



**PROUDLY
SUPPORTING
THOSE WHO
SERVE.**

Minutes

Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group (AFCCG) 16th September 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
Andy King	Regional Lead North East & Yorkshire, RCGP Veteran Friendly Accreditation Programme, NHS Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit
Chris Bradley	Development Manager, Rotherham MCVC
Cllr Ian Jones	Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCVC
Ssgt Elvis Pressley	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham
WO2 CSM Ray Owram	WO2 CSM Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Rotherham
Neil Halsey	Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions
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
Hannah Hall	Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust
Elaine Mason	Case Worker, Op Nova / Forces Employment Charity
Ron Moffett	Member, Royal British Legion (Rotherham)
Malcolm Blease	Chairman Royal Airforce Association, Rotherham

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Maj MP Lynch	The Royal Yorkshire Regiment
Clare Haynes	Veteran Liaison Support Officer, Walking with the Wounded/Op Courage
Danella Senior	Core Team Manager, NHS Op Courage
Sandra Tolley	Head of Housing Options, Rotherham MBC
Kim Firth	Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation Manager, Rotherham MBC
Andy Martin	Trustee, Help 4 Homeless Veterans
Amanda Naylor	Service Manager, Veterans Mental Health & Wellbeing Service (North of England) & Addictions Plus, Leeds & York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Steve Lowe	Regional Manager, Op Nova / Forces Employment Charity
Michelle Murray	Armed Forces Welfare Officer, Defence Medical Welfare Services, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust
Katie Merrills	Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust
Suzanne Smith	Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, NHS Rotherham Talking Therapies, Rotherham Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust
Helen Wyatt	Engagement Manager (Rotherham), NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board

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 and apologies were noted.	
1.2	Cllr Keenan informed the group that the Council had recently been awarded the Gold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Award, the Ministry of Defence's highest badge of honour.	
1.3	Cllr Keenan also congratulated Help4Homeless Veterans, Steve Bentham-Bates on recently being awarded the Silver ERS Award and presented him with the award in the meeting on behalf of the Reserves' Forces & Cadets' Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber. All Members in attendance passed on their congratulations.	

2.	Minutes of the last meeting, 3rd June 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.	
2.2	<p>Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council provided an update on those areas not covered on the agenda as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.2 - Discussions are still ongoing with the South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group regarding the event scheduled to take place on 19th November, around inviting local MP's. The lead Armed Forces Officers from the South Yorkshire Councils are due to meet tomorrow (17th September) to finalise the date and agenda. Further details regarding the event will be shared with this Covenant Group later this month. Greg Stephenson who had spoken at the Op Courage North of England Awareness and Engagement Event in March in Leeds had been approached to speak at the event but to date had not responded. The South Yorkshire Covenant Group would now like Andy King who leads on the Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation Programme for the region to speak at the event and he will be approached regarding this directly after this meeting. <i>Post Meeting Update: Andy King is now a confirmed speaker for the event.</i> 3.2-3.6 - Leanne Buchan, Rotherham Council's Head of Service for Creative Programming and Engagement is now chairing meetings of the Armed Forces Day Working Group which are taking place in person at the Museum in Rotherham and involving key leads from the armed forces community. To date positive feedback has been received from those represented on the Working Group. 4.11b – Written feedback from Focus Groups 'You said, We did' held with the armed forces community on loneliness and mental well-being had been circulated as part of the agenda pack for this meeting. Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council had also recently met with Ruth Fletcher-Brown, Rotherham Council's Public Health Specialist (Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Loneliness) and other colleagues within the Council to discuss the production of a flyer around combatting loneliness and isolation tailored for the armed forces community. A draft when produced will be shared with the Covenant Group for input / feedback. 7.1-7.4 – An update will be sought from Rotherham Council's Electoral Services Team regarding the Veterans Voter ID (new HM Armed Forces Veterans Card) and feedback provided to the Group. <i>Post Meeting Update: Rotherham Council's Electoral Services Manager, Mike Thomas confirmed in October 2024 that Government had announced that they have laid a statutory instrument in Parliament to add the Veterans Card to the list of acceptable photo ID for voting. This will come into force for elections, petitions and referendums that take place on or after 1 May 2025. Vicky Hartley notified all Members of the Covenant Group via email on 25th October 2024.</i> 	<p>Vicky Hartley</p> <p>Vicky Hartley</p> <p>Vicky Hartley</p>
3.	Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation (Rotherham)	
3.1	Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion introduced and welcomed Andy King, Regional Lead North East & Yorkshire, RCGP Veteran Friendly Accreditation Programme, NHS Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit to the meeting.	
3.2	A briefing had been circulated as part of the agenda pack for this meeting to assist with providing some background on the Accreditation Programme and detailing some of the concerns raised by the Covenant Group with regards to some GP practices in Rotherham not adhering to the accreditation requirements.	
3.3	Cllr Keenan and Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council had met with two representatives of the NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board on 21 st August to raise some of the issues raised by the Covenant Group. The representatives had advised that in commissioning priority care services, the NHS have a quality contract that has a series of requirements beyond core responsibilities and as part of that additional contract, their mental health colleagues requested that practices work towards and maintain accreditation with the scheme. There is currently no contractual obligation in relation to this. Unfortunately, there was no representation from the NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board in attendance at this meeting.	

