[](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-covenant-supporting-information)

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| Minutes  Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG) – 26th February 2024 | | | |
| **IN ATTENDANCE** | | | |
| Cllr Eve Keenan (Chair) | | Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC | |
| Vicky Hartley | | Member & Civic Support Manager & Armed Forces lead officer, Rotherham MBC | |
| Emma Colley | | Member & Civic Support Officer, Rotherham MBC | |
| Danella Senior | | Core Team Manager, NHS Op Courage | |
| Chris Bradley | | Development Manager, Rotherham MCVC | |
| Cllr Ian Jones | | Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCVC | |
| Ssgt Elvis Pressley | | Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham | |
| Maj MP Lynch | | The Royal Yorkshire Regiment | |
| Katie Merrills | | Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust | |
| Clare Haynes | | Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage | |
| Neil Halsey | | Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions | |
| Steve Lowe | | Regional Manager, Op Nova / Forces Employment Charity | |
| Jonathan Hunt | | Regional Chairman, SSAFA | |
| 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 | |
| Steve Bentham-Bates | | Chief Executive Officer, Help 4 Homeless Veterans | |
| Ian Birch | | Employment Adviser, Reed in Partnership | |
| Ron Moffett | | Member, Royal British Legion (Rotherham) | |
| **APOLOGIES RECEIVED** | | | |
| Lt Col RA McPherson | | Veteran and former High Sherriff of South Yorkshire | |
| Amanda Naylor | | Service Manager, OpCourage North | |
| Sharon Beardon | | Casework Services Manager, RBL South & West Yorkshire | |
| Sandra Tolley | | Head of Housing Options, Rotherham MBC | |
| Kim Firth | | Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation Manager, Rotherham MBC | |
| Mike Anthony & Alex Wilson | | South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority | |
| Malcolm Blease | | Chairman, Royal Airforce Association (Rotherham) | |
| Hannah Hall | | Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust | |
| Captain Terry Reilly | | Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham | |
| Helen Wyatt | | Engagement Manager (Rotherham), NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board | |
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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 noted that Jonathan Hunt was retiring and that this would be his last meeting. Members thanked Jonathan for his contribution to the Covenant Group meetings over the years and wished him well for the future. Colonel George Kilburn will take over from April. | |  |
| **2.**  **2.1** | **Minutes of the last meeting, 30th October 2023 and Matters Arising**  The minutes were agreed as an accurate record with items to be updated on covered as part of the agenda for this meeting. | |  |

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| **3.**  **3.1** | **Rotherham 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. A summary on progress of those areas of activity led by the Council was provided as follows:   * Item 1.1 (a & b) – raising awareness of the Covenant across Rotherham.   The Council website has been updated to encourage and assist organisations and businesses to sign the Covenant. The Council recently reaffirmed its pledges to the Covenant and had a signing with the Mayor of Rotherham, Leader, Armed Forces Champion and Chief Executive of the Council. A copy of the signed Covenant and pledges has been shared with Members as part of the papers for this meeting and is also published on the [Council’s website](https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/armed-forces-support/armed-forces-covenant).   * Item 1.1 (c) – a new Council policy setting out support and entitlements for members of, or those wishing to join, the Reserve Forces and Cadet Adult Force Volunteers was approved by the Council’s Staffing Committee on 12th January 2024. The Council is also doing an internal communications campaign to further promote the Covenant and raise awareness amongst all staff across the Council. The Council’s Head of Customer Services is leading on work to further embed into Council’s processes to ensure the customer at first point of contact is always asked the key question if serving or have served in the armed forces. * Item 2.1 – The Council’s Housing Allocations Policy was updated in November 2023 to remove the 5 year barrier to accessing services. Housing key forms have also been updated to ensure information is captured around the service history of individuals. Mandatory training is also being undertaken by front facing Housing staff on the Covenant and in relation to Housing and Homelessness. * Item 3.1 – Ruth Fletcher-Brown, Public Health Specialist at Rotherham MBC held a Focus Group with veterans at Rotherham MCVC on 16th February to discuss the loneliness and isolation agenda. Four veterans took part in the discussion and another session is planned for April. A report back on the discussions and findings will be brought back to the June Covenant Group meeting.   Vicky Hartley also reported that the NHS South Yorkshire Integration Care Board had recently reported that 28 out of 28 GP practices in Rotherham were now Veteran Friendly Accredited. Members noted this and requested further clarification be sought regarding the validity of the figures and the areas across Rotherham that this covers. Members requested a representative from the South Yorkshire Integration Care Board be invited to a future meeting to brief them further on progress in this area and to provide an opportunity to discuss further and better understand what GP surgeries are doing to promote accreditation and raise awareness amongst the NHS workforce. Examples were given regarding not all GP practices having signage displayed on buildings promoting accreditation and some NHS staff not being aware or trained on what this means. Major Adrian Hunt reported that Regent Square Surgery in Doncaster should be used as a surgery of good practice. Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham’s Armed Forces Champion requested this be picked up and looked into further by the Council’s Health Scrutiny Committee.  *Post Meeting Update: Vicky Hartley emailed the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board on 15th March 2024 to request attendance at the 3rd June 2024 Covenant Group meeting to discuss further and awaiting a response.*   * Item 4.3 – The Council is organising a Rotherham Together Partnership Showcase event on 6th March where senior representatives from South Yorkshire Police, Rotherham College, Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust, Voluntary Action Rotherham, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust & NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board will collectively sign the Covenant and make pledges. The Partnership will be instrumental in promoting the Covenant and encouraging other organisations and businesses across the borough to pledge and sign the Covenant.   [Homepage – Rotherham Together Partnership](https://www.rotherhamtogetherpartnership.org.uk/) | Ruth Fletcher-Brown, Rotherham MBC  South Yorkshire Integration Care Board, Vicky Hartley & Cllr Eve Keenan |

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| **4.**  **4.1**  **4.2**  **4.3** | **Rotherham Veterans Survey**  Vicky Hartley reported that the Council has produced a Veterans Survey that has been shared with Rotherham MCVC with a number of responses already received from veterans. The survey will be circulated to all Covenant Group Members with a request to ask veterans to complete and return to [AFCsupport@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:AFCsupport@rotherham.gov.uk) or to post to Rotherham Town Hall by the end of April 2024.  Claire Hayes, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage also offered to share a copy of Sheffield Council’s survey with Rotherham Council for information.  The results of the survey will be shared with the Covenant Group at the next meeting in June. | All Members  Vicky Hartley, Rotherham MBC |
| **5.**  **5.1**  **5.2**  **5.3** | **Update on South Yorkshire activity and Covenant Boards Annual Event in November 2024**  The South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group now meets three times a year, with an event at the end of the year involving all Covenant Boards/Groups from across all South Yorkshire. The joint event convened by Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield Councils will provide an opportunity for networking, important updates from key organisations and an update on what each Council is doing individually and collectively as a collaborative partnership.  Vicky Hartley reported that Kath Hayward, Regional Manager for the North of England and North Wales, Defence Transition Service has been invited as a speaker.  Members to provide any other suggestions for other guest speakers to the Council. | All Members |
| **6.**  **6.1**  **6.2** | **NHS Op Courage**  Danella Senior, Core Team Manager, NHS Op Courage presented an overview of the work and offer of OpCourage. A copy of the presentation delivered is attached.  On 13th March there will be an event on Stakeholder Awareness and Engagement at the Royal Armouries, Leeds. |  |
| **7.**  **7.1** | **Covenant Group Member Updates**  **Ron Moffett, Royal British Legion (Rotherham)**  **Armed Forces Day**  Ron Moffett raised that he was unhappy following a meeting with the Council’s Events Team around the planning for Rotherham’s Armed Forces Day (AFD). He stated that he felt there was no appetite or enthusiasm for the event and disappointed that there is not a wider programme of activity taking place throughout the day.  Chris Bradley, Rotherham MCVC informed Covenant Members that she had recently met the Mayor of Rotherham with a number of veterans and representatives from MCVC who had voiced their concerns regarding Remembrance Sunday and AFD. Rotherham MCVC and some of the armed forces community feel that there is an unwillingness to work with the community on the event and highlighted that it is about bringing all of the Rotherham community together to recognise the armed forces. Rotherham MCVC along with other representatives such as the RBL are willing and prepared to volunteer to support and get more involved in having a bigger and better event lasting more than the current 2.5 hours and stretching the full day. Involvement and engagement of children and young people has also been suggested in terms of having a poster competition involving schools.  Kate Merrills, RDaSH fed back that had a stall but had to close it down after a few hours due to lack of visitors.  Vicky Hartley informed the Covenant Group that there is an Event Working Group that has representation on from the armed forces community – Rotherham MCVC representative/s and RBL and that this Group is the most appropriate forum for these issues and discussions to take place. Rotherham MCVC and the RBL representatives on the Working Groups responded to say that there is unwillingness to have any discussions regarding extending the event and they have been met with pushback from the Council’s Events Team.  Cllr Ian Jones, Rotherham MCVC highlighted the 2019 event which was the best Armed Forces Day in Rotherham and had a programme of activity that ran well into the afternoon. The planning had significant involvement from the community in terms of assisting with the organisation of the event and also included the markets, local businesses and a significant amount of sponsorship secured alongside the Ministry of Defence grant to enable the programme to continue to later in the day and was very well attended by the public resulting in increased footfall in the Town Centre.  Vicky Hartley committed to raising this with the Events Manager and Head of Service in the Council who have overall responsibility for leading on the organisation of the event. Cllr Keenan requested that they be invited to the next meeting of the Covenant Group to hear the views / concerns of the community and to look at how the Events Team can work with the Armed Forces community to make this a better event in 2024 and beyond.  Given AFD is on 22nd June and the next meeting on 3rd June, the Armed Forces Champion requested a meeting be organised asap with the armed forces community and Council’s Events Team.  *Post Meeting Update: Leanne Buchan, Head of Service for Creative Programming and Engagement, Rotherham MBC who has responsibility for events in the Council has confirmed that she will attend the next meeting of the Covenant Group on 3rd June and will attend the next meeting of the Armed Forces Day Event Planning Working Group.* | Vicky Hartley, Rotherham MBC |
