

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Executive – 19 December 2019

Subject: Manchester Armed Forces Covenant – Progress Report & Action Plan

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services - Senior
Management Team Armed Forces Champion

Summary

In June 2013 Manchester City Council confirmed its support for the Armed Forces Community by signing the Armed Forces Community Covenant. This report sets out the background to the covenant and progress against current pledges.

Recommendations

1. That the Executive agrees to Manchester hosting and/or contribute to North West VE 75 commemorative event on the May Bank Holiday 2020 which has been rearranged to the Friday 8th May 2020, as part of a programme of national commemorations.
 2. That the Executive supports the following in support of the attached outline covenant action plan (appendix 1):
 - MCC to refresh and re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant, secure MHCC, MLCO Board support and in partnership with GMMHFT, the Royal British and Walking With the Wounded secure a joint signing with aligned pledges and action plan;
 - Individual Executive Members to promote contribution and delivery of Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant within their respective Portfolios and Civic duties;
 - to promote all customer-facing staff to complete Armed Forces Covenant Awareness E-Learning training reinforced by a presentation to all teams by the Royal British Legion and Walking With The Wounded in respect of the needs of the armed forces community and the resources that may be mobilised in their support;
 - a comprehensive review of the Armed Forces Covenant Website and the Armed Forces Self-Help Toolkit to complement the Veterans Gateway at local level.
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Wards Affected

All

| Manchester Strategy outcomes | Summary of the contribution to the strategy |
|---|---|
| A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities | The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation 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 | The report sets out how mutual support between public service / business organisations and the armed forces can enhance 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 will work 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 |
| A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work | Promote Manchester as a city with significant opportunities so that they remain living and working in Manchester; whilst promoting environmentally friendly modes of travel in their day to day activity. |
| A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth | We encourage all to experience the diverse nature of Manchester and promote the opportunities for leisure which supports the Health and Wellbeing of the Armed Forces Community. |

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

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations – to note that further work will be required between Executive leads and Legal Services to ensure effective delivery.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

There are presently no anticipated revenue costs. The delivery of Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant will be achieved within a Business As Usual approach; complemented by any funding made available via the Our Manchester Board; an application for additional capacity has been submitted and a decision is pending.

Financial Consequences – Capital

Negotiations are ongoing with the Ministry of Defence and available budget within Manchester City Council to support and deliver a VE 75 commemorate event; which will be reflective of and contained within the budget allocation.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 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 with fairness and respect within the communities, economy and society they serve and protect.

1.2 The current 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 and increasing concerns in relation to the support offered to service personnel and their families, particularly when transitioning to civilian life.

1.3 The Ministry of Defence now provides service leavers with extensive transitional support and the majority adapt and manage that transition well. However early service leavers, their families and those impacted by injury, ill-health or trauma continue to describe challenges across the following areas:-

- Understanding “civvy street” - Housing, paying your own bills, medical care, forming friendships – many of these routine negotiations are done for you in the military, for those discharged in poor health this is a challenge to get to grips with and the Veterans VCS plays a valuable advice and support role.
- Overcoming the pride barrier and accessing appropriate help - The military in a very short space of time demands high levels of personal achievement and self discipline, this creates barriers in “civvy street” when help is needed, particularly in terms of self esteem. Such barriers are often only broken down when a crisis point is reached.
- Finding a second career - It is often difficult for ex-service personnel to land well in a new career as their military role may not have direct links to civilian employment opportunities, skills, expectations and working environment. Many families will also have adjusted to a pattern of moving every 2 years with accommodation and schooling provided and it takes time to adjust and put down roots.
- Housing – the majority of complex conversations begin with the issue of housing. If we get this right, a number of other needs are resolved as a by-product.
- Strong Comradeship and shared experience within the armed forces - is difficult to replace in the civilian world and continuing armed forces peer support protects those whose health and wellbeing may be vulnerable

1.4 The 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” obligation to focus on 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 to civilian life.

