The Experiences of Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Background

Concerns about the welfare of homeless ex-Service personnel and the scale of ex-Service homelessness prompted the formation of the Ex-Services Action Group on Homelessness (ESAG) in London in 1997. ESAG has developed and/or supported a number of initiatives in the capital in the intervening period, including: The Ex-Service Resettlement Project, Home Base, The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division, Project Compass, and Veterans Aid.

This report documents the findings of an independent study commissioned by ESAG, and conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy (CHP) at the University of York, which sought to:

- assess the scale and nature of ex-Service homelessness in London by providing an overview of the number and characteristics of homeless ex-Service personnel in the capital; and

- evaluate the impact of the initiatives employed by ESAG in reducing ex-Service homelessness in the capital.

The study comprised a review of existing statistics, and interviews with 26 managers and frontline staff in ex-Service specific and 'mainstream' services working with homeless ex-Service personnel, as well as three representatives of central government departments and national homelessness umbrella bodies. It also involved in-depth interviews with a total of 59 ex-Service personnel: 32 of whom were homeless at the point of initial interview, and 27 of whom had recent experience of homelessness but had been rehoused successfully. The study included a longitudinal element, tracing the support service use and experiences of the 32 currently homeless ex-Service personnel over the course of one year.

The number, characteristics and experiences of homeless ex-Service personnel

The research found that an estimated six per cent of London's current non-statutory ('single') homeless population has served in the Armed Forces. This represents a substantial drop from the proportion (approximately one quarter) reported in the mid-1990s. Numbers do, however, remain significant: an estimated 1,100 non-statutory homeless ex-Service personnel (predominantly hostel residents, but including some rough sleepers), and approximately 2,500 ex-Service personnel in statutorily homeless families, are living in London on any given night.

Homeless ex-Service personnel are almost exclusively male, most are of White ethnic background, and they have an older age profile than the wider

non-statutory homeless population. The similarities between their characteristics and experiences, and those of other homeless people, are more striking than are the differences between the two groups. The vulnerabilities and support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel are, on the whole, very similar in *nature* to those of other non-statutory homeless people, but a greater *proportion* of ex-Service personnel have alcohol, physical and/or mental health problems. Only a small minority report vulnerabilities and support needs that are unique to people with a history of the Armed Forces, such as combat-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Some homeless ex-Service interviewees with mental health problems attribute these to events during military life – typically, but not exclusively, active Service. For a greater number, however, poor mental health is reported to be symptomatic of problems beginning in childhood, or traumatic events after leaving the Armed Forces (e.g. bereavement).

The pathways into homelessness experienced by ex-Service personnel differ in the extent to which they are associated with their military background. It was possible to identify four main life history trajectories amongst the current and former homeless ex-Service personnel interviewed. Indications as to the prevalence of each should be regarded as broadly indicative, and not precise measures given the qualitative nature of the research, but the four groups were as follows:

- First, there were those who carried vulnerabilities deriving from childhood or adolescence – such as fraught relationships with parents, a history of care, problematic drinking and/or involvement in criminal activity – into the Armed Forces and later civilian life. Approximately one quarter of the ex-Service personnel interviewed fell into this group.

- The second group comprised those who encountered difficulties within the Armed Forces, such as the onset of alcohol or mental health problems, which continued to affect them after discharge. A further one quarter of the ex-Service personnel interviewed reported these experiences.

- The third group included those who had a successful career in the Armed Forces but found the adjustment to civilian life (particularly employment and 'normal' family life) very difficult. This was the smallest group, comprising approximately one in six ex-Service interviewees.

- Fourth, there were others who had a successful career in the Armed Forces and did not encounter difficulties until an apparently unrelated trauma later in life – such as relationship breakdown, bereavement, or financial crisis. This was the most widespread experience, reported by one third of ex-Service interviewees.

Whilst many of the triggers for homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel are similar to those commonly reported by other homeless people, it is clear that a military background influences – and often quite profoundly – *how* ex-Service personnel *experience* homelessness. They consider themselves better equipped to endure, and are less fearful of, the hardships of street life.

They are also less inclined to seek or accept help given their tendency to elevate the perceived 'shame' of their situation. These factors, together with their greater propensity to drink heavily – which many claim was initiated or exacerbated by the military lifestyle – combine to make them more susceptible to sustained or repeat homelessness.

Ex-Service personnel were rarely accepted as statutorily homeless – despite the recent expansion of priority need categories in homelessness legislation to include individuals deemed vulnerable as a result of having served in HM Forces – and, like other single homeless men, tended to be low priority in social housing allocations.

The effectiveness of provision for homeless ex-Service personnel in London

A greater range of support options is available to homeless ex-Service personnel than most other members of the homeless population in London. In addition to mainstream homelessness services, they are eligible for specialist ex-Forces hostels, resettlement support, settled housing schemes, and employment initiatives. Some ex-Service personnel prefer ex-Service specific provision because they enjoy the company of people with shared experiences and appreciate the way staff value and 'understand' their Service history. Others, however, will not utilise dedicated ex-Service projects given their dislike of the dynamics in such provision, elevated feelings of perceived 'shame', and/or negative feelings toward the Armed Forces.

The reduction in the proportion of London's homeless population with a history of the Services and successful resettlement of many homeless ex-Service personnel indicates that the current service network is leading to positive outcomes. Most notably, the ex-Service 'route' provides quicker access to emergency accommodation than does generic provision; the specialist settled accommodation is regarded to be of high quality; and individuals rehoused via the ESAG network are provided with more resources to furnish their new tenancy.

There are, however, also a number of weaknesses in the existing service network for homeless ex-Service personnel in London. Awareness of services amongst potential clientele and mainstream homelessness agencies regarding ESAG initiatives and the more general provisions offered by other ex-Forces organisations is generally poor. Recent Service Leavers are more aware of such provisions than their older counterparts, suggesting that the influence of ESAG and enhanced pre-discharge resettlement package offered by the Armed Forces may have a preventative impact in the long term. There will nevertheless remain a cohort of older ex-Service personnel who have not had the benefit of this information and advice for a number of years yet.

The resettlement of homeless ex-Service personnel and other homeless people is impeded by a shortage of settled housing in London. Support provided in the lead up to, and period following, rehousing was greatly valued by ex-Service personnel but was often provided in an unstructured and

potentially unsustainable manner – particularly to those rehoused in independent social tenancies. The quality of life of a significant number of formerly homeless ex-Service personnel was severely compromised by social isolation and loneliness, as is often the case with other non-statutory homeless people.

Also, provision for homeless ex-Service personnel with mental health problems – particularly 'low-level' conditions such as depression and anxiety – was considered insufficient to meet levels of demand.

Recommendations

Key recommendations arising from the study include:

- Enhancing the Armed Forces' resettlement and post-discharge support programmes by: considering ways of breaking down the 'shame' barrier that inhibits ex-Service personnel from accepting help; promoting the value of the housing and financial briefings available within resettlement programmes; training Commanding Officers and resettlement staff in the detection of risk factors for homelessness and social exclusion (particularly amongst Early Service Leavers); and more proactively monitoring the wellbeing of ex-Service personnel after discharge.

- Increasing awareness of ESAG and other generic ex-Service welfare provisions available for homeless ex-Service personnel amongst potential clientele, and staff within mainstream homelessness agencies (at frontline and managerial levels). The accessibility and effectiveness of ESAG provision would be improved if it were more streamlined and had a well-advertised central point of contact or access.

- Providing, or facilitating access to, more settled accommodation, in a range of forms to cater for different levels and types of need. There was a particular call for greater provision of transitional accommodation to bridge the gap between hostel accommodation and independent tenancies for ex-Service personnel with medium or high support needs. More use could be made of the private rented sector to provide settled accommodation, with appropriately tailored support. Ex-Forces welfare charities might valuably facilitate this process by offering rent deposit schemes.

- Formalising tenancy sustainment services for ex-Service personnel – particularly those rehoused into independent social housing – and ensuring that assistance with money/debt management is integral to all post-resettlement support programmes.

- Devising means of combating the social isolation experienced by many formerly homeless ex-Service personnel – especially those housed in independent social tenancies – as well as the boredom experienced by many in hostel accommodation. This is of particular importance for individuals with substance misuse problems. On a related issue, there is a

need to develop ways of filling the social 'vacuum' that a reduction in drinking leaves in the lives of ex-Service personnel with alcohol problems.

- Providing more treatment for mental health problems amongst homeless ex-Service personnel. Specifically, there is an acute need for counselling services for individuals with 'low-level' mental health problems (e.g. depression).

- Commissioning research into the numbers of, and adequacy of provision for, homeless ex-Service personnel outside London. Any subsequent action to address identified gaps in provision must be preceded by intensive liaison with other service providers, local authorities, and interagency forums in potential recipient localities to determine whether the development of dedicated ex-Service projects, or the expansion of mainstream provision, would be more appropriate and cost-effective.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the study

Research reporting on homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in the mid to late 1990s suggested that approximately one quarter of homeless people in Britain had served in the Armed Forces (Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997). These and other reports also revealed that homeless ex-Service personnel tend to be more disadvantaged than other homeless people: they are older on average, are more likely to have slept rough, to have suffered from physical health or alcohol problems, and/or to have been homeless for prolonged periods (Anderson et al., 1993; Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997; Milroy, 2001; Dandeker et al., 2005).

Given these findings, a number of measures have been put in place by central government departments in an attempt to reduce the incidence of homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel. Perhaps most notably, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has expanded its pre-discharge resettlement service[1], such that most Service Leavers are given time and resources to undertake a variety of management and vocational training courses, as well as opportunities to attend briefings on housing and financial matters (Ballintyne and Hanks, 2000; National Audit Office, 2007). Whilst Early Service Leavers (who have served less than four years or been compulsorily discharged) are not entitled to the full level of support, as of 2004 they have been provided with a resettlement brief which signposts assistance available from ex-Service welfare organisations and provides information on access to housing. Under the new programme, mandatory one-to-one interviews should be employed to assess Early Service Leavers' vulnerability to social exclusion, and individuals assessed as vulnerable offered additional resettlement support[2] (National Audit Office, 2007).

In addition, in 2002 the categories of homeless applicants who have a priority need for accommodation and are owed the main homelessness duty were extended to include those deemed vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's Forces (Homelessness Priority Need for Accommodation (England) Order 2002). Moreover, the Joint Services Housing Advice Organisation (JSHAO) was set up in 1994 to provide Service personnel and their families with information and advice on housing options during and after their time in the Armed Forces.

In London, concerns about the welfare of homeless ex-Service personnel and apparent scale of the problem prompted the formation of the Ex-Service

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[1] The pre-discharge 'resettlement' service described here should not be confused with the 'resettlement' (rehousing) of homeless ex-Service personnel discussed later in the report.
[2] A recent evaluation of the Ministry of Defence's resettlement programme does however suggest that these briefings do not always occur, and that, for a number of reasons, in practice very few Early Service Leavers are offered additional support (National Audit Office, 2007). This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Action Group on Homelessness (ESAG) in 1997. ESAG played a pivotal role in advocating on behalf of homeless ex-Service personnel to bring about the policy and legislative changes described above, and was proactive in implementing several service initiatives 'on the ground'. Key initiatives developed or supported by ESAG in the capital included[3]:

- *The Ex-Service Resettlement Project* – which supports vulnerable homeless ex-Service personnel in accessing and maintaining settled accommodation.
- *Home Base* – provides short-term accommodation for younger ex-Service personnel, guidance with independent living skills, counselling, and employment advice.
- *Veterans Aid* (formerly known as Ex-Service Fellowship Centres) – consists of a drop-in centre offering advice, travel warrants, food vouchers, clothing, and accommodation referrals, as well as a direct access hostel for ex-Servicemen (New Belvedere House).
- *The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation* – provides long-term housing and support for disabled ex-Service personnel, including those with a history of homelessness who require support to prevent repeat homelessness.
- *SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) Forces Help Homeless Division* – meets the immediate needs of ex-Service personnel presenting at day centres for homeless people, and acts as a sign-posting service directing them to accommodation and other support services.
- *Project Compass* – provides training and employment opportunities to support homeless ex-Service personnel make the transition into the civilian workforce.

This report documents the findings of an independent study commissioned by ESAG and conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy (University of York) which examined the effectiveness of these initiatives in counteracting homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in London. The research was funded by the Veterans Minister's Challenge Fund and The Royal British Legion.

Aims and research questions

The overall aims of the research were to:
- assess the scale and nature of the issue by providing an overview of the number and characteristics of homeless ex-Service personnel in London; and
- evaluate the impact of the initiatives developed by ESAG in reducing ex-Service homelessness in the capital.

More specifically, the project aimed to address the following research questions:
- What are the numbers of homeless ex-Service personnel in London, and what proportion of the different categories within the homeless population do they comprise?

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[3] Full details regarding the target group, aims, structure, and contact details of each project are provided in ESAG (2004a, 2004b).

- Have the numbers and proportions of ex-Service personnel in London changed since 1997, and have their needs, characteristics and experiences altered?
- What are the most significant routes to homelessness for ex-Service personnel and why do some experience sustained homelessness?
- What are the factors that promote the successful resettlement of, and tenancy sustainment amongst, ex-Service personnel?
- What are the experiences of ex-Service personnel in trying to access local authority services in London?
- Which services work well in preventing potential homelessness and repeat homelessness among ex-Service personnel?
- How might successful service interventions be assessed and where appropriate 'rolled out' outside London?

