

## Armed Forces Families Strategy – **What have we delivered in the first year?**

Lead Workstream/ Secondary Workstream/ <i>Living in our Shoes recommendation</i>	Achievement	Narrative
<b>All workstreams</b> <i>LioS rec 110</i>	<b>Launch of the Strategy</b>	<p>The launch of the Armed Forces Families Strategy was not simply the publication of a document. The strategy provides a crucial bedrock for policy making within Defence and brings both coherence and relevance to a range of projects identified from various sources all designed to ensure that families and ‘family life’ are supported in our Armed Forces.</p>
<b>All workstreams</b> <i>LioS rec 110</i>	<b>Adopting a robust approach to implementation.</b>	<p>Within the Families Strategy each workstream has nominated leader who has mapped out how the desired outcomes will be achieved, and evidenced, through the application of Theory of Change (ToC) methodology. ToC is a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, are expected to lead to a specific developmental change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence. Workstream leaders give a progress update three times a year and a consolidated report is provided to Ministers annually.</p>

<p><b>Family Life</b> Service Life <b>LioS rec 2</b></p>	<p><b>Engagement with Service Families regarding Eligibility &amp; Entitlement</b></p>	<p>In line with the Families Strategy vision of an Armed Forces community that is welcoming and attractive to families, we have sought to actively listen to the experiences of a range of Service families to understand their difficulties when it comes to understanding their entitlement to support. We will use this engagement to inform further work undertaken through the Strategy Action Plan and will continue to actively seek the input of Armed Forces Families to monitor the impact and perception of our policies and activities.</p>
<p><b>Family Life</b> Service Life <b>LioS rec 2</b></p>	<p><b>Outdated language</b> – a stock-take has taken place on policies predicated on relationship status. This has identified discrepancies and inconsistencies of approach, conflicting and outdated language</p>	<p>In line with our core ambition for the Armed Forces Families Strategy to represent modern families and to reflect the views of those families, we have acted on feedback received from direct service family engagement to review our policies for terminology that may now be considered to be 'outdated'. Whilst some of the uses of such terms must remain in place for legislative reasons, we are committed to removing terms that do not accurately reflect the dynamics of our Armed Forces community.</p>
<p><b>Family Life</b> Service Life/ Education/ Childcare/ Health and Wellbeing and Supporting Partners. <b>LioS rec 53, 55, 56</b></p>	<p><b>Launch of the Wraparound Childcare (WAC) scheme.</b> This provides funding toward the wraparound childcare costs for the children of eligible Service parents.</p>	<p>In September 2022, MOD implemented the full rollout of the WAC Scheme after successful pilots in different areas. The scheme provides funding toward the wraparound childcare costs of those eligible parents with a child aged 4 to 11. Funding is for up to 20 hours per week and for up to 39 weeks of the year during term time only. As at</p>

		February 2023 there were around 6500 children making use of the scheme.
<b>Family Life</b> Service Life and Family Home <i>LioS rec 2, 11, 14</i>	<b>Eligibility &amp; Entitlement (E&amp;E).</b> Changing Policy to widen entitlement to couples in informal relationships.	The Future Accommodation Model (FAM) pilot has trialed the expansion of accommodation allowance to all Service couples in informal relationships (i.e. those who are neither married nor in civil partnerships) at 3 sites around the UK. During this time Service personnel in informal relationships became able to apply for use of surplus housing elsewhere in UK Defence estate. The MOD has since committed to the permanent broadening of this entitlement within the UK Armed Forces Defence Accommodation Strategy.
<b>Family Life</b> Service Life/ Education/ Childcare and Health and Wellbeing <i>LioS rec 92, 93</i>	<b>Month of the Military Child (2022)</b>	In Apr 2022 the MOD participated in and part-hosted an event to celebrate the first UK celebration of 'The Month of the Military Child', in close partnership with the charity Never Such Innocence. This consisted of events and activities throughout April to celebrate Service children and the positive impact they have on their families and local communities. The MOD are pleased that after the success of this first occurrence, we will be celebrating this occasion annually going forwards. These future celebrations will build on the activities that ran this past year (including an art and poetry competition) to promote the voices of Service Children, bolster community spirit, and also help raise awareness for those outside of Defence.