1.5 The underlying principle is not to differentiate in terms of preferential treatment, (special consideration is reserved for the bereaved or seriously injured), but to ensure that the particular demands of military life are understood and that those returning to civilian life have equal access to services and experience “no disadvantage” as a result of their military service.

1.6 Since 2011 all local authorities have been invited to sign the Armed Forces Community Covenant and to make localised pledges which complement the national covenant at local leadership level, encouraging wider local public service and business organisations to support the armed forces community and to promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the armed forces community.

1.7 Manchester City Council signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2013. A copy is posted is on the MCC website; The Armed Forces Community Covenant | The Armed Forces Community Covenant | Manchester City Council/

2.0 Governance

2.1 The covenant requires each Local Authority to establish a Covenant Board to oversee local pledges and develop an appropriate action plan. Within Manchester this has been taken forward via a Covenant Steering Group under the leadership of the Executive Armed Forces Champion, those initial pledges are detailed below.

- To oversee the implementation of the Manchester Community Covenant, including the development of an action plan, with key outcomes and owners.
- To work to assist transition of members of the Service community and their families, particularly in relation to the key areas of education, health, housing, welfare and employment.
- To raise awareness of the armed services and the contribution that they make locally and nationally, including through events such as the Remembrance Sunday commemorations and Armed Forces Day Thank You event; and to also raise awareness of their needs.
- To identify opportunities to integrate, wherever possible, military and civilian activities and events to the mutual benefit of both communities.
- To help create a culture where Armed Forces and Cadet Organisations in Manchester can offer support to their local civilian communities.

2.2 LGA guidance suggests adoption of the following infrastructure to support the covenant.

| Core infrastructure to deliver the covenant | |
|---|--|
| Individuals | Collaboration |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An elected member Champion• An officer point of contact with the council | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An outward –facing forum• A mechanism for collaboration with partners |
| Communication | Vision & Commitment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A web page with key information & links | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear public statement of expectations • A route through which concerns can be raised • Training of front-line staff • The production of an annual report highlighting key actions and plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy reviews • Enthusiasm and commitment |
|---|---|

3.0 Performance against the Covenant

3.1 Cllr T Judge has served as Lead member for the Armed Services since the Covenant was signed in 2013, with the benefit of personal military service he has developed strong links across the armed services and veterans' networks and has provided consistent support to the Lord Mayor in respect of remembrance celebration and military events.

3.2 A member of the Senior Management Team has also regularly undertaken the role of Armed Forces Champion. Paul Marshall, Strategic Director of Children and Education Services has recently assumed that role and now chairs the Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group.

3.3 The Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group will maintain oversight and ensure delivery of Manchester's Covenant Action Plan, it is currently serviced by Social Care Commissioning and brings together Armed Forces Leads from across Manchester City Council and engaged colleagues from Manchester health commissioners and providers (MHCC, MLCO, GMMHFT) as well as Greater Manchester Police, Dept. Work and Pensions, core Veterans VCS partners Royal British Legion and Walking with the Wounded.

3.4 A flexible approach to membership provides reach across all areas where military service may impact across adult social care, NHS care, public health, early help, education, work and skills, strategic housing, homelessness, offending plus leisure & sport provision in support health & wellbeing. Special considerations also apply to the armed forces in respect of council tax and benefits.

3.5 Formal remembrance celebrations operate to a well-established planning cycle and protocols administered by the Civic and Ceremonial Office. There are good relationships with local / regional military representatives and veterans organisations. The annual Armed Forces Thank You Day is administered through the Neighbourhood Events Unit and has a firm place in the cycle of city centre events.

3.6 There are regular opportunities to strengthen links with the armed forces via military events, regimental visits and celebrations which also generate footfall and economic activity in the city centre. An opportunity to contribute to the regional VE 75 celebrations in May 2020 is currently under positive consideration and at some point in the future when work on the Town Hall frontage is complete we would be in a position for Manchester to host the National Thank-You Event.