Definitions

A full glossary of terms is provided in Appendix I, but is important to clarify a few key definitions here. For the purposes of this research, the following terms were employed:
- 'Homeless' – taken to include both:
  a) 'statutory' homeless individuals – that is, those accepted by a local authority as unintentionally homeless and in priority need; and
  b) 'non-statutory' ('single') homeless people, including those sleeping rough, living in a hostel (where the stay is intended to be temporary), living in a bed and breakfast hotel, or staying with friends or family temporarily because they have no home of their own.
- 'Ex-Service' – anyone who has served in the Army, Royal Navy or RAF, or in the Merchant Navy in a war zone, including individuals who did not complete initial training.

Research methods

The research consisted of four elements.

1. Review of existing statistics

A review of relevant statistics was used to assess the numbers and proportion of ex-Service personnel among the homeless population of London. Existing data was also used, insofar as possible, to provide a profile of the characteristics of homeless ex-Service personnel in the capital.

2. Interviews with service providers and key informants

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a total of 26 managers and frontline staff in services working with homeless ex-Service personnel. All six ESAG services catering for homeless ex-Service personnel (identified above) were involved, as were four additional ex-Service welfare agencies, and five 'mainstream' (non ex-Service specific) homelessness agencies.

Three additional interviews were held with representatives of the Ministry of Defence, Communities and Local Government, and a national homelessness umbrella body to take account of the wider strategic context and policy arena in which services for homeless ex-Service personnel are delivered.

3. Interviews with formerly homeless ex-Service personnel

A total of 27 in-depth interviews were conducted with formerly homeless ex-Service personnel who had been rehoused into settled accommodation and had demonstrated success in sustaining their tenancy after engagement with ESAG initiatives. These interviews explored their routes into and experiences of homelessness, focusing particularly on what interviewees considered to have helped and/or hindered their access to housing and tenancy sustainment. The demographic profile of these interviewees, together with those participating in the longitudinal cohort study (see below), are provided in Chapter 2.

4. Longitudinal cohort study of homeless ex-Service personnel

Finally, a longitudinal cohort study of one year in duration was conducted with 32 ex-Service personnel who were homeless, as defined above, at the point of initial interview. Participants were re-interviewed twice subsequently at six month intervals to explore their routes into, experiences of, and (where relevant) pathways out of, homelessness – focusing particularly on their access to and engagement with different service interventions. Participants were recruited via ESAG and mainstream homelessness services, including hostels, day centres, and street outreach teams.

Contact details – including, where appropriate, the details of service staff, friends or relatives who would know where participants had moved to should their housing circumstances change – were provided by those recruited following the initial interview. Of the original 32 recruits, 24 were successfully re-interviewed and the housing status of 5 others was provided by service staff, with the consent of participants, during round two of the study. Twenty three were successfully re-interviewed (with housing status being provided regarding five others by staff) during round three – meaning that a total of 79 interviews were conducted during the course of the cohort study.

Follow-up interviews were held face-to-face wherever possible, but were conducted by telephone when necessary – for example, when a participant had moved out of London, or could not meet interviewers in person because of their work or other commitments.

All interviews conducted in the study were semi-structured and, with the exception of the shorter cohort study follow-up interviews, were conducted in-depth. The interview topic guides employed in each qualitative component of the study are provided in Appendix II. All of the interviews, with one exception, were recorded, with the permission of interviewees. Where used, individuals' names are pseudonyms.

Report outline

The next chapter reviews existing data on the scale of homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in London, and provides a general overview of their characteristics, Service history, and support needs. Chapter 3 examines the routes into, and experiences of, homelessness reported by ex-Service personnel participating in the study – focusing particularly on the similarities and differences between their experiences and those of other homeless people more generally. Chapter 4 assesses the effectiveness of the existing service network in preventing homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel, and in assisting those who do experience homelessness in London. The report concludes, in Chapter 5, with a summary of key findings and recommendations arising from the study.

Chapter 2: The Number and Characteristics of Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London

This chapter draws upon existing statistical data and additional information generated via the qualitative components of the study to provide an overview of the number and characteristics of homeless ex-Service personnel in London. It begins by outlining the data sources utilised. It then examines the scale of the issue – documenting changes in the proportion of ex-Service personnel within the capital's homeless population – before profiling the demographic characteristics, Service history, and support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel in the capital.

Data sources and analysis

Full details of the methods and findings of the review of existing data conducted for this study have already been provided in a separate report: Rhodes, D., Pleace, N. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2006) *The Numbers and Characteristics of Homeless Ex-Service People in London: A Review of the Existing Statistical Data*, York: Centre for Housing Policy, University of York. Space restrictions dictate that they are not replicated in full here, but are summarised.

By way of background, the four main datasets consulted were:

1. *Communities and Local Government P1E quarterly data*. This provides a count of the number of households accepted as statutorily homeless in England and the reasons they were accepted, including the priority need category/ies under which they qualified for assistance from their local authority. Data were obtained for the period from (the third quarter of) 2002 to (the third quarter of) 2005.

2. *Combined Homelessness And Information Network (CHAIN).* This is a Communities and Local Government funded database containing information on the characteristics (including any Service history) and support project use of people verified by participating agencies as sleeping rough in London. Data were provided for all contacts recorded by outreach teams and accommodation projects between 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2005.

3. *Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) client records.* OSW – a London-based charity supporting homeless people in their move towards employability and work – kindly provided anonymised data regarding the characteristics (including any Service history) of clients for the period April 2000 to January 2006.

4. *Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services (SPACES) data*. Information was collated regarding the number and characteristics of ex-Service personnel settled by the SPACES accommodation placement

centre within, and outside, London since the project's inception in September 2000.

Further statistics were generated from the interrogation of the dataset developed via a recent Communities and Local Government funded nationally representative survey of statutorily homeless families in England, conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy in partnership with BMRB International (see Pleace et al., 2008).

Additional figures regarding the characteristics and number of homeless ex-Service personnel assisted were provided by ESAG services, The Royal British Legion London Office, Joint Services Housing Advice Office, and SSAFA Forces Help. The mainstream homelessness agencies Thames Reach, The Salvation Army, and St Mungos – all of which provide a range of accommodation and other services in London – also kindly provided headline counts of the number of their (London) clients with a Service history.

It is important to note that as with all data on homelessness, the statistics collected were subject to a number of limitations (Rhodes et al., 2006; see also Cloke et al., 2001; Pawson and Davidson, 2006). These included:

- the data cover a limited range of services and do not provide an overall picture of the extent of service contact with homeless ex-Service personnel across London;
- the data are without exception confined to recording details of homeless ex-Service personnel who have been in contact with specific homelessness services;
- the way in which individuals are asked about having been in the Armed Forces, and the prominence of the question in assessments, varies between different datasets;
- the veracity of an individual's description of themselves as a former member of the Armed Forces is not always subject to independent checking;
- in P1E statistics, 'ex-HM Forces' cases may be concealed where homeless applicants qualify under more than one priority need category (e.g. where children or an expectant mother are present, or other factors such as vulnerability as a result of old age, mental illness, or physical disability are given precedence in recording); and
- with the exception of P1E, data cover restricted geographical areas and are often focussed on central London.

The review of existing quantitative data was complemented by information gathered regarding the characteristics of ex-Service personnel participating in the qualitative components of the study, namely the interviews with formerly homeless ex-Service personnel and cohort study participants. Service provider interviewees and focus group participants were also asked about the (changing) characteristics and support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel they encountered within their own projects.

The proportion and number of ex-Service personnel in the homeless population

Taken together, the data reviewed indicate that currently approximately 6 per cent of non-statutory (single) homeless people in London have served in the Armed Forces[4]. Estimates in the 1990s that around one quarter of homeless people had a Service history (Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997) have not been accepted universally – with some commentators suggesting that they may overstate the prevalence of homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel (Higate, 1997, 2001). Even so, it does appear that there has been a substantial reduction in the proportion of single homeless people who have a Services background during the last decade.

The explanation for this reduction in the proportion of homeless ex-Service personnel in the non-statutory (single) homeless population may lie, at least in part, in a reduction in the overall Service outflow. In 1996/97 26,770 people left the trained strength of the Armed Forces, whereas 18,850 did so in 2006/07 – representing a fall of some 7,920[5]. The reduction however also seems likely to be at least partly attributable to the preventative work of the MoD (see Chapters 1 and 4) and the initiatives undertaken by ESAG to address and prevent ex-Service homelessness in the capital (Rhodes et al., 2006). In addition, as one service provider explained, the influence of National Service must be taken into account:

> *You get in the newspaper that half the rough sleepers on London's streets are ex-Servicemen. Well actually, yes, perhaps a few years back that might have been true, but you've got to take into account that a few years back almost everybody had done National Service and had therefore been in the Services. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Despite the apparent reduction in the proportion of London's homeless population with a Service background, the number of ex-Service personnel who are homeless at any one point in time continues to be significant. Further statistical analyses enabled generation of an overall estimate that there may be up to *1,100 non-statutory (single) homeless* ex-Service personnel in London *on any given day* (Rhodes et al., 2006)[6]. It must be emphasised that

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[4] A detailed explanation of how this figure was calculated is provided in Rhodes et al. (2006). In summary, however, it is based upon figures generated by all available (recent) datasets and surveys – which cover a large number of street homeless and hostel dwelling populations in London. The OSW data suggested that around six per cent of clients had a Service background, and very similar figures were recorded by Thames Reach (6 per cent), CHAIN (5.9 per cent), and The Salvation Army (6.7 per cent). A St Mungos survey found that 3 per cent of service users were ex-Service personnel. Together, these figures coalesced around the value of 6 per cent.

[5] Calculated from Defence Analytical Services Agency Table TSP 05 'Trained Outflow to Civil Life': http://www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/tsp5/tsp5. Data relates to all Services (Army, Royal Navy and RAF) and figures include officers and other ranks. The 2006/07 figures are provisional.

[6] Again, detailed accounts of how numbers of non-statutory (single) ex-Service personnel were calculated may be found in Rhodes et al. (2006). In essence, the value of six per cent cited above was applied to estimates of rough sleeping and hostel dwelling populations in

this figure does not consist solely of rough sleepers, but is predominantly comprised of ex-Service personnel living in hostels etc.[7] (see Glossary in Appendix I).

The number of individuals accepted as *statutorily homeless* and in priority need primarily due to vulnerability as a result of having served in HM Forces in London is small: only 24 were accepted as such between (the third quarters of) 2002 and 2005 – equating to less than one per cent (0.03 per cent) of total acceptances in London over the period (Rhodes et al., 2006)[8]. There is however reason to believe that these figures under-represent the scale of statutory ex-Service homelessness in the capital given the limitations of P1E data identified above – most especially the tendency for other factors (such as age or health) to be given precedence in the recording of priority need classifications (Rhodes et al., 2006)[9].

Data collected as part of the recent nationally representative survey of statutorily homeless families in England described above was however used to produce an estimate that there will be in the order of *2,500 statutory homeless* ex-Service personnel living in temporary accommodation as part of a homeless family in London *on any given day* (Rhodes, et al., 2006)[10].

While the estimates of the number of statutorily and non-statutorily homeless ex-Service personnel here provided have to be taken as broad indicators, the data from which they are derived are robust and consistent enough to allow for confidence that the 'true' figures lie close to those indicated.

London. The mid-2005 estimate of rough sleepers in London (based on local authority housing strategy statistical appendix returns) of 221 rough sleepers, and the mid-2004 estimate of 19,000 homeless people in hostels in London produced by ODPM, were used to estimate that around 1,100 ex-Service personnel were among the rough sleeping and hostel dwelling population of London (i.e. 6 per cent of the totalled rough sleeping and hostel populations).

[7] By way of context, a total of 248 rough sleepers (including those with and without a history of the Armed Forces) were recorded in single night street counts in London in September 2006 (Communities and Local Government, 2007; see also Randall and Brown, 2007 for earlier figures). Nationally, recent estimates suggest that there are 498 people sleeping rough on any single night in England (Communities and Local Government, 2007).

[8] Some, but not all, local authorities began recording 'secondary' priority need categories from 2004. In addition to the 24 'primary' priority need households recorded, London authorities reported an additional two cases who had served in the Armed Forces but had a more pressing priority need during the period stated.

[9] That is, lone ex-Service personnel (not in a family) accepted as statutorily homeless by local authorities are only likely to be recorded within these P1E statistics if an authority determines their history of being in the Services to be either the main or secondary reason for their homelessness.

[10] This estimate is based upon a figure drawn from the Communities and Local Government funded homeless families survey (see above) which was statistically representative of all statutory homeless families in England (Pleace et al, 2008). Within London, these data indicated that 4 per cent of statutorily homeless families contained an adult respondent who had served in the Armed Forces. During 2005, approximately 63,000 statutorily homeless families were in temporary accommodation on any given day in London (Source: P1E returns). If 4 per cent of these households contained someone who was ex-Service personnel, the approximate number of statutorily homeless families containing someone with a Services background would be around 2,500 (Rhodes et al., 2006).

