

SUPPORTING THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY WITH  
HOUSING IN WALES

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE



Cover images © Crown copyright 2011 / 2014

LIVE ON  



# ABOUT THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

---

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)

A larger copy print version of this document is available on request.

Registered charity number 219279  
[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

# CONTENTS

---



Forewords	Page: 4
Introduction	Page: 8
<b>Chapter One</b> – Homelessness and rough sleeping	Page: 10
<b>Chapter Two</b> – Housing Allocations	Page: 17
<b>Chapter Three</b> – Identifying the Armed Forces community	Page: 25
<b>Chapter Four</b> – Key sources of support	Page: 28
<b>Conclusion</b> – Suggested actions to take	Page: 31
Further reading and bibliography	Page: 34

# FOREWORD

---

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 don't 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.

Significant progress has been achieved in addressing disadvantage and providing special treatment where appropriate and we welcome the commitment to the Armed Forces

Covenant by Welsh Local Authorities. In 2016 the Welsh Government introduced its *National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel*, which has provided clarity and been a big help to Welsh veterans. 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 your organisation 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, appearing to read 'Ant Metcalfe'.

**Ant Metcalfe**  
Wales Area Manager  
The Royal British Legion

# FOREWORD

---

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.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Tytherleigh'.

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



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Richardson'.

**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 Wales 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 Wales 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, in Wales, a question on prior Service in the Armed Forces is now asked during the annual rough sleeper count, although that data is not currently made publicly available. This makes it difficult for charities and other providers to accurately target their resources.

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.

In 2018, the Welsh Government introduced the *Rough Sleeping Action Plan*, which is an addition to the 2009 *Ten Year Homelessness Plan* and have stated that "The Welsh Government is committed to the goal of ending homelessness in Wales. Our strategy is first and foremost prevention but if homelessness cannot be prevented ensuring it is rare, brief and non-recurrent." It is clear, therefore, that tackling homelessness needs to remain a priority right across Wales.

### 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, and their families, can be better supported out of homelessness.

### What support currently exists?

In 2016 the Welsh Government introduced a Housing Pathway for Ex Service Personnel, which sets out much of the help and support available to veterans in this area.

Under the 2014 Housing (Wales) Act, if a Service person is 56 days away from discharge without accommodation, a local authority has a duty to help them find suitable accommodation. This accommodation can be in either the private or rental sector and must be expected to last at least six months. People homeless on leaving the Regular Armed Forces are classed as being in priority need, however, the Welsh Government is currently assessing whether priority needs to be extended or removed. The evaluation is due to report in 2020, and it is The Legion's hope that priority need will be

extended to cover several years post discharge from the Armed Forces.

The Housing (Wales) Act also classes someone as in priority need if they are "vulnerable as a result of some special reason (for example: old age, physical or mental illness or physical or mental disability)." The Legion would again like to see local authorities recognise receipt of a War Disablement Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Guaranteed Income Payment as one of these 'special reasons', given that both are compensation for injuries or conditions sustained during Service.

### Summary of Code of guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016 Part 2

- A homelessness strategy must include provision for people leaving the regular Armed Forces of the Crown.
- Authorities should accept *Certificates of Cessation of Entitlement to occupy a Service Quarter and of Impending Homelessness* produced by the appropriate Area Office of the Defence Housing Executive as sufficient evidence - these certificates are usually issued six months before discharge.
- Authorities should recognise that priority need arises where the applicant has failed to secure suitable permanent accommodation since leaving the Armed Forces.
- When considering degree of permanence, in addition to considering suitability of accommodation, as described in Chapter 19 regard must be made of the original intention of the arrangement when the applicant took up occupation of the accommodation. For example, if the applicant moved in with

friends to accommodation which was only ever intended to be a temporary measure until they found alternative accommodation, then this may not be considered as 'settled'. No time limit should be placed on eligibility following discharge, if no suitable permanent accommodation has been found.

- Authorities will need to consider whether former Armed Service personnel who have been housed following discharge, but later become homeless, are vulnerable due to some special reason. They will need to take account of their Service background which may lead to vulnerability, particularly if they have post-traumatic stress disorder.
- The local housing authority must ensure that their services are designed to meet the needs of groups at particular risk of homelessness, including people leaving the regular Armed Forces of the Crown.

- It is paramount that Local Authorities consider the individual needs of the applicant when developing interventions for Armed Forces veterans to access the specialised services available to them.
- Where someone has presented up to six months prior to discharge from the Armed Forces, Authorities must provide information, advice and assistance via the Section 60 duty for the Housing (Wales) Act.

## EXTRACT FROM CODE OF GUIDANCE ON VETERANS:

Under *Section 70 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014*, people who have formerly served in the regular Armed Forces of the Crown and who have been homeless since leaving those forces are recognised as being in priority need. However, veterans may also experience difficulties post-discharge, in adjusting to civilian life. This may include, late onset of trauma, mental health difficulties, problems associated with physical injury and substance misuse. These issues may then result in difficulties in adapting to their new life and in some cases involvement with the criminal justice system.

