

News story: First ever UK-wide veterans strategy launched

Produced jointly between the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments, and including the Northern Ireland Office, the 'Strategy for our Veterans' outlines a new vision and principles to support those who served, as well as their families, in every aspect of their lives once they have hung up their uniform. Having looked back 100 years to the Armistice, this vision and its supporting principles are intended to ensure current and future veterans, and their families, can look forward to the next 100 years confident in the nation's support.

The strategy identifies six key areas where support is most needed over the next ten years: community and relationships, employment and skills, health and wellbeing, finance and debt, housing, and contact with the law. It assesses the barriers and opportunities in these areas to providing support to each veteran, including improved collaboration between organisations, better co-ordination of services and more robust data on the veteran community.

It will be published alongside a consultation paper that seeks views on how best to champion and deliver the needs of the ex-service community. This UK Government Consultation informs how the strategy could be implemented across the UK, except for devolved matters in Scotland and Wales. Open to everyone, including charities, employers, academics, service providers, local authorities and the veteran community, the UK consultation will ultimately inform action planning by providers of public services to support the ex-service community. The Scottish and Welsh Governments will engage separately on devolved issues such as housing and healthcare.

As part of the package of support for veterans, the Veterans' Gateway's 24/7 helpline will trial a new outreach service where it will proactively call those who have served, to check in on their wellbeing and remind them of where support can be found.

As a first step in better understanding the profiles and needs of veterans, a new question is being considered for addition to the 2021 Census in England and Wales, and in Scotland, that will allow ex-service personnel to declare their service. The move will help authorities develop a better understanding of where veterans live and work so the right level of support can be provided.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

While the vast majority of veterans thrive in civilian life, we have a responsibility to ensure that any who do struggle as a result of their service – whether finding a job, getting on the property ladder or with mental health issues – get the support they

need.

The 'Strategy for our Veterans' is a crucial step in our cross-government efforts to support those who have protected us. By harnessing the combined reach of the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments and co-ordinating services across charities, local authorities and businesses, we will ensure no-one is left behind.

As part of the strategy, the UK Government has also committed to understanding and improving how veterans are viewed by society. New research by YouGov, commissioned by the MOD and the Forces in Mind Trust and published today, shows that while the public believes those who have served embody many positive characteristics – such as loyalty and self-discipline – common misconceptions that military veterans are more likely to be institutionalised or suffer from mental health issues remain.

Today's strategy builds on the huge package of cross-government support already available to ex-service personnel to help them and their families transition to civilian life.

Transition to civilian life

- For up to two years before and after leaving service, personnel can access the Career Transition Partnership, which offers one to one guidance and training to those exploring new careers after leaving the military.
- This year, the MOD will launch the new Defence Transition Service – an extra layer of care that will identify and support those most vulnerable as they leave service.
- The Veterans' Gateway was launched in 2017 and acts as the first port of call for ex-service personnel and their families. The MOD has announced that the Gateway's 24/7 helpline will trial a new outreach service where it will proactively call those who have served, to check in on their wellbeing and remind them of where support can be found.

Mental health

- This year, the UK Government has doubled its funding of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, committing a further £10 million to support veterans who may be struggling with their mental health.
- A specialist Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund has been established to distribute this money, which will provide cash for projects that improve veterans' wellbeing through activities which have been proven to significantly benefit the mental health of individuals.
- Since 2010, the UK Government has also provided an additional £22.5m to the NHS in England to support the mental and physical health needs of both military personnel and veterans, with a further £9m since 2017 to set up the new Transition, Intervention and Liaison Services (TILS), which provides community based support for those personnel approaching discharge.
- In the Budget, the Chancellor announced the UK Government is investing

at least £2 billion extra a year in our mental health services by 2023/24, with new mental health crisis centres, support in every major A+E unit in the country and more mental health ambulances.

- NHS England last week confirmed that every part of the country now has dedicated mental health services up and running for veterans, and announced the first 25 hospitals to become 'Veteran Aware', delivering specialist healthcare support to those who have served.
- The first cross-government strategy to tackle loneliness will allow all GPs in England to refer patients suffering with loneliness to community activities and voluntary services by 2023. This builds on the £20 million dedicated to helping charities and community groups to expand programmes that bring people together.
- Veterans in England, Scotland and Wales benefit from priority access to NHS secondary care for service attributable conditions.

Housing and finance

- All veterans have access to housing and financial guidance through the Career Transition Partnership, which ensures they are given the skills to remain self-sufficient in civilian society.
- The UK Government has committed to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it altogether by 2027, as part of the Rough Sleeping Strategy launched this year.
- The MOD will continue to engage with a wide variety of agencies who assist in homelessness and rough sleeping for veterans.

Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell said:

At a time of year when people of the UK have united to commemorate the end of World War One it is fitting that all four nations are working together to ensure our military veterans – many of who are from Scotland – are properly looked after.

This strategy is an important step towards making sure that the men and women who've selflessly served the UK and put their lives on the line for us have the best possible quality of life for them and their families.

Veterans Minister, Scotland, Graeme Dey said:

This UK-wide strategy for our veterans recognises our commitment to supporting our large and diverse veterans community, and making sure those leaving our Armed Forces receive the services and support they need to readjust to civilian life.

The strategy will help us build on the support already available to the veterans community in Scotland, across key areas like housing, healthcare and employment. We will consult with organisations across the public, private and third sectors, and with the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, over the coming months to help shape how we

respond to veterans' changing needs.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The outpouring of gratitude that we saw right across Wales on Remembrance Sunday underlines just how proud Welsh people are of our forces and the sacrifices they and their families make to keep Britain safe. It is a community that deserves our steadfast support – particularly when the time comes to leave the military and to start afresh in civilian life.

Alun Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Wales, said,

This time of the year serves as a poignant reminder of those who fought bravely in previous conflicts to preserve our way of life. Through the collaborative approach of the Armed Forces Expert Group we have made tremendous progress in Wales delivering appropriate services and support for our Armed Forces community and this new Veterans Strategy confirms our joint commitment to achieving the best outcome possible for our veterans, one that will make a real difference to their lives.

The Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said:

Our country owes a massive debt of gratitude to the brave men and women of the Armed Forces who put their lives on the line every single day to defend our way of life. We will always salute their bravery, professionalism and, of course, sacrifice. Nowhere has this been more evident in recent decades than in Northern Ireland where, without the contribution of the Armed Forces and the police, there would have been no peace process.

It is largely through their efforts that the future of Northern Ireland will only ever be decided by democracy and consent and we must never forget that. I am particularly pleased, therefore, that this Government has put in place a strategy to that our brave veterans are not left behind and that everybody who served their country gets the support they need when they leave the Armed Forces.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

Each member of our armed forces is an asset to society, leaving the military with a fantastic range of transferrable skills.

The new study by YouGov shows how valued our veterans are, but that more can be done to counter some of the misperceptions that exist around the impact of military service.

So we're stepping up our efforts across Government to make the case for veterans, working closely with businesses and the charity sector.