



Consultation Response

A City for all Londoners

Royal British Legion consultation submission

1. About us

1.1. The Royal British Legion was created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of World War One, and still remains one of the UK's largest membership organisations. We are the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, providing financial, social and emotional support, information, advice, advocacy and comradeship to hundreds of thousands of Service personnel, veterans and their dependants every year. In 2014/15, we responded to over 780,000 requests for help— more than ever before. For further information, please visit www.britishlegion.org.uk

2. General Comments

2.1. The Legion notes the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, that:

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.¹

2.2. In June 2012 the Greater London Authority signed the Armed Forces Covenant and The Legion commends them for doing so.

2.3. The Legion welcomes provisions already in place across London to help reduce disadvantages faced by members of the Armed Forces Community. The Mayor of London and The London Assembly have made great progress in supporting the Armed Forces community and recognising the sacrifices members of the Armed Forces have made, and these have been welcome.

2.4. The Legion welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. The Armed Forces community continue to face significant disadvantages in many aspects of their lives which hold them back from participating fully in community life and sharing in London's successes. Action is needed to address these and The Legion stands ready to engage in dialogue on any initiatives which seek to ensure that the efforts, welfare and interests of Serving and ex-Service personnel, and their families, are recognised and not forgotten.

2.5. London is home to a significant number of serving Armed Forces personnel, ex-serving personnel and their families. As of 1st July 2016, there are 4,500 Regular

¹ Ministry of Defence, [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015](#)

serving personnel posted within Greater London². As of 31st March 2015, there are 6,410 recipients of an Armed Forces Pension residing in Greater London alongside 4,870 recipients of compensation for an injury.³ The Ministry of Defence estimated in their Annual Population Survey that there are 134,000 ex-Service personnel living in Greater London.

2.6. However, these above statistics do not show the complete size of the Armed Forces community. Family members and many former members of the Armed Forces are not recorded in official statistics. Policies to reduce disadvantages face by members of the Armed Forces community will have a positive effect on a sizable portion of the city's residents.

2.7. Across London there are many examples of positive efforts to reduce the disadvantages faced by the Armed Forces community. However, more can be done to fully implement the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant across London. The points below highlight significant areas of concern for the Armed Community but are by no means exhaustive.

Specific Comments

3. Housing

3.1. Access to affordable housing is consistently identified as an area of disadvantage for the Armed Forces community. The nature of service life can require personnel and their families to move home frequently with the result that many will opt to reside in service provided accommodation. When leaving the Armed Forces and transitioning into civilian life, personnel face difficulties in finding a new home. In London, with the ever increasing cost of housing, this problem is further magnified.

3.2. Guidance already exists which aims to apply the Armed Forces Covenant to local authority managed housing and reduce the disadvantage applicants from the Armed Forces Community face. Statutory guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2012 states:

Authorities are also strongly encouraged to take into account the needs of all serving or former Service personnel when framing their allocation schemes, and to give sympathetic consideration to the housing needs of family members of serving or former Service personnel who may themselves have been disadvantaged by the requirements of military service and, in particular, the need to move from base to base. This would be in line with terms of the Government's Armed Forces Covenant published in May 2011.⁴

3.3. Local authorities are already required by statute to make a number of extra provisions for the Armed Forces Community when members apply for help with

² Ministry of Defence, [Location of UK regular service and civilian personnel quarterly statistics: 2016](#)

³ Ministry of Defence, [Location of armed forces pension and compensation recipients](#)

⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012, [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#) page 22, paragraph 4.24

affordable housing. These are detailed in full in guidance from the DCLG.⁵ The Mayor of London sits in a position to ensure that these policies are applied in full by all the London Boroughs and encourage innovative new methods of redressing disadvantage faced by this community.

4. Jobs and Skills

- 4.1. Research undertaken by the Legion shows that working age veterans in the UK are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their civilian contemporaries despite an ever growing marketplace of employment support and opportunities.⁶
- 4.2. The Legion published a report titled 'Deployment to Employment' in September 2016⁷ examining the employment rates of veterans in more detail, the barriers veterans may face in the civilian jobs market and the rationale behind closing the employment gap. The Mayor may wish to take on board the recommendations to ensure that the Armed Forces community is included in plans to help Londoners secure good jobs and develop their skills.

5. Mental Health

- 5.1. Research evidence indicates that the most common mental health problems in the UK Armed Forces community are depression and anxiety⁸. The Royal British Legion's research has found that working-age veterans are twice as likely as the general population to report depression⁹. Specific groups within the Armed Forces community may be at an increased risk of mental health problems such as those with combat experience, medics, early service leavers and Reservists. Ex-service personnel can also find it difficult adjusting back to civilian life and may need support dealing with the stress this transition can cause.
- 5.2. Veterans with service-related mental health problems may have specific and complex issues that are not always best met by mainstream NHS Services. It is therefore vital that specialist support is available and can be accessed in a timely manner.
- 5.3. The Mayor should ensure that such support is available and that it can also be provided to spouses and partners of Armed Forces families who have experienced deployment or who are caring for a partner with a mental health problem.

⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, (2012), [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)

⁶ The Royal British Legion, [A UK Household Survey of the ex-Service community](#), (2014), p.64

⁷ The Royal British Legion, [Deployment to Employment](#), (2016)

⁸ Fear NT, Jones M, Murphy D, Hull L, Iversen AC, Coker B, et al. What are the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of the UK armed forces? A cohort study. *The Lancet*. 2010;375(9728):1783-97.

⁹ The Royal British Legion, *A UK Household Survey of the ex-Service Community*, (2014), p.39

6. Public Sector Staff Awareness

- 6.1. Recent research has highlighted that more needs to be done to upskill frontline staff in Local Authorities with regard to the Armed Forces Covenant. Over a third of all councils in Wales, England and Scotland have no mechanism in place for briefing staff on the Armed Forces Covenant (39%). Within the Armed Forces community only 4.5% felt that all councils had a good understanding of their needs.¹⁰ The Legion recommends that the Mayor reviews staff training processes to ensure that all relevant public sector staff across London are aware of the policies specific to the Armed Forces community.

7. Reservists and Families

- 7.1. The Armed Forces Covenant outlines the promise from the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, do not suffer disadvantage as a result of service and that special treatment may be appropriate for those who have given the most. This community refers not just to serving personnel or veterans who have been in the Regular forces, but also to Reservists and Armed Forces family members. These people can face many of the same disadvantages as Regular serving personnel and the veteran community. It is vital that the contribution of Reservists and families in London is recognised across the region and that the Mayor take into consideration the challenges they face.

For further information or clarifications, please contact Bruce Holborn, Local Campaigns Officer, Royal British Legion, on 020 3053 7006 or bholborn@britishlegion.org.uk

December 2016

¹⁰ Shared intelligence, LGA, Forces in Mind Trust, [Our Community – Our Covenant – Improving the delivery of local Covenant pledges](#), September 2016.