It is worth noting that the findings of two studies published after the statistical review summarised above – whilst being based upon far fewer and very different data sources and thus not directly comparable to those reported here – serve to suggest that the proportion of ex-Service personnel within the homeless population may potentially be greater in some other parts of the UK. A survey conducted within hostels and day centres in Glasgow by the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership on behalf of Poppy Scotland and Veterans Scotland revealed that one in eight (12 per cent of) respondents had served in the Armed Forces (Glasgow Homelessness Partnership, 2006). Also, a recent survey of rural homelessness agencies in England revealed that the prevalence of ex-Service personnel amongst project clientele was affected by proximity to local military bases (Homeless Link, 2007). It could also be that regions with a strong tradition of Armed Forces recruitment – such as the North East and North West of England (The Royal British Legion, 2006) – may have higher than average levels of ex-Service homelessness, given the tendency for many (and especially young single) Service Leavers to return to the area of their parental home after discharge (see Chapter 3).

Records of the number of homeless people and/or individuals at risk of homelessness assisted by The Royal British Legion County Managers also indicate that numbers of ex-Service personnel affected by homelessness may potentially be greater in other parts of England and Wales. Portrayed in Figure 1, these data show that the greatest numbers were concentrated in Cornwall (119 individuals), followed by Devon (101), Lancashire (82), Cheshire (81), South Wales (76), and Sussex (72)[11].

It is however not possible to develop a comprehensive picture of the prevalence and geographic spread of ex-Service homelessness across the UK from existing data. In England, the limitations of P1E statistics in the measurement of statutory ex-Service homelessness described above dictate that they are of little utility in measuring levels outside the capital. Only 53 individuals in England were accepted as being in priority need primarily because of vulnerability due to having served in HM Forces in 2006/07[12]. Welsh WHO-12 statistics suffer from the same limitations, and Scottish HL1 data do not provide equivalent information[13]. Furthermore – reflecting the general lack of national statistics regarding non-statutory (single) homeless

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[11] According to The Royal British Legion records, more than half (57 per cent) of all such individuals assisted were staying with friends or family at the time, 29 per cent were living in a hostel or night shelter, 9 per cent were sleeping rough, and 5 per cent were staying in a bed and breakfast hotel.

[12] English authorities reported an additional 35 cases who had served in the Armed Forces but had a more pressing priority need. As noted above, secondary primary need categories were recorded by some, but not all, local authorities from 2004.

[13] In April 2007 HL1 began recording the number of households *presenting as homeless* at a Scottish local authority that contained a member who was 'formerly in the armed services'. We would anticipate that such figures will be published sometime in the course of the next year. These will not, however, be directly comparable to P1E and WHO-12 statistics which refer to statutory homelessness *acceptances*.

people (Briheim-Crookall et al., 2008) – there are no figures measuring non-statutory (single) ex-Service homelessness at the national level[14].

Given the current attention devoted to the role of Britain's Armed Forces by the media, it is perhaps unsurprising that several people interviewed for the current study – including service providers and (current and former) homeless ex-Service personnel – raised the issue of the potential implications of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for the future prevalence of ex-Service homelessness. Some predicted that numbers of ex-Service personnel experiencing housing and other difficulties may potentially increase, usually because of assumed links between active Service and mental health problems – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in particular. There remains, however, significant debate regarding the strength of such relationships, with some research concluding that there is little support for the expected causal relationship between homelessness and wartime military Service, combat exposure, or PTSD (Rosenheck et al., 1997; see also Kim and Ford, 2006).

Interviewees did however generally agree that whatever the impact of current conflicts on the number of homeless ex-Service personnel – should indeed there prove to be one – its effects are unlikely to be evident for some time given the typical lag between the experience of trauma and manifestation of associated problems in the lives of personnel affected. For example:

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[14] Statistical information on the numbers and location of non-statutorily homeless people is patchy and inconsistent in England. There are some shared data sets, such as the CORE (COntinuous REcording) returns for lets in social rented housing made to non-statutorily homeless people (see www.core.ac.uk) and the Supporting People Client Records (SPCR) for services that work with non-statutorily homeless people. However, in the case of CORE, data are confined only to those people who have received a social let from a housing association or a local authority and in the case of the SPCR data, they are confined to those non-statutorily homeless people who use a Supporting People service. This means individuals who do not approach these services are not recorded. The publicly available data in both SPCR and CORE, which lack individual identifiers, are confined to recording activity by service providers, i.e. the delivery of a Supporting People service or making a let to a non-statutorily homeless person. If a non-statutorily homeless person received two Supporting People funded services they would be recorded twice in the publicly available SPCR data, as they would in the (rather less likely) situation of receiving two social rented tenancies in the course of one year within the CORE data. Attempts are routinely made to count the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas, but the usual methodology of street counts is limited in three important respects. First, most counts only cover restricted areas like city centres. Second, it is known that for safety reasons many rough sleepers tend to stay out of sight and are thus missed by street counts. Third, there is considerable evidence that many people who sleep rough are actually individuals with very precarious accommodation, i.e. they might have a place to stay one night but not the next, rather than being people who spend significant amounts of time continually sleeping outside. This means the number sleeping rough on any one night is likely to significantly under-represent total experience of sleeping rough over a given period. Systematically gathered and maintained data on occupancy levels in hostels, direct access accommodation and night shelters for non-statutorily homeless people do not exist outside a few towns and cities (London, Manchester and Leeds lack such data, for example) and there may often not even be a clear idea of the number of available beds and their typical occupancy rates in many areas. Very little is known about the extent and nature of the population who are living in squats or within derelict or disused buildings that were not originally intended for accommodation.

It's too early to say. Any impact has not come through yet. [The media] can look, but it's not going to find it. It has not manifested itself. It probably will, but not yet. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)

Figure 1: Number of people homeless or at risk of homelessness assisted by The Royal British Legion County Managers in 2007

Royal British Legion Counties

Number of individuals assisted

	3 - 16
	17 - 33
	34 - 59
	60 - 82
	83 - 119
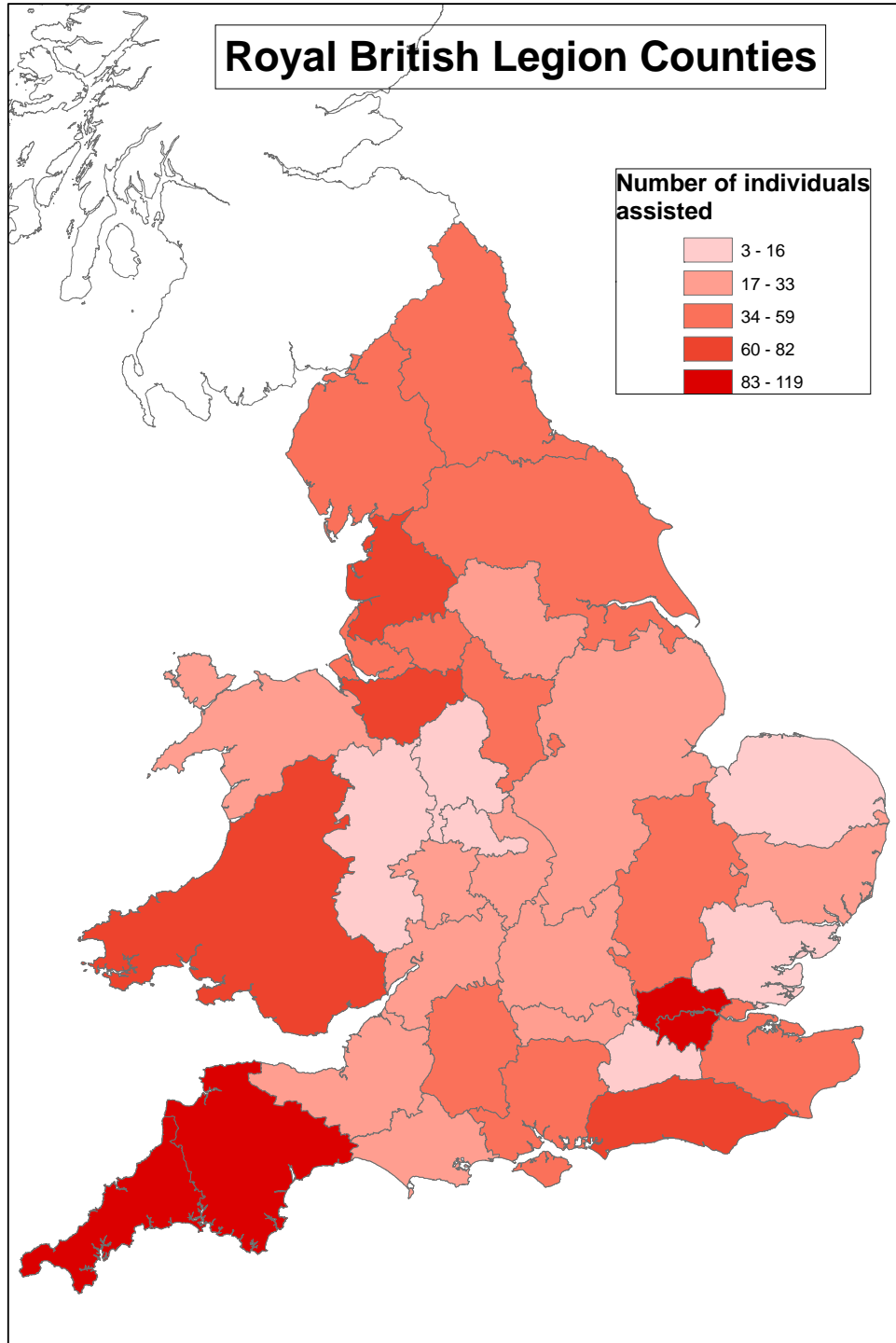
Source: The Royal British Legion County Manager returns, 01/01/2007 to 31/12/2007

Such interviewees were without exception fervent in emphasising that there is little foundation to media predictions that "hundreds of squaddies" will suffer from trauma-related psychosis and "thousands" will end up homeless upon

their return from Iraq and Afghanistan – as suggested by Wakefield (2003) for example.

Also of relevance here are figures recently published by the National Audit Office (2007) deriving from its evaluation of the MoD's resettlement programme. The evaluation involved a survey of all personnel who had left the Armed Forces in the two years prior to October 2006. Respondents were asked whether they had been homeless (including having to stay with friends) since leaving the Services. Notably, five per cent – most of whom were young and of junior rank – reported that they had (National Audit Office, 2007). Of these, one in five (21 per cent) had been homeless for less than one month, approximately half (53 per cent) had been homeless for between one and six months, 14 per cent between seven and twelve months, and 12 per cent over one year (National Audit Office, 2007).

The demographic profile, Service history, and support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel

This section provides details regarding the demographic characteristics, support needs, and Service history of homeless ex-Service personnel in London. Most of the data is drawn from the existing datasets and surveys described above – which usually relate to non-statutory (single) homeless ex-Service personnel only – thus the discussion below is largely confined to this group.

Where appropriate, the characteristics of the formerly homeless interviewees and longitudinal cohort study participants in the current study are profiled, revealing that they are broadly representative of London's ex-Service homeless population.

Demographic profile

The statistics collated confirm that London's homeless ex-Service population is almost exclusively male – with participating agencies reporting that 95-100 per cent of their homeless ex-Service clientele were men (Rhodes et al., 2006). This phenomenon is likely to be accounted for by the significantly smaller number of women in the British military (less than 10 per cent of UK Regular Forces are female)[15], together with their lesser presence among the non-statutory homeless population generally (Jones, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 2005). Reflecting this, all of the ex-Service personnel interviewed for the study were male. The terms 'ex-Service personnel' and 'ex-Servicemen' are thus used interchangeably in references to interview data throughout the remainder of the report.

Also similar to the findings of previous research (Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997), Rhodes et al. (2006) report that London's homeless

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[15] Calculated from provisional 2007 figures published in Defence Analytical Services Agency Table TSP 01: http://www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/tsp1/gender.html. This figure includes officers and other ranks across all Services.

ex-Service personnel are predominantly from a White ethnic background. Participating agencies reported that anywhere between 77 and 87 per cent of their homeless ex-Service clients were White.

Analysis of existing data also confirms that the homeless ex-Service population is, overall, significantly older than other homeless people. For example, 44 per cent of homeless ex-Service CHAIN clients were aged 50 or older, compared with only 18 per cent of all CHAIN clients; similarly, whilst 29 per cent of ex-Service OSW clients were aged 50 and above, this was true for only 10 per cent of non ex-Service OSW clients (Rhodes et al., 2006). Accordingly, the majority of the (former and current) homeless ex-Service personnel interviewed for the study fell within the 45-59 age bracket, and they had an average age of 52 years (Table 1). The youngest ex-Serviceman participating in the study was aged 22, the eldest 86.

Table 1: Age of current and former homeless ex-Service interviewees

Age (years)	Current homeless (cohort study)*	Former homeless (rehoused)	All
<25	2	0	2
25-44	4	7	11
45-59	19	14	33
60-74	6	6	12
75+	1	0	1
minimum	22	33	22
maximum	86	73	86
mean	51.7	51.9	51.8
Base	*32*	*27*	*59*

* Ages presented here are those at first point of contact.

