



**PROUDLY
SUPPORTING
THOSE WHO
SERVE.**

Minutes
Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG)
17th February 2025

IN ATTENDANCE

Cllr Eve Keenan (Chair)	Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham MBC
Vicky Hartley	Member & Civic Support Manager & Armed Forces lead officer, Rotherham MBC
Deborah Vickers	Member & Civic Support Officer, Rotherham MBC
James Clark (item 3)	Assistant Director for Housing, Rotherham MBC
Sandra Tolley (item 3)	Head of Housing Options, Rotherham MBC
Major Adrian Hunt	Member, Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee & Branch Secretary, SSAFA
Cllr Ian Jones	Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCVC
Chris Bradley	Development Manager, Rotherham MCVC
Elaine Mason	Case Worker, Op Nova / Forces Employment Charity
Maj MP Lynch	The Royal Yorkshire Regiment
Ron Moffett	Member, Royal British Legion (Rotherham, Rawmarsh & Parkgate Branch)
Lt Col RA McPherson	Veteran & President Royal British Legion for South and West Yorkshire
Steve Benthams-Bates	Chief Executive Officer, Help 4 Homeless Veterans
Pauline King	Regional Employer Engagement Director, Reserves' Forces & Cadets' Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber
Clare Haynes	Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage
Suzanne Smith	Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, NHS Rotherham Talking Therapies, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust
Sam Blakemore	Veterans Lead Employment Advisor, NHS Rotherham Talking Therapies, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust
Malcolm Blease	Chairman Royal Airforce Association, Rotherham
WO2 CSM Ray Owrap	WO2 CSM Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham
Zanib Rasool	Partnership & Development Manager, Rotherham United Community Sports Trust
Cheryl Dunstan	South Yorkshire RECONNECT service, South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Danella Senior	Core Team Manager, NHS Op Courage
Hannah Hall	Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust
Michelle Murray	Armed Forces Welfare Officer, Defence Medical Welfare Services, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust
Neil Halsey	Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions

Item	Title	Action
1.	Welcome, Introduction and Apologies	
1.1	Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion & Chair of the Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group welcomed everyone to the meeting. All in attendance introduced themselves and apologies were noted.	
2.	Minutes of the last meeting, 16th September 2024 and Matters Arising	
2.1	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record with most items to be updated on covered as part of the agenda for this meeting.	

3.	Housing & Homelessness	
3.1	Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion introduced and welcomed the Council's Assistant Director for Housing, James Clark and Head of Housing Options, Sandra Tolley to the meeting.	
3.2	Presentations were delivered on the Housing Options for Veterans (delivered by James Clark and attached at Annex A) and on the Council's Housing Allocation Policy Review (delivered by Sandra Tolley at Annex B).	
3.3	Following the presentations, discussions took place, and a summary of issues raised were as follows: Housing Options for Veterans • The pathway for the armed forces community is often difficult with housing and homelessness for the armed forces community continuing to be a challenge as the local connection rules differ for allocations and homelessness. • The process to register on the housing register with local Councils is not consistent and varies. • Veterans find it hard to register and it would be helpful to have some further information on how the Council can assist with the registration process. • There appears to be very little housing priority given to veterans on health grounds. It was noted that all Councils are different but there is national guidelines to the Local Connection Criteria for Allocations. • New build proposals in the borough were welcomed – an example case was highlighted and given in relation to exclusions from bidding for new build due to not being a Council tenant. • The Council needs to make best use of its stock, for example, ensure age is an assessment criteria, sheltered accommodation sits within the policy and that people over 50 are assessed (young people access to ground floors / allocate 4 bedrooms house to large families). Noted that Rotherham Council allocates bungalows on a shared basis given some veterans have lost limbs and need ground floor e.g. the 50% on need irrespective of age. An example was provided in relation to Sheffield criteria being 60 plus. • Highlighted that the Council owns 20,000 homes and there are a lot through the 'Right to Buy' initiative. It was noted that the Government has recently pledged to 1.5m new homes and that rules have been changed to make it more difficult to 'Right to Buy'. • Refresher training for officers in the Council and the development and introduction of process maps for officers to refer to setting out the processes in relation to existing housing / homelessness policies were welcomed. It would be helpful for the Covenant Group to work with the Council on expanding the process map for the armed forces community.	Sandra Tolley / Vicky Hartley
3.4	Sandra Tolley reported that there will now be a dedicated specialist officer to support the armed forces community going forward. The lead officer will be invited to attend future meetings of the Covenant Group. Rotherham Council's Housing Allocation Policy Review	Vicky Hartley
3.5	Members in attendance were supportive of the proposed changes outlined in the presentation in relation to the following: • Who is eligible, including local connection criteria. • How the Council prioritises different people with different needs for housing. • The sizes and types of properties available to different types of households.	
3.6	Sandra Tolley confirmed the consultation deadline was 6 th April 2025 and in terms of timeframes for approval of the changes this is likely to be later in the year (summer / early autumn) due to decision making processes which will require approval from the Council's Cabinet and full Council.	

