

# SUPPORTING THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY WITH HOUSING IN ENGLAND

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE



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# LIVE ON



# ABOUT THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

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The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring that their unique contribution is never forgotten. We were created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War, and still remain one of the UK's largest membership organisations. The Legion is the largest support provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, helping veterans young and old transition into civilian life. We help with employment, financial guidance, respite and recovery, through to lifelong care and help to live at home.

We provide specialist support to the Armed Forces community who are at risk of homelessness and housing insecurity, or are simply trying to understand their rights. We help people find emergency accommodation, support people into social housing, and help people furnish and settle into new homes with our direct grants. We provide this support to serving and ex-serving personnel and their families, including bereaved family members and separated partners and spouses. We've been here since 1921 and we'll be here as long as they need us.

For further information, please visit: [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

For support, call our helpline on **0808 802 8080**. We're open 8am-8pm, 7 days a week.

For information on this document please email [publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk)

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# FOREWORD

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The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten. The vast majority of veterans and their families go on to lead fulfilling lives and make a positive contribution to our local communities but for some, additional support may be required, and the Legion is here to secure that support.

Many of the people we support require our assistance to find suitable, good quality, sustainable accommodation after leaving the Armed Forces. There will be varying degrees of severity to these requests for help, from those who have means and simply don't know where to look for a new home, to those who are facing the worst forms of homelessness and find themselves sleeping rough. Regardless,

no one who has served in the UK Armed Forces should face any form of homelessness and the Legion will always be here to support those in need of assistance.

We do not provide that support in isolation. The Legion works at its best when we work in partnership with local statutory services and other charitable organisations. The sharing of expertise, resources, and experience between statutory services and charities like the Legion results in quick and effective action to support those most in need. You will read in the following pages many examples of these partnerships in action and hopefully take inspiration from them.

Since the Armed Forces Covenant was enshrined in legislation in 2011 and reinforced by local community pledges

up and down the country, significant progress has been achieved in addressing disadvantage and providing special treatment where appropriate. However, there is always more we can do to ensure we are making a tangible difference to the lives of our local Armed Forces community and the Legion will continue to work in partnership with local government to ensure this happens.

I hope the following pages will be a welcome resource for local authorities and that our recommendations will be acted upon. We look forward to working in partnership with local government to implement the Armed Forces Covenant and help to improve the lives of the Armed Forces community.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Byrne".

**Charles Byrne**  
Director General, The Royal British Legion

# FOREWORD

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We are delighted to support and endorse the production of this excellent Toolkit developed by The Royal British Legion to ensure that local authorities can support veterans in housing need to access accommodation as quickly as possible.

The Cobseo Housing Cluster is the umbrella group that co-ordinates the response to veterans' homelessness in the UK. In 2018 we launched a 'Call to Action' to try and reduce veterans' homelessness as close to zero as possible – an eminently commendable objective. We focus on three areas. Transition; to ensure that everyone who leaves the Armed Forces has a clear pathway to accommodation. 'Civvy street'; to make sure that local authorities and charities identify veterans quickly and channel them through to appropriate services, including those the veterans' sector can offer. Lastly to ask for resources; not only

funding to run the services homeless veterans need, but also ensuring that housing providers of all types make their accommodation available to veterans that need it.

This Toolkit energises the second area, by ensuring that Local Authorities have the knowledge and understanding of how they can best identify and respond to homeless veterans as we all work to bring veterans' homelessness down as close to zero as possible. We look forward to working with you to achieve it.



**Ed Tytherleigh**  
Chief Executive, Stoll  
Co-Chair of the Cobseo Housing Cluster



**James Richardson**  
Chief Executive, Haig Housing  
Co-Chair of the Cobseo Housing Cluster



# INTRODUCTION

In 2011 the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant were enshrined in legislation as a result of campaigning by The Royal British Legion. Since then, national and local government, along with numerous charities and over 3,000 businesses and other organisations, have now committed to ensuring that the key principles are upheld:

- Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

Today, every local authority in Great Britain and a number in Northern Ireland have made a public commitment to uphold the Covenant's twin principles and implement them in their work serving their communities. Having campaigned to ensure that the Covenant was enshrined in legislation, the Legion

has since been at the forefront of seeking its effective implementation. As part of this work, we have produced this new guide, which is intended to provide local authorities and housing authorities with practical advice on how to support members of the Armed Forces community facing a housing problem or impending homelessness.