Service history

Existing research reports that most ex-Service personnel experiencing homelessness served in the Army (Randall and Brown, 1994; Dandeker et al., 2005; Glasgow Homelessness Partnership, 2006). This is confirmed by SPACES data wherein 93 per cent of clients placed in London in 2004-2005 had served in the Army (Rhodes et al., 2006), and is a pattern also true of the current and former homeless ex-Servicemen interviewed for this study, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Force(s) served by current and former homeless ex-Service interviewees

Force(s) served	Current homeless (cohort study)	Former homeless (rehoused)	All
Army	22	18	40
Royal Navy	5	4	9
Royal Air Force	5	3	8
Territorial Army	3	0	3
Merchant Navy	1	3	4
Base	*32*	*27*	*59*

More than one response possible, hence column totals may exceed base number.

The greater presence of former Army personnel will almost certainly partially reflect the fact that they make up a comparatively greater proportion of the

British Armed Forces (57 per cent of the total full-time strength of the UK Armed Forces were Army personnel in 2007, compared with 23 per cent RAF, and 20 per cent Royal Navy)[16]. It may also be partially attributable to the Army's strategy of drawing a large number of recruits from educationally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds (National Audit Office, 2007) – a group generally acknowledged to be at greater risk of homelessness (Pleace et al., 2008; Quilgars et al., 2008).

Table 3 portrays the length of Service of current and former homeless interviewees. This reveals that approximately one in six ex-Servicemen had served less than three years, approximately half served between three and nine years, and approximately one third ten or more years. Only three had served more than 20 years. One left before completing basic training, and a few others during their specialist/trade training. The average length of Service for currently homeless individuals was 7 years, and for formerly homeless interviewees was 8 years, giving an overall average of 8 years. These figures are broadly comparable to the ex-Service personnel in Dandeker et al.'s (2005) study, and marginally longer than those reported by Milroy (2001).

Table 3: Length of Service of current and former homeless ex-Service interviewees

Length of service (years)	Current homeless (cohort study)	Former homeless (rehoused)	All
<3	6	4	10
3-5	10	8	18
6-9	8	4	12
10-19	7	9	16
20+	1	2	3
minimum	1	<1	<1
maximum	22	23	23
mean	7	8.2	8
Base	*32*	*27*	*59*

The majority of interviewees had been of junior rank, as Table 4 reveals. Several had however attained NCO/Warrant Officer/Senior Rate or Officer rank when serving.

Table 4: Final rank of current and former homeless ex-Service interviewees

Final rank	Current homeless (cohort study)	Former homeless (rehoused)	All
Officer	1	0	1
NCO/Warrant Officer/Senior Rate	4	3	7
Other rank/Junior Rate	17	18	35
No rank[*] / Rank not specified	10	6	16
Base	*32*	*27*	*59*

* e.g. left Armed Forces during training.

Half of the ex-Servicemen interviewed had seen active Service: 16 of the 32 currently homeless cohort study participants, and 14 of the 27 formerly

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[16] Calculated from Defence Analytical Services Agency Table TSP 02: http://www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/tsp2/tsp2tab.html. Figures include total full-time strength (trained and untrained) of the UK Armed Forces.

homeless interviewees, had done so. The proportion having seen active Service is slightly lower than that reported in previous research into ex-Service homelessness – 72 per cent by Gunner and Knott (1997) and 60 per cent by Dandeker et al. (2005). It must however be borne in mind that those percentages were based on small sample sizes and should therefore be treated with caution. For those interviewed, active Service was most commonly experienced in Northern Ireland, followed by the Falklands, with smaller numbers having served in other locations. One interviewee was a World War II veteran, and four had served in recent conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and/or Iraq.

Vulnerabilities and support needs

The review of existing statistical data indicated that the vulnerabilities and support needs presented by homeless ex-Service personnel are, for the most part, very similar *in nature* to those of the homeless population more generally – in that they revolve around issues such as substance abuse, poor physical health, and mental health problems. The *proportion* of homeless ex-Service personnel affected by such vulnerabilities is nevertheless greater. Only a small minority are affected by problems unique to ex-Service personnel (such as combat-related PTSD for example).

Specifically, existing data indicates consistently that alcohol-related problems are the most prevalent support need amongst homeless ex-Service personnel, and that ex-Service personnel are more likely to exhibit such problems than other homeless people (Rhodes et al., 2006; see also Randall and Brown, 1994). For example, 55 per cent of CHAIN clients with a Service history had an alcohol problem, as compared with 34 per cent of all CHAIN clients.

On this issue, and reflecting the findings of previous research (Higate, 1997, 2000a, 2000b; see also Gunner and Knott, 1997; Milroy, 2001), interviewees typically believed that an ingrained Armed Forces drinking culture does contribute to excessive alcohol consumption and is often associated with alcohol problems amongst homeless ex-Service personnel (see Chapter 3). Many professionals were cautious of implying causality, but all unanimously agreed there was a link between military Service and alcohol problems within this group. The following comment exemplified such a view:

> *Alcohol is a constant thread through all of this. Now that is a characteristic that is different from the general homeless population where drugs are the main … Alcohol is a major player. But I would step back from saying that it's the Services that cause it. It may be that those with addictive personalities … are more vulnerable. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Homeless ex-Service personnel also present a high level of support needs associated with physical health problems – with 51 per cent of ex-Service CHAIN clients having such problems, for example (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Contrary to the findings of previous research which suggested that homeless ex-Service personnel were equally, or less, likely to have emotional or

psychological problems than other homeless people (Gunner and Knott, 1997; Dandeker et al., 2005), the review of existing data revealed that CHAIN clients with a Service history were more likely to be assessed as having support needs associated with mental health problems than all clients (39 per cent, as compared with 26 per cent). This was also true for ex-Service OSW clients in comparison to non ex-Service OSW clients (23 per cent, and 16 per cent, respectively) (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Some of the support providers interviewed reported an impression that the proportion of homeless ex-Service personnel with mental health problems may have increased in recent years. They were however unsure whether this reflected a 'genuine' increase in the prevalence of such issues, or rather was indicative of the fact that those working in the homelessness sector are generally getting better at recognising and diagnosing mental health problems.

On a different note, evidence suggests that homeless ex-Service personnel are less likely to exhibit support needs related to drug use than other homeless people. For example, whilst 34 per cent of all CHAIN clients had a drug-related support need, this was true for only 24 per cent of ex-Service CHAIN clients (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Notably, support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel vary significantly by age – with older individuals (aged 50 and above) being more likely to have physical health or alcohol-related problems, but less likely to have a drug problem, than their younger compatriots (Rhodes et al., 2006). This accords with the pattern evident within the wider homeless population (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Quilgars and Pleace, 2003).

CHAIN data also indicate that just over one quarter of ex-Service clients had a prison history, with younger homeless ex-Service personnel (under the age of 50 years) being significantly more likely to have served time than those aged 50 years or older (37 per cent, as compared with 14 per cent). A relatively small proportion of ex-Service CHAIN clients had a history of care (8 per cent), and this level did not differ significantly between the two age groups (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Whilst it appears that many, and perhaps the majority, of homeless ex-Service personnel had stable childhoods (see Chapter 3), service provider interviewees reported that a number come from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds which may, to some degree at least, predispose them to forms of social exclusion such as homelessness (see also Milroy, 2001; National Audit Office, 2007). As one explained:

> *The Services are a refuge for some people … It may be that their background makes them more susceptible to the problems that we see. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Many support providers made a point of emphasising the inter-relatedness of the vulnerabilities and support needs of homeless ex-Service clients – especially the tendency for alcohol dependence and/or binge drinking to be

symptomatic of, whilst also serving to mask, underlying mental health problems:

> *The drink problem is just generally speaking a manifestation of something. Particularly with guys who binge drink. They present themselves as being pretty ordinary, pretty normal, pretty alright, but then go catastrophically off the rails. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

As is the case for the homeless population more generally (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000), such traits are often combined not just with housing difficulties, but also poverty and debt, such that a number of homeless ex-Service personnel present multiple, and sometimes very complex, needs. This phenomenon was evident in CHAIN data, wherein nearly half (48 per cent) of ex-Service clients in 2004/2005 presented two or more support needs related to alcohol, drugs, mental health, physical health and/or learning difficulties (Rhodes et al., 2006).

From the evidence available, it appears that only a small minority of individuals present vulnerabilities that are unique to ex-Service personnel – such as combat-related PTSD, for example. Given the profile of this particular issue in the media, many interviewees made a point of emphasising the need to maintain perspective regarding the scale of this problem, whilst being careful to neither deny nor denigrate the impact of such a condition on individuals affected:

> *A tiny minority of the people who've been in the Services [are affected] by PTSD … That doesn't take away the importance of treating those who do have problems, but it all needs to be kept in perspective. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Conclusion

Existing evidence indicates that the prevalence of ex-Service homelessness in London is reducing, such that an estimated six per cent of the capital's non-statutory homeless population has served in the Armed Forces. Numbers do, however, remain significant, with an estimated 1,100 non-statutory homeless, and approximately 2,500 statutory homeless, ex-Service personnel in London on any given night.

The majority of London's homeless ex-Service personnel served in the Army, and half of the ex-Servicemen interviewed for this study had seen active service. Their length of Service varied significantly, averaging at 8 years. Most were of junior rank at the point of discharge, but a notable minority had achieved NCO/Warrant Officer/Senior Rate or higher status when serving.

London's homeless ex-Service population is almost exclusively male, and is predominantly comprised of those with a White ethnic background. Its age profile is comparatively older than that of the homeless population more generally.

The vulnerabilities and support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel do, for the most part, reflect those characteristic of other homeless people in *nature*. However, a greater *proportion* of ex-Service personnel present alcohol problems and/or physical or mental health difficulties, than do homeless people without a Service background. Only a small minority present support needs unique to people having served in the Armed Forces.

The extent to which such issues caused and/or shaped experiences of homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Routes Into and Experiences of Homelessness

This chapter examines the causes and experiences of homelessness reported by the ex-Service personnel participating in the study. It begins by providing a summary of the different life trajectories described by interviewees, taking into account aspects of their pre-military life, their experiences within the Armed Forces, circumstances after discharge, and reasons for becoming homeless. Attention is then turned to specific elements of these trajectories in order to consider explicitly similarities and differences between their routes into and experiences of homelessness with those of the general homeless population.

Personal history and homelessness trajectories

The experiences of the 59 currently and formerly homeless ex-Service interviewees varied significantly, but it is possible to identify four main trajectories amongst their life histories. Indications regarding the proportion of individuals classified within each of the groups below should not be regarded as exact given the qualitative nature of the research, but are reported merely to provide a general sense of the relative prevalence of each.

First, there were those who reported *vulnerabilities preceding their military Service* – such as fraught relationships with parents, a history of care, problematic drinking and/or involvement in criminal activity during their teenage years (see for example the experiences of Thomas and Adam outlined in Box 1). For many of these individuals, their time in the Armed Forces was something of a period of 'suspended animation', in that problems in childhood or adolescence continued into adult life and often remained unresolved at the point of discharge:

> *[For some] … it's been literally like a suspended animation in the Army. They were messed up when they went in, that held them for a few years, and all the underlying issues are still there. It's all there, it's never been resolved, and you're dealing with it so far down the line. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Approximately one quarter of the ex-Service interviewees could be said to fall into this first category.

The second group – also comprising approximately one quarter of ex-Service interviewees – was made up of those who *did not exhibit obvious vulnerabilities prior to enlisting*, but reported d*ifficulties when in the Armed Forces and associated problems after discharge*. The nature of problems experienced during and after Service varied. For some they were the outcome of bullying, or traumatic incidents during active Service, as was the case for John as described in Box 2. For others, problems were the apparent consequence of the drinking culture of, and failure to adhere to behavioural protocols required within, the Armed Forces (e.g. Kevin's case in Box 2):

Box 1

Thomas

Now in his 40s, Thomas joined the Army when he was 17 because he was "heading down the wrong road" and it was the only strategy he could think of to prevent himself getting into further trouble with the law. He notes that "it was a Godsend to be accepted" but claims the Army's drinking culture was a major catalyst for later problems: "As soon as I started drinking my career started to go downhill – I could have got a lot more out of the Army but I was easily led and also led other people". He decided to leave the Army after being "busted", and consequently demoted, for incidents related to excessive alcohol consumption.

Thomas stayed with his brother for several months after leaving the Army, and was unemployed for three months, but found work relating to his trade and rented a private sector flat once he had saved up enough money for the deposit. He accumulated a significant amount of debt over the years and became homeless after a series of failed relationships, loss of money after an unsuccessful attempt to set up his own business, and what he refers to as a "lack of groundedness".

He slept rough for about a week, contacted the Ex-Service Fellowship Centre, and was given a room at New Belvedere House. He recalls that: "It was like a fall from grace. I didn't really want to end up in a hostel [but] unfortunately it was the only route I had left to take". He refers to his two years in the hostel as a time of "healing" wherein he was able to deal with his debt and emotional problems, before being referred to supported accommodation provided by The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation. He goes to AA meetings, and stopped drinking several years ago.

Adam

Adam is now in his early 20s, and had joined the Army at age 16 in order to "better himself". He was living with his adoptive parents at the time – and describes his relationship with them as always having been "rocky". He believes that he took many of his problems into the Army with him, explaining that he "cracked up" towards the end of his two years Service – not because of his time in the Armed Forces but "because of shit before the Army". He became suicidal and began to self harm. He had a psychiatric evaluation and was admitted to a hospital for a week, but later went awol and was imprisoned as a result.

