



Ministry
of Defence

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2015



Key Facts



A message from the Defence Secretary

This Government is committed to supporting its Armed Forces. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to ensure that Serving personnel, Veterans and their families are treated fairly. Each year we publish an Annual Report to Parliament on the actions we have taken to uphold the commitments in the Covenant. I appreciate that not everybody wants, or needs to read the full report. Therefore, the key changes are highlighted in this document.

We know that we need to do more. We understand that our Serving personnel, Veterans and their families should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and in the society that they serve with their lives. The Government recognises that duty, and we will continue to make the changes that are necessary. I would like to personally thank our Service personnel past and present for what they have done and what they continue to do.

Michael Fuller

Healthcare

What have we done?

- Embedded the principles of the Covenant into the **NHS constitution** in England. This will ensure that the Armed Forces Community (families and Veterans) are not disadvantaged in accessing health services where they live.
- Public Health England has launched the **Military pathway guidance for health professionals**, which aims to support Service families and recognise the specific needs which may arise particularly around mental health and wellbeing.
- Launched a **£500K** research programme to improve detection and **treatment of Noise Induced Hearing Loss** (NIHL) amongst Service personnel.
- Allocated **£2M** to set up a pilot **NHS Specialist Rehabilitation Unit in Stanmore** to provide improved access to orthopaedic care in England for regular and Reservist personnel and Veterans.



- Updated the **Armed Forces Community health pages** on the NHS choices website to help Armed Forces families manage their health needs.
- Allocated **£5M** to investigate the **psychological impact of battlefield injuries** and severe battlefield trauma and improve treatment of those affected.

Education

What have we done?

- Allocated funding from a **£20M** budget to **improve childcare facilities for Service families** at 40 locations in the UK and Cyprus.
- Amended the **Schools Admission Code** in England, to prioritise Service children in the admissions process. Service families can also now apply for, and be allocated a place before they move into the area.
- Allocated around **£21M** in **Service Pupil Premium** payments this year to support the pastoral needs for almost **70,000** Service pupils in state schools in England.
- Allocated **£6M** in grants to **154 applicants** for **Education Support Funding** in 2015 to help UK state schools mitigate and manage issues caused by exceptional mobility and deployment. Over **24,500** children from Service families have benefitted from this.

- Written to headteachers to confirm arrangements for **term time absences** where parents are returning from or going on deployments.



- Briefed all **local authorities in England and all Regional Schools Commissioners** to highlight the importance of the Covenant and set out specific measures aimed at supporting Service pupils, including advice and signposting on term time absence.
- Worked with schools and local authorities, arranging reciprocal visits and briefs to ensure a smooth transition back into UK schools for **children rebasing from Germany**. During 2015, **1,200** children from Service families have successfully transitioned back to the UK.
- Funded the **Military Ethos Alternative Provision programme**, which employs over 300 Veterans, including Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS). This programme aims to help the most disengaged young people in some of the toughest parts of the country to do better at school.

Accommodation

What have we done?

- Given **£85.5M** to help over **5,600** personnel to buy or improve their home through the **Forces Help to Buy scheme**. The Defence Secretary wants to double the number to 10,000 by Oct 16.



- We have not allocated **Service Family Accommodation (SFA)** below Standard 2 for Condition in the UK. The condition of the SFA estate has continued to improve, and over **99%** of UK properties are at the top two Standards for condition.
- Invested **£65M** to upgrade and improve **SFA properties in the UK**. **185 properties were upgraded** to the highest condition standard. They have been fully modernised throughout; and
- Made **lifestyle improvements** to a further **3,000 SFA properties** by installing new kitchens, bathrooms, double glazing and insulation. Following complaints last year we have addressed damp and mould problems in **2,000 properties**. We are also funding efficiency measures in 'hard to heat' SFA through external wall insulation.

- Reduced accommodation charges on SFA properties overseas by **20%** and waived their **Contributions In Lieu Of Council Tax** to MOD from April 16.
- Delivered nearly **2,000** new **Single Living Accommodation** (SLA) bed spaces through modernisation programmes.
- Introduced the **Tenancy Deposit Loan Scheme** to give Service personnel an advance of salary to fund the cost of a deposit if they want to rent a property privately.
- Launched the 'own your own home' website, which provides advice about accessing government funded affordable housing schemes including specific options for Service personnel: <https://www.ownyourhome.gov.uk/>

What else have we done?

For Reserves

- Made Reserves eligible for the new **Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2015** for non-mobilised service, based on paid attendance. This means that Reservists can now receive pension contributions for all Reserves activity.
- Introduced a **new post-nominal for all Reservists** who have served for 10 years or more. This recognises the tremendous and growing contribution Reserve forces make to our national security.
- Invested over **£14M** to improve **occupational health services** for Reservists; this is helping to bring healthcare provision for Reservists closer to what we provide for regular personnel.
- Provided access to the **Armed Forces Railcard**, offering Reservists and their families **1/3 off rail fares**.



For Families

- Launched a two year **Spouse Employment Support Trial**.
- Agreed that spouses and adult children returning from overseas are now **exempt** from the three month residence requirement for claims for income-based Jobseeker's allowance.
- Agreed that Military spouses reaching State Pension age from 6 April 2016 will be able to apply for new **National Insurance credits** to cover periods from 1975 that they have spent accompanying their Service partner on postings outside the UK.
- Introduced an allowance to enable **Foreign and Commonwealth personnel** to **register a birth** as British at public expense. This applies to children born from 1 April 2015 on an accompanied overseas tour.
- Following feedback, started developing a new **UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy** to review and improve the support we provide to families. The new strategy will be launched by the end of the year.