3.7 There has been a strong lobby to the Admiralty for a further vessel to be named HMS Manchester, this presently looks unlikely given reduced naval assets. However,

discussions are taking place around a possible affiliation between the City and a new Frigate which would provide opportunities for educational visits and mutual support.

3.8 Since the last formal annual report in 2016 work has been completed on the area of St Peters Square adjacent to the re-positioned Cenotaph, visibility and accessibility is much enhanced. Flagstones now commemorate Manchester's 6 VC heroes, soon to be joined by a seventh in commemoration of Lieutenant-Colonel John Stanhope Collings-Wells, V.C. who has belatedly been identified as being born within the City.

3.9 The Cenotaph has now become a well visited part of the Civic Quarter. The work undertaken has received very positive feedback and now provides an excellent focus for acts of civic and personal remembrance where visitors are frequently welcomed by Volition Cenotaph Volunteers. Through the Public Realm Team the Council is also active in the maintenance of local war memorials that fall under MCC responsibility.

3.10 An MCC Armed Forces Covenant Website is maintained with links to the Manchester Help & Support Armed Forces Self-Help Toolkit, wider local authority support and specialist support services for veterans. It also provides an email link for anyone seeking to enquire about additional services and support. Some development of this site is required in respect of wider local government responsibilities linked to the armed forces, links to partners and the Self-help Toolkit needs to complement the Nation Veterans Advice Gateway at local level.

3.11 An Armed Forces Open Forum was last held in June 2017 and subject to consideration of this report we intend to set up a further consultation event to coincide with Remembrance week activities in November 2019. The majority of staff working within public service are likely to have had little if any direct experience of military service so it is important to connect with the experience that exists. We are building up a bank of MCC staff with service experience alongside serving reservists and veterans who are keen to support the development of the Covenant in Manchester and we will be exploring how we utilise this experience going forward.

3.12 In addition to our local commitments MCC also serves as the lead authority for the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant Development Programme a two year programme developed across the ten GM authorities and funded via the Covenant Trust Fund. This programme seeks to capture the additional reach and cost benefits of cooperation at GM level to enhance awareness of the covenant across GM public service organisations, business and the wider public; to establish an Armed Forces Covenant e-learning Programme in respect of customer-facing staff and to consolidate armed forces friendly policies at GM level, in areas such as housing, health, education, employment and support for transition. Work is currently progressing in relation to housing allocations and the local authority's role as a good practice employer in relation to support for military reservists within the Council and service personnel transitioning to civilian life. GM authorities have recently expressed a wish to maintain this GM level work at minimal cost to each authority.

4.0 Partnership with the Manchester Veterans Voluntary and Community Sector

4.1 Whilst the local authority and NHS have universal obligations to all citizens and the NHS is required to give priority to citizens injured in the course of their service, the veterans VCS is frequently the first point of contact, providing significant preventive and targeted support directly to the armed forces community or in support of statutory intervention. Veteran's organisations are rooted in comradeship and shared military experience and are frequently best placed to deliver support.

4.2 Manchester's covenant responsibilities benefit from a particularly close working partnership with the Royal British Legion and Walking With The Wounded which both enjoy strong informal networks with wider partners. Leadership is fluid and there is a close fusion of thinking. Both organisations have a strong mission, enjoy high-level patronage and are well placed to capture abundant community goodwill towards the armed forces community and deliver specialist support sympathetic to their needs and experience of military service. This includes:-

