

ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT

Key Facts





A message from the Defence Secretary

This Government is committed to supporting its Armed Forces. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to ensure that those who serve in the Armed Forces are treated fairly. Each year we publish an Annual Report to Parliament on the actions we have taken to uphold the commitments in the Covenant. I appreciate that not everybody wants, or needs to read the full report. Therefore, the key changes are highlighted in this document.

We know that we need to do more. We understand that our Serving personnel and their families should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and in the society that they serve with their lives. The Government recognises that duty to you, and we will continue to make the changes you need. I thank you for what you do, and have done.

[Insert Signature]

Healthcare

What have we done?

- **Embedded** the principles of the Covenant into the NHS constitution. This will ensure that the Armed Forces Community (families and veterans) are not disadvantaged in accessing health services where they live.
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- Public Health England has **launched** the Military pathway guidance for health professionals, which aims to support Service families and recognise the specific needs which may arise particularly around mental health and wellbeing.
 - **Launched** a **£500K** research programme to improve detection and treatment of Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) amongst Service personnel.
 - **Allocated £2M** to set up a pilot NHS Specialist Rehabilitation Unit in Stanmore to provide improved access to orthopaedic care in England for regular and reservist personnel and veterans.

- **Updated** the Armed Forces Community health pages on the NHS choices website to help Armed Forces families manage their health needs.
- **Allocated £5M** to investigate the psychological impact of battlefield injuries and severe battlefield trauma and improve treatment of those affected.

Education

What have we done?

- **Allocated** funding from a **£20M** budget to improve childcare facilities for Service families at 40 locations in the UK and Cyprus.
- **Amended** the schools admission code to prioritise service children in the admissions process. Service Family can also now apply for, and be allocated a place before they move into the area. [No other group can do this].
- **Allocated** over **£20M** in Service Pupil Premium payments this year to support the pastoral needs of 60,000 Service pupils in state schools in England.
- **Issued** grants to **154 applicants** for **Education Support Funding** to help schools mitigate and manage issues caused by exceptional mobility and deployment. **24,500** children from Service families have benefitted from this.

- **Written** to headteachers to confirm arrangements for term time absences where parents are returning or going on deployments.
- **Worked** with schools and local authorities, arranging reciprocal visits and briefs to ensure a smooth transition back into UK schools for children rebasing from Germany. During 2015, **1,200** children from Service families have successfully transitioned back to the UK.

Accommodation

What have we done?

- Given **£76M to help 5,000** personnel to buy or improve their home through the Forces Help to Buy scheme. The Defence Secretary wants to double the number to 10,000 by Oct 16.



- We have **not allocated** Service Family Accommodation (SFA) below Standard 2 for Condition in the UK. The condition of the SFA estate has continued to improve, and over **99%** of UK properties are at the top two Standards for condition.

- **Spent £65Million** upgrading and improving 185 SFA properties to the highest condition standard. They have been fully modernised throughout.
- Made 'lifestyle improvements to a further **3,000 SFA properties** by installing new kitchens, bathrooms, double glazing and insulation. Following complaints last year we have addressed damp and mould problems in **2,000 properties**. We are also funding efficiency measures in 'hard to heat' SFA through external wall insulation.
- **Reduced** accommodation charges on SFA properties overseas by **20%** and waived their contributions in lieu of council tax to MOD from April 16.
- **Delivered nearly** 2,000 new Single Living Accommodation (SLA) bed spaces through modernisation programmes.
- **Introduced** the Tenancy Deposit Loan Scheme to give Service personnel an advance of salary to fund the cost of a deposit if they want to rent a property privately.

What else have we done?

For Reserves

- **Made** reserves eligible for the new Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2015 for non-mobilised service, based on paid attendance. This means that Reservists can now receive pension contributions for all Reserves activity.



