



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL



The Armed Forces Covenant

**ANNUAL REPORT
2020**

CONTENT

- Summary -----3
- Strategic Highlights ----- 3
- The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme ----- 4
- HR/OD Development ----- 4
- Walking with the wounded ----- 5
- Royal British Legion ----- 6
- Manchester Active ----- 7
- Honorary Freedom of the City of Manchester ----- 8
- Battery 209 (The Manchester Artillery)
- Naval Affiliation ----- 8
- Developing Employees ----- 9
- Collaboration GM ----- 10
- Steering Group ----- 10
- Armed Forces Covenant Guide ----- 10
- Manchester Housing ----- 11
- Intranet ----- 12
- Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund ----- 12
- Looking Head ----- 12

Email: [Email Here]

Website: [Website Here]

[Type here]

ANNUAL REPORT

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 when accessing public or commercial goods and services as a result of their military service.

Alongside the inherent risks of military service, life in the armed forces presents many challenges and restrictions which disadvantage service personnel but which are taken for granted by the civilian community, the covenant seeks to redress that imbalance. It also allows for special provision for those who have sacrificed the most, such as the bereaved and injured.

The current Armed Forces Covenant was introduced in 2000 and refreshed in 2011, this followed the end of military campaigns in the Middle East and Afghanistan, major reductions in regular armed forces personnel, an expansion of reserve forces living within our communities and increasing concerns in relation to the support offered to service personnel and their families particularly when transitioning to civilian life.

Each year the MoD must lay a report before Parliament to cover the effects of membership, or former membership of the Armed Forces on the field of healthcare, education and housing.

In June 2013, Manchester City Council formally expressed its support for the Armed Forces Community by signing the Armed Forces Community Covenant and establishing a Covenant Steering Group through which we work with our public sector partners and the armed forces charities to drive local recognition and understanding of the needs of the armed forces community.

This Annual Report summarises our continuing work to promote the covenant across the City and within the Council, to bring awareness to our employees, ensuring that those who serve and their families, experience no disadvantage as a result of that service - We are striving to embed the Covenant in everything we do.

The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are currently being incorporated into law, as
[Type here]

part of the Armed Forces Bill 202 which aims to help prevent disadvantage faced by the Armed Forces Community due to the unique nature of their service. It is anticipated that the bill will become law in 2022 and through the progress reported within this annual report we anticipate that Manchester will be well-placed in respects of these new requirements.

Strategic Highlights

This report is presented on behalf of the Lead Member for the Armed Forces and the Covenant Steering Group. The Steering Group meets regularly in a workshop format with representation from across the Council alongside our public service and veteran sector partners from across including GMP, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), the Royal British Legion (RBL) and Walking with the Wounded, many of whom bring direct military experience alongside a strong motivation to work together across organizational boundaries, to make things happen for individual veterans and the armed forces community. For example, a system of Armed Forces Champions across GMP ensures that vulnerable veterans on the street can be quickly identified, linked to employment and benefits via the DWP and debt management, housing or healthcare support via the RBL and Walking with the Wounded. This is a credit to individual enthusiasm and commitment.

Operating Highlights

This year has been a challenging time for everyone in Manchester and the rest of the Country as the pandemic continues to dominate our lives. Even in these unprecedented time's we continue to support the Armed Forces Covenant and supporting the Armed forces Community.

Following our last report to the Council Executive in December 2019 we are pleased to have been able to create a dedicated MCC Armed Forces Covenant Coordinator working across the Council to support the Armed Force Community, bringing Manchester into line with neighboring local authority partners and providing the big push to implement to our local Action Plans.

The priority has been to accelerate raising awareness, develop and progress a training programme and support the implementation of the covenant across the Council and partner organisations.

It was great to see advocacy in action when the Revenue and Benefits Team took part in trialing the E-Learning training on the Armed Forces Covenant. This is a vital part of the Council during the pandemic and if any ex-forces resident contacts the team they now know the appropriate action to take, to help, to signpost and open up access to a range of services when needed.

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support and to align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards which provide recognition to organisations which build upon pledges and

[Type here]

advocacy to provide demonstrable support to the Armed Forces community

Manchester currently holds the Silver Award. However, in line with our ambition and planning an **application has been submitted to be considered for the Gold Award which is anticipated to be determined in June/July 2021.**

Human Resources/Organisational Development (HR/OD)

Guaranteed Interview scheme - The Armed Force Covenant Steering Group have been working closely with colleagues in HR/OD to find practicable ways to ensure the Armed Forces and Veterans are not disadvantaged when applying for vacancies with Manchester City Council. It has been agreed that Armed Forces and Veterans will be guaranteed an interview when applying for roles within the City Council as long as they meet the Minimum requirements for the role.

