



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2017



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Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 2011



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ISBN 978-1-5286-0154-2

ID CCS1217588010 12/17

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

The Armed Forces Covenant
An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown
And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families.

They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

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 most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.



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FOREWORD

Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE MP, Secretary of State for Defence

I am privileged to be able to present my first Covenant annual report to Parliament since becoming Defence Secretary. This is the sixth annual report since the Armed Forces Act 2011 came into force.

Our brave Service personnel are central to our national identity and our standing on the world stage. Against a backdrop of increasing threats our Armed Forces are more important than ever in protecting our national security, representing our interests on the world stage and reinforcing ties with our NATO allies.

In a post Iraq and Afghanistan era we are engaged in more operations across the globe than ever before and the legacy of past conflicts continues to be felt by our people. Despite this, the work of the Armed Forces is less prominent in the minds of the public, which is why for me, the principles of the Covenant are more relevant today than they have ever been.

Delivering on a key manifesto commitment, the creation of a new Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board recognises this. As joint chair of the Board I will ensure it is able to hold Departments to account so we can deliver for Service personnel, Veterans and their families.

The Covenant honours the sacrifices the Armed Forces Community make to keep us safe. This extends far beyond putting themselves on the line, as acknowledged in the Armed Forces Act 2011, the unique demands of Service life can cause disadvantage in comparison to the general population. It is vital that we acknowledge that Veterans, families and the bereaved have all made sacrifices, alongside serving personnel, that should continue to be recognised and wherever possible mitigated. This will be the guiding principle for our work.

The Covenant is also a partnership between the Armed Forces and the wider society they serve and are part of. I am pleased to see the positive impact that the Covenant fund is having in helping to integrate local communities. This has been helped by the sharing of best practice between local authorities and community organisations.

The report sets out what has been delivered this year as well as where more needs to be done. It is encouraging to see what has been achieved in coordinating services for Veterans' mental healthcare and more widely. And the announcement of O2 as the 2,000th signatory of the Covenant is testament to the positive collaboration with the private sector.

However, concerns remain with issues such as the perception of Veterans, maintenance of Service accommodation, childcare provision and transition to civilian life. These areas and others where progress has been slower than expected will be the focus of our efforts for the forthcoming year.

As part of a wider effort to improve understanding of the Covenant within the Armed Forces I have asked for a summary document to be made available to all serving personnel, to help them understand the type of support that is available to them.

I would like to thank my colleagues in Government and the Devolved Administrations for their continued commitment and I am looking forward to working with them to ensure our Armed Forces Community receive the support they deserve.





The Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood, co-signs Countrywide's Covenant pledge with their CEO, Alison Platt, and her team.

INTRODUCTION

Rt. Hon Tobias Ellwood, MP, Minister for Defence People and Veterans

Having had the privilege to have served in the Regular Army, and now in the Reserve Forces, the Armed Forces Covenant is something I am passionate about. I wholeheartedly recommend a career in the military – the experiences you gain, the skills you learn and the bonds you build are unparalleled. But they are not without sacrifices, both for the individual and their family. These include the upheaval that accompanies frequent moves, months spent apart from your loved ones and the risk and worry of operational deployments.

That is why the principles of the Covenant are so important – the sacrifices are willingly made but must not be compounded by members of the Armed Forces Community then being disadvantaged in accessing public and private goods and services. And we must go the extra mile to support those who have given the most, including the injured and the bereaved.

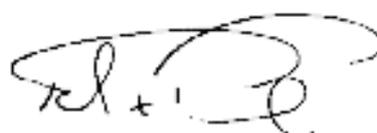
I am proud of what the Covenant has achieved in its relatively short life to date, and was heartened by the shared determination of colleagues from across government and in the Devolved Administrations at the new Ministerial Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board to build on this success. The service charities and Families Federations, who I meet with regularly, are right to flag the areas where concerns remain, including Service accommodation, availability of childcare, alcohol problems amongst Veterans and how delivery of the Covenant is measured. Work is underway to address these and other issues and we will keep Parliament informed.

The Covenant is not only a debt owed by the nation to our Armed Forces Community, it is also a partnership between the Armed Forces Community and wider society, at the national, regional and local level. I am delighted that both public and,

increasingly, private sector organisations are recognising the business benefits of, for example, hiring Veterans and Reservists. Defence is the single largest provider of apprenticeships in the UK, we continue to invest in our people throughout their careers with us and the skills and experiences they leave with stand them in good stead for whatever second career they choose, across the full spectrum from chefs to astronauts, and everything in between.

It is an impressive achievement that today we are able to announce the 2,000th signatory of the Covenant, and this is only the start. We have commissioned an independent review of the Covenant in Business, to identify and share best practice from organisations of all shapes and sizes and use this to inform and drive ever better mutually beneficial partnerships spanning a range of organisations from multinationals to local businesses and from football clubs to faith groups, improving both the quantity and quality of Covenant pledges.

The launch this year of the Veterans' Gateway has improved the accessibility of support for those Veterans' who need it. Going forward we will build on this and in 2018 will produce a cross-government Veterans Strategy, focusing both on celebrating and maximising the potential of Veterans and including plans to prioritise and target support determined by evidence-based need. It is my firm belief that, as a nation, we could and should do more to publically demonstrate the widespread affection and respect that is deeply felt for our Veterans, and recognition, including plans for a Veterans' ID card, will also form a key strand of this Strategy.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Communicating more and working together better”

Oversight

The Government strengthened its commitment to delivering against the Covenant with the creation of a new biannual Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board, jointly chaired by the Secretary of State for Defence and the First Secretary of State. The Board provides strategic direction and drives delivery of Covenant commitments across government. At the inaugural meeting in October the Board discussed its priorities for the forthcoming year, with a particular focus on measuring the success of current initiatives and using an evidence base to identify priorities for the future.

A Co-ordinated Approach

The last 12 months have seen significant progress in coordinating efforts across the key areas of the Covenant. In healthcare, the introduction in England of the Transition Intervention and Liaison Service provides access to appropriate and timely mental health services. The Veterans Covenant Hospital Alliance launched by NHS Improvement on 1 December 2017, aims to improve healthcare services for Veterans by bringing together, initially, over 20 acute NHS hospitals and Health Boards to share best practice before rolling out across England.

In April a Covenant-funded ‘Map of Need’ was commissioned to provide an evidence-based analysis of what Veterans and Armed Forces families services are being sought and where. The announcement in October, that the Office for National Statistics will recommend to Parliament the inclusion of an Armed Forces question in the 2021 census, along with confirmation from the National Records of Scotland that it is testing a question on its Veterans community, will help us to collect richer information on Veterans in the longer term. The Veterans’ Gateway, launched in April, provides a

focal point for Veterans and their families to access services which meet their needs. This Covenant-funded initiative is managed by a Royal British Legion-led consortium and provides a single point of contact for advice, information and signposting services to organisations which are best placed to provide Veterans with the type of support that they need. Along with the Map of Need and the census data, the information generated from the Gateway will help to build evidence over a period of time, with the potential to form the basis of a more considered cross-government Veterans Strategy.

In education, collaboration between local authorities, the Devolved Administrations and the MOD encourages a consistent approach to addressing the needs of Service children. The Service Pupils’ Progression Alliance, involving a variety of educational organisations within the UK, confirmed the inclusion of Service children as a target group for universities in their fair access agreements.

Improving community integration and the collaboration between service delivery organisations is important in delivering the Covenant effectively. The *Our Community Our Covenant report*, published last year, identified a number of recommendations which are now being delivered by an Action Group, including the publication in June of standardised guidance for local authorities to improve understanding and delivery of Covenant issues.

Increasing requests for help

The Armed Forces Community, like wider society, is experiencing the continuing pressures of essential austerity measures. Combined with a welcome reduction in the stigma associated with seeking help, many charities face increasing calls for support. Collaborative working is key to meeting these challenges and HMG will continue to work in partnership with the third sector and other groups, including through initiatives such as the Veterans' Gateway and the Map of Need, to ensure the needs of the Armed Forces Community are understood and handled by organisations best placed to provide the right support.

Promoting the Covenant

Increasing awareness of the Covenant to enable both the Armed Forces Community, and wider society, to benefit from what it has to offer, remains an ongoing priority. Covenant funding is available for local authorities to build mutually beneficial partnerships between the Armed Forces Community and their local community.

Today marks a milestone for the success of the Covenant in Business, with O2 becoming the 2000th signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant. The rapid growth of the Covenant in the private sector is a reflection of the greater awareness of Covenant issues and increasing understanding of the clear benefits of drawing on the skills of Reservists and Veterans.

As well as signing the Armed Forces Covenant, businesses which recognise the value of supporting the Armed Forces Community can apply for the Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme. In January the MOD, in partnership with Atkins, launched the Gold Alumni Awards which recognise the work companies have done to develop Armed Forces-friendly policy. Gold Award winners act as role models in demonstrating what other organisations can do to encourage and support the Armed Forces Community in the workplace.

Summary of 2017 Deliverables

Healthcare

The MOD implemented its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy to ensure improving the mental health of its people, which includes Service personnel, Veterans and their families, is prioritised.

NHS England launched the Veterans Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service which can be accessed through all four regions across England: North, Midlands and East, London and South East and South West.

NHS England launched the Veterans Trauma Network to support a holistic and empathetic clinical service for those who have had traumatic injuries in service.

The Welsh Government has issued new guidance to Health Boards on prioritising healthcare for Veterans. This guidance updates and replaces that issued in 2008.

In August 2017 the Scottish Veterans Commissioner published '*Veterans Health & Wellbeing in Scotland – Are We Getting it Right?*', a paper which concluded that Veterans in Scotland are generally in relatively good health and have a positive experience of accessing health and social care provision. The Scottish Government are following up on key areas that the Commissioner felt worthy of further exploration.

Education

In England, from September 2017 the Common Transfer File allows Service children to be identified and better supported when moving schools.

The newly-created Service children's Local Authority Working Group was launched, focusing on improving support for Service children.

The Welsh Government introduced the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Bill which has reached Stage 2 and is undergoing detailed consideration. This will provide provision for all those requiring extra support, which includes Service children.

The Scottish Service Children Strategy Group has contributed to a growing suite of guidance for practitioners and parents of Service children in Scotland.

Accommodation

Forces Help to Buy scheme payments passed over the 10,000 mark and have continued to rise, currently standing at 12,800 payments with a combined total of £193 million that has been advanced to Service personnel.

The Covenant in Business

O2 became the 2,000th Covenant signatory, pledging to promote the Armed Forces Covenant, support spousal employment and work with the Career Transition Partnership to help employ Veterans.

In January 2017 MOD, in partnership with Atkins, launched the Gold Alumni Group for Employment Recognition Scheme Gold Award winning organisations who have acknowledged the responsibility that comes with the top-level recognition. The Group aims to encourage and support other organisations to achieve ERS Gold and act as a sounding board for Armed Forces employer policy development.

The MOD has secured agreement from broadband providers to waive cancellation fees for Service personnel and their partners when they are posted abroad, or to another part of the UK not covered by their service.

The MOD provided mortgage lenders with more detail on specialist and Reservist pay to help Service personnel and Reservists have a fair chance of securing mortgages.

The Covenant in the Community

In early 2017 MOD introduced the local grants programme. Funding has enabled various initiatives promoting the integration of military and civilian communities as well as programmes to assist Veterans with the development of life skills to ease transition.

A Forces in Mind Trust and MOD-led Action Group has been created to take forward the recommendations of last year's Our Community, our Covenant report. One of the key recommendations of the report was to introduce guidance for local authorities to ensure consistent delivery against Covenant obligations. The MOD has published the new guidance, which includes annexes covering regional variations.

In March almost £3.5 million of Covenant funding was committed to 23 'clusters' of local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales. The awards were made to bids prioritising strengthening local government delivery of the Covenant and encouraging development of best practice in delivery to Armed Forces families in the community. Resource will be used to train front-line staff and build sustainable working between the various organisations which engage with, or aim to engage with, serving personnel, Veterans and their families.

The Wider Covenant

In June 2017 the Covenant-funded Veterans' Gateway was launched by a consortium led by the Royal British Legion. The Gateway provides a single point of contact putting Veterans and their families in touch with appropriate organisations to support their needs.

Following detailed consultation between MOD, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the independent, but aligned, 'Count Them In' campaign from the Royal British Legion, ONS confirmed it intends to recommend the inclusion of a Veterans question in the 2021 census. This will improve the quality of data available on Veterans and help focus services where they are most needed. Similar discussions are taking place between the Scottish Government and the National Records of Scotland.

In October the College of Policing updated its vetting guidance so that spouses and dependents of Service personnel will no longer fail the residency requirements due to time spent overseas, when applying to work for the Police Service.

2017 Report Commitments

A summary of new commitments made in this report by various organisations

Healthcare

All GP registration forms in England will include a specific question about whether a patient has served in the Armed Forces.

NHS England to pilot a military Veteran-aware accreditation programme for GP surgeries initially in the West Midlands before being planned for roll out nationally. Accredited surgeries will have specialist knowledge of Veterans' issues.

The Welsh Government will implement a national action plan across Wales aimed at expanding the provision of psychological therapies.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has committed to improving the awareness of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among their assessment providers by releasing insight reports. The Department will also produce tailored advice to Veterans who are applying for Personal Independence Payments or Employment Support Allowance.

Education

The Department for Education will produce guidelines for schools on the use of Service Pupil Premium funding.

The MOD will consider options for providing increased notice to Service families to allow more time for the school admissions process.

In England, from September 2018 the Common Transfer File will include a richer set of data on Service pupils. This data will aid the development of policies to ensure that children from Service families are not disadvantaged.

The Scottish Government is adding an explicit reference to children from Service families and barriers to learning in the revised Additional Support for Learning Code of Practice.

Accommodation

By 2019 the MOD will establish a Single Living Accommodation management information system to provide information on the condition of the estate and inform key investment decisions.

DCLG intends to consult on new statutory guidance for local authorities which will remove the local connection requirement for divorced and separated spouses and civil partners.

The Covenant in Business

An independent review of the Covenant in Business will publish its findings in 2018.

During 2018 credit reference agencies and lenders are aiming to complete system changes to improve the recognition and transfer of individuals' credit history while they are based at British Forces Post Office addresses, building on recent improvements in this area.

MOD will, in consultation with business, introduce key performance indicators for the Covenant in Business.

The Covenant in the Community

HMG will continue to drive delivery of the recommendations of the Our Community Our Covenant report via the newly formed Action Group.

The Wider Covenant

Following thorough consultation in 2017, MOD will formally consider options for strengthening the childcare support offer for the families of service personnel early in 2018

The Welsh Government will develop proposals for a Veterans' employment pathway.

HMG will produce an evidence-based Veterans Strategy informed by monitoring the Veterans' Gateway and the developing Map of Need, to ensure resource is allocated to areas of greatest need.

The Government will implement the new cross-government communications strategy, endorsed and owned by the new Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board, in order to increase awareness and understanding of the Covenant.

SSAFA, in collaboration with MOD and the Career Transition Partnership, will launch a two-year mentoring trial in January 2018 aimed at supporting early service leavers.

OBSERVATIONS

by External members of the Covenant Reference Group

Naval Families Federation, Army Families Federation, RAF Families Federation

Whilst the high tempo of UK operations endures the impact of Service life on Armed Forces families remains challenging. The issues of mobility and long periods of separation from loved ones demand a level of commitment and resourcefulness from families, which sets them apart from the general population. Constant change and the prospect of new policies that will redefine the Armed Forces' lifestyle mean that unease and uncertainty prevail. Whilst families are proud of their serving loved one, and willingly make compromises and sacrifices, it is vital that the Armed Forces Covenant plays its part to ensure that they are treated fairly.

The Families Federations recognise the Armed Forces Covenant as an important and valuable mechanism to effect necessary change and very much appreciate the way in which Government departments and other stakeholders continue to work with us to achieve it. Much has been accomplished in the past 12 months but there remains considerable work to do. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on those aspects of the Report relevant to serving personnel and their families.

Healthcare

That Armed Forces and Veterans issues are now part of the national curriculum for GPs, and will be tested in their Royal College of General Practitioners membership exam, is an extremely positive development. We look forward to there being greater understanding of the unique challenges that Service personnel and their families face.

Following our observations about compensation for clinical negligence cases for those families living

overseas, we were pleased to note that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has now issued a Defence Internal Notice on Health Service Provision for Entitled MOD Personnel in British Forces Germany.

Whilst we recognise that families are now able to transfer their place to new waiting lists when they move location due to an assignment, we are still hearing concerns from those who then face even longer waiting times for certain treatments. This is a particular issue for those trying to access an NHS dentist in a number of remote locations around the country, which have a large military footprint, including North Wales, Norfolk, Devon and Cornwall. Whilst we are working with our unit Covenant Champions, local authorities and NHS England and health partners to try and find resolution locally, more could and should be done.

We recognise that work is being undertaken to ensure that those families who are assigned to Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged with regard to the time they have already spent on a waiting list for treatment. However, concern remains about cases involving family members who find that they do not meet the eligibility criteria in their new location, or that certain medical treatment is not provided in Northern Ireland. Additional waiting times and concern about whether they will be able to have these procedures is causing undue anxiety.

We would like to recognise formally the activity, support and engagement offered by the Armed Forces Commissioning Managers within NHS England, which has been outstanding; they continue to assist many families in need of advice and help. We also welcome the Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and we are pleased to note that Mental Health is at the forefront of the Health Agenda. We look forward to seeing the new services implemented over the coming months.

Education

As key stakeholders in the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP), we are delighted to be working alongside our partners in helping to improve educational outcomes for Service children. The development of the SCiP website is providing a hub of information and resources for professionals involved in Service children's education. The organisation Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) continues to provide proactive guidance to schools on how best to support Service children, especially through the challenges of mobility and separation.

We welcome the introduction of a Service child flag on the Common Transfer File from September 2017, which means that Service children will now be identified when moving schools. We would welcome the addition of key information detailing each child's support needs. We also look forward to learning about the impact of the Service Children's Local Authority Working Group which will work collectively to improve education for Service children in the 13 key areas around the country.

The overseas education suitability reviews, recently conducted by the MOD, are a welcome asset for families who are considering an overseas assignment. This will enable them to make an informed decision, based on the facts, about the provision of educational facilities outside of the UK.

The Families Federations are reassured to learn that the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) will not be affected by the wider reform of school funding. The SPP provides schools and academies in England with a much needed additional resource, allowing them to support Service children in a number of ways, and we believe that it should be protected. It has stood at £300 per pupil, per year, for some time now and an increase would be well received. We would also welcome the extension of SPP to include early years (under 5s), to support transitional childcare arrangements, and for all children in compulsory education, including those aged 16-18 years.

There is still more work to be done, however, on educating schools on how best to spend their SPP, especially those that have lower numbers of Service children. While they receive less funding, they still need to use it as effectively as possible to support their Service pupils, and not combine it with their main Pupil Premium funding.

The issues surrounding Service children being moved to a new school during the academic year are well documented. We recognise the work that the Directorate of Children and Young People, via the Children's Education Advisory Service, are doing to try to resolve some of the difficulties that occur, particularly as a result of these mid-term moves. We would, however, welcome information about what work, if any, is being undertaken by the single Services to help overcome some of these issues, through careful timing of assignment order dates. We recognise that the needs of the Service will always prevail, but believe that more well-timed moves in some cases would go a long way to support parents and to aid retention.

In our Observations on the Annual Covenant Report 2016, we requested further support for school admissions by way of changes to the Schools Admission Code. Whilst we have continued to pursue this with the Department for Education, as it stands the Code will not be changed. We believe that this decision needs to be revisited.

