



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Summary





A MESSAGE FROM THE RT HON BEN WALLACE, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

Our Armed Forces protect our nation with unwavering honour, courage and commitment. We owe them a vast debt of gratitude and have a duty to ensure that those who serve, or who have served in our Armed Forces, and their families, suffer no disadvantage in comparison to other citizens as a result of their service to our country. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured or the bereaved. This is what the Covenant is set out to do.

It is my honour to present the eighth report since the Armed Forces Act 2011 established the requirement on me as Secretary of State for Defence to report each year to Parliament on the progress of the Armed Forces Covenant.

This booklet provides highlights of the full report and a high level summary on what has been done to support fair access to healthcare; education; accommodation; inquests and judicial engagement; family life; transition and through life support; and business and the community; and the delivery by the Covenant Fund Trust to uphold the principles of the Covenant.

While I am proud of the progress made this year, I acknowledge that more needs to be done. As outlined in the Conservative Party manifesto and Queen's Speech, we will seek to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law and over the course of this Parliament will continue to remove disadvantage faced by our Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

HEALTHCARE

In financial year 2018/19, in addition to the 17,430 veteran referrals seen in Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, 4,561 referrals were received for the Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) and the Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS), which provide specialist NHS care pathways just for veterans. The total referrals for both TILS and CTS was 9,864 as at 30 September. An additional £10 million was received in April 2019 as part of the NHS Long Term Plan to invest in these services to increase geographic coverage and service provision.

As at September 2019, additional 285 GP practices in England were accredited as 'veteran friendly', increasing the total accreditations to 375. The accreditation is designed to equip GP practices to better understand the specific needs of veterans and their families (including bereaved families).

Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans Framework was launched in March 2019 by NHS England, NHS Improvement and the MOD. It is a personalised care approach for Service personnel who have Service-attributable complex and enduring physical, neurological and mental health conditions. The framework provides effective planning and improved discharge process by bringing the MOD, health and social care, Services charities and other organisations together earlier in the care pathway approximately nine months before their discharge.

The MOD joined the cross-government National Suicide Prevention Strategy Delivery Group in early 2019, sharing best practice and ensure a joined-up and co-ordinated response towards deliberate self-harm and suicide prevention.

The Scottish Government, in partnership with NHS Ayrshire and Arran, continue to provide funding of £1.4 million per year until 2021 to Combat Stress for specialist mental health services. The Scottish Government and six local health boards also continue to jointly fund the Veterans First Point Network which offers a one-stop-shop for Veterans no matter their need.

The Scottish Government has also strengthened its network of Armed Forces and Veterans Champions within NHS boards to improve the support available and help deliver the Veterans Commissioner's report recommendations.

The Veterans Trauma Network expanded into the NHS in Wales in October 2019 to further increase provision for veterans with Service attributable physical health conditions. NHS Wales also granted additional funding to 'Valley Dental' practice in RAF Valley to provide additional NHS dental places. With the addition of the 'Children's Dental Practice' at Holyhead Hospital.

The Welsh Government will continue to fund Veterans NHS Wales to enable veterans to access treatment specifically targeting mental health issues. We will also invest in the creation of national and regional initiatives to prevent suicide and self-harm.

EDUCATION

Service children were formally identified as an underrepresented group in Higher Education by the Office for Students. This raises awareness of the issue, and creates opportunities to remedy it.

The Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP) has established its UK-wide network, with a further six research-practice hubs launched in 2019.

The 'Service child' flag indicator in England was included on all three termly school censuses to help better identify and track Service children moves.

In 2019/20, over £23.1 million of Service Pupil Premium funding is being distributed to over 10,000 schools across England, to benefit over 77,000 Service children.

Department for Education has provided statistics that show the post-16 and post-18 education, and employment and training destinations of young people who had 'Service child' status at the end of secondary school.

The Scottish Service Children's Strategy Group (SSCSG) has developed a range of guidance materials for children's services professionals, parents and carers during 2019 and hosted a best practice event in May 2019.

The Welsh Government is continuing the Supporting Service Children Wales Fund by providing an extra £250,000 for the academic year 2019/20.

