

SERVING GREATER MANCHESTER'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION MANIFESTO 2017



LIVE ON 

Registered charity number 219279
www.britishlegion.org.uk

ABOUT THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Royal British Legion was created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War, and still remains one of the UK's largest membership organisations. We are the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, providing financial, social and emotional support, information, advice, advocacy and comradeship to Service personnel, veterans and their dependants. In 2015/16, we responded to over a million requests for help - more than ever before. For further information, please visit: www.britishlegion.org.uk

The Legion supports the Armed Forces community including serving personnel, Reservists, veterans, and their dependants with managing their finances, accessing military compensation and statutory benefits, adapting their homes, and seeking employment. We offer help for carers and breaks for families, children and those needing support. The Legion has six care homes for ex-Service men and women and their partners, provides dementia care, and offers immediate needs grants and other forms of help for those in crisis. In conjunction with the Ministry of Defence and other Service charities, we pledged £50m over ten years to the

development and operation of Personnel Recovery Centres and The Battle Back Centre (Lilleshall), as part of the Defence Recovery Capability programme, and we fund pioneering research into the devastating impact of blast injuries.

The Legion works across the political spectrum and with policymakers to improve the lives of the Armed Forces community. We have been campaigning to further the cause of serving personnel, ex-Service men and women and their families since 1921. Having been the only national organisation to campaign for the Armed Forces Covenant to be enshrined in legislation, the Legion plays a leading role in holding all levels of government to account on Armed Forces Covenant commitments.

In 2014 the Legion opened one of our first Pop In high-street advice centres in Manchester city centre. Situated on Cross Street, opposite the iconic Town Hall, this centre provides face to face support and advice to the local Armed Forces community. This Pop In – one of 16 across the UK – is helping ensure we are closer to the people who require our support, when they need it most.



For support call our helpline 0808 802 8080, 8am to 8pm, seven days a week.
For information on this document please email publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk
A larger copy print version of this document is available on request.

FOREWORD



The first election for Greater Manchester Mayor will be a pivotal moment in the civic history of the city and the country. The process of devolution is driven by the goal of creating a healthy, productive, and thriving region empowered to form local solutions to local problems. Greater Manchester will soon be able to tailor services around the needs of its citizens, charities, public sector organisations, and businesses to an even greater degree. This is not an opportunity to be missed.

Greater Manchester has a long history of supporting the Armed Forces. In July 2016 the UK's national commemoration of the start of the Battle of the Somme was held in Manchester Cathedral. Thousands of men from local regiments and from surrounding towns and cities were committed to action on the first day of that battle, and thousands since have made countless sacrifices and continue to do so. Today, it is estimated that although the North West of England comprises only 11% of the UK's population, 20% of all Armed Forces recruits in the

country originate in the North West. Greater Manchester contributes significantly to that total. When they finish their service, many ex-Service personnel return to settle in the North West, with the Ministry of Defence estimating there are 83,000 veterans living in Greater Manchester along with their families.

The Royal British Legion recognises that for this new chapter in Greater Manchester's history to flourish as intended, all parts of society must embrace and support the great opportunity that lies before the city region. The election of a new Mayor will bring big changes and everyone within Greater Manchester has a stake in the growth and development of this new institution. The Armed Forces community in Greater Manchester will continue to provide a huge contribution to the area and they must be appropriately supported as they do so. This document highlights ways in which the disadvantages and barriers that some members of the Armed Forces community face can be overcome to enable them to be socially and economically active.

This document is a result of listening to the concerns of those in Greater Manchester who are serving in the Armed Forces, Regular or Reserve, those who have served, and the families who stand by them. We urge everyone to listen to what they have said and to act to improve the outcomes for these individuals and their families.

Alison Bunn

Area Manager, Greater Manchester & Lancashire,
The Royal British Legion

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011 the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant were enshrined in law as a result of campaigning by The Royal British Legion. National and local governments, along with many charities, businesses and other organisations, have now committed to ensuring that the key principles are upheld:

- 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; and
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

The Legion welcomes the support that the ten Greater Manchester local authorities, the interim Mayor, and national representatives of all parties have given to the Armed Forces community in recognition of their service. However, significant challenges remain.

This manifesto seeks to build on the progress made by outlining five key recommendations for the new Mayor of Greater Manchester. These are based on our experience supporting veterans, serving Regulars and Reservists, and their families.

