



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT

Armed Forces Covenant: annual report 2020

What the Welsh Government has done during 2020 to ensure fair treatment of serving Armed Forces, veterans and their families.

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Contents

Ministerial foreword

Feedback from the Armed Forces Expert Group members

Introduction

Veterans scoping exercise: summary of progress

Military support during the COVID-19 pandemic

Charity support

Governance and engagement: delivering the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales

Armed Forces liaison officers: our voice in the communities

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: success stories

Our 2019 to 2020 commitments: progress to date

Health

Education and skills

Housing

Benefits and finance

Support on return to civilian life and criminal justice

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Employment and Skills

Commemoration

Future commitments: what we will do over the next year:

Conclusion

Ministerial foreword

Our annual report has, for the second year running, been written as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Wales. During this challenging time our Armed Forces have continued to provide vital support to the Welsh Government, our NHS and Local Health Boards in helping those who need it most. We thank them for their continued, invaluable support.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, working with our partners, we have continued to support the Armed Forces community. This report reflects our achievements and those of the wider community, notwithstanding the fact that COVID-19 has inevitably impacted on progress in certain areas.

We have introduced the 'Great Place to Work for Veterans' scheme, recognising veterans' skills. We are supporting the veteran's rail card scheme, so that veterans and their family members receive discounted UK travel. We have progressed our Veterans scoping exercise recommendations and the UK Veterans strategy in Wales, listening to, and responding to veterans' concerns.

2021 marks 10 years since the Armed Forces Covenant was recognised in law. We have seen many achievements in Wales, including:

- Increased funding provision for Veterans NHS Wales, enabling veterans with mental health issues to receive the support they need
- In 2017 we put in place disregard for War Disablement Pension and Armed

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- Forces Compensation Scheme payments when veterans access social care
- We are funding the Armed Forces Liaison Officers until 2023, helping to embed Covenant guidelines and services within Local Authorities across Wales.

We commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of VJ Day virtually, honouring veterans whose bravery and sacrifice marked an end to World War Two. COVID-19 restrictions changed how we marked this milestone, however this did not lessen the respect shown by the people of Wales.

Collaboration is key to progress; we value the support of our Armed Forces Expert Group and key partners. Working together and listening to our Armed Forces community will help us ensure the services we deliver continue to meet their needs.

Feedback from the Armed Forces Expert Group members

In our 2019 annual report the Armed Forces Expert group members raised a number of issues to be addressed by the Welsh Government and the sector.

The Families Federations' asked for more prominence to be given to the Forces Families Jobs platform and that all local authorities and Local Health Boards be encouraged to advertise vacancies through this portal. The Forces Families Jobs platform has been promoted across the sector in Wales.

The Families Federations also called for acknowledgement of the work of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in enabling, easier access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for Service children. This was included in our 2019 annual report; other LHB areas have also adopted this policy.

Some disappointment was felt about the delay in completing the school admissions code review. The review is hoped to be resumed in the new Senedd term.

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The need for further work to be done to address issues some Service personnel and families are facing in respect of council tax charges. Discussions have taken place between the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Family Federations. Issues have now been resolved. The Family Federations have been invited to attend the WLGA Armed Forces network to raise awareness of their roles and share good practice.

Clarification was also sought on the policy regarding health waiting lists and whether family members moving into Wales from other parts of the UK would also benefit from time accrued on waiting lists. We have confirmed that the policy does include family members.

Confirmation of the timescales for the improvement of data on Service children was raised. This work has been delayed due to priority work on COVID-19 and the end of the EU Transition Period (Brexit). However, it is hoped this work will be resumed during this Senedd term.

NHS and Veterans NHS Wales called for the Veterans' healthcare in prison guidance to be updated to take account of the Supporting Transition of Military Personnel (SToMP) work in prisons, and lack of referrals to Veterans NHS Wales from veterans in prison. Our plans to update the Welsh Government's Veterans' Informed Prisons guidance were put on hold in 2020 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is something we intend to revisit and discuss with the prison health leads, as part of the COVID-19 recovery plan for prisons in Wales.

Work is underway between the Armed Forces liaison officers and the Veterans in custody support officers to further publicise Veterans NHS Wales in the criminal justice system; to ensure those supporting veterans leaving prison can help them engage with the service as early as possible after release.

The National probation service commented on the issue of taking forward the findings of the Veterans Scoping exercise with regard to criminal justice. It was agreed that there were sufficient existing work streams available through SToMP to examine the work. Since the ending of the SToMP project, consideration is being given to how best to monitor ongoing support for the ex-Armed Forces personnel in prisons.

The Armed Forces Expert group members thank Welsh Government for the report and the advancements that they are making in addressing the needs of the Armed Forces community across Wales, we can see much progress has been made particularly under such difficult circumstances due to COVID-19 and it is good to see so many from across the sector come together to address the needs of isolated veterans.

The following areas also we also feel need priority action over the term of this Welsh Government:

- Develop a national plan to implement the changes required from the Armed forces Act
- Work with the Ministry of Defence to provide resettlement centre services in Wales to ensure improved transition into civilian life.
- Ensure that there is ongoing review of the capacity and funding needed for Veterans NHS Wales to meet the mental health needs of veterans in a timely manner for first appointment and follow up treatment
- Ensure that injured veterans can consistently access chronic pain treatment when they need it, where they need it and in a manner that works for them, close to home and different from the service provided by the veterans trauma network, which is intended for those with major physical disabilities
- Commit to permanently fund the supporting Service children in education Wales fund and continue investment in the SSCE Cymru Project to ensure Service children have the best possible start
- Expand and accelerate the roll out of guaranteed interviews for Armed Forces Service leavers, Reservists and spouses who meet the minimum criteria for public sector jobs in Wales.
- Extend housing priority need to cover 5 years post leaving military service and ensure divorced or separated spouses and partners of Service personnel in Wales can access housing support on the same terms as other Armed Forces families.
- Update the 'Veterans Substance Misuse Treatment framework and deliver better support to veterans with substance abuse issues.

On Remembrance we look forward to hearing about the Welsh plans for Falklands 40 in 2022.

Introduction

Our third Armed Forces Covenant annual report demonstrates progress and wide-ranging support for our Armed Forces community; progress achieved through working together with our key partners.

As with our 2019 annual report we have drafted this report during the challenges of COVID-19. However, we have continued to deliver for our Armed Forces community. We have changed our approach, engaging virtually with the Armed Forces sector in line with restrictions.

Our achievements include:

COVID-19 support

- Serving personnel have supported our NHS and communities. They have been instrumental with the successful roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine and in other areas including support for the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust.
- Charities and organisations have adapted how they deliver services to ensure continuity of support. Between August 2020 and January 2021 the Royal British Legion's Branch Community Support initiative made 1527 calls to isolated veterans.

Veterans Scoping Exercise

- Continued delivery of the recommendations made in our Veterans' Scoping exercise; monitoring progress through our Programme Board and Action Groups.

Funding provision

- Provided funding of £275,000 to enable the Armed Forces liaison officers (AFLOs) to continue in their roles until 2023, supporting those more

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vulnerable in our communities.

- Increased funding to support Veterans NHS Wales, providing total recurrent funding from 2021 of £920,000 a year.
- Further investment of £250,000 a year to support Service children in Wales, to provide focused, targeted support where it is most needed.

Information and awareness

- Publication of our Capitalising on Military Family Talent toolkit, November 2020.
- Development of our Covenant Wales website, highlighting the support available for the Armed Forces community across Wales.

Support for the Armed Forces community

- We are participating in the veterans' rail card scheme. Veterans in Wales can receive a third off rail fares, provide discounted tickets for a named secondary cardholder and children travelling with the cardholder.
- Four Regional Schools Liaison Officers (RSLOs) have been appointed whose roles include engaging with and supporting schools to understand the needs of their Service children. The RSLOs will remain in post until September 2022.

