

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 10 September 2021

Subject: Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant Delivery

Report of: Andy Burnham – Mayor of GM Portfolio Lead for the Armed Forces Covenant and Steven Pleasant Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for the Armed Forces Covenant

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

In June 2017, GMCA Members re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant and made a strong commitment to transforming the offer for the Armed Forces Community in Greater Manchester. This report presents a third update on the work that has subsequently taken place.

The report also presents information about future initiatives and campaigns that have been developed using the expertise of the GM Armed Forces Leads across the localities and partners.

Furthermore, the report proposes that GMCA seeks to maintain delivery and its national position in the lead of developing a coherent regional approach to provide a Gold Standard Offer to the Armed Forces Community. Forthcoming legislation (Armed Forces Bill 2021) will have an impact on public sector delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and this report seeks to prepare the city region to move to the next level of support for those that are serving, have served and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Note the update provided on progress made to deliver against the Armed Forces Covenant coherently across GM.
2. Note the forthcoming developments with regards to forthcoming legislation which will provide the impetus to further enhance delivery of Greater Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant.
3. Approve the proposal to resign Greater Manchester's Armed Forces Covenant in accordance with the GM Mayor's Manifesto pledge.

BOLTON
BURY

MANCHESTER
OLDHAM

ROCHDALE
SALFORD

STOCKPORT
TAMESIDE

TRAFFORD
WIGAN

CONTACT OFFICERS:

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Impacts Questionnaire		
Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion	G	
Health	G	
Resilience and Adaptation		
Housing	G	
Economy		
Mobility and Connectivity		
Carbon, Nature and Environment		
Consumption and Production		
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		
Further Assessment(s):	Equalities Impact Assessment	
 Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.	 Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.	 Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.
		 Negative impacts overall.

Risk Management:

N/A

Legal Considerations:

N/A

Financial Consequences – Revenue:

N/A

Financial Consequences – Capital:

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 1

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Report to GMCA – Armed Forces Covenant 25th October 2019 -
<https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/documents/s2893/12%20Armed%20Forces%20Update.pdf>

TRACKING/PROCESS		
Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution		No
EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN		
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?		No
GM Transport Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
N/A	N/A	

1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 In Greater Manchester, the Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment by local authorities and their partners from across all sectors to support members of the Armed Forces community in their area. The aim is to embed and sustain activity, ensuring that members of the Armed Forces community receive the support they need in their local communities in recognition of their dedication and sacrifice. Additionally, there have and continue to be significant efforts made to nurture public understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces community and encourage activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life.

1.2 For the Combined Authority, the Covenant is the vehicle to bring knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces Community. It is also an opportunity to build upon existing good work on other initiatives. In that way, a common approach to meeting the needs of this identifiable community within Greater Manchester is being adopted, ensuring that the three underpinning principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are upheld:

- Those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.
- The Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of services.
- Military service and the sacrifice inherent in it should be recognised.

1.3 Across Greater Manchester, each local authority has a lead officer. In October 2019, GMCA took the innovative step to have a permanent programme manager supporting and coordinating delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant across the city region. The GMCA and local authority leads form the strategic group to deliver the GM Armed Forces Programme. Additionally, GMCA has instigated a quarterly Armed Forces partnership Forum that brings together the public and third sectors operating in support of the community in GM.

2. KEY UPDATES

2.1 **GMCA.** The importance of the Armed Forces Covenant was illuminated by the pledge made in the Mayor of GM's manifesto pledge:

‘We will continue to improve support for people who have served in our armed forces. We are proud that Greater Manchester is the country's strongest recruiting ground for our Armed Forces and we accept the responsibility that comes with that to provide the best possible support to people who have served our country. We remain strongly committed to the Armed Forces Covenant and will support more of our councils to achieve the Gold Standard under it. We believe the Wigan Veterans Hub represents outstanding practice and will support other boroughs to replicate it.

2.2 **Health.** Significant progress has been made in the area of Health. The recent introduction of the High Intensity Service across the North West has seen a service that has augmented the existing nationally commissioned services. GM continues to benefit from the service excellence delivered by Pennine Care in the form of the Military Veterans Service which continues to be a nationally recognised initiative, being locally commissioned. In addition to 5/16 GM Trusts gaining Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance accreditation, the GM Armed Forces Covenant programme is now a central part of the knowledge base for the social prescriber cohort in GM. Future initiatives will build on this and further increase knowledge about the niche needs of the Armed Forces community in primary care networks across the City Region.