Members of the SSCE Cymru Network produced the Service Children Funding Guidance for schools in Wales document to provide information and advice on the funding available to schools with Service children.

The Welsh Government will continue to progress the work to enable the collection of data on Service children in schools through the Pupil Level Annual School Census.



HOUSING

In financial year 2018/19, £116 million was invested in improving and modernising Service Family Accommodation – a 40% increase on the previous year. A further £123 million is being invested in financial year 2019/20.

A Future Accommodation Model pilot was launched at HMNB Clyde in September 2019.

As at 30 September 2019, the Forces Help to Buy scheme had helped around 19,400 Service personnel purchase their own property at a total cost of £293 million (an average of £15,000 per claim) since its introduction. The scheme has been extended until December 2022.

Following a change in policy in April 2019 to permit cohabitation in Service Families Accommodation, 250 Service personnel in long-term relationships or with residential responsibility for a child have been housed in surplus SFA, and a further 109 are waiting to move in.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched a consultation on new statutory guidance for local authorities designed to improve how members of the Armed Forces community are allocated social housing in January 2019. In March 2019, they also allocated an additional £1 million of bespoke funding to support vulnerable veterans who are or are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Scottish Government published refreshed Local Housing Strategy guidance that encourages local authorities to fully consider the housing requirements of the Armed Forces community in September 2019. They also awarded East Lothian Council over £350,000 to deliver six homes for veterans in East Lothian. These homes are expected to be completed by the end of 2019.

In 2018/19, 75 new referrals were received for the Military Matters project in Scotland.

The Welsh Government commissioned an independent assessment of priority need in Wales to determine if amendments are required to support its aim of ensuring that veterans can access the support and services they need.



INQUESTS AND JUDICIAL ENGAGEMENT

The Defence Inquests Unit attended 41 inquests between 1 September 2018 and 30 September 2019.

A new dedicated unit, the Northern Ireland Legacy Inquest team, was set up in 2019 to deal with the extensive Northern Ireland Legacy Inquest programme.

A 12-week public consultation was launched on 22 July 2019 on proposed legal protections measures for those who have served in operations outside the UK.

SUPPORTING FAMILY LIFE

Flexible Service became law on 1 April 2019, allowing Regular Service personnel to ask to temporarily work part-time and/or restrict their separation from their home base, subject to operational need.

The Covenant Fund Trust's Removing Barriers to Family Life grants programme was created to support the 2018-20 Families Action Plan. Grants will be awarded by the end of March 2020.



The Forces Families Jobs website was launched by the Families Federations in September 2019 to offer a 'one-stop-shop' website providing free access to employment and training opportunities to families of the UK Armed Forces.

A soft launch took place on the 3 October at the Welsh Government Armed Forces conference raising awareness of the initiative among Welsh stakeholders.

To understand the issue of loneliness and whom it affects, a question on loneliness is now included in the tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) (first iteration was FAMCAS 2019) and is recommended for inclusion in Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2020 so that we can respond appropriately.

SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

The Strategy for our Veterans was jointly published by the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments on 14 November 2018 and each home nation has subsequently conducted its own consultation to inform how they will implement the strategy.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs was created in July 2019 to work with departments to coordinate and drive government policy on veterans' welfare, spanning mental and physical health, education, and employment.

A tri-Service non-UK nationals working group has been established and is meeting quarterly to take forward the recommendations of the review of provision.

The Veterans' ReGroup pathfinder service for veterans in the Criminal Justice System was launched in the Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire areas in August 2019.

HM Revenue and Customs launched an internship programme for Service personnel in transition in August 2019.

Skills Development Scotland established a network of veterans champions across its five regional areas to support Service leavers and veterans along their employment pathway.

The Welsh Government provided £500,000 to continue funding for Armed Forces Liaison Officers from 2019 to 2021.

In supporting the Transition of Military Personnel project, the Welsh Government has implemented its whole system pathway for veterans at the five Welsh prisons.

Funding for projects in Northern Ireland through the Armed Forces Covenant: Local Grants programme more than tripled to £221,410 in Financial Year 2018/19, compared with £67,630 in 2017/18. Already, £133,903 has been awarded in the first two rounds for financial year 2019/20.