We understand that the MOD Education Support Fund (ESF) is scheduled to close. We would like to highlight our support of the ESF as a vital resource for schools, especially for those wishing to provide targeted support for Service children which cannot be funded through Service Pupil Premium. The key reasons for its introduction, i.e. deployment and mobility, remain extant, and we would like to see the fund retained.

We continue to receive evidence from families who are affected by the huge variations in the provision of Special Educational Needs support around the country, particularly those who are assigned to work and live in more remote locations. We would like this issue to be reviewed in the coming year to determine what extra support can, and should, be provided to those families who have to move location due to their Service commitments.

Accommodation

The issues surrounding accommodation continue to generate the highest number of concerns reported to the Families Federations. Nevertheless, we are pleased to see progress with the performance of CarillionAmey, although there is still room for improvement in some areas, such as follow-on works and communications. Their decision to

introduce Customer Engagement meetings is to be commended, as families have long voiced their frustrations about not having face to face contact with the team responsible for Service Family Accommodation. We also welcome the recent engagement by the MOD and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation with regards to the new housing contract, and we look forward to representing the views of families as this important consultation is taken forward.

The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2017 report highlights that the number of Service personnel who feel that they get value for money for their Service accommodation is at its lowest for 8 years. We believe that there is a direct correlation between this decline, the previously poor performance of CarillionAmey (which only recently has started to perform to the contract targets), and the introduction of the Combined Accommodation Assessment System (CAAS) (which is deeply unpopular with many who feel that often significant rises in charges are not adequately explained or justified). This sense of frustration is compounded by poor communication and a complex challenge/appeal process. We note the CAAS Working Group's intent to simplify the system, but remain concerned by the negative effect of CAAS.

We note the MOD's intent to establish a Single Living Accommodation Management Information System, but are concerned that this has now been in the pipeline for years, and that there is still no sign of a working solution. We continue to hear about the poor state of infrastructure in units, including Single Living Accommodation (SLA), and the concomitant adverse effect on morale and feeling valued. The MOD now needs to address this urgently as the condition of SLA is an area of real concern for those personnel still living in poor quality and badly maintained accommodation.

There remains much confusion, and some anxiety, about the long-term plans for Service accommodation under the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) programme. The Families Federations will continue to work with the FAM team to represent the views of families across all three Services and to ensure that those who are working on the new policy are aware of their concerns. We will also provide information and feedback on the proposals, as we believe it is essential for families to be involved in this process, especially in those locations selected to be

part of the pilot in 2018. We would like reassurances that our feedback is given sufficient consideration by the FAM team, and that decisions are not solely based upon financial constraints. In addition, we would like the FAM team to recognise the unique nature of the three Services and the potentially differing requirements of those families.

We are delighted that, following much work by the Army Families Federation and the Royal British Legion, there is movement on the issue of divorced/separated spouses having a local connection when applying for social housing. Once the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association have completed their consultation, we look forward to seeing new statutory guidance being issued to ensure that military family members are not disadvantaged because they too have been mobile, in support of the Armed Forces.

Covenant in Business

The growing engagement of businesses is celebrated but we think there is still much more that could be done, especially by regional Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) and not just the national or multinational corporate giants. Much attention is given, quite rightly, to supporting Reservists and Veterans in the workplace but spouse or partner employment is an issue that affects a great many Service families too. We will therefore be interested to note the findings of the review being commissioned by the Forces in Mind Trust to look at the pledges made by businesses to support Service family members.

The Wider Covenant

Family Life

The introduction of a new MOD Domestic Abuse Strategy is to be commended. We hope that this will reassure family members that the MOD and the single Services take this issue very seriously, and that there is a clear focus on prevention through education and awareness. As a result of a successful bid for Covenant Funding, the Army Families Federation Foreign and Commonwealth Specialist, on behalf of all three Federations, has already been able to assist 20 spouses who have been victims of domestic abuse and has had a 100% success rate with their immigration applications. It is hoped that their work will complement the policies and procedures put in place by the new strategy.

Whilst we welcome the news that the MOD has held initial meetings with the Home Office to discuss the challenges faced by some Foreign and Commonwealth families when applying for visas, we would like to see this issue given a higher priority. These cases frequently take months to resolve and can involve substantial amounts of money, which is having a significant impact on the families involved.

Service families moving to and from the devolved administration areas have raised concerns regarding the nuances of living in different countries. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are some clear benefits to living and working in Scotland or Wales, there has been a particular focus on the issue of the Scottish Rate of Income Tax and the challenges faced by some family members when applying for funding for further or higher education courses.

Childcare

We were delighted that Directorate of Children and Young People was tasked to produce a draft childcare policy but are disappointed that it has been buried in the MOD for nearly a year with no news about its adoption. We recognise the potential costs, and that this is an issue that can affect all families, whether Service or civilian. Nevertheless, there are some issues that are unique to Service families, and are compounded for dual-serving and lone parents. Childcare remains a significant challenge for our people, not just in terms of cost but in terms of availability, governance, quality, opening hours and variability of delivery. We would welcome a decision in the near future.

Transition from Service to Civilian Life

The research currently being undertaken by our Transition Liaison staff will help to identify the actual needs and concerns of families as they go through the process of leaving the Armed Forces. We expect that this evidence will prove invaluable to informing Tri-Service policy on transition.

The Families Federations would welcome a commitment that policy makers will continue to work with us to review the current approach to transition policy, and the current Resettlement provision, to identify where it can be explicitly extended to families or where new provision needs to be designed. This could include provision for supporting families to understand better what life after the Service

could look like, and to help them to identify skills, characteristics and experiences that are of value to themselves and future employers, as well as to help families to become active citizens.

Communicating the Covenant

We recognise the Armed Forces Covenant Cross-Government Communications Working Group as an effective and positive development, but suggest that more is needed in the way of tailored messaging that will resonate with every rank, trade, age group and family situation. We also believe that there is more that can be done to support Unit Covenant Champions. We still hear about organisations that have signed up to the Covenant and yet failed to tell their employees, leading to confusion, stress and unnecessary bureaucracy when approached by Service families. Finally, despite the excellent work of Forces in Mind Trust and the MOD to identify and share good practice, we would like to see more work done to ensure that the Covenant is effectively communicated to local authorities, ensuring a focus on the removal of patchy delivery of the Covenant across different authorities.

Conclusion

On behalf of the serving Armed Forces community we would like to offer our sincere thanks to everyone who has played a part in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant during the past 12 months and are particularly grateful to those who have worked to address areas of disadvantage for our families. Whilst we celebrate the encouraging progress that has been made, we look forward to seeing the recently renewed commitment made by the Government to support Armed Forces families yielding positive outcomes.

Cobseo – The Confederation of Service Charities

Overview

The many achievements in the delivery of the Covenant over the last year are set out clearly in the Report. The overall tone is positive, and we would agree that there has been a great deal of excellent work to improve delivery. Mechanisms exist, too, to monitor and adjust agreed actions in year where necessary, including the Action Group set up this year as part of the “Our Community Our Covenant” report released by the Forces in Mind Trust with the Local Government Association. Nevertheless, it is clear from feedback from Cobseo members that there remains a great deal to do if the Armed Forces Community is to receive the support that it deserves, and that Government has undertaken to provide. Our comments below are intended to focus constructively on the major issues.

The National Perception of Veterans

The perception of veterans as a burden rather than a benefit to society is an enduring problem and clearly puts them at a ‘disadvantage’ to use the key word in the Covenant. The latest report by Lord Ashcroft highlights the issue. He reports that there has been no drop-off in the proportion of the public who believe Service Leavers were likely to have been damaged by their time in the Forces – even though we are no longer seeing casualties from Afghanistan, the military are less prominent in the media, and the campaign profile of the Forces charities is a good deal lower. This suggests that efforts to address this misconception are not succeeding. Lord Ashcroft calls for co-ordinated action and we agree. We therefore welcome the priority given to this at the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board in late October.

Growing Need

The Report acknowledges the increasing number of calls for help being experienced by many charities, and the Veterans Gateway and Map of Need, both of which are referenced throughout the Report, will in due course be very useful means of capturing the extent of assistance sought by veterans. Ahead of comprehensive data being generated by the project, though, the following figures from SSAFA reflect the trends experienced over the last year by a

significant proportion of Cobseo members. In 2016 SSAFA supported 8% more people (67,616) overall than in 2015, visited and conducted 8% more cases (38,978), took 16% more emails and calls (25,531) for assistance and got 11% more (£16 million) of their and other charities’ monies to beneficiaries than in 2015.

The underlying themes behind the increases may not be significantly different from those being experienced by the general population but the exigencies of Service life and the pressures service personnel and the families face during and after military service are such that some veterans and their dependants are less able to deal with the pressures and are increasingly seeking third sector support. Add to that the growing number of younger veterans with more complex needs seeking support, and the rising awareness of isolation and loneliness amongst some veterans, and the overall situation gives cause for concern.

Veterans Strategy and Cross Government Co-ordination

The Covenant is a national commitment and cross-government co-ordination is essential. We welcome the formation of the Ministerial Board, which will provide strategic direction and drive delivery of the Covenant, and look forward to working with it.

We are hopeful that one of Ministerial Board’s first steps, to appoint a lead Minister for Covenant and Veteran issues in each Department, will improve ‘buy in’ across Government. We would also hope that the Covenant Reference Group remains the principal focus for dialogue between the third sector, government and the devolved administrations in respect of the delivery of the Covenant. The Service Charities Partnership Board remains the focus for the wider engagement of charities with the MOD and we have been encouraged by the attendance of the Minister for Defence Veterans and People at the charities Board, and his broader engagement with the Service charities sector.

Finally, in this regard, we see the development of the Veterans Strategy, building on the Veterans Vision endorsed this year, as another key task for the Ministerial Board and a demonstrable step in clarifying responsibility for the delivery of the Covenant at the heart of Government. Cobseo stands ready to provide support in its drafting.

Measuring Covenant Outcomes

The Report highlights a series of positive measures, which should assist service personnel, Veterans and their families. In a third priority identified at the inaugural MCVB, though, it was recognised that the government's ability to measure the delivery of the Covenant across other government departments and the devolved administrations needs further work to address the gaps where the focus remains on input measures rather than focusing on the outputs and outcomes being achieved.

We agree and welcome the direction given.

We would like to see future Reports include:

- performance targets set, and the Secretary of State reporting against them (this was an aspiration first raised in the Covenant Report 2016);
- input from Veterans and families – there is scope for wider peer review mechanism here;
- a plan for the coming year, published early in that year, to include an outline of planned consultation and information gathering across government and the third sector, which will enable the third sector to engage in a collaborative manner from the outset.

Housing

Housing needs stand out as a major issue both for those serving and those in transition.

Future Accommodation Model. The Families Associations articulate clearly elsewhere the concern with which families view proposals under the Future Accommodation Model, which threaten to remove one of the key elements of security that Service brings. We support fully their concerns.

Transition. Separately, we acknowledge the progress made towards Covenant goals set out in the Report.

Yet housing is arguably the most pressing of needs for Veterans in transition. Many servicepersons are insulated from the real and geographically varied costs of housing and leave preparation for housing until late in the transition process. Too many Service personnel, especially younger personnel and Early Service Leavers, are leaving the Forces with no plan around where to live afterwards, or any meaningful conversation around where they might live after they are discharged. There is a Career Transition Partnership and we suggest there could be an Accommodation Transition Programme as well. Forces in Mind Trust also funded a pilot programme supporting 80 personnel with no fixed plans post service. Over 18 months they were able to source accommodation for 40 of them, full-time employment for 28 and ongoing mental health support for 17 – thereby saving Veterans charities and the taxpayer considerable expenditure downstream. We believe that we need to do more to identify and support the vulnerable cohort leaving the Armed Forces.

War Widows

Some progress has been achieved but there is still a long way to go to ensure that widows are treated equally and fairly; if there isn't a veteran or serving soldier in the 'family' the potential for them to be forgotten remains. As a consequence, the War Widows Association still has to campaign for the recognition of War Widows and War Widowers as part of the Veterans community. Issues surrounding social isolation, mental health and access to social care are also becoming more obvious and will only increase in this cohort. We would wish to see widowers given a higher profile in the initiatives that are being taken forward.

Healthcare

Overall, we welcome the introduction of a range of initiatives set out in the Report by NHS (England) (including the Transition Intervention Liaison Service, the Veterans Covenant Hospital Alliance and the Veterans Trauma Network) and by the Health Services of the Devolved Administrations. Whilst it is too early to comment on the outcomes of these initiatives, experience in England raises two concerns, which will need careful monitoring as initiatives progress. Securing the engagement of partners prior to implementation has been very positive but once funds are granted, some charity partners have found engagement during implementation to be one sided,

with a consequent impact on driving initiatives forward. In addition, liaison and action are often personality driven, with significant impact when key individuals change. Those commissioning services must ensure that both sides are held to account in all respects once implementation is underway, and consideration needs to be given to greater co-ordination between the NHS, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Hospital Trusts and service providers.

The Quinquennial Review of Armed Forces Compensation Scheme has reported but we do not know what recommendations the Government has accepted. We would welcome an update on these and on the Combat Indemnity consultation.

The Integrated Personal Care for Veterans initiative has been slow to implement and is not yet fully up and running. We consider the project still to be at risk, at least until Veterans UK have been able to deploy the planned caseworkers. Some difficult questions around 'eligibility' also remain unanswered.

We agree that the Veterans Prosthetics Panel and Complex Prosthetics Assessment Panel at Headley Court continue to work well for Veterans but would welcome reassurance that they will continue to do so after the move to Stanford Hall. This remains a really high priority for younger Veterans. The Veterans Mobility Fund is also working satisfactorily but the LIBOR sourced funding is finite and we seek reassurance that plans are also in place to continue this initiative.

There is no mention of the pressures that the MOD-owned Departments of Community Mental Health (DCMH) in the UK are under, and what this means in terms of the reduced access to mental health services for serving personnel in the UK. For example, it is our understanding that in Catterick the local advice is that low-risk Service personnel should be referred in the first instance to welfare agencies (including SSAFA) in order to ease DCMH waiting list pressures.

War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Service Tribunals.

In previous reports, we have highlighted that those making appeals to this Tribunal do so through the respondent organisation i.e. the MOD. In all other cases, the appeal is submitted directly to the appropriate committee or tribunal; so called 'Direct Lodgement'. The absence of Direct Lodgement

causes delay and gives the impression that the Tribunal is not independent. Last year we were advised that Scotland and Northern Ireland had decided to implement Direct Lodgement. Recently we were informed that Scotland's implementation will begin imminently. However, we also understand from the Ministry of Justice that implementation in England and Wales will not progress until a slot is made available in the reform programme, which is not likely to be until 2019. We would urge that the time frame is reviewed and brought forward in order to reduce delay, confirm the independence of the process, and address geographical disadvantage.

Accommodation

Identifying homeless Veterans. In a recent Freedom of Information Act request carried out by Stoll, 70% of local authorities confirmed that they asked whether an individual presenting as homeless was an Armed Forces Veteran. However, even if they do ask, this does not necessarily translate into action. The Cobseo Housing Cluster is therefore asking local authorities (and services funded by them such as homeless charities, CABs, advice services and Housing Associations) not only to 'ask the question', but also to have a protocol and plans in place as to how to respond. This can be as simple as promoting the Veterans Gateway and the newly-founded Veterans Housing Advice facility.

The Veterans Housing Sector. Historically, despite some very strong provision, the providers of housing to Veterans have not worked in a co-ordinated fashion to make it as straight forward as possible for Veteran to access housing when it is needed most. The development of the Veterans Housing Advice service, set up by the Cobseo Housing Cluster and being delivered by a consortium of the Royal British Legion, Shelter and Connect Assist, is a significant step forward and one we would like to be embraced by all parts of the Armed Forces community. The Cluster has also been the driving force for initiatives such as the Clearing House (a noticeboard of all current voids within the Veterans sector) and the Veterans Nomination Scheme, a brokerage scheme enabling ex-Service personnel to receive appropriate prioritisation for social housing. While there is more to do, especially in increasing knowledge of the Veterans Housing Advice service and relations with the 'civilian' sector, the sector has made significant strides in improving the opportunities for Service personnel leaving the Forces to be accommodated.

Little real advance has been made overcoming the need highlighted last year to make decision making more timely in respect of calculations over adaptations for injured personnel transitioning to civilian life, although a meeting between the MOD, Treasury and Cobseo representatives has taken place. The AFCS is calculated at service end, when the discharge date is known but decisions of house purchase, time for adaptations to be completed, and understanding the worth of any payment, needs to be known much earlier in the pathway process. It is not a question of any interim payment, although in some cases very useful, but an estimated value of AFCS and GIP is vital to inform the house purchase and adaptation work.

The Wider Covenant

The Report notes the formation of the Northern Ireland Veterans Support Committee (NIVSC). Supported by the NI RFCA, this initiative has provided the foundation for a recently submitted proposal by Cobseo in partnership with NI RFCA to reinforce the nascent Veterans Support Office in NI, so that it can develop the necessary structure and protocols to help optimise delivery of the Covenant in NI particularly for Veterans and their families.

Summary

Overall, a great deal has been achieved this year by all those engaged in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant. Much energy is already harnessed to improving delivery further but, as set out above, much still remains to be done, too. Cobseo members look forward to supporting delivery of the Covenant in any way they can.

The Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion welcomes this year's Annual Report and the progress that has been made in a number of areas over the last year. As highlighted in the report, in June a consortium launched the Veterans' Gateway, which is a positive example of cross-sector collaboration in partnership with government. We were glad to see the implementation in April of the full disregard of military compensation for social care means tests in Great Britain – we would now like to see the completion of this work through its implementation in Northern Ireland.

Accurate data about and identification of the Armed Forces community remains an issue and so we are especially glad that, following the Legion's 'Count Them In' campaign and with positive engagement from MOD and other departments, the Office for National Statistics has announced its intention to recommend the inclusion of this topic in the 2021 census in England and Wales. We now look forward to the government supporting this recommendation in its census white paper, and also for parallel progress to be made on its inclusion in the census in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Legion published a manifesto in advance of the 2017 general election, and so we warmly welcome progress on three of the five issues contained therein: the census; support for corporate signatories of the Covenant; and on divorced and separated spouses' social housing access. On the latter, we hope that the very positive moves in England highlighted in the report are matched in the rest of the UK so as to remove any disadvantage. We would also like to see progress on our other recommendations on the treatment of Gulf War Illness and of Non-Freezing Cold Injuries amongst Veterans.

This year the Legion has worked closely with the NHS in England and in Wales to identify issues with priority treatment implementation and how it can be improved. We welcome the progress outlined in the report but note that there are still challenges to be addressed.

We welcome the commitments by Department for Work and Pensions to release insight reports to improve on PTSD awareness amongst assessors and to produce tailored advice for Veterans applying for Personal Independence Payments or Employment Support Allowance, and look forward to progress on these.

We note that the government has indicated that it will publish a green paper on care and support for older people by summer 2018 and we hope that the needs of the Armed Forces community are recognised in that area of policy development.

In Wales, we have called for Service children to be identified within schools via the PLASC and for the introduction of a Service Pupil Premium, as in England. The latter is particularly relevant in the context of the future of the Education Support Fund.

We are glad to support efforts ensuring local authorities meet their Covenant pledges. We note the progress that has been made, but that it continues to be variable across the country. We welcome the establishment of posts, often funded by the Covenant Fund, within and across clusters of councils to drive forward Covenant implementation – it is important that the sustainability of these important roles is also considered.

