

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Executive – 30 June 2021

Subject: Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020/21

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services / SMT
Armed Forces Champion

Summary:

The Armed Forces Covenant is a long-standing promise by the nation that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, will be treated fairly and will not be disadvantaged as a result of their military service and includes accessing public services.

This report introduces the 2020/21 Annual Report in respect of the Council's pledges under the Armed Forces Covenant and its associated Action Plan which can be found at appendix 1 and 2.

A great deal of activity has taken place during 2020/21 to promote the Armed Forces Covenant in Manchester which has included awareness raising training for staff and changes to policies and guidance and applying to be awarded gold standard under the Ministry of Defence] Employer Recognition Scheme.

In addition, Manchester City Council has awarded the Freedom of the City of Manchester to 209 Battery 209, Royal Artillery aka the Manchester Artillery. Planning for this event is being progressed to take account of Covid19 and the conduct of public/large events.

Recommendations:

Executive Members are recommended to:

1. Consider the content of this report and recognise the progress that during the period 2020/21
 2. Note the government's intention to legislate to place the covenant on a statutory basis.
 3. Endorse and support the priorities for 2021/22.
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Wards Affected - All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the decisions proposed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Contribution to the strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Armed Forces Covenant connects public service and business organisations with the armed forces community, ensuring that those who serve or who have served to protect our freedoms and our economy are supported and treated with fairness and respect.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Our work through the Covenant connects the city with the skills of the armed forces, enhancing employment opportunities and the skill base of the Manchester economy
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	The report sets out how we are working with partners to ensure that the armed services community experiences no disadvantage as a result of their service and are supported to make a continuing contribution to our city.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue - None

Financial Consequences – Capital - None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

Manchester City Council, The Armed Forces Community Covenant | The Armed Forces Community Covenant | Manchester City Council

Ministry of Defence, A Guide for Local Authorities: How to deliver the Covenant in your area -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655596/Booklet_-_Local_Authority_Guide_-_Overview.pdf

Manchester City Council Executive, 19th December 2019, Manchester Armed Forces Covenant – Progress Report & Action Plan

<https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s12246/Armed%20Forces%20Covenant.pdf>

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On 19/12/19 Manchester City Council Executive approved a range of recommendations in support of the Manchester Armed Forces Covenant and its associated Action Plan. In line with our covenant pledges this report introduces our first Annual Report in respect of progress made during the period 2020/21.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a long-standing promise by the nation that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, will be treated fairly and will not be disadvantaged in accessing public and commercial goods and services as a result of their military service. It also allows for special provision for those who have sacrificed the most, such as the bereaved and injured.
- 2.2 The current Covenant introduced the concept of the wider “Armed Forces Community” of regular service personnel, reservists, veterans, their partners & children and builds upon the traditional “remembrance” obligations to focus on the current partnership between local public services and the military and the wider sacrifices associated with military service, in respect of restricted personal freedoms / choice, including access to commercial and public services and the challenge of transition from military to civilian life.
- 2.3 Within the Covenant the City Council pledged to maintain a Steering Group and an action plan. The Covenant Steering Group meets regularly under the leadership of the SMT Armed Forces Champion and the Action Plan is maintained with the support of the Lead Member for Armed Forces.
- 2.4 This report also provides an opportunity to introduce the Armed Forces Bill 2021 which is currently passing through Parliament with government support. This will place the Armed Forces Covenant on a statutory footing and will apply across local authorities and a range of public service organisations.
- 2.5 Whilst improved procedures and initiatives have been put in place by service providers over the last ten years, the Government is concerned that some members of the Armed Forces Community still face disadvantage when accessing public services caused by a lack of awareness of the Covenant and the unique nature of service in the Armed Forces.
- 2.6 The legislation is designed to increase awareness of and, in turn, improve the delivery of the Covenant in those key areas that are fundamental to a good life, healthcare, education and housing, while retaining the ability of local service providers to honour the Covenant in the best way to suit local needs.
- 2.7 The Armed Forces Bill 2021 is currently making its way through Parliament and it is anticipated new Covenant legislation will come into force in 2022. From all evidence available and the work highlighted within this report it is anticipated that Manchester will be well-placed to meet its requirements.

3.0 Annual Report

- 3.1 The attached Annual Report provides evidence in respect of progress against our action plan, a copy of the updated plan is appended to this report. The current pandemic has inevitably impacted on the action plan and we have focussed on those objectives that could be achieved whilst working within social distancing restrictions, including staff training, recruitment, maintaining a strong local network of supporting agencies and the immediate practical support requirements of the veteran population during the pandemic -an area within which our veterans charitable sector colleagues have been particularly active.
- 3.2 Proposals in respect of a refresh and resigning of the “Manchester Armed Forces Covenant” alongside our new health partners, the VCS and wider public service partners have been postponed to 2021/22 at a suitable point when Manchester’s NHS colleagues are able to engage with wider issues beyond the immediate management of the pandemic.
- 3.3 This will be actioned as soon as practical and will form part of a long-planned strengthening of our relationship with the armed services, within which we hope to revitalise the Armed Forces Day, complete the process of granting the freedom to 209 Battery (the Manchester Artillery) with a presentation and march through the city and complete the affiliation of the City with a new generation Naval Frigate. These events will be utilised to promote and position the Manchester Armed Forces Covenant and to support the return of footfall to the City Centre.
- 3.4 These events will also be utilised to strengthen our support for reserve forces and cadet groups, providing the city council opportunity to demonstrate its role as an exemplar employer and to also give recognition to those local private employers across Manchester who have signed the covenant, go the extra mile to support and utilise the skills of the military.
- 3.5 The Annual Report has been used as a basis for on-going engagement with veterans’ groups and stakeholders which will contribute and informed the setting of priorities and planning.

4.0 Recommendation

- 4.1 There has been a great deal of activity and as set out in the Annual Report (appendix 1) impact and benefit for Armed Forces and Veterans who are resident in Manchester.
- 4.2 It is anticipated the work that has been undertaken to date along with the Recognition of 209 Battery, Royal Artillery will further promote the commitment of Manchester City Council, resulting in even greater impact. This will include further progressing the engagement of Manchester Health and Care Commission and Local Care Organisation.

4.3 It is recommended Manchester City Council Executive:

1. Recognise the progress that during the period 2020/21
2. Note the government's intention to legislate to place the covenant on a statutory basis.
3. Endorse and support the priorities for 2021/22.