2.3 **Bolton.** Bolton has a new team from the Chief Lead, Helen Gorman (Bolton Council Borough Solicitor), Armed Forces Champion and former Army Veteran himself Cllr Andy Morgan and a key support worker in the Mayoral office. As a local authority, Bolton is finding its feet and reinvigorating the work of previous staff who have since left the authority. Key to the improvement of Bolton's Armed Forces Covenant is a forthcoming meeting with Wigan Armed Forces HQ who are well established to provide ideas and to support rapid improvement, getting the LA to where they want Bolton to be as they strive for the MOD ERS Silver award.

2.4 Bury. Bury's Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group has made significant progress in reviewing our Armed Forces Covenant, which will now be a single covenant across the Council and NHS Bury Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), to complement the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant. A recommendation to re-sign Bury's updated covenant will be presented to the joint Strategic Commissioning Board in August. Councillor Richard Gold has been appointed as the Cabinet Member for Communities, with responsibility for Armed Forces, to oversee implementation of the covenant action plan. Officer champions across thematic areas such as housing, health and wellbeing and employment and skills have been appointed to drive delivery of the covenant action plan under the direction of the Council's Director of People and Inclusion. Bury's Community Hubs will act as the front-door for veterans, co-ordinating community engagement, working with public services or Bury Voluntary, Community and Faith Alliance (VCFA) partners. Furthermore, Bury Council and Bury CCG have identified armed forces personnel including veterans as a community of identity for which equality analysis should be undertaken as part of policy development and review and recognised this group within their joint Inclusion Strategy.

2.5 Manchester. The Armed Forces Covenant in Manchester is headed up by Cllr. Tommy Judge as Lead Member for the Armed Forces and Paul Marshall Strategic Director of Children's Services as Senior Armed Forces Champion. Recruitment is taking place in respect of an AF Covenant Lead who will oversee compliance in respect of the anticipated Armed Forces Act. During Covid-19 restrictions Manchester has completed the roll-out of Armed Forces Covenant E-Learning, completed work on HR procedures to extend the guaranteed interview scheme to transitioning service personnel, extended support to serving reservists within the council and granted the Freedom of the City of Manchester to 209 Battery. which we hope to formally celebrate with a military march through the City and a formal award when social distancing restrictions permit. Our agenda for the forthcoming year is to re-sign the Covenant along with our new health service partners and focus on primary and secondary healthcare for ex-service personnel alongside our broader efforts to make Manchester a welcome home for transitioning AF personnel wishing to bring their skills to the region.

2.6 Oldham. Oldham's Armed Forces Partnership Group has been meeting every 4 weeks since April 2020 to provide support for the Armed Forces community during the pandemic. This has meant a true partnership approach to case work including successfully dealing with a number of housing and welfare cases. Cllr Cath Ball was Oldham's Champion until May 2021 and has been a great supporter and advocate for the work, driving forward all aspects of the covenant and provided grass roots community work. A replacement for Cllr Ball will be announced soon. Oldham will be looking to apply for Gold Employers Recognition Scheme accreditation in the next round and will be carrying out a piece of work to identify our business and employer champions and encourage others to support the work of the covenant.

2.7 Rochdale. On Saturday 15th May, the Centenary of the Royal British Legion was commemorated by wreath laying ceremonies at our main memorials across the Borough. Our Veterans Breakfast Club re-started on Thursday 27th May; the club has a new home at Touchstones Art Gallery and Museum whilst Rochdale Town Hall is closed for refurbishment. On Sat 5th June Rochdale AFC Military Veterans took on Oldham Athletic veterans in a charity football match with all proceeds going to Springhill Hospice.

2.8 **Salford.** Since the previous update to GMCA, Salford City Council has received Bronze and Silver MOD Recognition awards and have applied for Gold this year. SCC has also recruited a full time dedicated officer to support veterans, ex-armed forces personnel, separated spouses, and widows or widowers who are struggling with their tenancies, homeless or threatened with homelessness. The service is tailored support on a range of housing issues, debt and welfare issues. This officer is also supporting wider GMCA projects to mitigate the risk of homelessness and housing issues across the City Region. Furthermore, Walking with the Wounded clients are able to access free gym membership through Salford Community Leisure and this offer is being revisited with a view to Foundation 92 working alongside Leisure providers to enhance the Health and Wellbeing offer across the locality.

