

Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces, Veterans, and their families

Stoll response, on behalf of the Cobseo Housing Cluster

The Cobseo Housing Cluster's policy pro forma of housing issues for Veterans that we believe should be a priority for this Government can be found [here](#).

- 1. Do you agree with the proposal to use statutory guidance to strongly encourage the exemption from local connection requirements of divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation that has been provided by the Ministry of Defence?**

Yes we agree.

The mental health and wellbeing of our Armed Forces, whether they are Regulars, Reservists or Veterans, is a priority for this Government. We want to ensure that serving and ex-members of the Armed Forces suffering from mental ill health are given appropriate priority for social housing where they need it.

We therefore propose that the guidance makes clear the circumstances in which we would expect local authorities to apply the 'medical and welfare' reasonable preference category and the additional preference requirements to members of the Regular and Reserve Armed Forces, and Veterans, to ensure that those who are suffering from mental ill health are given appropriate priority for social housing.

We also want to ensure that Local Authorities consistently ask the question whether someone applying for housing is a Veteran and that the Housing Strategy makes sure that there are clear plans in place to provide advice and assistance for ALL current or past Members of the Armed Forces who apply to Local Authorities for support – including Reservists and spouses or civil partners of current Serving personnel.

- 2. Do you agree with the proposal to use statutory guidance to make clear the circumstances in which we would expect local authorities to apply the 'medical and welfare' reasonable preference category and the additional preference requirements to ensure members of the Armed Forces and Veterans suffering from mental ill health are given appropriate priority for social housing? Views are sought on the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal.**

We are undecided about the proposal.

We support the need to make clear the circumstances in which we would expect Local Authorities to apply the 'medical and welfare' reasonable preference category and the

additional preference requirements to ensure members of the Armed Forces and Veterans suffering from mental ill health are given appropriate priority for social housing.

However, our preference is for secondary legislation rather than the use of statutory guidance. The advantage of statutory guidance is that it will ensure Local Authorities will need to consider this issue carefully. The disadvantage is that it is not legally binding. That is why we recommend secondary legislation is required.

While we are completely supportive of the principle, in practice there are a number of issues that need to be considered, namely:

- 1) How are these individuals going to be identified? Who will have the authority to give a diagnosis that meets the reasonable preference category?
- 2) A significant number of Serving personnel develop trauma injuries once they have returned to civilian life and it is hard to be definite the degree to which it is related to service. Is it only those who are medically discharged because of their mental health, or would the reasonable preference be applied to those who develop such condition later on.
- 3) Would the reasonable preference category be extended to Veterans and Armed Forces personnel who develop mental health conditions while in Service that cannot be directly attributable to their Service?

We also have a concern that there is little consistency in the way that Local Authorities identify Armed Forces personnel, or in their ability to give appropriate advice and assistance once identified. And on too many occasions, advice and assistance is given before a full assessment is even undertaken. We feel this is a bigger issue overall than the awarding of extra points of reasonable preference for Service Leavers with mental health problems – although this is within the context of supporting the overall initiative.

3. Local authorities are invited to provide details of how they are using their existing powers under the allocation legislation to support serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families

Our 2012 statutory allocations guidance strongly encourages local authorities to ensure that the needs of all serving or former Service personnel are taken into account when framing their allocation schemes and to be sympathetic to the needs of their family members. The guidance provides examples of how they can do this by:

- using the flexibility within the allocation legislation to set local priorities alongside the statutory reasonable preference categories
- using the power to determine priorities between applicants in the reasonable preference categories
- disregarding any lump sum received by a member of the Armed Forces as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service
- setting aside a proportion of properties for former members of the Armed Forces under a local lettings policy

We are interested in finding out how local authorities are currently supporting serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families; how they are applying the guidance in paragraph 18 of the consultation document, and whether they have developed their own policies for ensuring that members of the Armed Forces community are given appropriate priority.

4. Local authorities are invited to provide details of how their current allocation policies ensure that members of the Regular and Reserve Armed Forces, and Veterans, who are suffering from mental ill health are given appropriate priority.