- **Introduced** a new post-nominal for all reservists who have served for 10 years or more. This recognises the tremendous and growing contribution reserve forces make to our national security.
- **Invested** over **£14M** to deliver a significant change in occupational health services for reservists; and provided improved medical support. This is helping to bring healthcare provision for reservists closer to what we provide for regular personnel.
- **Provided** access to the Armed Forces Railcard, offering Reservists and their families 1/3 off rail fares.

For Families

- **Launched** a two year Spousal Employment Support Trial.
- **Agreed** that spouses and adult children returning from overseas are **exempt** from the three month habitual residence test for claims for Jobseeker's allowance.
- **Agreed** that Military spouses reaching State Pension age from 6 April 2016 will be able to apply for the new national insurance credits to cover periods from 1975 that they have spent accompanying their Service partner on postings outside the UK.
- **Introduced** an allowance to enable the cost of Foreign and Commonwealth personnel registering a birth as British to be funded at public expense. This applies to children born from 1 April 2015 on an accompanied overseas tour.
- Following feedback, started **developing** a new **UK Armed Forces Families Strategy** to review and improve the support we provide to families. The new strategy will be launched by the end of the year.



For Veterans

- **Launched** a new Career Transition Partnership contract to support Service leavers translate their skills, experience and qualifications into a successful civilian career



- **Confirmed** that funding for the nine enhanced prosthetic centres for veterans will continue. All Devolved Administrations have committed to provide veterans with service attributable injuries with prosthetics equivalent to those provided to serving personnel.
- The Government has **allocated £10M** to the Royal British Legion to launch a veterans' hearing fund; and
- a further **£3M** to help veterans access high specification wheelchairs. Both will provide services and equipment not currently provided by the NHS in the area where they live.
- From April 2015 changes to survivor benefits became effective in both the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 75 and the War Pension scheme.

On Funding

- **Committed** over £150M since 2011 to deliver Covenant commitments. **Continued** funding hundreds of legacy projects that support the Armed Forces Community.
- **Launched** a new £10M annual Covenant fund to support Covenant commitments.
- **Launched** a new aged Veterans fund, which has £25Million available to it over 5 years. It will fund projects that support non-core health, wellbeing and social care needs for older veterans.
- **Allocated** £50M to support Cadet expansion.

What is the rest of society doing to help?

- More than 750 organisations have signed a Corporate Covenant, pledging specific support for the Armed Forces Community such as help with transition from Service to civilian life through work placement opportunities, and training courses.
- Mobile phone providers Vodafone, EE, O2 and Three, will now allow both service personnel and their families to put their contracts on hold when they are posted overseas.

