

## **Stockport Armed Forces Covenant Draft Priorities 2018 2021 – 2024**

### **Introduction**

The national Armed Forces Covenant was introduced by the Government in 2011. It is ‘a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly.’ The Covenant is fulfilled by different groups including Central Government, local government, the armed forces, businesses, charities and communities.

Local covenants are very important in delivering the national Armed Forces Covenant. Local covenants aim to complement the national Armed Forces Covenant at a local level: -

- By encouraging local communities, voluntary and community organisations, local businesses, local authorities and other public service providers to work together to support the local armed forces community and nurture understanding and awareness of the issues affecting veterans, serving personnel and their families;
- By encouraging activities which help to integrate the armed forces community into local life;
- By recognising and encouraging ways in which the armed forces community can use their skills and experience to support the wider civilian community.

In Stockport, we produced our local Covenant in 2012 and we have refreshed our priorities every three years since. Our priorities are developed and overseen by our Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group which comprises representatives from Stockport Council and other public service providers, charity and voluntary sector organisations and representatives of the local armed forces community.

Our priorities were most recently refreshed in 2018 for 2018-2021. A summary of key achievements since the publication of our 2018 priorities is included in the accompanying report.

Please note throughout this document “we” refers to the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group. A full membership list is provided in Appendix 1.

### **The Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant**

In 2014, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) became the first city-region to sign the Armed Forces Covenant. The commitment of the GMCA and local authorities in Greater Manchester to the Armed Forces Covenant was reaffirmed in June 2017 and July 2021 when it was resigned.

The Greater Manchester Armed Forces Covenant aims to provide a ‘Minimum Guarantee’ to all veterans in the city-region.

In Stockport, we are committed to working as part of the GMCA to help develop a coherent regional approach to provide a ‘gold standard offer’ to the armed forces community. Our Stockport Armed Forces Covenant and priorities aims to align with and complement the Greater Manchester Covenant.

## Refreshing our Covenant Priorities - One Stockport

In the three years since we published our 2018 priorities, we have seen huge changes which have impacted on all sectors of society, including the armed forces community.

In 2020 we had to adapt due to Covid-19. Looking forward we imagine the world in the coming years will be a completely different place. The 'One Stockport' Borough Plan provides a shared vision and priorities for Stockport, developed in partnership with Stockport Council and Stockport based organisations and stakeholders, including people who live or work in the Borough.

It sets out a vision for Stockport in 2030 as a fair and inclusive borough 'for everyone,' where 'diversity and inclusion is celebrated and everyone has equity of opportunity'. The Borough Plan includes the following ambitions: -

The image displays three vertical pillars representing the 'One Stockport' Borough Plan. Each pillar has a title, a description, and three numbered ambitions.

- ONE HEART**  
At the heart of Stockport are its people and the communities in which they live.
  - 1 A caring and growing Stockport  
Stockport is a great place to grow where children have the best start in life
  - 2 A healthy and happy Stockport  
People live the best lives they can - happy, healthy and independently
  - 3 A strong and supportive Stockport  
Confident and empowered communities working together to make a difference
- ONE HOME**  
Stockport is a great place to live, where no one is left behind.
  - 1 A fair and inclusive Stockport  
A borough for everyone - diversity and inclusion is celebrated and everyone has equity of opportunity
  - 2 A flourishing and creative Stockport  
Stockport is an exciting place to live, where people are active and celebrate the culture
  - 3 A climate friendly Stockport  
Stockport is a responsible and sustainable borough
- ONE FUTURE**  
Growing, creating and delivering a thriving future for Stockport.
  - 1 An enterprising and thriving Stockport  
A thriving economy which works for everyone
  - 2 A skilled and confident Stockport  
Everyone has the opportunities and skills to successfully achieve their ambitions
  - 3 A radically digital Stockport  
A digitally inclusive and dynamic borough

The refreshed Stockport Armed Forces Covenant priorities 2021-2024 will sit beneath this Borough Plan.

## Refreshing our Covenant priorities – the process

As part of the process of developing our new Covenant priorities, the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group has carried out extensive engagement in recent months in order to get a true picture of what it is like to be a member of the armed forces community in Stockport in 2021.

- We have produced two surveys – one asking for the views of veterans, serving personnel and their families and the other targeted at the people who work with the armed forces community. The surveys were circulated as widely as possible and advertised through various newsletters and social media in order to maximise the opportunity for feedback. The

surveys were available online (and where requested in paper copy) for 6 weeks and we received a total of 41 responses

- Members of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group also participated in a workshop, independently facilitated by the Armed Forces Lead at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The workshop provided an opportunity for members to discuss achievements and successes since the publication of our previous Covenant; issues and opportunities; and priorities for the next three years.

Feedback from the surveys and workshop has provided invaluable information which has been used to shape the priorities set out below.

### **What you told us?**

#### ***Our achievements and successes***

Feedback from the surveys and workshop reflects the good work taking place across Stockport to support veterans and their families as they transition to civilian life. Highlights include: -

- The offer of a personalised rehousing plan for all ex-armed forces applicants through the Housing First Initiative; and an effective homeless strategy, with strong systems in place for providing permanent and temporary accommodation for homeless veterans or those at risk of homelessness.
- A wealth of local third sector organisations offering support to veterans and their families, including a range of veterans' groups who have an essential role connecting veterans within the community and supporting their integration into the civilian community.
- A range of effective education, employment and skills support for veterans delivered by partners, including Job Centre Plus, Stockport Homes and Project Recce.
- The veterans passport enables veterans to disclose information they wish to share with health and social care professionals in a way that is comfortable to them and reduces the need to retell information multiple times and re-live traumatic memories
- Stockport Council received a silver award for the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in July 2021, in recognition of the Council's support to defence and the armed forces community.

