

LGiU
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION UNIT



HONOURING THE ARMED SERVICE COMMUNITY

THE ROYAL BRITISH
LEGION



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Contents

Forewords	
Executive summary	1
Introduction	5
1 Commemoration and socialisation	11
2 Scoping and engagement	16
3 Place shaping	27
4 Attachment to place	34
5 Accessing national services	45
Conclusion	53
Acknowledgements	55
Bibliography	56

Forewords

All too often, with focus concentrated on central government, the vital role that local authorities play in delivering services to the Armed Forces community is overlooked. I am extremely pleased that this excellent LGiU report has been able to highlight some of the good work and initiatives that local authorities are undertaking to ensure that the often unique needs of this community, especially at a time of high operational tempo, are met.

Furthermore, it is promising that many of the responding local authorities were conscious that they should have a better understanding of the presence and needs of Serving personnel, veterans and their families in their area. I hope that this report will encourage and assist more local authorities to develop this knowledge and also provide some ideas that they may wish to adopt or build upon.

Considering the current exceedingly tight financial climate, local authorities will welcome the fact that most of the recommendations and examples allow them to provide support to the Armed Forces community for little extra cost.

Chris Simpkins
Director General
The Royal British Legion

At the LGiU we champion local democracy because we believe it is the best way to achieve strong communities with good public services that meet local needs. For local councils and other local public services organisations, this means understanding who lives in the community and what their views and needs are. In every local authority area in the country there are members of a distinct community with particular needs: the Armed Forces community.

This project, in partnership with the Royal British Legion, aims to raise awareness of the needs of the Armed Forces community and to identify current good practice by councils. We are very grateful to the 40 local authorities and public service providers who shared ideas and information with us.

As expected, we found very significant goodwill towards the Armed Forces community within local authorities. Many thought there was a need to tailor their services to meet this community's needs. There was welcome recognition that this community included spouses, dependants, veterans and reservists in addition to those currently in full time service.

Many authorities expressed a desire for greater clarification of what services they should provide and how, showing a welcome commitment to continual improvement.

This report shows how a good local authority might provide better services to the Armed Forces community. It presents a variety of policy options. Councils could choose to implement a voluntary duty to consider the needs of veterans in designing services. They might recognise the disadvantage suffered by veterans in accessing services such as housing and award them greater priority to compensate. Local businesses could be recruited to provide discounts for members of the Armed

LGiU Honouring the armed service community

Forces community. Each of these policies would aid the Armed Forces community.

I hope that you will find this report useful and that in whatever way you can, you help us to ensure that these good practice ideas become common practice. Together we can ensure a better quality of life for those who defend our way of life.

Andy Sawford
Chief Executive
LGiU

Executive summary

The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) in partnership with the Royal British Legion (the Legion) has undertaken a study into the public services local authorities provide for members of the Armed Forces community.

Our aim is to identify the current level of awareness and provision, and in particular to share examples of good practice. From our study we are recommending 11 areas of good practice that local authorities and their partners should consider adopting.

- 1. Audit the war memorials in your area and commit to a programme of restoration and repair. Pledge to organise remembrance and home coming parades in cooperation with third sector organisations without charging those organisations.**
- 2. Support the development of veterans groups within your area and work with them to achieve council objectives in terms of social cohesion and education. This could be trialled in the existing Welfare Pathway local authorities.¹**

¹ Kent County Council was the first Welfare Pathway. It launched in November 2009. Local authorities such as Wigan and Hampshire have also now adopted them

3. Map the Armed Forces community in your area to understand how many there are in the community, where they live, their age, employment status and other relevant characteristics such as what public services they are accessing.
4. Publicise the services you offer to veterans and include their representatives in your key local partnerships, such as the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) or Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and in the compilation of your Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) (health).
5. Assume a voluntary duty to consider the needs of veterans in designing and delivering services in the areas of housing, health and education.
6. Councils should co-ordinate local businesses to provide discounts to members of the Armed Forces community.
7. Local authorities should demonstrate their commitment to supporting inactive members of the Territorial Army (TA), reservists and the families of Service personnel to retain or obtain employment.
8. Recognise the disadvantage that Service life can have in regards to accessing social housing and getting on the housing ladder and use the increased flexibility allowed by recent government guidance to provide priority to those leaving the Armed Forces.
9. Exempt veterans from the Disabled Facilities Grant means test if the adaptation is for a Service-related injury or illness, and exempt War Pensions and War Widows

Pensions from council tax and housing benefit calculations.

10. Award children of Service families a high priority in securing places in local schools through a flagging system and/or consider late applications by families recently deployed to the area as though they were submitted on time.
11. Inform healthcare practitioners of relevant policies designed to deliver the government's heightened duty of care to Service families and veterans. Including, informing GPs of the right of those with injuries or illnesses related to Service in the Armed Forces to priority NHS treatment for these conditions and of Service families right to have waiting times for treatment amassed in one NHS Trust carried over to another NHS Trust when they move home.

We believe these proposals would considerably improve the delivery of local public services to members of the service community.

**“LOOK THINGS IN THE
FACE AND KNOW
THEM FOR WHAT THEY
ARE.”**

Marcus Aurelius

Introduction

Our Armed Forces protect our basic freedoms. We all owe them a debt of gratitude. We are rightly conscious of our commitment to existing personnel deployed to operational theatres.

However, the Armed Forces community extends beyond this to include spouses, partners, children and other dependants.

It also includes reservists and veterans and their families.

Our commitment to Armed Forces personnel does not end when the guns cease or discharge papers are delivered.

The average age of veterans in the UK is 63. The Legion says that “the ex-service community² ...will lose a quarter of its number between 2006 and 2020”.

Fifty per cent of people in Britain aged over 65 are members of the ex-service community.³ This number is artificially high due to the Second World War and National Service, which was in operation until 1960. It will decrease over time, and consequently so will the costs incurred in providing services to the declining number of veterans and their families. Some elderly veterans

2 The ex-Service community includes all veterans (those who served as Regulars and Reserves) and their dependants (spouses and children under the age of 18)

3 Royal British Legion Response to the Service Command Paper, 14 April 2008

will have needs associated with their age, such as a need for a home adaptation. Younger veterans are likely to have different needs and they are the fastest growing group among veterans. We are honour bound to assist each of these groups but how can we achieve this?

The LGiU and the Legion wished to gauge the range and type of services provided to members of the Armed Forces community and to assess their ease in accessing these services. In July 2010 we sent a call for information to all English and Welsh local authorities. They were asked to provide examples of projects in their area that dealt with the Armed Forces community. Areas of interest included whether local authorities:

- provide targeted services to veterans
- have mapped the Armed Forces community in their area
- recognise the difficulties Service personnel face in accessing services such as school provision, child care, council housing and healthcare
- have formal links with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to ensure Service personnel can access the services to which they are entitled.