We have previously called for action to address alcohol problems amongst recent Veterans. Following new research published by Northumbria University this year that highlights this issue and the barriers to help-seeking, we reiterate our call.

We are concerned that there is no mention in the report of the Quinquennial Review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, which was published in February and to which there has not yet been a public response from government.

We note and welcome the report's highlights of this year's First World War commemorations and of the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial unveiling, and the Legion was glad to play its part in support of those activities. This year the Legion also organised the Women at War 100 event at the National Memorial Arboretum, which was an important opportunity to recognise the contribution of women in the Armed Forces past and present.



CHAPTER 1 – HEALTHCARE

Healthcare Observations from last Year's Report

- The Families Federations emphasised their concerns over the lack of information provided to families ahead of moves overseas, specifically in regard to the risks associated with healthcare cover. Internal policy has been updated to include guidance to Service personnel on the options available for healthcare in the EU and the associated risks.
- The Royal British Legion (RBL) noted the positive engagement from government departments and NHS England concerning their call for the next census to capture data on the Armed Forces Community. They commented that they would like to see a co-ordinated Government position in support of this proposal in principle. The ONS has confirmed that it intends to recommend the inclusion of the Armed Forces Community as a topic in the 2021 census.
- RBL also raised concerns about the level of awareness and understanding amongst healthcare professionals regarding Veterans' specific needs. This is a priority area as reflected in the various initiatives described later in the chapter.
- The Confederation of Service Charities suggested that Veteran-specific target times should be considered. This will be kept under review, however as the evidence indicates that Veterans are not disadvantaged in accessing healthcare there are no current plans to introduce Veteran-specific target times

This year's achievements in healthcare acknowledge the importance of early identification, understanding the specific needs of Service personnel, Veterans and their families and ensuring the pathways are in place and healthcare professionals are informed and empowered to provide access to appropriate treatment without unnecessary delay. Consistency of understanding is being developed through learning and accreditation programmes and encouraging organisations to set up formal communication channels.

Healthcare UK-Wide

In July 2017 MOD launched its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Strategy, written in collaboration with the Department of Health, will build a co-ordinated approach to prevent, detect and treat mental health and wellbeing issues, expanding the provision of cover to Service personnel, Veterans and their families.

The Complex Prosthetic Assessment Clinic, introduced at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court last year, continues to provide real benefit to the small number of Veterans referred from NHS Disability Centres with particularly challenging prosthetic needs. Some of the Veterans who attended the clinic have also been referred to the Direct Skeletal Fixation Programme. The £2 million LIBOR-funded programme has been commissioned in conjunction with NHS England and has to date treated 5 out of a planned 20 patients, both serving and Veterans, with life changing surgery. The service will continue when Headley Court closes and the new Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall opens next year.

The Defence Medical Services has agreed with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) a programme of inspections of Defence Medical Treatment Facilities

in order to provide external scrutiny and assurance of the quality of medical care being delivered to Service personnel. The inspection programme is now well under way with 13 Medical and Dental Centres inspected in the first quarter of the 2017/18 financial year. Inspections of Regional Rehabilitation Units and Departments of Community Mental Health are due to start before the end of the year. Defence inspection reports are being published on the CQC web site in a similar manner to NHS inspection reports. Where the CQC has identified areas for improvement, covering governance, staffing and infrastructure, the Surgeon General is committed to addressing its recommendations. Overall, the inspections will drive quality improvements in the healthcare delivered to our people.

Healthcare Overseas

Under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Healthline Healix contract MOD has ensured that Service personnel have the option to have treatment in a European country where it is safe and effective to do so. This minimises the disruption for families based in Europe. If any doubt exists concerning the ability to follow a safe and effective pathway then the patient can return to the UK for treatment. Individuals retain the right to return to the UK for treatment even in situations where treatment abroad is deemed appropriate.

Healthcare in England

Awareness in Health Professionals

The NHS in England is committed to raising awareness among healthcare professionals of Veterans' services. The Covenant Health Commitments are included in the NHS Constitution and Mandates, and form part of the contract with every NHS-commissioned provider. This helps to ensure all healthcare professionals will be considerate of these services. Veterans and Armed Forces issues, including the role of the Covenant, now form part of the curriculum for all GPs nationally and are tested in the Royal College of General Practitioners membership exam. NHS England is working with the Royal British Legion to raise awareness of priority treatment with practitioners.

E-learning packages are an important tool in educating health professionals and raising awareness about Veterans' needs, with over 1,600 completed sessions and a combined total of over 512 hours spent on the packages between January and September of this year.

Sharing best practice is central to improving standards across health professions. Health Education England provides support to the development of Armed Forces Champions across England and recently helped set up the North West Armed Forces Champions Network. This led to the creation of the Armed Forces Resource Pack which provides assistance to the Champions in their role and includes flyers and leaflets providing information on the Health Education England mandate and evidence in support of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Veterans' Covenant Hospital Alliance, launched on 1 December 2017, brings together over 20 NHS acute hospitals and Health Boards providing a forum to share knowledge and best practice, connect hospitals to other related services and generally improve awareness of Veterans' needs. It also allows Alliance Hospitals to share education and training resources and to achieve recognition and accreditation.

NHS England is also working with the Royal College of General Practitioners to develop a Veterans awareness accreditation programme for GP practices that is being piloted in the Midlands in late 2017 before roll-out to other regions. The programme aims to improve the identification and coding of Veterans in GP computer systems and will require GP practices to nominate a senior clinical Veterans lead who will have a deeper understanding of the (clinical and wider) needs of Veterans and the availability of local support and national referral pathways. It will also help to identify family members, so that they get better contextually-aware treatment and access to bespoke NHS and safe third-sector services.

Case Study: City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

The Trust has provided longstanding support for the Armed Forces, particularly in championing the recruitment and retention of Reserves and Veterans within the NHS.

Recognising that the skills Reservists and Veterans learn while in Service can be harnessed for the benefit of the NHS and patients, it has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the value of transferable skills. The Trust's Armed Forces Champion encourages other bodies to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and assists them to identify Reservist employees and draft flexible HR policies.

The Trust contributes to military engagement events in the North East of England and has shared best practice in supporting Reservists and Veterans amongst HR professionals across the health field.

It supports many military charities and has strong links with Forward Assist, a local charity providing advice, life-changing projects and opportunities to former Service people who find it hard to adjust to civilian life.



"I've been deployed to Afghanistan three times and the Trust's support has been amazing. I've been granted leave, colleagues have stepped in to provide cover and Trust members have sent me letters and parcels whilst deployed."

Kelly Bennett, City Hospitals Patient Flow Manager and Army Reservist, pictured above with HRH Prince Harry and NHS colleagues

Mental Health Services

In 2017 NHS England launched the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service. The service increases access to mental health services and treatment options, doubling the size of the current regional bespoke mental healthcare for Veterans in England. It provides support for the general and complex mental health needs of Veterans. And for the first time, serving personnel preparing to leave the Armed Forces can also access NHS care and treatment for mental health conditions, providing continuity when it is most needed. Between April and October of this year the service received 1170

referrals from a variety of sources. Most referrals were self-referrals, although there was a spike in GP referral activity earlier in the year.

In England most Veterans use mainstream NHS mental health services. These are expanding through the national Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme that now has a duty to record Veteran status. In April this duty was extended to all mental health services. Over 24,000 Veterans per year are recorded as using standard NHS IAPT services in 2016/17 (representing a 15.4%

increase on the previous year), with access times and outcomes at least as good (and sometimes better) than for the general population. This substantial increase, along with the numbers using the Transition Intervention and Liaison service, provides a reliable indication that more Veterans know about – and can access – the available support.

Spending on mental health for the general population has increased to a record £11.4 billion in 2016/17, with a further investment planned of £1 billion every year by 2020/21. NHS England spends £6.4 million per annum on additional bespoke services for Veterans.

Gate to Gate Report Implementation

NHS England has commissioned pilots in six areas of the country: Norfolk/Suffolk; Nottingham; South West (Devon & Cornwall); London; North West and West Midlands. Its Liaison and Diversion programme aims to enhance means of identification and to improve care options for serving personnel and Veterans in the criminal justice system and to enhance the services provided to their families. This has been used to address specific recommendations contained within the Gate to Gate report and has led to a variety of projects including: Needs Assessments / gap analysis; specialist in-reach provision in prisons; identification and diversion in police custody and the delivery of staff/professionals training. In 2018/19 there will be an opportunity to extend the provision of support to Veterans who have mental health problems. Support to Veterans who have mental health problems.

NHS Choices

Increasing awareness of support within the Armed Forces Community is also a priority. The 12 months prior to August 2017 showed there were over 60,000 visits to Armed Forces-specific NHS Choices pages, which range from Mental Health for serving personnel and Veterans to healthcare tips for recent Armed Forces leavers and options for the families of Armed Forces personnel and Veterans.

NHS Veterans Trauma Network

The NHS Veterans Trauma Network has been running for 12 months, with 46 seriously injured trauma Veterans referred to the service. It continues to deliver specialist reconstructive care, close to

where Veteran patients live and uses the full suite of wrap-around services and skills that the NHS Major Trauma Centres and associated centres can deliver. Growing evidence suggests this is both an efficient and effective use of specialist resources, as well as benefitting Veteran patients. Dialogue between patients, their families, their GPs and specialists remains a key tenet of delivering high quality care.

Veterans Prosthetic Panel

The panel continues to support the Armed Forces Community requiring prosthetics, ensuring they receive the latest prosthetics including the next generation microprocessor knees, with over 97% of claims being approved in 2016/17 and over £1.5 million being spent on Prosthetic Centres.

Healthcare in Scotland

Priorities in Scotland this year have included funding the provision of specialist mental health services for Veterans resident in Scotland at £1.2 million per year to 2018 in partnership with NHS Scotland and Combat Stress.

In partnership with the NHS the Scottish Government has committed funding of £825,000 in 2017/18 to support the continuing Veterans First Point network which offers a drop-in service and focal point for Veterans. A match funding offer for the next two financial years to 2020 has also been made to encourage sustainable services in the local area, recognising that service delivery rests with individual Boards.

To help ensure the Armed Forces Community have access to the full range of NHS services, the Scottish Government has introduced the Community Health Index which allocates all serving personnel and their families with an index number.

NHS Scotland has made it a priority to ensure that Veterans have equal access to the well-established National Specialist Prosthetics Service. If their injuries are as a result of Service they will be eligible for priority treatment. Most Veterans needing prosthetics have received them, and are provided with further care and support as required. In the 2016/2017 financial year three seriously-injured personnel received limbs.



A soldier with a prosthetic leg is pictured at the Personnel Recovery Centre in Edinburgh.

Healthcare in Wales

Alongside Wales' National Action Plan, there are a number of schemes under way in Wales aimed at addressing the mental health needs of Veterans.

A pioneering new partnership between Veterans NHS Wales and Change Step, is helping Veterans in Wales access crucial mental health treatment and support. Two highly skilled Veteran peer mentors are working alongside specialist psychological therapists to support Veterans who need treatment related to experiences during their time in service, or in adjusting to civilian life.

The Welsh mental health charity, Hafal is leading the Wales-wide FORCES for CHANGE programme. The programme encourages Armed Forces and blue light Veterans to reach out to fellow Veterans who are experiencing mental health problems. Their goal is to support them in accessing the services needed to recover and to hear their ideas about how those services could be improved. At the end of the campaign recommendations will be made on developing and improving services across Wales.

The Welsh Government has issued new guidance – Healthcare Priority for Veterans. It gives GPs, consultants, allied health professionals and administrative staff more information on the process of identifying, recording and referring Veterans eligible for priority healthcare. The guidance also provides links to statutory and third-sector organisations that may be able to assist both health staff and Veterans.

Since it was set up in 2010, Veterans NHS Wales has had approximately 2,900 referrals to the service. It has secured over £500,000 funding from Help for Heroes, which will pay for three full-time Veteran therapists for three years. These new posts will be targeted at Health Boards with the longest waiting lists. In November 2017 the Welsh Government agreed an additional £10,000 recurrent funding to increase capacity within Veterans NHS Wales.

The MOD Fast-track pathway in Wales provides secondary and specialist care, prioritising access to treatments for Service personnel who are actively serving but are currently graded as medically non-deployable. In 2016/17 the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee spend to support the Fast Track was £70k, funding 28 War Veterans to receive prostheses including artificial limbs, sports blades, up-grades and replacements.

Healthcare in Northern Ireland

Health and Social Care (HSC) Northern Ireland continues to ensure that Defence personnel and families assigned to Northern Ireland have their previous waiting times for NHS services taken into account locally, so they are not disadvantaged. Appropriate points of contact maintain close ties with Unit Welfare Officers in order to support Service families with any on-going healthcare concerns. The HSC provides support, where required, and attempts, where possible, to ensure no disadvantage as a result of the posting cycle.

Defence Medical Services provides mental health treatment for Service personnel and those in transition to civilian life. Outpatient services are primarily provided through military Departments of Community Mental Health. Inpatient care is provided by the Health Service, contracted by the MOD.

The Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Regiment Aftercare Service provides a level of psychological therapeutic and physiotherapy treatment to its cohort of Veterans via an embedded MOD private contract, working closely with other organisations to ensure cohesion. This has a high success rate and provides support from within the community base in four locations across Northern Ireland. Where possible, this support has also been provided in the Republic of Ireland. The Aftercare Service will merge in 2020 with the welfare service of Veterans UK with the intent to provide comprehensive wellbeing support to all Veterans, to include health matters.

Healthcare Metrics

The metrics focus on the standard of Service-provided healthcare and UK Armed Forces families' access to healthcare, including continuation of treatment if moved and the success of psychological services in treating Veterans.

The majority of Regular Service personnel continued to be satisfied with the Service-provided healthcare received (medical treatment 2017: 76%, Table 1) and the majority of their families continued to be satisfied with their ability to access healthcare (GP access 2017: 98%, Table 2). A small number of families moved whilst they were undergoing treatment; however, the majority were able to continue their treatment (GP access 2017: 93%, Table 3).

The slight drop in the percentage of families able to continue medical treatment following a move in the past 12 months (illustrated in Table 3) is not statistically significant, however we will monitor the trend.

Table 1: UK regular Armed Forces Personnel satisfied with Service-provided medical treatment received over the past two years, estimated percentage

2007-2017

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Medical treatment	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	77	76	76
Dental treatment	82	84	84	85	87	86	85	86	87	86	86

Source: Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. Only includes respondents who answered 'yes' to having received Service-provided medical or dental treatment over the past two years
2. Excludes n/a responses
- .. represents data unavailable

Table 2: UK Armed Forces families able to access medical care in the past 12 months, estimated percentage

2012-2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
GP (including nurse/midwife)	97	96	96 ||	98	98	98
Dentist	88	89	90 ||	91	90	90
Hospital or specialist services	..	..	.. ||	98	96	97

Source: Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2014 and 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. 2012-2014 – excludes N/A
2. 2015-2017 – Includes ‘Yes, without difficulties’ and ‘Yes, but with some difficulties’; Excludes missing and ‘No, I did not need to’ responses
3. Responses are filtered for those who required access to dental treatment [GP: 94%, Dentist: 87% and Hospital: 63% for 2017]
- || Break in time series due to change in response options and population reported on
- .. represents data unavailable

Table 3: UK Armed Forces families able to continue medical treatment¹ following a move² in the past 12 months, estimated percentage

2012-2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
GP (including nurse/midwife)	93	90	92 ||	96	95	93
Dentist	79	70	74 ||	75	82	81
Hospital or specialist services	..	..	.. ||	91	90	85

Source: Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2014 and 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. Refers to whether spouses/dependants were able to continue treatment in new location if moved
2. Includes: if moved for own reasons and; if due to Service
3. 2012-2014 – excludes N/A
4. 2015-2017 – Includes ‘Yes, without difficulties’ and ‘Yes, but with some difficulties’; Excludes missing and ‘No, I did not need to’ responses
5. Respondents are filtered for those who moved in the last 12 months whilst undergoing treatment [GP: 12% Dental: 7% Hospital: 9% for 2017]
- || Break in time series due to change in population reported on
- .. represents data unavailable

Health (IAPT)

Improving access to psychological therapies (IAPT) was the first national mental health dataset to contain an indicator for UK Armed Forces Veterans or their dependants. IAPT focuses on the number of new referrals received, waiting times, referrals entering treatment and health outcomes following treatment. The various measures demonstrated that the covenant is working effectively in relation to the standard of mental healthcare Veterans receive.

UK Armed Forces Veterans who were referred for psychological therapies in England were seen at least as quickly as the non-Veteran population, and

for both 6 week and 18 week pathways waiting times were above the respective targets (Table 4). A higher proportion of Veterans compared to non-Veterans entered and completed treatment (Table 5). The recovery rate for UK Armed Forces Veterans was at least as good as that for non-Veterans (Table 6), however, recovery rates continued to be below the 50% Government Target. NHS England has instigated a number of initiatives to improve the recovery rates and have seen an increase since 2014/15. Initiatives include supporting the lowest performing Clinical Commissioning Groups and offering workshops to share best practice to all commissioners and providers.

Table 4: UK Armed Forces Veterans, waiting times for referrals entering treatment¹, numbers and percentages^{2p}

2013/14 – 2016/17

Waiting times		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
6 weeks or less	veteran	4,130	78.5	5,990	81.1	7,390	84.5	8,690	88.2
	non-veteran	265,910	73.6	356,050	77.1	433,435	82.0	491,010	87.3
	Target		75		75		75		75
18 weeks or less	veteran	4,965	94.4	7,105	96.2	8,470	96.9	9,675	98.2
	non-veteran	336,080	93.1	438,255	94.9	508,720	96.2	551,590	98.1
	Target		95		95		95		95

Source: The data analysed was sourced from the National Commissioning Data Repository (NCDR). The NCDR is hosted by Arden & Gem CSU, operated by NHS England and the data is owned by NHS Digital.

1. For new referrals that completed a course of treatment in the year, the wait between referral received date and the first therapeutic assessment
 2. Please note that the information presented contains compressed figures (rounded to the nearest five) in line with NHS Digital reporting.
- ^p - The data provided by NHS England is provisional and may be subject to change when the final report is published in February. The data has not yet been reconciled back to the main IAPT data and so there may be small differences caused by definitions used in the data presented

Table 5: UK Armed Forces Veterans, referrals entering treatment & completing treatment¹, numbers and percentages^{2p}

2013/14 – 2016/17

Activity type		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
referrals entered treatment	veteran	12,795	79.7	12,310	79.4	16,865	79.8	19,480	79.8
	non-veteran	905,155	62.7	803,185	63.6	104,140	67.7	116,490	70.2
referrals completed treatment	veteran	5,255	32.7	7,380	47.6	8,740	41.3	9,850	40.3
	non-veteran	360,940	25.0	461,460	36.5	528,345	34.3	562,270	33.8

Source: The data analysed was sourced from the National Commissioning Data Repository (NCDR). The NCDR is hosted by Arden & Gem CSU, operated by NHS England and the data is owned by NHS Digital.

1. Please note that the information presented contains compressed figures (rounded to the nearest five) in line with NHS Digital reporting.
2. A referral has entered treatment if the patient attends one or more appointments. The majority of referrals end with the patient completing a course of treatment, however some patients decline treatment, are only treated once, are seen but not treated, or are discharged.
- p- The data provided by NHS England is provisional and may be subject to change when the final report is published in February. The data has not yet been reconciled back to the main IAPT data and so there may be small differences caused by definitions used in the data presented.