#### ***Issues and opportunities***

Attendees at the workshop and survey respondents identified the following issues and opportunities for further improvement: -

- Limited understanding within some frontline services of the health and wellbeing issues affecting the armed forces community and the range of support services available
- A need for improved availability of mental health support for veterans and their families

- Issues with temporary housing supply and the need for stronger links between local unit exit teams and housing providers
- Lack of knowledge within the armed forces community about the support available in Stockport and difficulty navigating procedures for accessing support – with a particular focus on health and wellbeing and benefits and entitlements
- Limited engagement of younger veterans and early service leavers with support services
- Lack of access to modern technology and digital skills was identified as a barrier to accessing services for some veterans
- Opportunity to support businesses and employers to further recognise and utilise the transferrable skills and experiences that veterans can bring to the local economy
- Opportunity to ensure armed forces families and local schools are aware of Service Pupil Premium and how to access it
- Limited understanding of the demography of the armed forces community in Stockport can present a barrier to accessing funding and shaping support services
- Workshop attendees felt that there may be a high proportion of young carers in service families who would benefit from further support
- Opportunity to further develop the armed forces youth engagement programme by working with schools
- Opportunity to further empower the Armed Forces Covenant Group to drive forward the Stockport Armed Forces Covenant priorities

### **Stockport Armed Forces Covenant Priorities 2021-2024**

The Stockport Armed Forces Covenant priorities for 2021-2024 are underpinned by the following vision: -

***‘members of the Stockport armed forces community and their families receive the support they need to thrive, whilst also celebrating their unique skills and diverse experiences, and maximising the opportunities for veterans and serving personnel to bring their invaluable contribution to the civilian community.’***

The following priorities for 2021-2024 respond to the issues and opportunities identified through our engagement with veterans, their families and local organisations / services working with the armed forces community.

- 1. Supporting transitions** - we will work to assist the transition of members of the armed forces community and their families, particularly in relation to the key areas of housing, education, employment, welfare and mental health

We will focus on the following: -

- Strengthening the links between Stockport mental health care groups and veterans’ groups
- Developing our understanding of the needs of carers in armed forces families, including young carers, and developing an appropriate response to these
- Working with housing providers to improve timely access to housing for veterans and their families when transitioning from the armed forces
- Working with the Stockport Economic Alliance and others to raise the awareness of the transferrable skills veterans are able to bring to local business

- Improving links between the employment support offer and armed forces community in order to maximise opportunities for veterans to contribute to the local economy
- Working with schools to proactively identify those children entitled to service pupil premium and identify / address any barriers to maximising uptake
- Working with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to strengthen links between local units and support providers in order to ensure early identification of need and referral for intervention

**2. Connecting the armed forces community to available support** - we will ensure that the support and good work taking place locally is effectively communicated to serving personnel, veterans and their families

We will focus on the following: -

- Raising awareness across statutory services, partners and the local VCFSE of the issues faced by the armed forces community and the support available
- Working towards the development of a 'no wrong door' model of support for veterans and their families
- Developing an easily accessible step by step guide to the formal and informal support available at transition, for sharing on the Council and partners' websites, at exit interviews and other key access points – with a particular focus on health and social care and benefits and entitlements
- Exploring ways to reach out to members of the armed forces community (with a particular focus on early service leavers) to encourage veterans to self-present and access support, including work to identify suitable physical spaces for face to face veteran social and support activity

**3. Promoting and celebrating our armed forces community** - we will raise awareness of the armed forces and the contribution they make locally and nationally; help to identify and promote further opportunities for the armed forces community to contribute to civilian society; and further develop opportunities for youth engagement with the armed forces

We will focus on the following: -

- Co-ordinating and promoting activities to mark events such as Remembrance Sunday and Armed Forces Day
- Working with schools and youth organisations to raise awareness of the wider role of the armed forces in relation to humanitarian work, including peace keeping and Covid response
- Continuing to develop and promote the local armed forces youth offer
- Working with the local VCFSE to maximise opportunities for veterans to bring their transferrable skills to the civilian community and promoting the therapeutic benefits of volunteering within the armed force community

**4. Leadership and advocacy** - we will further develop the role of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group to provide proactive leadership in the delivery of the Stockport Armed Forces Covenant priorities and to ensure emerging issues (at a Greater Manchester and national level, including the implications of the Armed Forces Bill, 2021) are addressed.

We will focus on: -

- Updating the terms of reference for the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group to formalise the role of the Group in providing leadership, partnership accountability and oversight for the delivery of the Covenant priorities.
- Proactively publicising our Covenant and priorities in order to raise awareness of our priorities and pledges for the armed forces community across partners and within the community.
- Working with partners to raise awareness of issues affecting the armed forces and proactively encouraging partners to sign the Stockport Armed Forces Covenant (or a version appropriately tailored to their organisation).
- Further developing our understanding of the needs of the armed forces community in Stockport through on-going engagement with representatives of the armed forces community and analysis of Census data (when published)
- Working with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to help develop a coherent regional approach to provide a Gold Standard Offer to the armed forces community.
- Stockport Council will work towards achieving Gold status as part of the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme – this includes a greater focus on ‘advocacy,’ including encouraging partners and other local organisations / businesses to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and engage in the Scheme.

We heard from members of the Armed Forces Covenant Group that the Covenant needs to be more action focussed. Therefore, we propose that the Covenant priorities for 2021-2024 are delivered through an action plan with deliverable actions and leads to sit underneath – in some cases task and finish groups may be established to take forward specific priorities and actions.

### **Monitoring our performance**

The delivery of the Covenant priorities will be overseen by the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Group and an annual report will be produced each year to provide an overview of progress towards achieving priorities.