About 40 local authorities and government agencies responded.⁴ The responses revealed a clear recognition of local authorities' responsibility to act. There were many examples of good practice and we have featured these projects in this report. However, similar to the government's recent consultation on this subject

4 All local authorities and Government Agencies which submitted evidence are listed in Appendix One

we found that while “many respondents agreed that measures should be put in place to support the Armed Forces... [they] had no strong preference as to how this was achieved”.⁵

Many of the authorities that responded were conscious that they needed a better understanding of the number of veterans in their community and their unique needs. Consequently few have tailored service provision. We believe this needs to change.

The scope of this pamphlet is limited by a series of constraints. First, local authorities have limited powers within a set range of competences. For instance, questions of immigration policy will not be covered by this pamphlet because local authorities do not control their borders.

Similarly, we do not comment on the rate of national benefits or the direction of recent reforms to healthcare commissioning (the abolition of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs)) or the creation of free schools and academies, with the consequent reduction of local government’s responsibilities in these areas. Each of our proposals is designed to be implemented by local authorities using their existing powers.

Second, we believe that *“the essential starting point is that those who serve must not be disadvantaged by virtue of what they do – and this will sometimes call for degrees of special treatment”*. We do not believe the Armed Forces community should routinely receive an enhanced level of public service provision. This could *“undermine public support for their role”*.⁶

5 The Nation’s Commitment to the Armed Forces Community: Consistent and Enduring Support: A Summary of Consultation Responses: February 2010, P5

6 The Nation’s Commitment; Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans, July 2008

Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council were concerned that “providing services targeted for veterans only could be seen as leaving other groups out which is against equality values”.⁷

However, serving personnel are entitled to as much lifestyle choice as any other citizen, continuity in the public services they receive and a heightened duty of care for sacrifice in respect of injury, illness or death related to Service.⁸

Some have described the Armed Forces community as “a mobile community” particularly in the case of Service personnel and their families. This can present difficulty in accessing essential public services designed to cater for static communities – our proposals are designed to aid them to access mainstream provision on equal terms with the settled community.

Furthermore, in exceptional cases an enhanced level of service is justified. For instance the families of military personnel are entitled to a funeral at local authority expense in the event of deaths in Service. This seems appropriate.

Third, these proposals need to be practical in an era when local authority budgets are being reduced by up to 40 per cent. We seek to minimise calls for more government spending. Clearly some of the ideas have wider cost implications. Councils wishing to fund these schemes would need to consider the cost implications. It is a question of priorities, and we believe members of the Armed Forces community should be given a greater level of priority than they receive currently.

7 [The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea](#)

8 [The Nation’s Commitment; Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans, July 2008](#)

The pamphlet is divided into five chapters, each relates to a key area of concern for members of the Armed Forces community. Our recommendations, if implemented, would constitute a gold star status for local authorities to aspire to. The LGiU believes the following four objectives should guide local authorities in this area.

Objectives

1. Members of the Armed Forces community should not be disadvantaged in their interaction with council services because of their unique circumstances.
2. Local authorities should have an understanding of the numbers of Armed Forces families within their community and undertake scoping activities to identify need.
3. The Armed Forces community should be integrated into mainstream provision but providers should cater for their unique circumstances in delivering services.
4. Public assistance should be provided with a view to preparing Service personnel and veterans to lead independent lives and reduce the need for future recourse to public assistance.

**“ALL WE HAVE OF
FREEDOM, ALL WE
USE OR KNOW –
THIS OUR FATHERS
BOUGHT FOR US
LONG AND LONG AGO.”**

Rudyard Kipling, *The Old Issue*, 1899

1 Commemoration and socialisation

- Audit the war memorials in your area and commit to a programme of restoration and repair. Pledge to organise Remembrance and home-coming parades in cooperation with third sector organisations without charging those organisations.
- Support the development of veterans' groups within your area and utilise these individuals to achieve council objectives in terms of social cohesion and education. This could be trialled in the existing Welfare Pathway local authorities.⁹

A key duty local communities owe to their Armed Forces community is to organise activities and provide facilities which commemorate their sacrifice. These include permanent war memorials, Remembrance ceremonies and homecoming parades. Councils also need to ensure demobilised Service personnel are integrated into community life; to reduce their sense of isolation. This can be achieved through supporting veterans' groups or by providing discretionary services which promote active elderly citizens.

⁹ Authorities which have piloted the Welfare Pathway include: Kent County Council, Hampshire County Council and Wigan Council

War memorials

Maintaining war memorials and commissioning new facilities in respect of current conflicts is an important discretionary local authority responsibility. Under the War Memorials (Local Authorities' Powers) Act 1923 and its later amendments, local authorities have the power to maintain, repair and protect war memorials in their district. They also have a separate power to correct inscriptions and add additional names to existing memorials in respect of more recent conflicts. There is no statutory duty to do so.¹⁰

As of 3 October 2010 almost 340 members of the Armed Forces had died in Afghanistan since Operation Enduring Freedom began in 2001. We should seek to honour their sacrifice in the customary manner. This includes auditing what memorials currently exist within each local authority area. A list of official war memorials is located in the UK National Inventory of War

Good practice

The Leicestershire and Rutland War Memorials Project began in July 2009 and aims to record all war memorials in the area. It has attracted 150 participants in its first year. All project data will be online by 2011. It has found almost 1,000 previously unrecorded memorials. A memorial site to the Service men and women who died in post 1945 conflicts is to be constructed on the council's campus. It will be comprised of a memorial sculpture developed in partnership with Loughborough University School of Art and Design.¹¹

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice, *War Memorials in England and Wales, Guidance for Custodians*, P6

¹¹ Leicestershire County Council

Memorials at the Imperial War Museum. However, many authorities have private memorials in their areas which should be recorded. Local authorities can then assess their condition and arrange any necessary repairs.

Remembrance

Remembrance ceremonies and homecoming parades are organised by many local authorities. The organisational requirements include shutting public roads to access by motor vehicles, designating parade routes and public spaces for the events to be held, assigning appropriate policing and other necessary tasks. Third sector organisations may contribute some organisational capacity. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) may need to be consulted, particularly to coordinate home coming parades. Some local authorities have sought to charge third sector organisations for the closure of roads necessary to hold such events. There is a risk this could become more widespread in the tight financial context. The effect of charging may be to deter local voluntary organisations from involvement. Therefore, we would encourage local authorities to continue to directly meet the costs of Remembrance ceremonies and home coming parades.

Socialisation

The continual redeployment involved in Service life disrupts the formation of the friendships and associations which can tie us to the place we live and help bind citizens together into a community. Veterans' and Regimental associations can help to bridge this gap by providing a network based on the shared experience of serving in the Armed Forces. Many local authorities across the nation support veterans' groups and engage in capacity building at a local level.