For Veterans

- Launched a new **Career Transition Partnership** contract to support Service leavers translate their skills, experience and qualifications into a successful civilian career.



- Confirmed that funding for the nine **enhanced prosthetic centres** for Veterans will continue. All Devolved Administrations have committed to provide Veterans with Service attributable injuries with prosthetics equivalent to those provided to serving personnel.
- The Government has allocated **£10M** to the Royal British Legion to launch a **Veterans' hearing fund**; and
- a further **£3M** to help Veterans access **high specification wheelchairs**. Both will provide services and equipment not currently provided by the NHS in the area where they live.
- From April 2015 changes to **survivor benefits** became effective in both the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 75 and the War Pension scheme.

On Funding

- Since 2011 we have committed over £150M in Libor fines to help deliver Covenant commitments. Continued **funding hundreds of legacy projects** that support the Armed Forces Community.
- Launched a new **annual £10M Covenant fund** to support Covenant commitments.
- Launched a new **aged Veterans fund**, which has **£25M** available to it over 5 years. It will fund projects that support non-core health, wellbeing and social care needs for older Veterans.
- Allocated **£50M** to support **Cadet expansion**.

What else is everyone doing to help?

- More than 760 organisations have signed a **Corporate Covenant**, pledging specific support for the Armed Forces community such as help with transition from Service to civilian life through work placement opportunities, and training courses.
- Mobile phone providers Vodafone, EE, O2 and 3, will now allow both Service personnel and their families to put their contracts on hold when they are posted overseas.



- Key members of the **financial and commercial services sector** are working with the MOD to: make sure Service personnel have fairer access to a mortgage, insurance; and to improve their chances of building a strong credit history. Royal Mail is working with their customers to encourage the use of British Forces Post Office data.
- Every local authority in mainland GB and two in Northern Ireland have signed a **community Covenant**. We are working with them to help them deliver the support they have promised to the Armed Forces community.
- The **Veterans Employment Transition Support programme**. (VETS) is a partnership of leading companies and charities. It will support the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) in helping Service leavers find employment, and provide mentoring, training and advice to Veterans, regardless of when they left the Armed Forces.
- Launched a **credit union** service to help Service personnel access safe and affordable finance.

What are our targets for the coming year?

The full report includes the unedited comments of key Service Charities and the Service Families Federations. This helps to hold the Government to account and identify the areas where more needs to be done. key priorities for next year include:

- We will publish the first **UK Armed Forces Families' strategy** and our plan for making the commitments a reality.
- We will publish detailed **metrics** to provide an objective assessment of how the Covenant is being delivered.
- The DfE will provide **further opportunities through programmes**, such as the Troops to Teachers programme, which provides a worthwhile career path for Service leavers and enables schools to have a better insight into Service life.
- In May, we will review the changes made to the **Schools Admissions Code** and the **Special Educational Needs Code** to ensure that they are meeting the needs of Service families. We will make further changes if necessary.
- From April 2016, the MOD will move to the **Government's Decent Homes Standard** (DHS); no Service family will be allocated accommodation in the UK which does not meet the DHS.
- We will continue to ensure **the National Housing Prime (NHP) contract**, awarded to CarillionAmey meets contracted standards.
- We will work to get firm commitments from **the financial services sector** to support the Armed Forces community.

- The Department for Communities and Local Government, will work jointly with the MOD, Local Government Association and Devolved Administrations to take forward work **to review the effectiveness of the Community Covenant**, with a view to identifying and sharing best practice. The results will be published in March 2016.
- The MOD will work with the Families Federations to publish a detailed toolkit of information to explain the challenges our Armed Forces communities face and how **local authorities** can support them. We will publish guidance on the role of a local authority Armed Forces champion.
- We will run a trial on the concept of **adapting unpaid leave policy** to reduce an individual's liability for deployment during 2015-17.
- We will look at ways of **making it easier for Veterans to access the high levels of support available**. We will report on this further in next year's report.
- We will work with Families Federations and charities to **understand the needs of divorced spouses and separated civil partners**, to establish the scale of any problems, and how these can be reflected in the Covenant.
- Following reports of the **late delivery of postal vote forms** to personnel Serving overseas for the 2015 general election, we will review the process and identify where any changes are necessary next year.

Find out more

The full report includes contributions from the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments on the Covenant commitments they have delivered. You can also find out more about their work by visiting their websites. To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means to you visit: **<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/armed-forces-covenant>**

If you think you are not getting fair access to goods and services because you are a member of the Armed Forces we want to hear about it. Contact either your Service Families Federation or the MOD Covenant team by emailing:

Covenant-mailbox@mod.uk

You can find the NHS choices, Armed Forces Community healthcare pages here: **<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/Pages/Militaryhealthcare.aspx>**

To find out whether Forces Help to Buy could help you visit: **<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy>**

For online support with making informed financial decisions visit the moneyforce website: **<http://www.moneyforce.org.uk/>**

Other useful links

Veterans UK:

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

The Royal British Legion:

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

SSAFA:

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

The War Widows Association:

<http://www.warwidows.org.uk/>

The Confederation of Service Charities:

<https://www.cobseo.org.uk/>

The Navy Families Federation:

<http://nff.org.uk/>

The Army Families Federation:

<http://www.aff.org.uk/>

The RAF Families Federation:

<http://www.raf-ff.org.uk/>



In 2016 we are launching the new Armed Forces Covenant brand, with one set of creative principles. By having one brand identity we are better able to engage all of our audiences across multiple channels with confidence and consistency. This is vital because we need to convey unity of vision and commitment - delivering our promise on behalf of the nation.