

UK ARMED FORCES FAMILIES' STRATEGY 2016-2020

Foreword

I am delighted to publish the first UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy which sets out our approach to Service families and provides guidance for MOD policy officials.

The recent Strategic Defence and Security Review rightly placed the recruitment and retention of our people as a priority for Defence. Britain's military competitive advantage is due to the professionalism and skills of our people, both Regulars and Reserves. At times of financial constraint, when there are increasing demands on our resources, we must make the most of the talents of all who work for us. But our personnel can only fully deliver their Defence task if they have the support of their families as well as the confidence that their loved ones will be able to access the right support when required. So doing more to listen, talk to and empower those families is vital if we are to continue attracting and retaining capable and motivated Service personnel.

We already expect a great deal from our military families. Our personnel are expected to provide an unlimited liability; this means that they might face serious injury or death during their service to the Nation. They will periodically be required to deploy on operations, sometimes at very short notice, or for protracted periods, or having only recently returned from a previous separation – and sometimes all three. There is often little or no choice for the Service person or their families in these separations. Their military career will also necessitate directed relocation within the United Kingdom or overseas. There are also the day-to-day realities of Service life, working long or unsociable hours with the associated impact that this can have on the family, such as childcare responsibilities. All of this places considerable additional pressure on Armed Forces' families; this combination of pressures is not faced in almost any other profession. So I remain indebted to Service families for their continued contribution to Defence. I am determined to do everything to make sure they are given the support and recognition they deserve.

Lt Gen Andrew Gregory, Chief of Defence People

January 2016

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Strategy is to provide direction to officials who are responsible for policy development in the areas that make up the 'offer' to the Service family. It will act as the starting point for the supporting Action Plan, to be delivered by Spring, which will operationalise the Strategy's Vision and deliver associated change. The Action Plan will be created in consultation with the single Services and key stakeholders, and a Communications Plan will notify the intent and activity to Service families.

2. Context

Whilst the needs of the Armed Forces must necessarily come first, we recognise and value the essential contribution that Service families make to Defence. Some families will experience little impact on family life as a result of their association with the Armed Forces, and will be able to take advantage of the benefits that Service life can offer. Others will experience the challenges associated with relocation and separation. Those who are most unfortunate may experience injury, illness or bereavement. The majority of Service families will operate somewhere in the middle of these experiences, depending on the Service

person's career or their family's circumstances. The offer to Service families as a result must be both accessible and flexible in order to meet these changing circumstances.

The Service 'family' comprises not only those we recognise in terms of entitlement, but those we need to engage and communicate with. There are also those who, at times, will need additional support - and we have a role in helping them access it. Accordingly, the definition of family will be different for different purposes – all-encompassing when it comes to communications and rightly narrower in definition when it comes to defined benefits.

3. Vision

Resilient, empowered, thriving Service families, who are treated fairly, have increased choice, and who are valued by the Nation.

4. Strategic Intent

The intent is to move those families who may feel that they are poorly treated and, as a result, underrepresented, towards an end state where they feel informed and engaged in Service life. In the first instance, this will be achieved by removing disadvantage (perceived or actual), but subsequently by creating and supporting choice in the system. This will allow families to make informed decisions that meet their individual needs, by encouraging fair treatment on a par with their civilian counterparts, empowering them with information so they know how and where to access support, and providing specialist support to those most in need, in order that they are able to thrive and take advantage of the benefits that Service life can offer. By providing a credible and realistic offer to the family, Defence will be better placed to attract, recruit and retain capable and motivated Service personnel who are valued by the Nation. Improved communication will be fundamental to the success of delivering this Strategy. This will be achieved by focusing on the following principles;

5. Principles

- **Fairness.** The commitments made in the Armed Forces Covenant to remove disadvantage caused by Service life and ensure that Service families face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- **Choice.** Providing greater choice (where possible) for the family so that they are able to make informed decisions based on what best meets their needs, acknowledging that choices change as needs change.
- **Empowerment.** Empowering families by giving them the appropriate tools and information so that they know how, where and when to access information and support if they need it.
- **Resilience.** We will engender resilience in families, supporting self-determination and independence as well as preparing them for their eventual transition out of Service life. To help families thrive we must work in partnership with our stakeholders to support families, especially those most in need.

