



West Midlands Mayoral manifesto

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ROYAL BRITISH LEGION



About the Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports serving members of the Armed Forces, ex-serving personnel and their families, ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten.

We are the country's largest Armed Forces charity, with 217,000 members, 120,000 volunteers and a network of partners and charities who help us give support wherever and whenever it's needed. We've been here since 1921 and we'll be here as long as they need us.

We provide lifelong support to our serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

- We support them with:
- Physical and Mental Wellbeing
 - Financial and Employment Support
 - Care and Independent Living
 - Local Community Connections
 - Expert Guidance

The Legion also works with politicians and officials at all levels to bring the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant to life, and to further the interests of the Armed Forces community.

Through our research and campaigning, we seek to inform welfare service providers and challenge myths about the Armed Forces community.

We also raise the profile of issues affecting serving and ex-serving personnel and their families and seek to improve government policy.

For more information contact us at: rbl.org.uk or call **0808 802 8080**

For further information on this document please email: publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk
A larger print version of this document is available on request.

Foreword



Karl Hobley Public Affairs and Campaigns Officer, West Midlands
Royal British Legion



The Royal British Legion was founded in 1921 to support Service men and women, veterans and their families and to campaign for their interests. We've been helping and speaking up for the Armed Forces community and their families ever since.

Our campaigning work both nationally and locally is guided and informed by the Armed Forces Covenant principles that:

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

The election of the next Mayor of the West Midlands offers a chance to realise this more comprehensively and tangibly across the whole region.

This is something we as a charity and our partners in the voluntary and charitable sectors have seen an ever increasing need for.

This document is the first time we have articulated our priorities for the West Midlands Mayor in this way, although the Legion has long engaged with governments at both the national and local level to implement practical measures that improve the lives of the Armed Forces community.

The Legion's West Midlands Team stands ready to assist the Armed Forces community with everything from housing advice to support in accessing benefits and home adaptations. Charities like the Legion and our partners are well placed to see the gaps in both statutory and local community provision. We have sought through this manifesto to highlight these and recommend ways we believe the Mayor can help.

The recommendations in this manifesto are the result of extensive engagement with the Armed Forces

community, our partner charities and agencies, councillors, Armed Forces representatives as well as our own staff and volunteer team based across the West Midlands region.

We are confident that if the next Mayor follows the recommendations we have laid out, the West Midlands can achieve a step change in the way this community are supported, valued and able to thrive.

Karl Hobley
Public Affairs and Campaigns Officer,
West Midlands
Royal British Legion



Summary of Recommendations

The Royal British Legion believes that the next Mayor of the West Midlands should:

Appoint an advocate for the Armed Forces community at the Combined Authority level, empowering them to challenge local authorities, public bodies and business, and to lead and champion good practice.

Enable veterans and the wider Armed Forces community to access and benefit from the widest range of employment and re-training options possible.

Support and champion the role of Reservists within the West Midlands, ensuring their unique and valued contribution to the community is recognised by public services and employers throughout the region.

Introduce a concessionary travel scheme for veterans in receipt of compensation as a result of their Service.

Coordinate the provision of integrated health care to the Armed Forces community within the West Midlands.

Implement a consistent approach across the region in the provision of housing and housing advice to the Armed Forces community.

Appoint an advocate for the Armed Forces community at the Combined Authority level, empowering them to challenge local authorities, public bodies and business, and to lead and champion good practice.

Since its introduction in 2011, every local authority in Great Britain, over 4,000 organisations including businesses, charities, and other public sector bodies, and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) itself have signed the Armed Forces Covenant. They have pledged to uphold its key twin principles of removing disadvantage for serving personnel, veterans and their families, and giving special consideration in certain circumstances, such as for those who have been injured or bereaved.

While each local council within the WMCA area has an elected member Armed Forces champion, we believe better, more comprehensive outcomes can be achieved by the Combined Authority showing leadership and providing support to both councils and local businesses.

Many of the challenges faced by the people the Legion helps are increasingly complex, often involving multiple public and charitable services. Our experience, alongside that of our partners in these sectors, is that greater coordination between public bodies coupled with a much-improved understanding of the Covenant and its commitments is needed to help the most vulnerable across the West Midlands.

For the Covenant to have meaning within the community, it must be understood, and have practical value to people's lives. We believe the next Mayor could help this by appointing and empowering an advocate or champion at the Combined Authority level.

