

MINUTES	MEETING:	Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG)
	DATE & TIME:	Monday, 6 th September 2021 (2.00 – 4.00pm)
	VENUE:	Virtual via Microsoft Teams
	CHAIR:	Councillor Eve Keenan, Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC
	SUPPORT & MINUTES:	Vicky Hartley, Executive Office Manager & Armed Forces Lead Officer, and Gillian Frost, Member and Civic Support Officer, Rotherham MBC
In Attendance Councillor Eve Keenan (Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC); Vicky Hartley (Executive Office Manager & Armed Forces lead officer, Rotherham MBC); Gillian Frost (Member and Civic Support Officer, Rotherham MBC); Malcolm Blease (Chairman, RAF Rotherham); Councillor Ian Jones (Chairman, Rotherham MCVV Executive Board); Lt Colonel McPherson (Member, Rotherham MCVV); Cheryl Jones (Hidden Faces Project, Rotherham MCVV); Jamie Noble (Head of Community, Rotherham United Community Sports Trust); Captain David Tomlinson (102 Battalion REME); Fiona Grayson (High Intensity Worker/Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, RDaSH); Suzanne Smith (High Intensity Worker/Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, RDaSH & Veteran); Jill Jones (Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation Placement Manager, Rotherham MBC); Natasha Aucott (Homelessness Development Officer, Rotherham MBC); Major Pat Ralph (MM, Assistant Secretary, Yorkshire Regiment & Chair, Yorkshire Regiment Association); Jane Townsend (Armed Forces Champion for SY, Universal Credit, DWP); Dawn O'Rourke (Armed Forces Champion Leader, DWP Work & Health Services); Victoria Goodchild (DWP), Samantha Mulholland (Wellbeing Practitioner, Sheffield Mind); Shafiq Hussain (Chief Executive, Voluntary Action Rotherham); John Topping (Secretary, Veterans Advisory & Pension Committee for Yorkshire & Humber); Steve Benthall-Bates (Chief Executive Officer, Help 4 Homeless Veterans).		
Apologies Received Major Adrian Hunt (Chairman, Rotherham MCVV & 102 Bn REME); Matt Thomas (Hospital Liaison Team Manager (Mental Health), RDaSH).		
Item	Title	Action
1.	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies	
1.1	Councillor Keenan introduced herself as the new Armed Forces Champion and individual introductions were made and apologies noted as listed above.	
2.	Minutes of the last meeting, 24th May 2021 and Matters Arising	
2.1	<p>The minutes of the last meeting were agreed. Updates on progress of actions were picked up as part of the meeting agenda as follows:</p> <p>a) 4.2 (Rotherham has a Suicide Prevention Action Plan and Multi-Agency Group). Vicky Hartley confirmed the Council's Armed Forces support webpages had been updated to include further information and signposting and she would continue to drive forward the work on veteran friendly GPs working with the appropriate health leads on the Covenant Group.</p> <p>b) 7.7 A flag-raising ceremony was held outside Rotherham Town Hall at the end of June to mark Armed Forces Day.</p>	Vicky H / health reps on Covenant Group
3.	Afghanistan – Impact on Armed Forces / veteran community and support	
3.1	Councillor Keenan noted that it was a very distressing time for the veterans' community and expressed her gratitude for the significant role that individual members of the Covenant Group were playing in supporting the community.	

3.2	The significant impact on mental health was highlighted and it was a priority to ensure that all veterans and their families were signposted and had access to right support.	
3.3	It was noted there is an Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme and some of the people being relocated to the UK have worked with the British military. Housing and other services are critical at this time and Vicky Hartley will be liaising with the Housing and Homelessness Teams in the Council regarding access to the Sheffield City Region funding allocated to Rotherham to provide some support.	
3.4	Jill Jones confirmed that Rotherham had been awarded £16,250 to be spent as a personalisation fund, eg bond/rent in advance, beds, white goods, furniture, clothing for interviews. The funding was for homeless veterans or those at risk of homelessness. This funding was available until the end of March 2022. Vicky Hartley would circulate the referral form to access this funding to all the Covenant Group. Note: Circulated via email by Vicky Hartley to all Members on 9/9/21.	Vicky Hartley
4.	Support to Homeless Veterans	
	Update on Sheffield City Region Funded Projects	
4.1	Vicky Hartley confirmed that Jill Jones had covered everything at item 3 (see 3.4 above). Help 4 Homeless Veterans & Farm Therapy Project for Forces Veterans Steve Bentham-Bates, Chief Executive Officer, Help 4 Homeless Veterans	
4.2	Steve Bentham-Bates briefed all on a key project and work taking place to support veterans to assist with easing their symptoms of PTSD by working with nature / animals on a farm in Lincolnshire run by a former veteran. Councillor Keenan and Vicky Hartley had recently visited the Farm Therapy Project and were very impressed by it.	
4.3	Help 4 Homeless Veterans working with the former veteran and his team were doing an excellent job of ensuring that veterans across the region receive the support they need. Further details of the project would be circulated to Members of the Covenant Group.	Vicky H
4.4	Steve Bentham-Bates advised that funding for the farm had been obtained from the Veterans' Foundation for 12 months and he would like additional funding for a part-time staff member, which he was working towards. It was a free day out for veterans (repeat visits accommodated) and referrals should be sent direct to Steve Bentham-Bates via email providing the number, rank and name of the veteran. He will then make contact with the individual and liaise with them regarding travel. Steve is currently providing the transport for veterans himself, but future consideration needs to be given in particular specialist for wheelchair access. Contact email address: stevenbenthambates@gmail.com Note: Email sent to all Members on 16/9/21 providing details of the project and permission obtained to share email contact information with Members and have available in the public domain.	
5.	Advice & Support Service to Veterans & Families, Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) - Jane Townsend, Armed Forces Champion for South Yorkshire, Universal Credit, DWP	
5.1	This was the first time DWP had put in a front-line service, which aimed to provide support for complex cases, signpost appropriately and support veterans' families as well. There would be access to specialist training and individuals would receive everything they were entitled to with one designated contact. The DWP would like to work closely with everyone on the Covenant Group to ensure no-one is missed. Contact email address: northcentral.armedforceschampions@dwp.gov.uk .	
5.2	John Topping queried how a veteran of no fixed abode could obtain help from the DWP and it was confirmed that the address of the local job centre could be used as the address, provided it was stated that he/she was a veteran	
6.	Veterans Outreach - Cheryl Jones, Project Manager Hidden Faces, Rotherham MCVC	
6.1	The relaunch of Rotherham MCVC took place on 23 rd July. Cheryl Jones gave an example of a positive story of a veteran who had been helped. She confirmed MCVC had been to various locations following the relaunch, including Rotherham Show, where a	