- The Royal British Legion (RBL) is active at national, regional and local level in support of the armed forces community and are key partners within the Veterans Gateway, which provides multi-channel access to advice, support and linkage to the resources of the wider veteran's charitable sector. The Gateway is structured around seven pillars of support which are, Housing, Employment, Finances, Living independently, Mental well-being, Physical health, Families and Community. These seven pillars provide an excellent framework against which to test the effectiveness of the local support system and will be utilised to shape our forward plan.
- The RBL also maintains a city centre "Pop In" Help and Advice Centre which serves the Greater Manchester area supporting veterans across a range of benefits, welfare and housing related issues, including debts, arrears & bond payments, support with furnishings, working in close collaboration with Walking with the Wounded, Greater Manchester Police and the council.
- Walking with the Wounded (WWTW) supports a pathway for vulnerable veterans to reintegrate back into society and sustain their independence from their Canada Street Hub in Miles Platting, developed in partnership with the Council and Haig Housing and with the support of the BBC's DIY SOS TV Programme.
- At the heart of the WWTW approach is employment and its connection to positive mental health. The Canada Street Team provides proactive, early intervention support for "at risk" veterans, and their families specifically targeting those with a desire to learn new skills and secure sustainable employment. Employment Advisors are embedded in veteran supported accommodation residences and with NHS regional veteran mental health teams, helping unemployed veterans to find employment and rebuild their lives. Advisors help to build confidence, organise work placements, source funding for any required training and ultimately assist in securing sustainable employment.

- For those veterans who have become homeless a 'wrap around' service is provided to help stabilise their housing status, address health needs, gain skills, improve employability and support them to move into independence; specifically focusing on employment but working in partnership to address any wider challenges.
- Temporary accommodation is provided within Canada Street and through Stody House, in partnership with NACRO & Mosscafe Saint Vincent's and a range of housing associations. Working through such partnerships WWTW now have access to in excess of 250 bed spaces across the country.
- From the Canada Street Hub WWTW have been able to establish the Northwest Regional Project Nova Team which supports vulnerable veterans caught up in police custody and the criminal justice system in general. With strong support from GMP which has a strong group of Armed Forces Leads across the force, this programme is identifying and diverting vulnerable veterans from the criminal justice system and reducing the re-offending rates.
- The Military Veterans Service operated by Pennine Care NHS Trust provides specialist NHS treatment service for military veterans enabling those with complex psychological problems to access treatment services. It is supported by the WWTW employment placement programmes and the WWTW "Head Start Programme" which provides 1-2-1 private therapy for ex-service personnel with mild to moderate mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, PTSD and adjustment disorder.
- WWTW also works to strengthen families, support is provided to enable both veterans and their families to gain the confidence and skills for a successful transition to civilian life. This model developed in the north-west aims to establish and maintain supportive relationships across family members, ensuring strong mutual support when challenges present.

4.3 These examples provide a solid example of good inter-agency cooperation and an instinctual "Our Manchester Approach" within which national and local innovation is welcomed, supported and societal responsibilities shared within a socially active community. We are keen to build on this approach with established organisations who wish to work in partnership to improve the effectiveness of support to the Armed Forces Community.

4.4 There is a particular need to stimulate more localised grassroots support within areas where there is a known concentration of veterans, this includes the Miles Platting/Newton Heath Neighbourhoods and Wythenshawe. Some limited financial investment may be required, however by demonstrating a strong working partnership between the VCS and the local authority, (such as in the Canada Street example) this is an area where significant external resources and goodwill can be leveraged. An application has been developed for submission to the Our Manchester Investment Fund might provide funding to 'pump prime' this support and develop further our grassroot approach and strengthen data analysis to inform service planning.

4.5 In January 2020 the Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group will be briefed on the re-development of the Broughton House Veterans Residential and Nursing Home, a long standing charitable organisation located on the Salford side of the Manchester border. The site is currently being developed into a multi-purpose Veterans Village with the benefit of significant charitable funding. It will offer radical new opportunities particularly for veterans in the north of the City who may require care or who wish to maintain active, independent, living, with a strong focus on comradeship and mutual support; touch-down space will also support those in transition who are seeking to exploit business opportunities and organisations seeking to develop services for veterans.

5.0 Service Areas

5.1 Health & Social Care - National and local level data in respect of the armed forces community is weak and disconnected. MHCC Health Intelligence are currently developing an Armed Forces Joint Strategic Needs Assessment however without reliable information as to who is a member of that community at this point in time we are unable to reliably measure what needs we are meeting successfully or those which remain unmet. Nor can we target prevention services or direct the community towards the specialist resources that exist for their benefit.

