

VALOUR Field Officer Presentation

Speaker Notes: Craig Nicholson

Slide 1 – Opening

Good morning. My name is Craig Nicholson, and I am the VALOUR Field Officer for North East England. I am going to briefly cover my background, how I see the VFO role, and why this role matters to me personally.

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Slide 2 – My background

I grew up in Northern Ireland during the height of the Troubles and come from a military family, with connections to the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Irish Rangers and the Royal Irish Regiment.

Fitness and music were my passions growing up, which led me to join the Royal Marines Band Service on 4 September 1989.

Just 18 days later, on 22 September 1989, the IRA bombed the Royal Marines School of Music at Deal, killing 11 Royal Marines musicians.

What I witnessed and experienced that day had a significant and lasting impact on my mental health.

My later career took me through 20 years in policing. Roles included, response office, tactical support, Source Handler, staff instructor, dog handler and Police Dog Instructor

I then moved into the Civil Service with DVSA, working as a Driving Examiner, Business Account Manager and Senior Project Manager where I oversaw both digital and operational projects. I also sit as a magistrate in the Adult Criminal Court in the Durham Bench, which gives me a strong sense of pride in contributing to the community.

The driver for becoming a VFO came from a very personal place. I do not share this for sympathy, but because it explains the journey that brought me here.

On 23 June 2025, I reached the lowest point of my life and attempted to take my own life. Following a week in ICU, I received outstanding support from Op Courage and Walking with the Wounded. It was the people in these organisation who influenced me to work in the veteran space.

That experience gave me a very clear understanding of how vital timely, compassionate and joined-up support can be when a veteran is in crisis.

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Slide 3 – How I see the VFO role

How I see the VFO role is very clear. A VFO is not a veteran caseworker, and the role is not to replace, duplicate or undermine the incredible work already being delivered.

The role is about partnership, connection, coordination, regional insight and strengthening the system by improving access to veteran support.

For me, the Armed Forces Covenant lies at the very foundation of VALOUR. The role is about being a visible regional representative: present, approachable and trusted by local authorities, statutory providers, charitable organisations, Armed Forces Covenant networks and VRCs.

A key part of the role is understanding the regional veteran support landscape at a granular level. That means knowing who provides what support, where they operate, how services are accessed, and where the pressure points exist.

By understanding the service offering properly, I will be able to identify gaps, weaknesses, duplication and pressure points across the system.

Partnership working is central to this. No single organisation can meet every need of a veteran, but together they can build a system that makes sure no veteran falls through the gaps.

I will work closely with VALOUR HQ and national VFO colleagues, sharing regional insight, learning from good practice elsewhere, and helping turn local intelligence into national learning.

Ultimately, I see the VFO role as the link between national ambition and local delivery — making sure VALOUR is not just a programme, but something veterans can genuinely feel the benefit of.

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Slide 4 – Why this role matters to me

“This is more than a role for me. It is a chance to give something back in a way that is personal and meaningful.”

My own journey has shown me that service does not always end when the uniform comes off.

It has also shown me that the right support, at the right time, can change the course of someone’s life as I did for me.

That is why this role matters to me. I want to help strengthen the system, support partnership working across the North East, and help ensure veterans can access the right support before they reach crisis point.

Thank you.

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