Veterans scoping exercise: summary of progress

The Veterans scoping exercise, which took place from September 2018 to August 2019, was a Wales-wide conversation designed to identify the gaps in services for veterans and their families. The exercise also formed the Welsh Government contribution to the UK strategy for our Veterans.

The final report was published in January 2020 and following this new structures were set up to take forward the recommendations.

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We have established three new action groups with representatives of partner organisations to take forward recommendations covering employment, transition and information and awareness and finance. We have also established a Programme Board and Cross Government group to monitor how we deliver.

Progress to date:

- In May 2020, funding of £85,700 was provided to cover the staff costs from October 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the three therapist posts previously funded by Help for Heroes. In March 2021 we announced an additional increase of £235,000 for Veterans NHS Wales providing total recurrent funding from 2021 to 2022 onwards of £920,000 a year. This has ensured Veterans mental health treatment in Wales is meeting current need.
- £50,000 funding has been invested in training for prosthetists in Wales in new technologies ensuring veterans receive the technological support they require based on their prosthetics.
- We announced that from April 2021 civilians will now be eligible for microprocessor knees in Wales; this will include veterans with non-service attributable injuries, subject to clinical need.
- We worked with Business in the Community and the Scottish Government, to produce the Capitalising on Military Family Talent toolkit highlighting to employers how they can recruit and retain military partners and spouses.
- In early 2020, we provided funding of £120,000 to 13 charities and providers in order to tackle loneliness and social isolation in the Armed Forces community.
- £250,000 investment to support Service children in Wales. £50,000 is funding a package of universal support provided by SSCE Cymru for all schools in Wales, along with £200,000 that will be managed by SSCE Cymru, working with Local Authorities, to provide focused, targeted support where it is most needed.

This work will continue and progress will be monitored.

Military support during the COVID-19 pandemic

Examples, of which there have been many, include Serving personnel deployed to support the whole town testing programme in Merthyr Tydfil, planning support for Welsh Government and Local Health Boards in addition to support for the Welsh Ambulance Service trust in the form of patient-facing driving and non-clinical support.

Members of the Armed Forces have also supported our mass vaccination centres across all Health Board areas working alongside existing NHS staff undertaking a range of roles from meeting and greeting patients to delivery of the vaccine.

The Royal Navy in Wales and its Regional Engagement team have worked hard to adapt in order to meet and comply with restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cadet organisations throughout Wales have enabled virtual opportunities for their 'Ships Company' to continue to learn life and CV enhancing skills, while still providing a platform for them to engage with friends in a safe environment. Units provided care packages for Cadets and siblings. One Cadet from Flintshire was singled out for his work in keeping 2,300 Cadets engaged throughout lockdown by running a support forum allowing Cadets and support staff to come together and discuss current issues. For this work Sea Cadet John Challenger was awarded the British Empire medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Charity support

Charities have continued to provide assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting how they work to meet new regulations and remaining available to the Armed Forces community when needed.

The Royal British Legion has continued to support veterans with online branch meetings. The Legion's Branch Community Support initiative made 1527 calls to isolated veterans from August 2020 to January 2021. From August 2020 to the

end of February 2021 the Legion received 76 new Benefit Debt Money Advice referrals in Wales and recorded £402,860 of financial gains for veterans and families.

The VC Gallery has continued to assist the ex-Service community in West Wales during COVID-19. As part of our funded project 'Veterans in the Community' the charity has been supporting veterans in socially remote areas. Speaking about its work VC Gallery co-ordinator Barry John MBE said:

“ Using the information that we gained during our 2020 Welsh Government project with isolated veterans, we created outdoor projects in safe spaces with walking groups, metal detecting, gardening, walking football and photography in the community.

“ As restrictions ease our two new projects “Dig for Victory D4V” and “Into the deep blue” will see a more outdoor direction to complement our in-gallery social engagements. With Gardening and woodwork, beekeeping, star gazing and even camp fire therapy, this has all come about after positive engagement discussing what our veterans would like to do, acting on all the information gained during our Welsh Government project with the consultations and events that we laid out through-out the rural areas attracting people that are sometimes hard to engage with. ”

The Ceredigion Armed Forces Hub Peer Mentor, Penparcau has delivered support for the Armed forces community across the county during the pandemic. This has included running VJ day commemorative events in line with COVID-19 guidelines, delivering food parcels in Cardigan during August 2020, and delivering 160 goodwill christmas parcels during the run up to christmas.

Change Step has continued to run drop-in services online, supporting veterans and families during the pandemic. Peer mentors have used technology to fully understand what their service users found easiest to connect with. This has included walk and talk sessions when restrictions allowed, which were of benefit to both staff and service users alike. Walk and talk sessions have been recognised as an element of delivery that Change Step intend to continue to offer post COVID-19 pandemic and have been a welcome addition.

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Change Step has also been working to ensure that basic household needs were met. Using Armed Forces Covenant Trust COVID-19 emergency funding, the charity worked with local food distributor, Castell Howell, to provide high value food and essentials deliveries. In total, 189 deliveries were made to 55 households across Wales. This provision gave peer mentors the opportunity to have valuable doorstep conversations and speak to service users in person. In addition to helping the veterans directly, the charity also frequently called upon community groups and food banks to help out. For service users that engaged in this element of support, Change Step found that veterans were more likely to buy-in to other areas of their care provision such as online training opportunities.

Woody's Lodge support teams have continued their work providing remote services for the Armed Forces community. Since August 2020, Welfare Officers have supported 181 Veterans and families across Wales, with issues such as finance, housing and benefits. Two homeless Veterans were also supported into accommodation. Twice weekly 'Zoom' coffee mornings were held providing social engagement and entertainment which assisted in combatting isolation. 175 telephone calls were made to check on the welfare of veterans and the charity also delivered a number of food parcels to those vulnerable in the community.

Woody's Lodge has continued to work with other agencies and local authorities. Although the hubs remained closed, Woody's were also able to carry out essential maintenance work at the new farm project in West Wales (Penlan Farm) with a "soft" opening once COVID-19 restrictions allowed. All drop in locations have been prepared ready for when restrictions are lifted, allowing face-to-face social gatherings.

Governance and engagement: delivering the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales

The Armed Forces sector has continued to work together to uphold the principles of the Armed forces Covenant and deliver services. It does this through active forums, networks and groups.

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Our governance structures provided scrutiny, feedback and opportunities for partnership working during 2020 to 2021 both at a Wales and UK level, ensuring a fully coordinated approach.

Armed Forces Expert group on the needs of the Armed Forces community

The Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government chaired the Armed Forces Expert Group in September 2020 and March 2021. Agenda items included Forces in Mind Trust's current priorities and updates on Armed Forces day and Covenant legislation.

Veterans Scoping Exercise Programme Board

Our Programme Board met in April 2021. Noting progress to date the Board considered additional means of progressing the recommendations, especially those where delivery had been impacted by COVID-19. The Scoping Exercise continues to provide the Wales delivery element of the UK Strategy for our Veterans and includes engagement with the UK Government's Office for Veterans Affairs and the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Armed Forces network

The WLGA Armed Forces network met in summer 2020. Local Government representatives had an opportunity to provide feedback to the MOD on the early proposals for the new Covenant Duty, to be included in the Armed Forces Bill 2021.

Armed Forces forums

Regional and local Armed Forces have continued to meet virtually. We have

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continued to attend and listen to feedback whilst also providing updates on issues such as the Armed Forces Bill and the Veterans Scoping exercise.

Our Armed Forces liaison officers (AFLOs) have continued to coordinate and support local work, raising awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant in their areas.

