



# Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2022/23

A review of the work we have undertaken over the past year,  
and our priorities for 2024/25



July 2024



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# Foreword



As lead member for the armed forces, I am pleased to introduce this report. It details the work we have undertaken over 2022/23 with our public service and voluntary sector

partners to meet our obligations under the Armed Forces Covenant and sets out our priorities for 2024/25.

The Covenant exists to ensure support for the members of the armed forces community, and we work hard to make sure its principles reach and benefit those who live and work in Manchester. The Covenant also serves to recognise and remember those who made sacrifices, particularly those who have sacrificed the most. The Covenant ensures that these people face no disadvantage when accessing public services, and that their experience and skills are recognised on return to civilian life or as serving reservists.

Since refreshing our commitment to the Covenant in 2021, it was my pleasure to preside as Lord Mayor and reflect the degree of our commitment by conferring the Freedom of the City on 209 Battery R.A., the Manchester Artillery. While the Covenant is making good progress, there are still some areas yet to benefit from its principles. Global events serve as an unfortunate reminder of the important role played by and sacrifice required from our armed forces in the defence of peace, national security, and freedom.

As the Covenant work matures, and we stay committed to being an armed forces-friendly organisation, we are beginning to see more and more positive changes, for example, since 2022 the number of veterans/reservists we hire has more than doubled, and the number that apply for Manchester City Council roles has increased over 500%.

Through our Armed Forces Covenant annual plan, we will continue to strengthen our relationship with the armed forces, expand our understanding of their specific needs, and reflect this in how we operate both as an organisation and service provider.

I recommend everyone to read this report and encourage feedback from everyone, which will help shape our current and future work with the Armed Forces Covenant.

Thank you for your interest and support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tommy Judge'. The signature is stylized and written over a horizontal line.

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

ARMED FORCES DAY

THE BIG

THANK YOU

[manchester.gov.uk/armedforcesday](http://manchester.gov.uk/armedforcesday)



# Background

The Armed Forces Covenant is, as once described by the Secretary of State for Defence, “the expression of the moral obligation the Government and the nation owe to the armed forces community” (HC Deb 6 December 2012 c73WS). The Covenant was introduced in 2000, and until 2011 remained an informal understanding based on the historical relationship between the people of Britain and its armed forces. The dynamic of this relationship can be seen dating back to 1593, expressed in the form of an Elizabethan I statute that enforced a weekly tax on parishes so disabled veterans ‘should at their return be relieved and rewarded to the end that they may reap the fruit of their good deservings, and others may be encouraged to the like endeavours’.

The nature of this relationship continued, and was reflected again following the First World War in a policy where businesses that employed disabled veterans were given preferential consideration for contracts and could display the royal crest. Following the Second World War, the understanding was embodied by the 1944 Disability Employment Act, which ensured sheltered employment, reserved occupations, and employment quotas for disabled servicemen and servicewomen.

The nation’s commitment to supporting its armed forces, or as it’s known today, the Armed Forces Covenant, remained a voluntary agreement until it was reintroduced in November 2022 as part of the Armed Forces Act 2021. This created a new legal duty for specified public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising certain statutory functions in the fields of healthcare, education and housing.

# Our priorities for 2022/23

## Promotion and raising awareness

A long-standing priority of ours is promotion of the Covenant and raising awareness of the experiences of the armed forces community. This results not only in people simply being aware of this work, but it also inspires others to act, sparks discussions on how organisations can improve, influences attitudes and behaviours, and most important of all, has a direct link to positive change.

## Prepared and proactive services

We have worked to ensure our services are better equipped, better informed, and better linked to support Manchester's armed forces community. The more our services know, the more they can do, and the more they can offer our communities. With that in mind, we have worked to ensure our services have the right information so they can make the right changes.

This has been achieved in a variety of ways, such as sharing the findings and promoting the use of our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), guiding services on signposting and directly introducing them to veteran support organisations, hosting briefing sessions and events where services can hear about the experiences of local veterans, and embedding our Armed Forces Champion Network. We still have lots of work to do, but we are committed to ensuring the Covenant and its principles are absorbed and reflected throughout the entirety of our organisation.

## Improving health outcomes

Our JSNA found that people who had served in the armed forces were more likely to be experiencing both physical and mental health conditions and were also less likely to engage with health providers. In response, we collaborated with health colleagues to promote the Veteran Friendly Accreditation for GPs, raised awareness around barriers to healthcare for veterans, and raised the profile of veteran specific health services offered by the NHS and charity organisations.

