



**PROUDLY
SUPPORTING
THOSE WHO
SERVE.**

Minutes Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG) 12th May 2025

IN ATTENDANCE

Cllr Eve Keenan (Chair)	Armed Forces Champion, Rotherham Council
Vicky Hartley	Member & Civic Support Manager & Armed Forces lead officer, Rotherham Council
Major Adrian Hunt	Member, Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee & Branch Secretary, SSAFA
Lt Col RA McPherson	Veteran & President of the Royal British Legion, South & West Yorkshire
Steve Bentham-Bates	Chief Executive Officer, Help 4 Homeless Veterans
John Healy	Chair of Trustees, Help 4 Homeless Veterans
Ron Moffett	Member, Royal British Legion (Rotherham, Rawmarsh & Parkgate Branch)
Malcolm Blease	Veteran & Chairman, Royal Airforce Association (Rotherham)
Clare Haynes	Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage
Pauline King	Regional Employer Engagement Director, Reserves' Forces & Cadets' Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber
Cllr Ian Jones	Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham Military Community Veterans Centre
Neil Halsey	Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions
Hannah Hall	Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust
John Hodson	Rotherham District, South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
WO2 CSM Ray Owram	WO2 CSM Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham

VISITORS / INVITED GUESTS

Simeon Leach (Item 3)	Economic Strategy & Partnerships Manager, Rotherham MBC
Louise Robinson (Item 3)	Programme Manager, Rotherham Investment & Development Office, Rotherham Council
Ian Bailey	Violence Reduction Unit in Sheffield (South Yorkshire Police), Barnsley Council Partnerships Manager & South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Georgia Cartledge	Homelessness Prevention & Resettlement Officer, Rotherham Council
Chris Bradley	Development Manager, Rotherham Military Community Veterans Centre
Maj MP Lynch	The Royal Yorkshire Regiment
Suzanne Smith	Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, Rotherham Talking Therapies, RDaSH
David Watson	Patient Experience & Involvement Lead (Mental Health), RDaSH
Amanda Naylor	Service Manager, Veterans Mental Health & Wellbeing Service & Addictions Plus, Leeds & York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Luke Lancaster	Public Affairs & Campaigns Officer, Royal British Legion
Elaine Mason	Case Worker, Op Nova, Forces Employment Charity
Chris Ashworth	Area Manager, Northern England and Scotland, Office for Veterans Affairs

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 as above.	
2.	Minutes of the last meeting, 17th February 2025 and Matters Arising	
2.1	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record with most items covered on the agenda for this meeting. Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council provided updates as follows: 3.3 – Process Map: Allocation Policy for Veterans and their families. A process map produced by the Council's Head of Service for Housing that Council staff in the Housing and Homelessness teams work from when supporting and advising veterans and their families was circulated for information as part of the agenda pack for this meeting and noted by Members.	

	• 3.7 – Dedicated Specialist Homelessness Officer. It was noted that Georgia Cartledge the new Homelessness Prevention & Resettlement Officer, Rotherham Council leading on support to the armed forces community had met with key leads from Help 4 Homeless Veterans and Rotherham MCV on 23rd April. It would also be helpful for a meeting to take place between the Council, Op Courage and DWP and Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council will put Georgia Cartledge in direct contact with Clare Haynes and Neil Halsey so that a meeting can be organised. • 4.1 – 4.5 Children’s Capital of Culture. A meeting was held on 14th March between Rachel Stothard, Strategic Partnerships Manager (leading on the programme) at Rotherham Council and Major Adrian Hunt (also lead Deputy Lieutenant for Cadets in South Yorkshire). At the meeting Major Hunt was briefed in detail on the programme and on how Cadets can get involved. It was agreed to promote activities that are due to take place for Cadets to enjoy with family and friends and promote Cadets through Rotherham’s Spotlight Campaign (website, social media etc).	Vicky Hartley Georgia Cartledge, Clare Haynes and Neil Halsey.
3.	Veterans Pathways to Work	
3.1	Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham’s Armed Forces Champion introduced and welcomed Simeon Leach, Economic Strategy and Partnerships Manager and Louise Robinson, Programme Manager, Rotherham Investment and Development Office, Rotherham Council to the meeting.	
3.2	They briefed Members on the Pathways to Work (P2W) model which is a strategic initiative to be implemented across South Yorkshire to reduce economic inactivity by integrating employment, skills and health services.	
3.3	The pilot will be funded for 1 year with an expectation of a further 3 years to follow. Programmes included will be Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, Health Growth Accelerator, Working Win, Workwell and Connect to Work.	
3.4	There are currently over 40,000 economically inactive people in Rotherham due to a mix of ill health, caring responsibilities, early retirees, students and a range of other issues. Survey data indicates only 15-20% of these people are currently looking for employment. Rotherham therefore has a target of aiming to get 400 people back into employment during year 1 under the Economic Activity Trailblazer.	
3.5	Simeon Leach confirmed that he is already engaging in neighbourhoods and promoting this across the borough working with other key organisations, partners and local employers.	
3.6	A System Service Manager is being recruited to run the Pathways to Work programme at a Rotherham level. Planned to be in post by early August. They will then be recruiting a team to support in the delivery of the programme. This team will sit within Rotherham Investment & Development Office, Rotherham Council	
3.7	The opportunity for voluntary, community sector organisations to deliver personalised support through the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, will open to applications in July. This will be circulated via the Voluntary Action Rotherham bulletin, released each Friday.	
3.8	Members of the Covenant Group in attendance agreed that veterans would benefit from this programme and the most effective way to engage veterans with the programme, would be through the System Service Manager to link in with the group once in post.	
3.9	It was agreed the most effective way of doing this would be for the System Service Manager, Rotherham Council to:	Simeon Leach and Louise Robinson,