Wales annual conference

On 3 December 2020 our Armed Forces conference was held virtually for the first time. Over 100 representatives from charities, Government and public sector partners attended. The opening address was provided by the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government with presentations from Fighting with Pride and VC Gallery.

Ministerial engagement

The First Minister and Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government engaged with UK Government and with stakeholders across the Armed Forces sector. Ministerial meetings provided an opportunity to highlight good practice and affirm our views on national issues affecting Wales, for example the UK Government's integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy.

Stakeholder engagement enabled Ministers to highlight our support for the Armed Forces community. Through participation in the RBL 10 year Covenant review, Ministers spoke about achievements to date and future aspirations.

All Wales Armed Forces charity forum

The All-Wales Armed Forces charity forum has continued to meet. This allows charities an opportunity to discuss issues and share best practice. Welsh Government attendance provides an opportunity to share updates and hear directly from those who work directly with the Armed Forces community.

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Veteran Support groups and hubs

Support groups and hubs have continued to deliver in challenging circumstances. This has included virtual support groups such as Valleys Veterans, Change Step peer mentoring and the expansion of Woody's Lodge to Penlan Farm in Ceredigion. Support from VC Gallery in Haverfordwest, Penparcau Hub in Aberystwyth and Newport veterans' hub has also continued along with the work of our local branches of the Royal British Legion and the Bulldogs in Port Talbot.

'Map of Need' data

We work closely with Northumbria University to ensure data pertaining to Wales is included on the Map of Need, an online directory of services available to the veteran community. Engagement with the Armed Forces liaison officers ensures that the directory continues to be up to date.

UK engagement

Our engagement with the UK Government has continued, enabling us to keep abreast of developments at a UK level and ensure Wales' representation when required.

Following the UK Government's announced intent to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant in law, as part of the Armed Forces Bill 2021 we have continued to engage with the MOD, our policy leads and legal teams to ensure our policy perspective is reflected in the Bill. In support of the Bill and its provisions relating to Wales, the Welsh Government laid a Legislative Consent Motion on the 18 February 2021. In brief, the Bill will introduce a new statutory duty on certain public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. The duty will apply across the UK and is intended to further raise awareness of the Covenant and, in turn, improve delivery against its

pledges in key areas.

Our response to the Andrew Selous report 'Living in our Shoes' highlights our commitment in supporting the families of Serving personnel. This will continue as part of our ongoing support of the MOD as it develops its UK Families' strategy. Our initiatives to support families are included in this report.

We have continued our membership of the UK Government's Covenant reference group, sharing good practice and ensuring a collaborative approach in the four nations of the UK and cross-department policy development.

Armed Forces liaison officers: our voice in the communities

The appointment of Armed Forces liaison officers (AFLOs) helps us work with local authorities and local organisations, delivering policies that support the Armed Forces community. These posts also help the information flow between national and local areas, so that we as a Government are more aware of the needs of the Armed Forces community.

We have confirmed funding of £275,000 a year for these roles to continue through 2021 to 2023. This will help them to build on the excellent work done to date.

Their achievements include:

South West Wales: Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend

- Improved local engagement: Participants at the three local authority and health board Armed Forces virtual forums has increased by up to 200%.
- Supported Neath Port Talbot education department to source grant funding to sustain a member of staff supporting Armed Forces families.
- Working with organisations to help with the recent increased incidences of Veterans in crisis.

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West Wales: Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire

- Collaboration with three local authorities has helped put in place a common approach in identifying veteran housing needs. In Ceredigion the housing team worked with 26 applicants who identify as a member of the Armed Forces community.
- Supported Woody's Lodge expansion into West Wales at their Ceredigion location, Penlan Farm.
- Provided direct signposting and support to the Armed Forces community on issues such as housing, financial assistance, family assistance, employment and mental health.

South East Wales: Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan

- Three virtual veteran groups established to strengthen relationships and tackle isolation.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf newsletter in place; work is ongoing to collate a Merthyr Tydfil newsletter, sharing information locally for the Armed Forces community.
- Over 250 service users contacted during lockdown to offer support and advice, raising awareness of the COVID-19 helpline number.
- Successful funding bid to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to purchase IT equipment to support those in the Armed Forces community facing social isolation.

Gwent: Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent

- Secured £19,440 from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to deliver mental health first aid courses to the Armed Forces community and support organisations.

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- Jointly worked on a new Veterans virtual coffee morning; in the process of introducing a Veterans Hub in each local authority supported by an Armed Forces organisation: Caerphilly Change Step, Blaenau Gwent Change Step, Newport Newport veterans hub and Veterans NHS Aneurin Bevan UHB. Hubs are in the process of being developed in Torfaen and Monmouthshire with partners to be confirmed.
- Training delivered to over 200 local authority staff, Gwent Police, health board and a bespoke session for 32 members of staff in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

North Wales: Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham

- Strengthened engagement with the Regional Suicide Board. The regional co-ordinator has now become a member of the North Wales Armed Forces Forum strategic group.
- Funding secured from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to deliver mental health first-aid training across North Wales.
- Registered with Refernet; collaboration with the Citizen Advice Bureau's in North Wales to highlight the additional needs and support for the Armed Forces Community.

Mid Wales: Powys

- AFLO appointed in spring 2021.
- Work is ongoing to raise awareness of the appointment and signpost to support available for the Armed Forces community

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: success stories

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust supports the Armed Forces Covenant

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by delivering funding programmes that make a positive difference to Armed Forces communities across the UK. Since its inception in May 2015 with £10million a year funding from the Ministry of Defence, Wales has successfully bid for funding of £6,060,078 to date covering:

- Veterans' Community Centres programme 2019 to 2020. Wales secured £281,044 in funding through its 68 successful applications; 9.8% of the total funding allocated.
- Removing Barriers to Family Life 2019 to 2020. Wales secured £749,000 in funding through its 4 successful applications; 10.4% of the total funding allocated.
- Forces Communities Together 2020. Wales secured £91,133 in funding through its 13 successful applications; 10.6% of the total funding allocated.
- Positive Pathways programme 2020. Wales secured £945,000 in funding through its 16 successful applications; 10.9% of the total funding allocated.
- Local Community Integration Grants 2020 to 2021. Wales secured £342,427 in funding through its 19 successful applications; 14.1% of the total funding allocation.

Good practice example

Appointment of Regional Schools Liaison Officers (RSLO)

In collaboration with 160th (Welsh) Brigade, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) secured £338,000 funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to appoint four RSLOs for a two-year project starting in September 2020.

The RSLOs for Service children in Wales have made significant progress. This includes:

- Conducting school visits: 55 schools have had an initial visit with further visits scheduled
- Developing and delivering a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training package for educators: delivered to 64 members of staff from 30

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schools

- Supporting local authorities to identify Service children numbers
- Developing a case management process for Service children interventions
- Enhancing SSCE Cymru engagement with Armed Forces organisations
- Implementing a social media strategy: resulting in a 312% increase in SSCE Cymru twitter profile visits
- Engaging with and supporting schools to understand the needs of their Service children.

