

RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF UK GOVERNMENT WELFARE SERVICES FOR VETERANS

The Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans 2023

UK Government Response

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Ministerial Foreword

The Government is fully committed to better supporting our Armed Forces Community. That is why the Ministry of Defence and Office for Veterans' Affairs jointly commissioned an independent review into the role, scope and breadth of UK Government welfare provision for veterans, including by the Ministry of Defence under the Veterans UK banner. This is the first time these have been considered in the round since the launch of the Strategy for our Veterans and corresponding Veterans Strategy Action Plan, and the creation of the Office for Veterans' Affairs. We want to ensure the services which Government provide to veterans and wider Armed Forces Community are fit for purpose and effective.

We know that veterans and supporting organisations want to see real change taken to enhance and rationalise welfare services for our Armed Forces Community, and that is what we intend to do. This response sets out our commitment and high-level plans to take forward the intention of the recommendations, and further detail will be made available as we make progress in due course. We are grateful to the team that conducted the independent review for their thorough work and engagement throughout and look forward to working across government and with partners across the sector who deliver welfare support to implement changes and deliver improved support for our Armed Forces Community.



Andrew Murrison.

DR ANDREW MURRISON MP
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PEOPLE & FAMILIES



John Mercer.

JOHNNY MERCER MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The Strategy

This response to the Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans, in conjunction with the Veterans Strategy Action Plan 2022-24 and its future iterations, form the overarching strategy for how the UK Government will best deliver welfare services for the Armed Forces Community.

Defining the roles of MOD & OVA

The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) is responsible for ensuring delivery against the UK Government's Strategy for Our Veterans. As such, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs is accountable to Parliament for the UK Government's overall approach to support and champion veterans.

Individual Government Departments and Secretaries of State, including the Ministry of Defence, retain responsibility for the delivery of services and policies that comprise the Government's support and commitment to veterans, and feed into the Veterans Strategy that is coordinated by the OVA.

The Ministry of Defence continues to play a significant role in supporting veterans, their families, and the bereaved community. In particular, as a former employer, MOD is responsible for providing specific support, including the administration of Armed Forces Pensions and Compensation.

MOD is also committed to continue providing additional support to service leavers, families, and the bereaved community to aid a successful transition to civilian life and will support them beyond their transition on issues that arise as a result of service. How MOD intends to transform the services that deliver this function following this review, and how they will be governed, is outlined in this response.

Changing Ministerial Titles

To better clarify the roles of the MOD and OVA in supporting our veterans, the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (MOD) will be renamed to the Minister for Defence People and Families. Veterans will be removed from the title to avoid further confusion with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs (OVA). MOD will continue to support those in service, their families, veterans, and the bereaved community by providing Pensions, Compensation, transition support, and additional support beyond transition for issues and vulnerabilities that have resulted from service. The name change is in recognition that the Minister for Veterans' Affairs oversees the delivery of cross-government support for all veterans, as well as the delivery of the Veterans Strategy Action Plan (VSAP), and therefore should be more clearly the focus for veterans' issues in Government going forward.

Improving the Veterans' Gateway

As announced in July 2023, the OVA is bringing the Veterans' Gateway into government, and is currently funding work to develop and improve the service. The OVA is currently developing prototypes and exploring how a renewed Veterans' Gateway can direct users to the information and support they need. OVA is working with a broad spectrum of the veteran community to test and develop this new offering, and is conducting rigorous user research. This includes looking at the best way to provide information of services available for both statutory and charitable services, whilst considering the suitability and geography of services available. OVA hopes to improve signposting to information, and the referral journey for those most in need of support.

The Government is committed to making sure that a suitable phoneline continues to be available to meet the needs of those who are unable to use digital services. MOD currently operates multiple phonelines, and the Veterans' Gateway has its own dedicated telephony service. This can be confusing for veterans seeking support and can result in multiple handoffs between organisations. The Government is therefore undertaking work to understand how services and advice delivered over the phone can be simplified and improved. Any future arrangement would continue to equip and train staff to provide a world-leading service for veterans.

Transforming Services

Veterans Welfare Service (VWS), Defence Transition Services (DTS) & Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V)

The MOD accept the intended outcome of all recommendations regarding the services which fall under the umbrella of what is currently known as Veterans UK. MOD is currently working to assess how best to meet the intended outcome of these recommendations.

