

**11 July 2011**

## **New advice centre opens for ex-servicemen in Coventry and Warwickshire**

**A new drop-in centre for veterans of the Armed Forces living and working in Coventry and Warwickshire has opened in Nuneaton at a formal ceremony attended by the Mayor of Nuneaton & Bedworth and the Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire this week.**

The Veterans Contact Point, believed to be the first in the country, is now located within Nuneaton Town Hall and will provide a one-stop-shop for advice and support on housing, finance, employment and training for veterans, their families and dependents.

The centre has received initial funding support from the Warwickshire & Coventry Branch of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) and will work in partnership with a number of charities including The Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes and ABF The Soldiers' Charity. Staff and volunteers at the centre will principally aim to support those veterans who have found it difficult to integrate back into the community.

The region's OnTrak programme, part of the European Social Fund programme which is managed by The Manchester College, will also support those individuals who may have been in trouble with the law since leaving the service.

At the opening ceremony, Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire, Martin Dunne said:  
"Many of the men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq have encountered traumatic experiences and whilst some will adapt easily to civilian life, others will find it more difficult. It is with these people in mind that this project has been started. It will offer a full range of services, from employment to housing support, as well as emotional and practical guidance for those with drug and alcohol addiction."

The launch of the centre has been led by Warwickshire Probation Trust and Warwickshire Police who recognised that a number of ex-servicemen were finding themselves in custody. The exact number is not known, however Warwickshire Police has been able to report that 139 people arrested this year said that they served as a member of the armed forces.

Len Hardy, veterans champion at Warwickshire Probation Trust conceived the idea of the Veterans Contact Point. He said: "The number of veterans arrested in Warwickshire this year equates to the fighting strength of a company in Afghanistan, so it is a very big issue. We want to ensure that former servicemen and women are signposted to relevant organisations and we have up to 15 members of staff, who are trained as Royal British Legion Volunteer Welfare Case workers, to offer support and advice for all veterans throughout Coventry and Warwickshire."

The centre also plans to train volunteer veterans to work as peer support mentors to others who need the service. The Veterans Contact Point will be open Monday to Friday between 10am and 4pm and will be staffed by trained professionals, many who are veterans themselves.

For further information contact the Veterans Contact Point on 024 7637 6129 or email [contactus@veteranscontactpoint.co.uk](mailto:contactus@veteranscontactpoint.co.uk)

**ENDS**

For more information on the region's ESF programme, please contact Bailey Lamburn, Michaela Maryon or Christine Smart on 0121 456 3199 or email [esfpr@smarts.co.uk](mailto:esfpr@smarts.co.uk)