## Data

The 2021 Census featured new questions that recorded data about people who currently serve or have previously served in the armed forces. The Census, run by the Office for National Statistics, is a once-in-a-decade snapshot of the nation that aims to give an accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. Having an improved and accurate understanding of the numbers, locations and age ranges of veterans will allow local authorities, the NHS, and the third sector to target support and resources where they are most needed.

We collated the Manchester data into our JSNA and used existing research to fill the remaining gaps. This allowed us to build an accurate picture of our local armed forces community and their needs. It is this data that drives our work to ensure we can give the right support in the right places. We will continue to build on our JSNA to ensure it grows and develops alongside our local veterans, and in turn, our services.

# Our achievements

## Armed Forces Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (as amended by the Health and Social Care Act 2012) states that every local authority must produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) covering the population(s) within its area. The Armed Forces Community Joint Strategic Needs Assessment provides a summary of the evidence and data regarding the health of the armed forces community.

The JSNA describes some of the health issues that may affect members of the armed forces community and what the data from the 2021 Census tells us about UK armed forces veterans living in Manchester. We use this data to inform our priorities, for example, the JSNA asserted that the armed forces community were more likely to experience health conditions that limit their daily activity when compared with the civilian population. This sparked our work into removing barriers to primary care for veterans.

The JSNA also describes what Manchester City Council and other organisations working in the city are doing to support members of the armed forces community and their families, as well as some of the opportunities for action that exist. Local authorities, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and NHS England must have regard to the JSNA when planning health and care services for the populations they are responsible for. The Armed Forces JSNA ensures that services have the information they need to meet the principles of the Covenant and ensure the armed forces community receive the correct level of support.

## Armed Forces Champion Network

To aid us in delivering our obligations under the Covenant, we have embedded an Armed Forces Champion Network throughout the organisation to ensure a consistent awareness and promotion of the disadvantages faced by the armed forces community, principles of the Covenant, and our duty as a local authority. The Champions will play a vital part in embedding the Covenant throughout the Council, allowing us to be a better employer and service provider.

### Champion Network Objectives:

- Provide visible and senior leadership on the Armed Forces Covenant across the directorate and directorate management team
- Lead on the directorate's approach to the Armed Forces Covenant
- Monitor outcomes of cases involving a member of the armed forces community
- Signpost residents from the armed forces community to the wider network
- Support their service to embed Covenant values and standards
- Facilitate an armed forces friendly environment/culture
- Contribute to the development and progression of Covenant work
- Maintain a presence of Covenant values, standards and goals throughout respective service
- Advocate for and be conscious of the armed forces community and Covenant work.

## Our reviewed and amended Reservist Policy

Our Reservist Policy allows reservists to take an additional ten days of paid leave to attend annual camps, but at the time of the review it did not extend to Adult Cadet Force volunteers. Following our review, we were pleased to announce that Adult Cadet Force volunteers are now covered within the scope of the policy. Not only does this benefit the Council's workforce to have the skills and experience volunteers attain at the camps, but it also allows us to play a bigger role in the development of our young people.

An Adult Cadet Force Volunteer who works at Manchester City Council said: "The extension of the reservist policy to include Army Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAVs) now means I can support the Greater Manchester Army Cadet Force (GMACF) annual camp, which I had been unable to do until the change in policy. Attending annual camp means I can further develop my problem-solving, leadership, team-working and communication skills. Being a part of GMACF also improves my mental health and wellbeing, through something as simple as enjoying the countryside, to challenging myself to learn new skills via the many activities and courses available via GMACF. There is also the pride and sense of achievement I get from helping young people reach their potential."

The following are all benefits that young people in the city of Manchester and throughout Greater Manchester gain from being a part of GMACF:

### Learn new skills

Cadets gain transferable skills, from teamwork to communication and manual skills, as they move through the cadet syllabus and rank structure.

### Meet new people

Cadets meet all kinds of people, including cadets from different parts of the country, CFAVs, local and national dignitaries, politicians, and even royalty! Cadets learn from them and make new friends for life.

### Build confidence

Cadets boost their confidence through volunteering by having the chance to try something new. They achieve things and feel a sense of achievement.

### Make a difference

Cadets make a positive impact on others, inspiring other young people, and enhancing their local community.

### Fun!

Cadets have great fun and have a thoroughly enjoyable time while attending the many activities and camps.

### Challenge

Cadets experience challenges and push themselves to achieve more, taking part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme or gaining one of the many other accredited qualifications on offer.

## Enhanced CV

Volunteering can be seen as an asset by employers, as it demonstrates teamwork, motivation and positivity. Gaining leadership skills, problem-solving experience and social skills will all enhance the cadet's CV.

