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| MinutesRotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG) – 3rd June 2024 |

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| **IN ATTENDANCE**  |
| Cllr Eve Keenan (Chair) | Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC |
| Vicky Hartley | Member & Civic Support Manager & Armed Forces lead officer, Rotherham MBC |
| Wendy Silkstone  | Member and Civic Support Officer, Rotherham MBC  |
| Ssgt Elvis Pressley | 146 Coy Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham |
| Maj MP Lynch | The Royal Yorkshire Regiment |
| Clare Haynes | Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage  |
| Michelle Murray  | Armed Forces Welfare Officer, Defence Medical Welfare Services (DMWS), Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust  |
| Elaine Mason  | Case Worker, Op Nova, Forces Employment Charity  |
| Major Adrian Hunt | Member, Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee & Branch Secretary, SSAFA |
| Pauline King | Regional Employer Engagement Director, Reserves’ Forces & Cadets’ Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber |
| Ron Moffett MBE | Member, The Royal British Legion (Rotherham, Rawmarsh & Parkgate Branch) |
| Andy Martin  | Representative, Help 4 Homeless Veterans |
| Chris Bradley | Development Manager, Rotherham MCVC  |
| Cllr Ian Jones | Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCVC  |
| Colonel George Kilburn  | Regional Chairman, SSAFA |
| Neil Halsey | Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions |
| Hannah Hall  | Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust  |
| Leanne Buchan (Item3) | Head of Service for Creative Programming & Engagement, Rotherham Council  |
| Ruth Fletcher-Brown (Item 4) | Public Health Specialist, Rotherham Council  |
| **APOLOGIES** |
| Lt Col RA McPherson | Veteran and former High Sherriff of South Yorkshire |
| Steve Bentham-Bates | Chief Executive Officer, Help 4 Homeless Veterans |
| Captain Terry Reilly | Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham  |
| Helen Wyatt | Engagement Manager (Rotherham), NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board |
| Danella Senior | Core Team Manager, NHS Op Courage |
| Kim Firth  | Homeless, Temporary Accommodation & Placement Manager, RMBC |
| Katie Merrills | Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, Rotherham Doncaster & South HumberNHS Foundation Trust  |
| Suzanne Smith | Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, NHS Rotherham Talking Therapies, Rotherham Doncaster & South HumberNHS Foundation Trust  |
| Malcolm Blease | Chairman, Royal Airforce Association (Rotherham) |
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| **Item** | **Title**  | **Action** |
| **1.****1.1****1.2**  | **Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham’s Armed Forces Champion & Chair of the Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.Cllr Keenan has been re-elected as a Councillor following the borough’s all out elections in May and is delighted to be continuing in the role as Rotherham’s Armed Forces Elected Member Champion. |  |
| **2.****2.1****2.2****2.3** | **Minutes of the last meeting, 26th February and Matters Arising** The minutes were agreed as an accurate record with all items to be updated on covered as part of the agenda for this meeting apart from the South Yorkshire Annual Event due to take place on 19th November (hosted at Rotherham Town Hall).Vicky Hartley reported that it has been suggested that Greg Stephens, veteran who attended the Op Courage North of England Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement event on 13th March in Leeds be invited to attend the conference on 19th November as keynote speaker. Contact was being made regarding this.Pauline King, Regional Employer Engagement Director, Reserves’ Forces & Cadets’ Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber offered to make contact with a senior representative from the armed forces should this be required.  | Vicky HartleyVicky Hartley to liaise with equivalents at the SY Councils  |
| **3.****3.1****3.2****3.3** **3.4****3.5****3.6** | **Rotherham Armed Forces Day – Feedback from the Armed Forces Community** Members noted plans for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day this week across Rotherham and plans for Rotherham’s Armed Forces Day on 22nd June as set out in the update paper for this meeting.*Post Meeting Update: On 10th June the Council received an email from Squadron Leader William McMiken, RAF Ceremonial & Air Events Team advising that due to the ongoing Air Accident Investigation and continuing pause of BBMF flying after the tragic accident on 25th May 2024, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight will not be in a position to conduct any displays or flypasts in the coming weeks and therefore the flypast allocation for Rotherham’s Armed Forces Day on 22nd June has been withdrawn.* The Chair, Cllr Keenan welcomed Leanne Buchan, the Council’s Head of Service for Creative Programming and Engagement who has responsibility for Council led events to the meeting. At the last meeting of the Covenant Group some concerns had been raised regarding armed forces civic events and the Council’s events team engaging with the armed forces community. Covenant Group Members were provided with a further opportunity to feedback directly to Leanne. In summary, feedback was provided as follows:1. There is lack of engagement and often an unwillingness from the Council’s Events Team to work with the armed forces community (mainly Rotherham MCVC and RBL) with suggestions and ideas often disregarded at meetings. There are also no recorded minutes of discussions from the event working group meetings.
2. There are missed funding opportunities as a result of no engagement with key businesses and Forces Friendly employers that may be willing to provide sponsorship to provide much bigger and better armed forces events.
3. Disappointed that Rotherham is the only Council in South Yorkshire not to be organising a Council led event for the D-Day 80th Anniversary on 6th June.
4. Armed forces events are not just for the armed forces community but for the wider community in Rotherham and an opportunity for all communities to come together and say thank you for the sacrifices that have been made and to show appreciation.