Although homelessness and rough sleeping is not as high among the veteran population as many people might think, some veterans still find it difficult to source suitable accommodation after leaving HM Armed Forces. Indeed, over the past year, housing has consistently remained one of the top three reasons for people to contact Veterans' Gateway; a nationwide first point of contact for veterans seeking support. Given the number of charitable organisations out there and the statutory provisions already in place, it is within the reach of all of us to bring the number of homeless veterans in England as far as possible down to zero.

The Legion is proud to operate in communities across the country,



working with local authorities and housing associations to build the local partnerships and pathways that will reduce homelessness among the Armed Forces community. The Legion is of course not doing this work alone. There are many national and local charities, several of whom feature in this guide, who are also working to support veterans and their families out of crises and into good, sustainable homes. We are grateful for their ongoing support of the Armed Forces community, and for their contributions to this guide.

We hope this publication will act as a valuable resource for all frontline

professionals providing housing and homelessness services, by:

- Highlighting the common problems faced by the Armed Forces community in relation to housing and homelessness;
- Outlining the existing responsibilities of government and housing authorities;
- Providing a toolkit of practical advice on how to improve services to the Armed Forces community and
- Identifying good practice from across England as a source of inspiration.

# CHAPTER ONE

## HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING

### The prevalence of veteran homelessness

There remains a popular misconception among the public that homelessness is both a common outcome of leaving the Armed Forces and that a large proportion of those who sleep rough in the UK are veterans. The reality is that the majority of veterans manage the transition into a new home successfully, with a relatively low number of veterans experiencing difficulties so great that they become homeless or end up rough sleeping. Research by the University of York in 2018 looked at the numbers across the UK in detail and concluded that the number of rough sleeping veterans is in the hundreds and that there are over 1,000 urgent cases of homelessness and 3,000 to 4,000 veterans in urgent housing need over any given year. However, these figures are based on estimates given the limited availability of accurate, official data. For example, the only part of England to count veterans in rough sleeping statistics is the Greater London Authority through the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) system. Over the past few years CHAIN reports have recorded around 2-3% of people using outreach services were former members of the UK Armed Forces. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local

Government (MHCLG) record that less than 1% of statutory homeless households contained someone who had previously served in the Armed Forces.

Nonetheless, this does not diminish the importance of acting to reduce instances of homelessness and rough sleeping among veterans. No one who has served in the UK's Armed Forces should have to face homelessness or be forced to sleep rough.

### Why might a veteran be faced with homelessness?

The causes of homelessness will largely be the same as for any other person faced with homelessness. There are, however, a few circumstances specific to a veteran's life that can increase the likelihood of them becoming homeless:

- **Poorly managed or unexpectedly early transition out of the Armed Forces** In 2019, three-quarters of Service personnel lived in Service accommodation during the working week. On leaving the Armed Forces, these personnel will need to find a new place to live. The Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services (SPACES) has supported an average of 1,000 single veterans a year, 84% of whom report that their

homelessness was a consequence of discharge from the Armed Forces.

- **Unrealistic expectations of housing options outside of the Armed Forces** The Transition Mapping Study 2013 illustrated low levels of awareness among departing Service personnel about what is required to buy or rent on the private market in the UK.
- **Emergence of or return to pre-existing vulnerabilities** Some personnel leave the Armed Forces and return to a lifestyle that was previously chaotic, which can reignite vulnerabilities that may have existed prior to joining the Armed Forces.

Whether as a result of a poorly managed transition out of the Armed Forces, or a problem arising some time after leaving Service, the UK's veterans can be better supported out of homelessness.

### What support currently exists?

If a former member of the Armed Forces is at risk of homelessness within 56 days or becomes homeless, they can seek statutory support via their local authority under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended most recently by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The local authority must seek to agree a Personalised Housing Plan setting out any reasonable steps to be taken to prevent or relieve homelessness before assessing whether homeless applicants are unintentionally homeless and in "priority need." Since 2002 "vulnerable former members of the Armed Forces" should

be included in the eligibility for priority need. This test for vulnerability remains complex and can be misunderstood by both homeless veterans seeking help and the local authority providing support but is set out in a text box overleaf for reference. If that test can be satisfied, a veteran is placed in accommodation by the local authority.

