

News story: Defence Secretary expands Army reserve numbers in Northern Ireland

Updated: update

The stepped up commitment underlines the military's strong ties with Northern Ireland, which currently hosts around 2000 reserves and nearly 2000 regular personnel.

Mr Williamson made the announcement while visiting Northern Ireland based reservists from 152 (North Irish) Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps and 2nd Battalion, the Royal Irish Regiment.

During the visit he also received an update on defence activities in Northern Ireland, including from 38 (Irish) Brigade, and met personnel helping keep the community safe by delivering niche explosive ordnance disposal and search support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

189 new reserve posts will be created, an increase of 9%, and will take overall Army reserve posts to 2100 by the end of the year.



Mr Williamson receives an update on defence activities in Northern Ireland from soldiers from 38 (Irish) Brigade.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our reserves programme is immensely popular in Northern Ireland, with more than twice as many people from Northern Ireland volunteering compared to the national average.

So I'm delighted to increase the Army's reserve numbers in Northern Ireland, underlining the military's commitment to the entire United Kingdom.

All three services have a presence in Northern Ireland, with reserve recruitment proving to be particularly popular. More than twice as many people from Northern Ireland volunteer for the reserves compared to the national average. As well as the 1850 Army reservists, there are 110 Royal Navy and Royal Marine reserves and 130 Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel. The popularity of the reserves programme in Northern Ireland is underlined by the fact that 502 Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadron, which was only founded in 2012, has grown rapidly to a strength of 130.

Northern Ireland also hosts 75 cadet units, the majority of which are Army Cadets. Three schools have also recently gain approval for combined cadet forces under the Government's Cadet Expansion Programme. A report by Northampton University last year found that cadet units increase social mobility and help children from disadvantaged backgrounds reach their potential. Cadet units in Northern Ireland have representation from children from across the community.

The Armed Forces Covenant is also being delivered across Northern Ireland and Mr Williamson received an update on the newly-formed Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (NI VSO). The NI VSO acts on behalf of a group of service charities as a single point of contact to provide services for veterans who feel unable to access public bodies or service charities.

The MOD has also allocated £300,000 over five years to improve the capacity and capability of Local Authorities and other service providers in Northern Ireland to apply for Covenant Funding. £600,000 from the LIBOR Veterans Fund has also been allocated to the Somme Nursing Home in Belfast.

News story: Cafcass new board members appointment

The Secretary of State today (23 May 2018) announced the appointments of Sally Cheshire, Catherine Doran and Mandy Jones as the new board members of Cafcass.

Cafcass was created under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The body safeguards and promotes the welfare of children involved in family court proceedings

The appointments are for a period of 3 years from 14 May 2018 to 13 May 2021.

Sally Cheshire CBE is Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the UK's regulator of the fertility sector and embryo research, and Chair of the North region for Health Education England. She is a Board member for Adoption Counts, one of the first regional adoption agencies in England and she is also an independent member of adoption panels in the North West.

Catherine Doran is a Non-Executive Director of the Disclosure and Barring Service, she also a Trustee and Board Member of the Over The Wall Charity which provides camps for children and young people who have life threatening illnesses.

Mandy Jones has in excess of 25 years experience working in the Civil Service in a number of high profile senior roles. She led a number of major organisational change programmes working nationally and internationally within the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and for the Cabinet Office.

These appointments have been conducted in accordance with the Cabinet Office Governance Code on Public Appointments.

They have declared no political activity

Press release: Domestic abuse sentence increased after Solicitor General's referral

A Bristol man who beat his partner because he thought she was cheating on him has today had his sentence increased after the Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, referred it for being too low.

James Llewellyn, 27, beat his victim with numerous punches to the head and body, and knee strikes to the face. She suffered a fractured jaw which required the insertion of metal plates that she will have for life, a suspected broken nose and eye socket, and severe bruising to the rest of her face.

Llewellyn was originally sentenced at Bristol Crown Court in March, where he received 5 years 4 months' imprisonment. Today, after the Solicitor General's reference, the Court of Appeal increased his sentence to 7 years 6 months.

Commenting on the sentence increase, the Solicitor General said:

“Domestic abuse is a grave crime, and Llewellyn did lasting physical and psychological damage to his victim. I am pleased that the Court of Appeal has today agreed to increase his sentence, and hope that this brings his victim some comfort.”

News story: Suspension of Marketing Authorisations

Updated: Additional clarification note

The marketing authorisation holders Bio-Tech Solutions Ltd and Mr H.I. & Mrs S.J. Moulds have failed to comply with an improvement notice relating to an inspection of their pharmacovigilance system. They do not have adequate personnel, systems and facilities in place to meet their regulatory requirements for pharmacovigilance.

Veterinary pharmacovigilance is the on-going monitoring of the safety and efficacy of medicines.

The following marketing authorisations have therefore been suspended:

- Johnson’s 4Fleas Powder for Cats and Dogs 1.05% w/w Cutaneous Powder (Vm 20889/4002), Bio-Tech Solutions Ltd
- Armitage Pet Care Flea and Tick Drop for Dogs 702 mg Spot-on Solution (Vm 20205/4003), Mr H.I. Moulds & Mrs S.J. Moulds
- Easi-drop Flea and Tick Drop for Dogs 742 mg Cutaneous Solution (Vm 20205/4000), Mr H.I. Moulds & Mrs S.J. Moulds

Note: These suspensions are not due to any compliance failures by the distributors of the products: Johnson’s, Armitage or Hyperdrug; or any products for which they are marketing authorisation holder.

Speech: Matt Hancock speaking at the Association of Chief Executives

Conference

Everybody in this room gets out of bed and goes to work to improve the lives of our citizens, the citizens of the UK and in some case those across the world.