3.4	Andy King confirmed that 28 of the 28 GP surgeries in Rotherham are accredited as Veteran Friendly as detailed in the paper and confirmed that 62% of GP surgeries across South Yorkshire are accredited. He confirmed that the definition of a veteran aligns i.e. anyone who has served 1 day in the forces, or a reservist who is not currently deployed. He also stressed how important it is for veterans to declare and inform their practice or hospital of their status, so that it can be noted and coded accordingly on the system.	
3.5	Work is still ongoing to instil and fully implement the accreditation programme requirements with examples being given around training and awareness needing to be implemented and rolled out fully to all staff within GP surgeries as part of the standard operating system. It was noted that high turn-over of staff within the NHS over the last few years has had an impact meaning that those that have previously been briefed and received the required training may have left and not passed on the knowledge to their colleagues.	
3.6	Andy confirmed there is no funding available for the training, just what is available through the NHS and that there are budget cuts ongoing through the NHS as well as restructures taking place resulting in further expected changes to some roles South Yorkshire.	
3.7	He informed the Covenant Group that the Sunderland model works very well with funding received via their Integrated Care Board and that a case study is in the process of being put together which can be shared with the Covenant Group in due course.	Andy King
3.8	Assurances were given to the Covenant Group that should there be any complaints or issues that need to be raised or fed-back in relation to GP surgeries not aligning to the accreditation programme, they should be sent direct to Andy who will be the main point of contact going forward and will take any concerns / issues forward and raise these directly with Practice Managers. He gave permission in the meeting for Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council to share his contact details with the Covenant Group as follows: Andy King, Regional Lead North East and Yorkshire RCGP Veteran Friendly Accreditation Programme NHS Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit Tel: 07886 623329 Email: andrew.king26@nhs.net	All Members
4.	Rotherham's Armed Forces Community Covenant Action Plan – Activity Updates	
4.1	Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council reported that the Action Plan has been further updated with a clearer breakdown of the Census information and advised that more detailed data was available on request through AFCsupport@rotherham.gov.uk .	
4.2	The Group were asked to note the updated Action Plan which included the following changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in pupil premium from £115 to £335. • Rotherham Council now having ERS Gold Accreditation 	
4.3	The Group agreed that Housing and Homelessness for the armed forces community continues to be a challenge. It would be helpful for further clarification in relation to the existing housing / homelessness policies and in particular local connection criteria to assist with better understanding the existing Council policies and processes currently in place to support the armed forces community. <i>Post Meeting Update: The Council's Assistant Director for Housing and Head of Housing Options will attend the Covenant Group meeting in February 2025 to discuss this further.</i>	Vicky Hartley
5.	Veterans Survey	
5.1	Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council confirmed the survey was now closed and 34 surveys had been returned with the results distributed as part of the agenda pack for this meeting. The Council has noted all the feedback and has already implemented some of the feedback received and will continue to make improvements where required.	

