



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

# Armed Forces Annual Report

Review of work undertaken over the past year  
and our priorities for the next year



September 2022



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## Foreword



As Lead Member for the Armed Forces, I am pleased to introduce this report, which sets out the work we have undertaken over the past year

with our public service and voluntary sector partners to honour our commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant, along with our priorities for the next year.

The purpose of the Covenant is to encourage support for the armed forces community working and residing in Manchester, and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of the armed forces community, particularly those who have given the most.

It seeks to ensure that they are treated fairly when accessing public services and that their skills are recognised on return to civilian life or as serving reservists.

Last year it was my pleasure to preside as Lord Mayor as we refreshed those commitments and conferred the Freedom of the City on 209 Battery R.A., the Manchester Artillery. This is our oldest serving military unit, and one of several located around the city within which Manchester residents serve to defend our country.

While the Covenant is not as well known as it should be, events across the world remind us of the important role our armed forces play within the defence of peace and freedom.

Through our Covenant Action Plan, we will continue to strengthen our relationship with the armed forces and our understanding of the needs of the armed forces community in line with pending Government legislation.

I commend everyone to read this report and to visit our Armed Forces Covenant website, where you can learn more about the Covenant and contribute to our action plan.

Thank you for your interest and support.

**Councillor Tommy Judge,  
Lead Member for the Armed Forces**



## Background

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment by the nation to those who currently serve or have previously served in HM Armed Forces, and their families. This commitment ensures that the armed forces community will face no disadvantage from being part of their service. By its very nature, military service is dangerous. All soldiers, sailors, and airmen are willing to sacrifice not only their lives, but many of the freedoms and privileges enjoyed by their civilian peers.

The purpose of the Covenant is to remedy and prevent the disadvantages experienced by service personnel and make certain that they too can benefit from the services and support that should be available to all. The Covenant also allows special provision for those who have sacrificed the most, such as the injured and bereaved.

The Armed Forces Covenant was instated in 2000 before being refreshed in 2011. This followed the conclusion of military campaigns in the Middle East and Afghanistan, a wave of redundancies of regular serving personnel, and the augmentation of Britain's reserve forces. This sequence of events catalysed a cause for concern regarding the lack of support available to service personnel and their families.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) are now required to present an annual report before parliament that discusses the effects of current or former membership of the armed forces and its impact within the spheres of healthcare, education and housing. In June 2013, Manchester City Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant, formally aligning its values and objectives with those of the Covenant and signifying its support for those who have served our country. This triggered the formation of the Covenant Steering Group, which exists to allow both collaboration and co-ordination with local public and third-sector organisations across Manchester.

The introduction of the Armed Forces Act 2021 ensures the nation's compliance with the Armed Forces Covenant, as it codifies Covenant obligations into law. This new legislation achieved royal assent in Parliament on 15 December 2021. This annual report is a summary of Manchester City Council's Covenant work across the city since the ratification of the Armed Forces Act 2021, and outlines current and future objectives that aim to improve the level of support for the local armed forces community.

## Operational highlights

This year we have undergone the challenging transition from COVID-19 measures to our 'new normal', but the echoes of the pandemic still very much affect our way of working. However, despite the inevitable barriers and challenges, we have continued to maintain and strengthen our support for the armed forces community and our commitment to the Covenant.

In January of this year, we welcomed our Armed Forces Specialist into our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team, putting us on a level footing with neighbouring local authorities. Our Armed Forces Specialist acts as the Council's node for the armed forces community and partner organisations, while working to fulfil Covenant obligations and the objectives of our Armed Forces Action Plan.

This year's priorities have been to improve the level of data we collect, upgrade the Council's infrastructure to ensure we can provide improved resources for the armed forces community, develop a better support model for those leaving the criminal justice system, and improve access to education. We are also focusing on stimulating local grass-roots activity to both build and strengthen local support services.



## What we have done

### The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

The Council is now a proud recipient of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme's Gold Award, for its commitment to supporting members of the armed forces community within the Council. This has been awarded by virtue of the Council's commitment, and indicates the successful alignment of our values to those enshrined within the Covenant.

