



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Summary





A message from the Defence Secretary

The Covenant honours the sacrifices the Armed Forces Community make to keep us safe, including those of Families and Veterans. It is also a partnership between the Armed Forces and wider society and I am pleased to see evidence in this year's report of the positive impact the Covenant is having in helping to integrate the Armed Forces with their local communities.

The annual report details the progress made in 2017, including in the key areas of healthcare, education and accommodation. As with previous years, the main achievements are summarised in this booklet. For serving personnel and their families, these include the continued success of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme; better processes being introduced to support Service children transferring between schools; and agreement from the major broadband providers to waive cancellation fees for Service personnel and their partners posted abroad, complementing similar schemes already in place for mobile phone contracts and car insurance. For those approaching the end of their service and those who have left, the launch of the Veterans' Gateway and the Transition Intervention and Liaison services are examples of coordinated, easily accessible services being provided for those most in need.

Whilst much has been achieved, more remains to be done. Feedback has identified a range of issues where concerns remain, including the maintenance of Service accommodation, childcare provision and transition to civilian life. These areas and others will be the focus of our efforts going forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Jones', located at the bottom right of the page.

Healthcare

What have we done?

- The MOD launched the **Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy** to ensure improving the mental health of all our people, including Service personnel, Veterans and 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. Between April and October of this year the service **received 1,170 referrals** from a variety of sources.
- The **NHS Veterans Trauma Network** has been running for 12 months, with **46 seriously injured trauma Veterans referred to the service**.
- 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.
- The **Veterans' Prosthetic Panel** approved 97% of claims in 2016/17 and spent over **£1.5 million on Prosthetic Centres**.



- In partnership with the NHS the Scottish Government has **committed funding of £825k in 2017/18 to support the Veterans First Point network** which offers a drop-in service and focal point for Veterans.
- The Welsh Government has **issued new guidance on healthcare priority for Veterans**. It gives all healthcare professionals more information on the process of identifying, recording and referring Veterans eligible for priority healthcare.
- In 2016/17 the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee spent £70k to support the MOD Fast-Track Pathway, **funding 28 War Veterans to receive prostheses** including artificial limbs, sports blades, up-grades and replacements.

Education

What have we done?

- Over **£22.5 million** of **Service Pupil Premium** funding to benefit **over 75,000 eligible pupils** in primary and secondary schools has been committed. The MOD published **examples of best practice** in January 2017 to enable maximum benefit to be achieved from this funding.



- In England, from September 2017 the **Common Transfer File** allows Service children to be identified and better supported when moving schools. The Scottish Government is adding an explicit reference to Service children families in its guidance for Education Authorities.
- The MOD has **conducted education suitability reviews** of various locations where Service children may accompany parents on overseas assignment and these reports will be made available to Service families.
- The **Service children's Local Authority Working Group** was launched, focusing on coordinating and improving support for Service children.

- In the academic year 2016/17, **90 students benefitted from The Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme**. The scheme provides Higher and Further Education Scholarships for the children of Service personnel whose death has been attributed to Service since 1990.

Accommodation

What have we done?

- **Over 12,800 payments** with a combined total of **£193 million** have been advanced to Service personnel, under the **Forces Help To Buy Scheme**.



- MOD has invested around **£80 million** over the course of 2016/17 in **Service Family Accommodation**.
- In April 2017 a **compensation scheme was introduced for Service Family Accommodation** providing for missed appointments and significant defects at move-in.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government intends to go out to consultation on **new statutory guidance for Local Authorities** on providing access to social housing. The new guidance proposes to **remove the location connection requirement for divorced and separated spouses and civil partners**.

Working with businesses

- **More than 2,000 organisations have signed the Armed Forces Covenant,** pledging specific support for the Armed Forces community such as help with transition from Service to civilian life through work placement opportunities and training courses.



- **The Gold Alumni Group for Employment Recognition Scheme** Gold Award winning organisations was launched. The Group aims to encourage and support other organisations to achieve Gold and act as a sounding board for Armed Forces employer policy development.
- The MOD 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.
- **New guidance has been provided to families posted overseas on paying mortgages in a foreign currency** and identifying providers of Forces-friendly solutions.

