

<b>Meeting: Strategic Commissioning Board</b>			
<b>Meeting Date</b>	07 March 2022	<b>Action</b>	Consider
<b>Item No</b>		<b>Confidential / Freedom of Information Status</b>	No
<b>Title</b>	Armed Forces Covenant update		
<b>Presented By</b>	Cllr. Richard Gold – Cabinet Member for Communities		
<b>Author</b>	Sam McVaigh – Director of People and Inclusion		
<b>Clinical Lead</b>	Dr. Cathy Fines – CCG Chair		
<b>Council Lead</b>	Cllr. Richard Gold – Cabinet Member for Communities		

<b>Executive Summary</b>
<p>In September 2021 the Strategic Commissioning Board agreed refreshed military covenants for both the Council and CCG. In doing so, the Board noted the importance of clear and tangible action to demonstrate Bury’s commitment to our military community (including veterans, current service personnel and reservists) and asked for regular updates on progress.</p> <p>The refreshed commitments were signed in November by representatives of the Council, CCG and Ministry of Defence (MoD).</p> <p>Since the refreshed Covenant was agreed, significant progress has been made in delivering on the Council and CCG’s commitment, including the roll-out of free leisure passes for military veterans, the development of a dedicated information hub on veterans support for GPs and support to Bury’s voluntary sector veterans groups.</p> <p>There is more work to do here and a clear action plan in place to drive further progress.</p> <p>In recognition of the work to date and commitment to this agenda, the Council is in the process of submitting an application for recognition at the Silver level of the MoD’s Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, and is committed to working towards the submission of a further application for Gold level accreditation in 2023.</p> <p>In tandem with this, as part of work to establish the equality, diversity and inclusion function and priorities of the new Integrated Care System (ICS), Bury will be emphasising the importance of the military community and seeking to ensure the commitments made by the CCG are embedded within the new ICS structures and remain a local area of focus through the Locality Board and its sub-committees.</p> <p>The above developments should be seen in the context of the new Armed Forces Act, which gained royal ascent in December 2021, enshrining the Armed Forces Covenant into law and requiring all public bodies to show due regard to the needs of the armed forces community in the provision of education, healthcare and housing and homelessness services.</p>

Recommendations
The Strategic Commissioning Board is asked to note the progress made to date on the Council and CCG's shared commitment to the military community, key priorities for the coming months and the submission of an application for recognition at the Silver level of the MoD's Defense Employer Recognition Scheme by the Council.

Links to Strategic Objectives/Corporate Plan	Yes
Does this report seek to address any of the risks included on the Governing Body / Council Assurance Framework? If yes, state which risk below:	No
This work supports the Council and CCGs joint Inclusion Strategy, the inclusion objective's of Let's Do It, It also supports both organisations' compliance with the new Armed Forces Act.	

Implications						
Are there any quality, safeguarding or patient experience implications?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has any engagement (clinical, stakeholder or public/patient) been undertaken in relation to this report?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have any departments/organisations who will be affected been consulted ?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there any conflicts of interest arising from the proposal or decision being requested?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there any financial implications?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there any legal implications?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there any health and safety issues?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
How do proposals align with Health & Wellbeing Strategy?	Tailored support and flexibilities to employees who are veterans or reservists will support their wellbeing					
How do proposals align with Locality Plan?	Promotes inclusive health and social care outcomes.					
How do proposals align with the Commissioning Strategy?	See full report for details.					
Are there any Public, Patient and Service User Implications?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>

Implications						
How do the proposals help to reduce health inequalities?	Through the delivery of actions to improve access to and tailor services to meet the needs of the military community.					
Is there any scrutiny interest?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are the Information Governance/ Access to Information implications?	None					
Is an Equality, Privacy or Quality Impact Assessment required?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, has an Equality, Privacy or Quality Impact Assessment been completed?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, please give details below:						
If no, please detail below the reason for not completing an Equality, Privacy or Quality Impact Assessment:						
EIA undertaken on the full Covenant refresh.						
Are there any associated risks including Conflicts of Interest?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the risks on the CCG /Council/ Strategic Commissioning Board's Risk Register?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional details	.					

Governance and Reporting		
Meeting	Date	Outcome
None		

## 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives. The Covenant does not intend to replace current work by public service providers, charities and individuals, but rather formalise a commitment and build on existing sources of support. Further information and online support relating to the Covenant can be access here: <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>
- 1.2 In September 2021 the Strategic Commissioning Board agreed refreshed military covenants for both the Council and CCG. In doing so, the Board noted the importance of clear and tangible action to demonstrate Bury's commitment to our military community (including veterans, current service personnel and reservists) and asked for regular updates on progress. The refreshed commitments were signed in November by representatives of the Council, CCG and Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- 1.3 In December 2021 the new Armed Forces Act received royal ascent, this enshrined the Armed Forces Covenant into law, with all public bodies now required to show due regard to the needs of the armed forces community in the provision of education, healthcare and housing and homelessness services.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on progress made to date on the Council and CCG's shared commitment to the military community and sets out key priorities for the coming months. It highlights the submission of an application for recognition at the Silver level of the MoD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme by the Council and a commitment to seek accreditation at the highest level of the scheme (Gold) in 2023.