The next Mayor of the West Midlands should work to ensure:

- The advocate is able to address issues at a strategic level, able to convene local authorities, bodies and agencies with which the Combined Authority works.
- The advocate champions and fosters collaboration between the West Midlands local authorities and other public bodies, such as Transport for West Midlands and local NHS Trusts.
- The advocate leads on the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant within the West Midlands Combined Authority and provides leadership within the region.



Enable veterans and the wider Armed Forces community to access and benefit from the widest range of employment and re-training options possible.

For working age veterans, securing stable employment after leaving the Armed Forces is a vital part of a successful transition to civilian life. In the year to September 2019, over 15,000 people left the Armed Forces and over half do so before age 30¹. The majority of these veterans will be successful in their search for new employment. However, challenges remain for a minority of veterans and more can be done to support them.

With the approval of HS2, Coventry's status as UK Capital of Culture in 2021 and the Commonwealth Games being hosted in Birmingham in 2022, the

West Midlands is uniquely placed to offer a huge range of employment opportunities to job seekers and those looking to re-train. Veterans, military spouses and early Service leavers should all be able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Given the investment in sporting facilities being made for the Commonwealth Games, we additionally believe the Mayor should actively promote Birmingham as a future host of the Invictus Games, further raising the profile of the veteran community in the region.

The next Mayor of the West Midlands should:

- Use their powers over the region's skills and training provision to increase the number of ELCAS² accredited training providers within the West Midlands, allowing more Service leavers to use their learning credits within the region.
- Ensure veterans and the broader Armed Forces community can access the employment opportunities arising from the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, the UK Capital of Culture in Coventry in 2021 and the building of HS2.
- Consider applying to host the Invictus Games in the West Midlands region, following the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.
- Continue the West Midlands Combined Authority Construction Gateway programme³, ensuring this is actively promoted to the Armed Forces community.

CASE STUDY: Dan O'Sullivan from Warsall

In July of 2011, Sgt Dan O'Sullivan from Warsall was serving with the 1st Battalion of the Irish Guards. However, he incurred life changing injuries having been attacked with a concrete block on a night out while on home leave. Despite sustaining life-changing brain injuries, ex-infantryman Dan is continuing to fight his way back to health and his determination has powered him to re-learn to walk, talk and drive.

With 16 years service, including two tours of Iraq and service in Afghanistan, Dan maintains he is still very much 'military minded' and as part of his recovery he has embarked on a disciplined physical fitness programme, determined to establish himself as a personal trainer.

As part of his development, the Royal British Legion funded his retraining at Portland College, as well as funding flights to America in 2015 to train and inspire American Forces.

Dan said: "The Royal British Legion has been incredible in aiding me in my recovery and helping me to aspire to retrain. Their generous funding has allowed me to go to college and gain qualifications towards my dream of becoming a personal fitness instructor for other disabled veterans. If it wasn't for their support with funding towards my retraining, I'm not sure where I would have turned in the aftermath of my injury and ongoing recovery."



Support and champion the role of Reservists within the West Midlands, ensuring their unique and valued contribution to the community is recognised by public services and employers throughout the region.

Unlike other areas of the country, the West Midlands does not have a particularly visible military footprint. This can lead to the impression that the region does not have a large Armed Forces community, or that most people who join the military move away from the region on joining.

Whilst the region lacks any sizeable garrisons or airbases, there is a significant military presence within many West Midlands communities in the form of Reservists. There are 33 Reserve Force Centres in the West Midlands⁴, including the Royal Navy's HMS Forward in Birmingham, numerous Army Reserve Centres and RAF Cosford just outside Wolverhampton.

Reservists undertake military training and demanding roles alongside their civilian jobs, working to augment their Regular counterparts. Many Reservists will deploy on operations for extended periods of time, facing the same challenges all military personnel face.

While the UK's Reserves are a critical component of the nation's Armed Forces, personnel can find it hard to juggle Reserve and work commitments without the understanding and support of their employer.

Major employers are opening new headquarters in the West Midlands and significant growth is predicted in the coming years, with existing employers expanding in the region. We believe the Mayor and the Combined Authority can show leadership in how the region can better promote, support and champion the contribution Reservists and their families make to both the Armed Forces and the community as a whole.

By encouraging local employers, partner agencies and member local authorities to employ and support Reservists, as well as doing so within the WMCA itself, the Mayor is well placed to help employers better support and understand their Reservist employees.