Our 2019 to 2020 commitments: progress to date

Health and well being

Action	Progress
Review the capacity within Veterans NHS Wales to further expand the service for veterans with mental health needs.	Complete. We have continued to support Veterans NHS Wales with nearly £700,000 a year. Funding of £85,700 was provided to cover the three therapist posts previously funded by Help for Heroes. In March 2021, we announced an additional increase of £235,000 for Veterans NHS Wales providing total recurrent funding from 2021 onwards of £920,000 a year.
Review our Armed Forces Covenant : healthcare priority for Veterans guidance, which promotes the identification of veterans by the NHS and enables veterans to access priority treatment if their condition is a result of their time in the Armed Forces.	Ongoing. The review of the 'Armed Forces Covenant :healthcare priority for Veterans guidance' was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It will now be undertaken during the next reporting year.
Continue to monitor delivery of support for our	Ongoing. Our Armed Forces

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Action	Progress
ex-Service amputees.	<p>Prosthetics forum continues to monitor support for amputee veterans and families.</p> <p>We announced that from April 2021 civilians will now be eligible for Microprocessor knees; including veterans with non-service attributable injuries, subject to clinical need.</p>
<p>Work with existing providers to promote substance misuse support services to the Armed Forces community.</p>	<p>Ongoing. This work remains ongoing with discussions currently taking place.</p>
<p>Continue to promote our Talk to Me 2 strategy within the sector to raise awareness of support available to help tackle suicide and self-harm.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Armed Forces liaison officers and Regional Suicide and self-harm prevention coordinators have raised awareness of support available to help tackle suicide and self-harm.</p> <p>With funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, mental health first aid training is being delivered to all 6 local authorities in North Wales and 9 local authorities in South Wales.</p>
<p>We will continue to take forward the recommendations of the Veterans' Scoping exercise in relation to healthcare.</p>	<p>Ongoing. The Welsh Government Local Health Board Champions Forum continues to meet, allowing health professionals to share information and experiences in supporting the Armed Forces community.</p> <p>Progress on scoping health recommendations includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurrent funding increase of £235,000 for Veterans NHS Wales. • Investment in training for

Action**Progress**

prosthetics.
Expansion of Micro-processor knees to veterans with non-Service attributable conditions.

Education

Action**Progress**

We will continue to work to improve data collection on service children in Wales.

Ongoing. Work is ongoing to collect data on the numbers of Service children in Wales.

SSCE Cymru worked with all 22 local authorities and independent schools in Wales to conduct a data collection activity, to provide a snapshot of the number and location of Service children in Wales as of March 2021. The data identified 2,146 Service children in Wales at that point.

Continue to support the SSCE Cymru project, providing Service children, families and schools with valuable resources and guidance.

Complete. We have provided £250,000 in funding to SSCE Cymru in support of Service children in Wales.

In collaboration with 160 (Welsh) Brigade SSCE Cymru was successful in its bid to appoint four Service Children Regional Schools Liaison Officers (RSLOs) funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The RSLOs are working directly with schools to provide training, advice and support.

Housing

Action**Progress**

Assess housing guidance

Ongoing. The COVID-19 pandemic and the emergency

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Action	Progress
to ensure the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant continue to be reflected.	homelessness response has overtaken the planned review of our housing guidance. This work will continue in 2021 and 2022, and include the potential need for legislative reform, which would require the revision of current guidance documents.
Take forward the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping Exercise relating to housing provision for the Armed Forces community.	Ongoing. Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) continue to work with partners, including housing departments, to support members of the Armed Forces community. AFLOs provide training to frontline staff regarding the Armed Forces community, to increase knowledge and awareness.

Benefits and finance

Action	Progress
Promote awareness of the benefits and provision in place for members of the Armed Forces community including those in receipt of compensation payments.	Ongoing. Our Information, Awareness and Finance Action Group has identified specific support in place for the Armed Forces community. This information has been shared wider through our Armed Forces Liaison Officers
Take forward the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping exercise relating to financial support available for the Armed Forces community.	Ongoing. Through membership of the Information and Awareness Finance Action Group, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is working with partners to promote support for the Armed Forces community. This has included the sharing of training and events across all parts of Wales through the Armed Forces Liaison officers. DWP have appointed a new Wales dedicated Armed Forces Lead in addition to 3 dedicated Armed Forces Champions covering their district structure.

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Action**Progress**

Continue to provide free bus travel for veterans injured during Service.

Complete. Veterans in receipt of benefit provided under the Armed Forces and Reserved Compensation Scheme are entitled to a blue badge. This also includes those with a cognitive impairment when in receipt of the relevant benefit award. In 2011 this was provided to those in receipt of Armed Forces Compensation Schemes.

Support on return to civilian life

Action**Progress**

Fund and support the work of the AFLOs, to identify key issues to be actioned at the Armed Forces Expert Group and Veterans Scoping work.

Welsh Government has provided additional funding of £275,000 for Armed Forces Liaison Officers until 2023.

Continue to progress work with key partners through the Veterans Scoping Exercise Information, Awareness and Finance Group to identify the most effective mechanism for sharing information and raising awareness of services available to support the Armed Forces community.

Ongoing. To improve information flow a new Wales AFLO newsletter helping to identify support available.

A new Wales Covenant Website is being developed for launch summer 2021. It will link to existing resources such as the Veterans' Gateway. It will also provide updated local and national information to the Armed Forces community and Service providers.

An Armed Forces Covenant Wales twitter page has been launched, acting as an additional resource for updates.

Progress the work of the Transition Action Group to ensure a collaborative approach in supporting and providing services for

Ongoing. Careers Transitions Partnership (CTP) continue to provide support for

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Action	Progress
veterans and their families who need support on return to civilian life.	Service leavers and Veterans. Virtual Employment Events are now held monthly. CTP have published to their website our Welcome to Wales guide, highlighting support available to Service leavers.
Work with the Careers Transition Partnership and HQ 160 (Welsh) Brigade to develop a Wales Resettlement Guide.	Ongoing. Work has progressed on a new Wales Resettlement Guide to bring together information on the support available in Wales. This will be launched during Armed Forces week and published on the Career Transition Partnership website and publicised to Service Leavers and families.

Employment and skills

Action	Progress
Publish an addendum on supporting military spouses, in partnership with BITC and the Scottish Government.	The Capitalising on Military Family Talent toolkit was published November 2020.
Take forward the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping Exercise pertaining to employment for the Armed Forces community.	Ongoing. Work is underway to deliver a veteran employer event. Members of the Employment Action Group are working with 160th (Welsh) Brigade and Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) to promote the skills of Service personnel, veterans and families and linking them with employers. The event will be held during autumn 2021.
Progress the work being undertaken to introduce	Complete. The Welsh Government is taking part in the 'Great Place to Work for Veterans' initiative. Veterans who meet the

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Action**Progress**

Going Forward into Employment and Guaranteed Interview Schemes into the Welsh Government.

minimum criteria for a job role will progress to the next stage of selection.

Governance

Action**Progress**

Continue to work with UK departments and devolved nations on proposals for new Armed Forces Covenant Legislation.

Ongoing. The Welsh Government has progressed all requirements regarding the Legislation in Wales. In support of the Bill and its provisions relating to Wales, the Welsh Government laid a Legislative Consent Motion on 18 February 2021. The provisions of the Bill relevant to Wales will be debated by the Senedd.

Work with UK partners to ensure the Veterans Scoping Exercise continues to support delivery of the pan-UK Strategy for our Veterans.

Ongoing. The Welsh Government has published its annual progress report against the Veterans Scoping Exercise. This was presented to the Armed Forces Expert Group in March. This has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

We will continue to work with the MOD and UK-partners to deliver agreed objectives on Armed Forces Covenant delivery.

Commemoration

Action

Progress

We will work with the WLGA, military, Local Government and Third Sector partners on plans for Wales Armed Forces Day. We will provide financial support for those events.

Ongoing. A five-year plan has been agreed with the WLGA and local authorities in Wales to host the national Wales Armed Forces day. Wrexham County Borough Council was due to host national Armed Forces Day in 2021; due to the current COVID-19 pandemic the event has been deferred until June 2022. We will work with the MOD and partners to mark this year's event digitally.

We will continue to work with our key partners to support Commemorative events, including the Battle of Britain and Remembrance.

Ongoing. The First Minister participated in the VJ75 National event at Llandaff Cathedral.