	significant amount of promotional leaflets (which now also include a QR code) had been distributed and some support provided to veterans. There is also a befriending project. Cheryl confirmed that many volunteers are needed in order to continue to provide the outreach service and ensure the van goes out to veterans and MCVV were working with Voluntary Action Rotherham on this.	
7.	Covenant Group Member Updates	
7.1	Fiona Grayson (High Intensity Worker/Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust) gave an example of how working with Rotherham Council had helped a veteran.	
7.2	John Topping (Secretary, Veterans Advisory & Pension Committee for Yorkshire and Humber) took part in the first face-to-face meeting on 21 st July in Cleethorpes. They can now call on the services of a barrister to help his organisation. John highlighted the fact that mental health issues were prominent, and it was sometimes difficult to get veterans to talk. Waiting times for war pensions had increased and it can put off service people when they experience difficulties at the first hurdle. He had contacts in the Yorkshire and Humber region and would organise a seminar later in the year.	
7.3	Samantha Mulholland (Wellbeing Practitioner, Sheffield Mind) advised that Keeping Families in Mind provided counselling to military families. There was no waiting list and they ran activity groups (eg arts and crafts and book clubs). This was online and face-to face would be coming soon. In Rotherham they were running a course for supporting someone with post-traumatic stress disorder. Samantha would send the quarterly newsletter to Vicky Hartley to forward onto Members. Note: August 2021 Newsletter was circulated to all Members on 16/09/21 via email.	Samantha Mullholland / Vicky Hartley
7.4	Councillor Ian Jones (Chairman, Rotherham MCVV Executive Board) had met the North East Lincolnshire Armed Forces Champion (this tied into the visit to Cleethorpes mentioned previously). The Breakfast Club had been reinstated to take place every second Saturday at the Storyteller in Parkgate.	
7.5	Councillor Keenan (Armed Forces Champion Rotherham MBC) gave an account of how she became involved in armed forces issues and updated on her activity as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The raising of the Armed Forces Day flag with the Mayor of Rotherham, Royal British Legion, Shadow Secretary of State for Defence & local MP and a small group of representatives on Saturday, 26th June. • Attendance at the re-launch of Rotherham MCVV on 23rd July. • The South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group on 24th August which she chaired. • Visit to the Veterans Therapy Farm in Lincolnshire on 2nd September. • Support to Veterans Outreach at Rotherham Show at the weekend. • Regular attendance of the South Yorkshire Breakfast Club • Working with the Civic Office and lead officer for Armed Forces in Rotherham on the planning for Remembrance Sunday, engaging with the key leads from charities and organisations. • Attendance at RBL dedication in Wath and expected attendance in Swinton. 	
8.	Any Other Business	
8.1	Major Pat Ralph highlighted the difficulty he had experienced in his 54 years of service in obtaining support from Councils across the country. He had never managed to gain social housing; only private.	
8.2	Jill Jones commented that, in Rotherham, veterans are given the highest priority in housing and there is a specialist team for veterans.	
8.3	Lt Colonel McPherson mentioned the Association of Service Drop-in Centres (ASDIC) which are well-funded and he is a Director. He also informed the Covenant Group that he is due to be appointed as High Sheriff of South Yorkshire in 2022 and he intends to organise a veterans' seminar and will engage with this Group in future regarding topics / areas of focus for discussion. He also intends to speak to senior representatives in Rotherham Council later this year to discuss his installation as High Sheriff and support to Rotherham.	

8.4	John Topping referred to the seminar he mentioned earlier and both Lt Colonel McPherson and Major Pat Ralph confirmed they would welcome input into that and would like to attend.	
9.	Dates of Future Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday, 13th December 2021 (2.00 – 4.00pm) 	