The next Mayor of the West Midlands should:

- Promote the benefits of employing Reservists to local employers, partner agencies, and local authorities.
- Introduce a guaranteed or preferred interview scheme for vacancies within the Combined Authority for veterans and Reservists, encouraging the further roll out of this policy among the constituent local authorities and their arm's length bodies, partners and principal suppliers.
- Support military spouses and partners by advertising WMCA and constituent authority jobs on the *Forces Families Jobs*⁵ website.



Introduce a concessionary travel scheme for veterans in receipt of compensation as a result of their Service.

Public transport and connectivity across the West Midlands region are a key area of the Mayor and Combined Authority's responsibilities. Significant investment continues to take place across the region with the expansion of the Metro network as well as the reopening of some train stations. The ability to travel locally, however, remains a challenge for the most vulnerable in the Armed Forces community.

Following the example of the Transport for London Veterans Oyster Photocard⁶, we are calling on the Mayor to introduce a scheme along the same lines. This would offer free and discounted travel across the public transport network to veterans in receipt of either War Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments. These schemes compensate veterans for injuries or conditions developed as a result of Service.

The Transport for West Midlands Swift card scheme provides an opportunity to introduce a similar scheme across the West Midlands Network.

Additionally, with the launch last year of the new veteran's railcard at the national level, there is an opportunity for other transport providers such as the metro and local buses to use this card to provide their own discounts, as well as to potentially validate eligibility.



The next Mayor of the West Midlands should:

- Introduce a concessionary travel scheme for veterans in receipt of compensation as a result of their service – in line with the Veterans Oyster Photocard in London.

Coordinate the provision of integrated health care to the Armed Forces community within the West Midlands.

Under the current devolution arrangements for the West Midlands, the Mayor does not have powers over health, in contrast to Greater Manchester. Despite this, the Legion and our partners believe that the Mayor can play an important leadership and convening role, driving improvements and innovation within the provision of healthcare.

Research indicates that the health of members of the Armed Forces community can be worse than the general public in specific areas. For example, working age veterans are more likely than the general population to report a number of musculoskeletal long-term health conditions⁷ and difficulty in hearing⁸.

Legion research has shown that those in Service, their families and veterans are more likely to report feelings of loneliness and social isolation⁹.

While charities like the Legion and our partners work to tackle this, more concerted action is needed to address this public health issue.

GPs in the West Midlands led the way in England by piloting initiatives such as veteran aware GP practices. By promoting this scheme¹⁰, as well as appropriate accreditation for hospitals and NHS Trusts such as the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance, the Mayor can help drive greater understanding of veterans' healthcare needs. By bringing together community, voluntary and NHS services the Mayor could help to improve collaboration and referrals between these services, leading to better long-term outcomes for all in the Armed Forces community.

The next Mayor of the West Midlands should:

- Drive participation in the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance¹¹, seeking to get all West Midlands Hospitals and NHS Trusts accredited.
- Continue and enhance efforts to tackle loneliness and social isolation, specifically by ensuring councils include loneliness and social isolation and its effects on the Armed Forces community in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies.

Work with local authorities to implement a consistent approach across the region in the provision of housing and housing advice to the Armed Forces community.

Although housing and homelessness remain the responsibility of local councils within the West Midlands, we believe the Mayor and the Combined Authority can and should use their powers to more effectively tackle this issue.

The Legion's experience locally, as well as that of our partners, is of veterans receiving a widely variable experience depending on when and to which council they apply within the region. Although account must be made for local context,

we believe an applicant for housing should receive a consistent level of support and service wherever in the region they present as homeless or in need.

There is also a need to address the needs of single Service leavers who do not have children. This group are considered low priority and it is local charities who are primarily left to support this group. We believe the next Mayor has the chance to change this, making specific provision for this group.

