



Support for Veterans

**A Work Plan Study by the
Communities Scrutiny Panel**

October 2014 - February 2015

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1. Chair's Commentary

The Panel looked at various options prior to this study based around the theme of services to veterans within the city. It was agreed that the report and the issues it scrutinised would be complimentary to the excellent work the Council is already doing in this area and that it be supportive and complimentary to this work.

The Panel met with several organisations, including senior officers from the Army and military charities which provided very informative presentations about the various services they offered. Open and honest discussions took place, and debate led to suggestions on how we, as a Council could be more supportive in assisting this growing community.

Members were very enthusiastic and found the presentations very enlightening. We were very well supported by officers and other councillors. We hope that following on from this study, Preston will work to establish closer and better links with our partner organisations to ensure we are the city that others benchmark against when looking into services provided to the veterans' community.

May I take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in this study.



Councillor Gale
Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Panel

2. Summary

This report gives details of a study undertaken by the Communities Scrutiny Panel into the services and support available for ex-service personnel in the local area.

The Panel gathered relevant information and carried out a number of interviews with various organisations, the details of which are outlined in the report.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 This topic was selected by the Panel as the subject of its next work plan study at the meeting held on 3 September 2014.
- 3.2 The Chair also reported on a request by DeliveredNW.com to support a project entitled 'Dig In North West' which is a community interest company supporting veterans and their families. The Panel resolved that it would consider this request during the course of the study.
- 3.3 The Panel's deliberations were conducted over the course of three meetings held 15 October 2014 – 7 January 2015.

The Committee interviewed the following charitable organisations:-

'42 Brigade Recovery Unit, Fulwood Barracks

Dig In North West

Armed Forces Group

Our Local Heroes Foundation

The Panel also received a presentation by Mr Peter Bargh, Assistant Director (Community Engagement), with regard to the Community Covenant, and

Mr John Cameron, Senior Housing Officer, gave a presentation on the work of the Council's Advice Services.

4. Membership

The Panel was chaired by Councillor Gale, the full membership being:-



Councillor Gale
(Chair)



Councillor Coupland
(Vice Chair)



Councillor B Cartwright



Councillor Corker



Councillor Eaves



Councillor Faruki



Councillor Kelly



Councillor Leach



Councillor Leeming



Councillor Mullen



Councillor Mrs Thomas



Councillor Thompson-Ortega

5. Deliberations

- 5.1 The following paragraphs give outline summaries of the key points/information gathered and discussed at each meeting together with links to the minutes of that meeting.

5.1.1 15 October 2014

- 5.1.2 The Panel considered the scoping document and selected various organisations and relevant council officers that they wished to interview as part of the study.
- 5.1.3 The Panel conducted an interview with Colonel B Heap and Lieutenant Commander L Hicks. Col Heap represented the '42 Brigade Recovery Unit which was the regional centre for wounded, injured or sick soldiers discharged in the North West. Lt Cm Hicks, whilst not dealing directly with injured or sick soldiers, was responsible for personnel who chose to resettle in the area and for setting strategic conditions of discharge.
- 5.1.4 The key issues identified by the interviewees during the course of the meeting were:
- **De-institutionalization** experienced by ex-service personnel upon leaving the forces. Many will have joined at 16 years of age and basic needs such as accommodation been organised for them. Therefore, a period of transition to civilian life, facilitated by adequate support, was necessary, such as help with housing and employment.
 - The value of a **Veterans Drop-In Centre** such as the type that can be found in Liverpool and Manchester, incorporating several relevant services accessible all in one place e.g. housing, welfare benefits, debt advice. He said that charitable organisations represented ought to be relevant, such as the Veterans Council and the British Legion.
 - **There is no record of the actual numbers of veterans within an area.** The army only formally enquire 12 months before personnel are due to leave and clearly this may change during that time. For example, of approximately 10,000 service personnel planning to leave October – November, 2,000 were unsure where they were going to live when asked and often change their mind depending on the housing market in different areas of the country.