The Welsh Government took account of the Remembrance period in respect of Wales' COVID-19 regulations and issued guidance for local events.

We worked with Race Council Cymru, 160th (Welsh) Brigade and RBL to hold a commemoration in recognition of the sacrifices of BAME Service personnel and families. The First Minister participated in the Wales National Service of Remembrance on Remembrance Sunday.

Health

Though the majority of Armed Forces personnel leave the forces healthy and ready to move onto the next stage of their lives, others may return from conflict or leave the Armed Forces with complex healthcare needs. These may not surface until years after the individual has left the Services. We are continuously working to ensure healthcare provision meets the needs of those who require

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support.

Special consideration to NHS treatment for service related illnesses or injuries

In 2017 we were the first nation to update its special consideration treatment guidance to reflect the Armed Forces Covenant. We are working with UK and Scottish Governments to consider how the new legislation on the Covenant, introducing a duty to have due regard to it in certain circumstances, will influence our future guidance. When issued, this guidance will provide a further opportunity to reinforce our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and the special consideration of veterans' treatment for Service related medical conditions.

Veterans NHS Wales

We continue to support Veterans NHS Wales. In March 2021 we agreed total recurrent funding to Veterans NHS Wales from 2021 onwards of £920,000 per annum. This demonstrates a 35% increase in the government funding of this highly valued service for veterans in Wales.

Between August 2020 and March 2021 there were 369 referrals to the service.

Sum of referrals	August 2020	September 2020	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020	January 2021	February 2021	March 2021
Aneurin Bevan	9	6	10	12	3	8	5	8
Betsi Cadwaladr	4	9	13	14	7	5	6	6
Cardiff and	5	8	4	5	3	7	4	6

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Sum of referrals	August 2020	September 2020	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020	January 2021	February 2021	March 2021
Vale								
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	9	11	5	10	9	11	11	14
Hywel Dda	6	6	7	4	7	6	9	4
Swansea Bay	8	10	11	14	8	8	5	9
Grand total	41	50	50	59	37	45	40	47

Sum of In Treatment	August 2020	September 2020	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020	January 2021	February 2021	March 2021
Aneurin Bevan	32	30	35	28	30	29	27	26
Betsi Cadwaladr	44	42	42	36	27	30	32	26
Cardiff and Vale	28	29	29	29	28	27	28	31
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	24	24	30	30	25	16	19	18
Hywel Dda	14	14	16	16	17	20	19	14
Swansea Bay	30	31	33	26	21	21	22	27

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Sum of In Treatment	August 2020	September 2020	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020	January 2021	February 2021	March 2021
Grand total	172	170	185	165	148	143	147	142

Sum of Assessments completed	August 2020	September 2020	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020	January 2021	February 2021	March 2021
Aneurin Bevan	2	9	2	9	2	4	3	7
Betsi Cadwaladr	7	8	3	5	9	8	6	1
Cardiff and Vale	3	4	2	9	5	3	2	5
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	10	3	10	2	3	6	6	4
Hywel Dda	7	3	2	2	1	1	1	7
Swansea Bay	8	5	4	4	4	6	5	4
Grand total	37	32	23	31	24	28	23	28

Case Study

Victor is a 41 year old not previously known to mental health services. He was referred by his ex-wife, through the VNHSW website, due to concerns about symptoms of PTSD. Victor was suffering from recurrent nightmares and flashbacks related to a road traffic collision in Bosnia. At the time of assessment

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he was also experiencing personal stress as a result of accommodation, work and caring issues. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had caused feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) was used to help Victor process his memories of the accident in Bosnia, as well as the emotional moments related to subsequent events. He was also working with a Change Step peer mentor to manage his social issues and Victor gave his consent for both agencies to work together in supporting him.

The EMDR approach went well; Victor was able to reduce the level of distress when recalling the incident, and his nightmares stopped. Working collaboratively VNHSW and Change Step encouraged Victor to re-engage with physical activities to boost his mood, provided holistic care and resolved his housing issue.

Victor has completed his treatment for PTSD. His psychometrics show changes from pre to post therapy, indicating significant improvement in his mental state.

Victor is now more physically active with a noted improvement in motivation and anger reduction.

Amputee support

From April 2021 civilians became eligible for microprocessor knees, improving long-term health, independent living and quality of life by giving the best mobility and function possible. This includes veterans with non-service attributable injuries, subject to clinical need, and was raised by BLESMA, the military charity for limbless veterans, during the Scoping Exercise. Microprocessor knees were already available to veterans injured in service, through the Welsh Government's Veterans Prosthetics policy.

Tom Hall, Wales and West said,

“ This announcement is wonderful news for our members in Wales. The funding in particular, will help a number of our non-service attributable

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above knee amputee members and will enable them to lead more independent lives. ”

Identifying the AF community

The Royal College of General Practitioners has produced a Veterans Healthcare Toolkit as a resource to support GP practices on how to deal with veterans' healthcare needs. We are working with partners to explore the development of a resource for Wales. Roll-out across Health Boards has been deferred during the COVID-19 pandemic and will be considered as part of the review of Clinical Priority Welsh Health Circular guidance.

Free swimming

In February 2016 the Welsh Government officially launched a scheme offering free swimming to veterans and serving members of the Armed Forces. The scheme was rolled out nationally from November 2015 with all 22 Welsh Local Authorities having a local scheme in place by January 2016. In March 2021 the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism agreed funding of £45,000 in financial years 2021 and 2022 to continue supporting the Armed Forces Free Swimming scheme for another year.

Veterans Health Needs Assessment

Recognising the varied healthcare needs of veterans Public Health Wales, in conjunction with Hywel Dda University Health Board, produced a 'snapshot' picture of these needs. The snapshot highlights that veterans have a similar health profile to the civilian population and aims to provide a better understanding of the issues that affect veterans and their families, to highlight the gaps in our knowledge, and to examine best and recommended practice to influence future work and services.

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Military support for Hywel Dda University Health Board

A pilot project between Hywel Dda University Health Board and 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital took place from November to December 2020.

In total, 7 military staff from 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital took part in the pilot, comprising 2 Health Care Assistants and 5 Combat Medical Technicians, as part of a clinical placement at Withybush General Hospital in Pembrokeshire.

During the pilot project, the 7 military participants completed skills for care training, enhancing their clinical skills and enabling them to work in clinical areas. This provided much needed support to the health Board and ensured that those involved were able to maintain their military competencies. It also provided participants potentially considering the Health Board as a future employer with a valuable insight.

Based on the success of the pilot, work is ongoing with 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital to finalise a formal arrangement for further training opportunities.

The Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) Wales

This has been operational for over a year. VTN Wales accepts referrals of veterans with complex physical injuries due to their service who may require specialist treatment. Several referrals have now been received. Governance of VTN Wales was transferred to the South Wales Major Trauma Network during late 2020.

Powys Teaching Health Board

Powys Veteran's Therapy Service has adapted its trauma based therapeutic intervention called EMDR (Eye Movement) to comply with COVID-19 regulations. A service that is only provided face-to-face the therapists experimented with different techniques and found innovative ways of providing the eye movement therapy and innovative tapping techniques using a variety of

technologies. The response from patients, including those with PTSD, has been very positive. Going forward the service will continue to utilise both face-to-face engagement and technology as a way of providing this support.

Powys Teaching Health Board was successful in a bid to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust 'Positive Pathways' to create an 'At Ease' garden on the Bronllys Hospital site. A collaborative approach explored veterans' needs. In addition to the garden the project is also linking in with the in-patient mental health unit in Bronllys Hospital to provide outdoor activities for patients on the ward.