Local Authorities working with their partners across Wales are signed up to Community Covenants, which encourage providers from all sectors to offer targeted support for their Armed Forces community. To increase access to this support, Local Authorities should work with local homelessness out-reach services to support the identification of ex-Service Personnel amongst homeless people.

### Improving homelessness services:

- **Extend Priority Need so it encompasses not just those that are leaving the Armed Forces but those who left up to five years ago as well, to allow for adjustment into civilian life.**

- **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 clients. 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.

- **Provide specialised advice and information**

Whether it is at the stage of providing initial advice or later in the process, have a clear understanding of what steps must be undertaken with a veteran applicant as soon as they are identified. Each local authority will approach this differently, but this should include:

- Signposting to nationwide specialist charities for additional support. There are many Armed Forces charities operating throughout Wales 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.

- **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

### Tŷ Dewr - Wrexham

The Salvation Army run a 12 bedded en suite temporary supported housing unit for veterans who find themselves homeless or threatened with homelessness. The building is owned by First Choice Housing who also have general needs housing for veterans at Ty Ryan in Wrexham.

Tŷ Dewr is in a tranquil location on the outskirts of Wrexham and is set in grounds with an external gymnasium. The aim of Tŷ Dewr is to support veterans making the transition into civilian life by identifying any support needs that they may have with the ultimate aim of finding them their own accommodation. Homeless veterans can access Tŷ Dewr by contacting the service directly, linking in with veterans' charities and by contacting Wrexham Borough Council housing department.

### Hafal, Acute Care Tenancy Support (ACTS)

The ACTS project is a housing related floating support project for people who have secondary mental health care needs. Support can be provided for up to 12 months and includes homelessness prevention.

### Cardiff Council - Veterans Advisors

Cardiff Council have three staff dedicated to support Veterans and their families in a number of fields including: Benefits, Employment, Debt and Housing. Housing support includes council housing as well as helping those who are homeless, or those that need help with first months' rent in advance. The Team work closely with a wide third sector network.

### Vale of Glamorgan, RCT and Merthyr Tydfil Councils - Veteran Advice Service

These councils have recently set up a "Veteran Advice Service" which provides free, impartial, dedicated information, advice and support to members of the Armed Forces community. The service covers a range of areas, including Housing, Benefits, Adult Social Care, Finances and Employment.

## 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**

Telephone: **0207 828 2468**

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

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

Alabaré **[www.alabare.co.uk](http://www.alabare.co.uk)**

Shelter Cymru **[www.sheltercymru.org.uk](http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk)**

Solas Cymru **[www.solas-cymru.co.uk](http://www.solas-cymru.co.uk)**

Tŷ Dewr **[tydewr@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:tydewr@salvationarmy.org.uk)**

Telephone: **01978 355410**

- Welsh Veterans Partnership **[www.welshveteranspartnership.org](http://www.welshveteranspartnership.org)**





# CHAPTER TWO

---

## HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

Members of the Armed Forces community who experience difficulties securing suitable accommodation can of course turn to local authority allocated housing for help. 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 Wales 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.

### Priority

The Welsh Government has stated that it is important that ex-Service personnel who have been seriously injured or disabled in Service and who have an urgent need for social housing should be given high priority within local authorities' allocation schemes in recognition of their Service. The Welsh Government's commitment to this was established in *The Nation's Commitment: Cross Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans 2008*, which was updated in line with Armed Forces Covenant and the Welsh Government's response, as set out in the *Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales 2011*.

### Additional Preference

*The Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016* gives additional preference to specified members of the Armed Forces community.

## EXTRACT FROM CODE OF GUIDANCE 2016:

All Local Authorities must consider, in the light of local circumstances, the need to give effect to this provision. Examples of people to whom a Local Authority should consider giving additional preference within their allocation scheme include:

iv. any applicant who needs to move to suitable adapted accommodation

because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability which he or she, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of Service in the Armed Forces.

v. people needing accommodation as a result of leaving the Armed Forces and the loss of military accommodation.

Some local authorities in Wales have changed their allocations policies to now give additional preference to the Armed Forces community. Some authorities have also placed the Armed Forces in the top available banding of their prioritisation, and whenever an allocations policy is changed, the Legion recommends that local authorities review the provisions relating to the Armed Forces community and determine if greater priority can be given.

### Local connection

Ordinarily, applicants to social housing must 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. However, there is an exemption to the local connection requirement, shown below, in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, to specified members of the Armed Forces community. We would like to see the local connection exemption apply to divorced and separated spouses, partners and children of Armed Forces personnel too.



## EXTRACT FROM NATIONAL HOUSING PATHWAY FOR EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL

For the purposes of the 2014 Housing Act, serving members of the Armed Forces, and other persons who normally live with them as part of their household, do establish a local connection with an area by virtue of serving, or having served, there while in the Forces. All Local Authorities must consider, in the light of local circumstances, the need to give effect to this provision. Examples of people to whom a Local Authority should consider giving additional preference within their allocation scheme include:

iv) any applicant who needs to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability which he or she, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of Service in the Armed Forces.

v) people needing accommodation as a result of leaving the Armed Forces and the loss of military accommodation.