The revised Code of Guidance following the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has substantially changed the package of support that local authorities must deliver to all people experiencing homelessness, but of particular note is the additional detail it provides on the duties owed to veterans. "Former members of the Regular Armed Forces" are now named as a distinct group of people who must be provided with specialised advice and information services.

### Summary of Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities Chapter 24: Former members of the Armed Forces

- Service personnel required to vacate Service quarters as a result of leaving the Armed Forces are not to be considered intentionally homeless.
- Specialised advice and information provided by local authorities must be designed to meet the needs of former members of the Regular Armed Forces.
- Local authorities will need to work closely with relevant partners to ascertain likely levels of need among veterans and to design services accordingly.

- If an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness, an assessment of their support needs must be conducted and a Personalised Housing Plan must be written to set out the steps the individual and the housing authority must take for the individual to remain in or find suitable accommodation.
- Service personnel required to leave Service accommodation can provide a *Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Accommodation* six months before discharge as proof of being threatened with homelessness.
- Members of the Armed Forces can establish a local connection through residence or employment in the same way as a civilian, as has been the case since 2008.
- The Secretary of State for Defence is required to refer members of the Regular Armed Forces in England he considers may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to a local housing authority.

## EXTRACT FROM CODE OF GUIDANCE ON DETERMINING VULNERABILITY DUE TO SERVICE:

In considering whether veterans are vulnerable as a result of their time spent in the forces, a housing authority may wish to take into account the following factors:

a) the length of time the applicant spent in the armed forces (although authorities should not assume that vulnerability could not occur as a result of a short period of Service);

b) the type of Service the applicant was engaged in (those on active Service may find it more difficult to cope with civilian life);

c) whether the applicant spent any time in a military hospital (this could be an

indicator of a serious health problem or of post-traumatic stress);

d) whether HM Forces' medical and welfare advisers have judged an individual to be particularly vulnerable in their view and have issued a Medical History Release Form giving a summary of the circumstances causing that vulnerability;

e) the length of time since the applicant left the armed forces, and whether they have been able to obtain and/or maintain accommodation during that time; and,

f) whether the applicant has any existing support networks, particularly by way of family or friends.

## Improving homelessness services:

### • Identify veterans as early as possible

Make it standard practice to ask all applicants to your authority if they, or a member of their household, have ever served in HM Armed Forces. The Legion has long called on all public bodies to "ask the question" at the first point of contact with members of the public. Some veterans can be reluctant to disclose former Service in the Armed Forces, so it is important to explain why the question is being asked. "Asking the question" allows identified veterans to be pointed to specialised routes of support and ensures they are given the most appropriate help quickly. The new Homelessness Case Level Information Classification (H-CLIC) data recording system now records cases where an applicant or a member of the applicant's household has previously served in the UK Armed Forces.

### • Provide specialised advice and information

Have a clear understanding of what steps must be undertaken with a veteran applicant as soon as they are identified – whether it is at the stage of providing initial advice, undertaking a prevention or relief duty, or the main housing duty. Each local authority will approach this differently, and build their own pathways but this should include:

- Signposting to nationwide specialist charities for additional support. There are many Armed Forces charities operating throughout the UK and the choice can be confusing. Veterans'

Gateway was established to be a first point of contact for veterans seeking support and can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Gateway can provide help from specialist housing advisers. More information is in Chapter Four.

- Connecting with local Armed Forces charities. National charities may be based in your local area, or there may be smaller charities with a specific geographic footprint. Build connections with them and work in partnership to support veterans and their families.
- If the applicant is already homeless, at the earliest opportunity explain the process for establishing vulnerability and determining Priority Need, and how this would affect the authority's main housing duty.
- When a Personalised Housing Plan is written, include details of the applicant's veteran status and utilise the expertise and assistance of Armed Forces charities. Charities like the Legion are willing to work in partnership with local authorities to support those in need, but they are not a substitute for the statutory duties of local authorities.

