



VETERANS WELLBEING HUB REPORT AUGUST 2021



By Victoria Coomber
Armed Forces Covenant Officer

CHARNWOOD, MELTON AND RUSHCLIFFE BOROUGH COUNCILS

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Summary

An opportunity to apply for up to £10,000 of funding from The Armed Forces Covenant Fund was identified, so the Charnwood, Rushcliffe, and Melton Armed Forces Covenant Project (in conjunction with Loughborough Wellbeing Centre, Harborough District Council and Rutland County Council) developed the concept of creating a Veteran-specific wellbeing hub. The notion was to set up and deliver a veterans' wellbeing hub to provide support and advice to veterans living across Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Rushcliffe Districts. The Hub - working with the third sector and health organisations who provide veteran health provision - was to deliver advice and guidance and Loughborough Wellbeing Centre mental health support and structured activities.

The Project was keen to understand if there was a need for a veteran's hub in the region and to seek the views of veterans to help shape delivery. Therefore, a survey was commissioned for 28-day period, to identify and evidence any such need,

The survey was developed in consultation with the Armed Forces Lead at Leicestershire Partnership Trust, with Loughborough Wellbeing Centre's, Chief Executive Officer (who is also a veteran) and with Rutland's and Harborough's Armed Forces Covenant Officer.

The online survey was distributed to known groups who support veterans, local military units, colleagues working in the Armed Forces Covenant arena and Veteran Breakfast Clubs. Social media campaigns across the 28 days promoted and raised awareness of the survey.

357 responses were received and reviewed after 28 days. The raw data has been analysed using graphs and tables. Key findings demonstrate overwhelming support for a hub.

- 86% said there is a need for a well-being hub
- 82% want to make new friends
- 64% want help with their mental health
- The Royal British Legion and Op Courage were listed highest as organisation's respondents want the hub to work in partnership with
- 65% of respondents would be prepared to travel over 10 miles to access the hub

Based on the above a request for almost £10,000 has been submitted to The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The grants will be awarded at the end of October 2021.

A further opportunity to apply to be a project partner in a portfolio in the Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme from The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust has been utilised with an expression of interest submitted for £100,000. This grant will grow and extend the hub model and includes creating satellite hubs across the region.

This programme will award 10 grants of up to £800,000 to portfolios of projects, which will work regionally to develop better, more joined up lasting support for local veterans with mental health needs. (The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, 2021).

There are currently 3 midlands-based military charities applying to be a portfolio holder and an expression of interest to be a project partner will be submitted by Loughborough Wellbeing Centre to all 3. The portfolios will cover each of the NHS High Intensity Service geographical boundaries. LLR and Rushcliffe sit in The Midlands region which covers both the West and East Midlands.

If successful, this will a 2-year project. Decisions made on funding applications will be made in November 2021.



Background



Charnwood, Melton and Rushcliffe Borough Councils formed a partnership in 2017. In 2018 a second successful bid to The Trust for £150,000 enabled the Covenant Development Officer's post to continue and work across the areas of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire covered by the three councils. A further successful grant for £20,00 has extended the partnership until January 2022.



Rutland made a joint application to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund along with South Kesteven and Harborough. The funding was secured in March 2018 and following successful recruitment the post of Armed Forces Covenant Officer was filled in August 2018. At the end of the 2-year funding Rutland County Council & Harborough District Council have committed to retaining the Armed Forces Covenant Officers post.



Loughborough Wellbeing Centre provides a safe and welcoming meeting place for people (aged 18 plus) who are experiencing, or recovering from, mental health difficulties. They are a suitable place for people looking for fun activities and somewhere to rediscover their self-confidence and be socially active again.

The Wellbeing Centre uses local facilities within Leicestershire, where a welcoming, safe environment can be offered for their drop-in wellbeing cafes and the new twice weekly evening crisis cafes that provide one to one support for people at crisis point. These provide activities for people who might otherwise find social gatherings difficult.

The Charnwood, Rushcliffe, and Melton Covenant partnership; Rutland and Harborough Armed Forces Covenant Officer; Loughborough Wellbeing Centre Chief Executive Officer (with support from the Armed Forces Lead at Leicestershire Partnership Trust) have been working together to shape and scope a proposal for a Veterans Wellbeing Hub – to be based in Loughborough.

From experience of interacting with a broad range of professionals who have worked with veterans, and publicity from recent media reports of the prevalence of mental health issues amongst veterans – have supported the teams' hypothesis that there is a need for a veteran-specific hub.

