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| **MINUTES**  | **MEETING:** | Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG) |
| **DATE & TIME:** | Monday, 24th February 2020 (2.00 – 4.00pm) |
| **VENUE:** | Town Hall, Rotherham  |
| **CHAIR:** | Cllr Ian Jones, Armed Forces Champion (Rotherham MBC) |
| **NOTE TAKER:** | Vicky Hartley, Executive Office Manager (Rotherham MBC) |
| **In Attendance**Cllr Ian Jones (Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC), Vicky Hartley (Executive Office Manager, Rotherham MBC), Sandra Tolley (Head of Housing Options, Rotherham MBC), Retd Major Charlie Helmn Assistant Regimental Secretary, Yorkshire Regiment), Ron Moffett (Chairman, Rotherham MCVC Executive Board and Royal British Legion), Steve Lowe (North of England Manager, Project Nova), Samantha Mulholland (Wellbeing Practitioner, Sheffield Mind), Nick Knowles, (Safer Neighbourhood Services Office, South Yorkshire Police), Marie Shadwick (Partnership Assistant, DWP), Rob Holmes (Station Manager, Dearne Fire Station, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue), Fiona Grayson (High Intensity Worker/Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, Rotherham IAPT, RDASH).**Apologies\*** *(represented by Deputy)*Shokat Lal (Assistant Chief Executive, Rotherham MBC), \*Kevin Costello (South Yorkshire Outreach Project Manager, Rotherham MCVC), Kevin Alsop (Personnel Recovery Unit, MoD), Lesley Jane Holt (Engagement Manager, RBL Industries Lifeworks Course), Malcolm Blease (Chairman, RAF Rotherham), \*Mohammed Aref (Enquiry & Liaison Officer, South Yorkshire Police), Rtd Col Jonathan Hunt (Regional Chairman, SSAFA)Andy Wallace, (SY Case Officer, Yorkshire Royal British Legion), John Topping (Secretary, Veterans Advisory & Pension Committee for Y&H), \*Nigel Coleman (Partnership Manager, DWP), Maj Adrian Hunt (Trustee, Rotherham MCVC & 102 Bn REME), Jamie Noble (Head of Community, Rotherham Utd Community Sports Trust)Jonathan Treen (Member, Veterans Advisory & Pension Committee for Y&H), Helen Wyatt (Patient & Public Engagement Manager, Rotherham CCG). |
| **Item** | **Title**  | **Action**  |
| **1.****1.1** | **Welcome, Introductions and Apologies** Cllr Ian Jones (Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Individual introductions were given and apologies noted as listed above. |  |
| **2.****2.1** | **Minutes of the last meeting, 23rd September 2019 & Matters Arising** The minutes of the last meeting held on 23rd September 2019 were agreed. Updates on progress of actions not covered on the agenda for this meeting were provided in an email from Vicky Hartley (Executive Office Manager, Rotherham MBC) on 1st October 2019 to all AFCCG Members.  |  |
| **3.** **3.1****3.2****3.3****3.4****3.5** | **Local & Regional Action Plans** **Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant 5-Year Action Plan 2019-2024**Vicky Hartley (Executive Office Manager, Rotherham MBC) ran through the Action Plan activity and progress of actions to date. During discussions, AFCCG Members agreed the need to give more focus and make further progress on the Health strand as follows: * **Explore opportunities** to increase health and wellbeing for serving personnel and veterans.
* **Embedding provisions for the ex-service community within key policy and strategy documents** such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and linking in with the work of Rotherham’s Health and Well-being Board.
* **Mental Health** - joining up of services (collaborative network of providers), raising more awareness, early identification/intervention, signposting/promotion of available services.
* **Suicide Prevention** (*note: recently reported that two of the recent suicides in Rotherham were veterans*).
