

News story: Britain's top armed forces-friendly employers honoured

51 businesses were last night honoured for their commitment to the military, including employing former service personnel, their families and reservists.

The MOD's Employer Recognition Scheme 'Gold Awards' awards were handed out by the Defence Secretary and HRH Prince Edward, the Earl of Wessex, to businesses and organisations who have shown outstanding support for the military community and the Armed Forces Covenant.

Employers won awards for initiatives such as employing veterans, supporting individuals transitioning out of the armed forces into a new career, and providing flexibility for reservists.

The 51 winners have been recognised for their long-term commitment to the armed forces, with organisations from the public and private sector achieving the top grade. Each has signed the Armed Forces Covenant, and where possible, engages with the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to promote the recruitment of service leavers, as well as honouring individual pledges of support.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Those who have served our country so courageously deserve the full support of organisations across the public and private sector.

The breadth and diversity of this year's Gold Award winners shows how business support for the armed forces continues to flourish. I offer my gratitude and congratulations to all the winners.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

When people leave the armed forces, they do so with unique skills and experiences that can benefit businesses and organisations across the country.

These awards show just how valued and in demand these skills are. I encourage more businesses to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and show their support for our brave service leavers.

This week the Government will launch its first UK wide Veterans Strategy which brings together aspirations and commitments from across government for

championing the needs of the ex-service community.

The Government has a wide range of schemes in place to support service personnel and veterans. From encouraging employers to recognise the value the military community to business through the Armed Forces Covenant to committing £22million of funding for mental health over the next decade for service personnel and £10million for veterans.

[News story: Improvement plan proposed for Northamptonshire children's services](#)

The Government has proposed to appoint a commissioner to oversee improvements at Northamptonshire children's social care services, following concerns raised by existing commissioners and Ofsted about how the council supports vulnerable children and families.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government James Brokenshire have written to the leader of Northamptonshire County Council in a move designed to take swift and early action to improve its children's services.

They have today confirmed they are ['minded to'](#) appoint Malcolm Newsam CBE as a children's services commissioner, following Ofsted's [findings](#) that the quality of services have deteriorated.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

We must make sure that vulnerable children and families are kept safe and instead of waiting for failure, we can prevent it by acting quickly to intervene where concerns have been raised about the quality of care.

Appointing a commissioner for Northamptonshire's children's services will help stabilise and improve the support for the children and families who need our protection.

Secretary of State for Communities Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Keeping vulnerable children safe is one of the most important duties local authorities carry out. Ofsted's report highlights serious concerns about the current performance of children's services in Northamptonshire and this cannot continue.

We are taking action today by recommending a children's commissioner joins the existing commissioner team at the Council. This will help to stabilise and improve the service so each and every child receives the protection they deserve.

The proposal to appoint a commissioner for children's services is part of the Government's children's social care strategy to spot early warning signs and take action quickly to support councils to make the necessary improvements where there is a risk of failure.

Malcolm Newsam CBE is an experienced director of children's services and has worked with many underperforming councils to oversee improvements with successful results. He was awarded a CBE in 2017 for services to children's social care.

Two commissioners, Tony McArdle and Brian Roberts, were appointed in May to oversee council services in Northamptonshire, following the discovery of serious failings and financial problems. The appointment of a children's commissioner would build on their initial work and provide additional support and expertise to tackle Ofsted's concerns, working with Lincolnshire County Council, which is providing peer support to the council as one of the Department for Education's Partners in Practice.

Through the work of this team, local government services in Northamptonshire could undergo a reorganisation and the new commissioner would look at how children's services could be delivered in the future. Findings will be reported back to the MHCLG and DfE Secretaries of State next year.

Since May 2010, 44 local authorities have been lifted out of intervention and have not returned – including Doncaster and Rotherham which were both rated 'Good' by Ofsted this year.

Northamptonshire County Council will now have the opportunity to make any representations to the Government on the appointment of a commissioner before a final decision, expected later this month.

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News story: Fishing without a licence costs owner, master and fishing company over £75,000

The master of a fishing vessel, a director of the company that owns the vessel and the company itself were sentenced at North Shields Magistrates Court on Friday 9 November in a case brought by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

E&J Shellfish Limited, which owned the vessel Catatonia, company director Ewan Inglis and master of the vessel Chris Ferguson were ordered to pay a total of over £75,000 by North Shields Magistrates' Court.

The court heard how sales notes showed that between January and September 2017 the Catatonia made 31 fishing trips when the vessel did not have a valid licence from the MMO for commercial fishing.

The MMO provided advice to E&J Shellfish Limited on completing the necessary paperwork prior to and after the transfer of the vessel to their ownership in January 2017. 18 of the fishing trips made without a licence were after the MMO had sent a letter to the vessel owners making it clear that it was unlicensed and that using it to undertake commercial fishing would be an offence.

As a result of the trips 18,458kg of razor clams were landed with a total value of £103,979.50.

The offences arose under sections 4 and 12 of the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967 ("the Act") and Regulation 3 Sea Fish Licensing (England) Order 2015. The Act provides for directors of companies to also be found liable for offences.

E&J Shellfish Limited, Ewan Inglis and Chris Ferguson all pleaded guilty in court.

E&J Shellfish Limited was ordered to pay a total of £65,010 – a fine of £12,000 plus a further £50,000 in respect of the value of the fish, plus a victim surcharge of £170 and costs of £2,840.00. Ewan Inglis was fined £9,850 plus a victim surcharge of £170 and Chris Ferguson was fined £383 and order to pay a victim surcharge of £38.

The vessel later became licensed in November 2017 after the owners completed the relevant paperwork and took the necessary steps for a fishing vessel licence to be issued.

A spokesperson for the Marine Management Organisation said:

“Commercial fishing by English fishing vessels, wherever they may be, is only permitted under the authority of a licence issued by the Marine Management Organisation.

“The outcome of this enforcement action shows that the MMO can detect non-compliance with legal requirements by carrying out cross-checks of information such as sales notes.

“We’re pleased the Magistrates recognised that undermining the regulatory regime is a serious matter.”

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