## 2. Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan Update

- 2.1 Since approval of the Council and CCG's new Covenant commitment in September, lead officers from across the organisations have met regularly to drive progress, connect activity and identify further opportunities to support Bury's military community. This internal group is working closely with a wider community Covenant Group, which includes representatives from the armed forces and veterans community and will next meet on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
- 2.2 The Council and CCG's Covenant Action Plan includes activity across seven interconnected themes. The actions within the plan reflect both work already being undertaken to ensure our armed forces community receive the services and support they rightly deserve and specific and new activities identified through the development of our new Covenant commitment. Key highlights of progress to-date within each theme are set out below.
- 2.3 **Employment and Skills**  
Targeted support is being provided to the veterans community through a number of the core employment and skills programmes delivered by the Council. The Working Well Work and Health programme has supported 38 veterans since 2017 and currently has 10 participants who have identified as veterans. Beyond this, the Council is actively working to promote both employment opportunities to the Veterans

Community and the range of skills support available. This includes a particular focus at an upcoming jobs fair and a scheduled briefing session to the Bury Business Leadership Group. As an employer, the Council's Supported Employment offer has been updated to give priority to veterans for work experience placements.

#### 2.4 **Publicity**

The Council has refreshed its online portal for the military community as a one-stop-shop for access to relevant support and services.

<https://www.bury.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=16267>

#### 2.5 **Health and Wellbeing**

This theme has, perhaps seen the most significant progress since September. Including:

- **Free leisure passes** – As of the 1<sup>st</sup> December, Bury Council delivered on its commitment to offer free leisure passes to all armed forces personnel, veterans and reservists. To date 39 mainly veterans have signed up and are enjoying the benefits that undertaking physical activity brings to general fitness and mental wellbeing. Bury is currently the only local authority across Greater Manchester to offer this level of free leisure passes, and this is to be showcased in an update of the GM directory of services to the Armed forces and Veterans community. One Veteran has said:

*'As a member of the Borough of Bury Veterans Association, I've recently joined the leisure centre and I can honestly say it has helped me with both my physical and mental health. I have used the pool and the gym on many occasions now. Thanks to Bury Council I'm feeling better with each visit. Even my wife has now joined up (a paid membership) so we now can exercise together'*

A Member of Bury Veterans Hub CIC said: *'Having the free gym pass allows me to release a lot of stress when ever I want or need to. This offer is an amazing one, and it is an example to all Council's across the country'*

A further case study from a member of Bury's veterans' community is appended below.

- **Work with primary care** – A new dedicated sharepoint information hub to provide details of services, support and information related to veterans has been rolled out to GP practices by the CCG and all practices were invited to a dedicated briefing session in February to promote the hub and ambition for all surgeries in the Borough to be formally classified as Veteran Friendly. Since this session, a second surgery in the Borough has received this recognition.
- **Health needs assessment** – Work is progressing on the development of a formal Health Needs Assessment for the veteran community, led by Public Health. This will include a specific focus on mental health and wellbeing in response to feedback from the community.

#### 2.6 **Housing**

Bury Council already recognises armed forces personnel through its housing and

homelessness activity. Work has been undertaken to raise awareness and understanding of the Council's covenant with relevant staff (see below) and housing associations across the borough.

## 2.7 **Recognise and Remember**

Many events over the last two years have sadly had to be cancelled or celebrated virtually, so with restrictions lifted this year, it provides an opportunity to engage and attend events face to face. As always, support and attendance will be given to Remembrance, Gallipoli and Armed Forces Day. This year also marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Falklands conflict and Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is intended to mark these two occasions and plans are currently being discussed in partnership with armed forces personnel and veterans.

Discussions are also taking place around two significant further developments in this area in response to community feedback. These include:

- Work to install handrails around the Radcliffe cenotaph. – It is hoped that rails will be in place to support those laying wreaths by Remembrance Sunday in 2022.
- The development of a strengthened memorial to George Stanley Peachment Victoria Cross (VC). – George from Bury was awarded the VC, the highest and most prestigious award that can be awarded. George, at only 18 years and 4 months was the youngest army recipient of the VC in World War 1. Officers are working with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Ward Members, the local community and schools to create a new exhibition and mural recognising Private Peachment, as well as looking at options around the renaming of a local park in his memory.