Adam's parents would not allow him to return home after discharge, so he stayed at friends' houses, slept rough (for about two months), and began taking drugs and drinking. He got into a few hostels but kept being evicted for drug use, and "messed up" a relationship because he was spending time with "the wrong sort of people". He had tried seeking help from his council, but they concluded that he had left the Army voluntarily and therefore made himself intentionally homeless. He had lots of different jobs after leaving the Army, but felt that everything was "somehow lacking".

He moved to London, slept rough for a few weeks, and then moved into New Belvedere House after being told about it by a fellow ex-Serviceman. He was living there when he first received badly needed treatment for his mental health problems, and later moved into the Home Base hostel.

Box 2

John

John served in the Army for 12 years and is now in his 50s. He was medically discharged on the grounds of chronic alcoholism which he attributed to a very traumatic incident during active Service: "I wasn't the same after that – I just started to hit the bottle". He separated from his wife after discharge, stayed with family and friends for a while, and was later allocated a council flat. He worked for a bit, but found it difficult to cope given the immense amount he was drinking and was soon evicted for rent arrears.

John then "hit the streets", where he remained for a total of 13 years. He did not seek help: "I didn't bother, I just did not care any more what happened to me. I just didn't want to know nothing". A support worker at a mainstream homelessness day centre informed a SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division volunteer about his case, who then arranged for him to undergo a residential detox and rehab programme.

He moved into The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation supported accommodation immediately after rehab, and "hasn't looked back since". He is receiving treatment for PTSD, provided by the NHS, but has had to fight very hard to get his war pension entitlement recognised. He reports that he is now quite relaxed and "coping alright", but that "sometimes things get a bit tight when the gas and or the electric bill comes in".

Kevin

Kevin spent 10 years in the Navy – a period he regarded as a "great time" but a "waste of time" as he spent so much of it drinking. He is now in his mid 60s and recalls there being a strong tradition of drinking in the Service, that alcohol was readily available in the ports visited, and that junior ratings felt pressured to fulfil expectations of hard drinking (although he suspects that this is less the case nowadays). Kevin was discharged under Services No Longer Required because he missed too many embarkations as a result of his alcohol problem.

He lived with his wife afterwards, but that relationship lasted only a few months longer – they had been "heading for divorce" because of his drinking for a while. He was able to hold down a job and rented a flat in London for a short time. Kevin lost that and then stayed with a succession of people "drifting from one calamity to another" over many years. He underwent rehab three times – the most recent session being prompted by a warning from his GP that he would not last the year if he did not stop drinking. He considers himself to have become homeless for the first time after that, because he had nowhere to go afterwards given his desire to avoid old haunts and drinking peers.

Kevin knew he would need support if he was to remain sober in the long term. The Salvation Army – who had arranged his last rehab – referred him to one of their specialist hostels for people with addictions, where he lived in a self-contained flat for nearly a year and received additional support from the Ex-Service Resettlement Project. He had been eager to move out of London to have a "fresh start" and hoped to access a Haig Homes ex-Services property. In the end, however, Kevin moved into a Salvation Army Housing Association flat in Portsmouth, furnished and carpeted with the aid of a Community Care Grant and additional money from SSAFA. Kevin was very happy there, felt he had all the support he needed, and was confident in the knowledge that he could call upon the Ex-Service Resettlement Project and SSAFA, amongst other organisations, for advice if need be.

The third group consisted of those who might be said to have had a *successful career in the Armed Forces* – often serving many years and/or being promoted – but nevertheless *found the transition to civilian life difficult*. As the experiences of Craig and Steve – summarised in Box 3 – indicate,

these difficulties often revolved around problems settling into stable employment and/or adjusting to 'normal' family life on 'civvy street':

I couldn't be bothered with them [jobs]. It just wasn't me. I was so used to travelling around all the time. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

This was the smallest of the four groups, consisting of approximately one in six ex-Service interviewees.

Box 3

Craig

Craig is now in his 50s, and has been homeless on several occasions during the past 20 years, including a total of 4 or 5 years sleeping rough. He served in the Army for 16 years, had been promoted to sergeant, and only left to save a failing marriage because he rarely saw his wife and child. They moved to the area of his wife's family and secured a council tenancy there on the basis that they would have lived there had he not been serving in the Armed Forces. Craig was later "screwed by the divorce court" when he and his wife separated.

Craig was homeless within two years of leaving the Army and had "no idea what to do" when he first landed on the street, but was directed to a mainstream day centre by a policeman. He does not like to ask for help and is reluctant to use hostels which he finds "unliveable", but recently moved into ex-Services specific transitional supported accommodation run by a Housing Association outside London. He feels very settled there and is optimistic about the future.

He describes his post-discharge life as being characterised by "drifting" and has rarely held down a job for long: "I'm yet to find something that I really want to do after the Army. I don't know why. Maybe I served too long. You get so used to the structure". He finds the lack of direction in civilian life, and "lax" attitude of the civilian workforce, difficult to deal with. In retrospect, he wishes that everything hadn't been done for him in the Armed Forces. He felt poorly equipped to make decisions and be independent afterwards. He had never dealt with everyday things like budgeting and utility bills, since his wife had done all of that when they were married.

Steve

Steve, now in his mid 20s, had joined the Army after completing his A-levels and working for a short period. He served for two and a half years, and did a six month tour in Iraq. He enjoyed the lifestyle but did not like his particular job in the regiment he had been recruited into, so left when he was not transferred, without planning what he would do afterwards.

Steve went home and stayed with his mother initially, and then with his father, but these were short-term arrangements and did not end on a positive note. At one point he lived in a council bedsit with his girlfriend but they were evicted due to rent arrears. He worked for a short time in a supermarket, a warehouse, and in security, but left each job because he was either bored, dissatisfied with the pay, or got sacked.

He later moved to London after a stint 'camping'. He found the contact details for the Ex-Service Fellowship Centre amongst the information he had been given when discharged, so approached the agency and was given a bedspace at New Belvedere House straight away. Steve missed the lifestyle, money, security of accommodation, and independence of Army life, so recently applied to re-enlist and has been accepted. He has returned home, where his mother has allowed him to live until the date of re-entry into the Army.

The fourth group, which was also the largest – comprising approximately one third of all interviewees – included those for whom their *Service was apparently quite unrelated to later homelessness* (see for example the experiences of Grant and Sam in Box 4). Whist some of these individuals reported having found the transition to civilian life difficult, most succeeded in securing and maintaining both work and housing after discharge and did not experience homelessness until difficulties later in life – commonly precipitated by financial crisis, bereavement, or marriage breakdown. Such crises commonly occurred many years after discharge (in one case 40 years afterward), and were usually considered by interviewees to be entirely unrelated to their Service history:

> *I was on the street … ten years later, after I left the Services. So the Services have got no relevance to me being on the street. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Unsurprisingly, the length of time between discharge and homelessness, and nature of intervening experiences, varied significantly amongst interviewees. The following comment resonated with the experiences of many of those in the fourth group, for example:

> *I was sorted, straight into employment. It was later that my problems started. I wasn't homeless straight from leaving the Forces. I'd thought my life was just going to carry on. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

For others – particularly those in the first and second groups – difficulties (which were in a number of instances multiple and/or extreme) were often encountered comparatively sooner. Indeed, for some, post-discharge life was quickly punctuated by periods of insecure housing, unemployment, relationship breakdowns, and/or other problems. For example:

> *When I look back on it I was awful… I could always get hold of money so it was waiting for the pubs to open, getting pissed and sleeping wherever… I was in towns I had never heard of… It's a horrible thing – I was looking for happiness but I just couldn't find it … It is all a bit hazy to me… (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *[I was] losing jobs, getting jobs, drinking too much again ... Same shit different places. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Box 4

Grant

Now in his mid 50s, Grant was a Warrant Officer in the Royal Navy, where he had "a very successful career" spanning 23 years, before taking voluntary redundancy during the post Cold War defence cuts. He already owned his home and a business, thus had an independent income before discharge and felt at the time that he did not need any advice from the resettlement service.

His business was, however, unsuccessful. He was declared bankrupt within two years of leaving the Armed Forces and his marriage fell apart as a result. Ashamed and guilt-ridden, he was ill with depression for several months but recalls being "too proud" to go and see a doctor at the time.

Grant "got back on his feet" by "sorting things out" himself. He worked in a series of jobs in the UK and overseas, but sometimes drank heavily. At one point he was staying with a family member and was thrown out because of his "awful behaviour". He moved into a hotel until his money ran out, and then into New Belvedere House after being directed there by a SSAFA worker. He subsequently underwent rehab, lived in Home Base for a period – where the therapy had been very helpful in "sorting him out" – and later moved into Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation housing. He has a tenancy support worker but still finds it difficult to accept the help on offer.

Sam

Sam, now in his mid 40s, served in the RAF. He loved the lifestyle and served for 12 years. He had been offered advice on housing prior to discharge but thought it would not be relevant as he planned to go and stay with his parents in Wales and assumed "everything would be fine". He found that there were few job opportunities in his field back home, so moved to London and rented a room in a flat owned by a friend.

Unable to afford the deposit and rent in advance for a new tenancy when his friend sold the flat, Sam found himself homeless. He approached the council for help but found that there was little they could do for him because he "didn't have any problems apart from being skint and homeless". He slept rough for two months before being referred to a room in a shared flat by a day centre key worker. He was however "recycled back onto the street" at the end of that six month tenancy, and slept rough for another nine months before being allocated a room in a mainstream homelessness hostel. He did not know that specific services existed for homeless ex-Service personnel, and recalled being very surprised how long it took him to get on the "first rung" of accommodation even with the support of mainstream homelessness agencies.

Sam is doing voluntary work and actively searching for employment with the help of a New Deal adviser. He has recently moved into a room in a shared house in the private rented sector. He managed to save up a month's rent and was given some money by New Deal for the deposit. He is not receiving any formal tenancy support but feels that he is coping okay, and is more confident about his job prospects now that he can give potential employers "a real address" instead of a hostel one.

Childhood and Service experience

This section focuses on the early stages in the life trajectories described above, including: interviewees' circumstances at the time of and reasons for enlisting in the Armed Forces, their reasons for leaving, preparations made for the transition to civilian life, and accommodation and employment arrangements after discharge.

Cirmstances at the time of, and reasons for, enlisting

Slightly more than one quarter of interviewees were aged 15 or 16 when they joined the Armed Forces; approximately half were aged 17-18, and the remaining quarter were 19 years or older when they signed up (minimum age 15 years, maximum 25; average 18). The vast majority were still living in the parental home at the time, and most joined immediately after leaving school. Virtually all of those signing up after the age of 18 had experience of the workforce, but were typically working in what they regarded as menial jobs which offered little in the way of job satisfaction or long-term prospects.

Several of the older ex-Service personnel had been called up for National Service, but most of the others had enlisted because of the prospects the Armed Forces offered for an active lifestyle, travel, adventure, and/or career promotion. For a significant number – including the majority of those in the first trajectory group identified above – the Services were regarded as a means of 'bettering themselves' given poor educational attainment and/or constrained employment opportunities:

> *I had had a very disrupted education, and the only thing that was really left for me was to join the Army. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *At the time I was in Glasgow, hanging around on street corners, going nowhere fast, so it was an opportunity to get out of where I was... At that time there wasn't much employment going around in Glasgow, it seemed like a good idea. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *It was either the Army or the pit, and I swore I would never go down the mine. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

For some interviewees – across all of the four trajectory groups – 'growing into' the Armed Forces was seen as an almost natural or inevitable event given prior family ties with the Services:

> *My life was sorted from the conscious age of knowing my dad was in the RAF … I would just grow up, and grow into a uniform, and go and wear it. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Service experiences and reasons for leaving

The great majority of interviewees reported that they had, on the whole, enjoyed their time spent in Service:

> *I loved the life, I loved what it represented, the company … I loved the discipline, the respect that was there. I couldn't find anything bad to say about it. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *Everybody mucked in. You didn't have to watch your back because there was always somebody watching your back for you. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I loved every single minute. The camaraderie was great. It was like a big family. You were looked after. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Even so, when asked why they had left, one of the most commonly cited reasons included dissatisfaction or frustration with aspects of Service life, such as boredom or the restriction of personal freedoms:

> *I got bored of it … I thought I just can't be arsed doing this any more. I just wanted to do something else. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *There was too much bull. It was too strict. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

It is widely acknowledged that the Service lifestyle – frequent travel and prolonged absences in particular – can place strain on relationships between Service personnel and their spouses, and divorce rates are higher amongst Armed Forces personnel than the general public (National Audit Office, 2007). Accordingly, many interviewees reported that they had left the Armed Forces in an attempt to save a failing marriage, protect a burgeoning relationship from the stresses of Service life, and/or provide greater stability for their children:

> *It was either the marriage or the Navy … So I decided to opt out when the eleven came. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

A small number were medically discharged – a few due to physical injuries incurred during Service, and slightly more due to mental health and/or substance misuse problems:

> *[I had] a complete and utter breakdown. Lost the plot completely from one end to the other. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

A similar proportion had been compulsorily discharged – including most of those in the second trajectory group identified earlier, together with many from the first – normally because of disciplinary matters such as persistent alcohol misuse, having gone absent without leave ('awol'), or (in only one case) possession of illicit drugs:

> *Being in Northern Ireland, it had taken its toll on all of us… We just extended our holiday, sort of thing [went awol]. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Preparation for leaving the Services

The degree and type of preparation for leaving the Armed Forces depended on when ex-Servicemen left. Older ex-Service personnel consistently reported that there had been a lack of information, advice or practical support to assist their transition into civilian life. For them, any assistance was typically limited to a recommendation that they visit the local Job Centre and/or council housing office:

> *It was just 'Thanks for your time, sign that paper, you are hereby discharged on such and such a date. Goodbye'. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *You got nothing as a conscript, you were just chucked out … 'You've done well, there's your discharge papers, we'll pat you on the head, and cheerio'. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Some were nevertheless careful to point out that that they had not actually sought help before leaving because they did not feel that they needed it. A number had planned for the future (by buying a house, for example) and many had other accommodation and/or employment arranged. Others felt confident that they would find work and somewhere to live:

> *I never looked into it [seeing if help was available]. I was quite happy to get out the gate to be honest … I was young. I mean I was 19, I didn't even plan the next day! (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I didn't have anything in my mind about what to do after. I just packed it in and that was it, just hope for the best. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

In contrast, the vast majority of younger interviewees and/or those who had left the Armed Forces more recently had benefited from the enhanced pre-discharge resettlement package now available to Service Leavers. They were, as a consequence, much better informed than their older compatriots regarding the help available to homeless veterans. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Housing and employment after leaving the Services

After discharge, almost all married personnel (many of whom by then had dependent children) moved into accommodation with their wives – be it a home they already owned or, more commonly, a council property. A small number remained in Services married quarters whilst trying to secure council accommodation.