5.2 This challenge will be partially mitigated by the inclusion of an armed forces question within the 2021 household census and more so by a wider movement to ensure that all public service organisations include a similar question within core CRM, contact centre and assessment scripts i.e. "Have you or any member of your immediate family served in the armed forces".

5.3 Within social care progress has to date been slow, however from August 2019 we have been asking the above question within the new Liquid Logic IT Framework which services care management processes across the Children and Families Directorate. We also now know that Manchester schools are in receipt of a "service child" pupil premium for 91 children. These details will feed into the JSNA process and new drop down service menus within Core Logic will provide an opportunity for the MLCO health & social care staff to progressively target the needs of the armed forces community.

5.4 From 2018 Manchester GP Practices have also been providing a strong lead with circa. 2296 Veterans currently recorded on practice systems. This will provide vital access to wider information in respect of the health status of veterans and to support targeted screening and signposting. Further exploration is taking place as to the adoption and local development of a national armed forces friendly GP quality mark to support this initiative

5.5 Housing and Homelessness - There are well established housing policies in place in respect of support for service personnel and veterans which ensure that questions in respect of military service are asked and recorded within the My Manchester Move process. The council's social housing allocations scheme awards additional preference to serving or former members of the armed services and their families who have urgent need to secure a home or move. In effect, residence requirements are waived and any serving or former members of the armed forces

who have a need to be rehoused are given the highest priority band on the Manchester's allocations scheme.

5.6 Likewise under the leadership of the Greater Manchester Housing Partnership Armed Forces Steering Group social housing providers are being urged to sign the covenant, establish an armed forces champions and be active in identifying, supporting and preventing homelessness within the armed forces community. We are currently prioritising work with Wythenshawe Housing who are keen to be active in this area and will share learning across the City.

5.7 Formal homelessness presentations from within the armed forces community remain low in contrast to the commonly held assumptions as to high levels of military veterans amongst the street homeless community. This maybe because of the significant levels of support and good practice that is provided via organisations such as Walking with the Wounded in Manchester.

5.8 Identified numbers of Armed Forces Veterans related homelessness are detailed below. The small increase has been attributed to an improved approach to the recording and understanding/knowledge of support veterans require. In accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act, we also have advice available which is designed specifically for former members of the Armed Forces and every effort is made to link those with an armed forces connection into the specialist services provided by the NHS and organisations such as the RBL and Walking with the Wounded.

| Financial Year | No presented | Outcome |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| 2014/15 | 4 | 2 Advice Only, 1 No full interview & 1 Withdrawn application (Not homeless) |
| 2015/16 | 0 | |
| 2016/17 | 1 | Withdrawn Application (Not homeless) |
| 2017/18 | 2 | Advice Only & Withdrawn application (Not homeless) |
| 2018/19 | 2 presentation reasons was leaving armed forces | Both relief cases; One was contact lost. The other was successful relief, found own tenancy |
| | 8 presented with being in armed forces as support needs | 1 Full Duty |
| | | 4 Decisions |
| | | 1 Relief |
| | | 2 Triage |

5.9 It is considered by the Council and organisations working with the armed forces community that the above figures most likely do not reflect the full extent of homelessness and Armed Forces veterans nor the complexity of their needs which may arise in relation to mental health and trauma arising from the military context.

6.0 In many situations, veterans trained within military expectations of self-reliance and regimental pride are reluctant to access support and therefore the true picture of

homelessness; masked by unstable and informal accommodation arrangements such as sofa-surfing.

6.1 RBL and Walking with the Wounded utilise their broader, informal networks, working alongside the Homelessness Service, GMP and the DWP to connect with vulnerable veterans and address their health and housing needs within a holistic approach which seeks to stabilise their housing situation through improved health and well-being, mentoring, training and support to access employment opportunities which underpins independent living.