## Build community spirit

The Army Cadet Force allows cadets to strengthen their social network, helping them to feel part of a larger community.

## Armed Forces Friendly GP Accreditation

The Veteran Friendly Accreditation scheme was created by the Royal College of GPs and NHS England. The accreditation ensures practices are able to identify, understand, support and, where appropriate, refer veterans into services designed especially for them. The University of Chester evaluated the veteran friendly scheme and found that 99% of practices would recommend it to others. The most valued benefits were having a simple process to identify veterans, clear referral pathways to specialist veteran healthcare support, and faster access to priority services.

We worked closely with Primary Care to promote the GP Veteran Friendly Accreditation to GPs in Manchester. In March 2024 we delivered a presentation outlining the benefits of the scheme to almost 200 GPs and practice staff. We have also offered to support practices pursuing the accreditation in any way we can. Since we began promoting the accreditation, accredited practices in Manchester have more than doubled from 15 to 33, covering just under 282,500 patients. This means 38% of Manchester patients are now registered with RCGP-accredited veteran-friendly GP practices.

## Covenant promotion

Promotion of the Covenant is key to ensuring that the correct level of local and nationwide support is available for the armed forces community. This not only educates people on the Covenant, but also allows them to learn about the armed forces communities' experiences, the barriers they can face, and strengths they can bring to a workforce.

We have given talks to various organisations to spread the word about the Covenant and the community it serves, including GM housing providers, Manchester GPs, the Manchester Local Care Organisation, and Manchester Health Watch. We will continue to prioritise the promotion of the Covenant and raise awareness around the armed forces community to ensure it is recognised, understood, and supported throughout the local area.

## Early Help

Working closely with our partners, we defined a referral pathway to Early Help for local armed forces families. Early Help supports children, families, and communities to build networks that enable the wider community to develop resilience, leading to a sense of wellbeing and improved quality of life.

The aim of Early Help is to identify needs within families early and provide preventative support and intervention before problems may become complex and entrenched. Early Help means both early in life, such as supporting very young children, and early after the emergence of various needs.

Engaging with Early Help allows armed forces families to receive the support they need at a time that meets the families' needs, and before any issues reach crisis point. The Early Help approach promotes and strengthens communities, children and family assets, and builds on the existing strengths of individuals and communities to help them develop new responses to difficulties.

## Armed Forces Week 2023

Armed Forces Week 2023 began on 19 June and was marked by raising the armed forces flag on top of the Central Library. It was attended by the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Councillor Yasmine Dar; representatives from each of the armed forces: the army, the Royal Navy, and the RAF; Mr Carl Austin-Behan OBE DL, representing the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater Manchester; Paul Marshall, the Armed Forces Champion for Manchester City Council's Senior Management Team; Joe Larrigan, RBL County Chairman for Greater Manchester; and a fanfare from the 103RA LAV Band.

Armed Forces Day took place toward the end of the week on 24 June in St Peter's Square. It included a ceremonial march through the square, accompanied by the Lancashire Artillery Band. Following the formal celebrations, members of the public were able to enjoy themselves and take part in various activities. This year we had a 105mm light gun on display, face-painting for young ones, live performances, and information stalls supporting the armed forces, including the Royal British Legion. An armed forces specialist from the Council promoted the Council's commitment to the Covenant, and advised members of the armed forces community on how to access services. Attendees were also given the opportunity to get their hands on some modern and historical military kit.

**Speaking at the event, the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Councillor Yasmine Dar, said:**

“Armed Forces Day is a very important day of national reflection. It is our chance to honour and remember the sacrifices of the armed forces, both past and present, and is an opportunity to remember those who have kept us safe.

“In addition to this, Armed Forces Day allows the city to come together and show veterans and members of the armed forces how grateful we are for their service, dedication and work to keep us all safe. I feel honoured to be leading the celebrations and hope people come down on the 24th to learn more about the armed forces.”

## **LGBT Veterans Independent Review: call for evidence**

In 2023, the Government urged those who were affected by the 1967–2000 ban on homosexuality in the armed forces to respond to a 17-week call for evidence to inform recommendations that would ensure the service of every LGBTQ+ veteran is understood and valued.

The Ministry of Defence said it was attempting to address “with compassion, the historic hurt or disadvantage that sections of the veteran community have experienced”, including those who were banned from serving openly between 1967 and 2000.

In response, we sent out communications to help raise the profile of this opportunity, in the hope that it would reach more people who would have the chance to share their experiences and shape the review’s recommendations.

