

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO LORD ASHCROFT ON THE VETERANS' TRANSITION REVIEW**

Thank you to you and your team for the thorough review conducted into the transition provision for Service Personnel, which not only highlights the amount of support already available, but provides coherent guidance on how it could be improved. The report has been well received by the Government, particularly for its very clear message that it is only a small number of Service Leavers who struggle with transition to civilian life. As you know the Chief of the Defence Staff has stated:

“I warmly welcome Lord Ashcroft’s Review of Veterans’ Transition and in particular the key message, that the majority of those who leave the Armed Forces go on to lead successful civilian lives. This chimes with my own perception. We must now ensure that society at large better understand the benefits of service life and the qualities that Service personnel take back into society at the end of their service. There are, though, a number who do struggle to make a successful transition and it is quite right that support is in place to help them. We are very grateful to the Service Charities and Other Government Departments for all they do in support of the veteran community; and the increasing role played by industry and local communities within the framework of the Armed Forces Covenant. We are working together to improve the experience of transition and promote the skills and experience of service leavers in the civilian workplace.”

The report has been analysed thoroughly by the relevant Government Departments and leading Service charities with the majority of recommendations viewed positively and, where possible and practical, being implemented. Below is an overview of the Government’s response, including a summary of the actions we will be taking within the ten identified themes of transition.

**Review of recommendations.** Twenty recommendations are now already in place either in full or in part, such as the provision of a 24hr helpline, resettlement advice for Early Service Leavers, financial education schemes and UK-wide process for calling forward medical records. Eleven are being developed in full, such as the creation of a directory of Service Charities, or in part through the New Employment Model (NEM), within the scoping work for the re-let of the current Career Transition Partnership (CTP) contract or within the Future Accommodation Work Strands routine business. A further eight recommendations are still being investigated in order to understand how best to progress them, such as producing a veterans’ app for advice and information, developing and maintaining contact with Service Personnel on transition and more appropriate messaging by Service Charities. Only three are not being taken forward as: the MOD are not able to make large Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments into Special Needs Trusts only, as they are

legally obliged to pay recipients directly; the MOD are not able to make Service Personnel pay for accommodation charges by Direct Debit rather than it being deducted at source because this would require a new payment system; and the amendment of Section 75 to the Northern Ireland Act is not believed to be required in order to deliver the covenant in Northern Ireland.

**Education and training.** As part of the work to review the terms and conditions of Service Personnel<sup>1</sup>, the MOD is examining ways of improving current Personal Development to create better through life development and career support for Service Personnel. The intent is to provide a Personal Development Pathway (PDP) which will encompass recommendations from the Lord Ashcroft Review, the Forces in Mind Trust Report and external research on Life Skills (financial awareness, housing advice), in order to encourage Service Personnel to take greater responsibility for their own development. This work will be developed over the coming months.

**Resettlement and Employment.** The re-let of the Career Transition Partnership contract provides an opportunity to build on the current high levels of provision with further improvements. The key tenet of the resettlement service, to assist all personnel leaving the Armed Forces, both regular and full-time reserve, to make a successful transition to civilian employment including self-employment, will be protected. The future contract will seek to maximise employment opportunities for all Service leavers and also hold the contractor to account for Service leavers' outcomes. The enhanced support recently extended to Early Service Leavers will be reviewed, with the improvements made to employment support for wounded, injured and sick personnel consolidated and integrated into the core resettlement programme. This will mean all Service leavers will be eligible to receive levels of resettlement provision that meet their transition needs. As the review suggested, it is intended that online support is further developed and civilian work placement schemes are used to enhance the transition journey. The Contract Delivery Partner will also be required to integrate with wider single Service transition support and the recently established Defence Relationship Management capability in MoD, to ensure we are approaching key national and regional employers to the best effect for Service leavers.

**Housing.** As Loyour report identifies, provision of housing advice and understanding of housing options are an important part of transition. Online housing information is already available to Service Personnel and veterans through either JSHAO or Veterans UK website. The MOD recently introduced the Forces Help to Buy scheme and MoneyForce initiative which will provide Service Personnel with tools to help them identify how much they can afford to borrow or save. The MOD already facilitate education and support in these areas to provide personnel the opportunity to make informed decisions on their housing needs throughout their careers. As an example, the Forces Help to Buy scheme specifically aims to support Service personnel in their

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<sup>1</sup> The New Employment Model (NEM).

individual choice to purchase their own property. The MOD is also developing proposals to communicate more clearly to Service personnel the accommodation offer and the value of the subsidy provided on Service accommodation in comparison with the civilian sector; pay statements will include a more accurate breakdown of accommodation cost, clearly explaining the subsidy. This will ensure Service personnel have a better understanding of the true cost of their accommodation, including how the condition of Service accommodation will be assessed and charged in future.