Table 6: UK Armed Forces Veterans, referrals showing reliable improvement¹, recovery² and reliable recovery³, numbers and percentages^{4p}

2013/14 – 2016/17

Outcome		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
reliable improvement	veteran	3,140	59.7	4,600	62.3	5,580	63.8	6,565	66.6
	non-veteran	214,695	59.4	280,445	60.7	328,360	62.1	366,750	65.2
referrals moved to recovery	veteran	12,795	79.7	12,310	79.4	16,865	79.8	19,480	79.8
	non-veteran	905,155	62.7	803,185	63.6	104,140	67.7	116,490	70.2
referrals showing reliable recovery	veteran	5,255	32.7	7,380	47.6	8,740	41.3	9,850	40.3
	non-veteran	360,940	25.0	461,460	36.5	528,345	34.3	562,270	33.8
Target			50		50		50		50

Source: The data analysed was sourced from the National Commissioning Data Repository (NCDR). The NCDR is hosted by Arden & Gem CSU, operated by NHS England and the data is owned by NHS Digital.

1. Reliable improvement = if when discharged the patient's ADSM score has decreased by 4 or more, or their PHQ-9 score has decreased by 6 or more, and both have not deteriorated by the same number
2. Recovery = if the patient were at caseness on their first appointment and upon discharge have scored less than the threshold scores for ADSM and PHQ-9
3. Reliable recovery = a combination of the above, where a referral has both shown reliable improvement in ADSM and PHQ-9 assessment scores, and changed from caseness to not caseness between the first and last appointments.
4. Please note that the information presented contains compressed figures (rounded to the nearest five) in line with NHS Digital reporting.
- p- The data provided by NHS England is provisional and may be subject to change when the final report is published in February. The data has not yet been reconciled back to the main IAPT data and so there may be small differences caused by definitions used in the data presented



New Case 1759

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Early Warning Station

CHAPTER 2 – EDUCATION

Education Observations from Last Year's Report

The Families Federations identified the need for a commitment in respect of the provision of education, by the MOD, in British Forces Germany throughout drawdown. An update is provided below.

The Families Federations also observed that support in relation to school admissions should be provided via the school admissions code. The MOD recognises that the lack of consistent information available to parents on the admission process has been an issue and is reviewing options to increase the flexibility of policy on assignment. The newly-created Local Authorities Working Group will focus on improving the information available to parents.

Continuing the theme of breaking down organisational boundaries, achievements in the education sector reflect a push to share knowledge and resources so that education professionals, local council representatives and parents are prepared for changes in circumstances and can minimise the impact to children's education.

Education UK-Wide

The Service Children's Progression Alliance

The Service Children's Progression Alliance brings together a variety of stakeholders around Service children's progression into further and higher education including MOD, the Devolved Administrations, UK Universities, and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), UCAS and the Department for Education. In the past 12 months discussions with OFFA have led to the inclusion of Service children as a target group for universities in their fair access agreements.

Current research is looking to compare educational pathway choices for Service children aged 16 and their civilian peers with better qualitative data from schools, and exploring whether there is comparable data available in other countries for post-16 choices. Focusing on increasing awareness within education professionals, Winchester University is offering a module on Service children as part of their Masters Degree course in education.

Overseas

When posted overseas Service families, supported by MOD, need to carefully consider the impact on their children's education. The MOD has conducted education suitability reviews of various locations where Service children may accompany parents on assignment and these reports will be made available to Service families considering overseas assignment.

Re-basing from Germany

The MOD has worked closely with schools and local authorities, arranging reciprocal visits and briefs in order to achieve a smooth transition back into UK schools for children re-basing from Germany. To date around 2,000 children from Service families have successfully transitioned back into the UK. The next major relocation will take place in 2019 with about 2,000 children returning to the UK, predominantly in the Salisbury Plain area. It is expected that the preparation work will minimise the upheaval experienced by Service families.

LIBOR Childcare Infrastructure Improvements

Improvements to childcare facilities have been made overseas and the LIBOR Childcare Infrastructure Improvements projects have enabled improvements to childcare facilities across the UK. In Autumn 2013 the then Chancellor announced that up to £20 million of LIBOR fines would be provided to MOD in support of infrastructure improvements to childcare settings on the Defence Estate. A total of 40 bids were successful and to date 33 of the settings have been completed; the remaining seven will complete in the first half of 2018.

LIBOR Case Study: The Blackdown Pre-School at Princess Royal Barracks on the Deepcut Station



A relatively small setting that, due to the isolated location, provides a much-needed service to the local Service families, and serves not only as a childcare setting but also as a hub for the local community, providing a wealth of information and support.

The funding enabled improvements to the classrooms and provision of an outdoor play area allowing greater accessibility for the families and a better learning environment. It was officially re-opened in September 2017 and since the refurbishment, the number of children attending the pre-school has increased and the opening hours have been extended to accommodate the additional free 30 hours of Government funding.



Best Practice

To help local authorities, schools and families to better understand the issues facing children in Service families, the Royal British Legion has published best-practice guides for England and Wales. These guides explain the unique challenges of Service life and the impact this can have on a child's education. They also provide advice on how organisations can support Service families and examples of how to maximise the impact of Service Pupil Premium and other funding.

Education in England

Service Pupil Premium

The Department for Education continues to provide additional funding to schools in the form of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP), to help them improve the educational outcomes of pupils from Service families. The funding is primarily intended to assist schools in addressing the pastoral needs of Service children – including those which arise from having to relocate frequently and/or having a parent who is absent due to being on training, exercise or operational duty. Pupils attract the SPP at the rate of £300 per annum if they have a parent who is currently in the Forces, or if they have been registered as a child from a Service family in any year since 2011. In the current financial year the SPP is worth over £22.5 million and will benefit over 75,000 eligible pupils in primary and secondary schools.

The provision of the SPP will not be affected by the wider reform of school funding. The Department for Education and MOD are continuing to identify and showcase evidence of good practice by schools in use of the SPP. In January of this year MOD published Service Pupil Premium: Examples of Best Practice. The impact of SPP can be seen in schools across the country with the funding contributing to an innovative range of projects, an example of which is provided below:

SPP Funding Case Study: South Farnborough Infant School

South Farnborough Infant School takes a number of children from the nearby Aldershot Garrison. The school, which is rated as outstanding by Ofsted, targets children from Service families for intervention as soon as they join the school, whether this occurs at the beginning of or during the school year. Through its SPP funding, which totalled £6,000 in 2016/17, the school offers children from Service families a range of funded activities that currently include Emotional Literacy Support, a computer club, a gardening club, and after-school sports. At the heart of the school's SPP policy is the belief that children from Service families should not be singled out to do things in isolation, but that the school should go the extra mile in providing these children with dedicated extra time and a choice of a buddy with whom to participate in the activities.

Data Sharing on Service Pupils

The transitional nature of Service life often requires Service pupils to move between schools and this can be disruptive for their education. One of the Covenant's priorities has been to minimise this disruption by improving the quality of the information relating to Service pupils transferred between schools. The Common Transfer File is the mechanism used to transfer information electronically to a subsequent school when a pupil leaves. The Department for Education and MOD have been working together to consider how this can be expanded to easily identify Service pupils and their specific needs. As a result of this work the file now enables schools to flag when a pupil who is transferring to another school is a Service child.

The Department for Education and MOD will publish the technical specification for the system changes to the Common Transfer File in January 2018. This will allow schools to include richer information from September 2018, including about a pupil's emotional wellbeing, attitudes towards learning, achievements and perceived attainment gaps.

School Admissions

Last year's Annual Report outlined the difficulties that some Service families can face in securing school places outside of the normal admissions cycle, which can be a significant source of stress for them.

The MOD has focused on engaging more closely with local authorities to address concerns around admissions, particularly where it is planning for and then providing for an increase in Service children in their areas.

In June 2017, the inaugural meeting of the Service children's Education Local Authorities Working Group took place, where MOD met with senior representatives from the 13 local authorities that provide education for the largest number of Service children. The local authorities present represented a third of all Service children in England and are exploring the possibilities of sharing data amongst the group which will give a better understanding of the educational outcomes attributed to Service children and how they compare to their non-service peers.

Further guidance on school admissions and other issues, along with accompanying literature, will be provided online once they have been updated.

Support for the Bereaved

The Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme, funded by the Department for Education and administered by MOD, provides Higher and Further Education Scholarships for the children of Service personnel whose death has been attributed to Service since 1990. The scholarships enable a bereaved child to remain in Further Education for up to three years and will contribute toward the cost of tuition and maintenance for initial undergraduate courses in the UK. In the academic year 2016/17, the scheme has so far benefitted 90 students.

Education Metrics (Children from Service Families)

The metrics focus on the standard of education received by Service children and the training and education available to Service personnel. The metrics demonstrated that the Covenant is working effectively in relation to the standard of education children from Service families receive. This year the Department for Education have provided a number of new measures including attainment at the year 1 phonics screening checks, attainment at Key stage 1, and attainment for the English Baccalaureate.

The Department for Education continues to work with MOD on improving information relating to educational progression, which accompanies a child when they move schools. The measurement of the impact of moving schools is reported biannually and will be available in the 2018 report.

Table 7a: Service children¹ and non-Service children^{1,2} achieving acceptable level at Key Stage 2³ in England, percentages

2012/13 – 2015/16

		% achieved acceptable level			% reached expected standard
		2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
KS2 ³	Service children	78.6	79.9	82.2 ||	57.0
	Non-service children	78.9	81.7	82.9 ||	53.0

Source: Department for Education

1. Includes pupils at state funded schools in England with a valid school census record and KS2 or KS4 result

2. Excludes pupils who receive free school meals (FSM)

3. KS2 2012/13 to 2014/15 Level 4+ for reading, maths and writing; from 2015/16 expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

|| Break in time series due to methodology change

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2016-revised>

Table 7b: Service children¹ and non-Service children^{1,2} achieving acceptable level at Key Stage 4³ in England, percentages

2012/13 – 2015/16

		% achieved acceptable level			% reached expected standard
		2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
KS4 ⁴	Service children	64.4 ||	62.9	64.9	64.0
	Non-service children	65.3 ||	62.7	63.0	57.4

Source: Department for Education

1. Includes pupils at state funded schools in England with a valid school census record and KS2 or KS4 result

2. Excludes pupils who receive free school meals (FSM)

3. KS4 - 5+ A*-C GCSE including maths and English

|| Break in time series due to methodology change

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2015-to-2016>

Table 8: Service children and non-Service children Year 1 phonics screening check, percentages

2015/16

	Number of eligible pupils ¹	% meeting required standard of phonic decoding	% not meeting the required standard of phonic decoding	% absent	% disapplied
Service children	5,931	83	16	0	1
Non-service children	652,250	81	18	0	2

Source: Department for Education

1. Attainment in maintained schools in England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/phonics-screening-check-and-key-stage-1-assessments-england-2016>

Table 9a: Service children and Non-service children achieving the expected standard¹ at Key Stage 1, percentages

2015/16

	Number of eligible pupils ²	Reading	Writing	Mathematics	Science
Service children	5,724	78	68	75	86
Non-service children	641,598	74	65	73	82

Source: Department for Education

1. including those with a higher standard

2. attainment in maintained schools in England

Table 9b: Service children and Non-service children achieving the higher standard at Key Stage 1, percentages

2015/16

	Number of eligible pupils ¹	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Service children	5,724	27	14	18
Non-service children	641,598	24	13	18

Source: Department for Education

1. attainment in maintained schools in England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/phonics-screening-check-and-key-stage-1-assessments-england-2016>

Table 10: Service children and non-Service children achieving English Baccalaureate in England, percentages

2015/16

	Number of pupils at end of Key Stage 4	% of pupils entered for all Ebacc components	% of pupils who achieved Ebacc for all components
Service children	3,668	42.2	25.7
Non-service children	540,689	39.7	24.7

Source: Department for Education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2015-to-2016>

Education in Scotland

In Scotland all children have a right to additional support to overcome barriers to learning. Additional support needs encompass a wide range of issues, including those which might impact on children from Service families, such as coping with periods when a parent is deployed or dealing with interrupted education. The responsibility to identify, provide for, and review these needs sits with Education Authorities. To support them in this work, the Association of Directors of Education for Scotland has a dedicated National Transitions Officer, funded through the MOD Education Support Fund, who has a key role in working with local authorities, schools, Service families and the Scottish Government.

To promote consideration of Service children, the Scottish Government is adding an explicit reference to children from Service families in the revised Additional Support for Learning Code of Practice which guides Education Authorities in their statutory duties. Education Scotland's revised national self-evaluation tool *'How Good is Our School 4'* now includes specific quality indicators on 'transitions' and 'ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion'. Both indicators are significant in supporting children from Armed Forces families and are being used by schools and by Inspectors in school inspections.

Case Study: Highland local authority

The Highlands have around 600 pupils from Armed Forces families. Using Educational Support Funding, the authority has been working to understand and highlight the needs of Armed Forces families, and to put in place support to meet their needs. To ensure sustainability beyond the Educational Support Fund, the local authority has embedded the education and wellbeing of Armed Forces pupils within their Promoting Positive Relationships Team. One member of this team now has specific responsibility for these pupils and works closely with schools, military, primary mental health workers and the third sector. The support to Armed Forces families is written into their Service Improvement Plan which is monitored and updated on a regular basis. Highland local authorities also piloted a marker for recording pupils from Armed Forces families on the local authority management information system, which has helped provide better support for pupils.

Scottish Service Children Strategy Group

The Scottish Service Children Strategy Group continues to guide and engage in work around supporting children from Armed Forces families in Scotland. This year the Group has been involved in a range of work including: engaging with key partners on policy and guidance around starting school early and the early learning and childcare offer in Scotland; contributing to MOD guidance including an introductory guide to education in Scotland; the Covenant Guide for local authorities; and supporting the National Transitions Officer to develop specific resources for Scotland.

Education in Wales

The Welsh Government consulted on a draft Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill between July and December 2015. The Bill makes provision for a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with additional learning needs. To date the Bill has reached Stage 2 and is undergoing detailed consideration.

In parallel, the Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru project is ensuring the continued development of resources and guidance for schools, teachers and organisations working with Service children and their families.

A new initiative known as Military Kids' Club has been launched in Wales. It brings the children of Service personnel and Veterans together to share experiences and offer support to one another.



For Service leavers it is important to translate their experience and knowledge gained within the Armed Forces to the civilian workplace. The Recognition of Prior Learning scheme is aiming to help Veterans who have served in the last 10-15 years gain Higher Education credits. This ensures their knowledge, skills and experience that they have achieved while serving can be used to develop a new career

pathway. Staff in the University of South Wales map Veterans' prior learning against relevant courses to determine the number of Higher Education credits that can be awarded. Depending on previous experience, up to two-thirds of an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification can be accredited.

Education in Northern Ireland

During the 2016/17 academic year there were 677 children of Service personnel enrolled across at least 92 pre-schools/nursery, primary, post primary and special schools in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland provides schools with additional funding to support these pupils on a per capita basis via the Common Funding Scheme. Qualifying pupils are those pupils in primary or post-primary schools whose parent is a member of the UK Armed Forces, is not normally resident in Northern Ireland and who has been posted for a period scheduled to last no less than two years.

In-Service Education Metrics

The MOD is the UK's largest provider of apprenticeships and invests significantly in schemes which support elective education, such as learning credits and the Army Skills offer. A Professional and Personal Development Plan has been proposed, to build a culture of personal development in Defence. The MOD will seek approval of the proposed plan by the end of 2017 to allow implementation in early 2018.

Whilst Veterans' employment levels are on a par with (or better than) national averages, the percentage of regular Service personnel satisfied with the opportunities to gain civilian accreditation and opportunities for personal development has remained consistently low with only 46% satisfied with civilian accreditation opportunities and 54% satisfied with personnel development opportunities in 2017 (Tables 9 & 10).

Table 11: UK Armed Forces personnel satisfied with opportunities to gain civilian accreditation¹, estimated percentage

2007 – 2017

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Satisfied	42	42	45	50	51	46	43	42	47	48	46

¹ Relates only to Service training courses and not training received prior to leaving the Services (Resettlement training)

² Minor wording change in 2011

Table 12: UK Armed Forces personnel satisfied with opportunities for personal development, estimated percentage

2007 – 2017

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Satisfied	42	44	49	56	57	54	52	52	57	57	54

Source: Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

¹ Minor wording change in 2011

Table 13: UK Armed Forces personnel who used Career Transition Partnership and were employed within 6 months of leaving the Armed Forces, estimated percentage

2010/11 – 2015/16

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Employment rate	85	85	83	83	85	80p

Source: ADAPT (Career Transition Partnership ex-Service personnel employment outcomes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/career-transition-partnership-ex-service-personnel-employment-outcomes-statistics-index>)

¹ Estimated from a 20% sample of those who used billable Career Transition Partnership services

^p Estimated employment outcomes for 2015/16 are provisional (see the Education commentary above for full details).

The employment rate six months after leaving the Service for those who used the Career Transition Partnership services has remained consistently high (2015/16: 80%, Table 11).

The percentage drop has been caused in part by a change in methodology. MOD will continue to monitor the trend and the next set of statistics will be published in January 2018.



CHAPTER 3 – ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation Observations from Last Year's report

- The Confederation of Service Charities pointed to the current housing adaptations policy, requiring that funding applications for modifications to homes are made before the Service person is discharged, leading to premature decisions being made at a critical point in the transition process. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation has made improvements to the funding process and MOD is consolidating advice into a new, more focused policy, which will be published in early 2018.
- The Families Federations suggested that divorced and separated spouses should be afforded the same protection in regard to accessing social housing. The Department for Communities and Local Government intends to go out to consultation on new statutory guidance for local authorities.
- Poor condition of Single Living Accommodation (SLA) and maintenance concerns were underlined as a significant risk to recruitment and retention. The MOD acknowledges the issues with SLA and is investing in the estate. In parallel, a new management information system will help to ensure that this investment is targeted where it is most needed.

Having a comfortable home, which meets the needs of the individual and the Service family, provides stability and reassurance in times of uncertainty. Work under the Covenant over the past year has looked to increase flexibility and provide Service personnel and families with options that fit their personal circumstances. The MOD acknowledges that the principles of the Covenant should apply equally, irrespective of relationship status; Service personnel, Veterans, widows/widowers, families and former partners should have access to housing which meets their needs and reflects the sacrifices they have made.

Accommodation UK Wide

Service Family Accommodation

The MOD continues to ensure that all Service Family Accommodation (SFA) allocated to Service personnel meets the UK Decent Homes standard as a minimum. The MOD remains focused on improving standards and invested around £80 million over the course of the 2016/2017 financial year, with plans to invest a similar amount during 2017/2018 financial year.

The MOD acknowledges the concerns of Service personnel, particularly around maintenance and repair of their properties under CarillionAmey's National Housing Prime contract, and has been focused on holding the contractor to account against the key performance indicators. The improvements in CarillionAmey's performance reported in last year's report have been sustained. Overall response repair performance has been above the 95% target since April 2016, bar one month. Longer term, work has begun to develop a new, affordable housing contract to replace the National Housing Prime contract from December 2019, which will incorporate lessons learned from the existing contract to further improve the service. Central to this will be increasing engagement with the Families Federations and other stakeholders.

The MOD remains committed to improving the 'lived experience' for Service families. In April 2017 a scheme was introduced providing compensation for missed appointments and significant defects at move-in.

The views of customers have been actively sought, with MOD and CarillionAmey hosting a series of engagement fora to provide an opportunity for issues to be raised directly. Following last year's input, MOD

issued a short information video ('We all have a part to play'). This sets out the responsibilities of MOD, Industry Partners and families. It also re-introduced briefings for families such as 'Preparing SFA for winter'.