In contrast, the vast majority of single personnel returned 'home' to stay with their parents, other relatives, or friends. For some this was a long-term arrangement, but the greater majority used it as a base from which to secure themselves more permanent accommodation of their own. A very small number moved directly into hostel accommodation.

Most were able to secure some form of employment after discharge, but the ease with which they did so, and security of employment, varied significantly. Those with a short Service history or with highly specialised military-specific roles often reported that a lack of transferable skills meant that options for employment after discharge had been constrained, and sometimes limited to poorly paid jobs:

> *Honestly, what skills do you think I could pick up in a heavy artillery regiment that could be useful in civvy street, apart from a driving licence? There's no skills. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *If you're a soldier who's been serving your country and you leave the Forces and go for a job only to be told that the best you can do is a cleaner or a security guard job, then that's a huge put-down. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

A lack of qualifications had presented an added barrier to employment for some of the older ex-Servicemen, but was less of an issue for those having left more recently:

> *…in the past people didn't get the qualifications. Some of them probably weren't comparable with things in the civilian world anyway … But nowadays pretty much everything is certified. (central government department representative)*

Most ex-Servicemen – including those who secured employment relatively easily – reported experiencing difficulty adjusting to the culture of the civilian workforce. For example:

> *When I was in the Army if you told somebody to do something you'd know it would be done. But in a civilian job, if you say 'Can you do that that and that' and it's not done, you start screaming and shouting at them, you're the one that loses the job. But in the Army, you're used to talking to people like that … And that's why ex-Servicemen lose their jobs so quickly. The rules are different and we can't get used to civilian rules. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Many also described having felt a (sometimes devastating) loss of self-worth and belonging during this transitional period:

> *I'd always had a place on a ship, a job. I'd always been somebody somewhere. All of a sudden I was nobody nowhere. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *You have this pride built into you. You know, I'm ex-RAF and am proud to be ex-RAF. People are proud of their infantry, or ship, or whatever … When you come out onto civvy street you're nothing. In the Forces you are part of a team, and if your comrade fails you do your best to cover it up and carry his workload. You don't develop this kind of relationship in civvy street … Life is so alienating once you're out of the Forces. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *You can imagine someone … is recognised as being the top gunner in his battalion, in the region. He gets lots of recognition, he gets lots of affirmation. In civilian life nobody cares, because all of a sudden that means absolutely nothing … It affects their confidence. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Notably, some of those discharged on medical grounds experienced a transitional period of enhanced vulnerability immediately afterward, wherein they could not claim welfare benefits because their Army pension entitlement had not been confirmed, but were reluctant to seek work because the extent to which their disability or illness would affect them had not been ascertained fully.

Causes and experiences of homelessness

Focusing on the more recent phases of interviewees' life trajectories, this section examines their reasons for, and experiences of, homelessness. One of the most striking findings of the study was the degree of similarity between their experiences and those widely documented for the homeless population more generally. This section documents the experiences reported, paying particular attention to those more prevalent amongst, and those apparently unique to, homeless people who have served in the Armed Forces.

The section begins by considering the role of relationship breakdown, outstaying welcome or no longer being able to be accommodated, eviction or end of tenancy, and financial crises as triggers for homelessness. It then considers the influence of alcohol abuse and mental heath problems both as triggers for, and influences upon, homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel. This is followed by an assessment of ex-Servicemen's experiences of rough sleeping, willingness to seek help, assistance provided by local authorities, and ability to maintain a tenancy after moving into settled housing.

It is important to emphasise that the triggers and experiences identified below are often complexly inter-related, as previously noted by Milroy (2001), and as is clear from the case study examples in Boxes 1 to 4.

Relationship breakdown

The most common reason for homelessness reported by interviewees was relationship breakdown, as reported in earlier ex-Service homelessness research (Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997) and as is also true for the homeless population at large (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Pleace et al., 2008). The divorce rate is known to be higher amongst ex-Service personnel than the general population (National Audit Office, 2007), and Gunner and Knott (1997) suggest that this may predispose them to homelessness. Interview data indicated that ex-Servicemen may indeed be particularly susceptible to relationship breakdown given the unique pressures of Service lifestyles – especially during the transitional period of upheaval and necessary adjustment to civilian life after discharge. Interviewees often attributed their relationship breakdown to strain placed on their marriage by Service life – arising from wives' resentment of their prolonged absences or frequent moves due to redeployment for example – and/or that their divorce was the eventual outcome of difficulty adjusting to living as a family unit '24/7':

The wife said to me 'You've travelled too much, you'll never be able to settle down'. And she was perfectly correct … Within 18 months of coming out we were divorced… That was when my troubles more or less started, the wanderlust, moving from pillar to post. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)

The wives have been so used to the money coming in, regular as clockwork. The husbands have been away for a long enough time to help relationships, you're not in each other's pockets, the kids are doing great. The wife has got autonomy, a lot of autonomy. And suddenly the family unit starts to break down… (ex-Service welfare agency representative)

Outstayed welcome / could no longer be accommodated

It was noted above that many ex-Servicemen – and indeed the vast majority of those who were single – returned 'home' to stay with family or friends immediately after leaving the Armed Forces. Most were able to secure their own accommodation from that point, but a small minority became homeless because these arrangements came to an end – usually because of bereavement or overcrowding. One ex-Serviceman, for example, reported having to move out of the family home after the death of his terminally ill father whom we had left the Armed Forces to care for. Others were unable to stay long-term because there simply was not enough room in the family home. Scenarios such as these are common triggers for homelessness within the wider population (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Pleace et al., 2008).

Eviction / end of tenancy

Also mirroring widespread experiences in the general population, another common cause of homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel was the end of a tenancy – sometimes due to the sale of a private rented sector property and lack of financial resources to secure new accommodation – but often due to eviction resulting from rent arrears. The experiences of Sam (Box 4) and Steve (Box 3) were cases in point.

Several became homeless at the end of a live-in employment contract – which was not uncommon for those working in the catering/hospitality industry. A small number reported that they had been evicted for rent arrears resulting from delays or other problems in the administration of Housing Benefit payments.

Financial crisis

Also common to the accounts of homeless ex-Servicemen – and more so than is usually the case for the general homeless population (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Pleace et al., 2008) – were financial crises causing homelessness. These were usually precipitated by redundancy, dismissal, or business problems:

It was just financial. My job went pear shaped and then I couldn't afford to stay anywhere anymore. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)

In some cases these financial crises were dramatic – with a small number having been declared bankrupt after business failure (see for example Grant's experience in Box 4).

Alcohol abuse

A substantial body of literature reports that substance abuse is a key contributor to homelessness within the general population (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Fountain et al., 2003; Kemp et al., 2006). Gunner and Knott (1997) and Milroy (2001) have previously noted that high levels of alcohol consumption may place ex-Service personnel at greater risk of homelessness, and it was reported earlier that homeless ex-Service personnel are more likely to have an alcohol problem (but less likely to have a drug problem) than other homeless people (see Chapter 2).

The issue of excessive drinking pervaded a great number of the accounts of ex-Servicemen in this study, and was often integral in explanations for their homelessness. For example:

> *It was really my marriage break-up and through my drinking that I fell into the pit. That's it in a nutshell … I knew I wasn't going to get back with my wife and I lost the luxury of having a home and family. Which is something that hurts me to this day, like, and I regret it with all my heart, like. I was so engrossed in my drinking at the time that I didn't care for anyone else. I never took responsibility, and that's why I fell into homelessness. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

For many – including individuals classified in all four of the trajectory groups outlined earlier – alcohol was used as a form of self-medication to deal with psychological problems. These derived from either childhood, their Service, and/or subsequent events:

> *I cracked up … and hit the drink very very hard … I was absolutely out of my brain with drink, sozzled … I was carrying around all this rubbish inside me for years and years, and of course the alcohol fuelled it … A lot of the time I was drinking was for self medication. It was just numbing the pain. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

The majority of ex-Servicemen identifying alcohol consumption as a factor contributing to their homelessness attributed their tendency to drink 'too much' – particularly in times of stress – to the drinking culture of, and habits formed within, the Armed Forces:

> *If you had a problem – got a dear john, wife left you, lost a mate – it's not 'There there let's sit down and talk about it', its 'Right, go and get pissed, turn up tomorrow morning suited and booted at half past eight'. That's it. That was the way it was dealt with. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *You were classed as a bit of a cissy if you didn't [drink]. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *Drinking is a huge part of the Army culture … You've got to remember that if you're in barracks and don't go out, you sort of miss out on the interaction … By the time you get to 21, 22 it's very much a way of life. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *When you're in Germany there's not a lot for you to do when you're single. So I just used to go down to the NAAFI [Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes pub/club], go drinking, and just carried on from there … I've only really just in these past two years calmed down from it. I've lost more jobs though it than I care to think about. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

But even then most were reluctant to hold the military accountable for their homelessness. For example:

> *Possibly it [homelessness] could be my own fault. I'd say 50/50 the Army and my own fault. In a way I can blame the Army because of [a traumatic incident in active Service]. But I had my chance between [then] and my discharge not to pick that bottle up and I chose to pick that bottle up. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Whilst it is difficult to determine the extent to which the prevalence of alcohol problems amongst homeless ex-Service personnel may be attributable to the alleged normalisation of binge drinking within the Armed Forces (Milroy, 2001), it is quite clear that excessive alcohol consumption severely inhibits their engagement with support services and acts as a barrier to sustained resettlement. It 'numbs' their acknowledgement of the difficulty of their circumstances and reduces their desire to do anything to rectify them (Segal, 1991; West, 2006) – as was certainly true for John (see Box 2).

Alcohol-fuelled expressions of aggression can put perpetrators at greater risk of bans from services such as day centres, cause problems for fellow residents and neighbours, and/or lead to eviction. One, for example, was encouraged to accept a hostel place after sleeping rough for 15 years, where he remained for several months, but was evicted for alcohol-related 'behavioural' reasons toward the end of the cohort study. His whereabouts following eviction was unknown.

The prolonged abuse of alcohol was also a key contributor to the very poor physical health of a number of interviewees. One cohort study participant died of an alcoholism-related condition during the course of the year.

Mental health problems

It was earlier noted that homeless ex-Service personnel are more likely to have mental health problems than homeless people without a Service history (see Chapter 2). Mental health problems were identified as a contributory factor to the homelessness of a number of ex-Service interviewees. For some, these were symptomatic of problems beginning in childhood (e.g. Adam – see Box 1). For others, mental health problems were said to have resulted from traumatic events after leaving the Armed Forces. Grant, for example suffered from severe depression after bankruptcy (see Box 4), while another claimed to have "lost it" after the death of his child, and yet another to have "gone a bit bonkers" following the sudden death of his wife.

A small number of ex-Service personnel however attributed their mental health problems to events during their Service, typically (but not exclusively)

active service – with John being a clear example (Box 2). Some had been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and were in receipt of a war pension. For most of these individuals, diagnoses were made several years after problems first arose – with symptoms often being masked by excessive alcohol consumption in the intervening period.

Experiences of sleeping rough

Previous research suggests that ex-Service personnel are more likely to have slept rough than other homeless people (Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997). Approximately four out of every five of the ex-Servicemen had slept rough at some point while homeless: 22 of the (total 27) formerly homeless interviewees, and 25 of the (32) cohort study participants, had done so. The length of time individuals had been street homeless varied considerably. Some slept rough for a few nights just until they were able to secure hostel accommodation. It was not uncommon for others to have slept rough (usually 'on and off') for several months, and in a significant minority of cases, many years – see for example the experiences of John described in Box 2.

