



Accommodation for Single Veterans: Developing Housing and Support Pathways

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

In 2013, the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York was commissioned by Stoll and Riverside, with funding from the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), to undertake a two stage research study on the accommodation and housing related support needs of single veterans in Great Britain. The first report, reviewing the nature of housing and support need amongst veterans, was published in late 2014 (Jones et al., 2014).

This second report focuses on the housing pathways of single veterans, and the role of the veteran accommodation sector within these pathways. It examines the housing pathways of single veterans over time, the factors that influence the housing pathways of single veterans and explores how the key stages in these pathways could be better supported by all services working with Service personnel and veterans. In particular, this second stage addresses how the veteran sector could better respond to the housing and support needs of single veterans.

Three main methods were utilised:

A qualitative longitudinal panel study of veterans

A qualitative longitudinal panel of 35 single veterans was recruited for the research in 2015/early 2016, drawn from five veteran providers who assisted with this recruitment process, including services that delivered accommodation-based and outreach/ resource facilities. In late 2016, repeat interviews were achieved with 15 veterans (and a further 4 new interviewees were recruited). In early 2017, we re-contacted a total of 22 veterans who took part in a final interview.

A review of housing and support services for single veterans

The extent of dedicated housing and support services for single veterans was charted, and a typology of provision prepared. From this, nine case studies of dedicated veteran accommodation services were selected, and research visits were undertaken. A total of 55 people participated in the case studies, including 11 strategic leads, 14 staff in the example schemes, and 30 veterans. Both individual interviews and focus groups were conducted. A Roundtable seminar was also convened towards the end of the research with key players providing housing and support services to veterans.

Analysis of enhanced SPACES monitoring data

Working with the SPACES (Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services), an advice and placement service for single veterans run by Riverside, an enhanced monitoring system was designed and data collected from October 2015 to October 2016 and analysed.

Findings

Need for housing and support

Available evidence indicates that single veterans are not significantly over-represented in homelessness provision, but that they are present in the low 1,000s. The 2016 survey of homelessness provision by Homeless Link suggested that 3% of accommodation project users, and 3% of day centre users, were veterans in England. The numbers (and proportions) of single veterans being accepted as homeless by local authorities in the UK are low, though it should be noted that there is presently limited eligibility for single people in England (this will change with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act). Scotland is the only country at present that records whether any member of a homeless household has been in the Armed Forces, with about 2% of homeless applicants in Scotland having a household member previously in the Armed Forces in 2016/17.

Just over 1,000 single veterans were supported by SPACES from October 2015-October 2016. Younger veterans, with relatively short Service times, were the main client group here. SPACES supported a smaller number of veterans into accommodation; these clients had an older average age and higher support needs than other service users.

Housing pathways of single veterans

Despite veterans not being over-represented in the homeless population, discussions with veterans in our longitudinal sample highlighted the complexity of present housing pathways for veterans. One group of respondents reported unsettled circumstances prior to joining up, and discussed being at risk of homelessness straight after leaving the Armed Forces. However, a larger group experienced episodes of homelessness some considerable time after they had left the Armed Forces. Some of these veterans had struggled from the start, moving between different insecure living

arrangements, including living with family members and poor quality unsupported tenancies. Another group had been settled on leaving but subsequently became homeless after a trigger event, often relationship breakdown. Here, a key issue was how they were identified as a veteran if/when they approached generic services, and whether these services could link them to veteran services. This study showed that veteran-specific housing options are not well known to the ex-Service community, and many veterans felt that more support could be available from local housing authorities.

The experiences of our longitudinal sample of veterans showed that veterans who had left within the last two years appeared more likely to discuss positive support they had received at the time that they left Service, although there were still calls to support this military-civilian transition further. Veterans who had left some time ago reported very limited transition support at the time that they left, and were more likely to feel disengaged from help. A conclusion is that there may be cohorts of veterans who left the Forces some time ago who have hidden needs, and may be disconnected from services or from information about how to get help.

Veterans' housing journeys suggested multiple opportunities to better support people who have already left the Services at earlier junctures, through preventative initiatives rather than a crisis intervention. This requires all sectors to work more effectively together to support people's housing and wider support pathways, including both veteran and generic providers in the statutory and third sector, as well as Government departments and allied umbrella organisations.

The role of the veteran accommodation sector

In late 2016, it was estimated that the following provision was available in the veteran housing and support sector:

- 1226 units of accommodation
 - Further 87 units in pipeline;
- 276 floating support places.

The dedicated veteran accommodation sector is a relatively new sector. Whilst there is an established historic base for some of the services, a large number of units have been developed in the last five years, and the sector has expanded by 14% since 2014 (with key schemes still in the development process). The main aim of the sector is to assist homeless veterans who are struggling with daily life to make a positive transition to independent and civilian life.