In addition to the specific priorities outlined in this document, the Legion stands ready to engage in dialogue on any initiatives which seek to ensure that the efforts, welfare, and interests of serving, ex-Service personnel, and their families are recognised and not forgotten.



THE LEGION BELIEVES THAT THE NEW MAYOR OF GREATER MANCHESTER SHOULD:

Provide leadership on the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant by appointing an Advocate for the Armed Forces community.

Improve public services' knowledge and awareness of the size and needs of the Armed Forces community.

Ensure that Reservists and Armed Forces families are provided with the support to which they are entitled.

Ensure that members of the Armed Forces community have access to clear and consistent housing advice and the support to which they are entitled.

Ensure that the Armed Forces community across Greater Manchester can access specialist mental health treatment and support.

Provide leadership on the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant by appointing an Advocate for the Armed Forces community.

There is much excellent work taking place across the ten Greater Manchester councils in relation to support for the Armed Forces community. However, stakeholders have suggested there is a lack of coordination and leadership in planning and implementing support across the region. This can lead to disparities in the provision of important services, and inconsistencies in the application of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Mayor will be in a strong position to improve this situation, and should therefore appoint an Advocate with a clear remit to coordinate support for the Armed Forces community. This role would provide focus on implementation of the Covenant across all ten councils, with other local public bodies, charities, stakeholders, and local Armed Forces units.

The Advocate should:

- Monitor the implementation of the Covenant and ensure its principles are applied to all public sector services, policies, and decision-making bodies.
- Provide, coordinate, and embed training for frontline public sector staff and ensure consistent service delivery to the Armed Forces community across all organisations.

- Improve arrangements for sharing best practice and data between councils and other service providers.
- Improve information provision to the Armed Forces community, such as that provided by council websites.
- Report directly to the Mayor and produce an annual report detailing what actions have been taken to implement the Covenant and identifying any issues that need to be addressed.

This leading figure would act as an ambassador for the Armed Forces community across all ten councils, continuously driving improvement and supporting councils in developing and delivering effective practices to implement the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Advocate will provide accountability, leadership, and coordination across the region and help make Greater Manchester a national leader in services for the Armed Forces community.

Craig Smeaton served in the Army for more than a decade and did two tours of Iraq. Despite struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, Craig was determined to create a secure home for his wife and two daughters back home in Swinton, but huge problems drove him to the brink of despair.

Craig said: *"I'm told there's lots of great work going on across Greater Manchester for the Armed Forces community, but I haven't seen it. I was passed from pillar to post trying to sort out a serious issue in order to support my family, but nobody was interested until I finally got help from the charitable sector.*

"For three years my family suffered, but if local authorities and housing organisations had shared information, they would have been better placed to resolve the issues. There was simply no accountability, and we were just passed around without any action.

"The delay in getting help put a huge amount of stress on my partner, my young daughter and me.

"In sheer desperation I contacted a Case Officer from the Legion and she got a grip of the situation, brought organisations together and made things happen. Now we've been rehoused in accommodation especially for ex-Service people in Canada Street, in north Manchester, I've got a good job and life is so much better. But we endured this hellish existence for three years during which time I contacted everybody I could think of - we were crying out for help but nobody was listening. If there was someone in Greater Manchester responsible for looking after the Armed Forces community, and coordinating services, I could have spoken to them and got help much quicker."



Improve public services' knowledge and awareness of the size and needs of the Armed Forces community.

Feedback received during the consultation informing this manifesto, and from the Legion's experience of local covenants across the UK, suggests that it is difficult to plan services and meet any needs within the Armed Forces community if there is a lack of reliable data at a local level about the size of the community and the issues they may be facing.

The Legion believes that the inclusion of questions in the next UK Census would assist in the local delivery of the Covenant, but the earliest this could happen is 2021.

There is, however, much that can be done locally in Greater Manchester to help address this lack of information. The Legion believes it should be the duty of all statutory service providers to 'ask the question' and ensure that veterans are identified and therefore able to access the services to which they are entitled.

The new Mayor should introduce a consistent question, which is asked across all public bodies when veterans and family members present to them for support. This would have the following benefits:

- Those presenting to a public sector service would be identified and directed to the most appropriate support, information, or guidance. For example a member of the Armed Forces community with a mental health problem or a problem with debt.
- Data regarding the profile and needs of the Armed Forces community would significantly improve as more organisations record this type of information, and gaps in service provision could be identified and addressed.
- Early identification of problems allows for quick action to address them. Potential problems can be identified sooner and addressed before they become more serious.
- Members of the Armed Forces making the transition out of Service and into civilian life could be identified and supported through the process.