### • Social housing allocations

It may be most appropriate to direct an applicant to housing allocations. Details of how the Armed Forces community access these services are explored in Chapter Two.

## BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

### Greater London Authority

Has teamed up with charity Veterans Aid to provide a route off the street for every veteran who is homeless or facing homelessness in London. Veterans Aid offers immediate accommodation and a bespoke, structured pathway into independent living. The service's "no first night out" approach means it also supports any UK veteran who is at risk of becoming homeless in London, to prevent them from having to sleep rough in the first place. Outreach teams from across Greater London can refer clients to the service and help them off the streets.

### Armed Forces Outreach Service

The Armed Forces Outreach Service (AFOS) is a unique local authority partnership of Durham County, Gateshead, Newcastle City, South Tyneside and Northumberland Councils. AFOS employs veterans who are trained as outreach workers specialising in homelessness and housing and who only see clients from the Armed Forces community, including serving personnel, veterans and families. AFOS is a point of contact for all veteran related welfare matters for local authorities within the partnership region and provides expert advice and support for Armed Forces Champions and local authority officers supporting the Armed Forces community and deals with client referrals from them.

### Salford Council

Have a dedicated Armed Forces champion officer working directly with veterans, ex-Armed Forces personnel, separated spouses, and widow(er)s who are struggling with their tenancies, homeless or threatened with homelessness. The champion can provide tailored support on a range of housing issues and has the knowledge of both the national and local voluntary sector to be able to signpost clients to the most appropriate place for additional support, if required. Information on specific options for the Armed Forces community and contact details for the champion are easily accessible on the council website, further streamlining the provision of tailored support.

### Southwark Council

Trialled the new provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act for 18 months before the nationwide rollout and learned much from that process. Alongside the public bodies defined in the new Code of Guidance, the borough will accept referrals from other outside organisations, including Armed Forces charities. This allows the borough and the specialist charities to work in partnership to help a person already, or threatened with becoming, homeless.

## FURTHER ASSISTANCE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Veterans' Gateway can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)**

Telephone: **0808 802 1212**

Text: **81212** to receive a call back.

For veterans in crisis: Veterans Aid:

**[www.veterans-aid.net](http://www.veterans-aid.net)**

Veterans Aid provides immediate, practical support for UK veterans in crisis regardless of age, ethnicity, rank, gender or length of Service.

Freephone: **0800 012 6867**

Tel: **0207 828 2468**

**[info@veterans-aid.net](mailto:info@veterans-aid.net)**

Operations Centre: 27 Victoria Square, London, SW1W 0RB





# CHAPTER TWO

## HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

Members of the Armed Forces community who experience difficulties securing suitable accommodation can turn to local authority allocated housing for help. Indeed, in the year to March 2018, MHCLG recorded that nearly 7,000 households given a new social housing letting included someone who has served in the Armed Forces, approximately 2% of total lettings. However, in the experience of many members of the Armed Forces community who apply for social housing, this is not always a smooth process. Legion services are frequently required to help veterans and their families navigate their way through the complex process of applying for social housing. Our volunteers and staff report considerable variation between local authorities across England in the way that support is provided to members of the Armed Forces community in search of social housing. The Legion's Household Survey in 2014 found that 6% of those who had been discharged from the Armed Forces in the past five years experienced some difficulty in applying for council or housing association accommodation.

There are two main differences, compared to other applicants, to consider when supporting the Armed Forces community through social housing: in 2012, the law was amended to give certain Regular and Reserve Armed Forces veterans additional preference on housing waiting lists, and to prevent local authorities applying a local connection requirement for five years after leaving Service.

### **Additional preference**

By law, local authorities must ensure that "reasonable preference" (overall priority) is given to certain people in identified housing need, including those who are homeless, those who have medical and welfare needs, and those who live in overcrowded housing.

*The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulation 2012* requires local authorities to give additional preference (high priority) to specified members of the Armed Forces community who have reasonable preference and urgent housing needs.

## EXTRACT 2012 REGULATION:

Local authorities must give additional preference to any applicant who:

- i. is serving in the Regular forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's Service,
- ii. formerly served in the Regular forces,
- iii. has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation

provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner who has served in the Regular forces and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that Service, or

- iv. is serving or has served in the Reserve forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's Service.