This consultation provides the opportunity to produce a single standalone piece of guidance on allocating social housing for the Armed Forces community, updating and building on existing advice in the 2012 and 2013 statutory guidance. This would support greater awareness of the particular circumstances of the Armed Forces community amongst housing staff, promote a consistent approach across local authorities to the way they consider applications from members of the Armed Forces community, and ensure their housing needs are considered appropriately.

We propose that the new guidance brings together all existing guidance on the allocation of social housing to the Armed Forces community.

5. Do you agree with the proposal to bring together in one standalone document guidance on the allocation of social housing to the Armed Forces community?

Yes, we categorically agree that guidance on the allocation of social housing to the Armed Forces community should be brought together in a single document. We stand ready to support the preparation of this document. We represent the Cobseo Housing Cluster – an award winning coalition of the 20 most significant housing providers to Veterans in the UK – And would like to take an active part on developing this document.

The production of new guidance will enable Local Authorities and other bodies to easily interpret the Government's intentions in this area. This will lead to better implementation. It will also ensure greater consistency across the country.

Our response to question 5 includes important information that should be considered in the guidance.

However, MHCLG should also work closely with the MoD because if some practical measures are implemented to support Service Leavers before they leave the Armed Forces, the work of Local Authorities will be made significantly easier.

The measure we seek was published in our [Call to Action](#), launched at the House of Lords with Ministerial endorsement in Spring 2018. The creation of a Housing Transition Pathway, giving housing a similar level of importance as employment and the current Career Transition Pathway will make a huge difference and will help reduce unnecessary homelessness within the Veteran community. We recognise that the majority of Service

personnel will undergo a successful transition, however, MHCLG should work with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that every single Service leaver, whatever their circumstances, is asked about their housing options after Service. Those identified of being at risk of homelessness should be given bespoke and well-informed advice to ensure they have a pathway away from homelessness upon leaving the Services. This would ensure the Ministry of Defence fulfils its own responsibilities under the Armed Forces Covenant. To this end we recommend that Service Directive 3221 is applied consistently so that every Service Leaver, whatever their circumstances, is asked about housing as part of the transition process. This should also be a key commitment in the Veterans' Strategy.

Identifying an applicant as a serving or former member of the Armed Forces or another member of the Armed Forces community at the start of the process is key to dealing with the application effectively. This might mean taking relatively simple measures, such as including an appropriate question in the application form, or as part of any initial interview. Specialist training for staff and managers to help them identify members of the Armed Forces and understand their specific needs and circumstances should also support an improved application process and ensure those who have contributed through their service are treated appropriately and given the priority they deserve.

We propose that the guidance encourages local authorities to include a question on their housing application form which asks the applicant if they are a member of the Armed Forces or have ever served in the Armed Forces or are another member of the Armed Forces community; and to ensure that staff and managers are provided with appropriate training.

6. Do you currently include a question on your application form that asks whether the applicant is a current member of the Armed Forces, a Veteran or another member of the Armed Forces community?

The Cobseo Housing Cluster represents over 20 of the leading providers of accommodation to Veterans in the UK. Therefore we ask the question whether someone has served in the Armed Forces and we have clear eligibility criteria for our housing. The question is particularly geared towards Local Authorities and we welcome the focus on this issue. In Spring 2018 we published clear recommendations for Local Authorities, urging that they be mandated to ask if people presenting for housing have served in the Armed Forces and if so to take action to ensure their housing needs are addressed.

Our call to Action specifically called for:

'The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that the H-CLIC form which records homelessness data from Local Authorities asks for data on Veterans. This would mean that every Local Authority proactively identifies Veterans coming through their doors.'

We are very pleased that from December 2018 Local Authorities have started to include Veterans as a distinct category in their housing returns to central government. This is a major step forward and, if the data are analysed effectively, will help us prevent unnecessary homelessness in the future. However we are also aware that this will not pick up every applicant as many Local Authorities use advice and assistance as a way of not carrying out

a formal housing application and therefore not all Veterans may be identified as they apply for housing.