Good practice

- Rochford District Council has hosted an 'Afternoon Tea for Veterans of the District since 2007'.¹²
- Leicestershire County Council provides an annual civic banquet for members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and Service benevolent organisations.
- The City of Bradford Metropolitan Council has funded the Polish Veterans' Group and has now helped the group to find independent funding to continue.¹³
- The Wigan Borough Veterans Council was funded with a small council grant towards office expenses for 12 months. It recognised that Service organisations "differ greatly in their funding and ability to provide this [aiding veterans to access public services] support."¹⁴

Veterans are not a burden or cost to our community, they are an asset which, if engaged with wisely, can be of even greater benefit. We should seek to build on this foundation to utilise these individuals' experiences and skills to the benefit of the wider community. Blackburn Museum has worked with a local Asian youth group to document the experiences of Muslim servicemen in the British Indian Army in the Second World War. Their project – We Also Served – involved asking elderly veterans, many of whom could not speak English, to meet with young Asian men from the area to discuss their experiences. This allowed the elderly veterans to bond with younger members of their community. These conversations and relationships also helped to tackle the anti-British message of radical Islamic groups in the area.

12 [Rochford District Council](#)

13 [City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council](#)

14 [Wigan Council](#)

**“THERE ARE KNOWN
KNOWN. THESE ARE
THINGS WE KNOW
THAT WE KNOW.**

**THERE ARE KNOWN
UNKNOWN. THAT
IS TO SAY, THERE
ARE THINGS THAT
WE KNOW WE DON'T
KNOW.**

**BUT THERE ARE
ALSO UNKNOWN
UNKNOWN. THERE
ARE THINGS WE
DON'T KNOW WE
DON'T KNOW.”**

Donald Rumsfeld

2 Scoping and engagement

- Map the Armed Forces community in your area to understand how many there are in the community, where they live, their age, employment status and other relevant characteristics such as what public services they are accessing.
- Publicise the services you offer to veterans and include their representatives in your key local partnerships, such as the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) or Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and in the compilation of your Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) (health).

Identify the members of the Armed Forces community in your area: who are they and what do they need?

Councils cannot provide appropriate services to the Armed Forces community if they cannot identify them. The majority of respondents emphasised the difficulties in acquiring information about veterans and finding out how many Armed Forces personnel (including reservists) lived in their communities, where they lived or what unique public services they used or needed. It is difficult for local authorities to assess how effectively they are serving this community if they cannot identify its members. Inclusion of a question relating to individuals status in the 2011

census would assist in this regard. However, the census only occurs every 10 years and Francis Maude has suggested it could be abolished.¹⁵ Therefore, local authorities may wish to utilise the JNSA for identifying Service personnel. This responsibility is envisaged to pass from PCTs to local authorities when the former are abolished. Those local authorities which responded were very open about the difficulties acquiring the necessary information.

“Until 2009 there was no systematic method for collecting or monitoring outcomes specifically for the children of service families at county level.”

“There is no general database of veterans’ health statistics, and even the number of veterans is uncertain – with estimates ranging from 3.8 to 5 million in England. The location of veterans is unknown.”

“Unfortunately at the early stages of this report it became obvious that there was no way to accurately source the number of homeless veterans who have accessed homeless services.”

Local authorities need to define who qualifies as a veteran. Colonel R.H. Talbot Rice points out that “in 2001 the UK Ministry of Defence formally defined the word “veteran” as a person who has served more than one day in any of the three services, together with his/her dependants.”¹⁶ Councils could adopt this definition.

The next problem is how to identify these individuals now the clarification has been decided. The government recently introduced an HM Armed Forces Veterans’ Badge; 600,000 have been issued. However, not all veterans have received one and

15 *The Telegraph*, National Census to be axed after 200 years, 9 July 2010

16 *The Next Generation of Veterans: Their critical needs and their emerging rights*, Colonel R H Talbot Rice British Army Late WG, July 2009, P5

Good practice

- *Developing identification techniques:* NHS Bedfordshire operates Military Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Forum which has identified 'codes' for GP practices to capture data related to military veterans in order to ascertain the Bedfordshire population. This unique code identifies information related to military veterans so that GPs are aware when referring patients.¹⁷ They also mapped veterans in May 2010 to see how veterans accessed health services.
- *Mapping Veteran Communities:* Yorkshire Forward in cooperation with North Yorkshire County Council and the MOD employed SQW Consulting to map the distribution of the 17,000 MOD employees in North Yorkshire and assess their contribution to the local economy.¹⁸ Wigan Council is deploying four six-month placements funded under the Future Jobs Fund to undertake the demographic mapping of the veteran community in Wigan Borough. This will feed into its work as a pilot authority for the Veterans Welfare Pathway.
- *Scrutinising council service delivery:* In the North East of England all 12 local authorities' health scrutiny committee chairs are working on a scrutiny review looking into the physical and mental health of veterans and their social and economic well-being including their transition back into civilian life. The local authorities involved are Darlington, Durham, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-On-Tees, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

17 NHS Bedfordshire

18 North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Project

dependants have no equivalent identification. This may be resolved if the Armed Forces Covenant Task Force (Cabinet Office) were to recommend the creation of a Veterans' Privilege Card to the government.

The next step is to identify the services the Armed Forces community use and need and the number of people eligible to receive those services. This requires that Service personnel and veterans accessing public services are recorded as such. Pembrokeshire Care Service reported that veterans accessing housing assistance were often recorded under other categories. For example, those with partners or children are deemed as priority due to family dependants. This made them difficult to identify as veterans. Authorities seeking to identify and provide for Service personnel and veterans may consider the examples of public sector good practice – *see opposite*.

The aim of the North East Scrutiny Review is to “improve understanding of the health needs and experiences of the ex-service community, compared with the general population” and to look into “how a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations help to meet those needs and how that [services] can be improved”.¹⁹ The Board is set to issue a report in December 2010.

Promoting Service personnel and veterans’ awareness of service entitlements

We encourage Armed Forces community members to identify themselves as a Service person, dependant or veteran to those providing public services and make “reasonable efforts” to

¹⁹ [Durham submission: Regional Scrutiny of Health of Ex-Service Community Overview Day](#)

identify what they are entitled to. Service personnel have a responsibility to make authorities aware of their status. They should also report problems they encounter in accessing public services.²⁰ A number of local authorities run schemes to make veterans aware of their entitlements and familiarise local providers with these communities, and other public sector services have also undertaken measures to engage with the Service communities in their areas.

The Welfare Pathways

Welfare Pathways are partnerships between local councils, the MOD, and Service organisations to assist Service personnel, veterans and their families to access health and welfare advice and services. Kent County Council was the first to trial this approach, launching in November 2009.²¹ Authorities such as Wigan and Hampshire now also have them. Their aim as the North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership noted, is to “*enhance the local liaison*” between government, charitable and local council bodies providing services for members of the Armed Forces community.²² This means that: “Existing local networks of support will not be replaced or fundamentally changed.”