The Gold Award is the watermark of an organisation that has strived to mitigate the barriers faced by those who have served, and signifies that every effort has been made to make the organisation armed forces-friendly. It is important for Manchester City Council to achieve such an attainment, as it allows it to inspire other organisations and take the lead in a newly developed area of law. This is symbolic of the Council's responsiveness in providing a remedy for disadvantage, and also illustrates how equality is a pillar of our organisation.

### HR/OD development

#### Guaranteed Interview Scheme

The Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group have been working with our colleagues in HR/OD to ensure that the armed forces community will not face disadvantage when applying for roles within the Council. In pursuit of this, the Council now guarantees an interview to veterans and reservists if they meet the minimum requirements for a role. This is made clear on each job posting, as a statement about our guaranteed interview scheme is included to encourage veterans and reservists to apply.

#### Reservist policy

HR/OD have updated our Reservist Policy; this ensures that reservists are aware of the support they receive from the Council while serving. The policy outlines all entitlements due to reservists working within the Council, and aims to inform the reservists themselves as well as their managers. The policy also asserts our full support for the mandatory annual training expected of reservists and the adjustments needed should they be mobilised by their unit.

#### Armed Forces Toolkit

The Council previously featured an Armed Forces Toolkit webpage that aimed to signpost those from the armed forces community to the correct organisation and ensure they receive the right level of support. However, analysis showed that the page was rarely viewed, totalling a mere 34 visits in the past year. To remedy this, the Council is currently refreshing the toolkit to make it more relevant, dynamic, and informative.

The toolkit will feature two different sections on the page; one will be for members of the armed forces community themselves, and the other for professionals working with them.

The new page will feature regular updates from the local armed forces network, and will have improved signposting and a more thorough support model. The overarching aim is to ensure the toolkit does in fact have the tools to effectively help individuals and professionals alike, while remaining accessible and relevant to those in need of support.

### Naval affiliation

The Council is proud to soon be reaffiliated with the Royal Navy. Following negotiations between the Lord Mayor and the Office of the First Sea Lord to re-establish this affiliation, it has been confirmed that the vessel representing Manchester will be a next-generation naval frigate. The new ship will act as a symbol of mutual support between both organisations and allow the development of a stronger relationship.

### Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group

The Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group exists to facilitate cross-organisational collaboration, enable network expansion, and co-ordinate objectives. The Steering Group is the nucleus of the armed forces' work and has played a key part in local achievements. The group gathers on a bimonthly basis in a workshop format, with both core and flexible membership co-ordinated by the Senior Management team's Armed Forces Champion.

The Steering Group adopts a thematic approach, bringing focus to the individual pillars featured within the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan. A significant proportion of those involved possess years of military, public, and third-sector experience, as well as a strong desire to collaborate with a variety of organisations in the pursuit of common goals. The diverse landscape of expertise within the Steering Group allows for great insight into prominent issues and helps close the gap between military and civilian experiences.

### Armed Forces Focus Group

The Council's Armed Forces Focus Group is now active. This group consists of current and former members of the armed forces who are currently employed by the Council. The role of the focus group is to inform our armed forces' work and ensure efforts are directed to the right areas. Members of the focus group come from a range of different backgrounds, all with unique experiences in and out of the forces. The diversity of their experiences and skills allows for the identification of niche areas and ensures that relevant issues are addressed. The group will meet bimonthly utilising a thematic structure to cover current areas of interest as dictated by the Steering Group.

### Covenant funding

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust awards grants via specific funding programmes, and the Council has successfully secured a sum of £20,000, which will help to support the armed forces community. The Council intends to funnel this money into stimulating grass-roots activity in the local area, ensuring it is sustainable, impactful, and strategically placed. Currently, the Council is consulting with various organisations to

identify gaps in which these funds will prove most useful.

### Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan

The Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan has been refreshed and signed off by the Steering Group. This new action plan reflects what areas need more attention and how we plan to tackle them. The action plan is integral to our work, as it serves a number of purposes. It enables, directs and co-ordinates cross-organisational working, allows us to track our progress, ensures we are meeting deadlines, and – most of all – makes certain that each organisation involved is synchronised with the others.

### Armed Forces Connection Identifier Question

We have implemented an Armed Forces Connection Identifier Question within a number of our systems, such as Adult Social Care, Children and Families, Housing, Homelessness, and Education. This allows us to identify and link those from the armed forces community to the correct information, advice, organisations and support. We also utilise this data to inform the development of our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

### Our network of armed forces-friendly employers

One of the biggest challenges faced by those leaving the armed forces is finding employment; therefore, employers play a pivotal role in supporting the armed forces community. Because of this, we have developed a network of armed forces-friendly employers so we can engage, encourage and recognise their contribution and work. Not only will this help to cultivate a supportive environment for those leaving the forces and entering civilian employment, but it will also encourage other employers to do the same, thereby expanding this valuable network.

### Intranet Armed Forces Blog

In June 2022, the first Manchester City Council Armed Forces Work Blog was launched on the intranet. This blog keeps other Council employees up to date with the Council's work on the Covenant and aims to encourage others to read more on the topic. Aside from providing entertainment, it is hoped the blog will raise awareness among Council employees and give context to the armed forces training employees have received. The blog is a great medium for us to inform and educate those who have little or no experience of the armed forces community.

## What we are going to do

### CFO

#### Activity Hubs

CFO Activity Hubs are a new project financed by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), CFO, and the European Social Fund (ESF). These Hubs exist to provide a positive and safe environment for those released from prison. This allows prison leavers to develop new skills, meet new people, engage with the community, and set themselves up for a stable and more positive future.

Building this foundation is vital, as it reduces the risk of reoffending and helps prison leavers to reintegrating back into society. The CFO Manchester Hub has linked in with the Council to help deliver this support to veterans. By working alongside the Council and the wider network, CFO Activity Hubs will be able to deliver services to the armed forces community, armed with the knowledge and insight into the niche and unique barriers faced by veterans.

#### HMP Risley

CFO are currently working with HMP Risley in their development of a veterans' wing. Manchester City Council has been invited to play a part in this project and aid in its implementation. This is an exciting opportunity that allows the Council to make a real difference to veterans in prison and smooth their transition back into society. The veterans' wing will provide former service personnel with training modules that will assist in their personal development and education. The project was launched on 4 July 2022.

#### Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

We are in the process of developing an Armed Forces JSNA that will play an important role in how and where support is delivered. Both the Council and members from the Steering Group are involved to ensure the findings accurately reflect barriers and issues faced by the armed forces community. The JSNA can be used as an evidence base for preparing bids and by the voluntary and third sector to make certain community needs and views are represented. The JSNA will also be utilised by service providers, where it will inform the future development of their services, and by the public to scrutinise local health and wellbeing information, plans, and commissioning recommendations.

#### Departmental Armed Forces Champions

It is our job to ensure the Covenant is fully embedded throughout the Council, but due to the size of our organisation, this has become challenging. We need boots on the ground in involved departments to ensure Covenant obligations are being met, knowledge of the armed forces community is present, and someone is always close by to advocate, educate, and help with this line of work. To achieve this, we would like to put Armed

Forces Champions into a number of our departments. This will create a web throughout the Council through which information can be shared, updates given, and objectives tackled as one. This will synchronise all involved departments and make certain that all progress and effort is symmetrical throughout the Council.

## Why it matters

The overarching purpose of the Covenant is not a new concept, as there has been a sense of mutual obligation between the people of Britain and its armed forces dating back to the reign of Henry VIII. Until recently, these obligations had always remained unspoken and somewhat customary.

An example of this practice was a 1593 Elizabeth I statute that enforced a weekly tax on parishes so disabled veterans 'should at their return be relieved and rewarded to the end that they may reap the fruit of their good deservings, and others may be encouraged to perform the like endeavours'. It mattered to the people of 1593, and it matters to us now. Such a longstanding moral obligation only highlights the importance of the Covenant and why we must continue to help and support those who have served.

