

VALOUR Covenant Conference

Introduce yourself

I'm Neil Thomas and I'm the newly appointed Head of VALOUR. I'm a former Army Officer and Prison Governor and have worked with some of the most complex and disadvantaged veterans in the criminal justice system.

I'm joined on stage today by two outstanding speakers, Craig Nicholson one of our VALOUR Field Officers and Ian Millen the Chief Executive of Veterans Outreach Service, but I will leave them to introduce themselves later.

A heads up before we begin, after my introduction to VALOUR, we will be touching on some difficult topics, including suicide, trauma and armed conflict.

Discussing these can impact all of us differently. Please look after yourselves and each other.

Step out or away at any point for breather, no explanation is needed. And please do approach Ian and Veterans Outreach Support post session if you need support.

Slide 2 – The Fighting Instructions

I was a strange 8-year-old,

For my birthday my dad gave me a piece of the Royal Navy's Flagship, and I still cherish it to this day.

If you **stand on the deck of HMS Victory**, just a short walk from here, you're standing on the product of one of the most important ideas in naval history: **shared standards**.

In the 1600s, the Royal Navy had a problem.

Every captain **fought differently**.

Every squadron had its own **habits, its own signals, its own way of doing things**.

Individually, many ships were brilliant.

Collectively, they were inconsistent.

And any sailor will tell you inconsistency and confusion at sea costs lives.

So, under Admiral Robert Blake, the Admiralty created something revolutionary:

the **Fighting Instructions**, — a shared doctrine that set out how the fleet would manoeuvre, signal, engage, and support one another.

- It didn't remove leadership or initiative.
- It didn't turn captains into clones.

But it did ensure that when the fleet sailed, it sailed as one, with

- A common standard.
- A common language.
- A common way of turning best practice into everyday practice.

And it worked.

Slide 3 - Acting With Initiative Within a Shared Framework

It was those shared standards that **shaped the culture** that made victory at Trafalgar possible.

Nelson could break the rules and attack as two columns of ships, because every captain knew those rules. He could trust his fleet and his captains, to act with initiative within a shared framework.

That is why the Royal Navy won and still wins today — not because of one ship, but because the whole system works together. - **That is exactly what VALOUR aims to do.**

Slide 4 – What is VALOUR?

Today, across the UK, **we are building a fleet.**

A fleet that improves access to services for veterans and their families by

- Ensuring people know **how and where** to get support
- Improves **the understanding** of the needs of the armed forces community.
- Uses data to inform government policy and service design
- Supports and funds organisations to deliver and share best practice outcomes

We do this through 4 key pillars

1. **Veterans Services** and its casework teams **are the support ships** and the supply lines — they are the logistics, the sustainment, the capability that keeps the fleet operational and they ensure veterans and the armed forces community are looked after and cared for at a national level.
2. **VALOUR Field Officers** are the **liaison officers between ships** and VALOUR headquarters — carrying intelligence, solving problems, building the partnerships that keep the formation tight.
3. **Our VALOUR Recognised Centres are the ships** — each with its own captain and crew, its own strengths and skills, its own local waters to navigate. That said even the strongest fleet doesn't sail alone. Across the UK there are other organisations, charities and CICs who bring specialist skills, deep local knowledge and decades of experience. They, You are not outside of VALOUR, we aim to partner, learn and share. We want to build a **network of networks.**

4. **And finally HQ and VALOUR Digital is our signalling system** — its the modern equivalent of the flags and lanterns that once coordinated entire squadrons. It shows people the way, the way to get help and support. The digital system will help people find the fleet, even on the darkest nights and the roughest of seas. Through data it also gives us all a common picture of the support people need, and a common way of working.

Slide 6 – Gantt chart

The top of this chart shows the next 12 months, the bottom of the chart in green is the 3 year milestones.

- The **main effort** now is recruiting the remaining field officers
- Launching the 17 Round 1 VALOUR recognised centres
- And co-ordinating the appointment of further VALOUR Centres in round 2 of funding.

Next will be about operating VALOUR as a cohesive system and sharing best practice, operating as a team!

There are brilliant things happening in all the current VRCs and beyond.

We need to work together to find the opportunities that make best practice common practice

Slide 5 – A fleet is only a fleet when it sails together

- But a fleet is **only a fleet when it sails together**.
- And that is the phase of VALOUR we are now entering.

We are moving from consultation and system design to delivery, from VALOUR being a concept to a being a reality.

From the individual excellence of each of our existing centre's, to collective excellence.

From pockets of brilliance to a shared doctrine.

From “what works here” to “what will work everywhere.”

Just as the Fighting Instructions turned a group of ships into the world's most effective maritime force, VALOUR is supporting 17 centres — soon more — into a unified national system of veteran support that aims to complement your work and not to replace it.

A system where:

- Best practice becomes common practice, (Thanks Ian!)
- Learning is shared,
- Standards are lived and not laminated,
- And every veteran, in every community, receives the same quality of support — no matter which door they walk through.

We are not building a programme. **We are building a team.**

A fleet.

A national capability.

And like the Royal Navy that sailed from this very harbour, we will succeed because we sail as one.

I would like to Invite Craig one of our VALOUR Field Officers to share his personal story and share his motivations for joining the VALOUR team.

Thank you Craig, that was very powerful and moving.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised there are a number of excellent organisations that can support you. I will leave these on the screen whilst I introduce our next speaker.

Ian Millen is the Chief Executive of Veterans Outreach Support leading the charities, welfare, wellbeing and clinical services for veterans and their families across Portsmouth, the Solent and the Isle of Wight. He brings over 30 years of experience in the Royal Navy and a further decade in public service.

Any Questions for us?

- The Armed Forces Covenant is the why of VALOUR – it provides the moral purpose, the national promise and the strategic anchor. No disadvantage from service, fair treatment and special consideration where appropriate.

- VALOURs mission is to build a system that delivers on that on the ground and ensure action, consistency, and standards. VALOUR is the how.
- VALOUR supports the development of place based networks, because the covenant is delivered through those means we will support through best practice learning and offering advice. Our VFOs will be able to support getting the right people round the table locally, helping local provision align to national intent.