Dentistry

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board is currently in the process of establishing a North Wales Dental Academy in the Bangor area. This will be a focus for improving the quality and delivery of NHS dental services across North Wales, deliver increased NHS service provision, and support training and education for dental registrants. Welsh Government is supporting the setting up of the Academy, including providing additional recurrent funding of £250,000 per annum. This is a public service; accessible to all, including the Armed Forces community.

Suicide support

AFLOS in North Wales, Gwent and Cwm Taf have secured funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to deliver mental health first aid training. Aimed at organisations that work with the Armed Forces community, individuals attending the training will gain recognised qualifications in Mental Health First Aid Training.

Education and skills

We recognise that on return to civilian life Service leavers and veterans may

want to expand and build on the skills gained during Service. We also support the educational needs of Service children, who may face particular educational challenges as a result of parental deployment and mobility.

Supporting Children in Education Fund

For the 2020 to 2021 academic year the Welsh Government has once again provided £250,000 in funding to support the children of Armed Forces personnel in Wales. £50,000 was provided towards administration of Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru whilst £200,000 was distributed between the 22 Local Authorities in Wales, influenced by the number of Service children identified in each. Each Local Authority worked with their Regional School Liaison Officer and SSCE Cymru to produce a funding plan focused on identifying the needs of their Service children and projects that would have a sustainable impact.

Examples include the delivery of virtual after school workshops in Newport for Service children and their families allowing Service children the opportunity to share feelings in a safe and constructive way. In Conwy the funding will be used to establish a nurture room, creating a safe place for Service children to attend individual sessions and receive pastoral support.

Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru

The Welsh Government continues to fund the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru programme, whose mission is to provide the best possible educational support to Service children in Wales.

This year SSCE Cymru conducted a survey with parents and carers of Service children. Giving them the opportunity to share their experiences about living in or moving to Wales, the impact their lifestyles have on their children's education and the support they have received from schools. This research was the third element of a wider SSCE Cymru research project which has taken place over the last two years, including a school survey and discussion groups with Service children.

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In May 2021 SSCE Cymru launched a new Service family guide. The aim of the Guide is to provide information on education and living in Wales and the support that is available to schools, parents, carers and Service children. The structure and content of the Service Family Guide was developed based on the findings of the SSCE Cymru parent/carer survey findings report. [Read more about the guide and the support available.](#)

In collaboration with HQ 160th (Welsh) Brigade, SSCE Cymru secured funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, to introduce four Regional School Liaison Officers (RSLOs) for Service Children in Wales for a two-year project which started in September 2020. The RSLOs focus on supporting schools to understand the needs of Service children and embed activities to ensure sustainable support systems. Since their appointment the RSLOs are developing relationships with the Armed Forces liaison officers; working collaboratively to ensure consistency of messaging.

Data collation on Service children

Work has been undertaken to consider the collection of data on Service children. This work has been delayed due to priority work on COVID-19 and the end of the EU transition period (Brexit).

However, SSCE Cymru and the RSLOs in Wales have worked with all 22 Local Authorities to conduct a data collection activity that provided a snapshot of Service children as of February 2021. This activity identified over 2,000 Service children in some 500 schools in Wales.

Further and Higher Education

We are supportive of all those who wish to further their education and skills.

During financial years 2020 to 2021 a total of £133,972 was provided towards the Further and Higher Education Scheme enabling Service leavers across Wales to benefit from further higher education.

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During financial years 2020 to 2021 the Welsh Government contributed a total of £73,650 towards the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme providing children of those who have died in Service a head start in life through scholarships.

School Admissions Code

Children of Armed Forces personnel who are admitted outside the normal admission round are exempt from infant class size limits. In addition, recognising that families of UK Service personnel are subject to frequent movement within the UK and from abroad at relatively short notice, service admission authorities must allocate a school place in advance, if the applicant meets the criteria when the Service family moves to their new home.

The Welsh Government undertook a review of the Code prior to the current COVID-19 restrictions and there are no plans to change these arrangements which ensure that Service children are not disadvantaged. Plans to consult on unrelated changes to the School Admissions Code were put on hold due to the impact of COVID-19. It is hoped to resume the review under the new administration. Consultees will have an opportunity to put forward their views on any aspect of the Code as part of any future consultation, including in respect of admission of Service children.

SCiP Alliance

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance Hub Cymru has continued to progress. To date there are over fifty partners and stakeholders attending the twice-yearly meetings to explore how best to support Service families throughout their educational life course.

Together the University of South Wales and SSCE Cymru have developed an on-line Creative Forces day to engage with Service children and their families, outlining the benefits of Higher Education to assist with transitions to life outside of the military. Also in progress is the development of a UK wide project to deliver and evaluate the **Thriving Lives toolkit**, which seeks to provide schools

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with support and guidance throughout the education of Service children.

Additional Learning Needs

A new system for supporting learners, including Service children, with additional learning needs (ALN) will be implemented on a phased basis from September 2021.

Chapter 18 of the [ALN Code for Wales](#) includes guidance relating to educational provision for Service children with ALN. The ALN Code also sets out specific duties for maintained schools, colleges and local authorities when deciding upon ALN and when preparing or reviewing an individual development plan (IDP) for a Service child or young person.

Housing

Access to suitable affordable accommodation when leaving the Armed Forces is pivotal to a successful transition.

In collaboration with our partners the Welsh Government will continue to ensure the housing provision meets the needs of our Armed Forces community in Wales.

Alabare support and Welsh Veterans Partnership

Charities and agencies in Wales continue to provide tailored support for the Ex-Service community in Wales. The Welsh Veterans Partnership and Homes for Veterans Cymru (Alabare Christian Care and Support) work together to help veterans into supported housing and address any ongoing support around mental, physical and emotional health, debt, and barriers to successful living. The organisations work together to assess the needs of the veteran and family, and deliver a support plan enabling the veteran to successfully manage their home. Alabaré Homes for Veterans Cymru also delivers Social Enterprise

projects, Boots on the ground and Field Kitchen, to support veterans into employment and address issues around mental health.

Housing Code of Guidance

COVID-19 and the emergency homelessness response has overtaken the previously planned review of our housing guidance. This work will continue in financial years 2021 to 2022, including the potential need for legislative reform, which would include revising current guidance documents.

Housing support

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Welsh Government has worked closely with local authorities and provided them with additional funding, to ensure no-one including veterans is left without suitable accommodation and the support they need to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local authorities and their partners have supported people without a home into temporary accommodation, with over 9,000 individuals benefiting from this since March 2020.

Local authorities have, and continue to be able to access funding on a needs-led basis through our Local Authority Hardship Fund to pay for temporary accommodation, as well as the crucial wrap-around support to keep people safe. The Welsh Government also made a significant investment of up to an additional £50 million in financial years 2020 to 2021 in the next phase of our homelessness response, which is not simply about ensuring no one need to return to rough sleeping but is about beginning the long-term transformation of services, including embedding rapid rehousing.

To build on the significant strides we have made toward our long-term goal of ending homelessness in Wales, The Welsh Government is investing an additional £40 million into the Housing Support grant, bringing the overall grant total to £166.7 million during 2021 to 2022.

We will continue to work with local authorities and other partners to ensure people have a safe place to live as we work towards our goal of ending

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homelessness in Wales.

Armed Forces liaison officers continue to work with partners, including those in the housing sector, to support members of the Armed Forces community and provide training to frontline staff regarding the Armed Forces community, to increase knowledge and awareness.

Data collation

As part of the transformation agenda, we are currently undertaking a homelessness and housing support data project to ensure our future data needs are clearly understood and articulated. This will ensure that data collection informs policy development and improves service delivery. It also aims to ensure a consistent and coherent data collection to support our overarching policy aim to end homelessness in Wales. The need for the collection of data in respect of the Armed Forces community will be considered as part of this work.