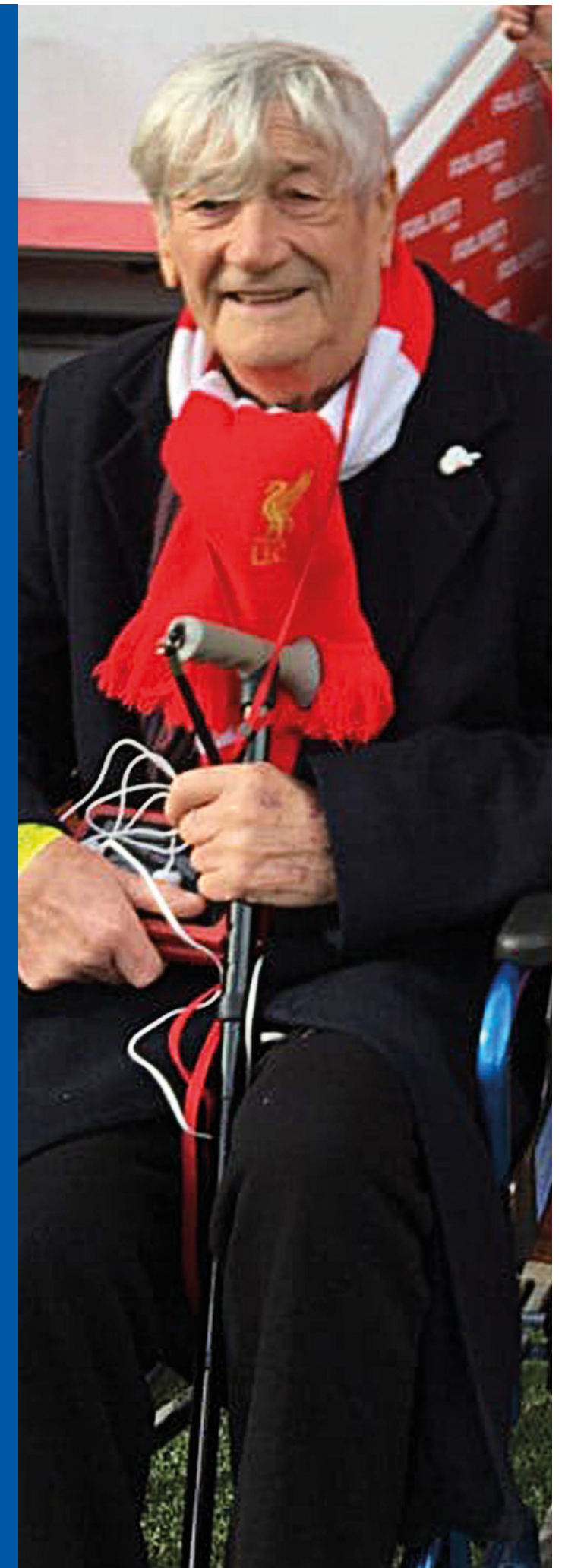
The next Mayor of the West Midlands should:

- Continue to support specialised services that will help rough sleeping veterans off the streets and into sustainable accommodation.
- When allocating land for housing development, consider specific provision for veterans within communities.
- Encourage a shared approach by West Midlands local authorities to the accommodation needs of single Service leavers who do not have children, making specific provision for this group within the region.

CASE STUDY: Victor Parry from Birmingham

Victor Parry sadly passed away from cancer in January this year at the age of 88. Victor was a veteran of the Army Service Corps and lived in Birmingham in recent years. Through working with a Royal British Legion Case Officer, we were able to make Vic aware of the services the Legion and other charities can offer veterans. Until recently Victor had been struggling to find suitable accommodation, having previously lived in a high-rise block meaning he was unable to get out easily to get shopping. With the help of his friend and Legion volunteer Anne, he was successfully moved into a more suitable home after contacting the council as well as getting support through the charity.

Speaking last year he said: "The Legion have been great providing support with my welfare needs and putting me in touch with the right people to ensure I have a comfortable home. However, 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."



Endnotes

- ¹ UK Armed Forces (2019) **Biannual Diversity Statistics**
- ² Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Service www.enhancedlearningcredits.com
- ³ Go Construct www.goconstruct.org/construction-today/whats-new-in-construction/major-projects/wmca
- ⁴ West Midlands Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association www.wmrfca.org/managing-the-estate
- ⁵ Forces Families Jobs www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk
- ⁶ Transport for London www.tfl.gov.uk/fares/free-and-discounted-travel/veterans-oyster-photocard
- ⁷ The Royal British Legion (2014) **Household Survey**
- ⁸ The Royal British Legion (2014) **Lost Voices**
- ⁹ The Royal British Legion (2018) **Loneliness and Social Isolation**
- ¹⁰ The Royal College of General Practitioners www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/a-to-z-clinical-resources/veteran-friendly-gp-practices.aspx
- ¹¹ NHS Improvement www.improvement.nhs.uk/resources/veteran-aware-hospitals





ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

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