All roles advertised will have a clear statement about the guaranteed interviews to encourage Armed Forces and Veterans to apply.

Reservist Policy - HR/OD have updated the Reservist policy, which makes it clear the support we give to the reservists who work for Manchester City Council. The policy sets out clear guidance for managers on the support Reservist can expect while servicing their Country. The policy is in full support of the mandatory training a Reservist undertakes on a yearly basis. The Policy also takes in to account the requirements that need to be put in place to support the Reservist if they are mobilised in the defense of our Country.

Forces-friendly Recruitment - Manchester City Council have now registered and is active on Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and Forces Families website. This will enable us to advertise roles that are going to external recruitment. We have a company profile with the MCC logo. We will work closely with HR/OD to provide support/guidance on the type of vacancies to post on both websites.

Walking With The Wounded

Established in 2010, Walking With the Wounded supports ex-servicemen and women who have struggled with their transition from the military to re-integrate back into society and sustain their independence. The charity focusses on employability, mental health and early intervention services to provide social inclusion, independence and to help break the cycle of those who have served and their families being a disproportionately high cohort within homeless, police custody, unemployment and mental health statistics. Walking With The Wounded's programmes all work in harmony to address persistent social problems and make lasting improvements to the lives of men and women we support. In 2018, Walking With The Wounded was recognised as an IPS Centre of Excellence for Veterans by the Centre for Mental Health - the first of its kind in the world. The award recognises the IPS service provided to veterans by WWTW in both Essex and Manchester, in partnership with other local and regional military and mental health organisations.

[Type here]

Over the last 12 months Walking With The Wounded's volunteering programme, OP-REGEN has been working closely with Manchester City Council. The relationship has developed so that Manchester City Council is one of OP-REGENs strongest strategic partners. The Programme was Initially established to support environmental and regeneration volunteering activities across the local authority for members of the armed forces community. With the support of Manchester City Council, during the Covid-19 Pandemic, OP-REGEN volunteers have supported the local authority food response teams across the city, often supporting over

5 days per week. 2,900 food parcels in total have been delivered in partnership with Manchester City Council, 2 Manchester based volunteers have been shortlisted for national awards/ volunteer of the year and inspiration of the year and 78 new volunteers have been recruited from across Manchester. Manchester City Council share our passion for highlighting the skills of those that have served and always ensure that all of our volunteers feel valued, empowered and part of the wider team.

Working out of our hub in East Manchester, we have been able to access some of the hardest to reach veterans across Manchester. The links we have with Manchester City Council have enabled us to best position ourselves to support our client group through our essential programmes. Today the area is affectionately known by many as the 'Manchester Veteran's Village' and has a strong community of both ex-Forces and Civilians who ultimately live within the Manchester City Council Local Authority.

Royal British Legion

We have developed a team-training program to help teams within the Council understand the Armed Forces Covenant in more detail. The training was developed to support the e-learning which has been rolled out across Manchester City Council. The aim is to give every team the opportunity to take part in the team-training over the next 12 months.

The partnership between the Manchester Council and the Royal British Legion is a strong partnership, working together to solve issues of housing and benefits. Over the last month we have two veterans refused support for housing, but with the support from the Covenant Manager both these issues have been resolved.

Manchester Active

Manchester Active work in partnership with Walking With The Wounded charity (WWTW) and Manchester City Council to offer free Health and well-being leisure passes to Veterans. This is a great opportunity for veterans to take part in a variety of sports across the whole of the City.

GLL, in partnership with MCRactive, agreed to fund 45 annual memberships for individuals identified by the Charity Walking with the Wounded to support them in both their physical and mental health. Some of the individuals identified are struggling with life outside of the armed forces and this offer gives them an opportunity to gain some social confidence, improve mental wellbeing and gives them an opportunity to improve their lifestyle.

Ability to access this provision which is restricted due to financial need is also taken into consideration and only those recommended by WWTW can access the scheme.

[Type here]

Engagement in the scheme has been positive with the majority of participants utilising there passes on average twice per week.

2019/2020

During 2019 to 2021, 15 veterans have signed up for annual membership using the facilities 47 times.