To improve communication with families, CarillionAmey refreshed its website, providing advice on their key activities, including response, maintenance and move-ins/outs. Regular social media updates are also now provided.

A new team has been introduced to focus on resolving Stage 1 Complaints more quickly and effectively and New Accommodation Officer training has been delivered, aimed at improving the consistency of moves. CarillionAmey has reviewed its supply chain to ensure sub-contractors are focused on customer service.

Single Living Accommodation

Concerns have been raised by Service personnel and the Service charities over the standard of SLA. Providing decent living standards is essential to maintaining morale on the front line and MOD agrees there is further important work to be done. Therefore, MOD continues to prioritise investment in the most pressing accommodation issues, which includes SLA.

To help improve understanding of the SLA estate MOD is developing a management information system which will allow more accurate monitoring of the condition and status of SLA. This information will be used to target investment where it is most needed.

The MOD has committed to invest significant additional funding to modernise the estate, delivering grade 1 accommodation for Armed Forces personnel across Great Britain. The project has invested more than £1.2 billion to upgrade some 23,000 bed spaces at 52 locations in Great Britain. In the 2017/18 financial year 2,780 new/upgraded bed-spaces are forecast to be completed across 12 sites.

Growing home ownership

Forces Help To Buy, introduced in April 2014, helps Service personnel get on or stay on the property ladder by borrowing up to 50% of their annual salary (up to a maximum of £25,000) to purchase their first property. This year payments from the scheme passed over the 10,000 mark and have continued to rise, currently standing at 12,800 payments with a combined total of £193 million that has been advanced to Service personnel. In October 2016 the then Secretary of State announced Forces Help To Buy would be extended into 2018.

Housing Adaptations

The Families Federations and Service charities raised concerns regarding the process of applying for funding for housing adaptations. Wounded, injured and sick Service personnel are entitled to have their private homes adapted to meet their clinical needs, but the process had been complex, leading to instances of further stress for those affected, and poorly informed decisions being made.

In response, MOD reissued its Adaptation Process guide in February. The guide is regularly updated, based on feedback from users and charities. There has subsequently been a notable reduction in the number of concerns to MOD about the adaptations process. To supplement the guide and improve understanding of how policy should be applied, the MOD is publishing a clarification document in early 2018. In the meantime MOD will continue to monitor the process to ensure any concerns are addressed appropriately.

Over the past eight years there has been an increase in the number of Service personnel requiring housing adaptations as a direct consequence of sustained operations. Whilst the drawdown of operations within Iraq and Afghanistan has reduced the number of adaptations required to support life-changing injuries, the need to provide adapted private homes for Service personnel will remain. There are currently 102 live adaptation projects being progressed.

Case Study

Following a serious accident which required extensive reconstructive surgery to his legs, Captain Dan had his private home adapted and gives an account of his own experience below:

Captain Dan's Perspective

"You are fully involved at every stage, from discussing the initial designs with architects to picking the final paint colour. I was apprehensive about having to make these kinds of decisions but I shouldn't have been. The builders understand that our needs are individual and I never once felt like I was being judged.

Our home has limited space upstairs, this meant that modifications couldn't be made to the existing bathroom. The architect decided that a downstairs bathroom was the best solution due to my mobility issues. A wetroom was added to the ground floor with all the floor heights downstairs levelled. Not having trip hazards is such a relief and allowed me to feel more confident when moving around. The existing kitchen was unusable, a new kitchen was installed with raised counter tops, easily accessible drawers and raised areas for white goods. Every stage of the process I was asked about design and what would work best for me.

As we lost space downstairs due to the addition of the wetroom we no longer had a dining room. An extension was provided to the front of the house to replace this. The adaptations have allowed me to cook for and eat alongside my family again. I have been given back my independence; my wife is no longer my carer."



The Future Accommodation Model

The mobile nature of Service life can be disruptive for Service personnel and their families, and providing accommodation options is one way of easing the impact. The Future Accommodation Model is looking at how we can modernise and improve the provision of accommodation, making it fairer and more flexible, while keeping it affordable. The new Model will continue to support the mobility of Service personnel, but also aims to support those who want greater stability for themselves and their families.

The provision of accommodation will move from a system based on rank and marital status to one based on need. We understand Service personnel with dependants will require additional support and our subsidy will reflect this accordingly.

The overall subsidy for accommodation will not be cut, but changes to entitlement mean that individuals may receive more or less, depending on their need. As well as providing an accommodation subsidy, MOD is considering how best to provide Service personnel with other support, such as training, time to find properties and in certain situations, the sourcing of properties themselves. This will enable Service personnel to live and work where MOD requires them to.

The MOD will shield Service personnel from price variations. Whether they live in SFA or in the private rental market, MOD will pay the geographical difference in cost of expensive locations.

Although decisions are yet to be made, proposals are entering the design phase and beginning to mature, with three options being taken forward. In October 2017, it was confirmed that, in future, accommodation will include the use of an allowance-based system. There will also be increased use of the private rental market and further consideration of broadening the accommodation entitlement whilst still providing SFA and SLA for those who want it as part of the FAM pilot.

The pilot will run over three to five years at a number of locations with each Service proposing sites that meet their prospective needs. It is expected that the locations will be announced in early 2018. The final version may change between the pilot and full roll-out. Wider implementation across Great Britain is expected to take place throughout the 2020s.

Accommodation in England

Starter Homes

The Government response to the 2016 consultation on starter homes (published alongside the Housing White Paper in February 2016) made clear its intention to exempt injured Service personnel and those whose spouse or partner has died in Service from the age restriction that applies to eligibility for starter homes. Starter homes would be sold at a minimum 20% discount to eligible first-time buyers and targeted to those who would otherwise be priced out of the housing market. We expect to make an announcement on the next steps for starter homes in due course.

Divorced and Separated Spouses

Following representation from Service charities and the Families Federations, MOD has worked with the Department for Communities and Local Government to address concerns over divorced and separated spouses' access to social housing. As a result the Department intends to consult on new statutory guidance for local authorities to ensure that divorced and separated spouses and civil partners of Service personnel who are required to leave SFA are not disadvantaged by local connection requirements when applying for social housing.

Local authorities are already prevented from applying a local connection test to disqualify Serving personnel – and those within five years of having been discharged – from applying for social housing. This is in recognition of the fact that members of the Armed Forces may be particularly disadvantaged by a local connection requirement because of the need to move from base to base. The rules also apply to bereaved spouses and civil partners of Service personnel who are required to leave SFA following the death of their spouse or partner as well as to seriously-injured Reservists recognising that they may have to move to another local authority area, for example, to receive treatment.

The new guidance would ensure that divorced and separating spouses are treated on the same basis, recognising that they may themselves have been disadvantaged by the requirements of military service.

Accommodation Metrics

Satisfaction with Service Accommodation

This year's metrics demonstrate an improvement in Service families' satisfaction with their accommodation which is likely to be due to the improved performance of CarillionAmey against the National Housing Prime contract, together with other steps to enhance the 'lived experience' such as the introduction of a compensation scheme. MOD will continue to monitor CarillionAmey's performance to ensure the improvements are sustained. In contrast, the statistics for Service personnel reveal a drop in satisfaction levels, which may reflect the concerns regarding SLA which MOD is aware of and taking action to address.

Table 14: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with the standard of Service accommodation, estimated percentage

2007 – 2017

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK Armed Forces personnel	48	50	49	54	57	56	57	58	58	53	49
Service families	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	63	53	67

Source: Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) 2017 and Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. AFCAS: Minor wording change 2011, 2012, 2013 AND 2015.
 2. AFCAS: "N/A / DON'T KNOW" option added 2011
 3. AFCAS: Excludes n/a and 'don't know'
 4. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service family accommodation or substitute service family accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [58% in 2017]
 5. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This question was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS.
 6. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation.
- .. represents data unavailable

Table 15: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with response to maintenance request (Service accommodation), estimated percentage

2011 – 2017

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK Armed Forces personnel	43	42	41	41	40	34	29
Service families	..	..	..	..	45	32	34

Source: Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) 2017 and Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. AFCAS: New questions in 2011
 2. AFCAS: Minor wording change in 2012, 2013 and 2015
 3. AFCAS: Excludes n/a and 'don't know'
 4. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service family accommodation or substitute service family accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [57% in 2017]
 5. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This question was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS
 6. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation
- .. represents data unavailable

Table 16: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with quality of maintenance service (Service accommodation), estimated percentage

2011 – 2017

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK Armed Forces personnel	42	39	40	39	40	33	29
Service families	..	..	..	..	42	29	29

Source: Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) 2017 and Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. AFCAS: New questions in 2011
 2. AFCAS: Minor wording change in 2012, 2013 and 2015
 3. AFCAS: Excludes n/a and 'don't know'
 4. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service family accommodation or substitute service family accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [57% in 2017]
 5. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This questions was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS
 6. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation
- .. represents data unavailable

Table 17: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with value for money of Service accommodation, estimated percentage

2011 – 2017

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK Armed Forces personnel	58	58	60	63	65	67	68	67	67	61	60
Service families	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	75	64	70

Source: Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) 2017 and Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) 2017

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>)

1. AFCAS: Minor wording change in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2015
 2. AFCAS: N/A and Don't know option added in 2011
 3. AFCAS: Excludes n/a and 'don't know'
 4. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service family accommodation or substitute service family accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [58% in 2017]
 5. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This questions was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS
 6. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation
- .. represents data unavailable

Social Housing

In 2015/16 there were no significant differences in social housing waiting list times between the UK Service population (including Veterans) and the non-Service population (table 17). This is likely to be in part due to the package of measures which the Department for Communities and Local Government introduced to ensure the Armed Forces Community had the same access to social housing and were not disadvantaged by the requirement for mobility whilst in Service. The package included: ensuring Veterans with urgent housing needs were always given priority for social housing; encouraging councils to take account of the needs of the Armed Forces Community in their policy making, and introducing regulations to ensure councils did not disqualify Service personnel who had recently left the Services and did not meet the local connection test.

Accommodation in Scotland

The Scottish Government is working in a number of areas to improve options for Service personnel, Veterans and their families. Online information has been improved to help Veterans access the most appropriate source of housing assistance, clearly setting out housing options and ways in which Veterans and their families can access more tailored advice and support.

The Scottish Guide for people leaving the Armed Forces and ex-Service personnel, has been updated.

Priority access to the Open Market Shared Equity Scheme and the New Supply Shared Equity Scheme is provided to both Service personnel and Veterans who left the Armed Forces within the past two years. Available data shows that in 2016/17, a total of 11 applications from those identifying as Armed Forces were made. Nine of these applications led to property being secured (82%), which compares favourably to the success rate for other applicants (48%).

Table 18: UK Service population¹ and non-Service population in England, length of time on waiting list for social housing, estimated percentage

2015/16

Length of time on waiting list prior to allocation	Service population and families		Non-service population and families	
	Under 65	65 and over	Under 65	65 and over
< 6mths	57.7	58.2	55.7	63.9
6mths – 1 year	14.2	15.3	13.6	9.2
1-2 years	6.9	10.4	10.4	10.0
2-3 years	6.2	u	6.0	4.6
3-5 years	4.4	2.3	6.4	4.0
> 5years	u	u	8.0	8.3
Total	100	100	100	100
Sample size ²	201	102	4,311	342

Source: English Housing Survey 2015-16, full household survey

¹ Has served or were currently serving in the Armed Forces

² Sample is presented at individual rather than household level

^u indicates sample size too small for reliable estimate

Table 19: UK Service population¹ and non-Service population in England, satisfaction with social housing, estimated percentage

2015/16

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK Armed Forces personnel	58	58	60	63	65	67	68	67	67	61	60
Service families	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	75	64	70

Source: English Housing Survey 2015-16, full household survey

¹ Has served or were currently serving in the Armed Forces

² Sample is presented at individual rather than household level

Accommodation in Wales

In August the Welsh Government published findings from an interim report on the evaluation of the Housing Act Wales (2014). The report identified a significant increase in partnership and multi-agency working.

An example of the success of this approach is the all-Wales Housing Pathway, launched in November 2016. To further publicise the Pathway, the Welsh Government has developed advice cards for Veterans sleeping rough, along with leaflets and posters. These include contact details for the Veterans' Gateway service in addition to a code which when scanned directs the user to further options and information about their housing needs.

The Wrexham Self Build – First Choice Housing partnership with Wrexham local authority is another project looking to address Veterans' accommodation needs. The Veterans' Accommodation Fund, supported by LIBOR funding, has provided £2.26 million which has allowed conversion and refurbishment of a property providing supported housing for 12 Veterans returning to civilian life. The funding is also being used to build 16 new flats on land donated by Wrexham local authority. This innovative project enables Veterans to participate in the construction of their own homes, acquiring a range of skills and qualifications in the process which may aid their future employment opportunities.

Similarly Grwp Cynefin (North Wales), working in partnership with Alabare, provides accommodation and support for up to nine Veterans in Glan Conwy. The scheme opened in December 2016, and is the first dedicated facility for Veterans in Conwy County. Many existing staff are Veterans themselves and have a keen understanding of the needs and issues faced by those leaving the Services.

The Welsh Veterans Partnership (WVP) is working to improve holistic care for Veterans in Wales and includes the NHS, charities and Service personnel. Its Coming Home project was launched in Wales in August 2016 with the aim of providing sustainable homes for Service leavers, Veterans and families in Wales. A new build development at Cardiff Bay, it will include 100 apartments. The WVP will make at least 15% of the properties available to Veterans.

Accommodation in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland all applicants have the same access to social housing as any other citizen and therefore there is no disadvantage in respect of the requirement for mobility whilst in service. Service in Northern Ireland (NI) with the Armed Forces satisfies the local connection requirement and as such applicants can apply for housing and homelessness assistance in NI if required. The allowance package continues to support those in NI and in mainland Great Britain wishing to settle in NI. This is achieved through the resettlement and Final Tour of Duty provisions. Local support is available through the local Brigade Military Housing Liaison Officer who provides assistance where practicable.

In September 2017, following extensive research, the NI Department for Communities published proposals to update the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Housing Selection Scheme. The system for assessing housing need and allocating social homes has been in place, largely unchanged, since 2000. The proposals will be subject to a 12 week consultation period ending in December 2017.



CHAPTER 4 – INQUESTS

The Defence Inquests Unit is the MOD's point of contact for UK Coroners investigating the deaths of Service personnel and MOD civilians where an inquest has been called. The unit is responsible for ensuring that materials relevant to inquests have been provided, as well as providing briefings and support to both former and current military and MOD civilian personnel who are called as witnesses. Since the last report there have been 29 Non-Operational and 4 Operational inquests.

The MOD considers each case and provides appropriate support tailored to the nature of the process under way. For legacy inquests in Northern Ireland this includes legal representation by the Crown Solicitor's Office and Counsel acting for the Department. In criminal cases, be that in connection with Northern Ireland, Iraq or Afghanistan, independent legal advice and representation will be provided at departmental expense. This will be provided irrespective of length of service, at no cost to the individual, and continue for as long as is necessary.

Iraq & Afghan investigations

The MOD recognises the strain that criminal investigations place on Service personnel and Veterans. We take seriously our duty of care, which includes supporting them when they face allegations arising from their service. There have been significant improvements in the provision of legal advice and pastoral support. While anyone interviewed as a potential suspect has always been entitled to legal aid, the policy on means testing was amended in September 2016; those interviewed as potential suspects in relation to incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan are entitled to free legal assistance. Recognising that Commanding Officers play a key role in ensuring that personnel receive the support they need, any Veteran being investigated is

assigned a Commanding Officer to help them obtain appropriate pastoral support.

Northern Ireland

The MOD has been working closely with the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that proposals to respond to the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland do not unfairly focus on members of the security forces. The legacy institutions arising as a result of the Stormont House Agreement would be under legal obligations to be balanced, proportionate, transparent, fair and equitable. They will make sure our Veterans are not unfairly treated or disproportionately investigated and will reflect that 90% of deaths in the Troubles were caused by terrorists.

Fatal Accident Inquiries – Scottish Law

For any military Service death in Scotland occurring on or after 15 June 2017 it will be mandatory for there to be a fatal accident inquiry. This results from recent legislation aimed at putting Service personnel in the same position as civilian employees.

The Scottish Government promoted an earlier change in the law, enacted in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, so that deaths in the course of military service abroad can lead to a fatal accident inquiry.



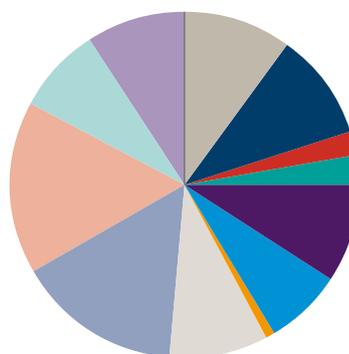
CHAPTER 5 – FUNDING

During 2017 the £10 million per annum Covenant Fund continued to support projects and programmes of work across the UK with new awards and through its ongoing monitoring and management of grants committed in previous years. This year organisations have been able to apply for grants at any time throughout the year and get a quicker decision than before.

The Covenant Fund

The Local Grants programme opened in early 2017 as a relaunch of the previous small grant scheme with additional emphasis on supporting projects with local partners, where there has been local identification of need and which will complement local services and existing provision. With grants of up to £20,000 available to charities, community-interest companies and military units, the programme continued to attract a large number of bids of increasingly high quality. Projects that the Covenant Fund has supported include activities and events which will promote integration between military and civilian communities through sporting, artistic, celebratory or educational experiences. The Covenant Fund has also funded programmes to assist Veterans with life skills, employability, and healthcare and to help improve integration between young people from military and civilian communities.

Covenant Fund Local Grants Total awarded 2017



Overseas £12,000	Multi England £29,800
Wales £321,113	North East £285,034
Scotland £324,795	North West £455,639
Multi Region £58,356	South East £515,184
Northern Ireland £107,108	South West £251,145
East £270,096	West Midlands £280,319
London £217,835	

The first projects funded under the Families in Stress programme began in April 2017 and will extend over two or three years. A total of 11 charities are using their specialist knowledge and experience to complement statutory and military welfare services in providing interventions and continuing support for military families experiencing traumatic or stressful life events. For example *Children 1st* will offer specialist family support for Service personnel based at HMNB Clyde (Faslane). It will make available intensive emotional and practical support to all family members in order to address the impact of stress, and to promote positive family relationships. *Relate Portsmouth* is developing a family counselling service for Naval families living in Hampshire. *Spurgeons' Recovering Together* project utilises a whole-family approach to support Armed Forces families affected by domestic violence and abuse, and Mind is running a project in Norfolk and Oxfordshire to support the mental health and wellbeing of spouses and partners of serving personnel at six bases.

Almost £3.5 million was committed in March 2017 to 23 'clusters' of local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales under the Covenant Fund priority Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant. Each of the awards is for partnerships of local authorities to work together to develop best practice in how they deliver to the Armed Forces families in their communities. Much of the resource will be dedicated to training front-line staff, finding ways of communicating better internally and externally, and building sustainable working between those internal departments and external agencies which currently engage with, or aim to engage with, serving personnel, their families and Veterans.

The Covenant Fund is also now investing in projects that will ensure it can best measure and demonstrate the impact of its funding, and in developing a 'Map of Need', for Veterans and their families, which will help the Fund, and also the wider military welfare sector, in determining where and how to target future resource.

£2 million was awarded to help set up the Veterans' Gateway. More detail on this is provided in chapter 8 The Wider Covenant.

The Covenant Fund has set aside £300,000 over five years to strengthen the capability and capacity of local authorities and their partners in Northern Ireland to apply for covenant funding.