And our task is to do that to the very best of our ability. And you can't do anything to the very best of your ability unless you use the very best technology that is available.

And the message that I wanted to give today is the vital importance of renewing that effort to double down on the use of digital technology and in particular data.

We have been talking about digital transformation for some time. We have made progress in certain areas, but the speed at which opportunities are advancing is faster than the speed at which we are adopting them.

So we need to, as the session after this will put it, 'do more for less', and take the enhanced opportunity to deliver improved services for the people who rely on us.

Technology is of course at the heart of many public sector organisations now.

For all of us who believe in the power of technology and in the fundamental importance of public service, this is a very exciting time. And ultimately these two things are two sides of the same coin.

There's three areas that I wanted to touch on today. The first is the importance and value of embracing opportunities. The second is thinking much more about the use and power of data. And third is the importance of the ethical frameworks in which this all sits.

Embracing opportunities

Now, I am a great believer in embracing opportunities when they come to you.

I started life working in the tech sector, and then drove digital transformation in the Cabinet Office.

And now that I am Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, I can see the opportunities right across government.

And I also personally try to embrace them. For instance I introduced my own app.

Thus far we've only got 10,000 people on it, but I often say there are only two types of people in the world.

The people who are on the Matt Hancock app, and people who are not on the Matt Hancock app yet...

So the first thing I want to talk about is embracing these opportunities and in particular embracing them through the smart use of procurement. So we can save billions of pounds of taxpayers' money whilst also delivering better public services.

The magic of 'more for less' is now very very clear. It is possible, desirable and efficient to improve procurement practices and crucially culture, so we actively look for the very best way of delivering a service or tackling a problem.

Asking the question 'what is the user need?' and then putting the user need first can deliver enormous improvements.

Now as a central government, we've done this in a whole series of different areas. The first of course and most iconic was the gov.uk website, bringing together all of our different websites.

We can now do everything from registering a ferret to getting a divorce on gov.uk. So I challenge any arms length body to tell me that there is not a role for digital transformation if we can improve the service to our nation's ferret owners using digital transformation.

We need to ensure that procurement is simple and does not have burdensome requirements like the need for indemnities, or years of years of accounts, which simply stops the most innovative companies from applying.

And we need to use the innovative frameworks that are available to bring huge advances and improvements.

I was very excited that the Prime Minister this week talked in great detail and with great enthusiasm about the potential for artificial intelligence to transform cancer diagnosis in this country.

The analysis is that it can save over 20,000 lives every year. So we need to also look at what changes are going on outside these walls and think about how we can bring them inside by being open and enthusiastic.

Using the power of data

This leads me onto my second point; the power of data.

The development of AI relies on the underpinning of data and getting the data architecture right for every organisation is so important.

It's important for two reasons; firstly and rather prosaically and mundanely it's important to make sure we fit within the rules.

And you may have heard a obscure EU law coming into force ... Someone might have sent you an email about it.

But I hope that the GDPR rules will be a forcing mechanism to make people stop and think "Is my data being held in the right sort of way" and "Is my data architecture good enough?".

Because ultimately the innovative use of data and the protection of people's privacy is not a trade off.

Because a good structure for how you hold and secure your data can lead to both the more innovative use of data and the use of some of the most cutting-edge machine learning and AI techniques, as well as better privacy and better services for citizens.

So I think we need to be ready to practise what we preach on GDPR, not just to avoid the glare of the Information Commissioner. But because by using our data better we can improve people's lives and there are legions of examples of how this is being done well.

Real time open transport data from TFL has allowed us to know how quickly it'll take to get from x to y.

The Environment Agency's LiDAR programme uses 3D maps and landscapes to model flood risk.

And the Border Force's analytics programme uses flight information to assess the risk of modern slavery.

There are a whole series of examples across the whole public service landscape.

My favourite is a fire service using data from the Food Standards Agency to predict the risk of fire, an absolutely brilliant cross-cutting use of data.

And the reason they could work it out was that premises with low food hygiene ratings have a strong correlation with a poor fire safety record.

So by using this data they were able to improve fire safety and food standards at the same time.

We want to see the innovative use of data and the use of open data wherever possible.

So not data published through PDFs, thank you very much, but through APIs instead.

Developing strong ethical frameworks

The third point is the importance of doing this work within a strong ethical framework.

Our overriding approach is to bring liberal values to the use of new technology and the Internet. Making sure we support its great freedoms, new technology and innovation, but not the freedom to harm others.

So getting the ethics right, particularly in the delivery of public services, is mission critical.

We're setting up the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, an independent

advisory body.

This has a remit to advise government and regulators on the measures we need to ensure ethical safe and innovative uses of data, including AI and other emerging technologies.

And my fear is that the pace of technology is changing so fast, that too often it's outstripped by our ability to develop codes and standards.

So the Centre will recommend changes in policy, setting standards which can come become industry norms in the public and the private sector. I think it's very exciting.

We've also refreshed the data science ethical framework, which is about how to maximise the value of data to the UK whilst also retaining that public confidence.

So making sure we use these new technologies in ethical ways is important.

It's not a trade off, because if we think carefully about how to use the data ethically we'll also be better at innovating in the use of that data.

Conclusion

We've made good progress. I was absolutely thrilled that we've recently been recognised as a world leader in digital government.

It is vital to deliver the best possible services to the public and I would challenge anyone to say their organisation can't benefit from this sort of improvement.

It requires the technology, being open to the world and crucially it requires a culture that embraces change.

And I urge you to look to your own organisations to see what you can do to use this technology and feel the benefits.

Thank you very much.