## **Credit their service**

Working with the Royal British Legion, the Council agreed to end the practice of treating military compensation as income by welfare benefit means tests, which had previously caused many veterans and their families to miss out on thousands of pounds a year. Councillor Tommy Judge, lead member for the Armed Forces, said: “We’re grateful to the Royal British Legion for highlighting this injustice and were happy to work with them to remove this final barrier, which affects the income of many of our brave armed forces personnel.

“Manchester is a city that is proud of its support for the armed forces, and treating them equitably and fairly like the rest of the civilian population is yet another way to show our gratitude for their service and dedication to all of us.”

Many local authorities continue to consider armed forces compensation as income in means tested benefits, and the Royal British Legion have been campaigning with their Credit their Service campaign to encourage councils to take action to remove this injustice.

Congratulating the Council for responding positively to the Credit their Service campaign, Hannah Pearce, Director of Campaigns, Policy and Research at Royal British Legion, said: “We want to thank Manchester City Council for working with us and doing the right thing by veterans and the whole armed forces community.

“All councils in Great Britain have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, and this is a really good example of the tangible difference councils can make to some of the poorest veterans in their community.”

## Election outreach packs

Owing to the introduction of new rules to the Elections Act, the Council developed an outreach pack to explain to the Manchester public the purpose of voting and the major changes in electoral processes and registration. We spoke with many different community groups to ensure residents understood the changes and how votes may be impacted. To ensure we reached the armed forces community, we dispersed these outreach packs via our third sector partners. This included ten fact sheets that covered:

1. The Elections Act: key changes in the elections and voting process
2. Voter ID: what photo ID you need to vote in a polling station, and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate if you do not possess such ID
3. Accessibility and elections: how we are helping disabled voters and voters whose first language is not English with practical support to vote in a polling station
4. Ensuring elections are fair: how we have helped to support different community groups in the voting process
5. Our polling stations: information on how to find your local polling station for an election and what support will be provided by staff on polling day
6. Electoral registration: how to register for elections in Manchester
7. Anonymous electors: how to register for an election and ensure your name does not appear on the electoral register for your own safety
8. New Parliamentary constituencies: the new Parliamentary seats in Manchester for the upcoming UK election and how to register for the election

9. Voting and public services: the services provided by the Council, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Government, and how to get in touch with your elected representatives
10. Online absent voting: the new process that allows you to register online for a postal or a temporary proxy vote for elections.

## GM Covenant Guides

This year, Manchester's 22 libraries operated as warm spaces to help people who were struggling throughout the winter. Last year there were tens of thousands of visits to places that had been set up as non-judgmental safe spaces where people could escape the cold. Our warm spaces offered free hot drinks, Wi-Fi, data SIM cards, newspapers, as well as information, advice, and signposting to support services in the city.

As part of this offer, we sent out the GM Covenant Guides to every warm space to ensure anyone visiting from the armed forces community knew where to get support. The GM Covenant Guides cover each locality, detailing what they can offer members of the armed forces community, and listing a number of charities that veterans and their families can contact for support. You can find the third edition of the guide [here](#), or by searching 'GM Covenant Guide' on the internet.

## New training package

We received new training modules from GMCA to ensure our workforce had the opportunity to learn about the armed forces community and to provide all the info they might need to effectively support veterans engaging with our services. The package of training aims to provide an insight into the armed forces community, and how it might differ from the public. The training covers how we can come together to support those people who have served us all.

### Training outcomes

By completing this training, our workforce will have a greater understanding of:

- Service life and culture
- The Armed Forces Covenant
- Legislation and Duty of due regard
- Issues affecting the armed forces community – through case studies.

## Recruitment

As an organisation, we try to promote our work and successes as much as we can to let veterans know we are armed forces-friendly and make ourselves an attractive option for veterans/reservists searching for employment. Between April 2021 and March 2022 we had 78 veteran/reservist job applications, and a total of five hired. From March 2023 to April 2024 the number of applications from veterans/reservists increased by over 500% to 423, while the number we have hired in a year has more than doubled to a total of 11. We will continue to work on increasing the number of applications and the number of successful applicants, ensuring those who have served have the same opportunities available to them as their civilian peers.

# Our priorities for 2024/25

## Promotion, delivery and raising awareness

Much of our progress can be attributed to promoting the Covenant and raising awareness around the armed forces community. This will remain a priority for us throughout 2024/25 as we continue to take every possible opportunity to improve and strengthen the mechanism that delivers the Covenant and expand the reach of its principles.

