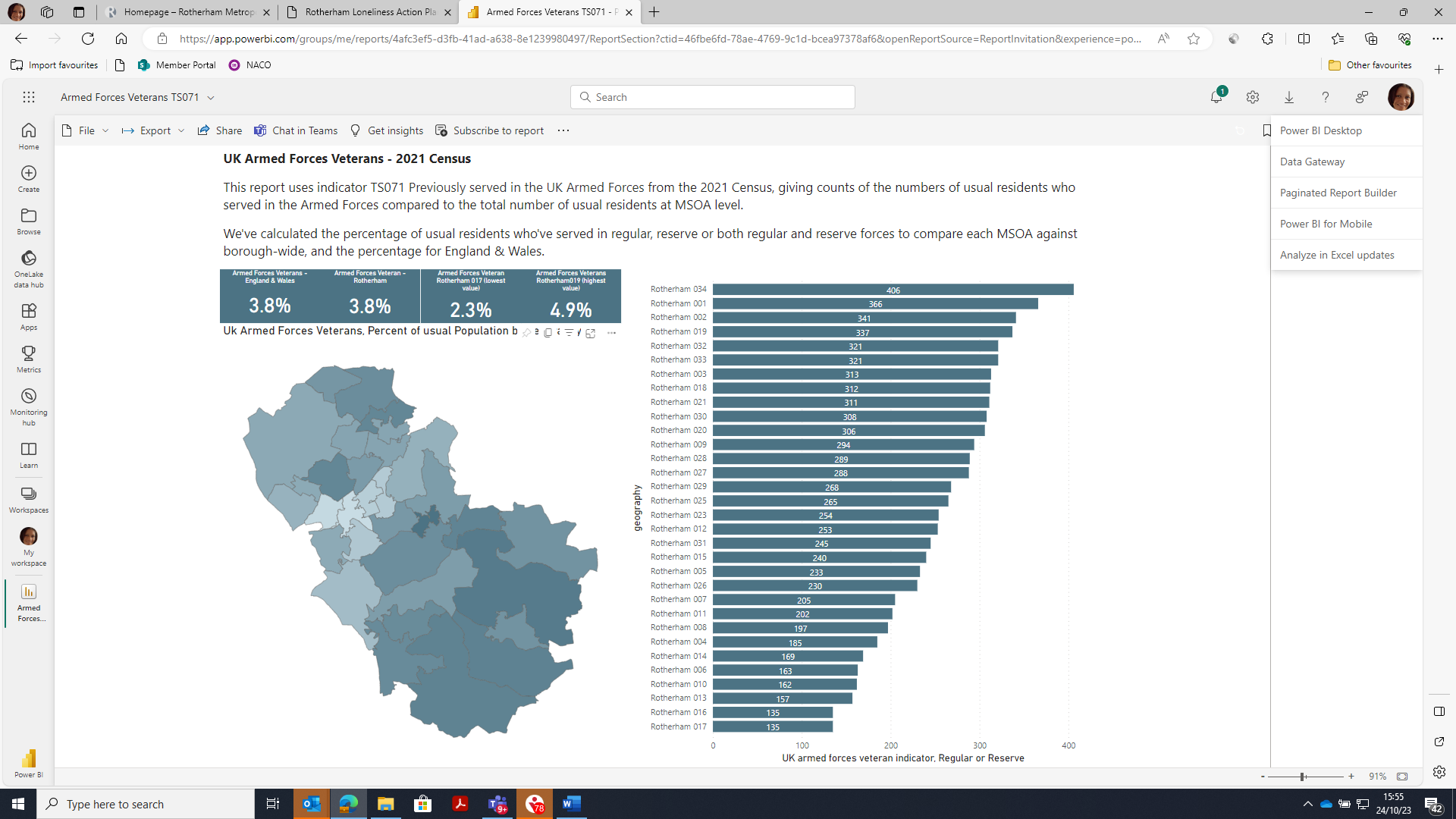


**DELIVERING OUR COVENANT – ROTHERHAM’S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT GROUP ACTION PLAN**

|  |
| --- |
| The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces,  and their families, are treated fairly.  The Covenant ensures we:   * Recognise the contribution made by the Armed Forces Community. * Remember the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces Community. * Share knowledge, experience and expertise to provide help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. * Encourage the integration from service life into civilian life.   The Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group is made up of representatives of Rotherham Council, the Armed  Forces and partners across the borough who have signed the Covenant. The role of the Covenant Group is to enhance and  join up the services, organisations and resources available to members of the armed forces community in Rotherham.  This Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan sets out how we will meet our pledge to acknowledge and understand those who  serve or who have served in the armed forces and highlights those areas where there is a legal obligation on certain public  bodies who provide local services **healthcare, education and housing services\*** to ‘have due regard’ to the principles  of the Covenant. |



|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Raise Awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant & Strategic Policy Commitment in Rotherham** | | | | | | |
|  | We will… | By… | Specific Activity | Responsible Lead | | Delivery Timescales |
| 1.1 | Raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and Duty in Rotherham and support the armed forces community into healthy relationships and their integration into our communities increasing the visibility of the armed forces community support services and organisations. | 1. Working collaboratively across the Rotherham Armed Forces Community Covenant Group. | Via networking and quarterly in person meetings chaired by the Rotherham Armed Forces Champion. | Rotherham Council & all Covenant Group Members | | N/A. Ongoing |
| 1. Understanding what the legal obligations are and what support and assistance is available for veterans and families. | Dedicated Council webpages [www.rotherham.gov.uk/armedforces](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/armedforces) | Rotherham Council | | N/A. Ongoing |
| 1. Improving the knowledge of the workforce and in particular customer facing, front of house and intervention staff across the Council and Covenant Group partnership organisations to enable effective signposting to the most appropriate support services. | Armed Forces Community and Military Human Awareness. New e-learning module on the Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty for Customer Facing Staff developed in 2023 by Warwickshire County Council and available for all to undertake working in a ‘customer facing’ role.  [AFC The Armed Forces Covenant for Customer Facing Staff](https://covenantfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/articulate_uploads/afc_the-armed-forces-covenant-for-customer-facing-staff-1/index.html) | Rotherham Council | | Ongoing |
| RMBC re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant on 4/01/24 (Mayor of Rotherham, Armed Forces Champion, Leader and Chief Executive) re-affirming its commitment to the armed forces community in Rotherham.  RMBC Armed Forces Reserves Policy setting out support and entitlements for members of, or those wishing to join, the Reserve Forces and Cadet Adult Force Volunteers approved by Staffing Committee on 12/01/24.  Communications campaign across RMBC to raise awareness of the Covenant and Duty across the workforce. Corporate internal intranet pages developed in early 2024 for all Council staff linked to RMBC website. | Rotherham Council  Vicky Hartley (Member & Civic Support Manager & Lead Officer for Armed Forces) | | Ongoing |
| Council wide piece of work undertaken in late 2023 led by RMBC’s Head of Customer Services to ensure that:   * The customer is always asked as part of the Council’s processes regardless of channel if they are serving/have served in the Armed Forces. * There is a standard ask of information with communications associated to it which will be taken through the Council’s Customer Experience Board to ensure the Council’s offer is expanded so information is captured and appropriately used to benefit the customer. | Rotherham Council  Helen Barker (Head of Customer Services), Lily Hall (Head of Organisational Development & Change) & Head of Communications | | Ongoing |