6. Delivering the Strategy

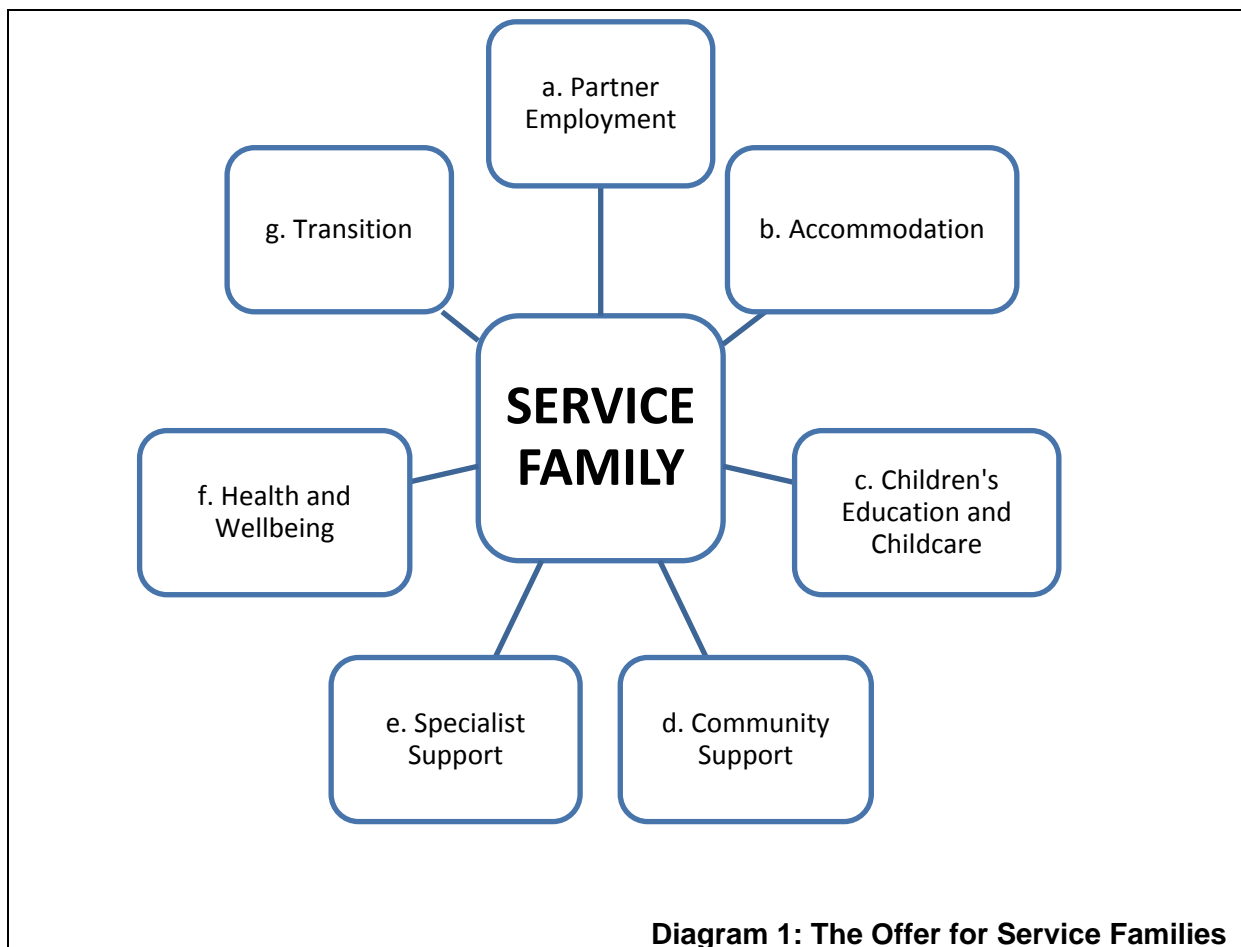
The initial focus of the Strategy will be communication in order to build trust and confidence, leading to informed choice, empowerment and, where needed, support. Subsequently, the Action Plan will need to:

- Recognise the ongoing communication challenge Defence has with Service families by exploring innovative ways to better communicate with our families, which could include options for social media and the development of digital communications in addition to more traditional ways of communicating.

- Continue to strengthen the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant principles and commitments by focusing on the areas of greatest disadvantage.
- Noting the enduring fiscal challenges facing Defence it is important that resources are targeted to where the greatest needs exist and to avoid duplication of effort.
- Develop a robust and sound evidence base on which to focus the Action Plan; this might include:
 - A bid for bespoke research on the changing nature of families, e.g. what expectations does the family have in terms of welfare support? What role does the family play in increasing recruitment and retention?
 - Amending/adding questions in the Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS).
 - Drawing on existing relevant and valid research.
- Work in partnership with the charitable sector, who bring specialist skills and experience to ensure our families are able to access the support they need.
- Ensure the principles of the *Family Test* are considered throughout the action planning process and policy development. (The *Family Test* refers to Government-issued guidance for policy makers in considering how policy and legislation can support strong and stable families).

7. Strategic Objectives

The current 'offer' to the Service family is made up of a number of areas, seven of which are priorities for the Strategy. The Action Plan will detail the activity that will take place within each of these areas over the next 12-18 months.



a. Partner Employment

Evidence suggests that one of the key 'push' factors for Service personnel deciding to leave the Services is the difficulty experienced by their partner in finding employment. In line with our commitment to recruit and retain capable and motivated Service personnel, we *will work to ensure partners are able to draw on the appropriate and necessary support* (which might include training) *to find employment, upskill or become self-employed.*

b. Accommodation

A key priority for Defence is to have an attractive and modern accommodation offer that supports Service personnel and their families and is affordable to Defence. Through CAAS (Combined Accommodation Assessment System), Service families should *pay a fair amount for quality accommodation.* Defence is developing a new accommodation model which seeks to *provide more choice, support more personnel to live in the house they choose, in the place they choose, and with the people they choose and meet their aspirations for home ownership.*

c. Children's Education and Childcare

Service children may experience disadvantage through both long or regular periods of separation from their Service parent or through frequent changes of school and curriculum during key stages of education. Although developments in flexible working may see improvements in work/life balance for Service personnel, for some children, some separation or mobility is inevitable and unavoidable. Our efforts will be directed at ensuring the *disruption to a child's education is minimised as far as possible given the reality of Service life.*

