

Commanding Officer 102 Battalion REME Statement for Stockton BC AF Annual Report:

102 Battalion REME is mandated to “deliver an annual update, to include updates on operational experiences and policy changes, and to be involved in community activities and events” to Stockton Borough Council as their part in the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

Firstly, I would like to make comment on the re-organisation of 102 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) post the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which was conducted from late 2010, through 2011 and into 2012. The final results have now all been published and the main effect on 102 Battalion is that we will increase from two Field Companies to three with no change to our Recover Company and Battalion Headquarters at Newton Aycliffe plus the loss of three Nationally recruited Companies. This change is to be completed by 2015.

I would next like to comment on our support to the ongoing Operation HERRICK in Afghanistan. Operation HERRICK 17, which was conducted over the period September 2012 to April 2013 has now concluded with the 30 REME TA soldiers mobilized by the Battalion have now all returned and have completed their Post Operational Tour Leave. 102 Battalion REME were the lead REME TA Battalion for this operation drawing soldiers and officers from the 4 other TA REME Battalions. Of the 30 REME personnel deployed 14 came from this Battalion.

102 Battalion will again act as the lead TA REME Battalion for Operation HERRICK 20. Operation HERRICK 20 will be a four and a half month tour in 2014 and this shortened tour will be accompanied by a reduced need for military personnel; a figure of 21 officers and soldiers will be required from the Battalion.

On the training front the highlight of the training year is the Annual Camp. In 2012/13 Training Year Annual Camp was conducted on the Sennelager Training Area, Germany. Annual Camp in the current, 2013/14 Training Year the Battalion will again exercise in Germany on Exercise RHINO SPROCKET over the period 07 – 20 September 2013. The training emphasis will be on Command Leadership for Battalion middle and senior management and Special to Arms training for the soldiers. Also, from mid November to early December 2013 this unit will provide the lead and the majority of manpower for Exercise DARK HORSE. This exercise involves 120 REME tradesmen and women repairing military equipment at the British Army Training Unit Suffield, Alberta, Canada.

Against the backdrop of this high operational and training cycle tempo I welcome the opportunity to make comment on the relationship that has built up between Stockton Borough Council and this battalion since the signing the Community Covenant in March 2012. My remit, as the Commanding Officer of 102 Battalion REME is that of Task Force Commander for Teesside and subsequently Tees Valley, was to encourage Stockton BC to sign up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant. Stockton BC embraced the Community Covenant concept whole heartily and immediately set in place their procedures to have the Community Covenant endorsed and fully supported not only by the elected members of the Council but also by the Renaissance partners. The other Local Authorities across the Tees Valley followed suit and by November 2012 all 5 Local authorities and their partners has signed the Community Covenant.

The Teesside Armed Forces Forum came into being at this time evolving from the Tees Armed Forces NHS Stakeholder Group with the first meeting held 4th October 2012 at Stockton Road TA Centre, Middlesbrough. The forum quickly grew from 4 Local Authority representation to five when Darlington “joined the fold” and the forum was renamed Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum (TVAFF).

The forum has acted as an extremely valuable platform on which to engage with all the Local Authorities across the Tees Valley and the working relationship with all the various bodies which attend the forum meetings can only be described as excellent.

Stockton BC representation consists of Cllr Jim Beall as the “senior” Armed Forces Champion of Stockton Borough Council, Laurayne Featherstone as the Stockton Lead Officer and Sophie Haste who provides excellent clerical support.

At the December 2012 meeting the decision was taken that that the forum should be co-chaired by CO 102 Battalion REME and an Armed Forces Champion. Cllr Jim Beall enthusiasm in volunteering to be the first Armed Forces Champion to co-chair the meeting epitomises the energy, drive and dedication that I have come to expect from Stockton BC.

Stockton BC, with the greatest respect to the other Local Authorities, is the most proactive of the Local Authorities in providing initiatives such as the development of the Service Directory but this does not detract from important work carried by all the local authorities on a co-operative basis on the 7 Armed Forces Community Covenant pillars; Employment, Education, Health, Housing, Welfare, Youth activity and Other Activity.

There will continue to be Armed Forces Community Engagement events across the Tees Valley, such as Armed Forces Day, Remembrance Parades, which only serve to strengthen the strong relationship between the Armed Forces and the community from which the soldiers, sailors and airmen come from and to where they will return at the end of their service.