2.9 **Stockport.** Stockport MBC has started the process of refreshing the priorities in their Armed Forces Covenant. The most recent Covenant was published in 2018 and includes a list of the priorities we aimed to focus on between 2018-2021. In the three years since they published their Covenant they have seen huge changes which have impacted on all sectors of society, including the armed forces community. They aim to engage as widely as possible to ensure that our new Covenant is shaped by an understanding of what it is like to be a member of the armed forces community in Stockport in 2021 and to ensure that the priorities in their Covenant are co-produced by the local armed forces community and the people and organisations that work with serving personnel, veterans and their families. They have produced two surveys and held a workshop with members of the Stockport Covenant Partnership Group. Feedback from the workshop and surveys is now being collated and will directly inform the first draft of priorities. Stockport MBC aims to finalise the Covenant for approval through the relevant governance procedures during the Autumn. Stockport MBC has also submitted a nomination for the silver award of the Employer Recognition Scheme – the outcome of this submission is expected in July.

2.10 **Tameside.** Tameside MBC were awarded the ERS Gold award in 2019 and will continue to work to maintain this standard; since then the Council has worked to support the Tameside and Glossop CCG and the NHS Foundation Trust in obtaining their ERS Silver awards, have supported 100% of GP surgeries to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and are working towards assisting all GP surgeries to obtain the ERS Bronze Award. Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care Foundation Trust have gained Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance accreditation and Tameside MBC have worked alongside Tameside Armed Services Community (TASC) and Tameside General Hospital to launch Tameside's version of the Veterans Passport throughout the hospital. Vanessa Rothwell is the Armed Forces Lead for Tameside, and is Partnerships Manager in Community Safety and Homelessness and has ensured there are robust processes in place for identifying and supporting any Veterans who are in need of support with housing, welfare and debt issues. Tameside MBC have also partnered with The Veterans Food Co, and during the first lockdown were able to produce and distribute 6,000 meals to the most vulnerable residents of the borough, including many Veterans and their families. The work on the Veterans Allotment project in Denton was delayed due to the pandemic, but works are almost completed and TASC have appointed a Development Officer to manage the project; we are hoping to hold an event to mark the opening as soon as restrictions allow.

2.11 **Trafford.** Having recognised the need for increasing support to the local and regional Armed Forces Community, Trafford Council have employed a full time Armed

Forces Lead Officer. A program of work including increasing awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Armed Forces Bill 2021 is underway; the project will include a training package for staff; distribution of literature and awareness sessions for all GP surgeries and hospitals across the borough. The long established Trafford Armed Forces Partnership continues to thrive and attract new members. Projects are planned with 207 Field Hospital, Shark Forces, Ground Work, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust and Trafford Social Prescribers. A series of Armed Forces events are due to take place throughout 2021/22. Trafford will continue to work to maintain its ERS Gold Standard award.

2.12 **Wigan.** Wigan Armed Forces HQ have changed their name to Armed Forces Community HQ CIC and are expanding their reach due to being successful in an award for continuation funding of the Tackling Serious Stress Programme. They are now mentoring 10 organisations across the country who have been awarded the Tackling Social Isolation Awards as a trusted partner of the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund. The HQ is also in the final stages of purchasing their first property and are working with Wigan Council who have commissioned a consultant to take a few local organisations through the Registered Local Landlord process. Additionally, the new social enterprise, the Veterans Maintenance Service is developing well and is fully financially viable. Finally, the HQ has been awarded 3 grants from the Moving Forces Continuation Fund to keep 3 of activity-based interventions for health and well-being going.

2.13 **GMP.** Work to embed a GM Out of Court Disposal solution for Veterans has completed. Additionally, with the introduction of an automated referral system for Veterans encountering the Criminal Justice System, GMP has transformed its referral rate to Armed Forces support providers from being one of the lowest in the country to the highest. Furthermore, GMP have launched a toolkit that allows frontline officers to refer direct to support providers and the Armed Forces community has a niche referral pathway embedded within it. Additionally, GMP has introduced a further scheme within custody targeted at youths and young adults where they are offered the opportunity to consider joining the military through the Manchester recruitment team or to enrol at the Motivational Preparation College for Training as a supported offer for young people to try and turn their lives around. The Force has also begun targeting presentations for specialist roles at its internal veteran community to harness their military skills for example the Counter Terrorism Specialist Firearms Officer role.