[Minutes 15 October 2014](#)

5.2 26 November 2014

5.3.1 Interview with Dig-In North West

The Panel interviewed Donna Rowe-Green from Dig-In North West, a charity based at the walled garden at Ashton Park. She was accompanied by Rob Wilson, a service user. The charity supported veterans by providing 'safe space' for ex-service personnel to meet and engage in a range of activities such as gardening, photography, carpentry and fishing. She explained that Dig-In had assisted 22 people this year of which 15 were 'core' users.

Rob Wilson, a veteran supported by Dig-In North West, gave the Panel an account of his personal experiences including being diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Key issues raised by Mr Wilson:

- **The importance of continuity of care** e.g. he had the same GP for twelve months. A member of the Panel suggested pursuing this with GPs surgeries/NHS as best practice for veterans.
- **Increased awareness / information in targeted places, e.g.in pubs, cafes, libraries, GP surgeries, town hall, Bus Station, Railway Station etc.**
- He also suggested greater awareness at **police stations i.e. a relevant contact for police officers to call.**

The Chair added that the Department of Work and Pensions was currently looking at identifying veterans in Job Centres and benefits offices to improve support. Peter Bargh, Assistant Director (Community Engagement), confirmed that the Council's welfare and debt advice service did collate data regarding clients who were veterans.

5.3.2 Interview with the Armed forces Group

Jacky Hohol and Alan McClellan from the Armed Forces Group gave a presentation about its work and background. The AFG was formed in 2012, gained charitable status in 2013 and was linked to the Community Covenant. The two key services it provided were signposting and help with employment (via the Guild Work Group). Ms Hohol was pleased to inform the Panel that, following a period of uncertainty **funding had now been secured and from next week the AFG would be based at Ashton Park next to 'Dig In', together forming a veterans' 'One Stop Shop'**. She also referred to a relatively new project for the Guild Work Club, providing on-site training for veterans with drug / addiction related issues.

5.3.3 Presentation on the Council's Community Covenant

Peter Bargh, Assistant Director (Community Engagement), gave a presentation on the history of the Council's Community Covenant from its launch in 2012 to date, including the 'Preston Remembers' Project and support for 'Dig In'.

He acknowledged that initially there was enthusiasm, but uncertainty as to how to help in practical terms. He explained that momentum was lost following the departure of a dedicated officer for the Community Covenant. Outreach surgeries were held, but not utilised and with hindsight they were perhaps not stationed in the right places.

He cited key issues as follows:

- Too many voluntary organisations
- Change in military personnel dealing with covenant

- Debt 'drop in' service not utilised
- Council staff and funding issues – not the resources to do outreach work
- Greatly reduced one stop shop

He indicated that original Covenant signatories were contacted again in 2013, but stressed the need to focus on actions and delivery of outcomes rather than just signing up.

- 5.3.4** A discussion between all parties and members ensues and emphasized **the importance of partnership working** as key to the success of any project (such as 'Dig In' with the Council's Parks Department and Community Engagement section which had been very successful), especially the need **for partnership organisations to be relevant and aware of the needs of veterans.**

The following key points / suggestions were made:-

1. Restrictions on the eligibility of charities under two years old meant that larger charities often benefited rather than smaller ones. It was suggested that all **charitable organisations should work together**, for example to provide **information and events on Armed Forces Day** and the importance of **networking particularly with business leaders**. The Chair indicated that a networking event was in the pipeline, supported by the City's Armed Forces Champion alongside the County's Armed Forces Group.
 2. Both Dig In NW and the Armed Forces Group confirmed that they had received PCC funding in the past but had recently been unsuccessful. The Chair suggested exploring the **possibility of the Council making support for veterans a priority in its VCFS funding policy.**
 3. **Obtain business sponsorship / assistance** e.g. Lloyds now providing debt advice / counselling
 4. **Establish a 'Corporate Covenant'** for businesses who are keen to be involved with supporting veterans
 5. **Arrange a meeting in early 2015** between the Council's Community Engagement section, Dig In and the Armed Forces Group to discuss taking the Community Covenant forward.
- 5.3.5** The following additional comments and suggestions were submitted following the meeting:-

1. **Support in finding an Ambassador or Champion for each organisation.** Councillors have some very influential links and may know people who are willing to represent local organisations. Often we have to turn down or send late apologies to an event due to needing to prioritise the needs of the veteran team. What many of us could use is someone who can attend the functions, someone who has the presence to be able to mix with high level people and represent not only what we need, but what we are able to offer. It would need to be someone who is happy to take the time to get to know the organisation they represent,

and support the staff team by being their 'public face' so that we can concentrate on the work that we do.