<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Rotherham's Remembrance Sunday Parade & Service, 10th November</p> <p>Planning for Rotherham's Remembrance Sunday civic event on 10th November in Clifton Park, Rotherham is underway which will follow the same format to previous years – from 10am to 12noon with a Parade through the park and service at the Cenotaph.</p> <p>Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council reported that Sheffield Council's Armed Forces Champion has recently raised concerns through the South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group regarding a planned football derby (Sheffield Wednesday vs Sheffield United) that has a 12noon kick off due to take place on Remembrance Sunday. All South Yorkshire Armed Forces Champions have raised concerns regarding this in relation to lack of respect and regard for Remembrance Sunday and events taking place in Sheffield and across South Yorkshire. There is likely to be reduced police resource to support Remembrance events as a result of the need for increased South Yorkshire Police presence at the match and the Armed Forces Champions are in the process of formally writing to Oliver Coppard, Mayor of South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and Police and Crime Commissioner.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>Covenant Group Member Updates</p> <p>Neil Halsey Armed Forces Champion, Department for Work and Pensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans to attend Rotherham MCV's drop-in on Friday, 20th September to speak to the community about pension credits and the winter fuel allowance. Plans to speak at the South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Annual Event on 19th November on Armed Forces Community Entitlements and Access to Financial Support. <p>Malcolm Blease, Chairman, Royal Airforce Association (RAFA), Rotherham</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAFA are on the verge of closure due to low take up of membership and they have also lost their charity status. Conversations will take place with Rotherham MCV to explore the possibility of amalgamating with the group, to prevent loneliness amongst their veterans. <p>Steve Bentham-Bates, CEO Help 4 Homeless Veterans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delighted to have been awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award. This quarter, Help 4 Homeless Veterans have helped 17 veterans (includes emergency accommodation in hotels/B&Bs, initial rent and board, essential items such as beds, fridges and food). Most of the cases were in Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster and a few from Lincolnshire. Help 4 Homeless Veterans were asked to assist veterans by Op Nova, MCV and SSAFA alongside some self-referrals from Op Fortitude. The Charity will run the Winter Fuel Grant scheme again in the 1st quarter of 2025 targeting veteran OAPs not eligible for government winter fuel payment. A new member of staff joined the team in July and assists with fundraising and publicity (fundraising project featuring a song and a film is due to be launched soon). The Help 4 Homeless Veterans founder has recently had major surgery resulting in being absence from the charity. The Therapy Farm project is still available for veterans (individuals to source their own transport) noting there is a limited amount of funding from the charity to assist with paying for fuel / transportation costs. Long-term aim is to save enough money to purchase own property in South Yorkshire to be used for emergency accommodation. Very pleased that the Mayor of Rotherham, Cllr Sheila Cowan who is a veteran has chosen the charity to support during her term of office. One of their volunteers received a High Sheriff Award for Voluntary Service earlier this year. <p>Cllr Ian Jones, Executive Group Chairman, Rotherham MCV & Chris Bradley, Development Manager, Rotherham MCV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moved into a larger office within the Silverwood Miners Welfare Centre. Took 46 veterans to Eden Camp and ran a day out to Cleethorpes. 2 Christmas events are planned and MCV will also be assisting RBL with the Poppy Appeal. The current National Lottery funding runs out in September 2025, so a bid is currently being worked on to secure additional funding for the charity. MCV have recently been assisting 3 veterans with complex needs. A veteran was recently released from prison to a bail hostel in Rotherham and being supported by MCV, alongside the police, probation service, SSAFA, Veterans in Crisis and the Council. MCV are currently working with the Council to obtain a duty 	<p>Malcolm Blease / Chris Bradley</p>

	<p>of care letter for the veteran to confirm his status as homeless, to secure housing with Johnnie Johnson Housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A veteran has also been supported referred via Op Courage with severe mental health issues due to 3 tours in Ireland and had been let down by the probation service, which will be taken further with the judiciary system. <p>Cllr Jones and Chris Bradley, Rotherham MCVC reported on some of the challenges and issues they had been faced with as a result of dealing with some of these complex cases – in relation to housing/homelessness and probation.</p> <p>Cllr Keenan, Armed Forces Champion requested that a detailed timeline of the events (including obstacles and barriers) in relation to these cases be sent through to Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council so that these issues can be looked into and raised with the Council's Strategic Armed Forces Group which consists of senior management from across the Council.</p> <p>Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council informed Members that she intended to invite a senior representative from the Housing and Homelessness team to the next meeting of the Covenant Group in November.</p> <p>Pauline King, Regional Employer Engagement Director, Reserves' Forces & Cadets' Forces Association for Yorkshire and Humber</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pauline encouraged the Covenant Group to take a look into the funding available through the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund available to support the armed forces community. <p>Ron Moffett, RBL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RBL have been supporting veterans and confirmed as yet there is no news on the winter fuel allowance as updates are only sent every six months. <p>Hannah Hall, Engagement & Inclusion Lead, Patient Experience, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently working on 75 cases. Reported that Alcohol Liaison Outreach has had its funding cut to the service. There is an increase in elderly patients and those suffering with dementia. The hospital hosts 4 tea parties a year, where the wards are decorated, and the best 'dressed' gets a prize. The next one will be for Remembrance Sunday and there will also be a visit from Rotherham MCVC's Outreach Trailer. <p>Cllr Eve Keenan, Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion and Emma Colley, Member and Civic Support Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As Rotherham's Armed Forces Champion and Trustee for Help 4 Homeless Veterans continues to deal with casework for the armed forces community and attends drop-ins at various charities across the borough. The Council's Armed Forces webpages continue to be built on and key information added to assist with signposting and providing a directory of support available in Rotherham and across the region. Some further information has been recently added regarding digital inclusion to support individuals to get online and connected with others. The Council has been working with Op Nova to support a homeless veteran and his family upon release from prison. The Council's Armed Forces Support inbox continues to be the route for all enquiries for the armed forces community and is regularly monitored and used as the main communication route for contact with the Armed Forces Champion and lead officers in the Council that support this agenda. 	<p>Cllr Jones & Chris Bradley, MCVC</p> <p>Vicky Hartley, Rotherham Council</p>
8.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>None.</p>	
9.	<p>Next Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday, 25th November 2024 (2-4pm, Rotherham Town Hall). <i>Post Meeting Update: Cancelled due to conference to take place the same month which was cancelled due to the bad weather.</i> Schedule of meeting dates for 2025 to be pulled together and confirmed with the Covenant Group. 	<p>Emma Colley</p>