

North East Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Regional Review of the Health Needs  
of the Ex-Service Community  
Social and Economic Wellbeing



Workstream Final Report  
January 2011

**NORTH EAST JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REGIONAL REVIEW  
OF THE  
HEALTH NEEDS OF THE EX-SERVICE COMMUNITY**

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING  
WORKSTREAM FINAL REPORT**



North Tyneside Council



## **The Scrutiny Review**

### **1 Context**

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the Social and Economic Well-Being workstream with regard to its examination of the relationship between the ex-service community and the wider social determinants of health. The report documents the issues raised to date, the evidence to support these issues and the recommended actions for the future.
- 1.2 The report includes details of:
- The aims of the review
  - How the review was carried out
  - Issues emerging from the review
  - Recommendations

### **2 The focus of the workstream - aims of the review**

- 2.1 The process the workstream has followed was designed to explore the relationship between the ex-service community and the wider social determinants of health (ie range of social, economic, cultural and environmental factors such as housing, low income and unemployment, education and skills) with a view to :-
- Establishing the wider health needs of the ex-service community in the region throughout their lives - (highlighting any specific issues related to differing stages of their lives ie young – under 24 – mid – 24- 49 and older – 50 plus)
  - Identifying progress in delivering relevant aspects of “The Nation’s Commitment” at a regional level and how to build and improve on this progress.
  - Establishing how local authorities and their partners can support the delivery of the “The Nation’s Commitment” at a regional level.
  - Establishing how the ex-service community are accessing services and how their needs are being assessed and met by local authorities and their partners across the region
  - Examining the extent to which the ex-service community may suffer health inequalities as a result of lack of / poor access to services and support within the North East region

It was considered that this would provide the workstream with a clearer picture of current need / provision and any gaps and assist in the identification of areas for improvement / inform future policy.

- 2.2 To fully explore the key areas the workstream focussed on:-
- Transition back into civilian life
  - Opportunities for promoting effective communication and co-ordination across agencies, providers and the third sector.
  - Identifying opportunities for developing a unified approach towards the ex-service community across the North East region when accessing local authority and partner services.
  - Barriers to accessing specific services / support identified by the ex-service community, research and third sector organisations
  - Examining good practice (both nationally and regionally)

2.3 The overall aim being to:

- improve health and well-being outcomes for the ex-service community in North East England, particularly by identifying and making recommendations to tackle any potential health inequalities to which they may be subject as a result of their service.

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### 3 Background / Policy Context

#### Health Inequalities

Health inequalities can exist in many dimensions including socio economic status, ethnicity, age, gender and geography. The causes and definitions of such health inequalities are complex. Health inequalities fall into four broad themes which are related to the determinants of health (see figure 1 below):

- *Inequalities in the wider determinants of health such as employment, education, housing and environment.*
- Inequalities in lifestyles or health behaviours such as smoking, drinking and sexual behaviour.
- Inequalities in access to services such as health and social care. Equity of access means equal access for equal need, where need relates to the level of illness.
- Inequalities in health status or outcomes such as life expectancy and ill health.

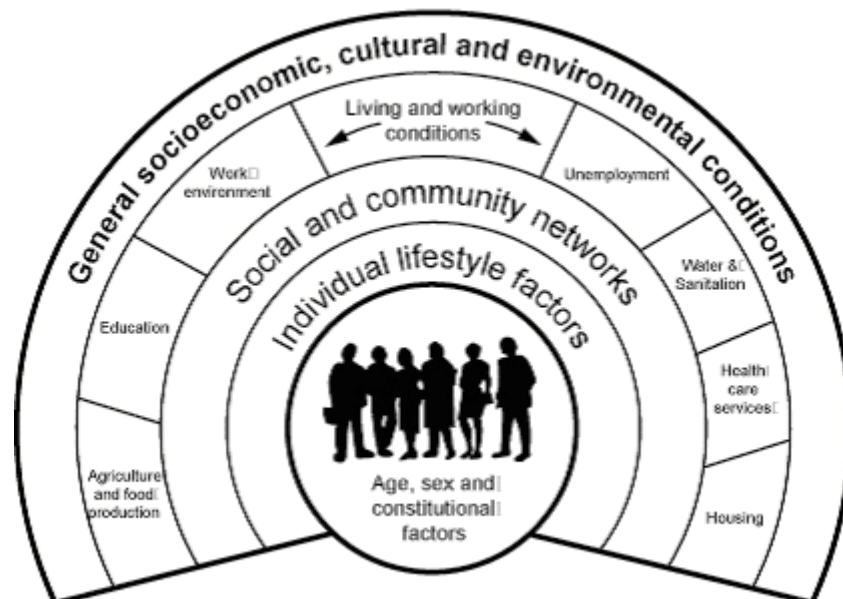


Figure 1: Determinants of health (source: Dahlgreen and Whitehead)

Health inequalities are a national priority. The Government sponsored Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health (The Acheson Report, 1988) highlighted several areas to tackle inequalities. These challenges have been taken up by various national policy documents such as *Tackling Inequalities: a Programme for Action* (2003); *Securing Good Health for the Population* (Wanless Report, 2004); *Choosing Health White Paper* (2004); *Our Health Our Care Our Say* (2006). The main themes are:

- *Supporting families, mothers and children* – to ensure the best possible start in life and break the inter-generational cycle of health inequalities, addressed through a range of interventions around tackling child poverty, implementing *Every Child Matters* and the *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*.
- *Engaging communities and individuals* – to ensure sustainability through Neighbourhood Renewal and the Local Area Agreement agenda.
- *Preventing illness and providing effective treatment and care* – delivering targeted preventative and healthcare services appropriately to improve the health of those most disadvantaged fastest.
- *Addressing the underlying determinants of health* – dealing with the long term underlying causes of health inequalities such as employment, education, housing and environment.

#### *Marmot Review*

3.2 Subsequently, the Marmot Review (February 2010) set out proposals for reducing health inequalities in England post 2010. The review has identified that there is clear evidence that action to reduce health inequity and improve health for all needs to be focused on addressing the wider social and economic determinants of health such as levels of education, economic status, work and power relations rather than being seen as a footnote to other action on healthcare and unhealthy behaviours.

3.3 Local councils are viewed as having a key role in building the wider determinants of good health and working to support individual families and communities.

#### *Sustainable Community Strategies*

3.4 Across the region local strategic partnerships have agreed sustainable community strategies setting out their vision to improve the economy, health and well-being of all their residents.

#### *Joint Strategic Needs Assessments*

3.5 In each local authority area, PCT's and Directors of Adult Social Services are charged with drawing up a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) of the priority needs of the population. Currently, no JSNA in the region specifically addresses the needs of the ex-service community although Stockton – on – Tees Borough Council has recently agreed to include this group in their JSNA.

#### *Profile and Needs of Ex-Service Community*

3.6 The Workstream has received evidence that fifty two percent of the ex-service community report a long term illness or disability. Among 25-65 year olds poor general health is two or three times more likely to be reported than amongst the general population but the ex-service community aged 16-24 reports slightly lower levels of general poor health (3%) compared to the general population (4%). Whilst 65 – 75 year olds reported better health than general population and 75 years plus report similar health to the general population (Royal British Legion report 2006 – Profile and Needs of the Ex-Service Community 2005-2020).