Case Study of a Large Grant: Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council: Youth Residential Arts and Adventure



Priority met: Community Integration

Funding awarded: £82,260

Region: West Midlands

The project aimed to improve integration between young people from Armed Forces families in the West Midlands area and ethnically diverse groups from Sandwell.

Funding was used to arrange six residential outdoor adventure and arts experiences, as well as a series of workshops which encouraged the groups to get to know each other and overcome challenges by working collaboratively and creatively.

Sandwell is a highly diverse area, and there is also a large Armed Forces presence in the wider West Midlands area. The project promoted 'British values' whilst encouraging positive cross-cultural and cross-ethnic relationships and understanding.

161 children took part, roughly half of these from Armed Forces families. The Sandwell Youth Service identified participants from ethnically diverse groups within the community, across six towns in Sandwell. The Sandwell Residential Education Service designed a structured learning programme for the children within the residential environment. The Army Welfare Service also provided youth workers to support 'ice breaking' workshops which took place before the residential part of the project.



"Not only did he make some great memories he also made some new friends, he met some nice people from another group who he has exchanged numbers with and keeps in touch with on a regular basis."

Feedback from the residential programmes that have taken place to date has been extremely positive, with a long term effect on relations amongst children from both groups being observed. It highlights the real impact this project has had on allowing young people to form lasting friendships across various community boundaries whilst sharing new, challenging experiences.



The project will be completed by March 2018, once three more residential programmes have been carried out. The council have also planned a follow-on event for the children and young people who took part in the Residential programme.

In a letter from a parent to a Youth Worker

"It was great to see the two groups of young people working together, learning a bit about each other's lives and showing empathy around some of the challenges they each face."

Russell, Sandwell Youth Service.

Case Study of a Large Grant: Portsmouth Royal Maritime Club: RMC Recovery and Rehabilitation Centre.

**Priority met: The Co-ordination and Delivery of
Support to the Armed Forces Community Funding
awarded: £304,700 Region: South East**

The project aimed to refurbish and improve existing facilities which are already well-used by the local Armed Forces Community to provide a space within which Veterans could experience rehabilitation for physical and mental health problems within a familiar and relaxed environment. The project team found that there was a great deal of pressure on MOD and NHS resources for issues such as PTSD, sometimes leading to a gap in the provision of treatment for longer-term Veterans. Funding allowed the upgrade of facilities for disabled people, including a new lift from the main reception to the lower ground floor, while adaptation of the existing pool made it more accessible for disabled personnel; it was also equipped to facilitate hydrotherapy sessions which now take Veteran referrals from the local hospital. A new clubroom, 'Below Decks' has been constructed, allowing a space for events, meetings and group therapy breakout sessions. This space is now used by the charity 'Veterans Outreach Support' to deliver therapy for individuals with PTSD.



Swimming pool handrails



Poolside lift for disabled users

Spotlight on Small Grants

South Tyneside Council: Veterans and Reservists Employment Project

Priority met: The Co-ordination and Delivery of Support to the Armed Forces Community

Funding awarded: £20,000 Region: North East



The North East of England provides significant numbers of recruits into both the Regular and Reserve forces. The project aimed to connect the local business community, the service community and supporting organisations to overcome barriers to employment for Veterans returning to the region after their service. It did this by promoting the benefits of employing Veterans and by creating permanent links between potential employers and those organisations supporting them into employment.

The funding allowed recruitment of a part-time project worker who helped to establish a fortnightly 'drop-in' service, providing advice to Veterans and Reservists on how to access support organisations to address issues such as debt, poor housing and unemployment. Many Veterans commented that the sessions allowed them an opportunity to socialise, network and support each other. The project co-ordinator also worked to educate local businesses on the benefits of employing Veterans, the Armed Forces Covenant, and the incentives of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

25 service charities and agencies were incorporated into a referral system, which provides Veterans with easier access to the services they need, including employment opportunities. As part of this project an online 'map of provisions' was created which signposts Veterans to services and advertises drop-in facilities.



Focus for 2017/2018

Support to Service families experiencing stressful situations, and encouraging greater integration between military and civilian communities have been identified as particular areas of focus for 2017/2018, building on the work already done to improve consistency of delivery of the Covenant at a local level through guidance from the centre as well as sharing examples of successful projects such as those described above.

Other Covenant-related Funding

The Aged Veterans Fund

The Aged Veterans Fund awarded £22.7 million of LIBOR funding in 2017 to 10 charities to improve support and introduce new services to help older Veterans. The money will help organisations across the country to continue the invaluable work they do to support older Veterans, which includes providing access to healthcare and carers, support with using the internet, and offering general advice.

One of the awards, totalling almost £4 million, went to PoppyScotland who manage 14 projects under its Unforgotten Forces programme, providing wellbeing improvements to homes, helping to prevent Veterans from feeling isolated, and supporting those who suffer hearing problems. Age UK received £4.4 million for its Joining Forces scheme, which gives up to 12 weeks of tailored support for older Veterans across the country, providing information and advice, practical support at home, access to social events and digital technology, and opportunities to become more active. £4.8 million was awarded to the Legion Healthy Living Portfolio, led by RBL, to promote healthy living through a number of ways including local activities, research to improve services, and the training of specialist staff.

The Aged Veterans Fund which was set up in 2015, had a total of £30 million of LIBOR funds available to support older Veterans. All funds have now been committed following the first round of awards in 2016 where £6.6 million was given to eight organisations.

Scotland

This year the Scottish Government provided Veterans Scotland with a further £90,000 to develop new and improved support for Veterans across Scotland and to facilitate the sharing of good practice between service providers in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Since 2013, Veterans Scotland have received a total of £360,000 to take this important work forward.

Last year there was a total investment of £600,000 over three years (2017-2020) to the Scottish Veterans' Fund for Veterans and ex-Service charities, which includes a three-year £240,000 contribution from Standard Life for projects to assist Veterans' employment. As well as continuing to help one-year projects, the Fund now welcomes applications for funding to be spent over a one or two-year period (2018 to 2020). The 2017 funding stream saw £200,000 of the fund awarded to 19 projects. The Scottish Veterans' Fund has now provided over £1 million to 144 projects since 2008.



THE HOME OF
JAGUAR MANUFACTURING

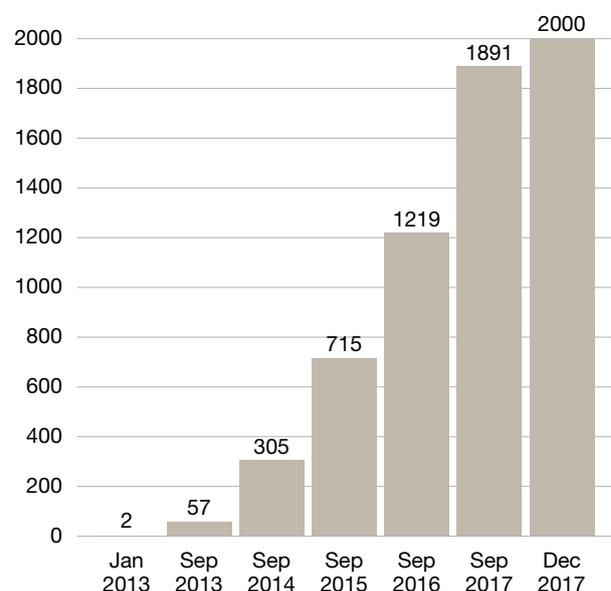


CHAPTER 6 – THE COVENANT IN BUSINESS

The support of businesses and other organisations is vital to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant, as forces-friendly employers of Reservists, Veterans and spouses, as service providers for the whole of the Armed Forces Community and as advocates within their business and wider communities. This year we have seen a significant increase in the number of organisations of all shapes and sizes making Covenant pledges, both because they see it as the right thing to do and because they recognise the business benefits of tapping into the wide range of skills and experiences that the Armed Forces Community can bring to their organisations.

Two major milestones have been achieved this year – in March, we reached the landmark of 1,500 signed Covenants and in December O2 was announced as the 2,000th signatory. A major focus for 2018 will be an independent review of the Covenant in Business, commissioned and funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, supported by the MOD, to identify and promote the best practice from across the full spectrum of major corporations through to small and medium enterprises and encompassing the private, public and third sectors.

Number of Armed Forces Covenant Signings



The London Stock Exchange signs the Armed Forces Covenant in the presence of Minister for Defence People and Veterans

Achievements This Year

The MOD continues to promote the Covenant in its relationships with businesses at the national, regional and local levels. Working closely with organisations and building long-term relationships results in companies being proactive in their support of the Armed Forces Covenant and other Defence initiatives. This includes organisations which signed a number of years ago coming forward to re-sign the Covenant in order to refresh and strengthen their existing pledges. These include large, well-known companies including Babcock International, BT and Rolls-Royce.

In March, Travis Perkins became the 1,500th signatory to the Covenant, making an exemplary pledge of support which includes: 10 days' additional paid leave for Reservist employees; collaboration with the Career Transition Partnership to host company open days for Service leavers and Veterans to offer CV writing and interview skills advice; work experience opportunities and placements. They also pledged to support the Royal School of Military Engineers by offering essential work experience opportunities in construction for engineers to gain nationally-recognised qualifications. The full list of Covenant signatories and their pledges is available on the Covenant website: <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) continues to grow from strength to strength. The scheme recognises employers who actively support the Armed Forces Community in their workplace and also encourages others to follow their lead. Attracting nominations from companies in every part of the country both in the private and public sectors, the scheme has seen a rapid increase in participation since it launched in 2014. To date, a total of 80 organisations have met the high standard required to win a Gold award, with 33 being recognised this year. Northern Ireland has developed a bespoke approach to the scheme that adheres to local sensitivities and meets local needs.

In January, Defence welcomed the launch of the Gold Alumni Group by ERS Gold Award-winning organisations who have embraced the opportunity that comes with this top-level recognition. The Group aims to encourage and support other organisations to achieve a Gold award and acts as a sounding board for Armed Forces employer policy development. Some case studies of Gold Award winners are provided below.



The Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Awards reception at the Imperial War Museum in October 2017

Multinational Company Case Study: Balfour Beatty

Since signing the Armed Forces Covenant in 2015, Balfour Beatty has shown determination in translating their Covenant pledges into far-reaching support.

The company welcomes Reservists, Veterans and spouses into the workforce and regularly raises awareness of the value of military skills internally and externally. Balfour Beatty's Armed Forces Forum, which operates across the UK, focuses on the recruitment, retention, development and support of ex-military personnel. The Forum is making strides towards a greater Armed Forces Community throughout the company.

Balfour Beatty recognises Cadets as excellent potential apprentices and actively seeks to attract them into the business.

The company's advocacy model is exemplary. By using internal communications channels to share staff case studies and celebrate military events such as Armistice Day and Reserves Day the company has built an Armed Forces-friendly culture across the organisation.

As a pro-active member of BuildForce, a construction industry initiative to recruit ex-Service workers, Balfour Beatty actively encourages other construction companies to offer training and employment to Veterans.



"Many Armed Forces leavers have transferable skills which are ideally suited to the construction sector. We recognise the business benefits associated with having a diverse workforce and are committed to offering a rewarding career, with opportunities for continued development."

Paul Raby, Balfour Beatty Group Human Resources Director

Public Sector Case Study: Hull City Council



One of the strongest and longest-supporting employers of the Armed Forces in Yorkshire and the Humber, Hull City Council (HCC) has spearheaded many successful initiatives.

HCC is the lead council in the region for the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership, which aims to strengthen support from local authorities. HCC's lead has ensured many councils adopt and build on best practice and take a consistent approach to supporting Armed Forces personnel.

HCC has built positive links with local units and funds a work club within a local Army unit to help Service leavers, Veterans and Reservists into employment. The club has helped personnel and military spouses who are relocating to the area to find new jobs.

Other initiatives include reduced rates at leisure facilities for members of the Armed Forces Community and free use of the City Hall for local units to hold recruiting events.

HCC provides annual funding for the Hull Armed Forces Forum which promotes housing, health, welfare, employment and education projects for local Armed Forces personnel, and is attended by 30 organisations.

"My line managers and senior managers have always supported additional time off with pay for Reserves training, as well as supporting my deployments. Without the committed support of the Council, I would not be where I am today within the Army Reserve."

Dave Sullivan, Hull City Council Senior Procurement Officer, Army Reservist

Business Advocacy

Deloitte were one of the first 50 companies to sign the Covenant and are an Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award Winner. They have long been convinced of the commercial benefits of employing Veterans and have been proactive in advocating this within the business community. In 2016 they commissioned the 'Veterans Work' report which identified how the wide range of soft and hard skills and experiences that Veterans gain during their time in service can benefit any organisation. The report shone a light on the topic from an employer's perspective and by providing tangible evidence of the benefits set out the business case for taking on Service leavers. This year, in order to reach a wider audience, Deloitte worked in partnership with the Officers Association (a member of MOD's Career Transition Partnership), Business in The Community and the Drive Project to produce three short films featuring celebrities, business leaders, actors and Veterans themselves to reinforce the key messages and themes highlighted in the report as well as challenge some of the misperceptions that exist around Veterans. The report and films are available at www.veteranswork.org.uk.

Small and Medium Sized Enterprise Case Study: Wolferstons Solicitors

This Plymouth law firm has upheld the values of the Armed Forces Covenant for several years. The first law firm to be awarded Gold, Wolferstons has inspired other firms in the legal profession to follow its lead.

Wolferstons' extensive initiatives for Reservists and Service leavers are commendable. Recognising the value of their transferable skills, the firm promotes Reserve service opportunities among its 180 employees and grants additional leave to fulfil military duties or to explore further opportunities in the Reserve Forces.

Offering work experience and advice on law career options for Service leavers, Wolferstons also promotes and sponsors a Veterans' employment fair that is now a firm feature in Plymouth's recruitment calendar.

Wolferstons offers free legal clinics to Service personnel and Veterans and free telephone and email advice to deployed personnel. It also contributes to military charities such as SSAFA and Help for Heroes and supports key military events including the Plymouth Poppy Appeal and Armed Forces Day.



"After a 19 year career in the Royal Navy, I am incredibly proud to work for Wolferstons; they've encouraged me every step of the way with my new career and supported me and other employees from the Armed Forces Community through workplace policies."

Natasha Mason, Wolferstons Armed Forces Coordinator, Royal Navy Veteran

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) continues to promote the Armed Forces Covenant with the national employers it supports. So far more than 50 employers they work with have signed the Covenant, including 12 this year. Practical support offered by employers includes the NHS increasing the attraction of Service leavers to the health sector; Network Rail providing employment opportunities for Reservists; and Royal Mail recruiting cadets into their apprenticeships. DWP have been working closely with recruitment company REED, who have embraced the Covenant and developed an internship for Veterans.

In June DWP held a one-week national campaign across the Jobcentre Plus network to promote the Armed Forces agenda; from recruitment into the Regular forces and their Reserves through to supporting Service leavers and spouses.

DWP success: Armed Forces Campaign in a Box

The objectives of the campaign were:

- To raise interests in Armed Forces careers.
- To increase Jobcentre Plus staff awareness of opportunities through a series of insight calls.
- To develop relationships between Jobcentre Plus Districts, Armed Forces recruiting staff and local Regular and Reserve units.
- To identify Jobcentre Plus customers who had served in the Armed Forces in order that they may benefit from appropriate programme special provision and support from partnership organisations.

Almost 2000 Jobcentre Plus colleagues participated in the staff insight calls and the various Jobcentre Plus districts organised almost 150 events, recorded 460 customers expressing an interest in Armed Forces careers, and arranged for 987 customers to attend Group Information sessions.

Looking Forward: Identifying and Promoting Best Practice

The Forces in Mind Trust commissioned an independent review of the pledges of organisations that have signed the Covenant. The review will examine the different ways in which various types of organisations are delivering Armed Forces Covenant pledges and highlight examples of best practice which can be shared and promoted. The evidence-based review will identify effective policies and initiatives as well as obstacles to delivery, before identifying how delivery could be improved and what action could be taken at local and national levels to support that improvement. Central to the research is a need to better understand the employment opportunities available to the Armed Forces and Service families as well as the provision of services in a wider sense through commercial arrangements, support networks and knowledge-sharing. Findings of the report are expected to be published ahead of the 2018 Annual Report and will help inform and shape future plans for strengthening the role that organisations play in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant.

Commercial Products and Services

We have continued to work closely with the financial services and telecommunications sectors to ensure that the Armed Forces Community has fair access to commercial products and services. The MOD-hosted Financial Service Steering group meets regularly with industry representatives. This valuable forum allows issues to be raised directly with industry representatives and has enabled progress to be made in a number of areas.

Achievements This Year

Financial Top Tips for Service Personnel

Service personnel and their families can experience difficulty in accessing commercial products and services. Mobility requirements, short-notice posting and time spent abroad can lead to financial penalties. The MOD has published online guidance which provides Service personnel and their families with top tips on getting a fair deal when they need to access financial services.

Home Media Packages

All the main broadband providers have committed to waiving cancellation fees for Service personnel and their partners when they are posted abroad, or to another part of the UK not covered by their service.

Mortgages

We have issued new guidance raising awareness of the nature of specialist and Reservist pay to help lenders when assessing affordability criteria and to ensure Service personnel and Reservists have a fair chance of securing mortgages. A summary document has been prepared for Service personnel, explaining why lenders need to make sure that loan repayments are sustainable and what lenders are likely to take into account. New guidance has also been provided to families posted overseas on paying mortgages in a foreign currency and identifying providers of Forces-friendly solutions.

Home and Motor Insurance



Via the Financial Services Steering Group, MOD continues to work with the insurance trade bodies to improve online guidance to Service personnel to reduce instances of Service personnel taking out insurance which is not suitable for their circumstances. A key message from industry is that price comparison websites may offer the cheapest cover, but it is often not the most suitable, and Service personnel may find a specialist broker is more appropriate. The British Insurers Brokers Association have also amended their website to highlight which of their members offer policies which have been tailored to the Armed Forces Community <https://www.biba.org.uk/armed-forces-biba-members-can-help>

Defence Discount Service

The Defence Discount Service (DDS) supports the Armed Forces Community as a whole and remains the only MOD-endorsed scheme. The Defence Privilege Card acts as a recognition card for the Armed Forces Community and for Veterans. DDS has seen record growth in 2017 with over 430,000 members and 7,250 business now signed up. DDS has continued to invest in and promote the service, and this year has signed up with the new Veterans' Gateway as well as developing a new mobile app and website with updated mapping and easier search facilities. The back of the Privilege Card has been designed to contain Veterans UK and Veterans' Gateway contact information. DDS has worked closely with Armed Forces Day, attending the national event as well as helping in advance with introductions to corporate sponsors.

Credit Unions

Access to credit union services was enabled in October 2015, following HM Treasury provision of £500,000 from LIBOR funds to establish 'a payroll deduction' system which would allow Service personnel to save responsibly, and pay off loans with the payment coming directly from an individual's salary at source. In the first year around 1,000 Service personnel signed up with credit unions. In the last year this membership number has grown to over 3,200. More than £2.25 million has been saved and around £6 million has been loaned responsibly. Support to this scheme is provided by PlaneSaver, London Mutual and the Police Credit Unions.

Credit history

The credit reference agencies are aiming to complete system changes to improve the recognition and transfer of an individual's credit history while they are based at British Forces Post Office addresses, building on recent improvements in this area. The agencies and lenders are keen to stress the importance of keeping address details up to date (and at a consistent address) on all credit agreements. This will help the agencies to obtain the information they require and ensure that an individual's credit report presents an accurate picture of their credit history.