Present provision can be typologised in two main ways. Firstly, provision can be categorised by the type of accommodation service provided, including hostel-type provision; shared houses, with support; single site self-contained flats, with support, and, finally, self-contained flats (single site or dispersed). Accommodation can be offered on either a transitional or longer-term basis. Any of these models could be offered as part of a 'veteran village'. Secondly, most providers offered a 'package of services' to veterans. The five main types of packages were:

- Accommodation and (housing related) support;
- Accommodation, support and resident facilities/resources;
- Accommodation, support, & open resource facility;
- Accommodation, support, outreach & open resource facility, and
- Outreach support only.

Most provision offered high quality accommodation and facilities. Partnership working enabled a range of housing, employment and health and well-being services to be delivered to service users.

The veteran interviews revealed that their veteran status was a positive part of people's identity, potentially offering them status and belonging at an otherwise difficult time in their life. For most veterans in the study, there was a clear preference for dedicated services. There was an overwhelming view that the veteran specific schemes had made a significant impact on respondents' lives at the point of moving in. Whilst there was a high level of satisfaction with the accommodation, a number of areas were highlighted for improvement including: more support for parents to re-establish/ maintain close relations with children; more proactive support and activities within supported accommodation; improved move-on opportunities with ongoing resettlement support. Support with employment was a high priority in most schemes, though locational issues and rent levels, alongside health needs, sometimes made it hard for people to find and sustain employment whilst living in schemes. Whilst living with peers could bring tensions, there was potential to develop more formal peer support initiatives.

There was considerable concern amongst providers about the future funding of supported housing for veterans, in particular, the then proposed policy to apply Local Housing Allowance rates to supported accommodation. Whilst this policy has since been dropped, a risk remains under current proposals where housing costs for short-term services (including the majority of supported housing for veterans) will be dependent upon income from devolved local authority block grant funding, where there is limited assurance about long-term availability. This contrasts markedly with the current model of funding, where housing costs are met through relatively predictable rental income streams, backed by welfare benefits that are based upon a system of individual entitlement. Further, if a localised funding system is introduced, there is an additional risk that services being delivered to people with no local connection (like veterans and women fleeing violence) might be a low priority under the proposed ring-fenced grant to local authorities for short-term supported accommodation. Fund-raising was presently utilised to plug gaps, and despite greater funds available within the veteran compared to the civilian sector, the future sustainability of many services was uncertain.

Conclusion

The available evidence suggests that there is a small but significant group of veterans who become homeless or are at risk of homelessness. Housing providers (both generic and veteran organisations) have responded to this by developing a niche sector of veteran accommodation (with some provision still being developed). The study has shown that this niche sector is valued by service users (particularly acknowledging their identity as veterans), and despite some challenges, can be a catalyst to help veterans to begin to stabilise their lives following adverse life events and homelessness. However, the study also highlights how housing pathways (including all types of accommodation) are still difficult to navigate and much more could be done to improve the housing journey from transition to settled accommodation, as well as to better support veterans who become homeless sometime after leaving the Armed Forces. The dedicated veteran accommodation sector's future sustainability remains a concern with proposed local ring-fenced funding for short-term supported accommodation. More broadly, if homelessness amongst veterans is to be addressed, veteran and generic housing and other services need to be better integrated or linked, with multi-agency support and leadership from within the sector as well as the Government.

Recommendations

Our research identified three main recommendations, with a number of sub-recommendations:

1) The development of improved housing pathways for veterans

- i. Better, more proactive transition planning (targeted at the most vulnerable), both pre-and post-Service leaving.
- ii. Improved systems to ensure that veterans are identified within housing and other welfare services (including all local authorities recording whether applicants have a Service history under the new English homelessness legislation).
- iii. A streamlined system for housing advice and referrals to generic housing providers and, where appropriate, to the dedicated veteran accommodation options.
- iv. Overall improved coordination, and joint working, between existing providers of veteran accommodation.
- v. Improved processes for nominations to generic housing and support services from the veteran-dedicated accommodation sector for veterans.
- vi. Greater coordination between health, housing, social welfare and employment sectors for veterans at all stages of the housing pathway.

2) Improvements to the existing dedicated veteran accommodation sector

- i. Peer support initiatives could usefully be investigated.
- ii. The sector could also consider how they can better assist veterans with parenting/ maintaining contact with children and wider family.
- iii. Improved focus on resettlement and outreach services.
- iv. Investigation of alternative housing-led models of provision (including models for both early intervention and at crisis point).
- v. Greater focus on monitoring and service outcomes (for example, the development of a core basic framework for evaluation).

3) Review of the funding sources available to support veteran housing pathways

- i. A shift in emphasis to ensure existing schemes, including those funded from veteran specific national capital sources, are able to access sustainable revenue funding, to enable the veteran accommodation sector to consolidate its present position. This is particularly important in the context of the Department for Work and Pensions/ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government proposals around future funding for supported housing.
- ii. Identification of possible resources to support veteran preventative or floating support services (including peer support initiatives).
- iii. Investment in key national, regional (or large city) posts to support mainstream services supporting veterans (for example, regional housing champions or combined authority 'metro' posts).



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