	• Link in with the Forces Friendly Employers Database & Career Transition Partnership (CTP) <i>Note: Rotherham Council is registered with Forces Families Jobs and CTP and has placed a standing job advert to direct applicants to the standard corporate Council website.</i> • Link in with the NHS on their existing Pathways to Work Programmes. • Liaise with Rotherham Military Community Veterans Centre regarding attendance at a future MCVC Drop-in. • Engage with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) - continue to engage via Marie Shadwick also linking in with Neil Halsey, Member of the Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group and Armed Forces Champion for South Yorkshire, DWP. • Engage with other charities and organisations such as Royal British Legion Lifeworks and Walking with the Wounded. <u>Rotherham Council Lead Contacts:</u> • Simeon Leach, Economic Strategy & Partnerships Manager Rotherham Investment & Development Office, Rotherham Council Email: simeon.leach@rotherham.gov.uk • Louise Robinson, Multiply Programme Manager Rotherham Investment & Development Office, Rotherham Council Email: louise.robinson2@rotherham.gov.uk	Rotherham Council
4.	Rotherham's Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan	
4.1	Members noted the progress updates against themed areas of activity in the current Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan.	
5.	Feedback from Key Meetings	
5.1	a) 21st March: Veterans Voice Event (Dinnington) – Secretary of State for Defence, Minister for Veterans and People & Jake Richards MP An event took place on 21st March which provided an opportunity for veterans to hear first hand from the Secretary of State and Minister on upcoming plans to improve the care and support for the armed forces community and to enable those in attendance to feedback and raise any issues direct with Government.	
5.2	Those Members of the Covenant Group that were in attendance at this event provided positive feedback on how well engaged the Government were with the armed forces community.	
5.3	b) 9th May: Covenant Structures & Delivery – South Yorkshire Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council reported that a meeting had taken place with the South Yorkshire Covenant Group (all the 4 South Yorkshire Councils), South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, Office for Veterans' Affairs (MoD), Royal British Legion & Reserves' Forces and Cadets' Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber on 9th May. The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority are currently gathering information and intelligence and acknowledge and recognise the importance of supporting the armed forces. They want to provide support where they can working with the Councils, Covenant Boards and existing networks. Further discussions will take place over the summer regarding what any future governance structures may look like given to date the Mayoral Combined Authority has not engaged in this work and alongside the recent Government announcement regarding VALOUR (the new £50m Government-backed initiative aimed to give veterans across the UK much easier access to essential care and support).	
5.4	Members will be kept updated and regularly briefed through this Covenant Group.	Vicky Hartley
6.	Briefing from the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA), Ministry of Defence (MoD)	
6.1	Apologies were noted from Chris Ashworth, Area Manager for Northern England and Scotland, OVA due to brief the Covenant Group on work of the OVA, MoD and on VALOUR. Chris Ashworth will be invited to a future meeting of the Covenant Group.	Vicky Hartley

7. 7.1 7.2 7.3 7.4	Commemorative Events a) VE Day 80 Events across the Borough Rotherham Council hosted a VE Day 80 shared moment of celebration lunch on 8th May at Rotherham Town Hall which included the 2 minutes silence. The event included a performance by Lorrie Brown 'A Salute to Dame Vera Lynn' and displays of personal artifacts from the 1940s. Rotherham MCVV gave all in attendance a special VE Day Commemorative coin which everyone was delighted to receive. Several events had also taken place across the borough which were shared with Members via email on 30th April from the Council's AFCSupport email account. b) Armed Forces Day, 21st June The annual Armed Forces Day event including the Mayor of Rotherham, Civic Dignitaries and the Armed Forces community was due to take place on Saturday, 21st June. The event will start at 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. A flypast is expected in the afternoon. Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council will email out to all Members following this meeting providing further details of how key organisations and charities can arrange for a stall to promote their services and raise awareness.	Vicky Hartley
8. 8.1 8.2 8.3 8.4	Covenant Group Member Updates Claire Haynes, Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage - Continues to work with a wide variety of services supporting veterans. - Requested to put on record the great work that all key organisations and charities do working together collaboratively and joined-up up to support the armed forces community. - Passed on thanks to Rotherham Council's Housing and Homelessness Team for the support and assistance provided recently to a veteran which is very much appreciated. Cllr Ian Jones, Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCVV - Continue to provide support to many veterans through MCVV. - Currently working on a video on lived experiences and for VE Day 80. - Visiting Scarborough for National Armed Forces Day, 28 June and the National Memorial Arboretum on 15th August to commemorate VJ Day 80. - Organising a trip to the Veterans Therapy Farm. - Outreach Van continues to raise awareness and promote support and will be out and about over the summer at key events. - Currently working on a South Yorkshire wide directory of support available to the armed forces community which will be launched later in the year. - Recently applied for ERS Gold Accreditation. Hannah Hall, Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust - Michelle Murray, Armed Forces Welfare Officer, Rotherham Hospital has now left and is due to be replaced. - Working with Healthwatch and Rotherham MCVV on the new health passport for Veteran's to use when attending healthcare appointments. - Recently applied for ERS Silver Accreditation. Ron Moffett, Member RBL (Rotherham, Rawmarsh & Parkgate Branch) - Ran through the RBL briefing, April 2025 (item 8b) circulated as part of this agenda pack summarising veteran population / key data and other key information. - RBL continues to manage casework across Rotherham and recently publicised and shared a very useful Councillor Workbook for Handling Casework to assist those elected to office to support the armed forces community in all localities across South Yorkshire. Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council has shared this with the cohort of 59 Councillors across Rotherham.	