- The MOD **worked with Insurers to improve the guidance available to Service personnel.** The British Insurers Brokers Association have 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>
- In June the **Department for Work and Pensions 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.
- Over **430,000 members** and **7,250 businesses** are now signed up to the **Defence Discount Service.**

For Families

- The Covenant Fund is providing **£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.



- Her Majesty's Passport Office **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 dependents of Service personnel.
- The Department for Education provided a grant of **£66k for 2016/17 and £134k for 2017/18 to SSAFA to deliver the Military Adoption Champion project**. 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 **make adoption more accessible to Service families**.
- 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.
- The MOD will shortly publish the first **Defence Domestic Abuse Strategy: 'No Defence For Abuse'**. The strategy will focus the Department's efforts to reduce the frequency and impact of domestic abuse.

For Veterans

- 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.



- 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** access healthcare and carers, support with using the internet, and offering general advice.
- The Office for National Statistics 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.
- The Scottish Government provided Veterans Scotland with a further **£90k 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.
- **The Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office** has now been formally established and resourced. It will provide a focal point for advice on support available to Veterans and on how applications for Covenant funding might be made and will train and oversee the network of Veterans champions who are elected to each of Northern Ireland's 11 local authorities through which individual referrals can be made.

Community



- The MOD produced an overarching Covenant guide for local authorities with annexes for each of the home nations detailing the specific procedures and policies in place there.

Funding the covenant

Spent £10million on projects to support:

- Families in stress
- Community integration and delivery of support to the Armed Forces Community
- A single grant of £2million to establish the Veterans Gateway Service
- Strengthening local government delivery of the Covenant

Committed to **spend another £10 million** in 2017/18 on projects to support:

- Families in stress
- Strengthening local government delivery of the Covenant
- Local grants for community integration and delivery of services
- A single grant to produce a Map of Need for the Covenant Fund
- A single grant to produce an outcomes framework for the Covenant Fund
- A single grant for the provision of a digital support programme for the Covenant Fund

Targets for next year



- An independent review of the Covenant in Business will publish its findings in 2018.
- All GP registration forms in England will include a specific question about whether a patient has served in the Armed Forces.
- NHS England will pilot a Veteran-aware accreditation programme for GP surgeries initially in the West Midlands before being planned for roll out nationally.
- SSAFA, in collaboration with MOD will launch a two year mentoring trial in January 2018 aimed at supporting Early Service Leavers.
- 2,780 new/upgraded Single Living Accommodation bed-spaces are forecast to be completed across 12 sites in 2017/18.

- 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. DWP will also produce tailored advice to Veterans who are applying for Personal Independence Payments or Employment Support Allowance.
- 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 transferring between schools to help smooth the transition process.
- 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.
- The Government 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.

Other useful links

Find out more

The full report includes contributions from the Devolved Administrations on the Covenant commitments they have delivered. You can also find out more about their work by visiting their websites.

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means to you visit:

www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk

If you think you aren't getting fair access to goods and services because you are a member of the Armed Forces, we want to hear about it. Contact either your Service Families Federation or the MOD Covenant team by emailing: Covenant-mailbox@mod.uk

You can find the NHS choices, Armed Forces Community healthcare pages here:

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/Pages/Militaryhealthcare.aspx>

To find out whether Forces Help to Buy could help you visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy>

To find out more about the help and support available to Veterans

Veterans gateway:

<https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

Veterans UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk>

Veterans Work:

www.veteranswork.org.uk

Veterans in Scotland:

<https://www.mygov.scot/veterans/> .

For online support with making informed financial decisions

Moneyforce website:

<http://www.moneyforce.org.uk/>

Financial top tips for Service personnel:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-top-tips-for-service-personnel/financial-top-tips-for-service-personnel>

For more information on Forces Friendly Insurers:

<https://www.biba.org.uk/armed-forces-biba-members-can-help>

Other useful links

The Royal British Legion:

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

SSAFA

<https://www.ssafa.org.uk/>

The War Widows Association:

<http://www.warwidows.org.uk/>

The Confederation of Service Charities:

<https://www.cobseo.org.uk/>

The Navy Families Federation:

<http://nff.org.uk/>

The Army Families Federation:

<http://www.aff.org.uk/>

The RAF Families Federation:

<http://www.raf-ff.org.uk/>