Many authorities have placed the Armed Forces in the top available banding of their prioritisation, and whenever an allocations policy is changed, the Legion recommends that authorities review the provisions relating to the Armed Forces community and determine if greater priority can be given.

### Local connection

The other change in the law relates to the local connection requirement. Many

local authorities require applicants for social housing to demonstrate a local connection to the local authority area in which they are applying, usually through a prior period of residency or employment in the council area. *The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulation 2012* provides an exemption to the local connection requirement to specified members of the Armed Forces community.

## EXTRACT 2012 REGULATION:

Local authorities must not use the local connection as a criteria for deciding on qualifying persons if the applicant:

- a) is serving in the Regular forces or who has served in the Regular forces within five years of the date of their

application for an allocation of housing under Part 6 of the 1996 Act;

- b) has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person's

spouse or civil partner where—

- I. the spouse or civil partner has served in the Regular forces; and
- II. their death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that Service; or

- c) is serving or has served in the Reserve forces and who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to that Service.

It is a policy sometimes misunderstood by council staff and often by the member of the Armed Forces community making the application. Furthermore, Service leavers can be unsure at the point they leave the Armed Forces where in the country might be most suitable for them to settle. If discharged unexpectedly early due to injury or other circumstances, the veteran may not be able to decide on long term housing arrangements. The same could also be true of a bereaved family member whilst searching for accommodation. As families and individuals can sometimes make a few moves and change circumstances in the initial years after leaving the Armed Forces, there may be

multiple contributing factors to a delay before an application for housing is submitted.

We believe this policy should be simplified, with government removing the five-year time limit altogether. In the meantime, we encourage authorities to be flexible and consider using their discretion to waive the limit on a case-by-case basis, allowing the Armed Forces community to access housing support with an exemption from the local connection requirement regardless of the time elapsed since they left Service. Indeed, we know of authorities who already do not apply a five-year time limit.

## BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

### Central Bedfordshire Council

Have a housing allocations policy that includes an exemption to residency and employment criteria to all currently serving and former serving Regular Armed Forces personnel. Ordinarily, applicants must have lived in the area for three years or worked in the area for six months. Current and former Regular Armed Forces personnel are exempted, and there is not a five-year time limit on ex-serving personnel making an application, which goes above and beyond the minimum required by legislation.

### Armed Forces Families

The family members of serving personnel and veterans are too often overlooked in discussions around the provision of public services. They make great sacrifices and provide invaluable support, which enables our serving personnel to thrive both in and after their career in the Armed Forces. The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant apply to the whole Armed Forces community, and this community includes the families of serving and ex-Service personnel. However, in cases the Legion has experienced, when an Armed Forces couple separate or divorce, the spouse wrongly ceases to be recognised as “family” under the Armed Forces Covenant, meaning that they are no longer eligible for certain allowances, for instance in relation to the local

connection exemption. In many cases, divorced or separated Service spouses receive no additional help in finding a home after they have moved on from their previous house.

At the time of publication, the Government were consulting on extending the removal of local connection criteria to include divorced and separated spouses of Armed Forces personnel. We await the outcome of these consultations. However, in the absence of any national guidance, the Legion encourages housing authorities to use their discretion when setting allocations policy and allow the local connection exemption to apply to divorced and separated spouses and partners of Armed Forces personnel.

## BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

### Cheshire West and Chester Council

Have chosen to extend exemptions to the local connection criteria to divorced and separated spouses and partners of Armed Forces personnel.

#### Extract from their housing allocations policy:

“In accordance with the Armed Forces Covenant for Cheshire West and Chester, those who are serving or have served in the Armed Forces are not required to demonstrate a local connection. Furthermore in November 2014, changes to the Allocations Policy were approved by the Council to include ex-spouses and civil partners of Armed Forces personnel within this group who do not require local connection to apply.”

### The Veterans’ Nomination Scheme

The Veterans’ Nomination Scheme (VNS) was set up by Stoll, in partnership with The Royal British Legion, to find stable and affordable homes for veterans. Stoll works collaboratively with over 90 housing associations and local authorities in England and Wales to match them with ex-Service personnel in need of a home. The scheme works well for single veterans or couples without children and with low support needs who are struggling to find an affordable home. Once an applicant has been referred to the VNS, Stoll will match them up with a nearby housing provider and secure accommodation at affordable rates of rent.