2.14 **GMFRS.** GMFRS are reinvigorating their Armed Forces Covenant and are determined to do more to up their offer as part of the public sector delivery partnership. Recent innovations are applying for the MOD ERS Silver award and ensuring that service leavers are aware of recruitment campaigns so that the undoubted transferable skills that those leaving the military can bring back to public service in GM.

2.15 **MOD Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS).** GM organisations recently received 7 awards at Gold Level in the MOD ERS. Set up in 2014 to recognise excellence in Armed Forces Covenant delivery, in this latest round, GMCA, Manchester City Council and Salford City Council received Gold. Additionally, Wigan, Wrightington and Leigh NHS Trust, along with Stockport NHS Trust also received a Gold award.

2.16 **Broughton House.** Greater Manchester leaders recently approved a £2m investment which will support the expansion of the UK's first Veteran Care Village.

Broughton House, in Salford, was first established in 1916 as a treatment centre for soldiers returning from World War One. Since then, it has evolved into a charity and care home for veterans. The care home is currently undergoing a £13m transformation to become the UK's first Veterans Village, with the new facility dedicated to Greater Manchester veterans of all ages and from all conflicts. GMCA previously approved investment of £3m to help fund the first phase of its development; this latest funding proposal will help support the construction of a further 64 beds and six apartments on the site. CEO Broughton House is working with the GMCA AF Programme Lead to embed the charity as a cornerstone of Armed Forces Covenant delivery in GM, alongside several key partners across public, third and private sectors.

3. FORTHCOMING WORK WITHIN THE PROGRAMME

3.1 Progress in Legislation. The Armed Forces Bill (2021) brings into effect a key change in stance from Central Government. It states that a public authority must, when exercising its public functions, have due regard to the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces, and the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service personnel from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces. Due regard means that in making decisions, as well as in operational activity, a body subject to the duty must consciously consider the obligations previously stated. The duty to have due regard only applies to the exercise of functions in healthcare, education and housing, as these are perceived to be the key areas that disadvantage is most prevalent. The Bill will amend the Armed Forces Act of 2011 and is likely to come into law early next year. GMCA is well advanced in planning for the new duty and will shortly commence a project to support Local Authorities to enhance their support for the Armed Forces Community and exercise the imminent duty of due regard.

3.2 Health. NHSE has appointed a NW lead for Armed Forces Covenant delivery who is working closely alongside the GMCA Armed Forces Programme lead. Charged with increasing the number of NHS Trusts achieving Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) accreditation¹, the NHS coordinator is also working close with GMCA to enhance visibility and awareness of Veterans' issues across Primary Care and Social Prescribing networks. Lessons identified in Tameside and Glossop will be allied to the RCGP Veterans Friendly practice programme at the opportune time in order to better support Veterans and their families in all areas of Health delivery.

3.3 Housing and Homelessness. GMCA, in concert with GMHP and key partners are in the early stages of investigating the feasibility of a community led housing project. Whilst this project is in its infancy, numerous community groups across GM are interested in participation and it is hoped that this initiative may alleviate some of the existing burden on local authorities when dealing with difficult to reach and house members of the community.

3.4 GM Blue Light Forum. GMCA facilitated a first meeting of the GM Blue Light Forum in May 2021 which brought together tactical and strategic leads from GMP, GMFRS and NWAS. Moving forwards, this is the forum through which initiatives will be shared and enhanced ways of working devised in order to ensure that all community facing preventative activity is coordinated.

¹ Currently, five NHS Trusts in GM have VCHA accreditation.

3.5 Moving Forces. Moving Forces is a GM designed, developed and delivered Armed Forces specific health and wellbeing programme that is about to close.

- **Background.** Since launching in 2018 as a 3-year pilot (funded by Sport England and the Endeavour Fund and delivered by GreaterSport), Moving Forces has helped over 500 military veterans and family members to get and stay physically active whilst improving mental wellbeing and reducing social isolation. Their ethos from the start was to co-develop all the sessions with the veteran community, ensuring that the programme was designed with veterans for veterans. They have provided free, regular, socially focused physical activity sessions at times and locations that suit their members, including football, archery, climbing, water sports, yoga, Tai Chi and much more. The programme has been a finalist for 3 national awards in the last 2 years, recognising their positive results around mental wellbeing and community impact.
- **Future.** The Moving Forces programme is due to complete its 3-year pilot phase in December 2021. They are now working with key partners across the Northwest (including GMCA, Walking With the Wounded, Royal British Legion, HQNW, Combat Stress, Wigan Armed Forces HQ, GM Active and many more) to create a legacy for the programme that will continue to support Veterans for years to come. This will include a thorough, co-developed 'Moving Forces Deliverer toolkit', which will provide detailed guidance for anyone delivering or planning to deliver a programme of physical activity sessions for military veterans.