**Health.** The MOD takes the health of its personnel very seriously, particularly those with mental health issues. In the event of a serious incident, case reviews take place automatically to ensure that personnel are receiving the most appropriate care and that lessons can be learned. As the report highlighted, it is vital that when a Service Person leaves the Armed Forces they do register with a GP and their medical records are handed over. To assist this process, all Service leavers are provided with a copy of their military medical history, along with information on how their GP can obtain a copy of their military healthcare record. In the event this is lost, within England and Wales when they do register with a GP, their pre-enlistment medical record also includes a letter explaining how to obtain the military healthcare record; this process is still being developed in Scotland. Research in the medical field remains vital to ensure the correct policies are in place to facilitate good health and wellbeing in service personnel, but must be credible and validated. You have been intimately involved with the commissioning of Anglian Ruskin University to provide a hub where all peer reviewed academic research can be located and I am very grateful for the funding that you have provided to support this; a central repository of factual information on the health of the Armed Forces and the veterans' community will hopefully reduce inaccurate statistics and data being quoted.

**Welfare.** The Veterans UK helpline, and its associated Veterans' Welfare Service, are the MOD's primary service provider for veterans. As the Veterans UK website moves to gov.uk, DBS Vets UK will be comprehensively reviewing the content, including links to third sector partners, OGDs, as well as other parts of Defence such as Career Transition Partnership. It will also include a link to the Directory of Social Change's online guide to Service charities, funded by Forces in Mind Trust, when this is available. Some 18,000 cards have also been issued through the MOD's Defence Discount Service since it was launched in June 2012 and in addition to the discounts offered through the scheme, the card carries the Veterans UK telephone number and the Veterans UK website address. To address concerns about the impact of Service life on spouses' employment, the MOD has been supporting the roll out of two career assistance programmes. Over 200 spouses have already benefited from the RBLI Lifeworks employability workshops and the University of Wolverhampton business start up courses that started in October 2013 for 2 years. The MOD is also looking to extend employment support to service spouses through the Career

Transition Partnership Contract. Alongside this the MOD, through the new Defence Relationship Management organisation and the Corporate Covenant, will be engaging national and regional employers to help create opportunities for spouses/partners.

**Third sector.** The Government continues to strengthen its links with veterans' charities to seek greater collaboration and coordination of the support they offer to veterans. An example is the development, with COBSEO, of a shared Vision for Veterans, including key principles, which describes how government, service charities and the like can best jointly deliver veterans' services, which has been endorsed by the Covenant Reference Group. A collaborative approach was also reflected in the improvements to the MOD's Veterans UK helpline, which were introduced in January 2014. While this service focussed predominantly on providing advice and support on pension, compensation and medal claims, it is also able to offer appropriate support on a wide range of issues, and signpost specialist services if necessary. To ensure that veterans in urgent need can receive support at any time of day, the helpline extended its opening hours and created an out of hours facility to connect veterans with either the Combat Stress or Samaritans 24 hour helplines; this arrangement builds on the existing relationships that have been forged between the MOD and other charities.

**Financial aspects of transition.** The MOD has already identified the need to develop the life skills of Service Personnel, which includes better understanding of financial issues and financial management. They recently introduced financial education for new recruits using the MoneyForce website, with plans to extend this awareness training to promotion courses. Working with the Royal British Legion, a Goal Saver tool has recently been added to Moneyforce, and a further two tools are due shortly. These are a MoneyFitness self-assessment tool and an Accommodation decision support tool. Service personnel will be able to enter personal financial information to obtain an understanding of whether, for example, they can afford to buy their own property; this information is critical to their financial decision making process.

**Advocacy and the Armed Forces Covenant.** The Armed Forces Covenant has already made a significant impact by raising the profile of the Armed Forces Community (including Veterans) amongst all Government Departments, Devolved Administrations, Local Authorities and the wider public and commerce; indeed every Local Authority in Great Britain has signed the community covenant. This has led to improvements to policy and provision in many areas to address disadvantage and promote Veterans' interests. Many Local Authorities have also chosen to have Armed Forces Champions as part of their Community Covenant. Best practise is already shared via an annual conference, newsletter and social media. The review of the Veterans UK website is also considering links to third sector partners, OGDs, as well as other parts of Defence such as Career Transition Partnership, which will see it become a very useful source for information.

**Information provision.** When personnel leave the Services they provide their future contact details, including email address, to allow contact to be made if required. Veterans UK are considering how to develop and maintain contacts and better information management on current Service Personnel as they transition. An investigation is also being conducted into the information Service charities would like to receive on recent Service leavers with the aim of passing certain data to selected 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations within data protection guidelines.

**Countering public misconceptions.** The MOD continues to promote the value of service life and how well the majority of veterans perform within society; this messaging is vital to maintaining a healthy recruiting pool and to ensuring the public understand both the worth of a veteran and how much they can offer. Key charitable partners are starting to highlight that it is only the minority of veterans they are required to support, but that it is right they are supported well.

You have very kindly offered your services to maintain an overview of transition and the MOD look forward to meeting your review team in September to discuss employer engagement and messaging in detail, and you in November to discuss progress.