These obligations have taken many different forms since their implementation by adapting to the needs and dynamics of their time. They have now evolved from a moral obligation to a legal obligation by virtue of the Armed Forces Act 2021. This legislation now compels various public bodies to pay due regard to the principles of the Covenant within the spheres of housing, healthcare and education. Therefore, Manchester City Council must now meet the requirements of the Covenant by law.

Obligations aside, equality and inclusion are in the Council's DNA; they always have been, and remain a pillar of our organisation, reflected by how we want Manchester to look in the coming years.

### Our priorities

Towards the end of 2021, we set ourselves priorities in a range of areas that we felt needed more attention. This subsection will reflect on such work and discuss the progress, consequence and impact of each.

### Data

We identified that data collection was a weakness of ours, requiring remedy as soon as possible. Since the prioritisation of data collection, we have implemented an Armed Forces Identifier Question into many of our systems. These include: Adult Social Care, Children and Families, Housing, Homelessness, and Education. This is valuable data that will provide insight into current or surfacing issues while also informing future projects, such as our JSNA. We have also ensured that we keep recruitment data since the implementation of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme. This ensures that we can hold ourselves accountable and make certain we follow through with our promise to the armed forces community.

### Criminal Justice System

An area we identified as needing initial cultivation and further support was around veterans exiting the Criminal Justice System. We are currently working with CFO to aid in the implementation of the veterans' wing in HMP Risley. This will allow not only for rehabilitation, but also personal and professional development for veterans soon to leave prison.

However, our initial vision was to have a model that engaged veterans shortly before their release and provided accommodation, employment, education and training to ensure a smooth transition from custody back into society. In pursuit of this, we have partnered with CFO Hubs that deliver post-release support to prison leavers and will work with them to deliver this support to veterans.

### Communications

Communications will always remain a priority, as it is our partner organisations that enable us to make an impact that would otherwise be unachievable. We have been working closely with our partners and drawing on their knowledge to ensure we are heading in the right direction. We have also expanded our network, widening the landscape of expertise to inform our work.

Throughout this year, we have been engaging with local organisations to both map current gaps in support services and build a strategy of how they can be remedied. We currently hold a sum of £20,000 from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, which will be injected into areas that will fill these gaps.

### Priorities for 2022/2023

The above priorities will remain as such until their completion. Once concluded, we will continue to monitor their impact to ensure they function and deliver support as intended. When they are deemed both sustainable and effective, we can begin to redirect our focus elsewhere.

### Approach

An overarching priority for the next year will be the co-ordination of local services. Despite a solid network of organisations, a certain level of fragmentation still exists. This equates to duplication in a variety of areas and the dilution of valuable funding and resources. To remedy this, we hope to promote and improve cross-organisational working and encourage a more centralised approach. In pursuit of this unified support structure, we must develop mediums that can be used to share information in a variety of contexts.

### Health and wellbeing

An area identified as a future priority will be improving access to health services and the appointment of a GP Armed Forces Champion. This will be a multifaceted approach targeting specific barriers faced by the armed forces community. To name a few, we hope to promote veteran GP registration, encourage the diversification of referral pathways, aid in the introduction of health passports, and promote awareness of veterans' and reservists' health and wellbeing.

### Advocacy

Advocacy is imperative to the work around the Armed Forces Covenant; many of the public have never engaged with the armed forces community and are therefore unaware of the barriers they face. To ensure awareness is raised, we aim to inform and educate those around us on the topic. This is because to those who have no experience of the armed forces community, the Armed Forces Covenant may seem both unnecessary and irrelevant. In tandem with Covenant obligations reaching legal status comes the risk of institutions simply 'box ticking' by way of performative support models that exist only to conform to the obligations asserted by the Covenant.

Our advocacy work will aim to raise awareness and expose the fact that the barriers faced by the armed forces community are both real and prevalent. Through this we hope to ensure that local support services are genuine in intent and impactful in practice.