3.6 Social Isolation Project. GMCA will deliver a social isolation project in the second half of FY 21/22 in order to capitalise on the successes of community support during the Covid 19 pandemic. Inspired by experiences in Rochdale and other local authority areas, the project seeks to bring the Armed Forces community closer to localities by providing volunteering, befriending and developmental activities. Planning is underway and this project will be fully operational by the end of the year.

3.7 Awareness. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the work to publicise the Armed Forces Covenant through animated films was paused. This workstream has recently reopened and the next 3 animated films will shortly be released and work is underway creating the final product, centred on health.

3.8 Personal Development. GMCA has recently bid to the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund for continuation funding in order to renew the programme of personal development across GM. Due to the success of the elearning, first created in 2018, the time has come to refresh and also provide a shortened version to aid the culture change in organisations required to deliver the enhanced duty to our Veterans and their families. A working group will be established in September 2021 to work in partnership with Warwickshire County Council to develop a reinvigorated elearning package that also creates specific development products that centre on housing, transition and other key aspects of the disadvantage the service personnel and their families can face.

4. GM ARMED FORCES PROGRAMME FUTURE

4.1 **The GM Armed Forces Covenant.** As noted previously, GMCA most recently signed its Armed Forces Covenant in 2017. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, a planned resigning in June 2020 was postponed; with imminent changes in legislation and the significant progress that GMCA has made in its Armed Forces Covenant delivery since then, it is timely for Greater Manchester to re-signal it's support for those that have served and accurately reflect its plans for the future of delivery. The proposed GM Armed Forces Covenant is at Appendix 1 to this report.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Recommendations appear at the front of this report.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

We, the undersigned, commit to honour the Armed Forces Covenant and support the Armed Forces Community. We recognise the value Serving Personnel, both Regular and Reservists, Veterans and military families contribute to our business and our country.

Signed on behalf of:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Signed: _____

Name: Andy Burnham _____

Position: Mayor of Greater Manchester _____

Date: TBC 2021 _____

The Armed Forces Covenant

An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom

Her Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown

And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

Section 1: Principles Of The Armed Forces Covenant

1.1 We, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, will uphold the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, which are:

- *no member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen*
- *in some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved.*

Section 2: Demonstrating our Commitment

2.1 Greater Manchester Combined Authority recognises the value serving personnel, reservists, veterans and military families bring to Greater Manchester. We will seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, by:

- *continuing to work in partnership across the ten local authorities of Greater Manchester and other public and third sector organisations to create a coherent gold standard of provision for the Armed Forces community;*
- *enshrining the Armed Forces Bill 2021 in all appropriate policies and pathways across Greater Manchester, so that the duty of due regard to Service in the military is not only upheld, but a guiding principle in all we do;*
- *providing leadership, best practice and support to the transformation of the minimum guaranteed offer for the Armed Forces Community in Greater Manchester;*
- *continue to improve the Greater Manchester programme for the Armed Forces Community that delivers practical and tangible effect in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant;*
- *Recognise best practice where it is evident and create partnerships to spread excellence in delivery.*
- *deliver a social isolation project that seeks to bring local communities closer to the Armed Forces community in each locality;*

- *scope an Armed Forces Community led housing initiative that seeks to place former service personnel at the heart of designing a place for those that have served to live;*
- *promoting the fact that we are an Armed Forces-friendly organisation;*
- *seeking to support the employment of veterans young and old and working with the Career Transition Partnership and other employment service providers, in order to establish a tailored employment pathway for Service Leavers;*
- *striving to support the employment of Service spouses and partners, both within the organisation and promoting their employment through the wider Armed Forces Covenant action plan;*
- *endeavouring to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment;*
- *seeking to support our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, including by accommodating their training and deployment;*
- *offering support to our local cadet units, either in our local community or in local schools;*
- *supporting the local authorities of Greater Manchester's participation in Armed Forces Day;*

2.2 We will publicise these commitments through our literature and/or on our website, setting out how we will seek to honour them and inviting feedback from the Service community and residents of Greater Manchester on how we are doing.