Local councils aim to ensure that those operating the national point of contact telephone number know which local services to direct people to. Local Armed Forces community champions are working to resolve any difficulties and liaise with relevant

20 The Nation’s Commitment to the Armed Forces Community: Consistent and Enduring Support, P14

21 Ministry of Defence, Armed Forces Welfare Pathway launched, 6 November 2009

22 North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership – Executive, Armed Forces Community Welfare Pathway, 7 January 2010

Good practice

- Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust operated a Local Services and Armed Forces Networking Event in May 2010. Service personnel from the five military bases in Oxfordshire were invited to familiarise them with the work of local voluntary and statutory agencies. Twenty five local agencies attended. Attendees requested this be made an annual event.
- Oxfordshire JobCentre Plus recently held an event called 'Civvyisation.' This featured an exhibition with 20 organisations for veterans to identify work opportunities. Manchester City Council operated a 'Reaching out to Veterans' Conference in January 2009. Its aim was to "clarify who is a veteran, explore some of the challenges faced by the veteran community and support the ex-service community."
- NHS Bedfordshire has sent letters, emails and leaflets to practice based commissioning implementation managers, GPs and chief operating officers and held meetings with primary care commissioners to inform them of the need to give priority treatment to veterans whose wounds were gained through their Service.
- South Oxfordshire District Council delivers the council magazine to the base to ensure service families know about local council services.

23 Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust

24 JobCentre Plus

25 Manchester City Council

26 NHS Bedfordshire

27 South Oxfordshire District Council

organisations to check on performance. It is too early to evaluate the success of these projects. None has existed more than a year. However, the effort to provide a more tailored service is welcome. It could help resolve some of the problems we have identified.

Taking public services out to the Armed Forces community

Essex County Council's library service shows how an authority can adapt its services to meet the needs of Service personnel. It operates a mobile library service. To encompass local Service personnel and their families it has altered its route to include the local Armed Forces base. The mobile library service stops at the Colchester Garrison and the Carver Barracks at meal times. This allows Service personnel to register with the library.²⁸ This service could be adapted to include all the public services that Service personnel would need to register for, including dentist, GP, local schools, higher education and council tax. The one stop shop should be portable. It would provide considerable advantages to these public services as it would ensure their client registers were regularly updated. The number of mobile library services is uncertain. In 2003, there were 656 in operation across the UK.²⁹

Coordinating service delivery with local units of the Armed Forces

Councils should also consider cooperating with the MOD to identify the Service personnel in their areas. Councils should

²⁸ Essex County Council Libraries

²⁹ *The Guardian*, Is the mobile library dead? Leo Hickman, Wednesday 7 April 2010

promote the involvement of local representatives of the Armed Forces in regional and local decision making bodies.

Recommendation 10 of the Independent Inquiry into National Recognition of the Armed Forces stipulates that “Commanding Officers (COs) of all Regular and Reserve Military establishments should prepare an annual public outreach programme aiming to maximise local familiarity with his or her unit and its activities at minimum cost and diversion of resources”.

Recommendation 18 refers to the desirability of “affiliations with local government”, it stipulates that the Armed Forces should “designate senior Military officers in the regional structure (ideally the same officers who are charged with overseeing public outreach) to act as a point of contact for civic bodies, including local authorities”. Councils should make sure they know who is responsible for this in their areas and that these MOD representatives are integrated into the local planning and delivery mechanisms.

Unsurprisingly, among the responses we have found a correlation between areas which have high levels of Service personnel and those authorities which have specific arrangements in place to cater for them. Richmondshire District Council said their authority has Catterick Garrison within its boundary. This is “*reported to be the largest army base in Western Europe*”.³⁰ Oxfordshire County Council has 7,500 serving personnel within their county boundaries. North Yorkshire County Council has “one of the largest concentrations of service men and women in the UK”.³¹ These authorities have deployed the following mechanisms to ensure representation of military concerns in developing strategy and delivery services.

30 Richmondshire District Council

31 North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Project

Good practice

- Oxfordshire County Council has a Military Liaison that is “owned by an officer working within [their] Partnership Working Unit and [they] have a ‘contact matrix’... that assists with good communication between military personnel and key council officers”.³² The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) bid was compiled in cooperation with the input of the MOD reflecting the importance of the military to the local economy.
- Colchester’s Garrison Commander is a member of the Local Strategic Partnership.³³ Richmondshire District Council allows representation from the MOD on the Richmondshire Local Strategic Partnership and their Crime Reduction/Community Safety Partnership.
- Leicestershire County Council operates an All-Party Working Group on support to the Armed Forces. It meets between two and three times a year and is chaired by a Lieutenant Colonel. This group includes the Legion and the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association.
- South Oxfordshire District Council includes a representative from RAF Benson on its South Oxfordshire Partnership.
- North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Project is run by the MOD to ensure Service families receive “the same quality and accessibility of services and opportunity as their neighbours in the civil community.” In 2008, 15 (North East) Brigade, which is responsible for the Yorkshire and Humber and North East regions initiated this scheme to improve coordination with the civil community. It includes a governance board for senior stakeholders including 30 military and civilian agencies to co-ordinate strategy.³⁴

Good practice

● Wigan Council operates a Veterans Council composed of veterans with severe and persistent illnesses and those with an involvement with issues impacting them. It meets monthly. Other ex-Service organisation representatives and veterans provide information on treatment, delivery and service initiatives for veterans. The aim is to develop “strong working partnerships” with statutory, ex-Service and third sector organisations. The council seeks to promote early intervention in the areas of housing, health and social care, employment and education, social activities and other organisations involved in early prevention activities so as to increase take up and reduce acute demand.

It is important that all local authorities, not just those with local Armed Forces bases, try to identify and consult with the Service community. The importance of this was recognised in an Independent Inquiry into The National Recognition of the Armed Forces which found that “increased separation of the Armed Forces from civilian life carries risks for both parties: the material and moral support of society is indispensable to the motivation and morale of the Armed Forces, and public understanding of the military determines the climate within which the Forces can recruit and train, and the willingness of the tax payer to finance them adequately”.³⁵

32 Oxfordshire County Council

33 Colchester Borough Council

34 North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Project

35 Ministry of Defence, *The Government's Response to the Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces*, P2

**“MORE IS NOT
BETTER, BETTER
IS BETTER.”**

General Gordon R Sullivan

3 Place shaping

- Local authorities could assume a voluntary duty to demonstrate consideration of the needs of veterans in designing and delivering services in the areas of housing, health and education.
- Councils could co-ordinate local businesses to provide discounts to members of the Armed Forces community.
- Local authorities could demonstrate their commitment to supporting inactive members of the Territorial Army (TA), reservists and the families of Service personnel to retain or obtain employment.