The Council’s Head of Service committed to:1. Increasing engagement with the armed forces community and widening out the representation on the events working group – the membership will be reviewed liaising with Rotherham MCVC.
2. Convening a meeting asap from July 2024 after this year’s Armed Forces Day (AFD) working group to commence plans for AFD 2025 and to move these meetings from virtual to in person with the Mackay VC Barracks, Fitzwilliam Road, Rotherham proposed as the meeting venue going forward.
3. Reviewing the timings and format to reflect feedback for future AFD events (from a 12.00/1.00pm finish to later in the day).
4. Working together with the armed forces community to look at various funding streams in addition to the Ministry of Defence funding that is available to support armed forces events in future noting that organisations such as the Arts Council do not provide funding for civic or armed forces related events.
5. Engaging with the Royal Yorkshire Regiment further in terms of parade participation given they have the Freedom of the Borough in Rotherham.
6. In light of Rotherham becoming the world’s first Children’ Capital of Culture there will more engagement with the cadets and young people in the armed forces community.

The Head of Service also confirmed that the Council does not have a £400k budget for events as referred to by Cllr Jones in the meeting and informed Covenant Group Members that each Council event has a limited budget of £5k which in the first instance has to cover the infrastructure costs. It was also confirmed that the Council continues to apply for musical support and a flypast plus Ministry of Defence funding for AFD which only provides a small limited cost towards the event.Vicky Hartley highlighted the challenges this year in relation to 146 Coy Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers (REME) and the likelihood that this year’s contingent may be smaller than usual. Ssgt Pressley, 146 Coy REME confirmed that this is due to reduced capacity and budget restraints. It was also noted this was also the case in other areas too. | Leanne Buchan, Rotherham Council  |
| 4.4.14.24.34.44.5  | **a) Health and Well-Being** **Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation** Vicky Hartley, lead officer for Armed Forces fed back to Members that she had made contact with the NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board at the end of March following feedback at the last Covenant Group meeting. A request had been made for a representative to attend this meeting on 3rd June to provide some further information.The NHS SYICB had advised that in commissioning primary care services, they have a quality contract that has a series of requirements beyond core responsibilities. As part of that additional contract their Mental Health colleagues requested that practices work towards and maintain accreditation with the Veteran Friendly Accreditation Scheme, but making checks regarding the validity of that accreditation is the responsibility of the scheme itself and not the NHS.Due to the SYICB not being the experts on accreditation and the NHS not having the resources to check that practices are meeting all the requirements, there is a need to determine who is responsible in order to follow up on this very important issue which requires priority.During the meeting, a lead named contact was provided (Andrew King, NHS regional lead for North East & Yorkshire on GP accreditation and training) who can assist with providing some further information and approached and invited to attend a future meeting. A generic email address veterans@rcgp.org.uk was also provided.*Post Meeting Update: Vicky Hartley emailed Mr Andrew King on Monday, 3rd June immediately following the meeting and received a response on 10th June confirming he will attend the next Covenant Group meeting on 16th September.*Cllr Eve Keenan, Armed Forces Champion has just recently been appointed as chair of Rotherham’s Health Select Commission for the term 2024/25 and is concerned that specific needs for veterans are not being addressed in Rotherham and would like to pick up veterans health as part of the Commission (subject to further discussions in the Council in relation to the Commission’s work programmes). | Vicky Hartley to contact Mr Andrew King and feedback to the Group.Cllr Keenan  |
| **4.6****4.7****4.8****4.9****4.10****4.11** | **b) Loneliness and Isolation** Ruth Fletcher Brown, the Council’s Public Health Specialist (Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Loneliness) provided feedback on the Focus Groups held with Rotherham MCVC in February and April 2024. The Armed Forces community is identified as a group that is at risk of loneliness and isolation and the purpose of the sessions was to meet with the armed forces community who are a vulnerable group to seek their feedback and better understand the challenges the community faces with the intention of the findings to:1. Incorporate into a Loneliness Chapter in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (Rotherham Health Data Hub) and helped to inform the Health and Well-being Strategy and other key strategies and plans such as Suicide Prevention and Self Harm Action Plan.
2. Used to help inform commissioners and providers about the needs of the community.
3. Incorporate into Making Every Contact Count Loneliness training for staff and volunteers across place – spotting the signs and asking sensitive questions to assist with support and signposting.
4. Develop specific actions to address this.
5. Using anonymised statements/key messages as part of the campaign for Loneliness Awareness Week, 10th to 16th June.