2. **Support in writing bids.** The Council have been very successful in obtaining Heritage Lottery money, and of course assess the bids that come in for their VCFS pot, so know what they as funders are looking for. Being able to spend some time with someone who has that experience would be very valuable.
3. **Information sharing** e.g. events that are coming up in the town that we can be represented at, promotion within internal Council newsletters or marketing, generally helping us to spread the word that we are here and what we do.

[Minutes 26 November 2014](#)

5.3 7 January 2015

5.4.1 Interview with the Local Heroes Foundation

Steve Pearson, Barton Hoyle and Jackie Collins gave a presentation about the work of the charity, which included help for veterans with employment, job training, accommodation and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder therapy. Mr Pearson explained that the foundation was now a national charity and that it was currently assimilating several smaller charities in order to provide them with better financial security and thus more time to concentrate on their support services rather than fundraising.

He also gave details of ambitious projects which reflected his philosophy that charities should be enterprising to generate income as well as relying on grants and donations. The projects aimed to actually create jobs for veterans and provide a service to the local community. Some examples include:

Woodland Activity Centre – the recent purchase of 6.1 acres of land at Cabus, nr. Garstang to create a facility for paintballing, segways etc. and will be aimed at schools and businesses

Positive Youth Training Course for children around Year 8 age group who are disruptive/under achieving. It aims to teach new skills e.g. orienteering, map reading. The charity provides the course in liaison with LCC Education Officers and referrals are made from schools. The course provides employment for 6 veterans.

Blackpool City Centre CCTV Monitoring – contract with Blackpool Council which provides 8 jobs for veterans.

Other enterprise schemes included a network of restaurants, motorhomes for Veterans free holidays (in partnership with caravan clubs), a Rent Guarantee Scheme and the purchase of a former nightclub to create a multi-use facility e.g. for conferences, indoor

archery/climbing (in partnership with ALDI who are funding refurbishment).

5.4.2 Mr Pearson also expressed interest in engaging in partnership with Preston City Council in the following areas:-

- **Community Asset Transfers** – buildings/land on which training can be provided by veterans to benefit the local community e.g. with writing CVs and job applications. Mr Pearson hoped to acquire the Old Post Office for this purpose and to provide other services as a Central ‘Hub’.
- **Assistance with Bid Writing** – expertise to apply for grants on behalf of the charity

5.4.3 Members were very supportive of the work of the charity and made a number of suggestions which may assist/further this work:-

- Funding from Central Government for apprentice training.
- Involvement with prison service
- Qualifications/training – accreditation by recognised body will be more beneficial to veterans and the community.
- Positive Youth Training Scheme – Year 8 may be too young (however, as the scheme progresses this may be reviewed).
- Look at gender/ethnicity with regard to Youth Training Scheme.
- Work with Sea Cadets.

A number of individual members of the Panel offered the benefit of their contact links with regard to the above.

5.4.4 Interview with Advice Services

John Cameron, Senior Housing Advisory Officer gave a presentation about the work of the Council’s Advice Services with regard to veterans.

Mr Cameron explained that housing applications are processed through the Select Move housing register, which is a partnership lettings service incorporating most housing associations in Preston. He confirmed that **housing advice and debt advice staff do ask clients if they have served in the forces in the last five years, and also that there is a request for this information on the relevant form.** He informed members that of the 3070 live applications, five applications were from clients living in service quarters. However, it was noted by the Chair that it may take time for the impact of military personnel planning to leave October/November this year to become apparent (as discussed at the October 2014 meeting).

He indicated that veterans were a priority group in accordance with housing regulations. However, it was established that the status of forces widows/widowers was only covered in supplementary guidance rather than housing regulations, and therefore was not applied uniformly across all housing associations.

Mr Cameron reminded members that the Council also worked with the private sector to meet housing demand. Steve Pearson indicated that he had around 90 private properties in the North West and that he would be happy to work with the Council to assist.