8.5	Lt Col RA McPherson, Veteran & President, RBL (South & West Yorkshire) Due to attend Royal British Legion's National AGM this weekend.	
8.6	Major Adrian Hunt, Member of the Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee & Branch Secretary, SSAFA - A reorganisation of the charity continues with a move from 11 regions down to 6. - A Network Delivery Programme has just been rolled out aimed to deliver the best support to beneficiaries in an environment that supports volunteers and employees.	
8.7	Steve Bentham-Bates, CEO Help 4 Homeless Veterans - Assisted many veterans which has involved support with first month rent, deposits, beds, food parcels etc and also co-ordinated some visits to the Therapy Farm. - Referred a number of veterans to Op Fortitude. - Andy Martin, Trustee has recently received the High Sheriff Award. - Launched the 'Buy a Brick Campaign' with the aim of purchasing a property that can be used for temporary accommodation in the region in future. - Received donation of £20k from the Mayor of Rotherham, Cllr Sheila Cowen at the end of her 2024/25 term of office as one of her chosen selected charities. <i>Note: It was also confirmed that this donation would be used to benefit the veterans of Rotherham and put towards funds already raised to purchase a property to be used to accommodate veterans.</i> - Due to have a stall at Rotherham's Armed Forces Day 2025 to raise awareness, promote the support available and the Buy a Brick Campaign.	
8.8	John Hodson, South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (SYF&R) - Several veterans are recruited to SYF&R and there is an internal support network established within the service for veterans. - Will look to make some enquiries to see if it is possible to secure an appliance in the Town Centre for Rotherham's Armed Forces Day.	John Hodson / Vicky Hartley
8.9	Malcolm Blease, Chairman Royal Airforce Association, Rotherham Reported challenges regarding a recent visit to his GP Surgery in Rotherham and being disappointed to hear that the surgery is not aware of the Armed Forces Covenant or the Veteran Friendly Accreditation Scheme despite the surgery being accredited. Stressed that more needs to be done given the framework scheme does not currently align to the NHS. <i>Note: Cllr Keenan, Armed Forces Champion reported that she had recently written to Connect Healthcare Rotherham CIC, which is a Federation formed by all GP practices in Rotherham as shareholders and Dr Jason Page, GP representative on Rotherham's Health and Wellbeing Board regarding concerns raised by Members of the Covenant Group. This had also been raised direct by the armed forces community with the Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans and People at an event in Rotherham on 21st March.</i>	Cllr Eve Keenan / Vicky Hartley
8.10	Neil Halsey, Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions DWP will be setting up a generic email address for direct support / contact with the Armed Forces Community across South Yorkshire. This should make it much easier to communicate and liaise with the Armed Forces Champion, Neil direct via a centralised inbox. When set up and shared with Members this can be publicised and promoted as required on individual websites etc. Post Meeting Update Generic email for DWP SYORKS Exforcesandfamiliesupport confirmed as SYORKS.Exforcesandfamiliesupport@dw.gov.uk	
8.11	Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion - Continues to deal with casework as Armed Forces Champion for the armed forces community. - Attends Rotherham MCV's monthly drop-in and other breakfast clubs across the borough.	

9. 9.1	Any Other Business Royal Air Force Association Memorial Bench in Clifton Park Malcolm Blease thanked the Council for their involvement in securing additional CCTV in Clifton Park to assist with monitoring the RAFA Memorial Bench which had been damaged in 2024 and had cost a significant amount to repair which had been paid out of the RAFA charity funds. To safeguard and assist with ensuring this did not happen again in future the Council liaising with the Council's CCTV Project Manager in the Community Safety and Street Scene managed to secure installation of a new CCTV camera covering the area where the bench is located in Clifton Park which was installed in April.	
10.	Next Meeting and Future Dates • Monday, 18th August (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall) • Monday 10th November (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall)	