We urge MHCLG to ensure that Veterans are part of housing and homelessness strategies in Local Authority Housing Departments. This means not only recording whether someone applying for housing advice is a Veteran, but also being able to give the appropriate advice so the Veteran has a clear housing pathway. The statutory guidance issued to Local Authorities on housing allocations in 2012 specifically emphasises the flexibilities authorities have to prioritise applications from ex-service personnel. We believe that this guidance needs to be applied consistently to ensure that every Local Authority identifies Veterans and can advise them appropriately.

The Ministry of Defence, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and umbrella bodies within the Veterans, housing and homelessness spheres should also endorse the Veterans' Gateway and their enhanced housing offer to support Local Authorities to give effective advice to the Veterans they identify without using Local Authority resource. This is an enhanced offer within the Veterans' Gateway offering tailored support to Veterans.

7. Would you support the proposal to use statutory guidance to encourage local authorities to include such a question?

Yes. Ideally the H-Clic form should cover this area but we know it does not always happen in practice. We would support this proposal however our preference would be for secondary legislation in this area. That would be optimal.

8. Local authorities are invited to provide details of how they are training their housing staff to deal with applications from serving or former members of the Armed Forces or other members of the Armed Forces community.

[This question is directed at Local Authorities]

9. Would you support the proposal to use statutory guidance to encourage local authorities to provide appropriate training for staff and managers to deal with applications from serving or former members of the Armed Forces or other members of the Armed Forces community?

Yes, we would support the proposal to ensure appropriate training in this area.

However there are additional measures that should be taken to alleviate unnecessary homelessness in the country. Identifying people's housing needs before serving personnel leave the Armed Forces and by ensuring a consistent approach at Local Authority level (as highlighted already) will make a significant difference. However, we also need to address the significant shortage of supported housing for Veterans. Supported housing for Veterans should be put on a sustainable financial footing once and for all. Veterans are the only

supported housing sector in the UK where the majority of support costs are paid for by the charities themselves. This is not sustainable and threatens to undermine our country's ability to support homeless Veterans. Given the unusual nature of demand, which is often associated with Veterans who originate from outside the area where they are seeking accommodation, revenue costs for support services should be funded nationally, through a fund established by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. If funding continues to be allocated locally, clear planning should be put in place by Local Authorities within the framework for supported housing funding. This framework should specifically require Local Authorities to consider the needs of Veterans as they map demand and create supported housing strategies.

Personal data

The following is to explain your rights and give you the information you are entitled to under the Data Protection Act 2018.

Note that this section only refers to your personal data (your name address and anything that could be used to identify you personally) not the content of your response to the consultation.

1. The identity of the data controller and contact details of our Data Protection Officer

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is the data controller. The Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotection@communities.gov.uk

2. Why we are collecting your personal data

Your personal data is being collected as an essential part of the consultation process, so that we can contact you regarding your response and for statistical purposes. We may also use it to contact you about related matters.

3. Our legal basis for processing your personal data

The Data Protection Act 2018 states that, as a government department, MHCLG may process personal data as necessary for the effective performance of a task carried out in the public interest. i.e. a consultation.

4. For how long we will keep your personal data, or criteria used to determine the retention period

Your personal data will be held for two years from the closure of the consultation.

5. Your rights, e.g. access, rectification, erasure

The data we are collecting is your personal data, and you have considerable say over what happens to it. You have the right

- to see what data we have about you
- to ask us to stop using your data, but keep it on record
- to ask to have all or some of your data deleted or corrected
- to lodge a complaint with the independent Information Commissioner (ICO) if you think we are not handling your data fairly or in accordance with the law. You can contact the ICO at <https://ico.org.uk/>, or telephone 0303 123 1113.

6. Your personal data will not be sent overseas

The Data you provide directly will be stored by Survey Monkey on their servers in the United States. We have taken all necessary precautions to ensure that your rights in terms of data protection will not be compromised by this.

7. Your personal data will not be used for any automated decision making.

8. Your personal data will be stored in a secure government IT system.