The lack of available data and the absence of the 'veterans voice' in identifying need were recognised by the team, at an early stage. Therefore, it was agreed that a broad-reaching survey - aimed predominately at veterans and their support networks - should be conducted. The team agreed that speaking to Buddy2Buddy (Leicestershire Partnership Trusts virtual café), veteran members could provide further evidence of need.

The team also presented The Veterans Hub concept to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Civil Military Partnership Board which has representations from the third sector, statutory organisations and local military units for feedback and comment. All the responses were positive and supportive.



Veterans Wellbeing Hub -an Overview

A grant bid for almost £10,000 has been submitted to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, to fund a 6-month pilot of the Veteran Wellbeing Hub – to be based in Loughborough. The grant bid, if successful, will be awarded at the end of October 2021 and the new hub would become operational in January 2022.

The concept of having a veteran specific wellbeing hub came through discussions with Loughborough Wellbeing Centre (LWC) Chief Executive Officer who is a veteran and has been delivering mental health and wellbeing services in the local community for over 10 years. This includes being mental health first aid trained and delivering a range of mental health and suicide prevention courses across schools and in the community. LWC has also provided support and advice to Buddy2Buddy (AFCFT Funded virtual café).

Anecdotal feedback from across the region-Charnwood, Oakham & Lutterworth Breakfast Clubs who already support veterans and expressing wanting to establish something 'more' than Breakfast Clubs can offer indicated a need.

LWC premises are already established as a Safe Space in Loughborough Town Centre and provides a place of refuge and sanctuary for people living with enduring mental health challenges. To ensure this, they have a mutually agreed membership agreement with their existing café members.

Loughborough Wellbeing Centre (LWC) has been delivering similar support within the community for the past 6 years and has good working relationships with partner agencies, including the local Police and Local Authority.

It was clear the LWC were best placed to deliver the veterans wellbeing hubs.

Scoping out the veteran's hub with the wellbeing centre's 'doubled hatted' Chief Executive Officer and two of the regions Covenant Officers was straightforward and broadly based on the delivery model currently used by LWC.

The proposal that LWC pilot and deliver a dedicated veterans wellbeing hub, 10 hours a week-based in their new centre in Loughborough. Learnings from this pilot will help improve service delivery and feedback shared with partners and statutory services. The hope is this feedback will help shape and create new services if gaps are identified.

The hub will provide a safe, secure space offering support, advice, hospitality, structured activities, and friendship. The hub is not a coffee morning or Breakfast Club.

What is unique and inspiring about the hub model is that it will create a blend where veterans are provided tailored help and support by experienced staff, trained in understanding the military way of life and group structured activities; but will also create opportunities for veterans to attend the other wellbeing centre activities with the wider community.

Also provided are:

- Sessional workers (who are veterans) will work with small groups and when required, on a 1-1 basis to identify need and support e.g., Signposting to other services such as housing, employment support, benefits etc.
- Support from military charities, specialist mental health services, advice, and information agencies in providing a single space for them to operate
- Group sessions e.g., creative therapies and life coaching.

There will be a membership agreement for those attending the Veterans Wellbeing Hub to create a mutually agreed standard of expected behaviour, which will include respect for others, diversity and inclusion of all, safety, and acceptable behaviours. The Sessional Worker will work carefully with veterans to ensure that this is adhered to so that all members feel welcome and respected.

There will be a robust safeguarding policy for vulnerable adults that is regularly reviewed. The Chief Executive works closely with partner agencies as the Designated Safeguarding Officer to implement any safeguarding issues as and when required to ensure vulnerable adults are supported robustly.

The survey showed veterans want to make new friends therefore this will be a strong focus of the hub through group sessions, something which LWC have years of experience of through operating wellbeing cafes.

Staff will monitor veteran engagement, listen to, and seek views and thoughts, recording responses ensuring continuous service improvement. Especially in identifying barriers to getting support.

Themes/issues raised will be analysed; shared with agencies/partners; to help identify where the hub can provide support with delivering targeted training and awareness raising of 'veteran' issues.

Where veterans need clinical intervention, support to access 'Op Courage' will be provided

"Op Courage is a new NHS service that provides specialist care for those Armed forces veterans suffering from a mental health crisis.

The new service combines the Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), the Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS) and the Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service (HIS)".

(<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/armed-forces-and-veterans-healthcare/veterans-nhs-mental-health-services/>, 2021)

The Hub will work closely with local partners/organisations that tackle homelessness, addictions, victim support and debt management etc.

Mental Health Recovery College and Adult Learning teams will provide free educational courses. The local Walking group Leader (volunteer) and Charnwood Council Physical activities team will provide free activities.

Local veteran support groups will be welcomed, including RBL, SSAFA, Op Courage, RAFA, Help for Heroes as well as others as we develop this pilot project. They will be offered space to hold open access surgeries for veterans to help them with the types of issues that they may need support with.