3.7 In 2009 the Kings College Report “The Health and Social Outcomes and Health Service Experiences of UK Military Veterans” subsequently indicated that on the available evidence, taken as a whole, the ex-service population appears to have comparable health to the general population. However, the report recognised that whilst the evidence base has grown considerably since 2003, many gaps remain

concerning the health and social outcomes of UK ex – service personnel. Recommendations included further longitudinal qualitative research on the transition from military to civilian life and that evidence on health related outcomes and experiences among ex – service personnel is reviewed regularly.

### 3.8 *The Nation's Commitment*

In 2008 the Government published a review of cross government support to the armed forces, their families and veterans "The Nation's Commitment" Ministry of Defence Priorities for armed forces community in 2010. The report's "essential starting point" was the principle of "no disadvantage" ie those who serve must not be disadvantaged by what they do and this will sometimes call for degrees of special treatment.

The document set out a range of commitments and specific measures aimed at improving the health of the armed forces community, including, but not limited to veterans and their families (some of these measures relate to housing, education and skills, transport, support for families, benefits and building careers).

### 3.9 The Ministry of Defence / NHS Partnership Board after consulting with stakeholders, proposed the following four key priority areas upon which to focus during 2010 :-

- Ensuring equality of access for armed forces families
- Promoting effective communication and co-ordination across agencies, providers and the third sector.
- Veterans' mental health services.
- The transition of armed forces personnel to NHS care following medical discharge.

#### *Local Government Response to Nation's Commitment*

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) response to the Ministry of Defence consultation on "The Nation's Commitment ...". (MOD consultation July 2009) have indicated that a dialogue with the armed forces community is needed to understand and address needs; recognise the benefits of creating a network of local advocates to act as champions for the Armed Forces Community; support a system through a welfare pathway for providing co-ordinated advice and information and consider that there is a greater role for the Direct Gov website in providing accessible advice and information. Nationally there are currently four Welfare Pathway Pilots which aim to improve access to information for veterans (Wigan, North Yorkshire, Fife and Kent Council's).

#### *Armed Forces Covenant*

The coalition government is currently rewriting the military covenant with a view to producing a new tri-service document. The new document sets the tone for government policy and is aimed at improving the support available for serving and former members of the armed forces and their families. The Armed Forces Covenant will build on the work currently being taken forward by the Command Paper "The Nation's Commitment...". The coalition government is currently considering how best to fulfil the covenant in terms of resources / policies and the findings of the Armed Forces Task Force led by Professor Hew Strachan was published on the MOD website on 8 December 2010. The coalition government

has indicated it will begin work on two of the proposals - an Armed Forces Community Covenant and a Commendation Scheme for individuals or bodies who give exceptional support to the Armed Forces and will respond to the rest of the proposals in Spring 2011.

#### **4 How the review was carried out - Methodology**

4.1 This report is the result of three evidence gathering sessions of the workstream between August and November 2010.

4.2 During these three sessions the Workstream considered and analysed evidence and views from a wide range of stakeholders:

- a small sample of the ex-service community across the region.
- Commander of Catterick Garrison
- MOD Military / Civil Integration Project
- Career Transition Partnership
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Housing providers across the region
- Norcare
- NE Royal British Legion
- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, North East (SSAFA - NE)
- Service Personnel and Veterans Agency
- About Turn CIC / Forces for Good
- Military Mental Health
- Job Centre Plus
- Principle of Finchale College, Durham
- Mental Health North East / Northern Pine Tree Trust
- North East Employers Coalition
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Middlesbrough
- Director of Adult Care and Housing, Gateshead
- Assistant Director of Adult Care and Housing, Darlington
- Head of Economic Development, Gateshead
- Labour Market Co-ordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

4.3 The three sessions were supplemented with a visit to the new Norcare Veterans Centre on Bentinck Road, Newcastle.

4.4 At each evidence gathering session, key lines of enquiries were discussed with a range of stakeholders. The following paragraphs provide a breakdown and analysis of the issues which emerged from these sessions.

#### **5 Findings from the review – Analysis of Evidence**

5.1 All of the evidence gathering sessions included a focus on potential health inequalities:

*The ex – service community*

##### **The national position**

There are an estimated 4.8 million veterans in the UK and 5.37 million dependents. This is forecast to decrease to 3.1 million veterans and 4.45 million dependents by 2020. Approximately 84% of veterans are men and approximately 60% of the adult ex service community are aged over 65 years compared to 20% of the general adult population. Veterans over 85 years are set to increase

significantly over the next decade. Approximately 31 % of the ex- service community live alone compared to 19% of UK adults.

## 5.2 The regional position

### *Profile of ex – service community in North East*

The workstream has concluded that identifying the ex – service community within the North East is difficult as there is a general lack of available data in relation to numbers / social profile / geographical location. However, available information has highlighted that :-

- It is estimated that approximately 10-15 percent of ex – service personnel live in the North East which would amount to an ex service community of one million (less than five percent of the total population).
- Approximately 10% of recruits to army come from North East and they predominantly join the army.
- Younger members of the ex- service community (16 -44 years) are more prevalent in the North of the UK.
- According to figures from the Directorate of Resettlement - in the last two years 5620 service leavers indicated a preference to settle in the North East ( area covering Humber to the Borders)– these comprised 3700 (Army), 1100 (RAF), and 820 ( Navy).
- There are approximately 1500 early service leavers each year from 15 Brigade at Catterick and 40% of these are from the North of England (the majority young, single men who have been part of the infantry) - these are over and above the 5620 service leavers - (the garrison at Catterick covers the geographical area Hull to Berwick to Carlisle and is the largest training garrison in Europe - 40,000 regulars, reserves, cadets and dependents).
- The workstream noted that there are approximately 10,000 forces personnel serving at Catterick Garrison. The army recruits strongly from the North East region and so when they leave many servicemen return to the North East. Many service personnel in the North East fall within the non-commissioned ranks but the North East is no different to other parts of the country in this regard. The numbers of non-commissioned service personnel generally significantly outweigh those who are commissioned.
- There is evidence that a significant proportion of armed forces recruits from the North East tend to be from lower socio-economic groups.
- In the period April 2009 to April 2010 there were 59 service leavers from RAF Leeming aged between 20 and 55 years – some of whom will therefore be quite institutionalised. On average approximately 17% have indicated that they will be resettling in the North East.

## 5.3 *Transition from Military to Civilian Life*

The workstream considers that it is clear from the evidence it has received that the vast majority of ex-service personnel experience the transition from military to civilian life without any major difficulties. For most individuals being part of the armed forces is a positive experience and they do well when they leave.

Currently, a wide range of tailored support is provided to assist service leavers make the transition to civilian life both from within the tri –services

themselves and from the Career Transition Partnership which provides transition services to all eligible ranks of the Armed Forces (ie those who have over four or more years service). Overall, the workstream considered that there is evidence that this support is robust and forms a comprehensive resettlement programme which supports individuals to settle back into the areas from which they came. The National Audit Office report ([www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)) has indicated that the UK is “at the forefront of providing tailored professional help to military personnel as they leave”.

The workstream noted that take up of the support is voluntary. Whilst a significant proportion of those entitled to receive the services of the Partnership do take up these services there are still approximately 2000 individuals nationally who for a variety of reasons choose not to do so.