A voluntary local authority public duty to consider the needs of the Armed Forces community

The Armed Forces community is often invisible to local public service providers, including local authorities. This explains why its needs are often not met. It is not possible to ascribe, within this study, a solution to every problem a Service person or veteran may face. However, a UK government consultation paper, *The Nation's Commitment to the Armed Forces Community: Consistent and Enduring Support*, July 2009, contained an intriguing proposal for a new public duty on local authorities (or

regional bodies) relating to the Armed Forces.³⁶ This proposal was one of a series of “ideas... [which were] intentionally broad and wide ranging” and unfortunately did “not represent proposals for a particular course of action”.³⁷

The response to this consultation revealed a split between some local authorities and the Armed Forces over whether the former should be ascribed a duty to provide for the Armed Forces community in their service delivery. The report considered introducing a statutory duty. This would have meant that local authorities would be obliged by law to consider the needs of Service personnel and veterans in all their actions. Its applicability would be similar to the equalities laws in scope.

Local authorities’ objections were understandable. Such a wide-ranging duty would be expensive to fulfil and difficult to defend on cost grounds given the limited number of individuals concerned. However, an adapted version of this public duty could have considerable merit. A voluntary duty to demonstrate consideration of the needs of members of the Armed Forces community with respect to a limited number of areas could help solve many of the problems we have identified.

The Prime Minister has appointed a Military Covenant Taskforce, which, we understand, is currently exploring a similar idea. Signing up to this pledge would be a positive choice made by local authorities. The principles could be represented by an emblem, similar to the Investors in People award that a council could proudly display.

36 The Nation’s Commitment to the Armed Forces Community: Consistent and Enduring Support, P11

37 The Nation’s Commitment to the Armed Forces Community: Consistent and Enduring Support, P5

This voluntary duty would imply that local authorities would need to: identify areas where Service life would have a detrimental impact on members of the Armed Forces community and areas where special treatment should be considered (i.e. where an individual has a long term disability caused by their Service); and identify where service gaps exist and develop proposals to close them, perhaps based on good practice elsewhere.

If local authority decisions did disadvantage members of the Armed Forces community, they would need to demonstrate that they were aware of any negative effects and had taken cost effective steps to limit their impact.

A voluntary standard could be supported by a quality standard or award, independently verified by an organisation like the Legion or the Confederation of British Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO). The principles this 'award' would embody could be developed in cooperation with local authorities. Policies relating to access to healthcare, allocation of social housing and other policies that mitigate the impacts of the mobility of Service life could be assured by appointing an Armed Forces Champion within each council. Their duty would be to produce an annual report on the local authority's compliance with this duty.

Private citizens would not have legal recourse to enforce this duty in the courts, but it could be used to form the basis of a formal complaint through the council's own complaints procedures. It could be implemented in a way that was not subject to judicial review. The duty would be merely symbolic but subject to regular public review. The Legion (or other independent body) would be free to remove the right to use the trademarked emblem for public bodies that no longer implement these proposals.

Co-ordinating local businesses to support the Service community

Local authorities have a recognised role in promoting economic development. Rochford District Council operates a 'shop at my local' scheme which features discounts offered by local retailers to local citizens. At the same time some local authorities are making their services easy and cheap or free to access for members of the Armed Forces community.

North Tyneside Council offers a card, which affords Service personnel free gym use and swimming at council leisure facilities if they are local residents and on a period of leave from active Service.³⁸ Wirral Borough Council offers free swimming at the leisure centre to serving personnel and veterans.³⁹

The nationwide British Veterans Recognition Card includes a series of discounts available to veterans and is available at a fee to all Service personnel. There is no reason why authorities could not replicate this scheme on a local level.

Local authorities could recruit local businesses to sign up to become 'supporting Service' businesses. They could commit to do three things:

- provide discounts to local Service personnel and veterans
- support their employees right to participate in the Territorial Army or reserves

38 [North Tyneside Council](#)

39 [Wirral Borough Council](#)

- support recruitment events to private sector roles for members of the Territorial Army or reserves recently demobilised and the families of service personnel.

This begs the question of how businesses will identify Service personnel. Councils could encourage local businesses to accept the Service personnel ID card as identification to obtain discounts. The Armed Forces in their response to the National Recognition of the Armed Forces Inquiry have stated that *“the new military ID card will still provide the necessary level of proof of identity to qualify for discounts offered by commercial firms”*.

The MOD is currently scoping the costs of introducing dependant and veteran versions of these cards, including what charitable funding might be available to support this initiative. This would help resolve the problem veterans and reservists face in formally identifying their status. A veteran’s badge already exists as previously noted. We would recommend that the discounts from local businesses should be added to the nationwide defence discounts directory as a cost effective means of ensuring all new people moving to an area quickly identify the relevant local discounts.

The Government Equalities Office suggests that there is reluctance among some employers to employ applicants from military families because of negative perceptions about the level of commitment they can give.⁴⁰ Mothers often need to fulfil all parenting functions on their own while their husbands are on deployment. Regular re-deployments make it difficult to build up the experience and skills necessary.

40 Government Equalities Office, *Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce: Taskforce Report March 2010*

Some authorities have taken action to support veterans seeking employment. Manchester City Council supports the 'Hire A Hero' campaign, founded by Karen Chadwick and led by a group of ex-Service personnel.⁴¹ Didsbury's 'Hire a Hero' scheme works with businesses to find positions for recent veterans. While the overwhelming majority of veterans find employment within six months of being discharged, the MOD is charged with providing resettlement services under the Career Transition Partnership for the 20,000 plus individuals leaving the Armed Forces each year.

Local authorities should consider extending the services they provide to veterans to their spouses and partners. This could ensure that the same problems associated with increased mobility that affect Service personnel do not prevent their spouses and partners obtaining employment. The recession we are experiencing makes co-ordination with councils in this area even more important.

41 Manchester City Council

**“WHAT IS OUR TASK?
TO MAKE BRITAIN A
FIT COUNTRY FOR
HEROES TO LIVE IN.”**

David Lloyd George (Earl Lloyd-George of
Dwyfor)⁴²

42 Speech at Wolverhampton, Nov. 23, 1918, quoted in *The Times*, Nov. 25, 1918. (The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations” by Tony Augarde)

4 Attachment to place

- Commit to increase home ownership among those serving in the Armed Forces by encouraging take up of remaining shared ownership schemes among Service personnel.
- Recognise the disadvantage service life can have in regards to accessing social housing and use the increased flexibility allowed by recent government guidance to provide realistic priority to those leaving the Armed Forces.
- Exempt from the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) means test veterans who require an adaptation as a result of a Service related injury or illness.

The main difficulty for local authorities in dealing with Service personnel is the fact that they are mobile. This makes many of the common tools used to fairly restrict demand and apportion supply in public services such as waiting lists, inappropriate. Linking Service personnel to a specific home, or assisting them to gain other secure accommodation would allow them to access other public services on the same basis as the settled UK community.

Service personnel and veterans interact with local authorities in the field of housing in three main ways: to purchase discounted

accommodation under government schemes; to apply to be allocated social housing upon discharge from the Armed Forces; and to request alterations to their homes in respect of disabilities, some of which result from their Service. There is no comprehensive solution so we shall deal with each in turn.

