

## Partnership working roundtable

### Purpose of this session

The purpose of the virtual session held on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022 was to discuss issues relating to partnerships, including how to establish them, maintain them, and share best practice.

### Key points from the session

- Have a clear and shared goal or priorities within your partnerships
- If you can, work with existing or previous relationships and organisations, who may have similar goals to you. Then develop from this to other organisations
- Keep partners updated and 'in the loop'
- There's a place for both face-to-face and virtual meetings. Try to tailor which style of meeting you choose depending on who attends
- Understand that partnerships can sometimes be personality driven. Consider how best to work with certain personalities

### A special thank you to those who supported us in this session:

**Chris Thomas** is the Armed Forces Covenant Programme Manager for Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). GMCA was the first combined authority to sign the Covenant in 2014 and the first city-region to adopt one approach to delivering the Covenant. Chris has had experience of working with several local authorities, health, and housing, to deliver support to and, raise awareness of the Armed Forces Community and their families.

**Lisa McFadyen** is the Armed Forces Outreach Service (AFOS) Coordinator, for the AFOS Lisa sits within Gateshead Council, the lead organisation for the AFOS. The AFOS is a local authority partnership between Gateshead, Newcastle, County Durham, Your Homes Newcastle and believe housing. Through AFOS the Armed Forces Community in the Northeast receive support and advice around housing, finance, employment and welfare. Lisa has experience of working across four local authorities and other partners in the Northeast.

### How have you established your partnerships? Do you use any particular governance mechanisms in this?

#### Chris Thomas

- Background context: Combined authority in Greater Manchester is the Mayors office and the combined efforts of 10 local authorities (through devolution). Through devolution and combined authority, they are able to do more within the city region.
- When Chris first started his role he thought he needed to initiate a big and bold Armed Forces partnership within the Combined Authority. But he quickly realised that partnership working had already been happening before he joined; and so he needed to understand where the Armed Forces and Covenant sat in the wider public service reform piece. Chris made sure any partnership was in line with Greater Manchester's goals, strategy and business plan. Partnership was more broadly about working with partnerships already existing within an existing framework.
- This style of partnership does affect the style of governance, the need for Terms of Reference (TORs) and how partnerships are brought together.

- Chris used existing partnerships to identify individuals within these to bring together under an Armed Forces Covenant. This was both public sector and Voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs). He also used the Armed Forces Champions.
- His approach was to increase knowledge, up skill and culture change within existing organisations.
- Now have quarterly partnership meetings, which tend to be more informal. These partnerships incorporate local authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, health organisations (down to trust level and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). There is an opportunity for each organisation to share best practice and any challenges they've experienced.
- Have no TOR, but there are some data sharing agreements in place.
- This is really a 'coalition of the willing'.
- Some Armed Forces charities were already embedded in the Greater Manchester partnership infrastructure (like Walking with the Wounded), while others were not.
- It's also important to understand the profile of the Armed Forces Community in your areas. For example, Greater Manchester has a huge number of Veterans, a handful of reservists and not many regular service personnel.
- It is possible that attempting to force partnerships (through TOR etc) can turn people away. Partnership working can (and should be) reactionary to geographics, demographics etc.

#### Lisa McFadyen

- In the Northeast there is a huge amount of serving personnel (regular and reservist) and veterans. A lot of time is spent with welfare officers, delivering life skills briefs, and raising awareness in organisations.
- Following the COVID-19 pandemic it was really important to reignite previous partnerships. During COVID, the AFOS had a significant drop in referrals.
- Lisa is involved quite heavily with training across organisations. Training is delivered regionally but has national attendance (and sometimes international).
- There are a wide range of partnerships. Some are historic and others have been forged recently; they have all changed over time.
- All AFOS staff are ex-military, this can be a huge advantage; they are front-facing and work on the ground with clients.
- Lisa has built a relationship with SSAFA who provide case workers. She has worked with SSAFA to train all AFOS staff to be SSAFA case workers. Previously, when someone was identified as needing support it would take 5 weeks to have a case worker come out and meet them. Now this can happen on day one. She has a Memorandum of Understanding and data sharing agreement with SSAFA to agree this.
- A lot of relationships and partnerships are based on 'the partnership of the willing'
- Geography and demography of an area have a huge impact on how partnerships work.

#### Having established partnerships, how do you maintain them?

#### Lisa McFadyen

- Having a shared aim, regular meetings and shared deadlines can all be helpful.
- 'It's not what you know, but who you know'... about pulling on pre-existing relationships.
- Ultimately having a common goal is the most important thing.

- Keep people up to date, keeping things fresh and interesting. Important to include partners in the decision-making process.
- Knowing who you're dealing with and their priorities.
- Having staff who are ex-military are able to connect with clients.
- Partner organisations, AFOS and clients speak the same language.
- Are now in a place where organisations are coming to them to seek collaboration.
- Virtual vs Face to face partnership meetings: have been able to attract national organisations for knowledge and support, which was previously unattainable. There are massive advantages to meeting in-person but meeting online has massive advantages too.

### Chris Thomas

- Fortunate that they have Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester; means a lot of things can get done (especially when bringing private companies into partnerships).
- There is an important difference between 'communication' and 'engagement'.
- Have tried all sorts of engagement mechanisms and it is important to figure out what works well.
  - Have tried using emails, website updates, Padlet (which has been very helpful as a noticeboard), and action plans.
- Combined authority partnership isn't working on the frontline as it's more high-level. The partnership is more about reinforcing and supporting those working on the frontline.
- How do we actively engage within partnerships?
  - Face-to-face and virtual meetings. Keeping in touch with people is essential to maintain engagement.
  - Haven't flipped the partnership meetings back to face-to-face yet; people have found it much easier to join a two-hour virtual call, than travelling to attend a meeting in person. Get better attendance on virtual calls.
- Have struggled with organisations that are not military related organisations (e.g. Age Concern, Age UK – have struggled to maintain engagement with them as it is not their main priority for them, especially in a post-COVID context). But now might be the time to reinvigorate these conversations.

### Group Discussion about partnership working

- Regular meetings with partners/other local authorities are very important and beneficial.
- Important to understand the needs of service personnel in your area (e.g. housing, homelessness).
- Useful to work with pre-existing initiatives/partnerships. From a council's perspective this might look like extra funding, promotion etc for pre-existing groups/initiatives.
- Whole systems working together (an example was provided of over 40 organisations working together across a few local authorities)
- Important to also have a named Armed Forces person in local authorities who understands legislation and local authority work around the Covenant
- Virtual vs face-to-face meetings: important to know who's attending. If it's a group of Veterans, best doing it face-to-face, but if it's national attendees, best to have virtual meetings

- Partnerships can be personality driven and dependent.
- The role of Armed Forces Champions needs to be better promoted and understood.
- It is also about getting engagement with regular service people.
- There are lots of strands to partnership working, including Veterans Hubs. Chris Thomas said there was an intentional decision to not avoid duplication across the whole of Greater Manchester (by local authorities within wider partnership). This was done so that more people had access to the same support, in different areas and at different times.
- Staff churn and turnover can make internal partnerships very difficult.
- It's worthwhile to promote and share the successes from partnership working. This could create greater visibility of collaboration working.
- The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) could have a role in promoting the need to prioritise the Covenant with Chief Executives of councils.

### Conclusion

It was interesting to note the variety in partnerships and partnership working that were discussed during the session. The varied depending on the nature of the Armed Forces Community presence in a particular area, and also the public sector structures in place. This helped to illustrate that there are many different ways of creating and maintaining successful partnerships rather than a 'one size fits all' model.