Three individuals' testimonials following the launch of this scheme:

“Having free access to the gym is a great help; it means I don't have to worry about the cost of an expensive gym membership and encourages me to go and use the facilities to keep physically fit. In addition to that, accessing the gyms is getting me into a social environment and mixing with other people which has been really good in improving my overall mental health.”

“The free gym membership was an excellent tool for me in terms of getting me out and doing something positive. It helped improve my mood no end and was a great experience; long may this service continue for veterans.”

“The gym is a very positive course to take as it has improved my fitness and mental health and has a host of other benefits including more energy, better sleep, more motivation and a better diet. For me it is also a good idea to get out of the house!”

Freedom of the City

The City Council has passed a motion to award the Freedom of the City of Manchester to 209 Battery, Royal Artillery (The Manchester Artillery). A member of 103 Regiment, Royal Artillery, 209 Battery was established in 1804 as a local volunteer militia force raised across the Manchester area in response to the Napoleonic threat. The Battery along with its predecessors, has served at home and abroad as a valuable Artillery Corps for some 216 years.

It was then re-established in 1859 as the United Kingdom moved to establish a standing volunteer army. From 1860 it was garrisoned at Ardwick Green and in 1881 officially awarded the honorary title 'The Manchester Artillery'. It has since enjoyed a close and continuing association with the city as a regular army unit, a reservist unit and now as part of the UK's expanding professional military reserve, based in Gorton.

Over the subsequent one hundred and forty years, the Manchester Artillery has seen active duty in the Boer War and the First World War served at Gallipoli, Sinai and the Western Front. The Unit served extensively overseas during the Second World War as part of the initial expeditionary force. The current 209 Battery continued to recruit and train Manchester citizens in readiness for the defence of this country at home and abroad.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic the freedom of the City for Battery 209 (The Manchester Artillery), has been put back to later in 2021 this is mainly due to give the appropriate
[Type here]

recognition to Battery 209 (The Manchester Artillery) with parade in Manchester.

Naval Affiliation

Naval Affiliation - Negotiations remain active between the Lord Mayor and the Office of the First Sea Lord to re-establish an affiliation between the city and a next generation naval frigate, which will provide an opportunity for mutual exchange and support, promoting the

Navy as a channel to cutting edge technological training and employment and providing opportunities to project the city on an international level.

Greater Manchester - Manchester continues to support the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant Programme which provides coordination, training and policy support across the city region in respect of responsibilities to the armed forces community. This is delivered by a Programme Manager placed within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority with funding provided by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund channelled through the City Council.

Developing Employees

E-Learning

Greater Manchester Combined Authority commissioned the development of an E-Learning training course to enable staff across the 11 local Authorities to have better understanding of The Armed Forces Covenant. In August 2020 Manchester City Council rolled out the E-Learning to all its employees. Every employee has access to the training via their e-learning account, the training is mandatory with reminders sent out weekly to those who have yet to complete. We currently over 3000 having completed.

There has been some resistance to undertake the training, the main reason seems to be employees think it has nothing to do with the individuals roles. After pointing out that it's in everyone interest to have an understanding of the Covenant as you never know when the Armed Forces Community might need help. The feedback from the training has been generally positive.

"I got an email to complete this training and thought "What" "Why". Armed Forces Covenant has absolutely nothing to do with my role in Libraries. I click the start learning button and found myself completing the training and was amazed, I did not realise such a thing existed and must admit I enjoyed the e-learning. It was relevant and how I can use the knowledge, to inform other staff and if I am in a position to help; I do know something about the Armed forces covenant now and the Armed forces community". (Member of the Library team)

Team Training (Royal British Legion)

The Royal British Legion have developed a training package that is supports the E-Learning and is based on face-to-face training. Pete Owen - Armed Forces Covenant Lead, has reviewed/attended the training and is currently in the process of rolling the training out across Directorate teams. The Armed Forces Covenant training will make a real difference on the [Type here]

ground in our local communities but this can only happen with the support and input of our employees.

Collaboration GM Wide

Our work in relation to the Covenant is also strengthened by cooperation across the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Programme. This has been funded for the three years from April 2018 by grant support from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund and administered by Manchester City Council. This has enabled the employment of a Programme Manager based within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. This provides a strong basis for work with regional health, housing, training and employment providers. A training programme has been developed for use by each individual authority. Strong progress has been made in raising awareness of the Covenant and the application of consistent policies across the GM area. The work will continue with the support of the GMCA and an agreed contribution from each GM Council from April 2021.