The issues surrounding Childcare such as availability, affordability and accessibility are well known and apply to both Service families and the general population. *Consideration will be given as to what form any MOD assistance should take in order to mitigate disadvantage to Service families.*

d. Community Support

Some Service families will have little call on the welfare services provided by Defence or the charitable sector, but all must have the information to *be able to access the community support services that are available to families.*

e. Specialist Support

For those Service families who experience challenging times through, for example bereavement, domestic abuse, debt or substance misuse, specialist interventions might be necessary. It is essential that families in this position are able to *access appropriate specialist support from an appropriate provider.*

f. Health and Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of Service personnel is imperative if we are to have physically and mentally robust Armed Forces. The health of the family contributes to this, and we must ensure that the health needs of all families are addressed, including those of families serving overseas where bespoke arrangements are in place. *Families can also benefit more widely by supporting their Service person in adopting a healthy lifestyle for the whole family.*

g. Transition

Both the Service person and their family transition from Service to civilian life, and it is in everyone's interests that this process is as successful as possible. For this to happen, *the family needs to understand and engage in the transition process from the outset.*

8. Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders are described below:

- a. **Service Families** are essential in the successful delivery of this Strategy. Feedback via the Families Federations, MOD surveys, tri-Service HIVES and unit welfare staff on their experience of the offer is important in order to improve areas of inconsistency.
- b. **Chief of Defence People** as Defence Authority for People, is responsible for setting the conditions to enable the recruitment and retention of Service personnel. These conditions constitute the 'offer' to Service personnel which must include a credible and realistic proposition that considers the needs of their families. CDP has overall responsibility for operationalising the Strategy via an Action Plan and for delivering change or assuring it is occurring as appropriate.
- c. **Single Services** are responsible for exercising Full Command of their Service personnel and for the welfare and morale of all personnel employed within their command. They are ultimately responsible for the recruitment and retention of personnel in each Service. The single Services and Command TLBs are responsible for engaging with MOD policy staffs and the Families Federations.
- d. **Families Federations** are the independent organisations responsible for articulating the views and concerns of the families they represent, for communicating this to the single Services, MOD and other Government Departments and, equally for supporting the communication of policy changes to Service families.
- e. **Charities and other partners** play a crucial role in supporting the provision of additional specialist support and advice to Service families. They also have extensive experience and Defence should continue to seek opportunities to work in partnership with these organisations, sharing good practice and helping to identify gaps in provision.
- f. **Government Departments, Local Authorities, Arm's Length Bodies and other public sector partners** are essential in delivering the support that Service personnel and families require. Defence will continue to work in partnership with other public sector organisations.

9. Financial Resources

Following the production of the Action Plan, we will be able to make more detailed financial assessments to deliver on the Strategy. In terms of high level funding we have:

- Armed Forces Covenant funding of up to £4M over two years (on an application basis) to support 'Families in Stress' [TBA].
- Funding to develop an Armed Forces Covenant microsite which will have an area particularly targeted towards families.
- Funding within single Services/Command TLBs which can be targeted on the basis of an agreed Action Plan.

10. Stakeholder Audience

The Strategy and Action Plan require engagement with or input from the following stakeholders:

- **Defence**
 - MOD Policy Officials (e.g. expertise from Defence teams including Armed Forces Covenant, New Employment Model, New Offer, Defence Relationship Management Organisation)
 - Service Personnel and their families (incl. recently bereaved, Reservists, Foreign and Commonwealth, single serving parents and dual-serving parents)
 - Defence Opinion Leaders
 - Defence Ministers
 - Single Services and Command TLBs
 - Single Service HIVES
 - Families Federations

- **Government**
 - Other Government Departments (and Arm's Length Bodies, such as the NHS, Public Health England)
 - Local Authorities
 - Devolved Administrations
 - Covenant Reference Group (CRG)

- **The Nation**
 - Potential recruits
 - Employers
 - The public
 - Service charities
 - Commercial organisations
 - Communities and individuals
 - The media and communicators
 - Academia
 - Third sector and charitable organisations

11. Governance

The Strategy is a sub-Strategy of the Defence People Strategy (DPS) and an Action Plan will sit underneath the Strategy and will detail a work plan, set against resources, action owners, metrics, timescales and reporting arrangements. The Action Plan will have a 12-18 month outlook with the intention of reporting on progress at the next MOD Welfare Conference in 2017. Progress against the Action Plan will be reported on a quarterly basis. The Families' Strategy lead will be responsible for holding officials to account for delivering on the Action Plan. Opportunities should be taken to use existing working groups and meetings to review progress.