

# Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel Meeting

Thursday, 19 March 2020

Dear Councillor

## VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE CITY SCRUTINY PANEL - THURSDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2020

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Thursday, 19th March, 2020 meeting of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel, the following briefing note that was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

<b>Agenda No</b>	<b>Item</b>
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7	<b><u>Veterans Support (Pages 3 - 6)</u></b>
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Anthony Walker - Homelessness Strategy & External Relationships Manager

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

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# Briefing Note

**Title: Housing Support for Veterans**

**Date: 16 March 2020**

**Prepared by: Anthony Walker**

**Job Title: Homelessness Strategy Manager**

**Intended Audience:**

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

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## Purpose or recommendation

To inform members of the support available for veterans from the UK Armed forces both locally and nationally.

## Overview

The City of Wolverhampton has a long history of providing support and advice for veterans. Over the last 10 years Wolverhampton has had a well-developed and organised covenant group that meet and discuss the needs of local veterans.

However, the nature of need for veterans across the City is different from the national picture with very small numbers of veterans in housing need or homeless, but reasonable level of need related to support veterans resettle into civilian life.

## Background and context

In the UK a military veteran is defined as anyone who has drawn one day's pay from the Armed Forces. A veteran is therefore not defined by the length, nature of their service, or when they left. They also remain veterans even if discharged from the forces for a serious or criminal breach of the 1955 Army Act.

As at the 1st January 2020 the UK Forces Personnel was 192,160, with over 15,000 leaving the armed forces every year, however the vast majority will resettle with little or no need for support or housing.

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) estimated those who required support were often failing to access available services. They suggested that nationally, the annual cost of failing to support individuals and families to transition back into civilian life, was in the region of £25 million. In response to this, and as a result of political lobbying, the national Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) was introduced.

The AFC is a pledge that acknowledges and understands that those who serve, or who have served, in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the

communities, economy and society they have served. In operational terms this means the local authorities, third sector partners, armed forces and housing providers will work together to provide assistance to vulnerable veterans. In response Local Authorities, including Wolverhampton, amended their social housing allocation policies to offer additional preference to veterans to access accommodation, as well part of the Homelessness Reduction Act duties to consider and assist in preventing and relieving homelessness.

The needs of veterans and the nature of housing are wide and varied. In Wolverhampton a Veterans' Housing Service operated for a pilot period of thirty months and aimed to provide vulnerable veterans with temporary housing and support in their transition to sustainable employment and accommodation. The project recognised that whilst a large number of military personnel leave the British Armed Forces on a yearly basis and resettle successfully into civilian life, a small number of veterans experience difficulties including mental ill health, substance misuse and offending which, in turn, can leave them at risk of becoming homeless.

The accommodation-based scheme provided tenancies to 31 veterans. Beneficiaries were mostly from the West Midlands region and neighbouring counties. However, the scheme had difficulties towards the end of the pilot, including:

- No national funding for the support needed to continue the delivery of the service.
- Small numbers of local veterans accessing the service; at the end of the pilot only 1 of the 16 clients had previously lived in Wolverhampton.
- The veterans ranged from men who had served between 6 months and 25 years to individuals who had been in 6 months, having been discharged from service recently, to as far back as 20 years ago. So the service required by individuals varied greatly.

Based on a lack of local demand and funding availability, at the end of the pilot period the service closed and all residents were moved into independent living.

The lack of demand in the City for shared housing for veterans is supported by local data, for example since 2016 only 15 veterans have approached the City Council homelessness and housing advice service. Whilst the demand for housing options is not significant, there is a need to continue providing advice services. However, that does not suggest that veterans may not require support with housing advice, in February 2020 the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) published a Designing Out Veterans' Homelessness Report. The document highlighted existing research, local case studies, best practice and the law/policy related to offering support for veterans.

## **Proposal/Options**

The findings in the WMCA report highlight that even though crisis and emergency provision may not be required in Wolverhampton, there remains a role to offer assistance to vulnerable veterans in different ways. Some suggestions include:

- The use of veterans to advise and feedback on the delivery of mainstream services which work with veterans on an infrequent basis, these services could include accommodation services, treatment providers and general health services.
- Investigate the opportunity for the Councils wholly owned housing company, WV Living, to offer discounts to veterans purchasing WV Living properties, as offered by Taylor Wimpey

and Bovis Homes who offer up to £4,000 discount to veterans wanting to buy new build homes.

- Improving the offer to veterans accessing private sector housing, this could include deposit bonds for tenant and incentives to landlords providing tenancies to veteran tenants.
- Veteran awareness training for mainstream services like health, housing, social care and partner organisations

These actions could be overseen by the City's AFC group and unlike the development of the accommodation-based services could offer valuable long-term support whilst not requiring large of amounts of long-term funding.

