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### **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL APPLICATION FOR ERS GOLD**

As Deputy Commander of 11 Infantry Brigade, I work extensively with Local Authorities, businesses and third sector organisations, encouraging them in their support of the Armed Forces in the South East. I have worked in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council for nearly 3 years and have always found them to be not only particularly supportive but also highly motivated to improve the way in which they implement the Armed Forces Covenant in the county. They were the first County Council to sign an Armed Forces Covenant back in 2011, but the main purpose of this letter is to emphasise their recent work and efforts not to rest on the laurels of this fact. The main purpose of this letter is to bring attention to and endorse the work I have seen recently being conducted by the Council, particularly in their policies related to the employment of armed forces personnel, their families and volunteers.

I jointly Chair the Oxfordshire Civilian Military Partnership so I gain true, and total insight of Oxfordshire County Council understanding of all the issues which arise from the Armed Forces Covenant and how they interact with the service community as a very large employer. Their level of understanding of the experience of service personnel and their families, of which there are a large number in their county is exemplary, and from my perspective crucially built on empathy, not sympathy. As an employer, and crucial to the ERS, the Council has clearly demonstrated its forces-friendly credentials through offering a guaranteed interview scheme for service leavers and veterans. They also offer work placements for those in transition, paid leave for reservists and CFAVs. An excellent example of their truly innovative approach which is beyond the 'norm' is they demonstrate their commitment to armed forces employment through having an armed forces buddy system, promoting reservist opportunities and identification of the needs and skills of service spouses. The latter an area I am particularly keen our partners focus on. Not many do. Their Armed Forces Employment Offer makes it clear to anyone from an armed forces background, just how strong the commitment the Council makes to them is. Consequently, I would, in many ways hold them up as exemplar Public Sector Armed Forces employers in our area.

I have also been impressed with the wider activity Oxfordshire Council have undertaken to encourage others to sign the Covenant and crucially explore signing up to the Employer recognition Scheme, making them serious advocates of the scheme. They have promoted it amongst schools, with Peace Groups, with local employers of different sizes and partners across the public sector.

I would, therefore, wish to offer very public support and endorsement of the Oxfordshire County Council bid for an ERS gold award. As an organisation they are truly motivated to really go above and beyond in support the Armed Forces, and to advocate the benefit which can be gained from employing people from every part of the wider military community.

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