<p><b>Family Life</b> Service Life and Health and Wellbeing <i>LioS rec 80, 84</i></p>	<p><b>Creating a domestic abuse ‘Survivor’s Network’ within Defence</b></p>	<p>In addition to the engagement that Defence continues to undertake when developing policies (such as our new Defence wide action plan on tackling domestic abuse, due for publication late 2023), Defence is also empowering survivors by supporting the formation of a survivor-run awareness network and community. This initiative will seek to bring together those who have been affected by domestic abuse within Defence in a secure community whilst also outwardly advocating for greater awareness and understanding of issues relating to domestic abuse.</p>
<p><b>Family Life</b> Service Life and Supporting Partners <i>LioS rec 51, 93, 94</i></p>	<p><b>Celebrating Forces Families Awards</b></p>	<p>Defence was able to support the inaugural Forces Families Awards that were designed to acknowledge and celebrate the resilience, the amazing projects families have undertaken, triumph over adversity and inspiring career paths taken whilst being part of the whole community. Recognition events such as this build on a theme of the Living in Our Shoes report that forms much of the Families Strategy intent.</p>
<p><b>Service Life</b> <i>LioS rec 85, 86, 87</i></p>	<p><b>Europe Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS)</b></p>	<p>European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) immigration rules amended to allow the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas to be treated as part of the European Economic Area (EEA) for Armed Forces families being assigned back to the UK.</p>
<p><b>Family Home</b> <i>LioS rec 11</i></p>	<p><b>Forces Help to Buy</b></p>	<p>Following a successful pilot period FHTB became an enduring policy in January 2023.</p>

		FHTB recognises the domestic challenges that Service personnel can face when pursuing a mobile career in the armed forces, and helps them and their families to establish a foothold on the housing ladder.
<b>Non-UK Families</b> <i>LioS rec 85, 86, 87</i>	<b>Non-UK Service Personnel and the Student Loan Company</b>	DfE have agreed that non-UK SP should be regarded as Settled for the purpose of funding from the Student Loan Company (SLC) and have instructed the SLC accordingly.
<b>Non-UK Families</b> <i>LioS rec 85, 86, 87</i>	<b>UK Immigration Visas</b>	MOD policy on allowances has been updated to allow the costs of UK immigration visas for non-UK Service Families to be claimed when they are serving overseas.
<b>Non-UK Families</b> <i>LioS rec 85, 86, 87</i>	<b>Life in the UK test.</b>	Reached agreement with the Home Office that that families of Armed Forces personnel can take the 'Life In The UK' test whilst they are in the UK and use this for any future indefinite leave to enter (ILE) applications (even if they are overseas when applying for ILE).
<b>Education</b> <i>LioS rec 25, 34</i>	<b>Changes to UCAS</b>	May 2022 saw the introduction of a Service child and a veteran 'flag' on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application form. Collaboration between the MOD, UCAS and the SCiP Alliance led to this welcomed addition, allowing universities and colleges to offer more

		bespoke advice and support to Service children and veterans applying to university or college
<b>Education</b> Childcare and Supporting Partners <i>LioS rec 90, 91</i>	<b>AF Families Fund (AF3) has been launched.</b> This annual £4M grant funding scheme is now available across the piece to support the delivery of the Strategy.	The MOD's Armed Forces Families Fund was launched in Sept 2022. The Fund is managed on behalf of the MOD by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund. In 2022/23 the fund approved applications focused on Service children's education, early years education and support to the partners of Service personnel.
<b>Education</b> Family Life/Service Life/ Childcare and Health and Wellbeing <i>LioS rec 35,39</i>	<b>SEND review Green Paper (Right Support, Right Place, Right Time)</b>	Following on from the MOD and MODLAP response to the DfE consultation regarding its SEND review Green Paper, MOD and MODLAP local authority partners have produced materials to support other English local authorities in meeting their Covenant duty of due regard. These include a guide to LA SEND teams and school-based SENCOs regarding the areas of practice to consider and mechanisms to employ to remain consistent with their new duties. These materials will be available in late Spring 2023.