SUPPORT TO THE COVENANT FROM BUSINESS AND THE COMMUNITY

There were 1,000 new signings of the Armed Forces Covenant in 2019, taking the total to over 4,000 as at 30 September 2019.

The Defence Discount Service saw further growth in 2019 with over 500,000 members and 12,000 businesses signed up as at September 2019.

A record number of employers received Employer Recognition Service gold award (100 in total – an increase of 96% from the 51 awarded in 2018).

The MOD published the ‘Welcome to England’ guide to add to those already produced in Wales and Scotland.

The national Covenant in the Community conference was held in April and brought together Covenant practitioners and stakeholders from around the country to share best practice.

The Forces in Mind Trust published the Benefit not Burden report in Spring 2019 advising how to further embed the Covenant in the private sector, following a review of the Covenant in business.

The DWP has secured around £5 million of funding to bolster the role of its Armed Forces Champions across the country and will be able to triple the resources dedicated to supporting the Armed Forces community.

The DWP, MOD and HMRC refreshed the advice on how eligible spouses and civil partners who accompanied their Service partner on postings outside the UK can apply for National Insurance credits.

The Officers' Association, together with BITC Cymru, delivered a workshop for businesses looking to attract veterans into roles within their organisations in January 2019.

The Welsh Government, in collaboration with members of the Armed Forces Expert Group, developed its Employment Pathway. Working in collaboration with BITC Cymru, the Welsh Government developed its Employers' Toolkit. Both these documents were launched in December 2018.



THE COVENANT FUND TRUST

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust makes grants that support the Armed Forces community. In 2018/19 financial year, it delivered four major funding programmes.

Armistice and Armed Forces Communities

Programme supported projects linked to the Armistice commemorations which helped communities think about the Armed Forces today. £1.3 million was spent on 2,773 local community projects.

Armed Forces Local Grants Programme funds projects that support community integration and/or the delivery of local services for the Armed Forces community. 150 grants were made across the UK totalling £2.4 million.

Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans, Carers and Families made grants totalling £4.6 million to innovative portfolios of projects that are exploring better ways of supporting veterans who are very unwell, together with their carers and families.

Continuation and Sustainability Grants made £1.3 million in grants to seven projects supporting veterans in the Criminal Justice System.

In 2019/20, £9.5 million have been earmarked for the following programmes; Removing Barriers to Family Life (£7.5 million will be awarded in February 2020) and the Armed Forces Covenant Local Grants has projected spend of £2 million.

Additionally, in the 2018 Autumn Budget, the Government announced £10 million to support veterans' mental health and wellbeing needs, to be distributed by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund was created as a result. The fund has two programmes, the positive pathways programme, and the strategic pathways programme. An additional £3 million was announced for the Veterans' Community Centres Fund which is a capital grant programme for the refurbishment of community centres run by Armed Forces organisations and used by veterans and their communities. All funds will be awarded by the end of March 2020.



PRIORITIES FOR 2020 AND BEYOND

Healthcare

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is working with its Devolved counterparts across the UK with the NHS and Service charities, to redefine what ‘priority treatment’ means, to make it more meaningful and future-proof for veterans and clinicians.

In Spring 2020, Defence Statistics will publish the ‘Veterans Cohort Study’ into causes of death for UK Service personnel between 2001 and 2018.

NHS England and NHS Improvement are working with the Defence Medical Services on a scoping exercise to determine how many veterans might benefit from the services at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre.

The Government has committed funding to the development of an NHS England-led National Rehabilitation Centre to be co-located with the DMRC at the Stanford Hall site, to provide cutting-edge rehabilitation services to the public in England. The facility is scheduled to be operational in 2022.

The veteran-friendly GP practice accreditation is being rolled out across England over the next three years to help ensure practices are equipped to best care for veterans and their families as part of the commitments of the NHS Long Term Plan.

NHS England and NHS Improvement are progressing arrangements to commission a High Impact Mental Health Service for veterans who are in a mental health crisis and need urgent and emergency care and treatment. This will commence with pathfinder services launching in April 2020.