The 'Veterans UK' organisational brand will be retired in 2024 and the existing operating model of what is currently DTS, VWS and IPC4V will be transformed to become a single case working team, working under a single support function with a new name. This new entity will provide multiple services. The benefit this will have to service users and case workers is that it will create a more agile team with equal capability to deliver a high-quality service to those who need it.

MOD is still assessing how best to communicate these changes, including how these will sit alongside the existing Armed Forces Pension and Compensation services, and how it will fit into the new referral pathway. MOD wants to ensure that any new support function that encapsulates these services is appropriately named with input from stakeholders, and crucially, is inclusive of not only veterans, but those in service, those transitioning out of service, their families, and the bereaved community. MOD also want to ensure these changes take effect and are communicated at the most appropriate time to avoid creating additional complexity in the system.

At this stage, MOD cannot confirm whether any existing services will be commissioned to the service charity sector but can commit to examining this recommendation as the new service is introduced and monitored. It is apparent that operational changes should take place within MOD first. As an organisation with extensive delivery capability, an ongoing transformation programme in Pensions and Compensation, and in-house specialist welfare support, MOD will evaluate the new operating model and consult potential referral partners in due course should this be deemed appropriate. The MOD remains committed to delivering the best possible support to members of our Armed Forces Community and ensuring a warm handover to any further support across Government and the charitable sector regardless of who is providing it, should this be most effective for all parties.

MOD is currently working to better define its services to the Armed Forces Community, including who is eligible, and ensure the branding is inclusive and appropriate – whilst being aware of the variety of channels users may come from to access these services. Work will continue to more clearly define the scope and specific eligibility criteria for the services that will fall under this new MOD support function, and this will be outlined in a

refresh of Joint Service Publication 100 (JSP100)¹ and included in package of communications. MOD will continue to work with OVA and other stakeholders to consider how future eligibility criteria fits into the wider network of support across the sector.

Governance and Assessment of Services

To ensure effective governance and assessment of this new MOD support function, MOD will transform existing governance structures in Defence. A new board that monitors the delivery of welfare services will be established to act as a vehicle to set key performance indicators and monitor delivery and outcomes. This board will include permanent representation from the OVA.

MOD has held several highly successful lived experience events with a variety of stakeholders previously and accepts the review's recommendation to formalise this as the new welfare support structure is established. An update on how this will operate will be provided via communications on the implementation of recommendations in due course.

Ilford Park Polish Home (IPPH)

The MOD supports the intent of both recommendations pertaining to the future of the Ilford Park Polish Home. It is important to ensure the commitment given by the UK Government to Polish veterans of the Second World War is met, and MOD will therefore engage with stakeholders to conduct a formal consultation with remaining entitled veterans to ascertain what their plans are.

MOD wants to make sure that it delivers to every single entitled veteran who may want to take up the Government offer and will communicate next steps following the conclusion of the consultation when a better picture will have developed of future occupancy levels.

The role of the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPCs)

The Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees Act in support of the modernised role of the VAPCs has received Royal Assent. The success of this Act, alongside the Independent Review and the Non-Departmental Public Bodies Review of the VAPCs, provides a platform for the Government to clarify the future role and structure of the VAPCs.

Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (NIVSO)

The Government recognises the views expressed in the review on the knowledge and trust held by the NIVSO, and the recommendations on its future. The Office for Veterans' Affairs will fund the NIVSO for the financial year 2024-2025. During that period, the OVA will work

¹ JSP100 is the MOD policy for supporting service leavers and their families. The current policy is available at: [Help for service leavers, service personnel and families from Defence Transition Services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/help-for-service-leavers)

across Government and beyond to evaluate the impact of the NIVSO, to determine its appropriate activities, future funding and governance arrangements.

Training and Learning

Training and Learning in MOD

To assure the delivery of effective casework that facilitates high quality client outcomes, MOD will ensure all staff in the new support function have access to ‘industry standard’ thinking and training on key subjects related to work involving members of the Armed Forces Community, such as trauma-informed, safeguarding, domestic abuse, military awareness and sensitivity, and military transition.

MOD will continue to evaluate its current training package in the context of available funding and assess opportunities for further development to ensure a qualified customer-focussed approach across Defence Business Services. As noted, MOD will examine the relationship between the MOD Helpline for the new support function and Veterans Gateway. Further training for Helpline staff will be dependent on the outcome of that examination.