As of July 2019, over 530 veterans have been supported into social housing but there is a long waiting list in some parts of the country and Stoll are always looking for new housing associations and local authorities to partner with to find more houses for veterans.

#### How does the VNS work for social housing providers?

1. The housing provider allocates one or more properties to the programme to be ringfenced for a veteran.
2. Stoll manages referrals and carries out checks on the applicants to ensure they are ready to manage a tenancy and consider who will be appropriate for the available accommodation.
3. Stoll will match a veteran looking for accommodation with the right type of accommodation within the area they are looking.

4. The provider then can interview the veteran and carry out their own checks and processes.
5. If there is a good match, the veteran is asked to sign the provider’s tenancy agreement and can move in when ready.

#### How does the VNS work for applicants?

1. Any organisation that works with veterans can make a referral to the VNS team. Direct applications from veterans are not accepted. The referrer will verify the veteran’s Service record and support needs and demonstrate that they will arrange support for the veteran, if it is needed.
2. The VNS team will acknowledge receipt of the referral and review the application. If successful, the veteran is added to the waiting list. VNS will try and match the veteran with appropriate accommodation in the desired area.
3. The veteran will be invited by the housing provider for an interview and pre-tenancy checks. The veteran will then be invited to view a property to see if it is appropriate.
4. If the veteran is happy, a tenancy is prepared and a moving in date is arranged.

#### Further information:

[www.stoll.org.uk/housing/vns/](http://www.stoll.org.uk/housing/vns/)  
Email: [vns@stoll.org.uk](mailto:vns@stoll.org.uk)  
Telephone: 020 7381 8652



### Improving Housing Allocation Services:

- **Identify veterans as early as possible**

Make it standard practice to ask all applicants to your authority if they, or a member of their household, have ever served in HM Armed Forces.

- **Train staff**

Make staff in your organisation aware of the legislation and correct procedures around the local connection exemption and additional preference due to members of the Armed Forces community.

- **Partner with the Veterans' Nomination Scheme (VNS)**

Consider working with Stoll through the VNS or set aside housing stock specifically for ex-Service personnel or their families.

- **Signposting to nationwide specialist charities for additional support**

There are many Armed Forces charities operating throughout the UK and the choice can be confusing. Veterans' Gateway was established to be a first point of contact for veterans seeking support and can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Gateway can provide help from specialist housing advisers. More information is in Chapter Four.

- **Review housing allocations policies**

Regularly review policies and consult with Armed Forces charities to implement the best possible service to members of the Armed Forces community. Take the opportunity to remove the five-year time limit on local connection exemptions and to allow the exemption to apply to divorced and separated spouses and partners of Armed Forces personnel.



## BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

### Cheltenham Borough Council

Have purpose built ten properties specifically allocated to veterans and their families at affordable rent. The land, formerly a car mechanic's yard, was repurposed and the council, in partnership with Cheltenham Borough Homes, built a mix of properties including one and two bed flats and two-bedroom houses, at a cost of £1.4million. Twelve different veteran families have since been housed in these properties. The allocations policy in place will ensure that veterans and their families are prioritised in the future when properties in the development become available for new tenants.

### Wandsworth Council

Have set aside properties for the Veterans' Nomination Scheme (VNS) and receive veteran applicants through the scheme and through direct approaches to the council. The council keep properties aside for allocation to veterans who can live independently. Some properties are also available for veterans from outside the borough and the council will help to house people referred through the VNS who are looking for accommodation in south-west London.

### Cheshire East Council

Undertook a review of their housing allocations policy in early 2018. The Royal British Legion responded to the consultation and provided evidence to demonstrate the importance of improving provision for the Armed Forces community. The new allocations policy was implemented in July 2018 and included an improved offer for Armed Forces applicants, including placing applicants in a higher priority banding.



# CHAPTER THREE

## IDENTIFYING THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

### Ask the question

Providing specialised support is dependent upon members of the Armed Forces community being identified. The Legion has supported many members of the Armed Forces who did not receive the support they would expect, or would most benefit both them and the statutory provider, either because they were not given the opportunity to disclose their Service in the Armed Forces or because the authority did not know what to do next with the identified veterans and their families.