3.7	The suggestion of Members sending a collective letter of support from the Covenant Group in relation to the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy Review was supported. Post Meeting Update - Letter of support drafted for consideration by all Members and emailed on 3rd March by Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council via AFCSupport requesting feedback or any objections to sending the letter by 14th March. - Dedicated Specialist homelessness Officer details: Georgia Cartledge, Homelessness Prevention & Resettlement Officer Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Communication route to make contact – emails to be sent to the Council's Housing & Homelessness Management Team's generic inbox: homelessmanagementteam@rotherham.gov.uk with copies to afcsupport@rotherham.gov.uk & georgia.cartledge@rotherham.gov.uk - Georgia Cartledge has been invited by Vicky Hartley to attend all future Covenant Group meetings.	Vicky Hartley
4. 4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5	Children's Capital of Culture – Engaging with the Young Armed Forces Community Cllr Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion reported, this year Rotherham has become the world's first Children's Capital of Culture. For Children's Capital of Culture, festival year 2025 there will be a programme of activities and events designed and delivered with Children and Young People aged from 0-25. Cllr Keenan has requested through the lead service in the Council that is managing the programme that engagement take place with the young armed forces community. Contact is being made through each of the Cadet Leaders in Rotherham to discuss this further. Zanib Rasool informed Members that Rotherham United Community Trust has close links with Cadets in Masbrough and offered to make contact with them on behalf of the Group. Major Adrian Hunt and Pauline King offered to assist with making contact via their networks should there be any difficulty engaging with the Rotherham Cadet Leaders. Post Meeting Update: Vicky Hartley put Rachel Stothard, Strategic Project & Partnerships in the Culture, Sport and Tourism at Rotherham Council in direct contact with Major Hunt on 28th February.	Vicky Hartley
5. 5.1 5.2	Rotherham's Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan – Activity Updates Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council reported that the Action Plan included as part of the meeting agenda pack had been further updated and asked Members to note the following changes: Raising Awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant & Policy Commitment (Page 3) Adult Care, Housing and Public Health are having discussions regarding incorporating the standard question into their processes and also building in signposting via their various user platforms i.e Liquid Logic system.	

