

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 26th May 2023

Subject: Armed Forces Covenant Delivery in Greater Manchester

Report of: Andy Burnham Portfolio Lead for Armed Forces Covenant Delivery

Purpose of Report

GMCA Members have consistently made strong commitments to transforming the offer for the Armed Forces Community in Greater Manchester. This report presents a brief update on the work that has subsequently taken place. This report also presents information about key future initiatives that have been developed using the expertise of the GM Armed Forces Leads across the localities and partners.

Importantly, the report proposes that GMCA seeks to enhance 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. Recently enacted legislation (Armed Forces Bill 2021) is having an impact on public sector delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and this report seeks to highlight the next steps for the city region to move to the next level of support for those that are serving, have served and their families.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note the updates provided on progress made to deliver against the Armed Forces Covenant coherently across GM.
2. Agree the intent to develop a 5-year Roadmap, including Health outputs.
3. Recognise the determination across Greater Manchester to meet recent legislation but go even further to deliver a Gold Standard Offer for our Armed Forces Community, to be enshrined in a new GM Armed Forces Covenant.
4. Recognise the Armed Forces Community as a key Community of Identity that should be prioritised accordingly.

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Green

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

Nil

Financial Consequences – Revenue

Nil

Financial Consequences – Capital

Nil

Number of attachments to the report: 1

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Background Papers

- Included in report.

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

N/A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

1. 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 which also incorporates the DWP, GMP, GMFRS and Health leads. Additionally, GMCA has instigated a quarterly Armed Forces partnership Forum that brings together the public and VCSE partners 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 **Partnerships.** The last 5 years has seen the development of a working level partnership that is held up as best practice nationally, most recently in the LGA-commissioned report into Armed Forces Covenant efficacy. GMCA is lauded for investing in Covenant delivery by supporting local authorities and other public sector organisations through a focal point in the Public Service Reform directorate. This allows for a coherent approach across GM and an effective network of partners who work together to deliver.

2.3 **Legislation.** The Armed Forces Act 2021 introduced a new requirement for some public bodies, including the NHS and local authorities, to pay due regard to the principles of the Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. During the passage of the Armed Forces Act 2021 the Government resisted calls by opposition parties and military charities to expand this requirement to every area of public policy and to apply it to national government and devolved administrations. Statutory guidance was laid in secondary legislation (the Armed Forces (Covenant) Regulations 2022) and was published on 8 November 2022. The Government will review the operation of the new duty across the UK in its 2023 Covenant annual report.

2.4 **Working Alongside HMG.** In a recent meeting between the GM Mayor and the Cabinet Office Minister for Veterans, Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP, it was agreed that GMCA

would lead on a piece of work to develop a strategy with commensurate action plan that seeks to enshrine existing best practice in GM and elsewhere. The strategy will seek to demonstrate a roadmap that takes all partners on a 5-year journey to move Covenant delivery across all sectors to the next level. Workshops have since taken place to create a Local Standards Framework that drives action plans in the following areas:

- a. Housing and Homelessness.
- b. Health.
- c. Education for Service Children.
- d. Collaboration and Partnership.
- e. Employment, Skills and Finance.
- f. Criminal Justice System Partnership.

2.5 MOD Employer Recognition Scheme. GMCA currently holds 8 MOD Gold Awards and 3 Silver Awards. Two silver award holders are currently in the process of applying for Gold. Additionally, GMP, GMFRS and NWAS also hold Gold awards.

2.6 Organisational Development. In order to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant in GM, 5 pieces of elearning, alongside face-to-face briefing templates and guided discussion frameworks are in production. The first elearning package has recently been launched with more detailed information for customer facing staff and housing staff following shortly.

3. FORTHCOMING WORK WITHIN THE PROGRAMME

3.1 Stakeholder Commitment. In order for the GM Strategy / Roadmap for our Armed Forces Community to be groundbreaking, it should, at the very start have buy in and ownership from all key strategic partners in the City Region. Following the formal creation of the GM ICB, a strategic lead has now been identified and there is a strong desire to mesh the significant emphasis placed on Health in legislation into a coherent, pan-GM strategy. Similarly, notwithstanding the focus on the transport infrastructure in GM, TfGM have identified a lead officer and work is underway to understand the capacity

of TfGM in this FY to engage. Therefore the co-production team for the forthcoming Roadmap will be as follows:

- a. 10 x LAs.
- b. GM ICS.
- c. DWP.
- d. GMP.
- e. GMFRS.
- f. TfGM.
- g. VCSE representation.

3.2 Key Reports and Information. The following reports and information set the framework for the GM Strategy for our Armed Forces Community and will be referred to in both co-design and final iteration of the paper:

- a. HMG Strategy for Our Veterans - [The Strategy for our Veterans \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).
- b. HMG Strategy for our Veterans Action Plan - [Veterans' Strategy Action Plan 2022-2024 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).
- c. Forces in Mind Trust Report – A Decade of Covenant Delivery - [A-Decade-of-the-Covenant-Digital.pdf \(pcdn.co\)](#).
- d. Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance to the Armed Forces Act 2021 - [Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

3.3 Timeline. As discussed, work has already commenced on the Local Standards Framework that will define the 5 year Roadmap has begun. The next phases of work are:

- a. Complete draft action plans – June 2023.
- b. Consultation and Engagement – July 2023.
- c. Finalise Roadmap and Action Plans following engagement – August / September 2023.
- d. Report to GMCA – End October 2023.

- e. Launch Roadmap at Armed Forces Covenant in GM Event – November / December 2023.

4. GM ARMED FORCES PROGRAMME FUTURE

- 4.1 In order to update it's commitment to the Armed Forces Community, it is proposed to demonstrate the City Region's determination to do more. This is enshrined in the draft Armed Forces Covenant document at Appendix 1 which is included for approval to resign later in the year, once the Roadmap has been completed.

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: _____

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 Act 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;*
- *create and adhere to a rolling 5 year roadmap, with inherent action-centred planning to ensure that our Armed Forces Community receives the utmost support when it needs it, from public sector bodies that are aware, responsive and determined to prevent disadvantage;*
- *continue to improve the Greater Manchester programme for the Armed Forces Community that delivers practical and tangible effect in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant;*
- *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.