Obtaining funding to operate the hubs through The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust required the identification and evidence to demonstrate a need for a Veterans Hub. Therefore, the team decided to carry out a 28-day survey in July 2021 and focus group with Buddy2Buddy the virtual wellbeing café run by Leicestershire Partnership Trust. The results will help shape service delivery.



Focus Group

The focus group took place in July 2021, with the attendees of the Buddy2Buddy virtual Café. Buddy2Buddy has been running for since May 2021 and is open three nights week. Four veterans took part in the focus group which lasted about an hour.

To ensure the session covered the key areas the team wanted to understand and learn, a set of questions were prepared in advance.

Questions for focus group

1. What do you think about the idea of having a well-being hub?
2. Is Loughborough a suitable location?
3. What would you like to see at the well-being hub? Ideas and suggestions
4. What do you think of the concept that the hub will encourage opportunities to take part in activities with non-veterans from the wider community?
5. Do you think having veteran lead activities will work? Can we harness and hone veterans' skills?
6. How can we link and have synergy between Buddy2Buddy and The Well-being café? Should they work together? Should they share good practice?

The session started with an informal introduction to the project concept and an explanation of the information would be used. It was clear from early on allowing free flowing conversation with prompts based on the questions was going to work better with the cohort attending this focus session.

There was broad overwhelming support for the concept of a veteran's well-being hub based in Loughborough. Issues raised included accessing the hub will depend on a veteran's mental health journey as to whether they feel they can take part in a face-to-face experience however all agreed that an environment where other veterans were present would be easier to join.

One veteran said that having come out of crisis they didn't know where to turn to and were handed a leaflet. However, talking with Buddy2Buddy has helped and would welcome opportunities to now meet other veterans face to face and said it feels like this would be the next stage of the journey to recovery.

The 'squaddie' banter, jokes and shared experience are important to veterans, the sense of veterans understanding one another was mentioned a lot. One quoted "Civvies couldn't comprehend what's in my head" (Civvies is the military term for civilians). "There are some things I could only say to another veteran" "miss the banter." All agreed that veterans deal with things differently to civvies as the nature of the job meant that they used humour as a way of coping. The term work hard and play hard was also used.

There was some discussion around how it can be difficult to connect with civvies which makes them feel unconnected; however, when the conversation moved on to talking about feeling part of the wider community and support to integrate. The

importance given most of their lives will be spent be in civvy street; it was accepted that given opportunities in a safe environment to meet and make new friends would be welcomed.

Most agreed having productive activities to take part in where you create something would be better as it provides a sense of achievement. Suggestions included pottery, cookery classes (it was noted some veterans who are struggling have very poor diets), gardening, woodworking, and painting – potential to link in with the community allotment.

One veteran was particularly keen to help other veterans and use their experiences to help others suffering with their mental health.

Finally, the environment was again discussed and the need for it to have a quiet space, a safe room was suggested. It was also suggested that the space feels calm, and that staff are aware and experienced to notice if someone needs extra support. The importance of having a veteran running the hub was raised as this provides an instantly trusted person who will understand.

The opportunity to discuss other agencies supporting the hub, advice and information or support with finding a job did not rise as the session had come to an appropriate ending place.

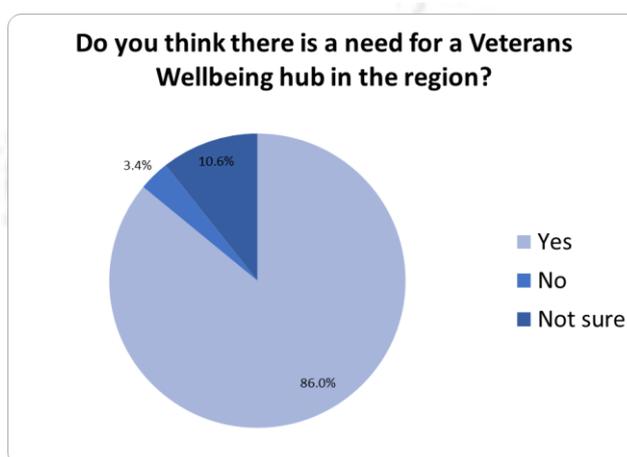
Key Learning

- Overwhelming support for a Veterans Wellbeing Hub
- Safe and trusted environment when it includes other veterans
- Opportunities to make new friends
- Activities that veterans could lead on would be positive
- Important that the hub is run by a veteran
- Needs to be a calm space

Survey Findings

Armed Forces Veteran Wellbeing Hub Survey

Question 1 asked respondents if they felt there was a need for a veterans Hub? 86% of respondents said yes there was need for a veteran's wellbeing hub.