| 1.2 | Embed provisions for the armed forces community within key policy and strategy documents across the Covenant partner organisations. | Ensuring provisions in Rotherham Council’s policies. | See specific themes in this Action Plan. | Rotherham Council & all Members of Covenant Group | | Ongoing |
| 1.3 | Show gratitude to the armed forces community. | Organise public events to show gratitude and to commemorate those who have lost their lives through service to their country. | Public civic events organised and held annually involving the military, armed forces community, charities and key organisations.   * Armed Forces Day (June) * Remembrance Sunday (November)   To also acknowledge, recognise and celebrate Reserves Day (June). | | Rotherham Council | Ongoing via the Borough’s Civic events programme. |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Housing\* & Homelessness** | | | | | |
|  | We will… | By… | Specific Activity | Responsible Lead | Delivery Timescales |
| 2.1 | Ensure the Council meets the legal requirements for Housing in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant Duty. | 1. Ensuring the armed forces community in Rotherham are not disadvantaged in accessing local authority housing and ensuring advice, information and signposting for the armed forces community on housing options. | The **Housing Allocation Policy** is positioned so that access to social housing is improved for Members or Former Members of the Armed Forces. Rotherham operates an Allocation Scheme with a Local Connection Criteria for a minimum of 3 years up to and including the date of application. However, the following applicants are exempt from the Local Connection Criteria:   * Members or Former Members of the Armed Forces, this includes Former Members of the Reserve Forces. * Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving service family accommodation following the death of their spouse/partner. * Relationship breakdown and divorcees of Members of the Armed Forces and Former Members of the Reserve Forces at the time of application. * Serving or former members of the Armed Forces Former and Former Members of the Reserve Forces who need to move in urgent circumstances because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service irrespective of when this was.   The Housing Allocation Policy awards the highest Band 1 as follows: | Rotherham Council  Sandra Tolley  (Head of Housing Options) | Ongoing. |
| |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Band 1 | Effective Date | Details of Applicant |  | | Armed Forces Covenant | Date of confirmation of discharge received. | Leaving His Majesties Armed Forces, or former members of the Reserve Forces, or is a family member who has resided with the Service Personal and has no accommodation to return to. (As per Allocation of Housing Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/1869).  Former members of the forces or Former Members of the Reserve Forces who have made an application and who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability should be assessed by the Medical Assessment team and placed in Band 1.  Note that those Former Members of Armed Forces or Former Members of the Reserve Forces with medical needs who make an application after five years from the date of discharge will be placed in Band 2). | One Offer  Time limited to 3 months, if no bids are made within 3 month or 1 offer is refused the application will move to band 3.  If the applicant has already had 2 offers in total and these have been refused the application will be cancelled.  Exempt from Local Connection.  Restricted to agreed areas of stock and turnover. |   **Note:**   * Review of RMBC’s Housing Allocation Policy undertaken and approved by RMBC on 7/11/23 to remove time criterion for former members of the AF, who are homeless and is it over 5 years from discharge. * Housing Application asks the question if ever served,and asks if a family member of a current member of the armed forces. * Tenancy Health Checks, undertaken by Housing Management asks the tenant if they have ever served. |  |  |