The Career Transition Partnership continuously works to increase take up and receives regular feedback from those receiving its services to ensure their effectiveness. On average there is a 15 – 30 % response rate from clients to surveys. Focus groups are also used and a survey on the effectiveness of resettlement is planned to go on-line to try and improve the response rate further.

A small sample of representatives of the ex-service community in the NE region and representatives of ex-service charities such as the NE Royal British Legion, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association and About Turn/ Forces for Good have indicated that the standard of resettlement support has improved significantly in recent years and have acknowledged that the provision of resettlement / transition support to ex – service personnel is currently of a very high standard. Prior to this resettlement support was considered to be much poorer. As a result, ex - services charities have indicated that there is a need to provide specific additional targeted support for a “hidden population” of ex - service personnel who left the services before these measures had been put in place and are vulnerable and currently lost in the system.

The workstream noted that there are cultural issues arising from the transition from military to civilian life which may increase the likelihood of some members of the ex – service community experiencing vulnerability, social isolation / exclusion (issues around institutionalisation and dependency /operating in a mainly male centric environment / lack of purpose after leaving services / lack of support networks as a result of having to move regularly during their working life within the forces / relationship breakdown / living alone). Difficulties in integrating into civilian life can result in alcohol misuse, domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and prison for some members of the ex-service community. MOD Defence Analytical Services and Advice have estimated that the number of regular veterans in prison is 3.5% (25 Jan 2010).

When examining why some ex - service personnel, as opposed to others, experience difficulties on leaving the services the workstream considered that it was important to understand the different categories of service leavers and when and why individuals leave the service.

The workstream noted that ex- service personnel who have served between four and twenty two years form one group of service leavers. At the 12 year stage and beyond there are resettlement packages and financial benefits for those who leave the service. Once a member of the services has served for 22 years they automatically become entitled to a pension. Twenty two years is usually the maximum length of time for non - commissioned service personnel to remain in the armed forces. However, there is now an option to take up 34 years service. Service personnel who fall within this group tend to leave the services for positive reasons and will have decided what they wish to do once they have left the army. They tend to be more organised about leaving and will have planned their resettlement.

Early service leavers are another group. The workstream noted that an early service leaver is someone who leaves the armed forces from between one day and four years and this is likely to be due to a negative reason. In many cases, either the service leaver will have decided they are not happy with army life or alternatively the army will have decided that they are not suitable for army life. Where the army has decided an individual is unsuited to army life this could be as the result of disciplinary action leading to dishonourable discharge for specific issues eg drugs. However, there are also cases where individuals are medically discharged early as a result of injuries sustained as a result of their service.

The workstream has received evidence that the level of support provided to early service leavers in general is significantly less than that provided to those with four or more years service. Early service leavers have been identified as at an increased risk of a range of adverse outcomes than longer serving personnel. Early service leavers are typically relatively young, single and male.

The workstream was therefore particularly concerned to understand the level and type of support currently in place for early service leavers at the point of discharge and the effectiveness of that support.

The workstream noted that early service leavers do receive some written information and are referred on to relevant services before they leave. However, there is evidence that many young people do not take full advantage of the written information being provided to them as part of the discharge process.

Since the National Audit Office Report on Leaving the Services (2007), additional support has been put in place to attempt to address the potential vulnerability of early service leavers. Early service leavers with potential vulnerability issues are identified initially by resettlement officers within the tri-services. Dependent upon the assessment of resettlement officers early service leavers can be signposted to other agencies by the services or referred on for additional support such as counselling via the Career Transition Partnership or receive enhanced support from the Regular Forces Employment Services.

The workstream has received information that the garrison at Catterick has approximately 1500 early service leavers each year, who for a variety of reasons find themselves unsuited to army life and may be considered

vulnerable and requiring additional support. However, the workstream noted that currently, the numbers of referrals of vulnerable service leavers by the services to the Career Transition Partnership appears to be very small. The workstream therefore sought to examine the effectiveness of the process and assess whether there were any gaps where individuals may get lost in the system. The workstream was concerned to understand how individuals were being assessed as vulnerable and the training representatives of the tri-services receive to help them identify potentially vulnerable individuals. The workstream was informed that improvements are being made by the armed forces in relation to the resettlement support currently provided. A training programme has recently been put in place to assist resettlement officers identify those who may be vulnerable.

The workstream acknowledged that not all early service leavers will be vulnerable / have health and well-being issues related to their service. For example those individuals who are only part of the armed forces for a matter of weeks and do not continue with basic training.

In addition to the early service leavers, the workstream has also received information that there are small numbers of service leavers who have served for lengthy periods within the armed forces who struggle to make the transition to civilian life as a result of institutionalisation and other issues such as poor mental health which may be as a result of their service. These individuals may have struggled to cope within civilian life for a number of years before they reach crisis point and present to ex -service charities or other support organisations for assistance.

The workstream noted that many individuals go into the services at a young age - missing out on huge chunk of life skills development whilst in the services – so when they leave as grown men they may struggle with day to day living as they are not prepared for it and do not know what needs to be done. Many will never have paid a bill before so simple things such as paying a water bill are completely alien. Everything is done for them as part of service life. Transition can involve not just readjusting to everyday life but also to life in the UK as some individuals have spent significant parts of their service life abroad

The workstream has received evidence that the armed forces are putting systems in place to ensure that those service personnel who are medically discharged are not returned to the community until the armed forces are confident that appropriate support is in place. Service leavers who are medically discharged receive full resettlement support irrespective of their length of service.

Alongside these groups of service leavers there may also be ex-service personnel who have been part of civilian life for many years and who face crises at different points in their life and find it hard to cope at that particular time. These difficulties may have nothing to do with service leavers previous service and the workstream has received evidence that the service leavers in question do not connect them to their previous service. The workstream acknowledged that it is not possible for the armed forces to identify potential problems which ex-service personnel may or may not experience in the future in civilian life. The workstream noted that the armed forces consider that

where ex-service personnel experience such difficulties after leaving the services other organisations who provide relevant support should provide assistance to these individuals.

### *Emerging Issues*

- Identifying the ex – service community within the North East is difficult as there is a general lack of available data in relation to numbers / social profile / geographical location
- Currently, there are no mechanisms / formal protocols in place to liaise with local authorities across the region / provide them with information regarding military personnel about to leave the services and their needs.
- The effectiveness of improvements to the armed forces resettlement provision for early service leavers should be kept under review by the armed forces to ensure there is effective identification of potential vulnerability issues.
- There is evidence of a need to provide specific additional targeted support to a small group of vulnerable ex-service personnel who for a variety of reasons find the transition to civilian life difficult.
- There is a wide range of support in existence within civilian communities via local authorities, third sector support agencies and other partner organisations but currently this is fragmented and needs to be joined up.
- Some ex- service personnel are advising they do not know where to go to go for help and support when they return to civilian life.
- When the ex – service community do seek help they currently need to contact a variety of agencies in order to access support.
- Many ex - service personnel are not aware that organisations such as the British Legion, SSAFA and Forces for Good are there to help them - they think that they are only to support those who have been in conflict - people also tend to associate these organisations with the word veteran and believe they are there to support the older generation and “poppy appeals”- in reality anyone who has been in the forces for more than 7 days is eligible for support from these organisations.
- Service life provides individuals with a system they understand and a sense of being part of a family / community - some members of the ex - service community and their dependent families struggle to cope without this “community” and feel lonely when they make the transition to civilian life - particularly where they do not have strong social / family networks or when these breakdown at some point in the future.
- Ex – service personnel may not be accessing appropriate help and support due to the stigma of accepting charitable welfare support.