Commonly, we find that local authorities do not understand the exemptions to the local connection requirement for veterans. 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.

In England, there is a five-year time limit on exemptions to the local connection criteria in housing allocations, **no such time limit exists** in Welsh Government legislation.



## BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

### Gwent Councils

Working closely with their Armed Forces Liaison Officer (AFLO) Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly Councils have started backdating housing applications for Service leavers, and recent Service leavers, to the date they began serving in the Armed Forces. This helps to reduce the disadvantage that may result from serving in the Armed Forces with regard to housing waiting lists. The Legion commend this policy and would like to see it implemented across Wales.

### Ty Ryan, Wrexham

Ty Ryan is a partnership between First Choice Housing and Wrexham Local Authority which has helped provide additional veterans housing in North Wales. It is a self-build project, which has enabled veterans to participate in the construction of their own homes, acquiring a range of skills and qualifications, in the process it may also aid their future employment opportunities.



### 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 Allocations 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. The AFLOs in each region will be able to assist with this.

- **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 Wales 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.





# CHAPTER THREE

## IDENTIFYING THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

### Asking 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 information:

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*, which should be 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 local authority and apply for social housing or make a homeless application if threatened with homelessness.

It is possible that local authorities will be approached by clients 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 should 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 local authority website will help applicants from the Armed Forces community be better prepared when approaching a Local Authority or housing association for support.



© Imran's Photography / Shutterstock.com

## 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 to 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)

### Alabaré – Homes for Veterans Wales

Alabaré provide dedicated support to veterans in North and South Wales - specifically; Swansea, Carmarthen, Clydach, Cardiff, Pontypridd and Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales; Glan Conwy, Llandudno Junction and Colwyn bay in North Wales.

The property in Clydach is the Old War Memorial Hospital and has four self-contained flats for veterans that are just ready to move into their own accommodation but still need a little help to get it right.

Veterans are given a key worker who work with them to agree a support plan based on their individual needs. Within the home, they can access training and develop the skills needed for independent living, including budgeting, healthy eating, shopping, and life skills.

Alabaré accept referrals to their Wales Homes for Veterans from local support agencies, The Royal British Legion and other charities.

For more information about Alabaré's Homes for Veterans email: [veterans@alabare.co.uk](mailto:veterans@alabare.co.uk) or visit <https://www.alabare.co.uk/theme/homes-for-veterans-wales>





# CONCLUSION

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Join Gwent local authorities in backdating housing applications for Service leavers, and recent Service leavers, to the date they began serving in the Armed Forces.
- Extend priority need to cover five years post discharge from the Armed Forces.
- Recognise receipt of a War Disablement Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Guaranteed Income Payment as a 'special reasons' and give those applicants priority need.
- Identify veterans as early as possible. Be sure to "ask the question" and explain to the client that it is being asked in order to direct them to the best support available.
- Build partnerships with Armed Forces charities in the area and design locally specialised advice and information to give to clients that have been identified as coming from the Armed Forces community. Use the Cobseo Housing Cluster directory, to see if there is any veteran specific accommodation provided in your area.
- 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.
- 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 client.
- 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.
- 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 continued

- 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 clients to the service

for support. Place details of the Veterans' Gateway on your local authority's website. Email [enquiries@veteransgateway.org.uk](mailto: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.



## FURTHER READING AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- Armed Forces Covenant:  
[www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk](http://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk)
- Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness:  
<https://gwedhill.gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160324-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-allocation-of-accommodation-and-homelessness-en.pdf>
- Cobseo Housing Cluster: [www.cobseo.org.uk/clusters/housing/](http://www.cobseo.org.uk/clusters/housing/)
- Forces in Mind Trust (2013) *The Transition Mapping Study*.  
<https://www.fim-trust.org/news/transition-mapping-study-report/>
- Housing (Wales) Act 2014:  
[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/pdfs/anaw\\_20140007\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/pdfs/anaw_20140007_en.pdf)
- Housing Pathway for Ex Service Personnel:  
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/national-housing-pathway-for-ex-service-personnel.pdf>
- Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO):  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-service-housing-advice-office-jshao](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-service-housing-advice-office-jshao)
- Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2018:  
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/rough-sleeping-action-plan.pdf>
- Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services (SPACES):  
[www.spaces.org.uk](http://www.spaces.org.uk)
- Stoll – Veterans’ Nomination Scheme:  
[www.stoll.org.uk/housing/vns/](http://www.stoll.org.uk/housing/vns/)
- Ten year homelessness plan for Wales: 2009-2019:  
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/10-year-homelessness-plan-2009-to-2019.pdf>
- University of York (2014) *Meeting the housing and support needs of single veterans in Great Britain*.
- University of York (2018) *Accommodation for Single Veterans: Developing Housing and Support Pathways*.
- Veterans Aid:  
[www.veterans-aid.net](http://www.veterans-aid.net)
- Veterans’ Gateway:  
[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)
- Veterans UK:  
[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)



# LIVE ON

THE ROYAL BRITISH  
LEGION