Improving ‘through career’ support

In recognising the uniqueness of Service life, the MOD, working together with the OVA, and partners across Government and the Private Sector, offers a significant package of support to the Armed Forces community to aid in transition back to civilian life. This includes a range of apprenticeship opportunities while in Service to develop a range of skills and qualifications recognised in the civilian world. On transition out of Service, the Career Transition Partnership provides all regular personnel leaving the Armed Forces with employment support and training, and a bespoke information and support service is delivered by Defence Transition Services for those Service leavers who need extra support.

The MOD and OVA accept the recommendation to continue to expand the provision of a better quality, through service education and support programme to better prepare those who serve and their families for civilian life. The Government is exploring the opportunity to digitalise the MOD Service Leavers Guide, and MOD and OVA will work together to transform this into a through-service handrail for support, including a HARDFACTS² assessment to ensure individuals can identify knowledge gaps for which learning opportunities are effectively signposted. As the Veterans Gateway work develops,

² The acronym HARDFACTS stands for: Health Accommodation, Relocation, Drugs, Alcohol and Stress; Finance and Benefits; Attitude, Thinking, Behaviour and Welfare; Children and Family; Training, Education and Employment; Supporting Agencies.

opportunities will be examined for building this learning resource into an online capability that is accessible to all.

A wide range of welfare support is provided to Service personnel throughout their career to develop well-being and resilience not only during their service, but to set them up for life after the Armed Forces. Welfare support policy is being rewritten to ensure clarity on what ‘through career’ support is available to all Service personnel, taking into account of the unique circumstances of service, and with a particular focus on linking in with transition and wider discharge welfare provision and processes to ensure Service personnel can use their time in the Armed Forces to build a successful life and career after their service. It will also factor in the recommendations of the Haythornthwaite Review of Armed Forces Incentivisation³ (HRAFI), particularly elements with the view to enable personnel to move in and out of service more seamlessly throughout their career.

Data Capability

MOD and OVA accept the intent of recommendations concerning data and have started work to explore how data can best be used to improve welfare support for veterans.

MOD already shares personal data with consent on an individual, case-by-case basis to ensure better delivery outcomes for veterans. MOD and OVA aspire to create a holistic view of a welfare case and be able to share this more easily, where appropriate, with other service providers so that a veteran could be referred more easily. However, to explore opportunities to develop the capability of having a single (and shareable) view of a veteran, further work is required to evaluate the case management systems currently in use in Defence and across the wider sector, given the potentially significant practical and financial implications for Government and charities.

MOD is examining the proposal, and feasibility of, a new case management system for what will become the new Defence Business Services (DBS) welfare support function. It is important that any changes to case management must be cognisant of the existing DBS modernisation programme, the capabilities of the new Veterans Gateway service, and the new Veteran’s digital verification service. It must also consider the different case management systems for in-service welfare support across the single Services and how this fits together – before evaluating how any new system can be interoperable with others which are used across the sector.

Communications

MOD’s Defence Digital Communications (DDC) will work collaboratively with OVA Communications and DBS Communications to develop a strategic communications plan.

³ [Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era - a review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614441/Agency_and_Agility_-_Incentivising_people_in_a_new_era_-_a_review_of_UK_Armed_Forces_incentivisation_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)

This will outline the responsibilities of the Minister of Defence People and Families and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and their respective Government departments as well as inform the Armed Forces Community and other stakeholders of the key deliverables based on the agreed recommendations within.

Further Work and Next Steps

The Government will provide an update on the progress of implementing this response within the strategic communications plan that is being developed in light of this review. We will reflect on the effectiveness of frequent reviews as the new strategy and governance unfolds. Following the publication of this response, MOD and OVA will actively engage with a broad range of stakeholders to consider their ideas, views and concerns as to how we best implement elements of the recommendations which require further work and consideration.

Annex A

The recommendations of the Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans.

Strategy

Recommendation 1

HMG must design and articulate a single strategy for veteran welfare services. This must be inclusive of family members and the bereaved and must be aligned to the Strategy for our Veterans. It should articulate how these services contribute to delivering the vision of the UK being the best place in the world to be a veteran.

Recommendation 2

In-scope services, and any new services, should be refined to include scope, time and eligibility limitations to enable adequate resources to be allocated to each service.

Recommendation 6

Ensure the distinction between the obligations to veterans of the MOD and OVA are clear and communicated to stakeholders, including clearly delineated governance and accountability: • The MOD is responsible for the delivery of specific welfare services to veterans (Veteran Welfare Service, Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V) case working, DTS, pensions, compensation, medallic services to veterans and some other bespoke services to specific cohorts). It also leads on the Armed Forces Covenant. • The OVA is responsible for leading the cross-government strategy and policy, co-ordinating effort and holding departments (including MOD) to account for delivering services effectively and developing pathways for veterans in conjunction with other departments and organisations.