In Wigan, the borough council has been asking all people who approach their services if they are serving, have served or have a connection to the Armed Forces. Via the council's 'Armed Forces Consent Form' anyone who lives in the borough can identify as a member of the Armed Forces community in order that the council can offer more appropriate support to the Armed Forces community and notify them of any new services which are being developed for the future.

This Consent Form ensures that all information held across the Council's systems records the Armed Forces status and stays up-to-date, making all departments aware of the individuals' backgrounds and therefore linking them to the most suitable support.

Even if the individual doesn't require immediate support, if something happens in the future it reduces delays in providing the support required.

The support available can also include signposting to social groups, employment, training and volunteering opportunities for veterans.



Ensure that Reservists and Armed Forces families are provided with the support to which they are entitled.

The principles of the Covenant apply to the whole Armed Forces community. This community includes Reservists and Armed Forces family members, who can face many of the same disadvantages as Regular serving personnel and the veteran community, in addition to more unique challenges. It is vital that their contribution in Greater Manchester is recognised. We believe that Greater Manchester, with help from employers and service providers, can become a leader in support for Reservists and Armed Forces family members.

The new Mayor should introduce policies to support Reservists and family members of serving or ex-Service Armed Forces personnel.

Reservists

The new Mayor should ensure that:

- Extra paid leave is granted to public sector employees who are Reservists and spend time away on training camps and courses during normal working hours.
- Mobilised Reservists who are public sector employees do not lose out on any employee benefits that are tied to

length of service or are dependent on continuous service, for example pension contributions, health and life insurance.

- The benefits of employing Reservists are promoted to private employers and examples of good support are recognised and shared across Greater Manchester.

Families

It is important to remember that the spouses, partners and children of Armed Forces personnel can experience unique pressures and face disadvantage resulting from the service of a spouse or family member. The Armed Forces Covenant must be fully applied to this group.

The new Mayor should ensure that:

- Divorced or separated spouses do not have their past sacrifices forgotten and are eligible for the same housing support as spouses and partners of Armed Forces personnel.
- Public sector staff understand the difficulties families can face and provide consistent information and guidance, especially when a serving family member has been deployed.

Doreen Stringer, 62, from Stretford, served in the Territorial Army for 27 years with 842 Signal Troop at the Army Reserve Centre in Rusholme. Doreen has literacy issues and, when she ran into financial difficulties and needed urgent help, she was referred to The Royal British Legion.

"I was probably too proud to ask for help. I was very fortunate because a lady at the Council referred me to the Legion and they came to see me and began to help me out on a very practical level. I really felt I had no voice until I got this help, and I wasn't aware that I was even eligible having served as a Reservist.

"I loved it to bits being a Reservist, they had to drag me out of there! But I got into trouble because the small pension I received actually restricted my access to benefits and I found myself in a mess financially. Reservists need help in understanding these issues and those providing services must recognise the unique circumstances that can come from being a Reservist and make sure they aren't penalised or disadvantaged.

"Reservists play a big part in their communities and there needs to be more access to work opportunities after leaving Service."



Ensure that members of the Armed Forces community have access to clear and consistent housing advice and the support to which they are entitled.

Housing is often highlighted as a key issue for members of the Armed Forces community, particularly when serving personnel leave the Armed Forces and resettle into civilian life. The Legion sees many cases in Greater Manchester associated with access to housing and conflicting and inconsistent advice being provided.

Part of the problem can be the difficulty faced by members of the Armed Forces community – who may previously have been living in Service accommodation – in understanding what they are entitled to under the policies of Greater Manchester’s ten councils. There is variation in policies locally and in the way these are applied by housing providers. This can cause confusion amongst applicants and providers alike.

The new Mayor of Greater Manchester should work to ensure a clear and consistent housing policy across the city region for members of the Armed Forces community.

This policy must:

- Clearly state the degree of additional preference given to members of the Armed Forces community and the allowable exemptions to local connection criteria.
- Allow serving personnel and family members to apply for help with housing as soon as they know that they must vacate Service accommodation, and provide clear, accessible instructions online on how to do so.
- Provide clarity on who is entitled to support by indicating that serving and ex-Service Regular and Reserve personnel and their families; including bereaved, divorced, and separated spouses and partners; should be included.