6.2 Walking with the Wounded have supplied the following breakdown of veterans they have supported to obtain stable accommodation over the period 2016-19:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Housing in community | 135 |
| Housing within Stody House | 35 |
| Housing in Canada Street Supported house | 60 |
| Supported into other supported housing provision | 72 |

7.0 Employment & Skills

7.1 In October 2018 Manchester City Council received the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme's silver award. The scheme was launched by the government in 2014 to recognise employer support for the principles of the armed forces covenant with a particular focus on support for reservists and the service leavers in transition.

7.2 We are keen to build on this, the council is large and significant employer well placed to model best practice attributes in relation to the armed forces community and to shape similarly positive attitudes across our partners and suppliers.

7.3 In April 2018 there a special recruitment drive for a number of posts in Manchester City Council's Highways Department. This included openings for Project Managers and Quantity Surveyors amongst other operational roles. A new approach was piloted by adjusting the application process itself, holding an open day for Q and A's prior to the application deadline and in ensuring the posts were positively promoted to military partner organisations across the city.

7.3 We have set 2020 as the target year to achieve the gold award and arrangements are currently in place to review reservist support policies and recruitment policies with the possibility that we may be able to offer armed forces personnel in transition some form of guaranteed interview scheme, this will proceed for consideration via established decision making routes.

7.4 Relationships have also been established with the local armed forces recruitment personnel to explore how we can create additional opportunities and visibility for the services to demonstrate the range of trades, skills and wider opportunities that military service has to offer, this will include events, affiliation to a naval vessel and strengthened links to local regiments and bases.

7.5 We are also in discussion as to how social value within the procurement process can add further value for Armed Forces veterans.

7.6 The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is committed to have an Armed Forces Champion in every job centre across the country. Manchester already has excellent coverage with champions trained by the RBL in the principles associated with the Veterans Gateway's "7 Pillars" and well integrated within the wider network of armed forces support agencies, a model which is gathering momentum across the country.

7.7 Alongside veterans organisations the DWP is also a first point of contact for members of the armed forces community when faced with challenges, it shares the Veterans Gateway's holistic approach which seeks to build security for the armed forces community on the seven pillars of Housing, Living Independently, Family and Community, Employment, Mental Wellbeing, Finances and Physical health. The DWP will continue to support service leavers for as long as they need support.

7.8 Fortunately employment opportunities within the veteran's community remains bright and in high demand. The MoD Career Transitions Partnership and other agencies plus social media keeps the value of service leavers high.

7.9 However for those who face significant challenges access to housing, mental health services and lack of localised grassroots opportunities for support, particularly those built on sport and comradeship continue to present major barriers to successful employment placement and personal resilience. The DWP remains keen to work with local armed forces networks to improve access to support and opportunities.

8.0 Leisure and Sport

Manchester Sports and Leisure Trust has linked with Moving Forces a Greater Sport initiative to shape a strong preventive offer aimed at helping the armed forces community to stay physically active and socially connected, supporting transitions to civilian life and working with WWTW to improve the health, wellbeing and employment readiness of vulnerable veterans.

8.1 Promoted through local armed forces networks and sport clubs, sport sessions are available across Tameside, Rochdale and in Manchester where the Manchester City Military Veterans Team train at the City Football Academy, Wheelchair Basketball takes place at the Belle Vue Sports Village and Indoor Climbing at the Manchester Climbing Centre.

8.2 This is an area where one individual or a concerned group can make a big difference. Sale Sharks have signed the Covenant and Craig Monaghan now serves with the Sharks Forces project which uses rugby as a vehicle to engage and support former military personnel. A former soldier Craig was seriously wounded in action in Afghanistan where he lost 10 close colleagues who tragically lost their lives fighting for their country. On the club website reflecting on his own personal experience of serving in the military Craig believes there are important parallels between life in the Armed Forces and at a rugby club. "There are so many similarities between the

rugby world and the military world in terms of the banter, the team ethic and the special bond you develop. You are willing to lay everything down for your mates and to cover each other's backs so the characteristics of a rugby player and a soldier are very similar. I know that the military really appreciates what the club are doing and our partnership is only going to grow going forward, so it's really a win-win."