Increasing home ownership among Service personnel

The rate of home ownership is lower among Service personnel than the national average. An MOD survey found that only 30 per cent of regular soldiers in the Armed Forces owned their own home (FCAS 2006); this is perhaps related to the fact that affordable accommodation is provided by the MOD during Service. Home ownership among the wider UK population stands at around 70 per cent of the population. Young people in general face increasing difficulty obtaining a mortgage. The average age for purchasing a first home is now 38.⁴³

Service personnel tend to be younger people due to the physical demands of the job. Privates in the Armed Forces begin on a basic salary of around £16,000 per annum which is supplemented by an operational allowance, a separation allowance, subsidised living accommodation and other benefits. The overall remuneration package is around £25,000 per annum. This means that home ownership in most areas of the country is beyond reach.

The government has previously sought to expand home ownership among Service personnel through using ex-MOD land, allowing Service personnel to purchase at 50 per cent discounts and sub-let while they served overseas. Service personnel in England have key worker status and retain this

⁴³ *The Independent*, No place like home: The generation who can't afford to buy, Tuesday 16 March 2010

status for 12 months after discharge. This enables them to access the Key Worker Living Scheme.

In 2009, a £20m pilot scheme was launched to promote home ownership for Service personnel based on the shared equity or the rent-to-buy schemes. Richmondshire District Council worked with the MOD on the development of “a housing site using former ‘kick start’ funds with 13 properties earmarked specifically for Service personnel” and a “multi-million pound supported housing development for veterans with 13 units of social housing”.⁴⁴ This scheme could be vulnerable to government expenditure reductions but it has considerable merit. We believe it could be adopted and expanded by other local authorities.⁴⁵

Local authorities seeking to increase the take up of shared ownership schemes among Service personnel could consider being flexible in allowing tenants to sub-let properties. Local authorities differ widely between prohibition and acceptance in their policies towards sub-letting shared ownership properties. Affording Service personnel the right to sub-let their properties while on deployment or granting them exemptions from council tax during the periods of deployment could aid them to meet better the costs of home ownership.

Allocation of social housing

Not all Service personnel will wish to purchase property or be able to do so even accounting for significant discounts on property purchase prices. These individuals may need to access

[44 Richmondshire District Council](#)

[45 Homes and Communities Agency, New Home Ownership Scheme Moves Armed Forces up the Ladder](#)

social housing when they vacate their forces accommodation. Further when relationships breakdown, it is often the case that estranged spouses will seek access to social housing when vacating Service accommodation. If they are treated the same as new entrants to an area they will be at a disadvantage. Often, these groups will not have been able to accumulate waiting time on the list for social housing due to the fact they are continually redeployed to different areas.

Local authorities have a discretionary power to add additional groups and determine the exact level of priority in deciding their housing allocation policy. Government guidance indicates that local authorities that choose to apply the local connection rule should do so flexibly. The Department for Communities and Local Government state that *“for some authorities, local connection may be a policy priority. While there is nothing to prevent authorities framing their allocation scheme to include local policy priorities such as this, they must ensure that these do not dominate the scheme”*.⁴⁶

A series of options present themselves for local authorities, these include:

- awarding some priority to veterans to recognise their contribution to the community and the nation particularly in areas where the Service personnel resided prior to joining the Armed Forces or their family members currently reside
- disregarding the requirement to demonstrate a local connection in the case of all Service personnel or

46 Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings, Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities, P27

automatically awarding local connection points to those personnel

- increasing the priority ranking of Service personnel and veterans in terms of allocating social housing and alter the initial forms to capture applicants' status as veterans.

Each of these proposals has merit. We do not recommend that any in particular should be applied. However, local authorities should recognise a responsibility to house homeless veterans. It is a considerable embarrassment when this is not the case. Good local authorities will see the merit in adopting one of the measures suggested above. Many have already done so as shown below.

Good practice

- Interviews with three local Pembrokeshire County Council officers show that in accessing housing needs applicants are asked: "Are you or have you ever been in the Armed Forces?" To qualify for housing veterans need to demonstrate that they are priority need and they have not made themselves intentionally homeless.⁴⁷

- Berneslai Homes who operate the housing register for Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council afford Service personnel leaving the Armed Forces a local reasonable preference category in respect of their application.⁴⁸

- North Tyneside Council "prioritises active Service personnel and those that have left the forces by awarding them Band Two [a higher priority] within the allocations policy".⁴⁹

47 Pembrokeshire County Council

48 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

49 North Tyneside Council

Good practice

- South Oxfordshire District Council “considers Armed Forces personnel based in the district to have a local connection to the district so those living in married quarters and who are within 12 months of discharge are given priority on the housing register”.⁵⁰
- Manchester City Council declares that “ex-forces personnel returning to or arriving into Manchester, having left the Armed Forces are given a Manchester connection even if they have not previously resided here before”. There is also some flexibility to establish a local connection “if they [veterans] had spent three years in the area out of the past 10 years, a parent of sibling was based in Manchester or whether they had a child in primary school education”.⁵¹
- Midlothian Council in Scotland awards a level of priority for social housing if “the person is a full time member of HM Forces and prior to joining the forces previously lived in Midlothian and is due to return to civilian life”.
- Wigan Council awards veterans a “local connection” to give them a higher priority, even if they have not lived in the area for years, or their connection is based on being posted to the borough.
- Barnet Council is considering adopting a community contribution element which would give priority to those who make a contribution to making their communities “strong, stable and healthy.” Veterans will “qualify for a community contribution award automatically”.⁵²

50 South Oxfordshire District Council

51 Manchester City Council

52 Barnet Council, The Housing Allocations Scheme, Draft July 2010, The full rules, P27 and 29

Homelessness and priority need

In extreme cases Service personnel have had to apply for accommodation under homelessness legislation. Local authorities are required to grant certain groups reasonable preference for housing allocation.

These groups include people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing, the homeless and people owed a statutory homelessness duty. The only group of Service personnel recognised as having priority need in England are those with a recognised vulnerability caused by their service in the Armed Forces.⁵³ In Wales veterans need demonstrate no vulnerability, only that they have been homeless since leaving the Armed Forces.⁵⁴

It is regrettable when able bodied veterans have difficulty accessing social housing, and it is particularly unacceptable when disabled veterans encounter such difficulties. In 2009 the government made clear in the Service Personnel Command Paper (SPCP) that injured Service personnel should be given high priority in the allocation of social housing and declared they would issue statutory guidance to that effect.⁵⁵

All local authorities should consider adopting this policy in their areas.

53 Relevant lines that provide an Armed Forces related priority are: Statutory Instrument 2002 No.2051 The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002: 5. (2) A person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces

54 Welsh Statutory Instrument 2001 No.607 (W.30): The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001, 6. (1) A person formerly serving in the regular Armed Forces of the Crown who has been homeless since leaving those Armed Forces

55 DCLG, Housing Allocations – Members of the Armed Forces

Demobilised service personnel and the issue of ‘intentional homelessness’

Service personnel have suffered where they are found to be ‘intentionally homeless’ if they are to be ejected from Service accommodation as a result of a voluntary decision to leave the Armed Forces. The Housing Act 1996 Part VII specifies the legal duty on local authorities to provide housing for the homeless provided they are not intentionally so. The government guidance informs local authorities that they should not consider veterans intentionally homeless for leaving MOD accommodation following discharge. However, some local authorities have ignored this as the experience of Mr Omar Jarju shows:

Omar Jarju served as a Gurkha from December 2001 to November 2007. His tour included deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has two children and a wife. His local authority would not initially accept that they had a duty to house him. They said he had made himself intentionally homeless by leaving the Armed Forces with an honourable discharge.