[Minutes 8 January 2015](#)

5.5. Final Meeting – 25 February 2015

The Chair referred to Recommendation 8 which attempted to address the Panel's concerns regarding public confidence in street charity collections (particularly some lesser known military/forces charities which had appeared recently). It was suggested that the Council introduce a 'kitemark' issued as part of their application for a licence; this would be subject to meeting criteria identified at the application stage (e.g. by adding a couple of questions on the existing form).

Officer advice had been sought and that concerns had been raised with regard to the Council's resources and to the legal implications of Council system of 'endorsement' which went beyond the criteria of the Charity Commission, which is responsible for awarding organizations charitable status.

Members of the Panel noted the advice; however, they felt strongly that the issue of public confidence in street charity collections needed to be addressed and that the possibility of introducing such a system be explored further and therefore remain as a recommendation.

[Link to Minutes 25 February 2015](#)

6. Summary of Findings

- 1) Throughout its deliberations the Panel identified the importance of networking and partnership working, particularly with relevant organisations which were aware of the needs of veterans.
- 2) There was a strong case for charities and voluntary organisations which support veterans to work together e.g. by information sharing and on organised events such as Armed Forces Day.
- 3) There was a need to increase awareness among veterans of the services, charities and voluntary organisations which support them, e.g. by creating a "Preston Handbook" of relevant organisations and contacts

- 4) There were lessons to be learned from the Council's Community Covenant launched in 2012 and there was now an opportunity to re-establish links and focus on actions and delivery of outcomes.
- 5) The issue of assistance with bid writing was raised by all charities interviewed and a request was also made that projects supporting veterans be made a priority in the Council's Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector funding policy.
- 6) There was support for a 'Corporate Covenant' and networking with / approaching business leaders to obtain sponsorship.
- 7) The panel learned that Blackpool Council had awarded a contract for CCTV monitoring to a charity which had a specific policy to employ veterans.
- 8) The Panel noted that some organisations may be interested in Community Asset Transfers for the purpose of delivering projects which support veterans and the local community.

7. Recommendations to Cabinet

- 1) That the Council facilitate networking/ partnership working with charities, voluntary organisations and statutory bodies by sharing information about forthcoming events organised by charities and voluntary organisations which support veterans e.g. Armed Forces Day
- 2) That the Council assist its partners with the creation of a 'Preston Handbook' listing voluntary and charitable organisations relevant to veterans
- 3) That support be provided with bid writing to funding applicants whose work/projects support veterans
- 4) To explore the possibility of establishing a policy which prioritizes funding applicants whose work/projects support veterans
- 5) That the Council works with partners to explore business sponsorship and to create a 'Corporate Covenant'
- 6) That the Cabinet consider assisting forces/veterans' charities via Community Asset Transfers, should there be a business case to do so / appropriate criteria met
- 7) That the Cabinet explore the possibility of supporting veterans in the way that Blackpool City Council has via contractual work with

organisations which employ veterans, should there be a business case to do so / appropriate criteria met

- 8) To investigate a system of Council 'endorsement' for forces and veterans charity collections in the city, by way of a 'kitemark' denoting that the charity meets certain criteria/standards in order to reassure the public regarding these charities.

8. Financial and Legal Implications

At this point there are no financial implications. However there may be implications from the outcome of the recommendations, which would require further investigations.

The Council issues street collection permits under Regulations approved by the Council. There is nothing in them which would enable the Council to apply any threshold of acceptability. If there is evidence that some charitable collections are causing concerns to members of the public, then the Council's regulations could be reviewed and possibly amended. Of course any proposed amendments would need careful consideration as to their legality. The Regulations apply to all charitable collections.

9. Corporate Management Team Commentary

While many of the recommendations have considerable merit, some have the potential to be resource intensive. Specifically:

- 1) That the Council facilitate networking/ partnership working with charities, voluntary organisations and statutory bodies by sharing information about forthcoming events organised by charities and voluntary organisations which support veterans e.g. Armed Forces Day.