Ruth reported that the feedback and findings will enable the Council and Partners to have a much better understanding of the contributing factors to loneliness and isolation (bereavement, caring responsibilities, anxiety etc).Joining groups for human interaction, being outside in the natural environment, social media, attending key events out in communities (breakfast clubs, drop-ins, coffee mornings, crafts/sports club memberships ie bowling etc) are all important to combating loneliness and social isolation.The Covenant Group highlighted that there are many members of the armed forces community who are unaware of how to access key groups and social networks that are available in their communities and across the borough. Agreed next steps:1. To incorporate the feedback and findings as part of the work on the Loneliness Action Plan report to be considered by the partnership Better Mental Health for All Group, which oversees the implementation of Rotherham’s Loneliness Action Plan. This group reports into the Health and Well-being Board.
2. To feedback ‘You said we did’ to those that participated in the Focus Groups via Rotherham MCVC.
3. To look at further promoting and sharing key information working with the Council’s Neighbourhoods and Communities teams and key leads in the Covenant Group and other key partners such as VAR on signposting, promoting key networks / activities taking place in localities to assist with combating loneliness and social isolation but also noting that digital isolation is a contributing factor too for some of the armed forces community.
4. To feedback to the Council’s Strategic Armed Forces Group which is chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive and has Strategic Director, Assistant Director or Head of Service representation from each key service area in the Council and responsibility for ensuring the Council’s support for the armed forces and requirements are embedded into all mainstream services.
5. To update the Covenant Group on progress at the next meeting on 16th September.
 | Ruth Fletcher-Brown Ruth Fletcher Brown, Vicky Hartley, Martin Hughes, Waheed Akhtar, RMBCRuth Fletcher Brown / Vicky Hartley Vicky Hartley  |
| **5.****5.1****5.2****5.3****5.4** | **Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan – Update on areas of activity** Vicky Hartley, Rotherham MBC ran through the Action Plan which is a standing item on the agenda for Covenant Group meetings. Updates focussed on those areas highlighted in amber which had been covered off on the agenda earlier (3.1a, Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation and 3.1b, Loneliness and Isolation).It was reported that the Council had submitted an application for Gold accreditation in March for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and would hear back on the outcome later in the year.UK Armed Forces Veterans 2021 Census – Vicky Hartley will speak to the team in the Council who provided data from the 2021 Census and expand on the narrative ie Rotherham Codes (034, 001, 002 etc) and figures provided against these which totals 8,211 veterans recorded in Rotherham. | Vicky Hartley  |
| **6.****6.1****6.2****6.3****6.4**  | **Rotherham Veterans Survey** Vicky Hartley, Rotherham MBC reported that in early January the Council produced a survey shared with Rotherham MCVC and circulated to all Covenant Group Members on 15th March requesting to encourage the armed forces community to complete and return it to the AFCsupport@rotherham.gov.uk or post back to Rotherham Town Hall by end April.To date 27 completed surveys have been received as follows: * Completed by 11 veterans at Rotherham MCVC drop-in.
* Completed by 8 veterans at the South Yorkshire Veterans Breakfast Club.
* Completed by 8 veterans via Ron Moffett, Royal British Legion.

Given the low number of responses received, this will be circulated again to Members of the Covenant Group to request to further circulate and also circulated at the Veterans Voice Seminar that is being organised by Rotherham MCVC on 21st June.A further update report incorporating further responses received from the date of this meeting will be shared at the next meeting on 16th September. |  All MembersVicky Hartley / Members / Rotherham MCVC Vicky Hartley |
| **7.****7.1****7.2****7.3****7.4** | **Veterans Voter ID (new HM Armed Forces Veterans Card)**Cllr Ian Jones, Rotherham MCVC reported that he had contacted the Council’s Electoral Services Manager in March ahead of the borough’s all out elections in May regarding the MoD Form 90 being used as an acceptable form of photo ID. The Manager had confirmed as the MD form 90 is used as the Military ID for current serving members of the armed forces, it was an acceptable form of photo ID.It was however confirmed that the new HM Armed Forces Veteran card, which has been recently introduced, is not currently on the list of acceptable photo ID.Cllr Jones had therefore requested this be brought to the attention of the Electoral Commission given as of 1st January 2024 all forces leavers previous to 2024 can apply for the new veterans ID card to replace their form 90 which means that some veterans will have already destroyed it thinking the ID card has replaced all elements of its use.Andy Martin, Help4Homeless Veterans informed Covenant Group Members that the decision-making Board that considers what is deemed as acceptable ID ahead of the elections only meets on an annual basis and this decision will have been taken in September last year ahead of the new ID card being introduced which is the reason for it not being an acceptable form of ID for the borough’s all out elections. This will also apply to the General Election in July. It is hoped that the Electoral Commission will be reviewing this again in September 2024 to address this issue. |  |
| **8.****8.1****8.2****8.3****8.4****8.5** | **Covenant Group Member Updates** **Cllr Keenan, Rotherham’s Armed Forces Champion** * Continues to manage e-casework for veterans and will be re-starting surgeries at Rotherham MCVC in August and attending the Veterans seminar led by Rotherham MCVC on 21st June.
* Delighted that Cllr Sheila Cowen, newly appointed Mayor of Rotherham and who is also a veteran has chosen an armed forces charity (Help4Homeless Veterans) to support for her term of office 2024/25.