* **Tackling loneliness** –exploring how veterans could benefit from initiatives developed and invested in through the Council’s loneliness agenda**.**
* ‘**Veteran Friendly GP Practices in Rotherham** – encourage all practices to work towards the Veteran’s Friendly GP Practice Accreditation Scheme, to ensure they comply with the Primary Care Armed Forces Covenant. This requires:
* The mental health lead in Practices to take responsibility for the practice working towards accreditation.
* Recording and flagging AF veterans and reservist on the practice system. Asking the question ‘*Have you ever served*?’

It is noted that the CCG provide support to practices by providing details of the Accreditation Scheme criteria and guidance on mental health services for those leaving the armed forces and veterans, though AFCCG Members were disappointed to hear that there is only currently one accredited GP Practice in Rotherham. It was agreed that the next meeting of the AFCCG meeting in June should focus on the Health strand of the Action Plan with those AFCCG Member leads - RDaSH, CCG and representatives from the Council (i.e. Director for Public Health, Public Health Specialist for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention lead officer).**South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2019/20**AFCCG Members noted the activity set out in the South Yorkshire-wide Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan for 2019/20 which aligns with all other local area Action Plans in South Yorkshire. The South Yorkshire Local Authority Armed Forces Champions and lead officers are due to meet in April to review the Action Plan and will report back to AFCCG Members following this meeting. | Vicky Hartley to liaise with Health leads.Vicky Hartley to feedback to AFCCG Members  |
| **4.****4.1****4.2****4.3****4.4****4.5****4.6****4.7****4.8****4.9****4.10****4.11****4.12****4.13****4.14****4.15****4.16****4.17****4.18****4.19****4.20****4.21****4.22** | **Updates (General, Partner & Projects)**1. **General Update**

Vicky Hartley (Executive Office Manager, Rotherham MBC) provided an update on:* Rotherham Council’s new updated [webpages for armed forces](https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/armed-forces).
* **Veterans & Families Research Hub** and their website containing [key research and literature](https://www.vfrhub.com/vfr-research-search-results/?fwp_search=south+yorkshire) on military veterans and families.
* **Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority’s (SCR MCA) pledge to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC)** and their decision on 18th November 2019 to sign up to the AFC and agree to adapt its employment and equal opportunities practices to reflect the commitments made in signing up to the AFC.
* **Government’s Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2019** which includes detail on their [delivery and new commitments](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-annual-report-2019).
* The **Strategy for our Veterans UK Government Consultation** that has recently published its [response](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strategy-for-our-veterans-uk-government-consultation-paper).
* The **Armed Forces Covenant Fund (AFC) Trust Consultation** and theLocal Grants programme of the AFC Fund Trust which is currently [seeking views from the Armed Forces community](https://www.covenantfund.org.uk/making-grants-for-local-projects-our-consultation/) to help shape a new programme for the next two years which is due to end on 6th March 2020.
* **Ombudsman Armed Forces Covenant** [**Guidance to Councils**](https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/news/2019/nov/ombudsman-issues-armed-forces-covenant-guidance-to-councils-on-remembrance-day)issued inNovember 2019 aimed to help Councils meet their commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and learn from real cases the Ombudsman has investigated.
1. **Covenant Group Member Updates**

Updates were provided from individual Members of the AFCCG in attendance as follows:* Fiona Grayson (High Intensity Worker/Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, Rotherham IAPT, **RDaSH)** reported that recent guidance issued by the Department of Health advises against the use of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) on veterans in relation to military trauma. RDaSH are looking to provide alternative treatments.
* Rob Holmes (Station Manager, Dearne Fire Station, **South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue**) confirmed that the Fire & Rescue service continue to ask the question ‘*Have you ever served*?’. The offer for all AFCCG Members to use meeting space available at stations in Rotherham and across South Yorkshire remains open.
* Marie Shadwick (Partnership Assistant, **Department for Work & Pensions**) confirmed DWP are in the process of creating a dedicated Armed Forces Champion post for South Yorkshire.