| **7.2**  **7.3**  **7.4**  **7.5**  **7.6**  **7.7**  **7.8**  **7.9**  **7.10**  **7.11** | **Cllr Ian Jones, Rotherham MCVC**  There has been an increase in the number of drop ins and a rise in complex cases. Some collaborative work is also taking place with Hull 4 Heroes around suicide prevention.  **Katie Merrills, RDASH**  RDASH have a new steering group that meets every couple of months to discuss the needs of veterans. Work is ongoing to improve data collection for veterans and family members across the service. Staff are attending “Military Human” training at York to better understand how to support veterans.  **Neil Halsey, DWP Armed Forces Champion**  Improvements are being made across DWP towards recognising the Armed Forces community. Towards the 3rd quarter of 2024, DWP are looking at pushing out some outreach sessions.  **Major MP Lynch, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment**  On Sunday, 14th April, the Royal Yorkshire Regiment will be marching through Hull. On the 29th February Major Lynch will be meeting with the new Director of the Office for Veteran Affairs. Members were asked to feed in any issues they wish to be raised at this meeting.  *Post Meeting Update: Event Details for Sunday, 14th April - the parade will form up outside Hull Minster at 11.00am, following the inspection by the Lord Mayor it will be setting off at 11.20am and heading to the Guildhall. Once the parade in finished (by 12.30pm) there will be a reception in the Guildhall until about 2.00pm. The parade is open to all but not access to the reception as this is being organised by Hull City Council.*  **Steve Lowe, OpNova**  OpNova operates across 3 regions, the North of England accounted for half of all activity. Greater Manchester have developed a pilot scheme called the “Forcer Protocol”, which identifies missing veterans and so far, 45 missing Veterans have been found. The pilot will be extended nationally but remains in the Greater Manchester region for now.  **Major Adrian Hunt, SSAFA**  The Veterans ID card has been launched with a 10-day turnaround. SSAFA has dealt with 102 caseloads and 72 have been completed. VPAC - there has been an increase in cases where veterans have struggled to get hearing tests due to build up of ear wax – but are unable to get the wax removed. This relates to hearing loss claims due to time in the service.  **Pauline King, Reserves’ Forces & Cadets’ Forces Association for Y&H**  The 800th Covenant signing in Yorkshire and Humber is planned for next month. Army engagement groups are meeting on 29th February at Doncaster Racecourse and 19th March at Barnsley Holiday Inn. There is a military expo at Hillsborough Stadium on 12th March. The deadline for Gold ERS awards is 13th March and for Silver 17th April.  **Steve Bentham-Bates, Help for Homeless (H4H) Veterans**  Since the last meeting received 22 requests for help from around Yorkshire NE & North Lincs (out of a total of 47 this financial year). Since July advised just 6 veterans to contact Op fortitude as their needs were in assisted housing territory. Closed Barnsley drop-in on 5th February due to lack of take up after almost a 2-year trial so the £10k saving per annum can be better used supporting veterans. A new Therapy Farm grant from the Veterans Foundation has been received to help run for 2024/25 funding for 50 visitors a year. H4H veterans intend to fund the purchase of a property to provide short term emergency veteran accommodation for the South Yorkshire area.  **Ian Birch, REED in Partnership**  REED are replacing after 25 years as the CTP Employment contractors for Ministry of Defence. They support former members of the Armed Forces, Reservists, partners and former or current members needing help in getting back into work. They offer a tailored approach with advisors offering support to get veterans back into work. As soon as a person has left the forces, they can register, the DWP turnaround referrals in 5 days, then REED get in touch. REED are based at Stewart House, Rotherham and they also refund bus fare or petrol costs for people who travel to use the service. The full transition over to REED will be complete from 25th October 2024.  **Cllr Keenan, Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham Council**  Continues to manage casework for veterans and attend Rotherham MCVC drop-ins and serve as a Trustee on the Help for Homeless Veterans Charity Board. Rotherham Council is in the process of applying for Gold ERS status. | All Members |
| **8.**  **8.1**  **8.2** | **Any Other Business**  Major Hunt has retired after 47 years in the Armed Forces and was granted the King’s Volunteer Reserves Medal (KVRM) in the New Year’s Honours 2024. This award is prestigious and only awarded to 13 people a year. Members of the Covenant Group passed on congratulations to Major Hunt for this fantastic award.  Cllr Keenan reported that this may be her last meeting as Armed Forces Champion given the borough’s all out elections in May. She has enjoyed every moment working in this role and with veterans across the borough and with the Armed Forces Covenant Group and thanked the Group for their support, dedication and commitment during her term of office. |  |
| **9.**  **9.1** | **Future Meetings**  These would all be held in person at Rotherham Town Hall (2-4pm) on Mondays:   * Monday, 3rd June 2024 * Monday, 16th September 2024 * Monday, 25th November 2024 |  |