### **5.4 Ex-service community - access / barriers to housing and housing related support -regional position**

The Workstream noted that the Kings College report (the Health and Social Outcomes and Health Experiences of UK Military Veterans -Nov 2009) identified that two studies conducted in 1990s suggested ex service personnel may constitute 20 to 25% of the UK homeless population. Another UK study showed that 70% of ex-service personnel had been in the army; that most had been 18 or younger when they joined the forces; that half were single and never married, one in ten were widowed, and one in three were divorced or separated; and that one in three had been homeless for 20 years or more.

UK Studies suggest that compared with civilian counterparts, homeless individuals with an armed forces background are older, homeless for longer, more likely to have alcohol problems and physical disability and less likely to have drug problems and mental health difficulties

The Workstream noted that there are no accurate figures on the prevalence of ex - service personnel in the homeless population nationally.

A study conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York into ex-service homelessness in London was completed in 2008. This identified that the percentage of veterans in London's current non-statutory (single) homeless population had reduced from 22% in 1997 to 6% by 2007. A 2005 project to increase hostel spaces for single men in London is likely to have had a significant impact in reducing the non - statutory (single) homeless population in London in subsequent years.

Those who appear to be most at risk for homelessness and other related difficulties in the years following discharge from armed forces are:

- Those who leave armed forces after failing basic training or through administrative or medical discharges
- Those who have served in the Armed forces for many years, who, on discharge, find transition to civilian life very difficult

Pathways to homelessness appear to be very different in the ex-service and civilian homelessness. The Kings College report identifies a need to look at the stages in which both groups become vulnerable and how life events compound their inability to find settled or stable accommodation.

There are no accurate figures on the prevalence of ex – service personnel in the homeless population regionally.

Information from ex- service community charities / support organisations currently operating within the North East region indicates that ex- service community homelessness is often a hidden issue and individuals are sofa surfing / being picked up through hostels or are street homeless; many are vulnerable as a result of institutionalisation, alcohol/ drug misuse/ anti-social behaviour- they need supported accommodation

In 2008-09 out of a sample of 1500 ex – service personnel approximately 112 ( 8%) sought assistance from the British Legion North East for homelessness, (47%) sought assistance to obtain local authority housing, (25%) sought assistance to obtain owner/ occupier housing, ( 9%) sought assistance to obtain private rental housing.

In view of the above, the Workstream has sought to:-

- Understand the approach being taken amongst local authorities and partners in the region in implementing the housing related priorities from the Command Paper – The Nation's Commitment –
- Understand local authorities statutory role and approach to implementing statutory guidance in relation to housing needs of ex – service community

- explore how local authorities / housing providers within the region are currently made aware of the housing needs of armed forces personnel about to be discharged and the ex-service community
- understand the pathways through which the ex-service community are seeking to access housing / housing related support
- take account of the issues the ex – service community are identifying as barriers to accessing housing / housing related support
- Take account of examples of good practice from across the region and elsewhere.

The Workstream has obtained qualitative information directly from a small sample of the ex-service community across the region and representatives of ex- service charities. The aim being to gain a better understanding of the ex –service communities needs / issues with a view to targeting relevant areas for action / priorities for improvement in the future. One of the areas focused on related to housing needs and any potential barriers the ex-service community may face in accessing housing provision / housing support services.

Information has also been sought from local authorities and housing providers across the North East region via a short questionnaire with a view to understanding how the ex- service community are currently able to access housing / housing related services within the region and how their housing needs are being prioritised.

The Workstream was keen to understand whether current local authority housing services and provision from other housing providers across the region are sufficiently responsive to the needs of ex-service personnel and their dependents.

In addition, the workstream has examined the availability of housing provision / housing related support for the ex-service community via the third sector and the armed forces and examined the scope for more joined up work (Appendices 2 and 3).

### *Emerging Issues*

- Currently there is little formal contact between the armed forces and local authorities across the NE region.
- Local authorities / housing associations do not receive any information from the armed forces regarding the numbers of personnel about to be discharged and their housing needs. As a result local authorities are unable at present to properly assess / plan to meet the needs of the ex-service community as a specific group Local authorities need better information on the numbers of ex - service personnel requiring services and their needs
- A key focus for the future should be more preventative work between the armed forces, local authorities, partners and ex-service charities.
- Identification of the ex-service community is a key issue in ensuring that local authorities and other organisations who may be able to offer them support are able to appropriately assess need and provide access to the right services for those who need them.
- At present local authorities and other housing providers do not have a specific category for the ex - service community within their information

gathering systems. There is currently an expectation that service leavers provide this information themselves when they make applications for housing / housing related support.

- The Probation Service and the Prison service are starting to ask whether individuals are part of the ex-service community.
- Some Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) currently ask whether individuals re ex-service but not all do as each CAB is autonomous.
- The housing charity Norcare has devised three to four simple questions in order to identify members of the ex-service community which include reference to individuals' service numbers. In this way the charity hopes to ensure that the right people are accessing the service and start to uncover the number of ex - service community in the area.
- Ex- service charities within the region have suggested that local authorities in the North East consider establishing appropriate mechanisms to identify the ex-service community.
- There are no specific pathways established with the armed forces for the ex- service community to access housing / housing related services via local authorities / housing associations within the region.
- The majority of service leavers have had a positive experience within the armed forces and have planned for their move into civilian life including arranging housing. Many ex- service personnel who have had a full career in the service will have purchased a property prior to their discharge.
- There are a small group of service leavers who have had to leave the service early for a variety of reasons, or who have been in the service for many years and have had difficulties making the transition to civilian life. These groups are less likely to have planned their transition into civilian life and are those most at risk of homelessness and other related difficulties.
- For service leavers who fall within the vulnerable categories there are supported housing schemes through SPACES and there is a new development called the Beacon which will provide opportunities for supported housing for vulnerable service leavers in this region.
- The army considers that even where some service leavers face difficulties there is sufficient support available at the point these individuals leave the service. Mike Jackson House in Aldershot and the Galleries in Richmond are referral locations for SPACES which are used as staging posts to assist service leavers make the transition back to normal life. The Richmond Galleries will be taken into the Beacon site when built.
- The army considers that what is needed is more effective signposting and ensuring that the ex-service community are fully aware of how to access appropriate support. Individual service leavers also need to be more proactive in accessing assistance from appropriate organisations who can provide relevant support.
- Ex-service charities and the housing charity Norcare support the need for additional signposting and awareness raising regarding appropriate support and have also indicated that there is evidence of a need for targeted support for the small proportion of the ex-service community who fall within vulnerable categories.
- Individuals need some kind of focal point / contact where they can be referred / signposted on to relevant services. one or two areas in the country, although not in the North East, have established veterans champions.