Facing eviction from Service accommodation he appealed to the Legion. They were successful in convincing the authority of their duty to provide emergency accommodation only after a long battle in which Mr Jarju paid high rental charges and was forced to put all his personal items in storage at his own cost. He now has a satisfactory house with full use of his possessions but he has received no compensation from the local authority.⁵⁶

Situations like this should not occur.

56 Omar Jarju, Interview with author, 12/10/2010

Home adaptations

Local authorities have a responsibility to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to disabled veterans, without sufficient means, to provide for adaptations to their homes. They must provide a decision on DFG funding within six months of receiving a full application. These local authority administered grants provide for adaptations to homes, of any tenure, to enable independent living for people with a disability. They pay for items such as stair lifts, walk in showers, bath lifts or kitchen adaptations. The government has announced £70m in funding to help 35,000 people to have home adaptations in the next seven months, so they can remain independent in their homes.⁵⁷ The Government Office for Disabilities Issues cites the average cost⁵⁸ of a major home adaptation as £6,000 and the typical adaptations as a stair-lift and level-access shower.⁵⁹ However, the Independent Living Initiative by South Staffordshire Housing Association has managed to cut the waiting times for major housing adaptations from 12 months to seven days and the costs from £7,000 to £4,200.⁶⁰ Simple adaptations such as door widening can be delivered more cheaply (£300).⁶¹

57 National Housing Federation, *The future of funding for housing adaptations*, Monday 11 October 2010

58 They do not specify what constitutes a 'major' adaptation or whether this figure relates to adaptations in England or nationwide

59 HM Government Office for Disabilities Issues, *Better outcomes, lower costs, Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment : a review of evidence*, Frances Heywood and Lynn Turner

60 Home Adaptations Consortium, *Home Adaptations for Disabled People, Equality and Excellence in Future Provision*, August 2010

61 HM Government Office for Disabilities Issues, *Better outcomes, lower costs, Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment : a review of evidence*, Frances Heywood and Lynn Turner

Individuals in receipt of housing or council tax benefit are immediately referred through to maximum assistance.

Unfortunately many veterans who require adaptations as a result of a Service related injury are required to contribute towards the cost. Many feel that this does not provide sufficient respect for the contribution veterans have provided to the nation; nor does it satisfy the lifelong duty of care the state holds towards our veterans.

Many more veterans experience lengthy and unreasonable delays in receiving these adaptations. This can cause enormous discomfort and suffering.

Local authorities should explore ways to reform the administration of their DFG programme to ensure veterans do not experience this. Some local authorities work with the Legion to enable applications to be processed quickly. Many vulnerable veterans could benefit greatly if this was more widespread.

To speed up this process a local authority could do the following:

- accept independent occupational therapy assessments to reduce the time clients wait for an assessment for the DFG application, as practised by Cambridge City Council ⁶²
- provide exemptions from the means test for eligibility for the DFG for all veterans whose disability is Service-related, effectively passporting them through to provision.

⁶² Cambridge City Council

**“BUT NOW’S THE TIME
FOR THE YOUNGER MEN
TO LOCK IN ROUGH
ENCOUNTERS, TIME
FOR ME TO YIELD TO
THE PAINS OF OLD AGE.
BUT THERE WAS A DAY
I SHONE AMONG THE
CHAMPIONS.”**

Homer, *The Iliad*

5 Accessing national services

Integrating Service personnel and veterans into mainstream provision is clearly difficult. However, a number of authorities have developed policies in the areas of education and healthcare to account for the unique situation Service personnel and veterans find themselves in.

Education

The difficulty of obtaining school places for service children

Service children often lose out in allocation of school places. In the current system parents apply to schools stipulating preferences – Service personnel can often be on deployment overseas when this process occurs.

The government took some measures to redress these issues. When planning education services local authorities and admissions bodies were required to invite a Service representative to join the Admission Forum in areas where military personnel were concentrated, accept a military postal address for applications from Service personnel and not refuse a place to a child because they did not currently live in the area. The Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce in their March 2010 report also showed an awareness of this problem and resolved to consider committing local authorities to:

“Subject to consultation process and Parliamentary approval, local authorities will be required to give such applications a priority that would put them back on an equal footing with all the others, either before the offers are made in March or requiring that an extra place is given at the chosen school had the application been received on time and the same criteria applied.”⁶³

In an era where local authorities have a diminished role in allocating pupils to schools, with developments such as the free schools, a new solution is needed. This could include allocating a pupil premium to Service children similar to that ascribed to poorer students to make them more attractive to schools. This option is being considered by the government.⁶⁴ It could mitigate the existing situation where schools have little incentive to consider Service children as other students. Short term deployments mean service children do not provide a long term income stream for schools. The bureaucratic requirements of registering a child are the same but the pay off period for schools is much less. Schools are less likely to want to accept Service children without extra funding or support.

Local authorities have also taken action to aid Service children. Leicestershire County Council All-Party Working Group reviewed the schools admission policy and altered it to “provide for a high priority to be given to children of UK Services personnel”.⁶⁵

Similarly, Oxfordshire County Council has decided to flag Service children throughout their educational career. Local authorities

63 The Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce, March 2010, P18

64 Cabinet Office, The Coalition: our programme for government, P15

65 Leicestershire County Council

could adopt a flagging system for Service children as part of their statutory duty to ensure that all children within their area are educated.

Accessing healthcare

Some veterans, reservists and Armed Forces families face difficulties accessing healthcare. In relation specifically to Armed Forces families, spouses, partners and dependants of Service personnel need to register to receive healthcare through the NHS (including dentistry) in the same way as all other UK citizens. As a very mobile community they encounter problems registering with GPs, NHS dentists and in accessing NHS treatment.

Frequently, Service families have moved by the time they reach the top of waiting lists for appointments and treatments. This can seriously disrupt the provision of treatments such as IVF and mental healthcare. The previous government issued guidance from the Department of Health to English NHS Trusts to take into account time spent on waiting lists with other trusts.⁶⁶

The main role for local authorities is raising awareness of this requirement and monitoring compliance. When ensuring compliance local authorities need to consider the spouses, partners and dependants of serving personnel. It is not easy because they currently lack identification as members of the Service community. However, councils could consider writing to healthcare providers to inform them of their duties regarding Service personnel and requesting that they screen patients to identify them and their dependants. These needs should be taken into account when preparing JSNAs.