There is presently no officer time allocated to this work. In the past, this was the role of an officer within the Community Engagement Team but this post has now been deleted and further staff reductions are scheduled as part of the savings already agreed by members. There may be an option for the Voluntary, community and Faith Sector Forum to pick up on this issue via the Community Network who are already funded to provide administrative support and networking activities. The Council is already supporting the Armed Forces Day via the Events Team and other teams in the Authority.

- 2) That the Council assist its partners with the creation of a 'Preston Handbook' listing voluntary and charitable organisations relevant to veterans.

A way forward may be to look at an on-line resource or the use of social media by signposting veterans to pages on our website that could provide further beneficial information.

- 3) That support be provided with bid writing to funding applicants whose work/projects support veterans.

There are a number of Lancashire wide organisations that benefit from support in bid writing including the VCFS and One Lancashire Support. The City Council has little capacity to offer this sort of service.

4) To explore the possibility of establishing a policy which prioritizes funding applicants whose work/projects support veterans.

Members have recently reviewed the Grant Funding Policy.

5) That the Council works with partners to explore business sponsorship and to create a 'Corporate Covenant'.

There are organisations better placed and equipped to more effectively offer this service than the City Council e.g. Business in the Community.

6) That the Cabinet consider assisting forces/veterans' charities via Community Asset Transfers, should there be a business case to do so / appropriate criteria met.

There is already an asset transfer protocol in place which applies irrespective of the organisation applying.

7) That the Cabinet explore the possibility of supporting veterans in the way that Blackpool City Council has via contractual work with organisations which employ veterans, should there be a business case to do so / appropriate criteria met.

We believe this recommendation is covered by existing procurement rules but subject to Cabinet decision, will review them further.

8) To investigate a system of Council 'endorsement' for forces and veterans charity collections in the city, by way of a 'kitemark' denoting that the charity meets certain criteria/standards in order to reassure the public regarding these charities.

At present, any organisation wishing to carry out street collections need to be licenced by the council. This process does not look at the internal operation of the applicant only that it is a registered charity. The onus to assess the appropriateness of the internal operation of the organisation is on the Charity Commission. To provide a "kite mark" may place the Council in a difficult legal position of seemingly endorsing an organisation and open to criticism if the organisation subsequently falls foul. Additionally, the resource to make this work would be significant as there would need to be both a detailed initial assessment and subsequent audit.

Scoping Document

“Services / Support for Veterans”

Scrutiny Chair:

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1. Which of our Corporate Priorities does this topic address?

N/A

2. What are the overall aims and objectives in doing this work?
What are the possible outputs/outcomes to this review?

- Look at existing service provision for veterans within the community and how it can be improved
- Identify a wide range of charitable organisations who can help (not just military ones), with a view to promoting partnership working between each other and the Council
- Identify ways the Council can assist - e.g. Contact Centre compiling data on the no. of veterans in the local area requiring services
- Assessing outcomes of Community Covenant and identifying any deficiencies

3. What specific value can Scrutiny add to this work area?

- Make recommendations to Cabinet to progress the outcomes

- Working closely with elected members to ensure an understanding of the needs and requirements of this project
- Making sure the outcomes are realistic and achievable within the current council restraints
- Assist council services to understand their role within the project
- Champion external partners to support and contribute to the study

4. Duration of the Review?

4 months

5. What category does the review fall into?

Policy Development
External Partnership

6. What information do we need to undertake the Scrutiny Review

Invite representatives for interview:

- '42 Brigade Recovery Unit (Fulwood Barracks)
- Local Heroes Foundation
- Armed Forces Group
- 'DIG IN'
- Assistant Director (Community Engagement) - Council's Community Covenant
- Advice Services – Housing, Welfare Benefits

To provide information about the service currently provided to service and ex-service people and to how many

7. What processes can we use to feed into the review (site visits/observations, face to face questioning, telephone surveys, written questionnaires etc.?)

Interviews with representatives of the panel
Face to face meetings
Questionnaires
Online surveys

8. Diversity – How will we address the diversity standards in order to uphold the Council’s Single Equality Scheme?

All areas of work and any recommendations would be Equality Impact Assessed.

Recommendations can be discussed with the Inclusion Reference Group to identify any potential barriers – insofar as issues related to disability/mental health etc. - this would need to be specifically drawn out within the review