- Some form of dedicated telephone number either within local authorities or sub regionally could be a means of addressing this.
- The establishment of a formal network involving local authorities across the region would be of particular help to organisations such as SSAFA and the Royal British Legion whose work is co-ordinated/ provided on a sub regional / regional basis.
- Ex- service charities have also stressed the importance of ensuring that there are effective referral mechanisms in place between the armed forces and organisations such as ex-service charities for individuals who require support.
- Ex-service charities and the housing charity Norcare consider that better co-ordination and communication is needed and also a better understanding of what the voluntary sector can do to work with and support local authorities to assist the ex-service community.
- Local authorities and third sector organisations need to make practical links and raise local authority staff awareness of the support available amongst the third sector as well as amongst the ex-service community.
- It is key that officers at the front line of local authority services such as housing understand that ex-service charities such as the Royal British Legion can act as guarantors for bonds for housing provide support and can consider paying rent for individuals in particular circumstances
- There are no accurate figures on the prevalence of ex-service personnel in the homeless population regionally.
- Currently it appears that most ex - service leavers do not want social housing. However, where they do seek either social housing or advice and support council's across the region are able to operate in a flexible manner and considers the circumstances of each individual case.
- Applications for housing / housing related services are via direct application, choice based lettings bids, referral from local authorities, referral from other housing providers (via websites).
- There are currently a range of different lettings policies operating within the region.
- When making general applications for housing the ex-service community are assessed along with the rest of the general population and prioritised as part of priority banding systems, dependant upon their individual circumstances. Local authorities across the region look at each application for housing on its merits.
- Newcastle, the Tees Valley Compass Allocations scheme (this scheme covers Stockton, Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland), North Tyneside, Gentoo and NomadE5 are currently reviewing their lettings policies.
- As far as homeless applications from the ex- service community are concerned, local authorities and housing associations within the North East region are applying the statutory homelessness legislation and will place applicants in high priority for rehousing on allocations schemes, where they have been assessed as meeting the homeless criteria and are classed as in priority need.
- If individuals from the ex-service community are homeless and are assessed by local authorities as in priority need with a local connection to the area in which they are applying for housing then they may receive priority for housing.

- If service leavers applying to local authorities as homeless are young, single men, who are fit and healthy it is unlikely that they will meet the criteria to class them as in priority need for rehousing. The situation may be different if the service leaver has been part of the armed forces for a number of years and has a family – they may then be eligible for priority housing.
- Under statutory guidance ex-service personnel and their families must not suffer any disadvantage when seeking to access housing and those who are seriously injured and are in urgent need must be given high priority along with everyone else who has a similar level of medical need. This does not mean that they must receive top priority – there is no requirement on local authorities for that to be the case. The guidance ensures that ex-service personnel receive equal access to appropriate housing along with everyone else.
- Where ex-service personnel approach local authorities for assistance they will receive appropriate support where they are eligible and there are key access points which capture individuals who are vulnerable.
- Where individuals are not eligible for local authority services local authorities can signpost on to other organisations who provide assistance. This applies whether ex-service personnel seek support immediately on leaving the services or years later. However, local authorities cannot help if members of the ex-service community do not approach them and seek to access that support.
- Information from some local authorities and housing associations across the region indicates that the numbers of ex-service community currently accessing local authority housing / housing related services is low
- There is a lack of available, suitable accommodation to meet housing needs
- Single ex servicemen have particular problems in obtaining housing as they do not appear to have any priority within the local authority housing system
- Ex-service personnel without good social / family support networks are more likely to end up homeless
- Ex- service support organisations are aware of ex – servicemen who are homeless and living in hostels within the region who are vulnerable as a result of institutionalisation and who have issues relating to alcohol and anti-social behaviour etc- they need supported accommodation.
- Many of the most vulnerable will not access traditional services / engage with civilian community- these individuals need an outreach type of approach - they will engage with ex- military as they can identify with them.
- There is often a time delay between members of the ex - service community leaving the forces and presenting with problems requiring support
- There is some evidence that those who have served in the armed forces for some time and who are homeless do not settle well in hostels and specific provision suited to meeting their particular needs is required to support their transition back into local communities
- Specific projects aimed at providing supported housing for early service leavers and those experiencing difficulties in making the transition to civilian life are in place or are being developed in the North East region.

- There are a great deal of support mechanisms available to the ex-service community who can provide housing related support but not all individuals are accessing this support - one of the challenges is how to address this.
- Whilst there is a range of housing support available to the ex- service community via local authorities and the third sector etc this is fragmented and needs to be more joined up. At present there is a danger of duplication of effort amongst organisations
- A big issue for the ex-service community when accessing services is that there are now a plethora of organisations who can potentially provide help and individuals do not understand who does what and the differences between the organisations and the type of help and support they provide.
- There is a need for more effective signposting to ensure that the ex-service community are fully aware how they may access appropriate support.
- Signposting is not enough for the more vulnerable service leavers with specific problems - there is a need for more integrated pathways to services for these individuals
- The numbers of ex – service personnel seeking support on housing issues immediately upon discharge is small as many indicate lack of awareness of where to go for housing support.
- There is a recognition that individuals may approach the Council years after they have been discharged and that there may be factors such as relationship breakdown
- Third sector organisations, particularly ex-service charities, who provide housing related support, need to raise awareness amongst ex-service personnel of the support they provide.
- Individual service leavers also need to be more pro-active in accessing assistance from appropriate organisations who can provide relevant support.
- Ex- service personnel only qualify for discounted rent schemes, such as intermediate rent or Rent to Home Buy if they commit to full time reserve service. This would automatically prohibit members of the ex-service community who are medically discharged from benefitting from the schemes as they would be unable to make this commitment.
- Many registered providers operate low cost home ownership schemes. However, at the moment there does not seem to be a way of identifying take up of these products by the ex-service community or identifying whether these providers are assisting the ex-service community as well as other parts of the community.
- There may be scope for the Homes and Communities Agency (which funds housing development and provides support across the region) to broker assistance and ensure better co-ordination of work across the region to ensure that services are being directed at the right people, including the ex-service community and assist with sharing examples of best practice.
- There are examples of local authorities such as Darlington venturing into local agreements with registered providers to ensure that there are properties available to meet the needs of disabled individuals and this has been found to be helpful. The Homes and Communities Agency has indicated there may be scope for them to assist in better co-ordinating this type of work and sharing best practice.
- The Homes and Communities Agency is moving from their current funding arrangements to 3 or 4 programmes which will commence from the next

financial year. In terms of existing stock there may be opportunities to start examining the ex-service community's access.

- Some of the properties being offered by private landlords are very poor
- There is a lack of awareness amongst some local authorities and generally across housing associations in the North East region regarding the housing related priorities for the ex – service community set out in the Command Paper “The Nation’s Commitment.”
- There is a lack of awareness within local authorities of specific issues relating to ex-service community
- Information at Housing Advice Centres is not ‘geared up’ for the ex forces community’
- Ex – service personnel applying for social housing may not realise that medical conditions may give them more priority for housing.
- Housing staff may not realise that medical conditions may give the ex forces community more priority.
- The armed forces are likely to shrink, following the current spending review, with significant numbers of service personnel with levels of physical disability who have been kept in the forces likely to be discharged. These men and women will be presenting back to local communities who will not be geared up to meet their needs in terms of social housing.
- Ex service personnel with disabilities who fall in the younger / mid age groups may experience difficulties in bidding for adapted properties as there are usually age restrictions attached to the property, for example 60+.
- There are ex service villages and shared facilities for ex servicemen who want to live in service community, this is usually in the form of social housing. However, there are a limited number of options that are available to provide care facilities, to elderly ex service personnel. The majority of houses/bungalows/flats/hostels available are for those ex-service men, women and dependants who are able to look after themselves and many are adapted for the disabled residents.
- There are issues in that for private rented accommodation over 25 ‘s qualify for full housing benefit but under 25’s do not ( this is not the case for either local authority or housing association accommodation)
- Housing benefit does not disregard pensions from armed forces - this significantly reduces the overall award.