⁶⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Health Services in England*

Councils also could consider how to assist the spouses of Service personnel to access treatment. The spouses and partners of Service personnel may need assistance with childcare to help them to access healthcare services because they are the primary carer for their children.

Both simple chores such as registering for GPs, dentists and more demanding interactions such as receiving IVF treatment and mental health care can present Service families with added child care difficulties. Service providers need to consider this when designing services. Catterick Garrison has developed a unique partnership between the local authority, the MOD, the NHS and a sure start facility to ensure childcare for those receiving treatment. Similar schemes could be trialled in other authorities.

Local elected leaders can use their democratic mandate and local influence to publicise where other providers are falling short or where UK regulations provide a poor service for local citizens.

NHS priority treatment

NHS priority treatment has been an entitlement for those in receipt of a War Pension since 1953 but GPs are often unaware of this fact. On 1 January 2008 it was extended to all veterans with a Service related injury or illness. This entitlement to priority applies to NHS secondary care in England, Wales and Scotland, priority is not given over patients with more pressing clinical needs.

Research by the Legion has found few veterans receive this level of service, and most practitioners don't know of their responsibility to provide it.

“In a 2009 survey of 500 GPs, 81 per cent of those questioned said they knew not very much or nothing at all about priority treatment. Furthermore, 85 per cent had not informed secondary care providers of a veteran’s entitlement to priority treatment in the past 12 months.

“A further survey of 491 War Pensioners found that only 11 per cent reported being treated ahead of non-emergency patients on their most recent visit to hospital for their Service-related condition compared to 10 per cent in a previous survey carried out in 2007. Of the War Pensioners surveyed only 36 per cent knew of their entitlement to priority treatment.”⁶⁷

The issue of eligibility also remains relevant. There are around 4.8 million veterans,⁶⁸ 160,000 of these receive a War Pension.⁶⁹ The number entitled to priority treatment is less than the former but greater than the latter. It is unknown. This is partly due to the fact many veterans received one off gratuity or lump-sum payments rather than an on-going War Pension or Guaranteed Income Payment (equivalent to War Pension) from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

The Legion, in their Response to the Service Command Paper argued that the government should quantify the number of people “currently eligible for priority treatment for conditions related to Service, in order to accurately assess the demand for priority and the impact it has on the NHS”.⁷⁰

67 The Royal British Legion, General Election Manifesto 2010

68 Ministry of Defence, Welsh Guards launch Armed Forces Day 2010, 4 March 2010

69 The Royal British Legion, General Election Manifesto 2010

70 Royal British Legion, Response to the Service Personnel Command Paper

Local authorities should push central government to ensure that healthcare practitioners are fully aware of the rules regarding eligibility and make a more detailed assessment of the numbers involved. With the transfer of commissioning responsibility within the NHS from Primary Care Trusts to GP Consortia, the need to educate commissioners about the right to priority treatment is a key new role for local authorities.

Equally the new role for local authorities in public health, leading JSNAs, hosting local health and well-being boards and joining up commissioning between health and social care, will mean it will be imperative in the future for local authorities to be aware of the needs of their communities and particularly aware of the health and social care needs of Service families and veterans in order to fulfil their new roles.

Transferring medical records

Service personnel receive healthcare through the MOD. Upon discharge a summary of their medical records needs to be transferred from the MOD to the NHS. This is currently done by passing the summary to the Service person, who then needs to pass it onto their new GP when they register. Alternatively, formal requests for medical records can be made to the MOD, but few are aware of the process.

The MOD and the NHS are currently working together to encourage Service personnel to register with a GP before they leave the Armed Forces. This will enable their medical records to be sent directly to that GP and enable a smoother transition. However, this policy is still a work in progress.

Further, there are some veterans and reservist specific health services in the UK that are not widely known about. These

include the Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) at St. Thomas Hospital in London and the Reservists Mental Health Programme (RMHP). Some health trusts are also pioneering new approaches. The Community Mental Health Pilots are two year schemes set up in Camden and Islington, Cardiff, Cornwall, Stafford, Newcastle upon Tyne and Scotland to explore ways NHS clinicians provide new mental health treatment pathways to veterans.

To raise awareness of the availability of these services, the Legion – with the Department of Health – have created a booklet entitled *For those who served: Meeting the healthcare needs of veterans in England*. This document is aimed at veterans, and provides information on healthcare services but can also be a good resource for local authorities to distribute. Additionally, a recent guide has been completed by the Royal College of GPs, Combat Stress and the Legion entitled, *Meeting the healthcare needs of veterans: A guide for general practitioners*. It provides information and advice to GPs on veterans' specific services and can also be used by local authorities as an information resource.

Healthcare reform

The pace of healthcare reform makes developing partnerships and projects in this area difficult. The government's proposals to abolish Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and give their commissioning role to GPs could considerably impact the provision of specific healthcare services to some of the neediest members of the Armed Forces community.

However, the effects of reform are difficult to discern and local authorities are understandably reluctant to develop joint initiatives with bodies whose continued existence is uncertain. We would advise that councils monitor the performance of

government agencies in this area and implement targeted interventions where they fall short. Once the government's healthcare reforms have been implemented we believe that councils will seek to review the opportunities to coordinate expenditure on social care with those agencies or persons responsible for local healthcare expenditure to deliver a more integrated service.

One area where councils have significant powers and could make a real impact is the provision of social care, and in future, public health. Social care and public health policy impacts on a variety of areas where there is clear need for service provision for the Armed Forces community. These include alcohol treatment to combat the higher incidence of alcohol misuse among Service personnel, mental health care provision for those struggling with their combat experiences and those elderly veterans requiring home adaptations to remain independent within their home.

We are currently awaiting the outcomes of structural reform to healthcare services as soon as these have been implemented local authorities in turn will need to think about how they reform their provision for veterans, reservists and Service personnel.

Conclusion

Public services should be provided in a manner that ensures those who risk their lives to defend our country can avail themselves of these services on the same basis as any other citizen, or receive special treatment where the sacrifice has been great. We should aim to do the right thing for those who have put themselves in danger to protect our way of life.

We are grateful to the many local authorities who have shared examples of how they are delivering services for the Armed Forces community in imaginative and cost effective ways.

This report has considered that provision in respect of a local authority's role to commemorate veterans' sacrifice, design public services and adapt them to their citizens' needs, bring together local partners in support of community objectives, provide housing and represent their citizens' views to those who provide health and education services.

We have discovered that there is considerable goodwill within local authorities, as there is in the wider nation, for those who serve in the Armed Forces. However, Service families cannot be educated, treated and housed on goodwill alone. This research has shown that there remains a gap in the provision that local authority are able to offer veterans.

The local authorities which responded gave us examples of how they have sought to improve services. Taken together this forms a body of good practice ideas for all councils to consider in the interests of improving services for all members of the Armed Forces community.

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Oxfordshire County Council
Oxfordshire Job Centre Plus
Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT)
Pembrokeshire County Council
Preston City Council
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