| 2.2 |  | 1. Ensuring all Rotherham Council Housing staff are aware of the Armed Forces Covenant and entitlements under the Council’s Housing Allocations Policy. | All Council’s ‘frontline’ staff - Housing Options, Allocations, Estate Management and Homelessness are requested to undertake mandatory training on the Covenant and specifically about homeless ex-services personnel as requested by RMBC’s Senior Management Team. The Council’s e-learning training module which was developed in 2021 by the South Yorkshire Councils and rolled out across all 4 South Yorkshire Councils (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield). | Rotherham Council  Sandra Tolley  (Head of Housing Options) | Ongoing |
| 2.3 |  | 1. Prevent Veterans from becoming Homeless | The Council has a Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023-2026 which sets out how the Council and partners will address the challenges of homelessness and rough sleeping by focusing on 6 key priorities:   1. Make homelessness a rare occurrence by focusing on prevention and early intervention. 2. Minimise the use and improve the quality of temporary accommodation and end the use of hotels. 3. Increase access to affordable housing options. 4. Improve access to housing support, employment, and health services. 5. Support people with complex needs. 6. End rough sleeping in Rotherham.   The Strategy makes reference to people leaving the armed forces with no home (page 7 Understanding Homelessness) and also referenced in Priority 3 to Increase access to affordable housing options.  Although there is not any specific action for veterans, the above 6 priorities will apply in all cases. In particular in **Priority 3** there is anaction to review the Housing Allocations Policy, and this will give the Council the opportunity to review the policy for veterans and plug any gaps in provisions. | Rotherham Council  Sandra Tolley  (Head of Housing Options) | Ongoing |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Health\* & Well-being** | | | | | |
|  | We will… | By… | Specific Activity | Responsible Lead | Delivery Timescales |
| 3.1 | Ensure all veterans enjoy a state of positive physical and mental health and well-being enabling them to contribute to wider aspects of society. | 1. Working towards enhancing Veteran registration with NHS GP Surgeries and promoting the Veterans Friendly Accreditation across Trusts and Hospital Partners. | As of February 2024, 28 out of 28 practices are confirmed as signed up to the scheme.  *Note: It should be noted that, if a practice has a CQC status of ‘requires improvement’ they are not technically permitted to use the accreditation.  There are 3 of these practices but they have all worked with the Military Veterans Scheme to continue to deliver the requirements, despite not being officially accredited at present.*  [Veterans' healthcare toolkit: Veteran friendly GP practice accreditation (rcgp.org.uk)](https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=12533&chapterid=285) | NHS SY Integration Care Board  Rachel Garrison (Senior Contracting & Service Improvement Manager (Primary Care) Rotherham | Ongoing |
| 1. Ensure the armed forces community needs are embedded in key health strategies. | **Joint Strategic Needs Assessments**  Census data is included on the JSNA and this includes numbers and proportions people who have previously served in both regular and reserve UK armed forces (Rotherham and MSOA level.)  The JSNA is routinely reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board and is designed to inform the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and outline the current and future health and care needs of the population to inform action. | Rotherham Council | Ongoing |
| **Health and Well-Being Strategy**  Veterans are not currently (explicitly) mentioned, as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is a very broad and high-level document but the JSNA and other relevant strategies such as the Suicide Prevention Strategy feed into the Health and Wellbeing Board. | Rotherham Council | Ongoing |