## **5.5 Ex- service community -access / barriers to education, skills, employment and benefits – regional position**

One of the findings of the Kings College Report - Health and Social Outcomes and Health Service Experiences of UK Military Veterans (Nov 2009) is that in terms of employment most people do well when they leave the armed forces. However, psychological health is a key factor in whether service leavers are likely to be in full time employment when they return to civilian life.

The Kings College report identifies that those most at risk of difficulties following their discharge from the services are:-

- Those who leave the armed forces after failing basic training or through administrative or medical discharges

- Those who have served in the armed forces for many years and who on discharge find the transition to civilian life difficult.

The workstream has also received information that at present 8 / 9% of the army are unfit for active duty and it is estimated that almost all of these will need to be medically discharged in the next 12 to 18 months - their medical condition will impact on their ability to access appropriate housing and relevant training / employment in the future and their ability to reintegrate effectively into local communities.

In view of the above the workstream has examined:-

- What the ex service community in the region are identifying as their educational / skills / employment needs.
- What the ex- service community see as barriers / issues in accessing educational / employment opportunities?
- What is happening amongst local authorities regionally to progress the Command paper commitments ( raising awareness of employment opportunities and on the development of tailored access routes for service leavers with public sector employers)
- What are the pathways through which the ex- service community are seeking to access education / skills / employment related support?
- Examples of good practice from across the region and elsewhere.

The workstream has obtained qualitative information directly from a small sample of the ex-service community across the region and representatives of ex- service charities. The aim being to gain a better understanding of the ex –service communities needs / issues with a view to targeting relevant areas for action / priorities for improvement in the future. Access to employment has been raised as a key issue.

The workstream has received evidence that the Career Transition Partnership which provides transition services to all eligible ranks of the Armed Forces (ie those with over 4 years service) has indicated that up to 60 % of those eligible for the employment support or full resettlement programmes have found employment prior to leaving the services; 85% have found employment within 3 months of discharge and 94% within 6 months of discharge.

The Career Transition Partnership has a UK wide job finding support team and tracks its clients to the point that they achieve employment and beyond. Clients can access support two years prior to discharge and are followed up by the Partnership and can access their services up to two years post discharge. Clients are also able to access support from an employment consultant for the whole of their working lives. There are six employment consultants operating in the North East and they are based in Newcastle, Darlington, Doncaster, Leeds Manchester and Liverpool. Support can also be accessed from a central employment team based in Birmingham.

As part of the resettlement / transition process service leavers can also access a wide range of training courses from a growing list of registered providers. This supplements the opportunities service leavers will have had whilst in the service to take nationally recognised qualifications and course training pertinent to their specific rank. There are also opportunities to carry

out work placements with specific employers whilst on duty at no cost to that employer.

Mapping work is also taking place with Teeside business school in respect of the transfer of army skills into qualifications relevant to civilian life.

The Partnership raises awareness of the skills of ex-service personnel amongst the business community and employers and offers a no cost job matching service to employers. Currently approximately 1000 jobs are advertised on the Partnership's website and there are dedicated links to the public sector

Clients who are medically discharged receive full resettlement support irrespective of the time they have served. They have the option of home visits and can be referred to specialist providers such as Remploy (who provide employment services to public and private companies for disabled people) where appropriate.

However, information has been received which suggests that the unemployment rate for the ex-service community is high – particularly for the younger age groups - twice the rate of the general population.

Early Service Leavers – ie those service leavers with less than four years service, or who have been dishonourably discharged (with a loss of entitlements) in general are not eligible for employment support / full resettlement programmes. Early Services leavers in the main fall within the younger age groups. They receive significantly less support in gaining future employment (ie an employment briefing) and do not have access to any specific training courses, job finding service – no follow up support post discharge. Early service leavers have been identified as at an increased risk of a range of adverse outcomes than longer serving personnel.

Since the National Audit Office Report on Leaving the Services (2007), additional support has been put in place to attempt to address the potential vulnerability of early service leavers. Early service leavers identified as vulnerable by the services can now receive Regular Forces Employment Association (RFEA) enhanced support.

#### *Skills/ Benefits*

Some ex- service support organisations and ex-service personnel who have experienced difficulties in making the transition back into civilian life have raised issues around lack of transferable skills from military to civilian life as an important factor leading to greater risk of low income / reliance on benefits and social isolation.

Money management and debt have been identified as an issue for the ex – service community - many ex -service personnel have debt issues.

Information has been received that the majority of clients supported by the Royal British Legion have benefit / debt issues. Debt is a particular issue for the younger age group within the ex-service community and bankruptcy is emerging area. Tackling debt is also an issue for ex- service personnel within the mid to older age groups. A significant amount of support for clients 50

plus is focused around help to obtain Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Disabled Facility Grant enquiries, and tackling debt.

It has also been highlighted that ex – service personnel may not be accessing appropriate help and support due to the stigma of accepting charitable welfare support.

### *Emerging Issues*

- All serving personnel have the opportunity to gain a range of qualifications and this is encouraged by the armed forces
- service leavers with over 6 years service, who meet relevant criteria, will be offered the opportunity to achieve a first level 3 qualification (A level or vocational equivalent) free or fund first foundation or full degree. This support only applies to service leavers who left the armed forces, or entered their resettlement phase, on or after 17 July 2008. Those who left the forces prior to this date are ineligible. This fully state subsidised support may be transferred to the spouse or civil partner in the case of death in service or medical discharge where an individual's medical condition is so severe that it will prevent them from taking advantage of the educational support.
- On 4 October 2010 the coalition government announced plans to set aside funding for a new scheme for publicly funded higher education scholarships for the children of servicemen and women killed on active military service since 1990
- The government also confirmed that it plans to continue funding the scheme for service leavers to gain new qualifications and offer an enhanced scheme which covers more ex-service personnel. Implementation of both announcements is subject to the outcome of the Browne review into higher education.
- The coalition government is developing a tri service Armed Forces Covenant aimed at improving support for serving and former members of the armed forces and their families. Specific commitments to be taken forward as part of this work include support to service leavers to study at university and creating a new programme "troops for teachers" to recruit service leavers into the teaching profession.
- As yet there are no links between the Career Transition Partnership and local authorities who are seeking to address worklessness within their communities. There is a need for more sharing of information/ more joined up work between the Career Transition Partnership, the armed forces and local authorities so that the skills /employment needs of the ex- service community can be appropriately reflected in economic / health and well-being strategies across the region.
- Approximately 1200 ex-service personnel receiving support from the Career Transition Partnership settle in the North East Region.
- Links are beginning to be made between the Career Transition Partnership and Job Centre Plus in the NE region in order to take forward work identified as part of the Command Paper " The Nation's commitment ... " This work is in its very early stages and is focusing at present on developing a model whereby information can be shared and cascaded.
- Not all early service leavers are vulnerable – there is information that roughly between 50 and 55% go on to gain employment after leaving the services.