Recommendation 7

To further ensure the distinction between the roles of the MOD and OVA are clear at all levels, ministerial titles should be amended to properly reflect responsibilities. Thus, the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families, should become Minister for Defence People.

Improving the Veterans' Gateway

Recommendation 29

As a service providing assistance to the veteran community Veterans Gateway, should be fully funded and provided for by the OVA. This may require an additional funding stream for OVA.

Recommendation 30

MOD and the OVA should make a joint assessment as to whether the current Veterans UK helpline should continue to exist or the Veterans Gateway helpline. The rationale for closing either must be clearly articulated to users.

Recommendation 32

The Veterans Gateway, under the OVA should be the single point of reference for the veteran community for information concerning welfare services for veterans, including government and third sector services. It should provide a digital tool that enables users to find out which regional and / or national services they are eligible for, and how they apply.

Recommendation 33

Veterans Gateway should provide a platform for users to create an account which tracks and records the HMG services they have accessed and provides them with updates on their status with each.

Transforming Services

Veterans Welfare Service (VWS), Defence Transition Services (DTS) & Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V)

Recommendation 5

Work should be undertaken in collaboration with the third sector to ascertain whether some areas of DBS welfare support could and should be commissioned, leaving HMG with a smaller portfolio of services to directly deliver and which could be phased out over-time if demand decreases.

Recommendation 9

The VWS must be given a clear mission and scope that is directly connected to delivery of the government's vision for veterans: to support veterans who, having transitioned out of the armed forces and thus no longer eligible for DTS, are still in need of support due to vulnerabilities and/or limitations caused by service.

Recommendation 11

DTS should be renamed to make it clearer that it is a specialist transition programme for a minority of personnel. For example, Defence Transition Enhanced Support (DTES). This will need to be reviewed in conjunction with other DBS-related recommendations from this review.

Recommendation 12

Work should be undertaken within the MOD to ensure that each of these three DBS welfare services have a clear policy aligned to a central welfare strategy, that is easily accessible and understandable to all.

Recommendation 14

The services currently provided by VWS which are more general in nature, should be renamed so as to better define and communicate its role. Our suggestion is that this be known as 'Defence People Support (DPS)', so as to align it more closely with the suggested revised Ministerial title, provide more inclusivity, and remove reference to both 'veteran' and 'welfare' which can have negative connotations for some.

Recommendation 15

DTS and IPC4V case-working teams should be integrated with VWS services under the DPS banner (Recommendation 14) and brought together into one single support function providing a continuous portfolio of support ranging from transition specific support to through-life support for the most vulnerable.

Recommendation 19

The Veterans UK brand should be retired. Any new brand that replaces it should be more inclusively named and must be clearly communicated, including clear definitions of each team within it, their purpose and scope.

Recommendation 34 (Bullet 1)

A review and redesign of a strategy for welfare services for veterans as delivered under the Veterans UK banner, Defence Business Services, at this time, including, Veterans Welfare Service, Defence Transition Services, Integrated Personal Commissioning 4 Veterans.

Governance and Assessment of Services

Recommendation 8

A formal welfare services governance board should be created, that enables the MOD and the OVA to work more closely together to develop policy, monitor delivery and ensure services are continuously improved. This should include MOD and OVA officials, the IVA, and the Veterans' Commissioners for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, and third sector representatives. The board should be led by an independent chair.

Recommendation 10

KPIs should be designed which correspond to Recommendation 9 and against which performance is measured. These will be accountable to the new governance board (Recommendation 8).

Recommendation 21

Veterans UK (as is) must establish an independently Chaired client lived experience board, based on NHS England's Patient Voice model enabling bottom-up information sharing and evidence-based service improvements. Membership should include Veteran UK leadership, OVA, MOD Armed Forces People Policy, Commissioners and IVA, and charity representation.

Recommendation 34 (Bullet 3)

An exploration of a commissioning model for OVA to commission DBS for services for veterans and hold MOD accountable for delivering these services.

Ilford Park Polish Home

Recommendation 22

A public consultation should be launched as soon as feasible to promote the IPPH and encourage eligible future-residents to take up a place at the Home, with a view to closing to new admissions by the end of 2024.