| **Suicide Prevention & Self Harm Action Plan**  The Action Plan references at risk groups based on real time data of suspected suicides. Details of the suspected suicide record if the deceased was a veteran, where this is known.  The following action is taken from the Suicide Prevention Operational Group:   * RDASH promote the Veterans’ Mental Health High Intensity Service (HIS) to their staff to ensure that they refer veterans through to this service. <https://www.rdash.nhs.uk/services/our-services/adult-mental-health-services/new-veterans-mental-health-high-intensity-service-his/>   e.q.of deaths of veterans by suicide through the Real Time Surveillance system for consideration by the Suicide Prevention Operational Group considers.  Annual updates on progress of the Suicide Prevention and Self Harm Action plan are reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board. | Rotherham Council | Ongoing. |
| **Loneliness Strategy**  Rotherham has a Loneliness Action Plan which has been signed up to by all Health and Wellbeing Board Partners. The Armed Forces community is identified as a group that is at risk of loneliness and Rotherham Public Health held a Focus Group with veterans via Rotherham MCVC in mid-February 2024 and plans to hold a further Focus Group in April 2024.  Rotherham Public Health and Rotherham MCVC will feedback in June 2024 with the intention of the findings to:   * Incorporate into a Loneliness Chapter in the JSNA (Rotherham Health Data Hub). * Used to help inform Commissioners and Providers about the needs of these communities. * Incorporated into Making Every Contact Count Loneliness training for staff and volunteers across Place. * Develop specific actions to address this. | Rotherham Council | End June 2024 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Education\*, Employment & Skills** | | | | | |
|  | We will… | By… | Specific Activity | Responsible Lead | Delivery Timescales |
| 4.1 | Ensure service families are not disadvantaged in accessing education | Supporting service families who can apply and be allocated a school place via the Schools Admissions process ([see Department for Education Schools Admission Code](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001050/School_admissions_code_2021.pdf)). | The Department for Education (DfE) supports the Armed Forces Covenant and the DfE School Admissions Code for England includes requirements relating to children of UK service personnel and crown servants. The Code requires local authorities to ensure that ‘arrangements in their area support the Government’s commitment to removing disadvantage for service children’. It requires admission authorities to:   * **Allocate a school place to a service child in advance of the family moving to the area** (as long as one is available) provide the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date. Where requested by the parent, admission authorities are able to use a unit or quartering address (or, in England, a private address) as the child’s home address when considering an application. * **Providing Service Pupil Premium** for children whose parents currently serve within the Armed Forces, and those children who have been recorded as having Service child status at any point in the last 6 years. Children in state schools, academies and free schools in Reception to Year 11 who meet the [eligibility criteria](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium/service-pupil-premium-what-you-need-to-know) attract £310. Money is paid directly to the school and paid for the total number of service children as a whole within the school and not specifically allocated to individual children.   Eligible schools receive the Service Pupil Premium so that they can offer mainly pastoral support during challenging times and to help mitigate the negative impact on service children of family mobility or parental deployment.   * Allows priority in oversubscription criteria to be given to children eligible for the Service Pupil Premium, and the Code allows exceptions to infant class size limits for children of service personnel admitted outside the normal admissions round.   *Note: Service Pupil Premium Policy from 2021 and will change over the course of 5 years and therefore need reviewing/updating in line with policy.*  **Rotherham’s composite prospectus:**  Applications for relevant year admissions – Reception in Primary, Year 7 in Secondary and Y3 of a Junior School, are categorised within the admissions criteria based on the home address of the child as at the closing date for applications.  