CHAPTER 7 – THE COVENANT IN THE COMMUNITY

Observations from Last Year's Report

- The Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) identified a need to train local authority staff to ensure policies are properly implemented. The new guidance for local authorities, published this year, helps to ensure a common understanding of best practice and how local authorities can meet their commitments under the Covenant in the Community.
- Cobseo noted a need to enhance the communication of the Covenant within the Armed Forces Community. The Covenant website (www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk) is regularly updated to ensure material is current and relevant. We continue to support the network of Covenant Champions and hold regular Covenant Champions' conferences across the UK. The MOD has partnered with the British Forces Broadcasting Service on a range of activity described below. We are currently working with the single Service leads to increase the flow of Covenant, information and to improve understanding among all ranks within the Armed Forces.

There is now a clearer understanding of the scope of the Covenant in communities, helped by the publication this year of guidance for local authorities. However the quality of support services available to the Armed Forces Community still varies between local authorities. As evidenced in this chapter, 2017 has seen examples of best practice in communication and initiatives to improve community integration. During 2018 MOD and other stakeholders will look to promote these examples to ensure local authorities, businesses and other parties are aware of what can be achieved. Consideration will also be given to the best means of measuring satisfaction

levels within the Armed Forces Community with the support that is available to them locally.

Achievements This Year

The need for objective analysis of success in the delivery of the Covenant in local communities resulted in the '*Our Community, Our Covenant*' report being published in 2016. The report's recommendations have been the focus of our work in 2017 in taking forward the Covenant at the local level.

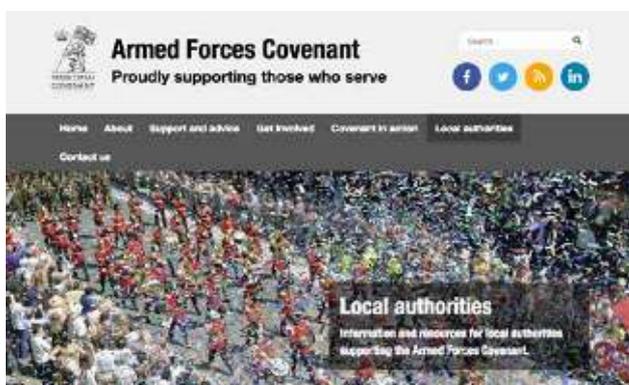
The report concluded that there is a clear mismatch on some occasions between what the Armed Forces Community and councils expect the Covenant to deliver. The new Armed Forces Covenant webpage, which is more accessible and friendly in tone, has proved very popular among families and service providers alike, improving access to good examples of delivery, news stories and Covenant guidance. This offers users the opportunity to provide feedback on the site and its contents to ensure that it remains current and helpful to the user.

The MOD has also helped Covenant Champions within Armed Forces units by improving their access to the latest information through regular updates from MOD for their further dissemination to the Armed Forces Community. In support of this the MOD ran three Champion Conferences this year to underline the importance of their role and to share best practice.

The report also indicated more could be done by MOD around transition – in terms of briefing our personnel and families on the realities of civilian life and in providing information to councils about those coming to reside in their areas. Detail of the action taken to address these concerns are set out in Chapter 8 *The Wider Covenant*.

One of the report's main observations was the need for a clearer narrative describing what we can expect of the Covenant, with good guidance to back it up. A section on the new Covenant website specifically targeted at local authorities and their local partners was created this year and is proving a useful and popular tool in better explaining the Covenant and sharing news stories and examples of good practice.

An overarching Covenant guide for local authorities was produced and published on the website in July and was followed by annexes for each of the home nations detailing the specific procedures and policies in place there. These were produced in close collaboration with representatives from the Devolved Administrations.



Work is now in hand to explore the creation of an on line, interactive version of the *Our Community Our Covenant* report's toolkit. This will help local authorities and their partners to better assess their own performance and provide a basis from which they can work to improve their local Covenant pledges.

An Action Group, co-chaired by the Forces in Mind Trust and MOD, was created this year comprising representatives from the Devolved Administrations, Local Government Associations, the Confederation of Service Charities and the Royal British Legion. This group's purpose is to facilitate and monitor the action plan derived from the recommendations of the *Our Community Our Covenant* report, and will provide recommendations to the Covenant Reference Group.

In March 2017 the Covenant Fund made its first awards under its 'Strengthening Local Government Delivery of the Covenant' funding scheme. 23 grants totalling almost £3.5 million were made to cluster of local authorities across the UK for programmes of work lasting up to two years which will result in improved services, information and communication.

A further round of funding for this programme will award grants early next year. In addition to this scheme, the funding of Local Grants for Community Integration and Local Service Delivery is continuing.

Local Guidance: Westminster City Council

Westminster City Council has always been keen to engage with the large concentration of Service personnel and Veterans in the borough, and has been an enthusiastic participant in the Armed Forces Covenant since 2012. Part of this commitment is a Covenant-specific section to the Council website. These webpages present in one place all the information on Council services required by local Service personnel, Veterans and their families. This includes practical information on school admissions, GP services, housing support and also includes links to useful websites such as the Covenant Fund and relevant charities.



Westminster City Council's aim of being a proactive member of the Armed Forces Covenant has been aligned with the principles laid out in the *Our Community, Our Covenant* report. In particular, the language used on the Westminster Armed Forces Covenant webpage follows the guidance of the 'Core Infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant' section of the report, in providing a clear point of contact for the Covenant within the Council, clear guidelines about what the Covenant means at the local level and information on the Council's elected Armed Forces Champion. Westminster City Council continually updates the website with news about Armed Forces related events and activity in the borough and will be carrying out further improvements to the website, to follow the best practice laid out in the 'Our Community Our Covenant report'.

Mutually beneficial relationship: Surrey County Council

An Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award winner, Surrey County Council is a strong advocate of the Armed Forces Community, employing over 25 Reservists and many Veterans. It recognises the huge value and contribution that staff who are Reservists and Veterans make to the Council.

The Council held a thank you reception for its Reservists (and those working in the district and borough councils and Surrey Police), which it used to explore further ways in which it could support them. It also provided an opportunity to meet Reservist colleagues.

The Council now promotes opportunities for staff to develop their skills at the Sandhurst Leadership Challenge course held by the Army at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. The course is an opportunity for staff to develop their leadership and teamwork skills under the expert guidance of the Reserve forces.

Working with Forces TV, the Council recorded a short film with Guildford Fire Station's Greenwatch (mainly made up of Reservists and Veterans), promoting the value of the transferrable skills gained from Service and explaining how these benefit the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.

Each year up to 10 Council employees attend the Sandhurst Leadership Challenge course.

The Council has now been offered two places on a new Interactive Leadership and Management Training experience at RAF Halton in Buckinghamshire, taking place in autumn 2017. It has offered the places to staff in children's services to help improve their offer. Following attendance on the courses the Council plans to hold a focus group to share learning and promote the benefits of the courses.

"The Sandhurst Leadership Challenge was great fun and a really good opportunity to think about leadership in a different environment. Undertaking a range of different challenges with people you have never met before, was a great test of teamwork and leadership skills and in the debrief after each challenge it was interesting to see what had worked well or more often where we had gone wrong! I've been able to use lots of learning from the day to think about how I can work more effectively on collaborative projects with colleagues from across the council and in partner organisations."

"Attending the Sandhurst Leadership Day has had a big impact on me: I constantly find myself reflecting on my approach to team work and leadership, using my experiences from the day, and learning from the other participants".



Wales

North Wales local authorities were successful in their collaborative bid for Covenant Funds to appoint two Armed Forces Liaison Officers. Integrated within the six local authorities the two officers cover the East and West of North Wales and their varied work includes mapping the Armed Forces Community population within each local authority, implementing training for local authority staff, strengthening partnerships between third-sector organisations and the local authority, supporting projects for Covenant and MOD funding that aid integration and the community, and reviewing policies in line with national guidelines. Appointments for Liaison Officer roles across other local authorities in Wales are under way.



CHAPTER 8 – THE WIDER COVENANT

Observations from Last Year's Report

- The Families Federations welcomed the Families Strategy and intent to produce a childcare policy. A paper titled 'Supporting the Affordability, Availability and Accessibility of Childcare for the Families of Service personnel has been produced by the MOD's Directorate Children & Young People after extensive research, and after consultation with all stakeholders (including the Families Federations). The paper makes a number of recommendations, which will be considered by the MOD Service Personnel Policy Group (SPPG) on 17 January 2018.
- The Families Federations raised concerns about a perceived lack of commitment to removing disadvantage faced by foreign and Commonwealth families and MOD is working with the Home Office to prioritise addressing disadvantage. Positive progress has been made with passport applications and visas.
- Concerns were raised about Service families' ability to adopt. The Military Adoption Champion project will look to identify the issues around adoption and to promote adoption within the Armed Forces Community.

The Wider Covenant refers to Covenant work which does not naturally fit under the four statutory areas of health, education, accommodation and inquests. Progress this year reflects the drive towards a more joined-up approach. The Veterans' Gateway and Project SToMP, run by the Welsh Probation Service and the Armed Service Advice Project in Scotland, all demonstrate what can be achieved by linking providers of services and working together to address needs from the outset.

Achievements This Year

The Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board

Following up on a key manifesto commitment, the inaugural Ministerial Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board (MCVB) met on 26 October 2017. Co-chaired by the Defence Secretary and the First Secretary of State, the MCVB will provide strategic direction and oversight for the delivery of the Covenant. At the first meeting the Board took action to strengthen accountability within government by asking relevant departments to appoint a lead Minister for Covenant and Veterans issues. It was also agreed that the inaccurate public perception of Veterans as damaged by their time in the Armed Forces, needed to be addressed urgently, through launching an evidence-based counter-narrative. Finally, the Board also recognised the need to fill in the gaps in the Government's ability to measure the delivery of the Covenant. To address this, departments were asked to investigate what further metrics they could introduce.

The Veterans Gateway



The sheer number of public and third-sector organisations offering support was confusing many Veterans, so the Covenant Fund awarded a £2 million grant to an RBL-led consortium including Combat Stress, SSAFA, and Poppyscotland to create the Veterans' Gateway. The Gateway was formally launched in June 2017 and provides a single point of contact putting Veterans and their families across the UK, who are unsure of where to turn in touch with appropriate organisations, to support their needs.

Monitoring and evaluation of the Gateway will inform work to improve the Government's understanding of where the UK's approximately 2.75 million Veterans live, and the differing levels of support they require. This will supplement the Covenant-funded 'Map of Need' to provide an evidence-based analysis of what services are being sought and where. The University of Northumbria are leading this work and will provide their findings to date in January 2018.

The announcement in October that the Office for National Statistics will recommend the inclusion of a Veterans marker in the 2021 census, following detailed, evidence-based, consultation between MOD and the Office for National Statistics and the Royal British Legion's independent 'Count them in' campaign, should enable a comprehensive picture of Veterans' demographics throughout England and Wales for the first time.

All of these developments will enable Government and its partners to make better-evidenced choices as to how the needs of the Armed Forces Community can be more effectively prioritised and met.

Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office

The Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (VSO) has now been formally established and resourced to expand capacity in supporting Veterans in Northern Ireland. It is facilitated by RFCA NI but resourced through and overseen by Cobseo. It will provide a focal point for advice on support available to Veterans and on how applications to draw down the Covenant Fund might be made. It will also seek to provide solutions to those Veterans whose needs are not being met by statutory bodies, such as health trusts, or the charitable sector. It will train and oversee the network of Veterans champions who are elected to each of NI's 11 local authorities through whom individual referrals can be made. It will also facilitate the meeting of the Northern Ireland Veterans Support Committee which comprises leading service charities and which acts as an information/best practice exchange body. The VSO is geared to finding solutions to individual Veterans needs through its own networks within NI, through the NIVSC or elsewhere where practical. The VSO is formally plugged into the Veterans' Gateway to ensure common and accurate exchange of information.

Veterans Portal – Scotland

In June a Veterans Portal was launched on the Scottish Government website: <https://www.mygov.scot/veterans/>. It offers a range of sign-posting links to other websites that provide help and support available to Veterans in Scotland.

Scottish Veterans Commissioner

The Commissioner published a report in August 2017: '*Veterans' Health & Wellbeing in Scotland – Are We Getting it Right?*' <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00524012.pdf>. and the Scottish Government's response to the recommendations is available online. Two further reports will follow, containing recommendations to the Scottish Government across the health and Veterans sectors.

Veteran Welfare

In North Wales, the Keep Safe Cymru for Veterans scheme is now available, providing Veterans with much-needed practical and emotional support from the emergency services in times of crisis. It allows the Veterans to register their details with the police, ensuring that should the need arise, there would be an appropriate response. On registration, each Veteran is issued with an Armed Forces Keep Safe Card and given a direct line into the South Wales Police Public Service Centre. The operator who takes the call will know immediately that this person has registered for the scheme.

National Insurance

In last year's Armed Forces Covenant report the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) reported on the National Insurance credit introduced in 2016, designed to help Armed Forces spouses and civil partners who accompanied their Service partner on postings outside the UK, to protect their future State Pension. 1,800 applications were made for the National Insurance credit, and over 1,500 applications were successful.

Universal Credit

In August 2017, DWP published an article called '*Universal Credit for members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and their families*' for Armed Forces Service organisations to carry in their respective magazines and on their social media sites.

Compensation

Veterans in Wales can claim under the War Pension Scheme if they are no longer serving and their disablement was a result of their service before 2005. From April 2016 £25 per week of the war disablement pension was disregarded when assessing social care needs. From April 2017 a full disregard was introduced.

Similarly, in Scotland, from 1 April 2017, £5 million has been committed to ensure that Veterans in receipt of social care in Scotland will now get the full value of their war pensions. This change, which delivers on a commitment set out in the programme for Government, will benefit up to 1,300 Veterans in Scotland. Arrangements in Scotland and Wales are now in line with those in England.

Workplace Benefits

The DWP has made tailored advice available to healthcare professionals carrying out Personal Independence Payment and Employment and Support Allowance assessments, so that they are aware of the specific issues that Veterans may face and can make allowances for these as appropriate. The guidance is helping to improve understanding of Veterans' needs.

Family Life

The UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy 2016-2020, published in January 2016, describes the relationship between the Service person's family, operational capability and recruitment and retention. The supporting Action Plan, developed in conjunction with the single Services and the Families Federations, identified a number of priority areas: spousal employment, transition to civilian life, childcare and domestic abuse.

Additionally, wider changes across Defence which will impact on Service personnel and their families, such as modernising the housing offer and designing a new offer for new joiners, have featured as areas of concern for families who are keen to understand more about how potential changes will affect their day-to-day lives. The Action Plan includes a requirement for a family welfare impact assessment to be completed as these new policies develop.

The Action Plan is supported by the Covenant Fund which assigned £4 million over two years to projects

that support 'Families in Stress', enabling specialist organisations to provide immediate or local support to families experiencing episodes of significant strain.

Foreign and Commonwealth Families

Her Majesty's Passport Office has waived the requirement for Service personnel, whether based in the UK or overseas, to attend an interview before a full adult passport will be issued, and work is progressing to introduce a similar exemption to the dependants of Service personnel. The Home Office is carrying out work to improve the online visa application process for foreign and Commonwealth families, to ensure that they are not being charged incorrect fees. Where families have incorrectly been charged a fee, the Home Office will give a full refund.

Childcare

One way of easing transfer between education establishments is to ensure the facilities at the new location are suitable for the child's educational needs and take into account their unique experiences as a Service pupil. Following thorough consultation in 2017. A paper titled '*Supporting the Affordability, Availability and Accessibility of Childcare for the Families of Service Personnel*' has been produced by the MOD's Directorate Children & Young People after extensive research, and after consultation with all stakeholders (including the Families Federations). The paper makes a number of recommendations, which will be considered by the MOD Service Personnel Policy Group (SPPG) on 17 January 2018.

Adoption

Service personnel and families have experienced difficulties with the adoption process due to the mobility requirements of their careers. To address this disadvantage, SSAFA has obtained a grant from the Department for Education to deliver the Military Adoption Champion project. The grant provided £66,000 for 2016/17 and £134,000 for 2017/18. The project will review current practice around the assessment and provision of support to potential military adopters, as well as working closely with local authorities to champion the concept, especially where there are large "local" populations of Service personnel. It will also aim to develop local authority understanding of responsibilities under the Covenant to make adoption more accessible to Service families.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse affects one in four women and one in six men within the UK, and while there is no evidence to suggest it is any more prevalent within the Armed Forces, we should assume that Service families are affected by domestic abuse at least to the same degree as wider society. The single Services already offer a huge amount of support to both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse; however, there is scope to offer a greater degree of consistency in how that support is made available. The MOD has recently published the first Defence Domestic Abuse Strategy: 'No Defence For Abuse'. The strategy focusses the Department's efforts to reduce the frequency and impact of domestic abuse, including through increased education and awareness, and through the provision of greater co-ordination of support to anyone experiencing any form of domestic abuse.

Veterans in the Criminal Justice System

A small number of Veterans enter the Criminal Justice System. The Ministry of Justice welcomes the efforts of organisations who aim to reduce re-offending and will continue working in partnership across government and Service charities, including the Royal British Legion and SSAFA, to improve their prospects.

An important factor is the early identification of those with a military background who enter the Criminal Justice System, and following a recommendation in the Phillips Review into Former Members of the Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System, HM Probation Service has introduced measures that routinely capture information on those entering custody or on community sentences. This information will assist to build a better picture of the needs and enable the flexibility to tailor rehabilitative work to the needs and characteristics of the individual.

National Probation Service in Wales: Supporting Transition of Military Personnel (SToMP)



Priority met: Former Service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System

Funding awarded: £390,200 Region: Wales

The National Probation Service in Wales launched the project to develop an 'end to end' approach, providing support to Veterans across Wales. This involves co-ordination from the point of police call out through to custody, court, prison, probation and resettlement into society.

The identification of Veterans within the Criminal Justice System enables them to be signposted to specialist Veteran support services to address the challenges they may be facing.

The project also aimed to promote by fostering strong working relationships with project partners including HMP Parc's Endeavour Unit which is dedicated to supporting Veterans. HMP Parc houses the majority of Veterans in prison in Wales. Charitable organisations were also incorporated into the system providing training, education and life skills, employment opportunities, financial support and a mentoring service.

Two Veteran Prison Liaison Officers were employed. They interview Veterans in custody to determine their individual needs, identify the most appropriate service for referral and facilitate the subsequent contact with the Veteran. Resettlement plans for the individual include details of the referral which meant prisoner engagement was secured prior to their release, encouraging the potential for continuity in support once the Veteran has left custody. An academic has undertaken research examining the effectiveness of the project; the results will inform the provision for ex-Service personnel in the prison system in the future, as well as exposing how useful existing interventions have been.

The **Scottish Prison Service** has established the **Veteran in Custody Support Officer Champions** who continue to operate in each Scottish prison, to help those who receive a custodial sentence.

The Armed Services Advice Project Scotland

A referral system has been in place for three years to enable PoppyScotland officers to refer individuals in need of assistance to relevant support groups through a single point of contact. This referral service involves collaboration through Police Scotland, Poppy Scotland and the Citizens Advice Service Scotland. Over 850 referrals have been made by Police Scotland to the service since its inception.

Transition

The MOD is developing a policy for transition which will provide support to the family, as well as the Service person. The new policy, which will be published in early 2018, will encourage single Services and individuals to prepare for the transition to civilian life early on in their careers. Through Forces in Mind Trust funding, each of the single Service Families Federations has appointed a 'Transition Liaison Manager' who for the next two years will recruit six families each, in order to track them through their transition process. This will enable key findings to be shared with policy officials to better understand the landscape that families face, and to share experiences, information, best practice and lessons learned in the development of transition policy.