## Our Manchester Behaviours and the Covenant

Our Future Manchester – Forward to 2025 focuses on a set of priorities that will help us achieve how we want Manchester to look in the near future. These priorities share an array of parallels with the Covenant work and will be a continuing influence in our decision-making. This subsection will illustrate how the Covenant work either reflects or feeds into the Our Manchester Behaviours.

**“Thriving and Sustainable – vibrant with a cutting-edge economy involving and fairly rewarding all our people.”**

The Covenant work will ensure that members of the armed forces community will receive the necessary support to enable them to thrive alongside their civilian peers. We will also make certain that they are able to aid us in the pursuit of a cutting-edge economy by making the most of their experience and expertise in Manchester’s local businesses and organisations. This is achieved by providing support services that work with veterans through their transition to civilian life, and giving the armed forces community a voice to ensure its members are fairly rewarded.

**“Highly Skilled – work-ready, well-educated young people and all residents supported to take up opportunities.”**

Veterans and reservists are highly skilled, but the unfortunate misconception is that this is only when in the context of war fighting. Our work will make sure that employers understand the level of transferable skills veterans and reservists possess, that the armed forces community has improved access to education, and that those who have left the forces can effectively articulate their skill set to employers. In summary, and in line with this second behaviour, our work will make sure that the armed forces community is work-ready. This is made possible by providing improved access to training and education, support in areas such as CV writing, and educating employers on the values that veterans and reservists can bring to an organisation.

**“Progressive and Equitable – so all can thrive, with better joined-up support, care and health services.”**

This is the crux of our work, with an emphasis on joined-up support, care, and health services. We picture a unified support structure that works as one to make the most of our resources and ensures we make as much of an impact as possible, thereby ensuring all can thrive. This will be achieved by continuing to develop close relationships with our partners, expanding and co-ordinating our network accordingly, and encouraging a more collaborative approach.

**“Liveable and Zero-Carbon – safe, enjoyable neighbourhoods with affordable housing, zero-carbon by 2038 using green growth and design, energy, and more climate-resilience.”**

Our work will help us make neighbourhoods safer and more liveable by contributing to the fight against crime, poverty and antisocial behaviour. For every one person we help into work, that is one person who is less likely to experience poverty and/or engage in crime. For every one person we can give access to mental health services, that is one person less likely to partake in unhealthy coping strategies such as drugs or alcohol. Every one person we help reintegrate back into society is also one more person that will contribute to both our city and our economy.

In Collyhurst ‘Victoria North’, 15,000 houses and five new neighbourhoods are to be built and created. This will also include parks and green spaces, and ensure that all building is aligned and works towards the 2038 zero-carbon agenda. Work will be readily available to those wishing to enter construction-related roles, and a focus will be given on the recruitment of veterans. All our work will contribute to this, and if we can provide the right support and opportunities, we can cultivate a positive and receptive environment for the armed forces community.



## Contributions from our partners

### Royal British Legion

“The RBL continues to work closely with Manchester City Council to support the needs of veterans, service personnel and beneficiaries across the region. Our engagement with the Council is fundamental to our success in many cases and includes collaborating on issues such as homelessness, domestic abuse, living independently, outreach support, benefits, debt and money advice. The partnership of these services and relationship with the Covenant team enables us to find solutions to support our community in the best possible way when required. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be evident in the work we undertake, and we continue to have a number of cases we collaborate on with Manchester City Council and look forward to continuing this positive relationship.”

### Sale Sharks

“At Sharks Community Trust we work with over 250 veterans, current serving personnel and their families each year with our armed forces project, Sharks Forces. We aim to support the community throughout Greater Manchester with a diverse and consistent timetable of events and activities. We aim to empower our programme participants to take a leading role within the project, providing peer-to-peer support.

We have worked alongside The Armed Forces Covenant Trust, Walking with the Wounded and Manchester City Council, as well as a number of regional and national charities to develop the provision across the area. Through these partnerships, we are able to support the community effectively and help to signpost participants to specialist organisations when they are in need of further assistance. We’re looking forward to continuing our relationship with Manchester City Council and to keep developing the provision within the area.”