* Steve Lowe (North of England Manager, **Project Nova**) updated on Project Nova confirming that they have received 45 direct referrals this year and they are now partners of the new South Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit Partnership.
* Samantha Mulholland (Wellbeing Practitioner, Sheffield Mind) reported on the success of securing Armed Forces Covenant funding to assist with removing barriers to family life. Sheffield Mind now have additional capacity to see more families of serving personnel / families of veterans and funding to appoint a further therapist. She confirmed new support groups for military families are on the horizon with an Arts and Crafts Group due to be established in Rotherham. An Armed Forces community event will be held in Hillsbrough on 31st May 2020.
* Ron Moffett (Chairman, **Rotherham Military and Community Veterans Centre** Executive Board and **Royal British Legion**) reported that Rotherham MCVC has recently been awarded bronze for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme by the Ministry of Defence recognising the commitment and support as an employer. Major Adrian Hunt is also due to take over from Lt. Colonel McPherson as Chair, Rotherham MCVC from March 2020.
* Retd Major Charlie Helmn (Assistant Regimental Secretary, **Yorkshire Regiment**) reported on work undertaken by the Yorkshire Regiment in assisting and supporting communities during the recent floods. He also confirmed Yorkshire Regiment are involved in a fundraising ‘march’ event due to take place over the Easter.

**South Yorkshire Projects**1. **Support to Homeless Veterans**

Vicky Hartley (Executive Office Manager, Rotherham MBC) reported back on progress on a number of projects that have been commissioned by the four South Yorkshire Councils (Rotherham, Barnsley, Sheffield and Doncaster) working in partnership with the Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority to deliver support to homeless veterans as a result of funding made available by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (£90k). The four Councils have now agreed how to best utilise the funding which aligns to delivering the priority at theme 5 ‘Making a Home in Civilian Society’ of the South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan. The 3 individual projects are:**Development of a South Yorkshire E-learning Module (£15k)**Barnsley Council has led on this project working closely with the other South Yorkshire Councils and with specialist organisations (Project Nova and Homeless Link) on the development of an e-learning module, specifically about homeless ex-services personnel and their families. The content was agreed at the South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group meeting on 13th January 2019 and is now in the process of being rolled out across all South Yorkshire Councils for homelessness officers, estate management officers and housing officers on the ‘front line’. It will also be introduced to other key organisations and charities that are dealing with veterans and partners within Armed Forces Community Covenant Groups. **Development of Strategy and Good Practice (£20k)**. A strategic review of the approach taken by each local authority’s homelessness team in relation to identifying and responding to veterans and their families is being undertaken. This includes identifying best practice in relation to supporting this cohort, applying relevant legislation and providing recommendations for improvement and working towards creating a consistent and excellent approach to responding to homeless veterans and their families across South Yorkshire.In December 2019, the contract to undertake this work was awarded by Barnsley Council (on behalf of the Sheffield City Region Combined Mayoral Authority) to Homeless Link and Stoll. As part of the project, Stoll will also deliver specialist veteran awareness training to each of the South Yorkshire Council’s homelessness teams including the delivery of a bespoke toolkit to assist with identifying and working with veterans and their families. The project is expected to be completed by end March and a report prepared by Homeless Link and Stoll to be presented to the next South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group in April.