### The Legion recommends asking a question that will identify:

- Former members of HM Armed Forces, Regular and Reserve
- Spouse or Partner of serving or former members of HM Armed Forces
- Widow(er)s of serving or former members of HM Armed Forces
- Dependent children of serving or former members of HM Armed Forces
- Recently divorced or separated spouses or partners of serving or former members of HM Armed Forces

Without understanding the need to ask the question and without knowing what tailored support will follow the identification of a veteran, frontline staff may neglect to ask. Therefore, we recommend that all public bodies emphasise the purpose and importance of asking the question during staff training, and that staff are fully aware of the service they should be providing to members of the Armed Forces community.

If a member of the Armed Forces community is approaching a housing authority on the advice of a military charity, it is likely that the veteran has been encouraged to disclose their previous Service in the Armed Forces and that they had their Service verified by the referring charity already. If that is not the case and verification is required, the authority and the veteran should contact Veterans UK to verify past Service.

### Further assistance

Veterans UK: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)  
Email: [veterans-uk@mod.gov.uk](mailto:veterans-uk@mod.gov.uk)  
Freephone (UK only): 0808 1914 218  
Telephone (overseas): +44 1253 866 043

### Experience of a Service Leaver

For Service leavers coming to the end of a long career, the likelihood is they will have been preparing for their return to civilian life for some time and be ready for their discharge from the Armed Forces. Up to six months before discharge from the Armed Forces, personnel can be issued with a *Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Accommodation* and, as is explained in Chapter One, this is now accepted as proof of being threatened with homelessness. Sometimes, it is personnel who leave the Armed Forces unexpectedly early who experience difficulties in settling back into civilian life. A Short Notice Discharge, for example as a result of discharge on disciplinary grounds or misconduct, can give personnel as little as 28 days' notice to vacate Service-provided accommodation and return to civilian life. Information is available to personnel preparing to leave the Armed Forces by the Ministry of Defence through the Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO), and there will be circumstances where personnel are advised by JSHAO to approach a housing authority and

apply for social housing or make a homeless application if threatened with homelessness.

It is possible that housing authorities will be approached by people who are still serving in the Armed Forces and who are preparing for their transition into civilian accommodation. In these cases, documentation giving notice to vacate Service accommodation should be accepted as proof of being threatened with homelessness.

### Documentation on discharge

Personnel may be given several pieces of documentation during the discharge process that will identify them as a veteran. The process of verifying Service and directing veterans to the most appropriate sources of support can be accelerated by requesting that veterans show their discharge papers, notice to vacate Service accommodation, or medical release forms when making an application to a local authority. Adding advice that these documents may be useful to the information on a housing authority website will help applicants from the Armed Forces community be better prepared when approaching a council or housing association for support.

## DEFINITION OF A VETERAN FROM MINISTRY OF DEFENCE 2018, *THE STRATEGY FOR OUR VETERANS*

"The Government defines a veteran as anyone who has served for at least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces either in the Regular or Reserves, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations. Veterans have already left the UK Armed Forces. Some non-governmental organisations have other definitions, though these differences are minor."

Remember that any household that contains a veteran or serving people, as described above, will be entitled to the special provisions described in previous chapters. That is why it is important to bear in mind that an applicant to a local authority may not be a serving or ex-Service person themselves, but if they are living with a family member who is, they are therefore a member of an Armed Forces household.

### Veterans' ID Cards

From 2019, some veterans may be in possession of a Veterans' ID card. This should help verify Service more quickly. However, it is important to note that as the card is not compulsory it is vital to continue to "ask the question" and verify Service in the other methods outlined in this document.

### Further assistance

Veterans UK: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)  
Email: [veterans-uk@mod.gov.uk](mailto:veterans-uk@mod.gov.uk)  
Freephone (UK only): 0808 1914 218  
Telephone (overseas): +44 1253 866 043

Guides and e-learning modules for local authority staff are available from the Armed Forces Covenant website: [www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/localauthorities](http://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/localauthorities)

Joint Service Housing Advice Office: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-service-housing-advice-office-jshao](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-service-housing-advice-office-jshao)

# CHAPTER FOUR

## KEY SOURCES OF SUPPORT

There are many Armed Forces charities in operation and it can be confusing to navigate through them all to find the best source of support for a member of the Armed Forces community in need. This chapter highlights key sources of support that simplify the process of finding appropriate assistance.