## Tackling health inequalities

Research into the health of the veteran community consistently finds that those who have served in the armed forces suffer poorer health than their civilian peers and are also less likely to be engaging with healthcare services. We will continue to take an evidence-based approach to tackling barriers to health among the armed forces community and working with health partners to ensure they are equipped and ready to support Manchester veterans.

## Understanding the armed forces community

To ensure our work is inclusive and can benefit the whole veteran community, we are committed to understanding the experiences of racially minoritised groups and women who have served, making sure we are informed, educated, and equipped to support them.

It is intended that the Armed Forces JSNA is a 'live' resource that is continually updated and refreshed over time. During 2024/25 we will seek to enhance the JSNA with additional local data. We are also keen to gather more insight into the lived experiences of accessing health and care services among members of the armed forces community and their families.

## Measuring impact

Ensuring our work has a positive impact and to what extent is important, as it allows us to reflect on our progress and see how we can do better. With this in mind, a priority for 2024/25 will be to tie into the Council's equalities metric framework to ensure the armed forces community will benefit from the same insights as our other communities.

# Our Manchester Strategy and the Covenant

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

## Thriving and sustainable

### Vibrant with a cutting-edge economy involving and fairly rewarding all our people

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

## Highly skilled

### Work-ready, well-educated young people, and all residents supported to take up opportunities

Veterans and reservists are highly skilled, but the unfortunate misconception is that this is only in the context of war fighting. Our work will make sure that employers understand the level of transferable skills that veterans and reservists possess, that the armed forces community has improved access to education, and that those who have left the forces can effectively articulate their skill set to employers. In summary, and in line with the second behaviour, our work will make sure that the armed forces community is work ready.

This is made possible by providing improved access to training and education, support in areas such as CV writing, and educating employers on the values that veterans and reservists can bring to an organisation.

## **Progressive and equitable**

### **So all can thrive, with better joined-up support, care and health services**

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

## **Liveable and zero-carbon**

### **Safe, enjoyable neighbourhoods with affordable housing, zero-carbon by 2038 using green growth and design, energy, and more climate-resilience**

Our work will help us make neighbourhoods safer and more liveable by contributing to the fight against crime, poverty and antisocial behaviour. Every person we help into work is one person less likely to experience poverty. Every person we can give access to mental health services is one person less likely to partake in unhealthy coping strategies that could harm them or others; and every person we help reintegrate back into civvy street is one more person who will positively contribute to our city and our economy.

## **A connected city**

### **World-class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth**

We encourage all to experience the diverse nature of Manchester and all it has to offer. Manchester's facilities for leisure supports the health and wellbeing of the armed forces community and provides the opportunity for both personal and professional growth.

# Contributions from our partners

## Walking With The Wounded

Walking With The Wounded (WWTW) deliver employment, mental health and care co-ordination programmes in collaboration with the NHS to get those who served, and their families – whether mentally, socially or physically wounded – back on their feet to make a positive contribution once more. Why? Because those who served, deserve! Our north west hub located in Manchester ensures that we collaborate with Manchester City Council so that together we can provide the best possible support for veterans and their families. Working closely with Manchester City Council is pivotal in WWTW delivering bespoke, tailored and holistic interventions to those who need them most. We fully understand that we cannot do it alone; we must collaborate with our partners to achieve positive contributions. WWTW look forward to continuing this effective, professional relationship.

## Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is committed to making Greater Manchester the best place in the UK for members of the armed forces community to live and work. In 2024, a roadmap will be launched with the intention of bringing together all sectors to deliver the highest possible standard of support for those who have served or are currently serving our country. This is only possible because of the work of local authorities, the NHS, and a wider public sector partnership that increases coherence and demands a partnership approach to design and delivery. Manchester City Council is very much at the forefront of this work and is providing a number of best-practice projects that other local authorities across Greater Manchester are actively seeking to take up. As an active participant of the Greater Manchester Armed Forces Partnership, Manchester City Council set the standard in many areas for other local authorities to follow, both regionally and nationally.

## Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion continues to work closely with Manchester City Council in our work to support the needs of veterans, service personnel and beneficiaries across the region. Our engagement with Manchester City Council is fundamental to our success in many cases and includes collaborating on issues such as homelessness, domestic abuse, living independently, outreach support, benefits, debt, and money advice. The partnership of these services and relationship with the Council's Covenant Team enable us to find solutions to support our community in the best possible way, when required. We continue to have a number of cases that we collaborate on with Manchester City Council and look forward to continuing this positive relationship. The Royal British Legion also engages with the Council's public policy, and during the past year we have been pleased to work with the local authority on improved implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty and the fair treatment of military compensation in assessments for locally administered benefits.