5.3 5.4 5.5 5.6 5.7	Housing (page 5) • New regulations came in on 18 December 2024 for all Local Authorities to accept Veterans from anywhere in the Country. Rotherham's Policy for Veterans had already been updated in November 2023, and Rotherham's Policy already includes exceptions to Local Connection for Veterans for applications for social housing. • Housing Application and medical assessment asks the question if ever served and asks if a family member of a current member of the armed forces. • Appointment of a specialist Homelessness Officer for Veterans within the Council to act as a lead point of contact for the armed forces community. • At 7/2/2025 the Council reported there are 176 applicants on the housing register that are noted as having served in the armed forces. This is relatively low given there are 7,000 currently on the register. • The homelessness team are referring veterans to Op FORTITUDE who may be able to find supported accommodation for veterans. • Process maps for Council officers to refer to and refresher training delivered. Health & Well-being (page 8) • Recommendation from Rotherham Mental Health Needs Assessment 2023-24 - Dr Connie Hobbs in the Council's Public Health Team has been liaising with Amanda Naylor, Op Courage in Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service at Leeds and Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. This is to ensure the profile is raised on specialist veteran mental health services and they are linked in with other services to raise their profile amongst the target population and promote their uptake. Combatting Loneliness and Isolation Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council reported back on the work that the Council has been leading on arising from Focus Groups held last year with the armed forces community via Rotherham MCVC and with the Council's Public Health Specialist. A flyer detailing the current support has been developed by key leads in the Council aimed to assist with combatting loneliness and isolation and improving mental health & well-being. The flyer included as part of the agenda pack for this meeting details the current support that is available, how the community can stay connected and highlights when key events take place in Rotherham. It was agreed the flyer be circulated through email outside this meeting to enable all Members of the Covenant Group given not all in attendance at the meeting to provide feedback. Once feedback has been received and the flyer finalised, this will be printed and be made digitally available to all Covenant Group Members to request that this be widely distributed amongst key networks. This will include seeking support from the Council's Neighbourhood Co-ordinators within wards across the borough to assist with distribution and other services such as South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority. <u>Post Meeting Update</u> Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council circulated the flyer to all Covenant Group Members via email on 26th February with a request to provide any direct feedback by Friday, 14th March.	Vicky Hartley / Deborah Vickers
6. 6.1	Introduction to the South Yorkshire RECONNECT Service Cllr Keenan welcomed Cheryl Dunstan from the new South Yorkshire RECONNECT service, South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. A flyer promoting the service had been circulated as part of the agenda pack and noted by Members in attendance.	

6.2	An overview was provided on the service which is care after custody offering support and release planning to individuals who are on release or on a temporary licence for up to 12 weeks prior to release. Support is also offered for up to 6 months post release date, or when all health care needs are met.	
6.3	The aim of the service is to look at how best to help provide support for veterans, supporting low and high risk clients with their needs including help to register with a GP, Dentist and support with general health and well-being.	
6.4	Members in attendance noted the service available to the armed forces community.	
7.	Upcoming Commemorative & Civic Events	
7.1	Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council briefed Members on activity led by the Council in relation to the following:	
7.2	a) VE Day, 80th Anniversary (8th May) A themed 1940s celebration lunch for invited guests will take place at Rotherham Town Hall on 8 th May hosted by the Mayor and Armed Forces Champion.	Deborah Vickers
7.3	Discussions are also taking place with Rotherham Museum, Clifton Park who plan to have a special commemoration event where original archival materials will be on display on 8 th May for the public to view.	
7.4	Cllr Ian Jones asked if the Council was planning on holding a beacon lighting event given Councils and local communities / organisations are being encouraged to light a beacon and Lamp Lights of Peace at 9.30pm on 8 th May.	Vicky Hartley
7.5	b) Armed Forces Day, 21st June The annual Armed Forces Day event including the Mayor of Rotherham, Civic Dignitaries and the Armed Forces community will take place during the morning of Saturday, 21 st June. It will commence at approximately 9.30am with a flag raising ceremony at the Town Hall followed by a parade in the Town Centre, Parade Inspection, Act of Worship, Speeches and Civic lunch for invited guests. Activities will also be taking place in the afternoon throughout the Town Centre.	
7.6	c) Victory over Japan (VJ Day) 80th Anniversary (15th August) Discussions are also taking place with Rotherham Museum, Clifton Park regarding a special commemoration event where original archival materials will be on display on 15 th August similar to the event being organised for 8 th May.	
8.	Covenant Group Member Updates	
8.1	Sam Blakemore, Veterans Lead Employment Advisor, NHS Rotherham Talking Therapies, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust Talking Therapy employment Services offer support to veterans (up to 7 sessions). For all aspects of employment support, such as job searching, CV writing and interview skills.	
8.2	Suzanne Smith, Veterans lead Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist. NHS Rotherham Talking Therapies, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS foundation Trust - Continuing to promote their service and build up connections. - In new position as veteran lead been attending AFVBC at Elmwood Farm and Maltby, also MCVC and casting innovations to build up a rapport and offer support and services to the Veteran community.	