8.3 MCC recently ran a Multi-sport Veterans Families day at the Regional Arena which attracted over 250 people, with further events planned at Debdale Outdoor Centre linked to Health Walks in the Park.

8.4 From the 1st September 2019, with the support of Greenwich Leisure Ltd and Sport and Leisure Management (Sport and Leisure Providers) free introductory passes and a 40% discount on Leisure Passes (off-peak) will be provided for members of the armed forces community who are part of a support programme.

8.5 At this stage the aim is to maximise these opportunities for the benefit of the armed forces community, evaluate and in what will be an annual reporting cycle setting out progress and impact continue to seek support from Executive Members and partners with clear recommendations to ensure we both consolidate and continually improve our support for our Armed Forces Veterans, for example in neighbouring authorities there already exists a universal free leisure/sport offer to all armed forces veterans and reservists.

9.0 Shaping our forward plan – a framework:

9.1 Following discussions within the armed forces steering group, with armed forces representatives and wider partners we have identified the following framework against which we will shape refreshed covenant, pledges and develop an associated action plan which will continue to improve the effectiveness of the city's support for the Armed Forces Community.

- **Re-signing and renewal of our covenant pledges** – Elements of the covenant have recently been updated and the MoD is keen for organisations to re-sign & refresh pledges in the light of new local government structures and local priorities in order to maintain focus and reinvigorate enthusiasm. It is therefore recommended that MCC and its key partners should consider the benefits of signing a joint "Our Manchester" Armed Forces Covenant, which will be inclusive of new delivery structures and bring in Manchester Health and Care Commissioning (MHCC) and the Manchester Locality Care Organisation (MLCO). Such an approach would not only underpin jointly aligned priorities, improve and develop effective data collection and coordinated delivery but maximise the reach and impact of Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant. Positive initial responses to a joint approach have been received from MHCC and the MLCO. Subsequently the next task is to secure agreement via the respective Boards.
- **An Underpinning "Our Manchester Approach"** – It is also recommended that the refreshed covenant should be signed alongside RBL and WWTH in recognition of their vital contribution and building on the current strongly

networked approach, to position Manchester as a leader in the fusion of support services for the armed forces across our community.

In line with the Our Manchester Strategy we are also keen to adopt a strength based approach which will emphasise and maximise the contribution of the armed forces to the economy and skill base of the region, by promoting Manchester as “armed forces friendly”, supporting the recruitment of regular and reserve forces and (working with GM Colleagues) to present Greater Manchester as a place of opportunity for transitioning service personnel to bring their considerable skills and training.

- **Shared Leadership** - It is planned that the current Steering Group will transition to a less formal approach to one that is better characterised by workshops and partnership; primarily focussed upon supporting the network of armed forces support agencies connect, share ideas and develop and coordinate their work, with the council adopting a convening and enabling role.

Initial topics will include how we develop the grassroots activity referenced at para. 4.4 and how the Broughton House development can support Manchester’s armed forces community referenced at Para.4.5 and how we can support and recognise the contribution of Manchester’s Cadet Groups.

- **Building on the Manchester Neighbourhood (Placed –based) Approach** - a number of smaller neighbouring authorities, have moved to support veterans via the concept of a central “Armed Forces Hub”, however the model is difficult to translate to a large diverse city such as Manchester and such “Hubs” frequently present issues of sustainability.

It is therefore recommended that we commit to working through our developing neighbourhood / place-based approach and by ensuring that all Contact Centres, Service Points, GP Practices, Neighbourhood Offices, etc. are armed forces aware, armed forces friendly and well placed to support or signpost the armed forces community to appropriate services or work jointly with our VCS partners.