It has previously been documented that homeless ex-Servicemen often consider themselves better equipped to deal with the hardships of street homelessness than other homeless people (Higate, 2000b). This was true for many of the participants in this study, with the following comments typifying widely held views:

> *My Army training came in handy funnily enough. It kicked in. I used the natural covering of the trees, and dug down and stuff like that. And made sure I had enough insulation under me, things like that. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *Being a Royal Marine is a tough life anyway … It's not as if we haven't got our own survival skills. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *Sleeping rough didn't worry us, we'd been in the Army, we could handle it. Ex-Servicemen don't consider sleeping rough that big a deal. We're quite hardy I suppose, and quite prepared to put up with hardship, as opposed to people who've lived a different kind of life and the hardship gets to them. It's part of your conditioning as a soldier. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Their alleged adaptability to physical hardship, and associated lesser 'fear' of rough sleeping, was commonly identified as a factor contributing to the sustained homelessness of many ex-Service personnel. Indeed, a significant minority of those interviewed reported having been very reluctant to move away from the street, despite concerted support and encouragement to do so from street outreach teams.

For many of these individuals, this barrier was apparently compounded by (sometimes extreme levels of) alcohol consumption in street drinking groups – fuelled by a search for comradeship akin to that they had 'lost' when leaving the Armed Forces (see also Higate (2000a) and Milroy (2001) on this issue).

> *Our let-out was to go out and drink, and drink a lot, just to diminish the pain. Other people who haven't been in the Forces don't understand, so you look to your own peers for comfort, to go out for a drink and forget about it. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

For a few, it was only seriously failing physical health, or witnessing the death of a rough sleeping friend due to ill health, that prompted them to accept offers of accommodation.

For some, reluctance to stay in hostels – often borne out of prior negative experiences or perceptions regarding the 'difference' of other residents – was an added deterrent to moving off the street:

> *The hostels are full of people with substance abuse problems, alcohol abuse problems, the mentally ill. I haven't got any of those. I do get depressed every now and again, but I don't fit any of those categories. I find that it's not liveable. There are no hostels for the normal people. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I told them … if you can get me in somewhere where people don't take drugs or drink and I can have my own room then I'll go. It took them a year to find somewhere… I couldn't be around people taking drugs and drinking. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

The sustained homelessness of many ex-Service personnel was further compounded by a reluctance to seek or accept help, as detailed below.

Reticence to seek or accept help

Whilst an issue relevant to the homeless population at large, previous research consistently reports that homeless ex-Service personnel are a group especially reluctant to seek help (Gunner and Knott, 1997; Higate 2000a, 2000b; Milroy, 2001). Accordingly, the vast majority of ex-Servicemen interviewed confessed that they had found it very difficult to ask for help, and several – such as John (Box 2) and Grant (Box 4) – had actively resisted offers of assistance for many years:

> *I'd rather die than prevail on them for help, honest to God … I've always done things on my own. So now seeing that I'm having a hard time doing it now, it's not something that I want to be known. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *Some don't want to admit that they are failing. Because that's not the way they've been trained, that they're geared up. You're not going to say in the Services that you're falling in some way are you? It's all about positivity and independence. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

> *We have to make sure we get the right interventions in at the trigger points, but it is difficult to help people who won't admit to any weakness... (mainstream homelessness agency representative)*

Existing literature typically attributes this phenomenon to the stoic 'pride' and 'independence' of ex-Service personnel. Their reluctance to seek help might however perhaps be better understood as being symptomatic of shame

deriving from their 'failure' to live up to certain standards of (or assumptions regarding) societal norms of achievement. Shame can be quite paralysing – whether or not it has any foundation in prior 'misconduct', and whether or not another person or group is 'doing' the shaming (Kaufman, 1993). Accordingly, for some homeless ex-Service personnel, shame about their situation was so acute as to make them rule out completely the option of seeking help from agencies assisting ex-Service personnel. The following comment, from a former Warrant Officer who was sleeping rough, was a case in point:

> *If you've been in the Forces for that length of time, you're independent, or you should be … You're taught to look after yourself in the Forces, so they're going to think … 'you shouldn't be in this state'. That's what most ex-Forces think they're going to say … They're sitting there, they're comfy, they've got a job, this, that, whatever. To finish up in the circumstances I'm in they're going to say 'He can't look after himself, he should know better'. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

For a number, their reluctance to seek help from ex-Forces organisations was compounded by the 'dishonourable' nature of their discharge. For others the fear of bringing shame upon their regiment had a similar effect:

> *One of the things that we try to do in the Services, and all Services are the same, is to build this sort of pride, this esprit de corps in the world in which they live … Whilst that togetherness is a strength on the one hand, from what we do it can be a weakness because it's holding people back from coming out and saying 'I've got a problem'. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

The problem was particularly noticeable with regards to the issue of mental health, as was certainly the case for Grant (Box 4). Professionals confirmed that:

> *Mental illness is not something that people are very keen to divulge. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

> *There's still a stigma about mental health in the Forces. Whether we like it or not, it is there. I think people feel weak if they are seen to access mental health services while they're still serving … There is a feeling, and it shouldn't be borne out because it's not true at all, but they feel that their career will be threatened or that they will be looked on differently. (central government department representative)*

This shame and reticence to admit to failings not only restricts ex-Service personnel's willingness to seek help and/or accept it when it is offered, but can also cause some individuals to present as being 'fine' by downplaying vulnerabilities during needs assessments. This can, in turn, lead to inappropriate referrals – to services providing insufficient levels of support for example – and has caused some difficulties in a number of ESAG initiatives.

This being so, whilst the National Audit Office's (2007) call for greater probing of Early Service Leavers' future accommodation plans is commendable, it must not be assumed that doing so will represent a panacea in homelessness prevention. For, it seems that many such Service Leavers will be unlikely to

comprehend the housing challenges that lie ahead, and even if they do have concerns they will be unlikely to admit them to a superior.

Accessing assistance from a local authority

The expansion of priority need categories within the homelessness legislation[17] to include people vulnerable as a result of having served in the British Armed Forces, and associated guidance regarding the imperative of taking their needs into account when devising homelessness strategies, has been seen as a very positive development:

> *The numbers picked up through that safety net are incredibly small. But having them in as a priority group encourages local authorities in terms of developing their homelessness strategies … Within that category we would expect local authorities that have a reasonable number of acceptances to be reviewing their engagement with agencies working with ex-Service personnel. (central government department representative)*

However, it appears that the inclusion of vulnerable ex-Service personnel as a statutory priority need category has had little tangible effect on their experiences 'on the ground' when seeking help from a local authority. In practice, it is usually only those with very serious physical or mental health problems accepted as being owed the main homelessness duty because of vulnerability due to having served in HM Forces:

> *In most local authorities it [expansion of priority need categories] meant nothing at all … Just because you're does ex-Services, what does that mean? Just get in the queue. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*
>
> *The statutory homeless route is a waste of space for us - don't even bother! We don't get anywhere. They send them all to us anyway... (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

There was also evidence to suggest that some councils (outside London) assessed individuals as intentionally homeless and therefore not in priority need because they had left the Armed Forces voluntarily (see for example Adam's experiences outlined in Box 1). Also, a small number of service providers drew attention to cases wherein ex-Service personnel had not been assessed as in priority need even after having been officially diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

As has historically been the case with regards to single homeless men (Lowe, 1997), the majority of ex-Servicemen interviewed reported being deemed low

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[17] The 'main homelessness duty' owed to 'homeless' applicants in 'priority need' (who must also be 'eligible' for assistance and not 'intentionally' homeless) is to secure (suitable) temporary accommodation until (suitable) settled housing becomes available, found either by the household itself or by the local authority. In practice this settled housing is almost always secured by the local authority that owes a duty under the homelessness legislation, and in most cases discharge of duty is through the offer of a social rented tenancy.

priority in social housing allocations[18]. Most had their name on at least one housing waiting list, but many reported feeling 'fobbed off' by council officers when approaching their local authority for help:

> *I didn't get much response from them whatsoever … They try to fob you off, they really do. I thought I'm wasting my time here, so I just walked out. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *They told me to bugger off … They said there was more important people, more needy people than myself … They wouldn't even put me in a bed and breakfast or anything. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I did approach the council, yes. But the problem with me is there's nothing wrong with me. I'm not an alcoholic, I'm not a drug taker, or mental, a gambler or whatever. I'm just on the street and with no money. So, when somebody else comes along with more problems I get bounced down. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

A significant minority did not even bother to approach the council because of assumptions – borne out of prior experience of the social housing allocation system or an awareness of the experiences of other applicants in similar circumstances – regarding the ability of the council to provide them with housing:

> *It takes too long. They put you on the waiting list and you wait about five or ten years for a flat if you're lucky. Didn't bother, waste of time. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I thought about it [approaching the council]. But probably there's no point. There's more chance of winning the lottery! (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Lack of local connection

In comparison to the general population, ex-Service personnel are at a disadvantage when applying for social housing because of local connection provisions in existing legislation. The 1996 Housing Act (s.199) provides that a person who is a serving member of the Armed Forces (or someone who normally lives with such a person) does not establish a local connection with a district through residence or employment while serving in the Armed Forces. Local authorities are responsible for framing their own policies on this, so whilst some of the ex-Servicemen interviewed had been able to access social housing immediately after leaving the Armed Forces, the lack of local connection presented a major barrier for a number of others.

The recent announcement by Communities and Local Government that the law will be amended to place ex-Service personnel on a more equal footing with other social housing applicants is therefore most welcome. The revised legislation – anticipated to come into effect in 2009 – will prevent local authorities from denying Service Leavers a local connection when positioning

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[18] Applicants accepted as having 'priority need' status under the homelessness legislation are not entitled to overriding priority in local authority housing allocations, but simply to 'reasonable preference'.

them on the waiting list for social housing or providing accommodation for them should they become homeless (Communities and Local Government News Release 119, 21 June 2007).

Independent living skills

Ex-Service personnel have previously been identified as one of a number of groups of homeless people – including young people and rough sleepers for example – who can be poorly equipped for independent living (Jones et al., 2001; Quilgars et al., 2008). It has also been suggested that the Armed Forces ethos can lead to a culture of dependency (National Audit Office, 2007).

The majority of ex-Servicemen interviewed recalled experiencing something of a 'culture shock' after discharge when having to deal with the day-to-day tasks of running a home that had previously been the responsibility of their employers or, for those homeless due to a relationship breakdown later in life, their wives:

> *In the Forces you don't have to deal with bureaucracy … But now we have to worry about electricity, council tax, rent… That might sound simplistic to someone who's done it all their life, but for someone who has not done it for years, 16 years, or 22 years, it's quite a cultural shock when you come out. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *They go from their mothers' apron strings to the Army's apron strings. Then they've usually got a wife and the wife copes with it … When these guys are away in Germany and all over the world their wives are doing everything, they're running the whole show. They are paying the bills, they're looking after the children … It's the same when they're in married quarters even. And when these things break down, as they sometimes do, they've never done it in their lives. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Basic tasks such as cooking presented problems for few ex-Service personnel, but difficulties with budgeting and utility bill payments were widespread. Many acknowledged that they could have benefited from advice or training in this area before discharge, but confessed that they would have been unlikely to take up such opportunities at the time given their assumption that they 'would be okay' in civilian life (see for example Sam's recollections in Box 4). It is therefore unsurprising that only one third (37 per cent) of personnel leaving the Services in the two years prior to October 2006 had attended the financial briefings now available as pat of the MoD resettlement package, with junior personnel being the least likely to do so (only 20 per cent had) (National Audit Office, 2007).

The lack of such independent living skills is frequently attributed to the 'institutionalisation' of Service personnel – a term which, as Higate (1997) points out, is typically employed rather loosely. Opinion regarding whether or not the Armed Forces foster a culture of dependency and/or impede the development of basic life skills was very divided amongst service providers and ex-Service personnel alike.   Some thought that there was some foundation to the use of the term 'institutionalised' in reference to homeless

ex-Service personnel – primarily because of their lack of prior experience in managing a home:

> *There is some truth to the public perception that ex-Service personnel are institutionalised, I believe so. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

> *You see, you're institutionalised in the Army. You get the money and it's your own. You don't have to pay your electricity or rent, or anything. It's easy, you know? It takes the responsibility away. It's the same here [hostel] – everything's provided. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *There is some substance to the argument that ex-Forces people are institutionalised. But I hate these words. It makes it sound like you're brainwashed, and you're not. But you're certainly taken into a system where everything is done for you. Your independence is taken away. You don't need to worry about bills and things. It's 'Go where I send you, do as you're told, don't think for yourself please'. You're not paid to think, you're paid to do. Until you reach senior rank level where you're expected to make decisions, you might not make any for six, nine, twelve years. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Many others, however, were critical of such a claim – arguing that it is based on an outdated view of Service life and/or fails to take into account the fact that many personnel successfully make the transition into civilian society (see also Milroy (2001) on this issue). For example:

> *[The argument that ex-Service personnel are institutionalised] is, for me, a load of rubbish … There is, in theory, no excuse for a squaddie coming out to not have the life skills necessary to run a home. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *In my experience the longer you're in the military the less institutionalised you become. Purely because you get promoted, you have more money. The first thing most of the young lads do is move away from the base and rent a house together. People get married and they buy houses. They pay their own bills, pay their mortgages, do everything that everyone else does … The ones that we have problems with are the young guys who have come from a background where their parents have done everything for them before they joined up, and then they've been in the military for two or three years where they've only lived on the base and haven't had to do anything for themselves and then for whatever reason have left … But people would say 'Oh he's institutionalised because he can't cook, he can't clean, he can't do all these bits and pieces for himself'. If he'd stayed longer that would've happened as a progression. (central government department representative)*

Accordingly, the National Audit Office (2007) finding that Service Leavers who had served the longest time typically found the transition to civilian life easier than those who had served shorter periods. Taken together, these findings do serve to undermine the 'institutionalisation' thesis.