In West Wales the AFLO has been collaborating with the three local authorities to establish a common approach to identifying the housing needs of the Armed Forces, collating a reliable data set of the Armed Forces community on waiting lists.

Other AFLO best practice has included working with local authority colleagues to identify the numbers of people within the Armed Forces community accessing Supporting People assistance.

Benefits and finance

We are aware of the challenges that can be experienced by Service leavers and veterans when accessing benefits. In collaboration with our partners and through the Information, Awareness and Finance Action group we are continually working to ensure this process is as straightforward as possible.

Veterans' railcard

We are fully participating in the veterans' rail card scheme. The new rail card allows veterans in Wales to receive a third off rail fares, provide discounted tickets for a named secondary cardholder and children travelling with the cardholder.

[Find out more information on how the veteran's rail card can be used on Transport for Wales's services and rail services across Great Britain.](#)

CADW

All Serving personnel and veterans may receive a reduce rate day ticket at all Cadw staffed sites. Accepted identification includes Serving military ID cards, the Armed Forces Veteran card, Defence Discount card and retired military cards from outside of the UK.

Childcare Offer

We recognise childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing working parents in Wales. Through our funded Childcare Offer we are providing 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year. Part time early education is universally free for 3 and 4 year olds with Local Authorities offering a minimum of 10 hours to learners. The difference is then made up with government-funded childcare. [This support is available across all Local Authorities in Wales and can be accessed by working parents.](#)

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Wales ensures provision is in place for veterans, service personnel and their families in need of advice and support.

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Across Wales, Armed Forces Single Points of Contact (SPoCs) are located in all 59 Jobcentre Plus sites, supported by district Armed Forces Champions and a Wales Champion. These posts are driving the Armed Forces agenda across the three DWP Districts and work closely with the site SPoCs to ensure our offer meets the needs of this community. As well as the full range of existing Jobcentre Plus services available they provide an additional level of support to the Armed Forces community to access benefits, find employment and as a gateway to other support services and organisations.

The DWP is represented on the Welsh Government's Scoping Exercise Action Groups and has played an important role in raising awareness of the financial support and other services members of the Armed Forces community can access.

Money, Advice and Pensions Service

The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) provides free and impartial money and pension guidance to the people of Wales and across the UK. MaPS is working in partnership with organisations supporting the Armed Forces community in Wales, including Armed Forces charities, Armed Forces Liaison Officers, Veteran's Gateway and others to ensure that bilingual money and pension guidance is promoted and easily accessed to support veterans, service personnel and their families, enabling them to make the right financial decisions throughout their lives and make the most of their money.

Work is underway to develop the Wales Delivery Plan for MaPS 10 year UK Strategy for Financial Wellbeing which will include a clear focus on the financial wellbeing of people in Wales including the Armed Forces community.

Support on return to civilian life and criminal justice

The majority of Service leavers transition from the Armed Forces well and

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integrate back into community life effectively. Having the right support in place on return to civilian life is crucial to a successful transition and is something the Welsh Government is actively addressing, working in collaboration with our key partners to ensure that Service leavers and their families returning to Wales have access to information on the support available at a local level.

Wales Re-settlement guide

In collaboration with 160th (Welsh) Brigade and the Career Transition Partnership we are developing a new Wales Resettlement guide to bring together helpful information on the support available in Wales. This will be published on the Career Transition Partnership website and publicised to Service Leavers and families.

Defence Transition Services (DTS)

Defence Transition Services (DTS) has supported clients in Wales for eighteen months; engaging with partners and stakeholders across the military sector, public and third sectors. The Officer in Charge of DTS chairs the Welsh Government's Veterans Scoping Exercise Transition Action group to ensure the experience of veterans is reflected in action taken.

DTS has received just over 400 referrals UK-wide since launching with a proportion of these clients settling in Wales. Support is provided for up to two years post discharge and the nature and intensity of support varies from case-to-case.

STOMP

Phase 2 of the Supporting Transition of Military Personnel (SToMP) project concluded on 31 March 2021, marking the end of what has been a successful four year period for the project. Formed in 2016, the project's primary goals were to design, implement and embed a consistent whole-system approach to identifying and supporting ex-Serving Personnel across Wales, from arrest to

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their exit from the criminal justice system; and to seek to prevent people from entering the criminal justice system in the first place.

Over the past year a rolling programme has delivered comprehensive briefings to all criminal justice agencies covering awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant, and support available to Police Custody, Health, Courts, prison, probation and Community Rehabilitation Company staff, in addition producing a bespoke powerpoint training pack for Police trainers to deliver to new recruits.

A suite of data products was also produced to assist in improving and monitor identification and to better understand the needs of our ex-Serving Personnel.

Going forward **Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru partnership** will continue to respond to the project's evaluation recommendations, sustain the achievements to date, monitor recording, and maintain relationships to ensure the continuation of joint working practices between the Service Charities and criminal justice partners.

Family support

In 2020 the Welsh Government revised and updated the Welcome to Wales document recognising the difference in policies that exist across the nations of the UK. We have continued to promote this widely to raise awareness of the services and support available. Following discussions at our Transition Scoping Exercise Action Group this report is now available on the Career Transition Partnerships website.

LGBT+ Veterans: Fighting with Pride

In October 2021 **Fighting with Pride (FWP)** celebrates its first year as a registered charity; it is working with Veterans organisations across Wales on a wide range of activities.

With the support of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, this summer FWP are bringing together LGBT+ Veterans from across the UK for their LGBT+

Veterans ‘Out and About’ programme based in Snowdonia. The programme will enable befriending, the opportunity for many to talk about times past and reflect on lost careers and take their first footsteps on the journey to re-joining the military family.

FWP has received a warm welcome from Veterans organisations across Wales. In December 2020 FWP addressed our annual Wales Covenant conference where over 100 charities, public sector bodies and Armed Forces support providers heard about the work of the charity.

In the coming months FWP, in partnership with RBL and the Veterans Gateway, will create an LGBT+ 24/7 support line to help connect LGBT+ Veterans to organisations where they will be warmly welcomed.

FWP is keen to connect with LGBT+ Veterans and Veterans organisations throughout Wales.

Veterans Gateway

The Welsh Government continues to promote the Veterans’ Gateway through our publications, and engagement with partners. The following chart demonstrates the percentage of incidents pertaining to Wales on a range of topics, August 2020 to April 2021.

Category	Wales	All
Finances	45%	31%
Information/Other	25%	44%
Mental wellbeing	9%	8%
Housing	9%	8%

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Category	Wales	All
Family and community	4%	3%
Employment	3%	3%
Physical health	3%	2%
Living independently	2%	1%

The number of incidents in Wales were 520 and 15,216 UK wide. The number of beneficiaries in Wales were 414 and 12,316 UK wide.

Case studies

Reason for the call: A pension query was made for a veteran that served between 1988 and 1996. The veteran wanted to know how much his pension would be and when he would receive it. A referral was made to the Forces Pension Society, who were able to explain the criteria and a claim form to secure his forecast.

Reason for the call: A veteran and his daughter called as the veteran was looking for outreach support due to his mental health leading him to problems with alcohol consumption. The problems were exacerbated due to his wife's dementia. A direct referral was made to The Royal British Legion for outreach support to be provided.

Employment and Skills

The Welsh Government recognises the wealth of skills and experience that Serving personnel bring to the workplace. We are working with our partners to raise awareness of the benefits of employing ex-Serving personnel.

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Employment Toolkits

We recognise that military spouses have a wealth of transferrable skills they can bring to prospective employment. Developed in collaboration with the Scottish Government our 'Capitalising on Military Family Talent' document recognises these unique skills, offering practical advice to businesses wishing to recruit military partners. [Find out more about how employers can benefit from recruiting military spouses.](#)

The document forms part of a suite of documents, our Employment Pathway that clarifies employment options available for ex-Service personnel and service providers that can offer assistance, along with our Employers' Toolkit which provides clear guidance for ex-Serving personnel and employers on the added benefits of employing ex-Service personnel.