Such changes would help to reduce confusion about what the Armed Forces community are entitled to, and aid council staff and all providers in understanding and implementing policies successfully when working with an applicant. For both the Armed Forces community and the ten Greater Manchester councils, this will create a more efficient process and reduce delays and frustration amongst those involved.

Dennis Edmundson served with the Kings Own Border Regiment for 13 years which included clearing mines in the Falklands left behind during the 1982 conflict. But 68-year-old Dennis has been a virtual prisoner in his home in Brightmet near Bolton for the past two years because of his limited mobility, coupled with inappropriate accommodation, leaving him socially isolated.

“I do want to go out; I haven’t left my flat for the past two years, because there are flights of steps at the front and at the back. I’ve got a Zimmer frame but that doesn’t really help me. I’m like a prisoner in my own home.”

“I would like to move somewhere more suitable, somewhere which has flat surfaces outside so I can get out of the house. It’s difficult to know what help there is in terms of housing so any advice or help would be really useful, not just for older veterans like me but also younger ones who may be getting a house for the first time and may never have had to organise rent, mortgages or any of that before.”

“The Legion have been great and they’re trying to help me find more suitable accommodation and that’s progressing. But it shouldn’t all be down to charities – there should be clear information available about what support there is for the Armed Forces and all local providers should help. It’s not special treatment – it’s asking for some clear information so we can help ourselves.”



Ensure that the Armed Forces community across Greater Manchester can access specialist mental health treatment and support.

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Research indicates that the most common mental health problems in the Armed Forces community are depression and anxiety.¹ Specific groups within the Armed Forces community may be at an increased risk of mental health problems post-Service, such as those with combat experience, medics, Early Service Leavers, and Reservists. Personnel can also find it difficult adjusting back to civilian life and may need support dealing with the stress this transition can cause.

Members of the Armed Forces community in need of mental health support should have access to specialised treatment, delivered by practitioners with an understanding of veterans' needs. Veterans with Service-related mental health problems may have specific and complex issues that are not always best met by mainstream NHS services. It is vital that specialist support is available and can be accessed in a timely manner.

The NHS constitution states that *"For those with concerns about their mental health who may not present for some time after leaving Service, they should be able to access services*

*with health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture."*²

In Greater Manchester such specialised care is currently provided by the Military Veterans Service (MVS), run by Pennine Care NHS Trust since 2011. The service has so far supported over 1,000 veterans with their expert care. The MVS provides a multi-disciplinary service offering support for depression, anger management, post-traumatic stress disorder, and also for drug and alcohol misuse when this is a contributing factor.

The Mayor of Greater Manchester should:

- Continue to fund specialised mental health treatment for ex-Service personnel.
- Examine the case to increase funding to ensure veterans' needs, no matter how complex, can be met.
- Expand the MVS and extend funding provision to include mental health treatment and support services for the spouses and partners of Armed Forces families.

Tony, 41, from Bolton joined the Army at 15 and served in Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles, but he was unable to cope with life back home when he was discharged from Service four years later.

"I was drinking to excess and got into trouble with the police. Doctors told me I had three months to live because of the state of my liver, but since The Royal British Legion referred me to the Military Veterans' Service in Bury, I've been able to fight back thanks to that support.

"Now I'm reunited with my family, I've got my confidence and pride back, and I'm making a positive contribution to society. I've started to do some mentoring, talking to other veterans who think they can't turn their lives around. I'm living proof that you can, but I know it's often a difficult journey, especially for Early Service Leavers like me.

"Because we have a specialist mental health team in Greater Manchester who understand the issues faced by the Armed Forces community I was able to get help with my drinking and the psychological therapy I needed

in the same place, instead of being passed from pillar to post. Now I just want my kids to be proud of me, so I volunteer for the Legion and I'm working with Veterans In Communities, where one of my recent projects has been setting up a community allotment. I'm now even looking forward to my first family holiday in years at the Legion's Byng House break centre in Southport – life is good!



"I've got a desire to 'give back' and I'm pretty good at reaching out to veterans who think they cannot, or don't deserve, to get better. The services I received were excellent – joined up and coordinated – and they need to be protected and expanded so that more people who need help can get it."

¹ Fear NT, Jones M, Murphy D, Hull L, Iversen AC, Coker B, et al. What are the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of the UK armed forces? A cohort study. *The Lancet*. 2010;375(9728):1783-97. ² The Handbook to the NHS Constitution. 27th July 2015. Page 17

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