Steering Group

The Steering Group continue to drive the development of Our Manchester Armed Forces Covenant ensuring the Armed Forces Community receive support with no disadvantage as a result of their military service. They are the driving force in making the Armed Forces Covenant work in Manchester

The Steering Group continue to hold bi-monthly meetings based on a workshop format with core and flexible membership, coordinated by the Armed Forces Champion.

The key role of the steering Group is to develop and implement the Armed Force Covenant action plan and support in the production annual report.

Armed Forces Covenant Guide

In 2020/21 a 1000 copies of the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant Guide were received by Manchester City Council and distributed. This included with the support and help of Manchester's library staff over 800 guides being distributed to every library in Manchester.

The aim of distributing the guide to all libraries primarily to promote The Armed Forces Covenant to The Armed Forces Community and the wider community. The guide will also give families who are thinking of leaving/left service an idea of what type of support and advice they might require while living in Manchester.

[Type here]

“Interesting read, I've been a member of the forces for 35years and never knew about the covenant or the support offered to the Armed forces community. Well done Manchester City Council” Member of the Town Hall extension Security Team

“No call for help should go unanswered”

Manchester Housing Partnership working (Advocacy) helps with the Covenant.

Partnership working is the only truly effective way of ensuring shared actions are meaningful. It is partnership working that widens understanding and helps to prevent, or reduce, misunderstanding and frustration. The more partners understand about each other’s realistic contributions to common goals, the more likely it is that those goals will be achieved.

As an example, early in 2021 the British Legion – a key partner - approached Manchester for help finding a suitable social home for a newly-discharged veteran. It was clear that certain assumptions were being made and that there perhaps was an unrealistic expectation of a specific outcome in an impossible timescale.

To help prevent any frustration, and to ensure everyone involved had the best possible understanding a housing officer explained in detail how qualifying veterans always are given the highest priority. But expectations need to be well-informed and realistic because the demand for social homes far exceeds supply, so even the highest priority doesn’t mean someone can expect to get a home very quickly.

Nevertheless, in this case, it was explained that everything that should have been done in support of the veteran had been done in double-quick time and he could be confident that his housing needs would be met in the quickest timescale. Explaining things to partners, especially how some very common assumptions about the availability of housing are not correct, meant that the British Legion, and the veteran himself, were assured that everything was in order and a positive outcome was likely in a short time.

There are currently a number of applications (2021) on the Manchester Housing Register (Manchester Move) these are a top priority due to being ex armed services.

Since Feb 2016, 78 ex armed services have been rehoused via Manchester Move.

“The covenant is a very useful reminder that all services have a role to play in supporting our veterans. Although the allocation of social homes has given ex services the highest priority

[Type here]

for years, it is still a useful challenge and support to have the covenant to remind us all to play our part”. (Manchester Housing)

Intranet Development

The Armed Forces Covenant intranet pages are currently under development and progress is being made to develop the content. The hope is this will be a useful resource for any employees who want to know more about the Covenant. It will also have a reservist section where any of our employees who are currently in the military can find up to date information and support.

Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, awards grants through specific funding programmes. Manchester City Council has been successful in securing £20,000, to bring awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant to our employees and the local communities.

This will allow us to reach out to the Armed Forces Community by setting up a series of network hubs within the community.

Looking Ahead

The steering group has worked well over the reporting year and with the onset of the Armed Forces Bill 2021 which reaffirms those duties and responsibilities as set out in the Armed Forces Act 2006 and duty on public services to 'give due regard' to the principles:

- Recognition of unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces
- It is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service personnel from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces
- Special provision for Service personnel may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.

Building on the progress as reflected in this annual report and in recognition of the impact from the Covid19 pandemic it is planned the Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group for the forthcoming year will continue its focus to raise awareness and remove any disadvantage experienced by veterans/armed forces personnel. In addition, bringing additional focus to the following 4 areas;

1. Re-establishing and strengthening the relationship and contribution of local NHS organisations.
2. Consolidate, embed and build on the initiatives and successes of 2020/21; gaining greater impact/outcomes for veterans in Manchester.

[Type here]

3. Veterans involved in the criminal justice system.
4. Development and delivery of a coherent communication plan raising awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and entitlement for veterans and service personnel.

[Type here]