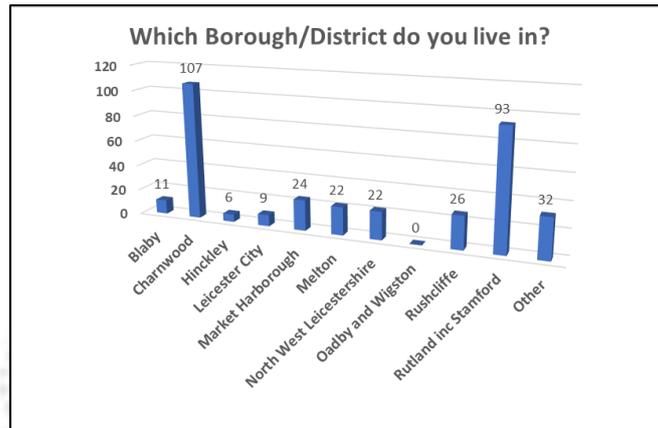
Question 2 asked respondents to say why they thought a veteran wellbeing hub was needed?

314 responses were received, reviewed, and then categorised under nine headings.

1	Not enough support for veterans/veteran's need more support	37%
2	Veterans need opportunities to make new friends with other veterans/ peer to peer support / feeling lonely	27%
3	Veterans need support in lots of areas- need a One Stop Shop	12%
4	Current providers and or provisions are not good enough	5%
5	Other e.g., told a story, just answered yes or they need it	5%
6	No explanation- but referred to the fact that a lot of veterans live in the region	3%
7	Experienced the success of other wellbeing/social spaces	2%
8	Location important/ locality is important/ don't want to travel into the city	2%
9	Covid-19 has impacted Veterans	1%

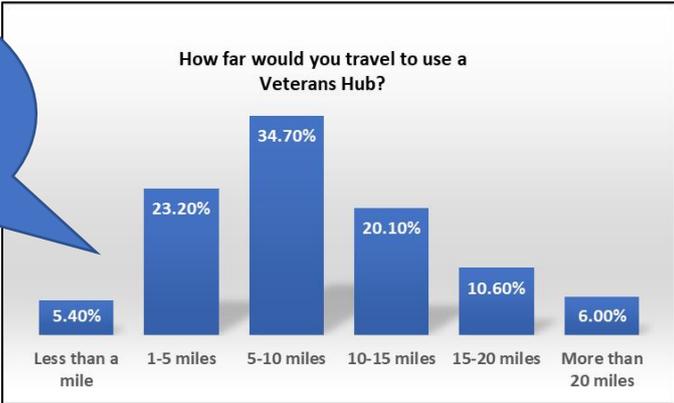
The responses clearly show that there is a belief that there is not enough support available for veterans and veterans want opportunities to make friends and or feel less isolated.

Question 3,4 and 13 related to travel and location

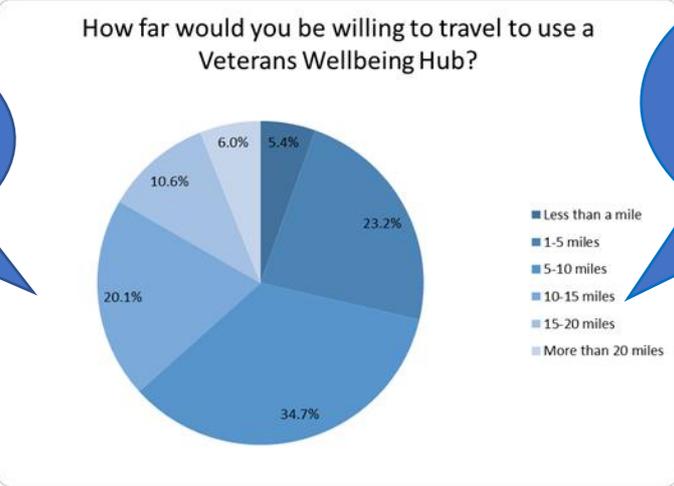


Given the location of the Veterans hub in Loughborough as expected Charnwood received the most responses; however, the number of completed surveys from Rutland is very positive given these veterans will have furthest to travel.

65% said they would travel over 10 miles to the hub.