8.3	Claire Haynes, Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage Provide a 'Walking with the Wounded' Walking Group, and Veterans always made welcome at The Wellness Centre, Halifax to drop in for a brew and chat or just to sit quietly somewhere safe and warm.	
8.4	Elaine Mason, Case Worker, Op Nova / Forces Employment Charity Continues to work with a wide variety of services supporting vulnerable veterans, including Care after Combat and South Yorkshire Probation Service.	
8.5	Cllr Ian Jones, Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCV & Chris Bradley, Development Manager, Rotherham MCV - Recently appointed a new Outreach Worker. - Looking at applying for ERS Gold Accreditation this year. - Applied for a funding bid from the National Lottery (decision awaited on whether successful – expected May / June). - Organised several events over the last few months and have a planned visit to CMADE (outdoor activity centre in Barnsley). - Undertaking a piece of work in relation to pulling together a Veterans Directory to capture key organisations contact details, centralise these into a published, accessible database for access to veterans, their support networks and all organisations that offer any support.	
8.6	Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council made reference to the Directory produced some years ago by Nick Wood, York St John University and suggested linking into this and reviewing what is currently available to avoid duplication of work.	Zanib Rasool
8.7	Ron Moffett, RBL RBL continues to support veterans and is currently supporting a veteran with dementia.	
8.8	Zanib Rasool, Rotherham united Community Trust Encouraged Members to promote the sports and physical activities taking place at Rotherham United Community Trust where the armed forces community are most welcome to attend and will share information with the Council for circulation.	
8.9	Steve Bentham-Bates, CEO Help4Homeless Veterans - Disbursed many winter fuel payments to OAP Veterans who lost their government winter fuel payment. - Assisted many homeless veterans at a cost of £2k in hotel bills including dealing with one difficult case that assisted with the prevention of a suicide. <i>Thanks were passed onto Cllr Eve Keenan for her role in assisting this veteran.</i> - Held a recent meeting with Cllr Eve Keenan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Assistant Director for Housing to discuss support in relation to Help4Homeless Veterans looking to purchase a property that can be used for temporary accommodation. - Help4Homeless Veterans are having a stand at Barnsley's Armed Forces Day this year. - The Therapy Farm is thriving and any visits can be co-ordinated.	
8.10	Malcolm Blease, Chairman Royal Airforce Association, Rotherham Currently supporting a widow of an RAF veteran.	Vicky Hartley
8.11	Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion, and Vicky Hartley, Armed Forces lead officer, Rotherham MBC - Continue to deal with casework for the armed forces community. - Recently briefed Pat O'Brien and Chris Ashworth, Office for Veterans Affairs on activity taking place within the Council and through the Covenant Group.	Vicky Hartley

	The OVA has moved from the Cabinet Office into the Ministry of Defence People Team. They want to build stakeholder relationships, gather insight, understand the local landscape and know what the challenges are at local and regional level to assist with influencing and informing Government policy. Vicky Hartley will be inviting them to a future meeting of the Covenant Group. • Vicky Hartley reported that the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) have recently been in touch regarding support to the armed forces. The SYMCA want to better understand what support is available across South Yorkshire and at the local level and a representative will be invited to attend a future meeting of the Covenant Group.	
9.	Any Other Business	
9.1	Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council was asked to clarify if the armed forces is specifically listed as a protected characteristic in the Council's Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and relevant policies. Post Meeting Update Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council has sought clarification from Rotherham Council's Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement who has confirmed that the armed forces is not specifically listed as a protected characteristic. There are nine statutory characteristics the Council must consider when designing services, implementing policy and have due regard to when consulting: age, sex, gender reassignment, race, disability, pregnancy/maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and marriage/civil partnership as outlined in the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.	
10.	Next Meeting and Future Dates: • Monday, 12th May (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall) • Monday, 18th August (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall) • Monday 10th November (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall)	