- Job Centre Plus is carrying out specific work to support service leavers who register for its services. The aim is that Job Centre Plus alongside local authorities will capture and provide support to ex-service personnel who are not receiving support elsewhere.
- Job Centre Plus has three Armed Forces Champions who operate across the North East region. This is a relatively new role with the remit to act as key point of liaison with the armed forces community to raise awareness of and facilitate access to employment opportunities which service leavers can access via Job Centre Plus to help them reintegrate back into civilian life.
- A key issue for Job Centre Plus is obtaining data on the numbers of service leavers who are likely to require support.
- In response to the commitments set out in the Command Paper “ The Nation’s commitment ...” Tees Valley Job Centre Plus is engaging with the armed forces and the Career Transition Partnership to help move ex-service personnel into sustainable employment.
- Tees Valley Job Centre Plus, the Career Transition Partnership and Middlesbrough Citizens Advice Bureau have indicated their support for the premise of a single point of contact hotline telephone number which ex - service personnel across the region could access if they have difficulties accessing services. **Tees Valley Job Centre Plus** are piloting a **helpline for the ex-service community in Teeside - 01642 398892** - Job Centre Plus staff will be able to use the telephone number if they identify a service leaver or family member who needs additional support which cannot be sourced via Job Centre Plus recognised provision. Job Centre Plus will signpost to one of ex-service support organisations and will ensure follow up to track progress of the referral. This will be a two way street and if any partners need advice on benefits or employment for a service leaver or family member they can also contact Tees Valley Job Centre Plus on the number.
- Tees Valley Job Centre Plus has held initial discussions with the North East Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of small businesses and ANEC in Darlington in relation to ex-service personnel with high level / management skills.
- Tees Valley Job Centre has also engaged with Tesco Distribution Centre to promote the skills of the ex-service community and this has been successful in moving some individuals into employment.
- Tees Valley Job Centre Plus is seeking to identify individuals in local offices who can act as local champions for the ex-service community.
- All ex - service personnel who have served in the regular armed forces for more than three months in the last three years have early entry eligibility into the New Deal Programme which provides gateways into further education, vocational training, volunteering etc. This means that they are entitled to access the programme from day one and can be fast tracked into various training options.
- All Job Centre Plus customers, including ex - service personnel and their families can access Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. In addition, payments can be made to serving and ex-service personnel who have suffered injuries, ill health or death due to service in the armed or reserve forces via the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme
- Local authorities and relevant partners are not specifically made aware of the educational / skills/ employment related support needs of personnel about to be discharged by the tri – services.

- There are no specific pathways established with the armed forces for the ex- service community to access benefit / educational / skills / employment related support services via local authorities and relevant partners within the region.
- Nearly 800 people leave the army each year from bases in North Yorkshire - many of whom return to other parts of the country, including the North East. A high proportion of these are seeking employment in transport and communications, construction or manufacturing sectors and professional or skilled trade occupations.
- A range of education / skills / employment related services/ support is available to the ex-service community within the North East region at this point in time or is being developed but this is fragmented and not joined up.
- Councils across the NE region co-ordinate and deliver a wide range of initiatives to move people close to the labour market and into work. Interventions are individualised and are designed to reflect personal and multiple barriers to employment whilst also focusing on the local labour market and needs of employers.
- There is evidence that in the past some Councils have received direct referrals from the armed forces to local authority services but this has not happened for some time. It is considered that it would be helpful to receive direct referrals in the future as Councils across the region and Job Centre Plus already have close working relationships and there is significant scope to provide appropriate support.
- A common data management system across the Tyne & Wear City Region and Tees Unlimited City Region helps support individuals moving across local authority boundaries. This particularly avoids individuals re-registering with local authority employment support providers if their housing is transient.
- Figures obtained for the Tyne and Wear City Region indicate that in 2008-09 there were only 12 registered ex - armed forces clients and 361 in 2009-10.
- At the end of 2008-09 the Tyne and Wear City Region included in its data collection a non - mandatory question asking whether individuals were ex-service. The difference in the numbers of ex-armed forces clients registered in 2008-09 and 2009-10 may be attributed to asking the question. Tees Unlimited City Region's database was developed approximately 18 months after the Tyne and Wear City Region database and it also includes in its data collection a non-mandatory question asking individuals whether they are ex-service.
- Figures obtained for Tees Valley Unlimited indicate that between 2008 - 2010 26 ex - armed forces clients were registered.
- Figures obtained for the Tyne and Wear City Region indicate that in 2008-09 eight ex-armed forces clients were placed in employment or self employment and sixty two in 2009-10.
- Of those ex-armed forces clients registered with Tees Valley Unlimited during 2008 -10 none were placed in employment or self employment.
- Work is taking place with North East colleges and places of further education and other third sector organisation to develop specific support to increase the skills/ provide educational and employment support and pathways into employment for the ex-service community.
- Finchale College, Durham is leading on the development of a North East Veterans Network and a directory of services available to veterans in the

north east with a view to improving communication and access to services. Currently 41 organisations across the region are involved. At this stage the effectiveness / quality of services advertised via the directory is not regulated.

- Organisations such as Norcare and Mental Health North East are carrying out work to develop specific pathways into services for “vulnerable” service leavers.
- The ex-service community are under-represented in the self employment market and this is a route into employment which could be targeted in the future.

## **6. Conclusions**

Overall, the workstream has found that the majority of service leavers have had a positive experience within the armed forces and they do well when they leave. They will have planned for their move into civilian life including arranging housing and obtaining employment.

There are a small group of service leavers who have had to leave the service early for a variety of reasons, or who have been in the service for many years and have had difficulties making the transition to civilian life. These groups are less likely to have planned their transition into civilian life and are those most at risk of homelessness and other related difficulties.

At present approximately 8/9% of the army are unfit for active duty and it is estimated that almost all of these will need to be medically discharged in the next 12 to 18 months - their medical condition will impact on their ability to access appropriate housing and relevant training / employment in the future and their ability to reintegrate effectively into local communities. Potentially this could have a significant impact on the resources of local authorities across the region in the future.

The armed forces are currently working with NHS partners and are putting systems in place to try and ensure that those service personnel who are medically discharged are not returned to the community until the armed forces are confident that appropriate support is in place. However, there is a need for greater information sharing and joint working with local authorities in order to allow local authorities to plan to meet future needs and support required for these ex-service individuals once they are returned to local communities.

There is evidence that the resettlement / transition support provided by the armed forces and the Career Transition Partnership is generally robust and forms a comprehensive resettlement programme which supports individuals to settle back into the areas from which they came. This programme is “at the forefront of providing tailored professional help to military personnel as they leave” National Audit Office report ([www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)). However, further work to tighten up support for “vulnerable” early service leavers is needed. The armed forces have already identified this as an issue and have put in place improvements to address this.

There is a significant amount of activity within the region to support the wider health and well-being needs of the ex-service community.

There are a great deal of support mechanisms available to the ex-service community once they have left the services via local authorities, ex service charities and a range of other partner and third sector organisations but these are fragmented and need to be more joined up. Furthermore, not all individuals are accessing this support - one of the big challenges is how to address this.