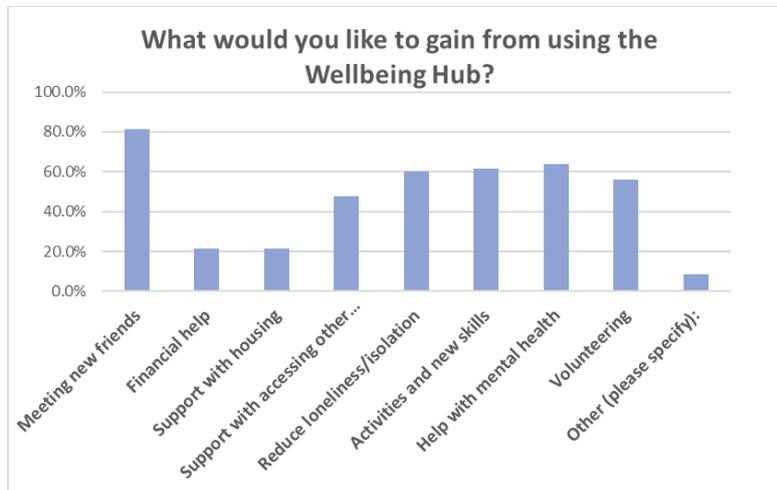


62% will travel by car to use the hub



**Recommendation
The hub is located close to a carpark**

Question 5 was designed to get an idea about what veterans want from the hub this question will help shape the delivery of the hub.



TOP 3



- **Making new friends**
- **Help with mental health**
- **Take part in activities/learn new skills**

Question 6 Which organisations would you like to see involved in the Wellbeing Hub? These are potential guests who can provided specialist and generalised advice and guidance to veterans attending the hub.

Royal British Legion	76.9%
Op COURAGE The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service	70.0%
RFEA- The Forces Employment Charity	65.4%
Combat Stress	60.2%
Citizens Advice	59.9%
Help for Heroes	54.2%
Walking with The Wounded	50.4%
The Ripple Pond	49.9%
Defence Transition Service	45.8%
Other (please specify):	20.5%

Question 7. This question provided answers based on the model already used by Loughborough Wellbeing Centre and was important to help understand whether current resources and activities will be what veterans want to take part in.

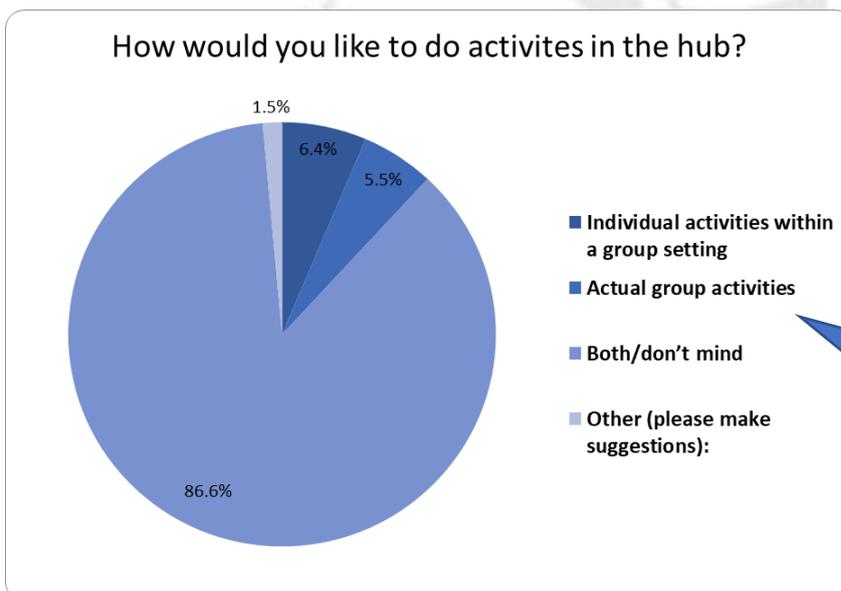


TOP 3



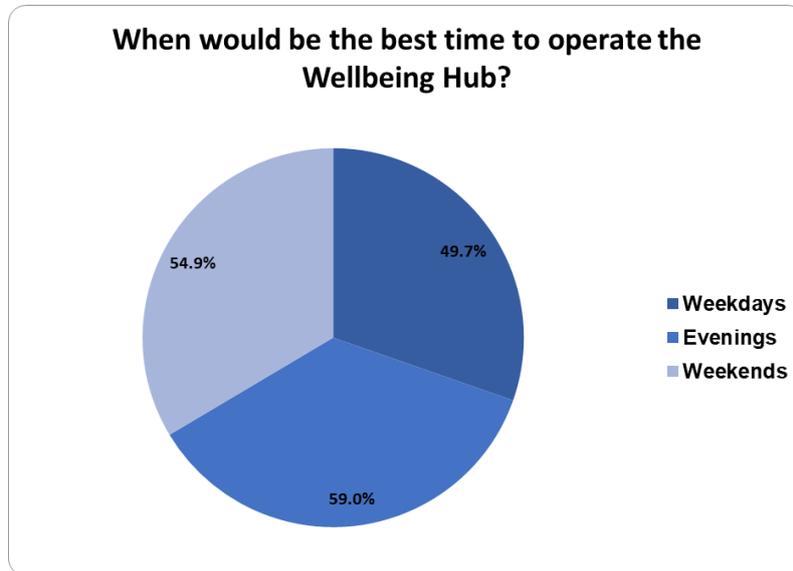
- **Mental Health Support Group**
- **Physical Activities**
- **Discussion Groups**