**Clare Haynes,** **Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage*** Details of an employment webinar on 10th June organised by the Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust will be shared with Covenant Group members via email following this meeting with a request to share with any veteran or service leaver contacts who may be considering a role in the NHS. Claire will be presenting her own journey from Military to NHS Op Courage.

*Post Meeting Update: Email sent to all Covenant Group members on 4th June from* *AFCsupport@rotherham.gov.uk* *on behalf of Clare Haynes with further details.***Chris Bradley, Development Manager, Rotherham MCVC*** MCVC continues to receive referrals and supporting veterans with complex needs and multiple issues.
* A Veterans Voice event has been organised for Friday, 21st June (10-2pm) at Silverwood Miners Welfare, Doncaster Road, Dalton, Rotherham which is an opportunity for veterans from across South Yorkshire to come together to understand how they can all work together, support each other and include the Armed Forces Covenant in their area.

**Major Adrian Hunt, Member, Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee & Branch Secretary, SSAFA*** SSAFA is currently undergoing a review in terms of how it will operate going forward from 2025/26 and will be particularly focussing on use of volunteers / trials.
* Veterans should also check as all are not aware of their pension commitment.

**Elaine Mason, Case Worker, Op Nov*** Continues to deal with casework on behalf of Op Nova/Forces Employment Charity.
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| **8.6****8.7****8.8****8.9****8.10****8.11** | **Pauline King, Regional Employer Engagement Director, Reserves’ Forces & Cadets’ Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber**Provided details of 2 upcoming events: * Humberside & South Yorkshire Army Cadet Force Engagement Day at Driffield Cadet Training Centre, 8th August (2-6pm).
* Armed Forces Covenant & Employer Recognition Scheme Reception, 17th July (6.30 – 9.00pm) Royal Armouries, Leeds.

**Andy Martin, representative, Help4Homeless Veterans** * Delighted that the new Mayor of Rotherham has chosen Help4Homeless Veterans as a charity to support during her term of office 2024/25.
* The founder of Help4Homeless Veterans has recently stood down.
* 56 veterans have been supported during the last operating year across South Yorkshire (10 from Rotherham out of the 56) 1st May to end April. Since May this year 4 veterans have been supported.

**Cllr Ian Jones, Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCVC*** Work continues to further improve the MCVC website (JustGiving account and page).
* There is a scheduled visit to the Arboretum.

**Michelle Murray, Armed Forces Welfare Officer, Defence Medical Welfare Services (DMWS), Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust*** Currently works Monday to Thursday and since taking up post a few months ago has supported 50 individuals with the main demographic being the elderly.
* A small event will be held at the Hospital on 28th & 29th June to promote services available at the hospital.

**Ron Moffett, RBL*** RBL is working closely with the census data and to October 2023 they have assisted 68 Rotherham beneficiaries, mostly with funding to help with the cost of living / energy crisis.
* The National President of the Royal British Legion, Sir Clive sadly died on 12th May very shortly after the RBL’s Annual Conference.

Members of the Covenant Group asked that condolences be passed on.**Neil Halsey Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions** * DWP are working with South Yorkshire Probation and Northern College in Barnsley and are in the process of arranging a course for veterans.
* Housing Benefit – 2024 is a 53 week year and people with weekly tenancy only get paid for 52 weeks. Clarification has being sought by Rotherham Council who have confirmed that all tenants are affected include those who do not claim benefits who also have to find an extra weeks rent. With regards to temp/supported accommodation customers claim housing benefit rather than Universal Credit so housing costs are covered for all 53 weeks. Covenant Group Members should direct to DWP in the first instance if there are any queries / cases for the armed forces community.
* Individuals who are sentenced to 6 months can lose housing even if released earlier and consideration needs to be given on the impact on the armed forces and wider community.
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| **9.****9.1** | **Any Other Business**None  |  |
| **10.** | **Future Meetings*** Monday, 16th September 2024 (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall)
* Monday, 25th November 2024 (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall)
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