NHS England and NHS Improvement will launch an engagement in early 2020 to better understand and explore the health needs of Armed Forces families with findings helping to inform the commissioning of a support service for this patient group.

Education

The Service Children Progression Alliance will launch an interactive online mapping and targeting tool in January 2020. The alliance is also developing a Service children's support framework for schools, and a suite of evidence-based resources for practitioners.

The Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council are continuing to engage with stakeholders to explore the barriers to Further and Higher Education that may exist for children of Service families.

By June 2020, the MOD policy for the Professional and Personal Development Plan as part of the Through Life Development Policy will be incorporated as guidance in JSP 822 in support of building a culture of personal development.

Accommodation

MOD's programme to deliver 917 modern new-build military homes at Salisbury Plain as part of the Army Basing Programme will be completed in July 2020.

In financial year 2019/20, MOD will invest £123 million to further improve and modernise homes for military families, including receipts from over 1,400 sub-let properties.

In early 2020, the Scottish Government will work with the MOD, local authorities and the third sector to develop and implement a pathway to prevent homelessness for people who have served in the Armed Forces.

In April 2020, the independent evaluation report commissioned by the Welsh Government to determine if amendment is required in the assessment of priority need in Wales to ensure that veterans are able to access support and services will report its findings. The Welsh Government will also review and update its Armed Forces Housing Referral Pathway.

Family life

The findings of the review and recommendations on how to improve the coherence of current MOD policies and those of other government departments to ensure they reflect the needs of families with additional needs will be reported at the 2020 Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum Conference.

Transition and through Life Support

The UK Government will publish a response to the Strategy for our Veterans Consultation shortly. The Scottish and Welsh Governments consulted on devolved matters separately. The three Governments will continue to work together to take this work forward to benefit Veterans across the UK.

The MOD is working to improve its understanding of non-UK nationals and the implications that cultural differences have for the type of support MOD should offer. The MOD and Home Office continue to discuss the challenges faced by the non-UK community on the wider issue of immigration policy.

Business and the community

The MOD will seek to address the key findings of the Forces in Mind Trust review of the Covenant in Business report throughout 2020.

The MOD's Defence Relationship Management team intends to utilise the Measurement of Effectiveness records to further develop regional performance measures and targets.

USEFUL INFORMATION

The full report which is available at GOV.UK includes contributions from relevant UK Government departments, the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Office on how they have delivered on the Covenant.

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means for you, please visit: <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/> Please contact your Families Federations (details below) or the MOD Covenant team by emailing COVENANT-MAILBOX@mod.gov.uk if you believe you are being disadvantaged because of your membership of the Armed Forces.

Armed forces healthcare in England: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare/>

Veteran friendly GP practices: <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/a-to-z-clinical-resources/Veteran-friendly-gp-practices.aspx>

Veterans NHS Wales: <https://www.veteranswales.co.uk/>

Forces Help to Buy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/forces-help-to-buy-scheme-extended-for-a-further-three-years>

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: <https://www.covenantfund.org.uk/>

Defence Discount Service: <https://www.defencediscountservice.co.uk/>

Forces Families Jobs: <https://www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk/>

National Insurance credits for partners of armed forces personnel overseas: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-insurance-credits-for-partners-of-armed-forces-personnel-overseas>

The SCiP Alliance: <https://www.scipalliance.org/about/information-page>

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

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

Veterans Work: <https://www.veteranswork.org.uk/>

Veteran Support in Scotland: <https://www.mygov.scot/veterans/>

Veteran support in Wales: <https://gov.wales/?lang=en>

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

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

Money force: <https://www.moneyforce.org.uk/>

Joining forces credit union: <http://www.joiningforcescu.co.uk/>

The Confederation of Service Charities: <https://www.cobseo.org.uk/>

The Royal British Legion: <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

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

Naval Families Federation: <https://nff.org.uk/>

Army Families Federation: <https://aff.org.uk/>

RAF Families Federation: <https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/>

The War Widows' Association: <https://www.warwidows.org.uk/>