Question 8 asked respondents their preferences for how therapies could be delivered. The options were Individual activities within a group setting, Actual group activities, Both/don't mind, Other (please make suggestions). Overwhelmingly the answer was both/don't mind with 86% answering.



Group activities will create opportunities to make new friends

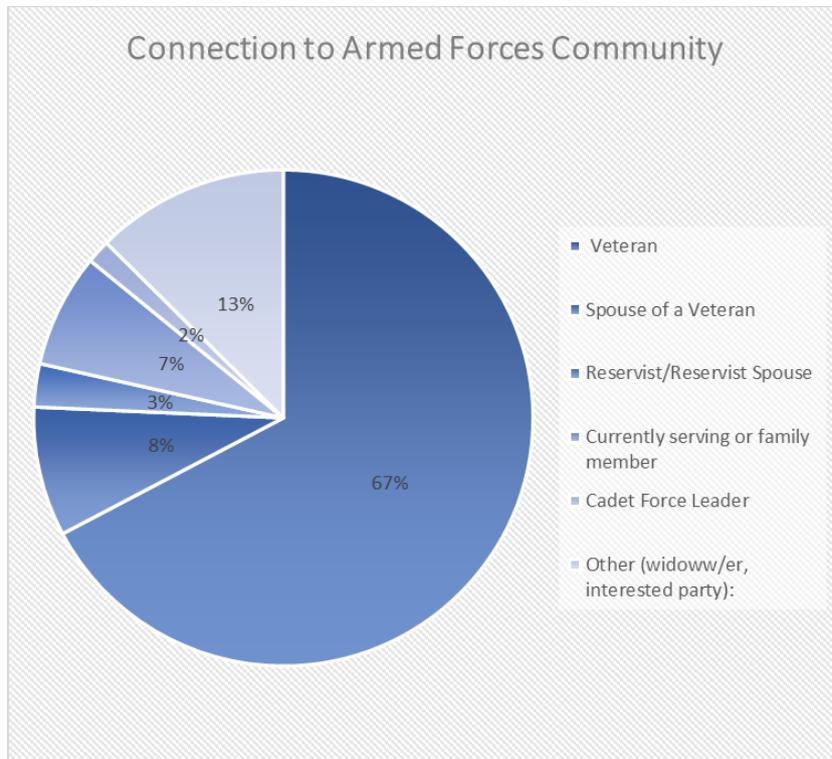
Question 9 asked respondents when they would be most likely to access the hub. The results are almost equal. This will help determine the opening days and times for the hub.



Question 10 asked for suggestions and ideas of what support the Wellbeing Hub should or could include? Below are the most common suggestions.



Questions 11 and 12 looked at who was completing the questionnaire and their connection to the Armed Forces.



Key Highlights on respondents

67% Veterans

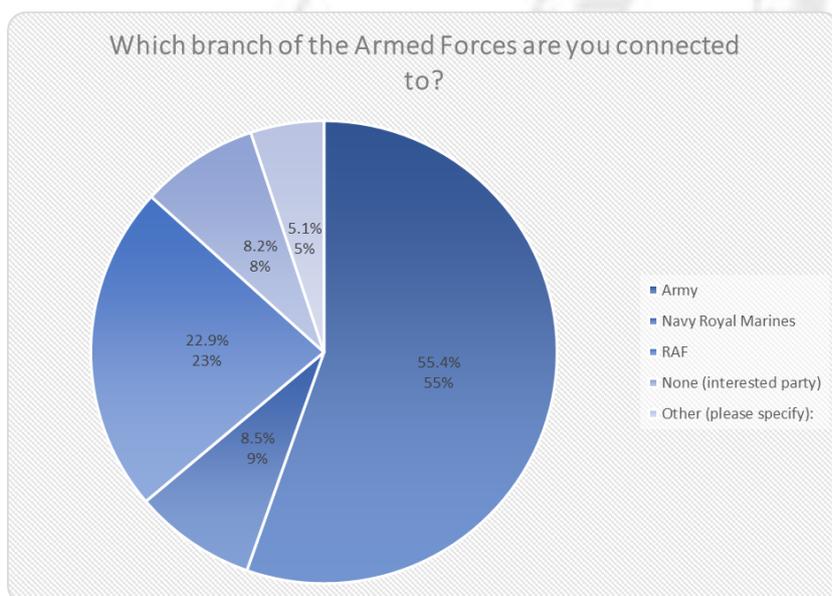
9.3% Veteran spouses

8.2% Current serving personnel/family member

55% Army Veterans

23% RAF Veterans

8.5% Navy Veterans



Recommendations

This survey and report aimed to find out if there is a need for a Veterans Wellbeing Hub for Veterans living in Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and Rushcliffe.