**Homeless Veterans’ Service Provision (£55k)**In September 2019, the South Yorkshire Councils agreed to provide seed funding to support the appointment of a development manager with Help4Homeless Charity in liaison with support from existing Council officers to directly deliver improved homeless support services for veterans. In October 2019 there was a meeting with Help4Homeless who made a u turn and confirmed they no longer wanted the funding for its original intended purpose.In November 2019, the South Yorkshire Councils met to consider an alternative plan. It was agreed that the funding should be used to support homeless veterans as per its original intention and the money allocated to a specialist armed forces organisation who will administer it on behalf of the South Yorkshire Councils. It was also agreed the selected organisation will also be responsible for collecting data on veterans which will be used to help plan future services e.g. what their primary needs are.The award of funding will be based on strict eligibility criteria which will set out what the money can fund. This may include for example rent deposit to secure a home, essential furniture etc. Funding will not cover costs that should be available through statutory obligations, benefits systems and other government schemes such as warm homes.Barnsley Council through YORtender are due to lead on an open tender process and will hold a market engagement event, to include officials from all South Yorkshire Councils with partners invited to attend to discuss the proposal. The tender evaluation panel will include representation from each of the South Yorkshire Council’s (housing specialists). Sandra Tolley (Head of Housing Options, Rotherham MBC) informed AFCCG Members that the Council continues to give appropriate priority to veterans through its Housing Allocation Policy which provides Band 1 priority a) to personnel or former members of the reserves forces who were serving in the regular forces at any time in the five years proceeding their application and to bereaved spouses and b) to civil partners or other family members including relationship breakdown where they will cease to be entitled, to reside in MoD accommodation (subject to conditions set out in the Policy).The Council also has the appropriate systems in place for recording veterans and continues to improve information and awareness so that veterans are aware of the policy.The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2022 also sets out the Council’s long-term vision to addressing the root causes of homelessness.1. **Veterans Outreach**

Ron Moffett (Chairman of the Rotherham MCVC Executive Board) presented a report on progress of the South Yorkshire Outreach Project. Since the project launch at the end of April 2019 and November 2019 the outreach resource has been deployed on 30 occasions supported by volunteers from the Rotherham MCVC. During that period it is estimated that they have had exposure to circa 171,500 members of the public at various events which has enabled engagement and appropriate signposting for veterans and their families.Bookings continue for 2020 for key events such as VE Day celebrations in May and Armed Forces Day in June.There continues to be a need to look at further ways of utilising the vehicle and trailer and take full advantage of its potential to continue to raise awareness of the Covenant. AFCCG Members were further encouraged to book the vehicle for key events, where there is likely to be gatherings of people or increased footfall across the borough.Funding for the project is due to end in August 2020 and discussions are taking place between Rotherham Council and Rotherham MCVC regarding the continuation of funding. It is proposed that going forward this is directly managed by Rotherham MCVC rather than Rotherham Council as the accountable body on behalf of the South Yorkshire Councils. | Fiona Grayson to send DoH guidance to Steve Lowe, Project NovaAFCCG Members to note. Samantha Mulholland to circulate event details to AFCCG Members Vicky Hartley to send to all AFCCG Members to roll out in their organisations.Vicky Hartley, Lt Col.McPherson & Kevin Costello  |
| **5.****5.1****5.2****5.3****5.4****5.5** | **National / Commemorative Events 2020**Cllr Ian Jones (Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC) reported that plans were well underway for Armed Forces Day (AFD) on Saturday, 27th June. Some sponsorship has been received towards the event and it will be on the same scale as last year’s event.Retd Major Charlie Helmn (Assistant Regimental Secretary, Yorkshire Regiment) informed AFCCG Members that the Yorkshire Regiment has had to decline the invitation from Rotherham Council to do their Freedom of the Borough parade on AFD due to being committed to the National event in Scarborough as the lead infantry unit using the 12th and 4th Battalion assets. The 2nd battalion also depart to Cyprus just prior to AFD.The Council is planning to hold an event to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of VE Day but is unable to confirm at this stage the date, venue and scale of the event. An event organised by Rotherham Markets is planned for Saturday, 9th May and further details for both events will be circulated to all AFCCG Members in due course.It is to be confirmed as to whether there will be a Council run event to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day, 15th August.Plans for Remembrance Sunday, 8th November are in hand with a de-brief from last year’s event held earlier this year and positive feedback received from the armed forces community and military on the event. | Vicky Hartley to send details to AFCCG Members  |
| **6.****6.1** | **Next Meeting**Monday, 15th June 2020 (2-4pm), Rotherham Town Hall |  |