## 2.8 **Integration with the Local Community**

Bury's Community Hubs are working to actively strengthen links with the armed forces community, support links between the community and other key partners and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations across the Borough and link the military community into available community support (and statutory provision where required). As part of this work, recent activity has supported strengthened connections between Bury and Salford veterans groups. 'Pitch Funding' has been applied for by two of Bury's Veterans associations, with events scheduled to take place imminently to consider the applications. Both applications seek to support the associations to do more to bring veterans together and support wellbeing. Support has also been provided to a Veterans association to find new premises to enable them to continue to provide their breakfast club and support work. Work with Castle Armories personnel have resulted in the breakfast club now being hosted there.

## 2.9 **Internal**

The Council and CCG's employment policies and supported employment work already identify and prioritise the veterans community, including through time-off for reservists. The organisations formally recognise the military community as a Protected Characteristic through their joint Inclusion Strategy and Equality Analysis approach. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Covenant E-Learning Package has recently been made available on the Council's E-Learning portal, which is also accessible to CCG staff. The package has been promoted

internally with a particular emphasis on completion by staff in the Community Hubs, Homelessness, Libraries and Leisure services.

### **3. Priorities for the coming months**

3.1 Key priorities for the coming months above and beyond delivery of the ongoing work highlighted above include:

- Bury Council was awarded the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme bronze award in 2020. Given the strengthening of our commitment and our re-signing of the Covenant, the Council has been accepted to apply for the silver award. The Council has submitted its draft application which will be formally assessed on 16<sup>th</sup> May. Subject to success at this level and the continued positive progress, the intention will be to submit an application for Gold recognition in 2023.
- As part of work to establish the equality diversity and inclusion function and priorities of the new Greater Manchester ICS, Bury will emphasise the importance of the military community and seek to ensure the commitments made by the CCG are embedded within the new ICS structures. This work will remain a local area of focus through the Locality Board and its sub-committees.
- Work to complete the planned Health Needs Assessment over the coming months will support the identification of key areas of focus from a wellbeing perspective. Based on feedback from the veterans community, mental health will be one specific area where work will be undertaken to consider how the Bury offer can be further improved.
- As noted above, Bury's Community Hubs are, and will continue to, play a crucial role in our integrated support to the military community. Continued and increased focus will be important here.
- Whilst Bury is in a strong position, it is important that we fully understand the new Armed Forces Act, which enshrines the Armed Forces Covenant in law for the first time. Work is being progressed at a Greater Manchester level to understand the implications.

### **4 Recommendations**

4.1 The Strategic Commissioning Board is asked to note the progress made to date on the Council and CCG's shared commitment to the military community, key priorities for the coming months and the submission of an application for recognition at the Silver level of the MoD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

**Sam McVaigh**

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February 2022

## Appendix: Case Study

My name is Owen Dykes, I joined the Royal Regt of Artillery on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1990 and discharged on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014 after serving 24 years. In my time in the army, I did a lot of amazing things and travelled to a lot of wonderful places, I also did operational tours in places such as Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan to name a few, during these operational tours I saw the darkest side of humanity and what we can do to each in the name of different cultures and religions, I also lost sixteen brothers in arms from my military family.

When I discharge in 2014 I didn't have a clue about civilian life as the only life I had known since leaving school was military life, I had the support of my wife but nothing had prepared me for the toughest battle of my life. With in a year of discharge I found myself in a dark place, I was on the edge of the abyss and couldn't see a way out, the only way I found to stop the pain was suicide. The flashback started and memories came to haunt me, it got to a point I was scared to go to sleep because of the nightmares, the flashbacks and nightmares felt real, as if I was back in the moment but there was nothing I could do about it. I was scared to go into crowded places, my threat assessment went off the scales as I felt there was an ambush on every corner, a sniper in every window, IED at every lamppost, I would jump at loud bangs. By the time I went to see my GP I was in the darkest place possible and had made a suicide attempt twice to end the pain, I remember the GP asking if I had tried to take my own life and I replied "yes" before collapsing in tears and begging for help before it was to late.

My fightback was support by my Veterans family as well as counselling but what was important was physical exercise, this equally helped as talking.

I rekindled my love for running and found no matter what the day or night had brought as soon as I put my headphones on and step on the treadmill or hit the road and start to run then I am in my own world were only one thing matters, if I have had a nightmare or flashback then I can run this out of my system and keep the demons at bay. The gym is now built into my routine where I can go for a haven of peace, once I have finished my exercise routine then I feel in a different positive place often on a high.

I have learnt to live with my mental health, I will have bad days and good days as every morning I get up to fight a battle against my mental health and been a recovering alcoholic,



my battle against going to the gym and gets me into For me the gym but a necessity, I need to shine a place and keep edge of the



the bottle, by helps my battle a better place. is not a luxury a necessity that light in the dark me from the abyss.