From the findings presented, the following learning and recommendations can be made:

Demographics

- The survey received 357 responses over 28 days. Responses were encouraged from the Armed Forces Community including those who have an interest in veteran welfare.
- Nearly three quarters; 74% of responses came from veterans
- 55% of responses were Army Veterans
- Almost a third of respondents live in Charnwood 30% of respondents live in and over a quarter in 26% Rutland County (including Stamford).

Support for a Veterans Wellbeing Hub

The survey results indicate an overwhelming support for the idea of having a wellbeing hub based in Loughborough. 86% of respondents, 307 said they felt there was a need for a hub. 65% said they would be prepared to travel over 10 miles to attend.

“I hope this gains traction as I'd be very keen to attend”

“I think this is a great idea - would it be free, or could we fundraise for it too”?

When asked why they believed there was a need; 37% said they felt there was not enough support available for veterans; highlighting the need to ensure that veterans and those supporting them need to be aware what help is available and how to access it. Finally, 31% felt veterans benefit from being with other veterans and receiving peer-to-peer support.

What should a Hub look like?

When asked what activities the hub could make available, 1464 responses were received by 347 respondents. Opportunities to meet and make new friends was the highest suggestion at 82%. The second most suggested idea was providing support with mental health at 64% this was closely followed by opportunities to learn new skills 61% and reducing social isolation and loneliness at 60%. These results should be used to develop and shape the facilities available when accessing the hub.

“I have seen first-hand the value of creating a safe space for veterans to meet other likeminded people who can support / share / and help each other along their individual journeys and pathways to recovery. A wellbeing hub is a fantastic idea, as reintroducing face to face meetings will encourage veterans not to feel isolated and the opportunity to visit or volunteer in a hub will add much more structure and value to their day”

1886 responses were received by 347 participants. When the respondents were asked what sort of activities they would like to see at a hub, mental health scored highly again with 63% wanting to see a mental health support group. The suggestion of having guest talks was popular with 59% of respondents ticking this box.

Overall activities that had a physical element were more popular than creative activities. 55% wanted to see a walking group, Physical activity scored 52.5% and Inclusive physical activities for all abilities (e.g., New Age Curling, Boccia) received 41.6%.

61% of veterans said they would like the hub to provide opportunities to learn a new skill. The survey suggested a few options and asked for suggestions. Cookery was the most popular with 33%, Music 30.2%, Photography 28.2%, and Art therapy 22.6%. Further suggestions that were popular included outdoor activities such as trips to museums, gardening, bowls, and biking.

“What I hope will be avoided is that it becomes just a get together of older veterans that simply talk about their service time. Don't get me wrong, talking about specific elements of active service is vitally important especially if it is linked to PTSD or other mental health concerns “

Respondents were asked for any other support that the Wellbeing Hub should or could offer. The most suggested ideas were, signposting, help with alcohol abuse, links to other community groups, computer (IT Skills) and creating a buddy system of support.

Perhaps a centralised advisor desk, that can signpost people to the help most suited to their needs.

This indicates two broad themes emerging from the survey results. Support for mental health issues and opportunities to expand friendships. The hub should consider ways of combining both themes as a priority in all service delivery. Regular

consultation of veteran service users is advised to ensure the hub continues to meet their needs.

Operational Delivery

Respondents were asked when the hubs should operate, and the results were similar with three options for when the hub should open:

Weekdays	49.7%
Evenings	59.0%
Weekends	54.9%

“Events/meetings held on different days and at different times to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.”

Some of the responses suggested the hub should be operated and run by a veteran. Clearly this is important to some veterans, suggesting there is trust between veterans who understand shared experience of life in the Armed Forces.

“The hub should be staffed by veterans, if possible”

“Any facility should be veteran managed. Civilians with no service experience, or reservists without any real-world operational experience would not work”

One of the most positive themes was the number of veterans who have offered to be involved, volunteer and help set up the hubs. This was not a question in the survey, yet many found an opportunity to ask if they could volunteer.

“An ability for the veterans to volunteer as part of the effort.”