Great Place to Work for Veterans

Good quality employment is a key factor for Service leavers and veterans to have a successful transition back to civilian life, and contribute to the communities in which they settle.

Following the UK Government's announcement of its 'A Great Place to Work for Veterans' initiative the Welsh Government introduced our 'Great Place to Work for Veterans' initiative in November 2020. Whilst in its infancy there has been considerable interest amongst veterans in securing employment with the Welsh Government.

Veteran employer events

Work is underway to deliver a veteran employer event. Members of the Employment Action Group are working with 160th (Welsh) Brigade and Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) to promote the skills of Service personnel, veterans and families and linking them with employers.

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CTP have introduced Regional Virtual Engagement Events for Wales in partnership with the South West region in England. The events offer veterans the opportunity to speak with potential employers.

Employer Recognition Scheme

In 2020 nine Welsh employers were among the 127 nationally who received the highest level of Award under the Scheme for supporting the Armed Forces.

The 2020 Gold Award winners were:

- Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd
- Cardiff University
- Enbarr Enterprises Ltd
- Forces Fitness
- Hire A Hero
- Monmouthshire County Council
- North Wales Police
- Public Health Wales NHS Trust
- Torfaen County Borough Council.

13 Welsh businesses were also acknowledged for their support to Defence and received a Silver Award.

Careers Wales

Working in partnership with the veterans' support agencies has enhanced the veteran support provided by Careers Wales. This has led to Working Wales developing a new recording system to help identify customers who are veterans or who are from a Serving family. This will be introduced in the autumn of 2021.

Commemoration

We are proud of our vibrant Welsh nation with its own language, heritage and cultural identity. This includes a proud military tradition.

Our Armed Forces continue to contribute greatly to the communities in which they live and settle. We honour and recognise the sacrifices they have made during conflict.

We are fully supportive of Remembrance events across Wales, and as a means of thanking the wider Armed Forces community we continue to provide £20,000 per annum to support a National Armed Forces Day event in Wales.

Like all aspects of life, Remembrance was also impacted over this reporting period. Working in collaboration with the Royal British Legion and partners we were able to ensure that national events were commemorated and recognised in a COVID-19 safe way.

Remembrance Guidance

We recognised that many people would wish to commemorate Remembrance and the need to do so safely within the regulations. Working closely with our policy colleagues and legal team we developed advice and guidance for Remembrance to help partners planning activities. The guidance was shared widely across all our networks.

National Festival of Remembrance

For the first time since its conception the Wales National Festival of Remembrance was a pre-recorded event. Broadcasted on Saturday 31 October it included entertainment, readings, personal reflections and the poignant Service of Remembrance. It also paid tribute to VE and VJ75 as well as Battle of Britain 80 and the Armed Forces response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

VJ Day

Once again the planned large-scale events were disrupted by COVID-19. Working with our partners we were able to ensure the occasion was recognised appropriately.

Adhering to restrictions the First Minister participated in the VJ75 National event at Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff, broadcast via the Cathedral's website.

We were also able to facilitate opportunities for the veterans who were active in service during VJ Day to share their stories with the First Minister and the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government.

Ethnic minorities' memorial service

The Welsh Government worked with Race Council Cymru, 160th (Welsh) Brigade and the Royal British Legion in the delivery of an ethnic minority's memorial service. Held at the Alexandra Gardens War Memorial and attended by the Welsh Government's Deputy Minister and Chief Whip the service paid tribute to the sacrifices of BAME Service personnel and families.

Remembrance Sunday

The First Minister participated in the Wales National Service of Remembrance on Remembrance Sunday. Reflecting the restrictions in place the event was commemorated differently this year, with many people watching online from home.

Future commitments: what we will do over the next year:

Health and well-being

We will work with our LHB Champions forum to start the rollout of the GP accreditation scheme in Wales.

We will review and publish our new Armed Forces Covenant, Healthcare Priority for Veterans Guidance, subject to UK developments including the Armed Forces Bill.

We will continue to take forward the recommendations of the Veterans' Scoping Exercise in relation to healthcare.

We will continue our Armed Forces Prosthetics Forum, monitoring and responding to issues in relation to the health needs of limbless veterans.

We will work with our AFLOs and partners including regional suicide and self-harm prevention coordinators to promote mental health first aid training.

Education

We will continue to explore improvements to data collection on Service children in Wales, working with key partners such as SSCE Cymru.

We will engage with key partners who work with Service families to monitor their experience of School admissions in Wales.

We will support the MODLAP and SCIP alliance forums in Wales.

Housing

We will continue to take forward the recommendations of the Veterans' Scoping

exercise in relation to housing.

Benefits and Finance

We will work with the Money Advice Pension Service (MAPS), DWP and other providers to promote financial support services via a targeted campaign to the Armed Forces community.

We will continue to provide concessionary travel for veterans and families in line with existing schemes.

Support on return to civilian life

We will publish a Wales Resettlement Guide in conjunction with the Career Transition Partnership and 160th (Welsh) Brigade.

We will provide grant funding to support local Armed Forces projects via our network of Armed Forces Liaison Officers.

Through AFLOs, we will ensure Local Authorities and other public service organisations have access to training for frontline staff to increase knowledge of the Armed Forces community.

Criminal Justice

We will bring together the AFLOs and those supporting veterans in prison to improve knowledge and awareness of support available.

We will work with the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), IOM Cymru and other partners to deliver the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping exercise.

Employment and skills

We will work with Employment Action Group members to deliver a Veteran Employment event.

We will continue to promote the Great Place to Work for Veterans initiative to provide veterans with employment opportunities in Welsh Government.

Family support

We will work with the UK Government and partners to produce a UK Armed Forces Families strategy.

We will continue to meet with the Families Federations and ensure the views of Service families in Wales are being heard.

Commemoration

We will work with the WLGA, military, Local Government and Third Sector partners to celebrate Wales National Armed Forces Day.

We will mark the delayed 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the Centenary of the Royal British Legion.

Governance

Through our established governance structures we will ensure partner organisations have the opportunity to raise issues affecting the Armed Forces community.

We will provide Wales input into the UK Covenant annual report.

We will work with the UK Government's Office for Veterans' Affairs to continue to

deliver on the UK Strategy for our Veterans.

We will continue to work with the UK Government on new Covenant legislation, preparing for its implementation.

Conclusion

This report provides a comprehensive picture of the work taking place across Wales to support our Armed Forces community.

Working in collaboration with our partners has helped us progress initiatives despite the continued challenging circumstances. Work is underway to further those initiatives whose delivery has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our commitment to the Armed Forces community remains firm. With the ongoing support of our partners we will continue to drive this agenda forward.

This year, I would especially wish to highlight the continued invaluable work undertaken by serving Military personnel in our country's response to COVID-19.

Adapting their methods of delivery to reflect regulations, our charities and veterans have also continued to provide much needed support in the communities. The provision of outdoor activities by VC Gallery, such as camp fire therapy and gardening, enabled positive engagement for all those who took part; supporting those who are more vulnerable and harder to reach. Change Step have offered continued support through delivery of its online drop-in service whilst the provision of essential food deliveries gave peer mentors the opportunity to have valuable doorstep conversations with each veteran.

There are many other examples to note; we thank all the individuals and organisations including Service charities, that have gone above and beyond to provide much needed support during these challenging times.

As this report helps to demonstrate, the Welsh Government remains fully committed to supporting our Armed Forces community, and will continue to work with the Armed Forces Expert Group and others to provide the support that's

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