To secure this objective with the support of the RBL and WWTW partners we intend to roll-out an armed forces awareness training programme, built around the “Veterans Gateway’s 7 Pillars” and develop a network of armed forces champions in all public –facing teams. Champions will be linked by a refreshed armed forces toolkit with regular email updates in relation to veteran support services and opportunities.

We also want our VCS Partners to develop a simple triage service tentatively to be known as “Military Checkpoint” which will support GPs, social prescribing, nursing and social care professionals to connect patients/service-users into the substantial range of specialist veteran support systems and goodwill. This will require some initial investment, we will work with our VCS partners to prepare a suitable bid for developmental funding from the Our Manchester Investment Fund.

- **Developing services within a Greater Manchester Framework** – It is recommended that we continue to move forward in partnership with the wider group of Greater Manchester authorities. Manchester has been active within the former AGMA Covenant Lead Officers Group which has recently welcomed leadership provided by the GMCA and the Office of the Greater Manchester Mayor. Whilst the covenant is important because it is a niche area within which sustainable solutions will be underpinned via a Greater Manchester approach.

This approach is already producing benefits in relation to promotion of the Covenant, training and policy development, in areas such as housing, homelessness and offending. Whilst the re-development of the Broughton House Veterans Village with financial support from GMCA will create significant opportunities for veterans in the north of the City who wish to maintain active, independent living.

- **Building better services on improved data and armed forces awareness** – The key to improved services rests upon “asking the question”, identifying members of the armed forces community and connecting them at the earliest opportunities to the substantial resources and goodwill that exists remains the most pressing challenge and we must make a determined push to ensure that all CRM and assessment scripts across MCC and our core partners. This will not be achieved purely by directive, within this determined push we must ensure that all customer-facing staff undertake the GM Armed E-Learning package to assist them to understand why the armed forces question must be asked, the opportunities support opportunities that are available and how they can be accessed. This will require the engagement of all directorates/departments across the council and its partners.

10.0 Resourcing Covenant Pledges and Action Plan

10.1 The actions points from this report will be gathered within the attached action plan which currently remains a work in progress. It will be refined with the support of the Steering Group and wider consultation with the armed forces community.

10.2 However some of these actions have been outstanding over several years and a determined push is therefore required to consolidate key actions in respect of staff training, data collection, development of the armed forces JSNA, website development and the re-signing and promotion of the Covenant in general.

10.3 Operational leadership is currently held by a Social Care Commissioner with wider responsibilities who is currently deployed to the MLCO. It is therefore recommended that some short term (circa 18 months) dedicated resources are identified to work with the steering group and move matters on at pace to ensure MCC delivers its commitments, a successful VE 75 event and Defence Employer Recognition Scheme's gold award in 2020.

10.4 It is suggested that we might take this opportunity to engage a suitable person with armed forces experience to drive the required work by utilising the

apprenticeship route and/or within an on-going business case which will be presented to the Our Manchester Investment fund within the next month.

10.5 Further comments are invited on this recommendation.

11.0 Recommendations:

Executive is asked to note and comment on this report and to endorse the following the recommendations

1. That the Executive agrees to Manchester hosting and/or contribute to North West VE 75 commemorative event on the May Bank Holiday 2020 which has been rearranged to the Friday 8th May 2020, as part of a programme of national commemorations.
2. That the Executive supports the following in support of the attached outline covenant action plan (appendix 1):
 - MCC to refresh and re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant, secure MHCC, MLCO Board support and in partnership with GMMHFT, the Royal British and Walking With the Wounded secure a joint signing with aligned pledges and action plan;
 - Individual Executive Members to promote contribution and delivery of Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant within their respective Portfolios and Civic duties;
 - to promote all customer-facing staff to complete Armed Forces Covenant Awareness E-Learning training reinforced by a presentation to all teams by the Royal British Legion and Walking With The Wounded in respect of the needs of the armed forces community and the resources that may be mobilised in their support;
 - a comprehensive review of the Armed Forces Covenant Website and the Armed Forces Self-Help Toolkit to complement the Veterans Gateway at local level.