“I would be happy to volunteer when the hub is established”

“I would be interested in any volunteering opportunities at the proposed centre”.

“Would like to help to set up”

This indicates that the hub should spread the opening times between daytime and non-social hours to ensure the maximum amount of service users can access their resources. It is possible that retired ‘older’ veterans who may have different needs could benefit from weekday openings and veterans who have employment the evenings and weekends. Having veterans supporting and working in the hub would be advised. Creating opportunities through volunteering may help deliver this or a veteran led participation group that contributes to hub direction and delivery.

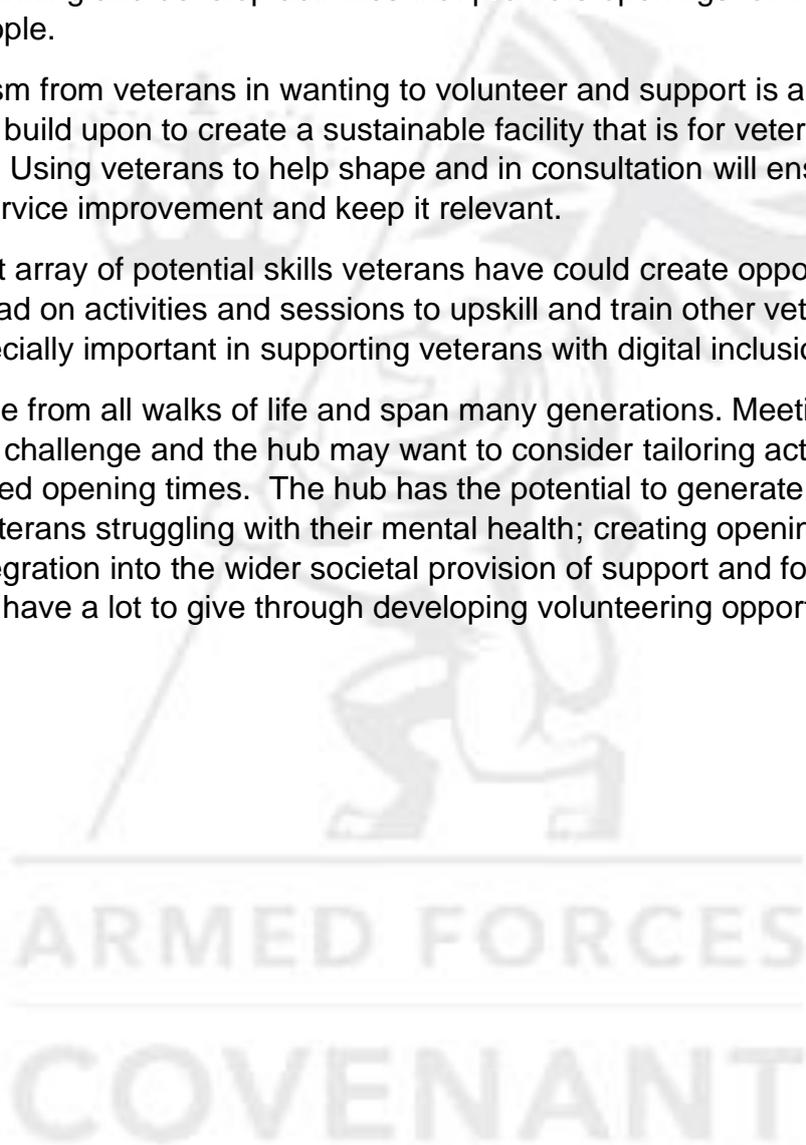
Conclusion

Both the survey and focus group feedback has clearly evidenced support and need for a Veterans Wellbeing Hub provision in LLR and supports the concept of operating a pilot hub in Loughborough. The responses have been overwhelmingly positive. Two broad themes have arisen in the feedback questions, supporting mental health and making friends stood out in the results. The hub should aim to combine these in all delivery planning and develop activities that promote openings for veterans to meet new people.

The enthusiasm from veterans in wanting to volunteer and support is an opportunity the hub could build upon to create a sustainable facility that is for veterans and run with veterans. Using veterans to help shape and in consultation will ensure continuous service improvement and keep it relevant.

Using the vast array of potential skills veterans have could create opportunities for veterans to lead on activities and sessions to upskill and train other veterans- this could be especially important in supporting veterans with digital inclusion.

Veterans come from all walks of life and span many generations. Meeting the needs of all will be a challenge and the hub may want to consider tailoring activities and operating varied opening times. The hub has the potential to generate real positive change for veterans struggling with their mental health; creating openings for increased integration into the wider societal provision of support and for those veterans who have a lot to give through developing volunteering opportunities.



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