## **16 Recommendations – Priority areas for the future**

16.1 Following the workstream’s investigation into the relationship between the ex-service community and the wider social determinants of health its recommendations are as follows:-

### ***Transition***

- The effectiveness of improvements to the armed forces resettlement provision for early service leavers should be kept under review by the armed forces to ensure there is effective identification of potential vulnerability issues.

### ***Communication and Co-ordination***

- There is a need to obtain more information generally regarding the numbers of the ex- service community who discharged and are settling / have settled within the North East and their overall needs. It is therefore recommended that formal information sharing protocols / arrangements are established between the armed forces and local authorities across the NE region. This will enable local authorities to properly assess / plan to meet the needs of the ex-service community as a specific group.
- There needs to be better communication/ sharing of information/ more joined up work between the armed forces, local authorities, partners and ex-service charities.
- Identification of the ex-service community( ie ex-service personnel and their families) is a key issue. The ex-service community’s status is very rarely recorded when individuals access services – there is some evidence that this might be impacting on their current ability to effectively access certain services and that recording this status improves access. Organisations such as the Probation Service, the Prison Service and the housing charity Norcare are now actively seeking to record such information in order to ensure that certain services are effectively targeted towards the specific needs of the ex-service community. It is therefore strongly recommended that local authorities across the region consider what might be the cost / benefits of collecting such information in the future.
- There is a need to raise awareness amongst local authorities and other partner organisations/ employers across the region of the very specific needs of the ex- service community.
- There is some evidence to support the need for the establishment of some kind of formal network involving local authorities which focuses on the needs of the ex-service community. It is recommended that local

authorities across the region, via ADASS and NE Directors of Public Health, explore with the armed forces and health partners how this may be taken forward having regard to networks / forums already in existence, their specific remits and the need to avoid duplication/ ensure effective use of resources (eg recently established NHS Armed Services Forum, the NE Regional Veterans Network and the MOD Military / Civil Integration Forum).

- There is a need to raise the level of awareness / communicate effectively with the ex-service community about the wide range of support currently available to them and how they may access relevant support services and removing any stigma from seeking help and support.

It is recommended that local authorities may wish to consider establishing a central point of contact in each local authority or sub - region who can act as champions for the ex-service community when they experience difficulties. Ex-service charities, Citizens Advice Bureau operating in the region and the Career Transition Partnership have all indicated that this would prove beneficial.

It is also recommended that local authorities across the region consider establishing a central point of contact telephone number - to increase the chances of people getting the help they need. Ex-service charities, Citizens Advice Bureau operating in the region, the Career Transition Partnership and Job Centre Plus have all indicated that this would be likely to prove beneficial.

The workstream would recommend that local authorities adopt the approach taken by Hampshire County Council, which is one of the four welfare pathway pilots, whereby ex-service telephone enquiries are channelled via councils' contact centres to an existing telephone number within a council department and a member of staff deals with enquiries as part of their role. Awareness training regarding the needs of the ex-service community and external support organisations would need to be provided.

It is also recommended that North East local authorities examine opportunities for using digital media to improve communication with the ex-service community and raise awareness of available support mechanisms.

As some sections of the ex-service community are “vulnerable” and hard to reach it is recommended that local authorities work with third sector bodies which provide an outreach service ( such as ex-service charities and Norcare) to raise awareness and improve access to available support mechanisms.

- It is also recommended that the Homes and Communities Agency is requested on behalf of local authorities across the region to consider how it may broker assistance and ensure better co-ordination of work across the region to ensure that services are being directed at the right people, including the ex-service community and how it might assist with sharing examples of best practice as part of its enabling role and within the local investment planning process undertaken with local authorities.

### ***Working towards a more unified approach - / effective planning and leadership***

- Local authorities have been identified as having a key role in shaping their communities and building the wider determinants of good health and working to support individual families and communities. There is evidence that a proportion of the ex -service community across the region are vulnerable and require targeted support. In view of this, local authorities in the North East may wish to consider dedicating a chapter in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments to vulnerable service leavers and their needs and identifying as a target population the ex service community within their strategic planning processes in relation to social exclusion, anti-poverty, homelessness and offending.
- Given the current lack of hard data regarding the health and well being needs of the ex-service community there is a need for further longitudinal qualitative research into the needs of the ex-service community. It is recommended that local authorities across the region take this forward as part of the development of Joint Strategic Needs Assessments across the region.
- It is recommended that local authorities across the North East request the NE National Housing Federation to carry out a mapping exercise to quantify current provision of ex - service community housing provided by their members and analyse best practice both nationally and within the North East.
- It is also recommended that following local authorities' assessment of the likely level of demand from the ex-service community the North East Housing Federation works closely with NE local authorities to help plan future provision.
- It is recommended that the armed forces and the Career Transition Partnership work more closely with local authorities across the region and provide them with an assessment of the likely level of demand / needs for employment / skills related services in order to inform future economic / financial inclusion strategies and future provision.
- A key focus for future planning should be more joined up / preventative work between the armed forces, local authorities, partners and third sector organisations such as ex-service charities.
- Local authorities within the North East may wish to consider the merit in developing a regional veterans charter to establish uniform good practice across the region which can form part of existing regional structures such as the Association of North East Councils (ANEC). The development of any charter to take into account any guidance in the Coalition government's forthcoming Armed Forces Covenant.
- As service leavers can settle anywhere in the North East it is recommended that the positive work being taken forward by Job Centre Plus in the Tees Valley is shared with Armed Forces Champions across

the rest of the region with a view to ensuring a consistent approach in supporting the training and employment needs of the ex-service community.

### **Access to services**

- At the moment there does not seem to be a way of identifying take up of low cost housing products by the ex-service community or identifying whether providers are assisting the ex-service community as well as other parts of the community. It is recommended that the Homes and Communities Agency is requested to examine these issues on behalf of local authorities across the region in order to ensure that the ex –service community are effectively accessing provision.
- It is also recommended that the Homes and Communities Agency is requested to examine opportunities for the ex – service community within any revised funding arrangements as an outcome of the comprehensive spending review.
- It is recommended that the North East National Housing Federation is requested on behalf of local authorities across the region to carry out work with Registered Social Landlords to raise awareness of the housing needs of the ex-service community.
- It is recommended that local authorities across the region examine the scope to provide housing related support for ex - service tenants once a property has been identified.
- There is some evidence that signposting is not enough for the more vulnerable service leavers with specific problems and there is a need for more integrated pathways to services for these individuals. It is recommended that the armed forces and the Career Transition Partnership work more closely with local authorities and third sector organisations such as ex service charities, Norcare and Mental Health North East with a view to developing a formal process for referring “vulnerable” (early) service leavers into specific services.
- It is recommended that an awareness raising campaign is carried out amongst staff throughout the Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley Unlimited City Regions regarding the importance of asking whether individuals are ex-service to ensure that they can be appropriately referred on to Job Centre Plus and receive their entitlement to early access to New Deal Programmes

The workstream recommend that the NE Regional Health Joint Scrutiny Committee, acting as the Project Board :

- i) Note the information and analysis of the evidence set out in the Social and Economic workstream’s report
- ii) Recognise the contribution of stakeholders / partner agencies within this area of work.
- iii) Develop an action plan which includes the service improvements identified and monitors this on a six monthly basis.

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