### Veterans' Gateway

Veterans' Gateway is a first point of contact for veterans seeking support. They put veterans and their families in touch with the organisations best placed to help with the information, advice and support they need – from healthcare and housing to employability, finances, personal relationships and more.

Veterans' Gateway can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)**

Telephone: **0808 802 1212**

Text: **81212** to receive a call back.

The website hosts a housing options portal that lists vacant space in veteran-specific accommodation provided by Cobseo Housing Cluster members and Veterans' Gateway supporters. This ranges from specialist hostel and supported housing projects to family accommodation. These pages are updated fortnightly and all housing providers that support the veteran community can request listing on the portal via **[enquiries@veteransgateway.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@veteransgateway.org.uk)**

The portal is accessed via **[https://support.veteransgateway.org.uk/app/finding\\_a\\_home](https://support.veteransgateway.org.uk/app/finding_a_home)**



### Cobseo Housing Cluster Directory

Cobseo is the Confederation of Service Charities and brings together its members to cooperate and collaborate with others in order to provide the best possible level of support to beneficiaries. The Cobseo Housing Cluster is made up of a wide range of charitable and social housing organisations that provide veteran-specific accommodation. The members of the Cluster work to provide more accommodation for the ex-Service community and bring about an integrated veterans' housing sector with clear pathways for ex-Service personnel in housing need to move into permanent homes. The Cluster also maintains a regularly updated directory of dedicated services for veterans.

The directory provides an index by geographical location that can be used to find support and accommodation in your local area.

Access the directory and find out more about the cluster's work on their website: **[www.cobseo.org.uk/clusters/housing/](http://www.cobseo.org.uk/clusters/housing/)**

No Homeless Veterans is a new campaign led by the Cobseo Housing Cluster to ensure that veterans are identified as ex-Armed Forces at their point of need and are quickly and effectively signposted to the enhanced support services available to them. The campaign has a dedicated website: **[www.nohomelessveterans.org.uk](http://www.nohomelessveterans.org.uk)**





# CONCLUSION

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Identify veterans as early as possible. Be sure to “ask the question” and explain to people that it is being asked in order to direct them to the best support available.
- Build partnerships of local authorities, housing associations and Armed Forces charities in your area; and design bespoke pathways and tailored information to give to the Armed Forces community. Use the Cobseo Housing Cluster directory, to see if there is any veteran specific accommodation provided in your area.
- Write Personalised Housing Plans that include details of a veteran’s status or a family member’s connection and utilise connections with charities in the area who can provide additional expertise and help to the applicant.
- Appoint and train dedicated “Armed Forces Champions” working in housing departments. These people will be key sources of knowledge to provide quick, effective support to members of the Armed Forces community. Make these people known to other members of staff and the public so their expertise is always found quickly.
- Remove the five-year time limit on exemptions to the local connection criteria in housing allocations policies and allow the local connection exemption to apply to divorced and separated spouses and partners of Armed Forces personnel.
- Set aside housing stock specifically for ex-Service personnel and their families. Better yet, partner with the Veterans’ Nomination Scheme run by the charity Stoll and set aside properties for the use of Armed Forces applicants for social housing. In areas of low demand, consider accepting applicants from all over the country.
- Review housing allocations policies regularly and consult with Armed Forces charities to implement the best possible service to members of the Armed Forces community.
- Verify an applicant’s past Service, if necessary, by contacting Veterans UK.



### Suggested actions to take cont.

- Understand that serving personnel may have been given as much as six months' notice to move out of their Service provided accommodation. Be prepared to accept that notice as proof of being threatened with homelessness and be sure to inform applicants to provide the documentation to council staff.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the Veterans' Gateway service and, where appropriate, direct people to the service for support. Place details of the Veterans' Gateway on your local authority's website. Email **enquiries@veteransgateway.org.uk** to request a digital marketing toolkit.
- Receive a briefing from the No Homeless Veterans campaign, provided by the Cobseo Housing Cluster.



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