The intention of the Admissions Code is that we do not disadvantage a service child in a transfer group where applications are based on the address a child is living at on a certain date. Therefore, for Service Personnel and Crown Servants, who may not have moved by the relevant date, the process must take account of the address the child will live at where there is a confirmed posting supported by the relevant documentation. Any application from a service family or crown servant should be considered within the relevant category of the published admissions criteria for a place at the preferred school(s) based on the intended address so as not to disadvantage the child concerned. This is not a guarantee of a place at the preferred school however and allocation of a place will be subject to the availability of a place within the admissions criteria.  There is provision within the Infant class size exceptions in the Code for excepted pupils when the application is outside of the normal admissions round for that year group and it is a confirmed service posting.  It is important to note that Rotherham MBC do not generally have service families who are “posted” to our area as there are no service bases in this area, most service families relocating to the area are voluntarily moving into the area often because they are leaving the services or for childcare reasons.  Both the Admission to Primary and Secondary school booklets (the composite prospectus) contain the information above as set out in the Admissions Code 2021.  For in-year school transfer applications, these are all subject to the availability of places in the child’s year group. We do not require proof of address before processing an in-year application and parents can apply in advance of their move. | Rotherham Council | Ongoing |
| 4.2 | Ensure best practice and national recommendations in relation to the Council’s HR policies to best support armed forces employees. | Signing up to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. | Covenant Group Members to encourage lead organisations and charities across the borough to sign up to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.  [Defence Employer Recognition Scheme - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme) | All Covenant Group Members | Ongoing |
| RMBC currently holds Employer Recognition Scheme silver (awarded in 2018) and revalidated in late 2023 and will look to applying for Gold status in 2024. | Rotherham Council | Mid-March 2024 |
| 4.3 | Ensure all employment opportunities for the community are fully exploited. | Promoting the Covenant borough wide and in particular to local businesses and engaging the sector in understanding the benefits of employing ex armed forces, reservists and partners of serving armed forces encouraging employers and local businesses to sign up to the Covenant pledge. | Through the Rotherham Together Partnership.  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 and Rotherham Council collectively signed the Covenant on 6th March 2024.  The Partnership is 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/) | Rotherham Together Partnership and B&R Chamber of Commerce | Ongoing |
| Through the Forces Employment Charity who provides life-long, life-changing support, job opportunities, and training to Service leavers, veterans, reservists and their families and has a range of programmes which support veterans in different circumstances, as well as providing support to military families. <https://www.forcesemployment.org.uk/> | Forces Employment Charity | Ongoing |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Finance & Debt** | | | | | |
|  | We will… | By… | Specific Activity | Responsible Lead | Delivery Timescales |
| 5.1 | Ensure that the community is aware of advice and support services that are available. | 1. Promoting advice services on websites and signposting through the Covenant Partnership. | Dedicated Council webpages [www.rotherham.gov.uk/armedforces](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/armedforces) | Rotherham Council and all Covenant Group Members. | Ongoing |
