Free bus travel for veterans

Council notes:

1. Bury has a proud military heritage, including its historic links with the Lancashire Fusiliers and is home to a valued Armed Forces community comprising veterans, serving personnel, reservists and their families.
2. The Armed Forces Covenant recognises the contribution made by members of the Armed Forces community and the principle that they should not face disadvantage compared with other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services, with special consideration appropriate in some circumstances.
3. Accessible and affordable public transport can play an important role in helping veterans access employment, education, healthcare, public services, social activities and support networks, supporting independence, wellbeing and participation in community life.
4. The Bee Network provides an integrated public transport system across Greater Manchester, with existing concessionary travel arrangements for eligible groups and specific travel concessions for members of the Armed Forces community on designated commemorative occasions.
5. There is an opportunity to explore whether a consistent, Greater Manchester-wide travel concession for Armed Forces veterans could provide practical recognition of their service, reduce barriers to travel and strengthen the region's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.
6. Any proposed scheme would need to take account of eligibility, affordability, funding, administration, existing concessionary entitlements and the practical arrangements required to deliver a consistent approach across Greater Manchester.
7. Other local authorities have explored or introduced targeted public transport concessions for veterans and serving Armed Forces personnel, demonstrating the value of considering practical measures to support the Armed Forces community.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Call on the Mayor of Greater Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Transport for Greater Manchester to formally explore the introduction of free Bee Network bus travel for Armed Forces veterans across all ten Greater Manchester boroughs.
2. Request that this work considers the potential to extend the concession to Metrolink tram services, with the objective of establishing a straightforward and consistent travel offer across the Bee Network, subject to feasibility and funding.

3. Request a costed feasibility assessment examining the potential financial implications, funding options, eligibility criteria, verification arrangements, administrative requirements and anticipated benefits of the proposed concession.
4. Ask that consideration be given to using recognised veteran identification, including the HM Armed Forces Veteran Card, to provide a simple and accessible means of establishing eligibility, alongside appropriate alternative verification arrangements where necessary.
5. Request that the assessment considers how the proposal would interact with existing concessionary travel entitlements and how duplication could be avoided without disadvantaging eligible veterans.
6. Ask the Leader of Bury Council and the Council's Armed Forces Champion to engage with local veterans, Armed Forces charities, the Royal British Legion, Bury Veterans Hub and other relevant organisations to gather evidence of need and ensure that veterans' experiences inform the proposal.
7. Request that the Council communicates its position to the Mayor of Greater Manchester, GMCA and TfGM, and seeks a response setting out the findings of the feasibility work, potential funding arrangements and recommended next steps within a reasonable and agreed timescale.
8. Invite all Greater Manchester councils and political groups to support the principle of exploring a consistent, region-wide travel concession for veterans, recognising that this is a shared regional issue which would benefit from a coordinated approach.

Council believes that recognition of Armed Forces service should be reflected not only in formal commitments but also in practical measures that can improve everyday life.

Council further believes that exploring free Bee Network travel for veterans would be a positive opportunity to recognise their contribution, support their independence and wellbeing, and strengthen Greater Manchester's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, while ensuring that any proposed scheme is deliverable, properly assessed and financially sustainable.