Transition – Early Service Leavers

In January 2018 a mentoring support service will be provided by SSAFA as part of a new Transition Trial. This is a collaboration between the MOD, SSAFA, Veterans Welfare Service, Army Regional Command and the Career Transition Partnership. The trial's aim is to provide a bespoke mentoring support service to those who might struggle the most with life challenges on their transition from the Services at the end of their career. The cohort of personnel who have been found to have the highest proportion of those with challenges are Early Service Leavers (those with less than 4 years' service). The trial will involve the Army and will be based in Catterick. It will centre around motivating and empowering the mentees to realise their own strengths and develop their own strategies for coping with life's challenges in the future, and signpost to specialist support where it is necessary.

In 2018 the Welsh Government will commission research into the linkages between adverse childhood experiences and early Service leavers with a view to implementing improvements to the transition process for early Service leavers.

Employment Opportunities

Following on from the success of its Housing Pathway, the Welsh Government proposes to develop an employment pathway for Veterans. The scheme will highlight employment opportunities and signpost services offering assistance with CV writing,

career planning and other such skills which will improve access to employment.

In 2017, the Scottish Government launched in partnership with Business and the Community and SaluteMyJob a best practice toolkit: Capitalising on Military Talent: https://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/capitalising_on_military_talent_final_interactive_pd.pdf. This followed the initiative Supporting Veterans into Employment, aimed to encourage employers to recognise the positive contribution that Veterans can make to workforces.

In April 2017 the Scottish Government established the Veterans' Employability Strategic Group to drive forward work on Veterans' employability in response to the Scottish Veterans Commissioner's recommendations in his Employability, Skills and Learning report published in 2016: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00509088.pdf>. The Strategic Group will continue to look at the recommendations as their work progresses; including on issues such as work placements, accreditation, and mapping of military skills into the civilian workplace.

War Widows

The Government recognises the unique commitment that Service families make to their country and remains sympathetic to the circumstances of this group of bereaved individuals. HMG is considering a policy review of this area and will make a decision in 2018.

Spousal Employment

Around three quarters of partners of Service personnel are in work, which compares favourably with the civilian sector. However, the nature of Service life makes it difficult for many partners to pursue a career and means they may not be employed in a role they would ordinarily choose. Furthermore, employment remains a challenge for spouses of Service personnel posted overseas.

The two-year Spouse Employment Support trial to provide tailored employment and employability support concluded in October 2017. The trial took place at RAF stations in the UK and Cyprus, involving 438 RAF spouses. Anglia Ruskin University are conducting an independent evaluation of the trial and we expect to have the final report in early 2018. An interim evaluation in March found that those spouses who taken part had found the trial worthwhile and

said it gave a sense of being valued by MOD. The findings will help shape future policy direction in this important area.

In October 2017 the College of Policing updated its vetting guidance so that spouses and dependants of Service personnel will no longer fail the residency requirements due to time spent overseas accompanying their Service person, when applying to work for the Police Service.

A Flexible Workforce

Proposed legislation, announced as part of the Queen's Speech in June 2017, will allow Armed Forces personnel to work part-time for short periods, as long as the operational effectiveness of the military is maintained. The flexible working measures, which are due to come into effect in 2019, will also allow personnel to limit the amount of time that they need to spend away from their home base and their families. The need to maintain operational capability lies at the heart of these arrangements, and applications for part-time working will predominantly be assessed against the need of the Armed Forces. Personnel would still be required to deploy on operations should the need arise, such as in cases of national emergency.

Internal MOD surveys have consistently reported that the impact of Service life on family and personal life is the most important factor that might influence them to leave and flexible working will help retain personnel. A recent survey found that 70% of respondents were supportive of more opportunities for flexible working, with 71% interested in taking up such opportunities in the future. These reforms are part of the modern offer to personnel and the Government's commitment to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant.

Transferable skills: Case Study: Roxane Heaton, Head of Innovation at Morrisons and Royal Navy Reservist

Roxane joined the Royal Navy when she was still at university and for the last 12 years has combined Reserves and Regular service. In 2015 she won the Woman of the Year prize at the FDM Everywoman in Technology Awards, for developing innovative and cost-effective technology, and digital content to support the Royal Navy's training and operations. The award led to a job offer from Morrisons as Head of Innovation.



Roxane says: "At Morrisons I help people across the business join up dots, save money and make improvements for both customers and colleagues – effectively what I did in the Royal Navy. I love my job – innovation touches people's lives in countless ways and creates true value. The Royal Navy prepared me well for the job at Morrisons and it's great for me to continue serving the country as a Reservist with Morrisons' full support to the Armed Forces Covenant."

"Teamwork, commitment and energy are fundamental in the Armed Forces and they are huge assets across Morrisons, so I feel my two careers come together as one."

Communicating the Covenant

Cross-Government Communications strategy

Communicating the Covenant message is critical to making progress in each of the core areas, which is why it remains a priority for HM and supports the Government Communication Service campaign priority of A Fairer Society. A collaborative approach has been developed across Government in communicating the Covenant, with MOD chairing the quarterly cross-Government Covenant Communications Working Group which co-ordinates and evaluates all communications activity, and includes representation and input from the Service charities and Families Federations. The MOD has facilitated a refresh of the cross-Government Covenant Communications strategy, with input from key departments, utilising insight and research on target audiences of Service personnel, Veterans, families, commercial organisations, and the general public, as well as delivery partners and stakeholders, to inform and prioritise future communications activity.

Communications approach

Government communications on the Covenant have utilised external and internal channels including national and regional media publications, social media and blogs, the Covenant and gov.uk websites, and other internal and stakeholder networks. Announcements such as milestone Covenant signings are celebrated, as well as waiving of broadband cancellation fees for Armed Forces personnel on postings in the UK and abroad, updates from the Forces Help to Buy scheme, and events such as the annual Employer Recognition Scheme Gold award-winners Reception and the International Ministerial Conference on Veterans' Issues.

The Covenant website continues to be a key communications channel for external and internal target audiences, using engaging content and case studies to demonstrate how the Covenant provides practical support to beneficiaries. Feedback has been positive and the site is continually reviewed, based on user needs. In March 2017 a Local Authorities section of the site was launched, developed using feedback from local authorities, including useful resources, links to training and e-learning and case studies.

The new Covenant brand has been embedded across Government communications through various channels, and resources are available through an externally accessible website to provide guidelines on using the brand.

The MOD and a charity consortium led by the Royal British Legion publicised the launch of the Veterans' Gateway in June 2017, informing the Veteran community, Service personnel and their families, and the general public about the support the Gateway can offer. The MOD collaborates with the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) on communications activity on the Covenant. In November 2016 it included a feature on the Covenant on BFBS Radio (UK and global), social media, and the Forces TV website demonstrating the benefits of the Covenant. This included interviews with a Defence Minister and with Covenant projects and beneficiaries and a radio phone-in with a Defence policy expert and Families Federations answering questions from Service personnel and their families about the Covenant and the support it can provide.

BFBS produced a Forces Money Week in October 2017, featuring a team of financial experts on BFBS Forces Radio and on Facebook Live, answering questions from the Armed Forces Community on financial and commercial issues, from mortgages and debt to investments and pensions, including support available through the Covenant.

Covenant Champions

The MOD continues to support the network of Covenant Champions established in units across the Armed Forces to help them communicate the Covenant to Service personnel. This has included input from the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions explaining employment and pensions support and supporting education for children from Service families, as well as posters on commercial products and services, and financial advice. Presentations on communicating the Covenant have also been given to Covenant Champions at conferences across the UK, and work will continue to support the Champions with a range of communications materials targeting key Covenant themes.

DWP Armed Forces Champions

Each Jobcentre Plus District has an Armed Forces Champion. This dedicated resource aims to raise awareness of how each Jobcentre can support Service leavers and build local partnerships with the Armed Forces Community and charities to improve the support for Service leavers and their families across the district.

In the past year jobs fairs have taken place across the country, in areas such as in Hexham, West Bromwich, Malvern, Rochdale and Liverpool. There is now regular representation from the Armed Forces within Jobcentres, building links with local communities and discussing the breadth of opportunities available in the Services.

Recognition

The Bereaved

The Armed Forces Covenant recognises the unique commitment that Service personnel make to protect our country by putting their bodies on the line. This is felt most keenly by family members who suffer long periods of separation from their loved ones while worrying for their safety. For those who have made the ultimate sacrifice and for the families and loved ones left behind, this will continue to be recognised and honoured.

First World War Commemorations

Commemorative events are an important means of giving thanks and acknowledging the sacrifice made by Service personnel and their families. The First World War commemorative four-year programme included three events reflecting the history and significance of the conflict on the Ypres Salient for the duration of the First World War, and particularly focused on the centenary of The Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). The two events on 30 July 2017 comprised the traditional Last Post ceremony at Ypres Memorial and a reception, followed by a broad range of visual media, Digital mapping of the Cloth Hall drawn up by the BBC, and telling the story of the war in the Ypres Salient from 1914. The events culminated on 31 July with a traditional commemorative, ceremonial and wreath-laying service.

Events were held in February to mark one of the 20th Century's worst maritime disasters in UK waters, the loss of the SS MENDI, a UK passenger steamship sailing from Cape Town. The SS MENDI collided with a large cargo steamship and sank in the English Channel south of the Isle of Wight, with the loss of 646 people, most of whom were black South African troops. Commemorative events included a wreath-laying ceremony at the Milton Cemetery in Portsmouth, a ceremony at the Hollybrook Cemetery in Southampton, and a wreath-laying ceremony on board the SAS AMATOLA at the wreckage site off the Isle of Wight.

As part of its continuing programme to commemorate the centenary of WW1, Scotland commemorated the Battle of Arras in April 2017. Commemorative events also took place in November 2017 to mark the centenary of the death of Dr Elsie Inglis, founder of the Scottish Women's Hospitals.

The Unveiling of the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial

On 9 March 2017 the MOD held a ceremonial unveiling of the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial in Victoria Embankment Gardens. The unveiling was preceded by a drumhead service on Horse Guards. The Memorial honours the contribution of all those in the UK Armed Forces and all UK citizens who supported the campaigns in the Gulf region, Iraq and Afghanistan from 1990-2015. Her Majesty The Queen and Prime Minister Theresa May were joined by Their Royal Highnesses The Duke of Edinburgh, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, and other Members of the Royal Family.



Armed Forces Day

This central Government initiative continues to steadily increase in support year-on-year. The general public express their support and thanks to the wider Armed Forces Community, with a record 390 local events conducted throughout the country and an expansive social media campaign taking place. The national event was held in Liverpool, supported by HRH The Earl of Wessex and the Prime Minister, and attracted around 200,000 attendees. The 2018 national event will be hosted by Conwy County Borough Council.



ANNEX A: TABLE OF COMMITMENTS

This table shows the commitments that were made for the first time in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report that was published in December 2016 and those that were recorded in the table at the back of that report as “to be completed”.

Key to progress status

Completed/Terminated	
On target for delivery	
More work needed to achieve target	
At risk of not being delivered	

Healthcare

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	
The MOD will continue work to implement the recommendations of the Care Quality Commission and the majority of the recommended infrastructure improvements by early 2016.	UK	Complete. The MOD has completed all of the recommendations contained in the 2012 Care Quality Commission review of the Defence Medical Services.	
Defence Statistics will publish the first report on the causes of deaths amongst Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts in 2015-16.	UK	Funding will be sought to access the NHS number from the electronic health record held by MOD and to flag and receive the deaths records from NHS Digital. Defence Statistics will publish the first report on the conclusion of the data matching process.	
The Welsh Government is working with Veterans NHS Wales, Cais and the Royal British Legion to introduce a more seamless approach to ensure that Veterans continue to receive healthcare that meets their needs.	Wales	In 2017 the Welsh Government has focused on increasing partnership working as well as publishing new guidance for Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales.	
NHS England will deliver new outsourced Veterans mental health services from 2017 onwards.	England	NHS England launched the Transition, Intervention and Liaison services which can be accessed through four areas across England: North, Midlands and East, London and South East, and South Central and South West.	

Education

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD will continue to work with colleagues in the Department for Education to seek to resolve the issue of transfer of information for children from Service families, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; modify and promote the Pupil Information Profile (PIP) for overseas and Devolved Administrations schools.	UK	From September 2018 the Common Transfer File will include a richer set of data on Service pupils. This data will aid the development of policies to ensure that children from Service families are not disadvantaged.	
The MOD will make further announcements, once the costings have been agreed, on where and when work will commence following the distribution of £20m of LIBOR money to support childcare provision.	UK-Cyp	33 of the settings have been completed; the remaining seven will complete in the first half of 2018.	
The MOD will work with Devolved Administrations and local authorities to ease the transition for Service personnel returning to the UK from Germany.	UK	The MOD has worked closely with schools and local authorities, arranging reciprocal visits and briefs to ensure a smooth transition back into UK schools for children re-basing from Germany. To date around 2000 children from Service families have successfully transitioned back into the UK.	
The MOD will improve online information on the school admissions process for Service families.	UK	The web pages are being re-designed and are currently still at the testing stage. Literature is being updated and will be uploaded to the website shortly.	

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD will continue to strengthen its partnerships with education departments, local authorities of main Armed Forces areas, professional bodies and networks to promote the needs of children from Service families.	UK	The Service Children's Progression Alliance was launched in June, bringing together representatives from local authorities and professional bodies.	
The MOD will complete an additional 50,000 apprenticeships by 2020.	UK	MOD is on track to meet the 50,000 target by 2020.	
Education Scotland will develop accessible national and local information to support Service families' transition into Scotland.	Scotland	Education Scotland is developing a website with partners, which will include guidance, resources, local authority pages and partner organisation information, and it is planned to go live in early 2018.	
Education Scotland will add an explicit reference to children from Service families and barriers to learning they may face to the Additional Support for Learning Code of Practice.	Scotland	The Scottish Government has gone out to consultation on the proposal to insert a reference to Service children.	
The Welsh Government will introduce the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill by December 2017.	Wales	The Bill has reached Stage 2 and is undergoing detailed consideration by the Children, Young People and Education Committee.	
The MOD will work with partners to create a research network for all research relating to children from Service families, to assist in identifying their needs and outcomes.	UK	The Service Children's Progression Alliance was launched in June and one of its main roles is to provide guidance on the commissioning of research.	

Accommodation

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
Establish a Single Living Accommodation Management System to provide critical information on the condition of the estate and inform key investment decisions.	UK	The design phase is under way with system requirements being developed. Full system roll-out is expected in late 2019. As the project progresses, the quality of data available on the SLA estate continues to improve.	
Continue to ensure that the National Housing Prime contract awarded to CarillionAmey meets contracted standards and that this is reflected in satisfaction levels.	UK	CarillionAmey continues to sustain performance levels which match those laid down in the contractor standards. MOD recognises the need to improve the 'lived in' experience such that it is reflected in satisfaction levels and continues to work with the contractor to foster further improvements.	
Develop an alternative approach to the provision of accommodation for Service personnel and their families.	UK & Overseas	The MOD Future Accommodation Model will modernise and improve the provision of accommodation, making it fairer and more flexible, whilst keeping it affordable for the MOD. Locations to run the pilot in late 2018 are being considered.	

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	
The MOD will spend some £1.85 billion on accommodation by 2020/21 in order to deliver 18,500 SLA bed spaces and 3,000 homes.	UK	The MOD has delivered over 50,000 SLA bed-spaces across the estate over the last 10-15 years (approximately 11,000 in the last five financial years). This includes investing over £1.2 billion to improve the standard of our SLA through the Single Living Accommodation Modernisation (SLAM) project.	
Continue to support Service personnel with the Forces Help To Buy Scheme.	UK	The scheme has been extended to 2018	
DCLG proposes to remove the age restriction for eligibility for starter homes for injured Service personnel and bereaved spouses by spring 2017.	England	DCLG expects to make an announcement on the next steps for starter homes later this year.	
Introduce the Crown Tenancies bill, so that Service personnel can be afforded the same statutory rights as tenants in the private sector	UK	The CTB will not proceed. This issue will be addressed as part of FAM.	

The Covenant in Business

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD will work with the Financial Services Sector to address any potential disadvantages associated with Service overseas.	UK	The MOD, through the Financial Services Steering Group, has made good progress in tackling disadvantage in commercial products and services. MOD will continue to assess what else can be done in this area.	
The MOD will work with the broadband providers to ensure the Armed Forces Community have fair access to the service, during 2017.	UK	MOD secured agreement from all major broadband providers to waive cancellation fees.	
The MOD will run a pilot of the new British Forces Post Office address format for Service personnel and their families when based overseas, by early 2017	UK	The BFPO format was in fact delivered in 2012.	
The MOD will work with lenders during 2017 to ensure wider application of the policy change, which allows Reservists to have their previous year's pay taken into account when applying for a mortgage.	UK	The MOD has provided mortgage lenders with more detail on specialist and Reservist pay to help Service personnel and Reservists have a fair chance of securing mortgages.	

The Covenant in the Community

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD will work across government and with key external stakeholders to develop and deliver an Action Plan based on the recommendations of the Our Community our Covenant review, in early 2017.	UK	The CRG has endorsed all of the recommendations from the OCOC report and a cross-government Action Group has been set up to deliver the recommendations.	

Terms and Conditions of Service

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	
Development of a New Employment Model	UK	<p>The New Employment Model programme has been a wide-ranging review of the Terms and Conditions of Service for Service personnel, both Regular and Reserve. It aimed to maximise recruitment and retention effect within available resources, recycle efficiencies, and produce a modernised offer that better supports lifestyle choice, and reduces the impact of Service life on individuals and their families.</p> <p>NEM is expected to close by the end of 2017, having completed delivery, the focus is now on embedding of the changes, with transition protection continuing to 2020 and beyond.</p>	

Family Life

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The Home Office will work to resolve issues experienced by foreign and Commonwealth families applying for visas and passports.	UK	The Home Office has identified the technical issues and is working to resolve them. Compensation is being paid to families incurring incorrect charges.	
The Welsh Government to introduce an enhanced flexible childcare offer for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds by 2020.	Wales	<p>Testing of the Welsh Government's Childcare Offer has begun in seven pilot areas across Wales.</p> <p>They will test all aspects of the new Childcare Offer for Wales to ensure it will be accessible to parents and sustainable in the long-term once rolled out.</p>	
Balance demands on Service personnel and their families through a New Employment Model	UK	NEM has produced a modernised offer through the introduction of new policies which have encouraged greater domestic stability and lifestyle choice for Service personnel.	

Support after Service

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD to identify ways to inform Veterans how to access the high levels of support available to them. The MOD to report on this further in the 2016 Covenant annual report.	UK	There are various schemes in place which provide additional support to Veterans across the Covenant landscape. The Veterans' Gateway and Veterans Covenant Hospital Alliance were launched this year. Other initiatives such as housing and employment pathways are either in development or have been delivered in England and the Devolved Administrations.	

Recognition

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD will continue working with the Families Federations to gather further evidence on the inclusion of divorced spouses in the categories of the Armed Forces Community and report on the subject in this year's report.	UK	DLCG intends to go out to consultation on new statutory guidance for local authorities which states that the local connection test for social housing should not apply to divorced and separated spouses and civil partners.	

Reserves

Commitment	Applies to	Progress	RAG
The MOD to publish the findings of research into the support provided to the Families of Reservists, in August 2017	UK	Published internally in October 2017.	