| 1. Ensuring local advice services ask if people are veterans and are aware of their needs and ensure proactive targeting of ex-service community by DWP front-line service. | **Support from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**  As part of the [Armed Forces Covenant](https://www.gov.uk/the-armed-forces-covenant), DWP has initiatives that help current and former armed forces personnel and families access Jobcentre Plus services and has an Armed Forces Champion for South Yorkshire within the Universal Credit, DWP team to provide an advice & support service to Veterans & Families. This involves a frontline role supporting work coaches in case loading claimants with complex needs, supporting veterans into work and helping resolve complex issues. Email: [northcentral.armedforceschampions@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:northcentral.armedforceschampions@dwp.gov.uk) which covers the Rotherham area and the whole of South Yorkshire for queries or referrals.  **Support from the Council**  The Council takes into account income from War Pensions when Council Tax support is being calculated. Full details about Council Tax Support and Discounts is available at [www.rotherham.gov.uk/counciltax](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/counciltax) | Department for Work and Pension, Rotherham Council and all Covenant Group Members. | Ongoing |
| **Veterans & the Law** | | | | | |
| 6.1 | Support the Armed Forces Community to be resilient and to remain law abiding citizens. | Ensuring members of the armed forces community in contact with the criminal justice are able to access appropriate support. | Op NOVA is delivered by the Forces Employment Charity and commissioned by the NHS. The service helps veterans who are in contact with the justice system by providing emotional and practical support, enabling veterans to access specialist support in areas such as health, housing and employment. The support is available pre and post custody across all of England. The service supports veterans who have self-referred or been referred by specialist police teams or other statutory organisations.  Upon receiving a referral, Op NOVA caseworkers undertake a needs assessment to establish what support is required by the individual, followed by practical support offered through a network of partners and local charities. Op NOVA caseworkers understand the experiences of ex-Service personnel both during and after their military careers – empathy which gives veterans the strength they need to make changes to their lives and access support through health and specialist services.’  [**www.forcesemployment.org.uk/programmes/op-nova/**](http://www.forcesemployment.org.uk/programmes/op-nova/)  Lead organisations can refer veterans in contact with the justice system to the service to receive support: [https://www.forcesemployment.org.uk/programmes/op-nova/opnova-referral-form/](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.forcesemployment.org.uk%2Fprogrammes%2Fop-nova%2Fopnova-referral-form%2F&data=05%7C01%7CEmma.Colley%40rotherham.gov.uk%7C86986f8e590445d7030108db3b45b174%7C46fbe6fd78ae47699c1dbcea97378af6%7C0%7C0%7C638168942750525614%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=4pn%2BYswQW1dYSEZmEeCQcr0DTJc8BM8XFWFyi2IIrQY%3D&reserved=0) | Project Nova / Op NOVA & All Covenant Group Members | Ongoing |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Working Collaboratively across South Yorkshire** | | | | | | |
|  | We will… | By… | Specific Activity | Responsible Lead | | Delivery Timescales |
| 7. | Work collaboratively as a South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership | Working with neighbouring Councils in the region (Barnsley MBC, Doncaster MBC and Sheffield CC) to coordinate, gather and share data and good practice across the region working to a joint Action Plan with the Armed Forces Champions and lead Armed Forces Officers from each Council. | Working on joint projects where a regional approach is cost effective and appropriate – identifying relevant funding opportunities to benefit veterans across the region.  Historical projects:   * [Sheffield Hallam University Research](http://shura.shu.ac.uk/23671/) (2017-19) * [York St John University Military Human Training](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/courses/professional-and-short-courses/military-human/military-human-impact-report/)(2017-19) * AF Covenant Fund Trust - SY Outreach Vehicle & Trailer (2018-21) * SCR Funded - Development of a Housing / Homelessness SY E-learning Module (2020/21) * SCR Funded - Development of Strategy & Good Practice - Review of the Approaches to supporting Former HM Armed Forces Personnel and their Families in South Yorkshire who are, or are at risk of becoming, Homeless (2020/21) * SCR Funded - Homeless Veteran Support Grants (Rotherham) 2020-23 | | Rotherham Council via the South Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Group (Armed Forces Champions and lead Officers for Armed Forces) | n/a |