside and Healthcare Group, City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, in signing the Government's Armed Forces Covenant.

South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts' Chief Executive Ken Bremner signed the covenant at a ceremony alongside Deputy Commander 4 Infantry Brigade Colonel Andrew Hadfield. They were watched by South Tyneside Trust employee reservists, an adult cadet volunteer, Board members including Trust Chairman Neil Mundy, and representatives from the Ministry of Defence, including Commanding Officer of 201 Field Hospital, Newcastle, Ben Banerjee, Consultant Vascular Surgeon at City Hospitals Sunderland.

Mr Bremner said: "Both of our Trusts are totally committed to supporting the armed forces community and it is an honour to formally pledge South Tyneside Trust's support through the signing of the covenant. We are very much looking forward to building on our association with the Ministry of Defence in the future."

“The NHS, businesses, local authorities, charities and community organisations throughout the UK can all benefit from the wide range of unique skills and experiences that reservists and veterans can bring to the workplace, coupled with the self-confidence, resourcefulness and positive attitude they gain through service in the forces. We already employ a number of veterans and are looking at initiatives that will provide work placement opportunities and guaranteed interviews, where they have skills that match a role.”

The two Trusts currently have 17 employees who are reservists within the armed forces, including the Army and Royal Navy, as well as an adult volunteer with the RAF Air Cadets. Medical reservists make up 13% of the overall reserves in the UK.

The covenant represents a promise by the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly. Its key principles are:

- No member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen
- In some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate, especially for the injured or bereaved

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust staff governor Jamie Hughes, who works in wheelchair services, volunteers with the RAF Air Cadets at 324 (South Shields) Squadron as a Pilot Officer. He said: “I was really proud to be asked to attend the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant. It’s important that we recognise the fantastic work our armed forces do and support staff within the Trust who are in the reserve and cadet forces to carry out their role. It has been proven that staff who are reservists come back from duty, training or deployments with renewed vigour and different and positive ideas of working that obviously benefit them but, also, the Trust. I have gained many transferable skills and would encourage anyone to look towards becoming a reservist. So many roles exist that would be adaptable from current jobs within the NHS.”

Also at the signing was Sharon McDowell, who is Matron for surgical specialities at South Tyneside District Hospital and who has served as a reservist for more than 30 years. She is currently a Colonel in the Army Medical Reserve and she has been

deployed to many places across the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Her last posting was as Commanding Officer of the Field Hospital at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. She said: “The covenant is very important as it demonstrates the nation’s commitment to supporting those serving in the armed forces and in the reserves in what they do, and to acknowledging the sacrifice they make for our country. The signing is a special occasion for our organisation, marking a pledge to our armed forces and also recognising the tangible knowledge and skills our employees who are reservists bring to the workplace and the values and standards they uphold.”

City Hospitals Sunderland signed the covenant early in 2017 and later in the year was among 33 UK employers to be presented by HRH Prince Henry of Wales with an Armed Forces Covenant Gold Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) award. The award is the Ministry of Defence’s prestigious badge of honour for organisations which have demonstrated outstanding support for the armed forces community.

Gary McLafferty, Ministry of Defence’s Regional Employer Engagement Director, said: “We are delighted that South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust has pledged support to our Armed Forces community and we look forward to working with them in the future. This pledge formally recognises the enormous support the Trust provides and the signing of an Armed Forces Covenant builds mutually beneficial partnerships with Defence; it provides support on employing Reservists, veterans, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and military spouses and improving fairness for the Armed Forces community in the consumer and health markets.”

In signing the covenant, South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts have pledged to:

- Promote themselves as armed forces-friendly organisations
- Recognise that veterans are entitled to priority access to NHS hospital care for any condition as long as it is related to their service, subject to the clinical need of others
- Work in partnership with other organisations to support the employment of veterans young and old

- Guarantee a selection interview to veterans who apply for a post and meet the minimum and desirable criteria for the role
- Strive to support the employment of service spouses and partners
- Endeavour to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment
- Support employees who choose to be members of the reserve forces or adult cadet volunteers by developing a policy to define their obligations towards employee reservists
- Offer support to cadet units in the local community, including local schools.
- Actively participate in Armed Forces Day

## **ENDS**

*Photo caption: South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust Chief Executive Ken Bremner at the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant, alongside Deputy Commander 4 Infantry Brigade Colonel Andrew Hadfield, with Trust Board members and reservists and Ministry of Defence representatives*

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