<p><b>Health and Wellbeing</b> <i>LioS rec 64</i></p>	<p><b>E-Redbook</b></p>	<p>The eRedbook is a digital version of ‘the Redbook’; a physical book used by parents and health professionals to record immunisation data as well as other physical data that helps monitor development and progress or identify potential concerns. It enables military families to electronically access and store medical documents/information with the added benefit of simple transfer of this data for overseas deployment and helps Defence keep in-step with the NHS on the provision of electronic records. A short funding arrangement was agreed to ensure that the provider was able to keep delivering support to Service families whilst preparing a more comprehensive business case for a funding bid under our new AF3 funding line, ensuring a continuity of provision for Service Families.</p> <p>Through a successful bid under the AF3 (referenced above) our provider is now able to further develop the eRedbook functionality and reach in order to better support our families stationed and posted overseas.</p>
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## Armed Forces Families Strategy – What are we focusing on next?

Lead Workstream/ Secondary Workstream/ <i>Living in our Shoes</i> recommendation	Task	Narrative
All workstreams <i>LioS 93,94,95</i>	<b>The initiation of a project that will look at how Defence communicates with its families and how it enables feedback to be provided on policy that impacts them.</b>	Throughout the Living in our Shoes report which received input from families themselves we are told that our communication could be better. This project will identify how and when families want to be contacted and how they can feedback to policy makers. This will not be a quick win but will result in a product that enables better two way communication.
All workstreams <i>LioS rec 2</i>	<b>Outdated terminology</b>	There will be a removal from policy, wherever it is possible, of terminology such as dependent and legitimised child(ren). This recognizes that relationships now tend to be dual working and the word dependent implies a financial (or other) dependency on the other.
All workstreams <i>LioS Rec 93</i>	<b>Survey of UK Armed Forces Families overseas</b>	AFFS will undertake a survey of families overseas to gather evidence about what issues are important to them. The survey will cover all workstreams within the Families Strategy as well as Safeguarding. The information from this survey will help to inform the future prioritisation of work.



<p><b>Family Home</b> <i>LioS rec 5, 13</i></p>	<p><b>Delivery of a new project to address Internet connection needs</b></p>	<p>Access to a high performing, secure, reliable internet connection is essential to the lived experience of Defence families wherever they live. A new project has been launched to assess the needs of our estate, identify gaps and deliver better connectivity.</p> <p>This project is looking at Defence accommodation on and off base and will be working in partnership with other government departments and major internet service providers.</p>
<p><b>Education</b> <i>LioS rec 33,34</i></p>	<p><b>Children’s Education- Continued support provided to the Service Children’s Progression (SCiP) Alliance</b></p>	<p>SCiP ‘Fundlers’ Forum’ scoping project will be launched in April 23. MOD continues to support the dissemination of the ‘Thriving Lives Toolkit’ across the UK</p>
<p><b>Education</b> <i>LioS rec 32, 30, 24, 23</i></p>	<p><b>School Admissions</b></p>	<p>MOD is currently working on the development of an admissions explanatory note, which is being co-produced between the DfE. This will provide both school admissions authorities and service parents with detailed clarification regarding the provisions contained within the school admissions code for Service children. This will be published alongside the school admissions code on gov.uk</p>
<p><b>Education</b> Family Life Service Life/ Childcare and Health and Wellbeing <i>LioS rec 36, 37, 38</i></p>	<p><b>SEND: assisting Service children with an EHCP when moving between UK and overseas.</b></p>	<p>In partnership with the local authority membership of MODLAP, MOD has engaged with the DfE team responsible for the SEND green paper on a number of occasions. This has resulted in the direction of the Green paper being informed with SME knowledge of where SEND legislation, policy and practice works and works less well for armed forces families. MODLAP (16 English LAs) also submitted a joint agreed response to the SEND</p>

		Green paper consultation, focussing on how this could better support children from armed forces families. As a result, the DfE has recently distributed a follow up survey to local authorities, asking detailed questions regarding how the current SEND Code of Practice and local interpretation of this, works for mobile armed forces families
<b>Childcare</b> <i>LioS rec 92, 60, 58, 57, 56, 55, 29</i>	<b>Defence Childcare Working Group</b>	A Defence Childcare Working Group will be initiated that will bring together the key stakeholders within Defence to discuss, socialise and provide options for the mitigation of issues impacting Service families trying to access appropriate, enriching and safeguarded childcare – no matter the age of the child.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b> <i>LioS rec 40, 41</i>	<b>A Defence Carers statement</b>	Working alongside colleagues within the Department, wider Government and also interested stakeholders including Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum (FANDF) Defence will produce a Carers Statement that sets out the support that carers from/within a Service family can expect.