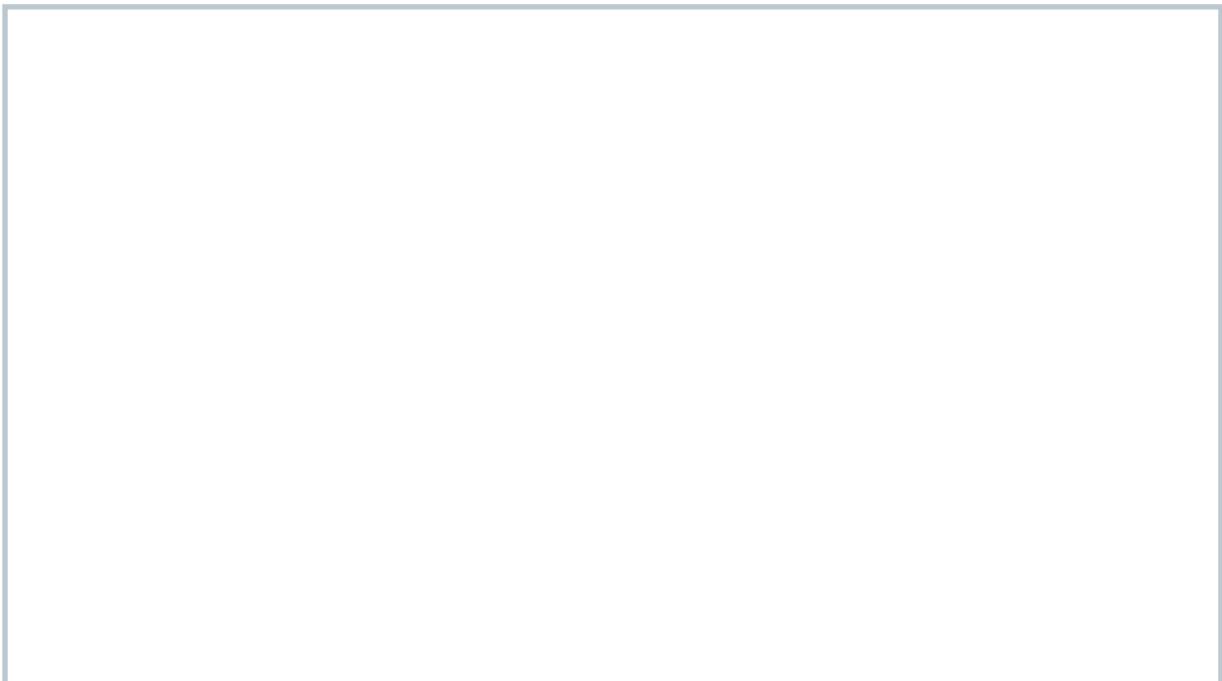


- Key members of the financial and commercial services sector are working with the MOD to: make sure you have fairer access to a mortgage, insurance; and to improve your chances of building a strong credit history. Royal Mail is working with their customers to make sure they use BFPO data.
- Every local authority in mainland GB and two in Northern Ireland have signed a community Covenant. We are working with them to help them deliver the support they have promised to the Armed Forces Community.
- The Veterans Employment Transition Support programme. (VETS) is a partnership of leading companies and charities. It will support the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) in helping Service leavers find employment, and provide mentoring, training and advice to veterans, regardless of when they left the Armed Forces.
- Launched a credit union service to help Service Personnel access safe and affordable finance.

What are our targets for the coming year?

- We will publish the First Families strategy and our plan for making the commitments a reality.
- We will publish detailed metrics to provide an objective assessment of how the Covenant is being delivered.
- The DfE will provide further opportunities through programmes, such as the Troops to Teachers programme, which provides a worthwhile career path for Service leavers and enables schools to have a better insight into Service life.
- In May, we will review the changes made to the schools admissions code and the Special Educational Needs Code to ensure that they are meeting the needs of Service Families. We will make further changes if necessary.
- From April 2016, the MOD will move to the Government's Decent Homes Standard (DHS); no Service family will be allocated accommodation in the UK which does not meet the DHS.
- We will continue to ensure the National Housing Prime (NHP) contract, awarded to CarillionAmey meets contracted standards.
- We will look to get firm commitments from the Financial Services sector to support the Armed Forces community.

- The Department for Communities and Local Government will work jointly with the MOD and Local Government Association to take forward work to review the effectiveness of the Community Covenant. The results will be published in March 2016.
- The MOD will work with the Families Federations to publish a detailed toolkit of information to explain the challenges our Armed Forces communities face and how local authorities can support them. We will publish guidance on the role of a local authority Armed Forces champion.
- We will run a trial on the concept of adapting unpaid leave policy to reduce an individual's liability for deployment during 2015-17.



- We will look at ways of making it easier for veterans to access the high levels of support available. We will report on this further in next year's report.
- We will work with DCLG and the Families Federations to understand the needs of divorced spouses and how these can be reflected in Covenant.
- Following reports of the late delivery of postal vote forms to personnel serving overseas for this year's general election, we will review the process and identify where any changes are necessary next year.

Find out more

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means to you visit: **<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/armed-forces-covenant>**

If you think you are not getting fair access to goods and services because you are a member of the Armed Forces we want to hear about it. Contact either your Service Families Federation or the MOD Covenant team by emailing:

Covenant-mailbox@mod.uk

To find out whether Forces Help to Buy could help you visit: **<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy>**



Ministry
of Defence