Recommendation 23

A further review of resident numbers should be undertaken in 2026 to ascertain occupancy numbers and likely need for extending the lease beyond the 2028 break clause. If it is deemed that there are insufficient numbers to justify the IPPH's existence, DBS should work with the charity sector and local authority to source alternative accommodation for the remaining residents, funded by MOD. Where possible, there should be an attempt by the new provider to recreate the Poland-specific nature of the IPPH.

Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees

Recommendation 24

Whilst the Private Member's Bill progresses, the OVA and the MOD should undertake work to properly define the potential future function of the VAPCs in their respective departments, in more detail than there has been time to do in this review. This should take account of the QQR and VAPC recommendations.

Recommendation 25

Once the legal position is defined [R24], the Ministers for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families and for Veterans' Affairs should jointly decide which of the three options outlined above they wish to take and then ensure that that work is taken forward.

Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (NIVSO)

Recommendation 26

NIVSO should be moved into the OVA in order to continue to operate in Northern Ireland as the OVA's regional presence. This will require an additional revenue stream for OVA from HMT.

Recommendation 27

Consideration to retaining the NIVSO brand, alongside that of the OVA, should be given. Over the last 5 years it has become a well-known, understood and trusted brand for Northern Ireland veterans, and the review team consider that to change this would be detrimental.

Recommendation 28

NIVSO should not be managing individual welfare cases. Nevertheless, in recognition of the trusting relationship NI veterans have built with NIVSO and of the time it will take for VWS NI to build its reputation and relationship with 71 NI veterans, NIVSO should remain a point of contact and triaging service, directing Northern Ireland veterans to other services, government or otherwise, and ensuring casework is picked up by the VWS team.

Training and Learning

Training and Learning in MOD.

Recommendation 13

Sharing best practice and aligning services where possible with other agencies undertakings similar roles should be undertaken, for example home-visiting with the DWP and casework management through organisations who offer similar such as (but not exclusively) DMWS & RBL.

Recommendation 18

Caseworkers providing all these services should receive adequate training to work with vulnerable service users, including, where appropriate, professional training and formal qualifications. This should include trauma informed practice.

Recommendation 31

Helpline staff must be adequately trained to manage effectively all calls that may come.

Improving ‘through career’ support

Recommendation 3

Aligned to the Veteran Strategy Action Plan commitment, HMG should ensure a better cohered, high-quality through-service education and support programme that prepares personnel throughout their military life for civilian life, not just as they come into the transition timeframe. While recognising that the single Services may have different in-service needs, this education system should be aligned across all three services, and co-ordinated centrally, including but not limited to:

- Information and education on how to operate in the civilian environment, particularly where service has meant lost opportunities for service people to learn about this in comparison to their civilian counterparts.
- Support adjusting to civilian life in and immediately post-transition.

Recommendation 4

The MOD should commission a review of tri-service welfare support provision, with a particular focus on transition and wider discharge welfare provision and processes, with a view to building on and rolling out what is currently being successfully delivered across the Services.

Recommendation 34 (Bullet 2)

A review of through-life welfare support related to transition and civilian life from the moment of recruitment.

Data Capability

Recommendation 16

A high-quality casework management system must be implemented. As a minimum, this must record all interactions, be interoperable with other relevant MOD systems, enable a 'one view' of a service-user, and provide high quality MI that enables the MOD to more accurately forecast demand and assess outcomes.

Recommendation 17

Opportunities for sharing data more widely with other organisations, including the third sector, should continue to be explored, via Data Sharing Agreements, which give individuals the option to agree to their data being shared with other agencies for agreed welfare support purposes. This is a key enabler to a more integrated model of support and will require a crossdepartmental effort.

Recommendation 34 (Bullet 4)

A review of data-collection and sharing capabilities across the welfare services, from in-service services to those provided to veterans.

Communications

Recommendation 20

Communications to (would-be) service users must be improved. A clear joint MOD / OVA communications and engagement strategy and plan for veterans' welfare and support must be developed. It should be adequately resourced to ensure delivery of enduring and effective communications to the single Services (at all levels), service leaver and their families, veterans and their families, the bereaved community, and wider stakeholder groups.

Recommendation 34 (Bullet 5)

A review of the communications and engagement strategy pertaining to welfare services for veterans as a whole.

Further Work and Next Steps**Recommendation 35**

A review of the welfare services for veterans' system should be conducted on a quinquennial basis. The objective of the review should be to ensure that (i) there is a well-articulated and coherent strategy guiding the system and its services and (ii) the objectives of each of the components of the system continues to effectively fulfil a purpose with reference to this strategy.