It seems that caution should be exercised before applying the term 'institutionalised' to homeless ex-Service personnel – perhaps even more so in the future as the Armed Forces encourage a greater culture of house buying. Many interviewees did however encounter significant difficulty with budgeting and money management, and a significant number were seriously affected by debt, thus highlighting a need for targeted and ongoing support in this area (see Chapter 4).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the pathways into homelessness experienced by ex-Service personnel have varying degrees of association with their military background. It was in fact possible to identify four main life history trajectories amongst the ex-Servicemen interviewed, these including those who:

- carried vulnerabilities deriving from childhood or adolescence into the Armed Forces and later civilian life;
- encountered difficulties within the Armed Forces (such as the onset of alcohol or mental health problems) which continued to affect them after discharge;
- had a successful career in the Armed Forces but found the adjustment to civilian life very difficult;
- had a successful career in the Armed Forces and did not encounter difficulties until an apparently unrelated trauma later in life (such as relationship breakdown, bereavement, or financial crisis).

There were a number of parallels between the journeys into, and experiences of, homelessness reported by the ex-Service personnel interviewed and those typically affecting other homeless people. Many shared histories involving a traumatic or disrupted childhood. Loss of accommodation because individuals had outstayed their welcome or could no longer be accommodated, and eviction or end of tenancy, were common triggers for homelessness amongst both groups.

Homeless ex-Service personnel are rarely deemed to be owed the main homelessness duty because of vulnerability due to having served in the Armed Forces. Also, and like most other single homeless men, the majority of ex-Servicemen are low priority in social housing allocations. They can however be at a comparative disadvantage to the general population when trying to access social housing given local connection provisions in housing legislation. This disadvantage should disappear once pending legislative revisions have come into effect.

The experiences of ex-Servicemen departed from those of the general homeless population in a number of other ways, to greater or lesser degrees. Whilst the predominance of relationship breakdown as a cause of homelessness was characteristic of both groups, ex-Servicemen appeared to be at particular, and potentially greater, risk of relationship breakdown – especially during the transitional period following discharge. They were also more likely to become homeless because of a financial crisis.

Also, alcohol abuse appeared to be a more common precursor to homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel, and this was often attributed to habits developed in the Armed Forces. Ex-Servicemen were also more likely than other homeless people to sleep rough – and do so for sustained periods – but significantly less inclined to seek, or accept, help. Lack of experience with financial and household management presented an added challenge for

some homeless ex-Service personnel, but the question of whether such individuals are 'institutionalised' is debated.

The next chapter assesses the effectiveness of existing service provision in meeting the needs of homeless ex-Service personnel in London.

Chapter 4: Service Network Effectiveness

This chapter considers the effectiveness of the existing service network in the prevention of homelessness amongst, and resettlement of, homeless ex-Service personnel in London. It begins by examining the influence of prevention initiatives implemented prior to discharge and awareness of services amongst homeless ex-Service personnel. It then considers their experiences of temporary accommodation, settled housing and support, employability initiatives, and health care provision. This is followed by an assessment of the effectiveness of inter-agency working amongst existing projects, and reflections regarding what must be taken into account should any elements of the network be 'rolled out' beyond London.
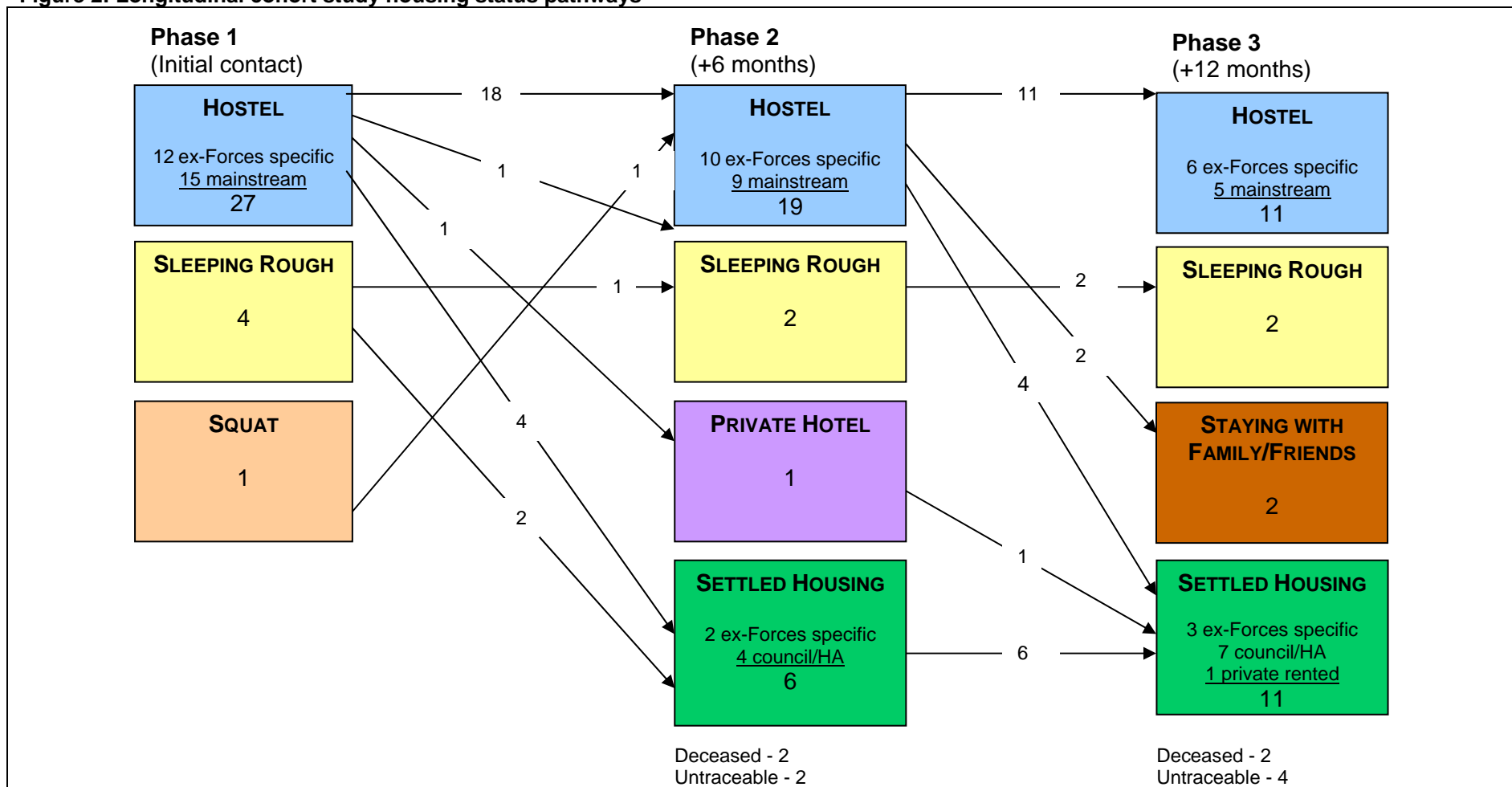
The chapter draws upon the accounts of both formerly and currently homeless ex-Service interviewees. Formerly homeless ex-Servicemen were able to talk about their experiences of homelessness and the process of being 'rehoused' into settled accommodation. Of the 27 interviewed, 14 were resident in settled accommodation catering specifically for ex-Service personnel (by The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation or Haig Homes, for example), 12 in social housing (i.e. a council or Housing Association property), and one in a private rented sector tenancy.

The longitudinal cohort study enabled exploration of progress made over the course of one year in assisting ex-Service personnel who were homeless at the first point of contact. Of the 32 participants, 27 were living in hostel accommodation (12 of whom were living in ex-Forces specific hostels, the other 15 in mainstream/generic hostels), four sleeping rough, and one living in a squat when first interviewed. Their housing status pathways over the course of the ensuing twelve months are portrayed in Figure 2. By the end of the year, 11 of these individuals had moved into settled housing, 11 were still living in a hostel (usually, but not always, the same one as at the beginning), two were staying with family or friends, and two sleeping rough. Of the remaining six participants, four were untraceable and two had, tragically, passed away.

Prevention: preparation for leaving the Services

It was earlier noted that ex-Servicemen who had left the Armed Forces very recently were much more likely to have had some experience of preventative initiatives via the enhanced MoD resettlement package than their older compatriots (see Chapter 3). Their experiences of the resettlement process prior to leaving the Services were nevertheless quite mixed. Many had found the resettlement package very employment-focused. It appeared that few recent leavers had attended the voluntary housing briefings – despite their being available to all Service Leavers (National Audit Office, 2007):

Figure 2: Longitudinal cohort study housing status pathways

Phase 1
(Initial contact)

Phase 2
(+6 months)

Phase 3
(+12 months)

HOSTEL
12 ex-Forces specific
15 mainstream
27

SLEEPING ROUGH
4

SQUAT
1

HOSTEL
10 ex-Forces specific
9 mainstream
19

SLEEPING ROUGH
2

PRIVATE HOTEL
1

SETTLED HOUSING
2 ex-Forces specific
4 council/HA
6

HOSTEL
6 ex-Forces specific
5 mainstream
11

SLEEPING ROUGH
2

STAYING WITH
FAMILY/FRIENDS
2

SETTLED HOUSING
3 ex-Forces specific
7 council/HA
1 private rented
11

18   11

1   1

1

1

2

4

2

2

4

1

6

Deceased - 2
Untraceable - 2

Deceased - 2
Untraceable - 4

Source: Longitudinal cohort study data

> *They tell you how to get a job, how to write a CV. They tell you everything they think you need to know to get a job … But they don't say about the accommodation side of it, what the council needs to do … Some people, knew about it, but others don't. No-one said to me 'Do you realise…?' (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Many interviewees nevertheless emphasised that such information had seemed irrelevant to them at the time, because they already had accommodation arranged (in the short term at least), and/or had no way then of comprehending the challenges that civilian life would present:

> *It didn't seem relevant at the time. I had accommodation sorted out. My parents were okay for me to go back, and I'd assumed I'd move on from there. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *For some of them the reality of civilian life, and all that entails, only really hits them when they're there. They cannot conceive of it whilst they are in the Services. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

> *They're full of confidence, hope and so on … They are told about everything. But in the heightened sense of excitement of leaving and so on, they don't take it in. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

It did in fact appear that the few individuals who discussed their post-discharge accommodation plans with senior officers were the Early Service Leavers[19] undergoing a one-to-one assessment of their vulnerability to social exclusion. The National Audit Office (2007) resettlement programme evaluation drew attention to inconsistencies in the quality of support provided to Early Service Leavers at unit level, and the experiences of interviewees were similarly variable. For example, whilst one was entirely satisfied with the information and advice about housing options offered (which eventually led to a referral to New Belvedere House), another had been unaware that he could discuss such issues with resettlement officers or senior staff at all. This outcome reflects the different degree of seriousness accorded to resettlement by individual Commanding Officers:

> *I had a good boss. I was told two years out 'Right, start doing your training', so I went on everything that was available. So when I was managing soldiers leaving the Forces or being discharged at the end of their Service, it was 'Right, where are you going to live, where are you going to move to?'. I would start this process ... Many others weren't so proactive. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Also echoing fears highlighted in the National Audit Office (2007) evaluation report regarding the ability of first line resettlement staff to determine if an individual Service Leaver is at risk of social exclusion, it was noted that:

> *The senior ranks also have a leadership responsibility, a duty of care to their men to keep en eye on what's going on. But if you're not trained to know what the signs are it's very difficult to do. (central government department representative)*

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[19] That is, those who had served less than four years or been compulsorily discharged (see Appendix I).

Accordingly, several interviewees argued that the MoD could valuably be more proactive in 'checking up' on the wellbeing of ex-Service personnel in the years following discharge and direct them to support services where necessary:

> *It should be recognised that people need debriefing and looking after – perhaps checking up on them after discharge... Being more proactive in offering support. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Awareness of service provision

Recent research conducted in Scotland by the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership (2007) discovered that the majority of ex-Service personnel surveyed were unaware of services for which they were entitled and this was also the case among respondents in this study. Only a minority approached one or more of the ESAG initiatives (as listed in Chapter 1) immediately after they first became homeless – the primary reason being that most were unaware that they existed at that point in time. Most first heard of them by word of mouth, and more often by 'accident' than design (see for example Craig's experience in Box 3).

Perhaps most worryingly, many of the ex-Service personnel contacted via mainstream homelessness agencies had still not heard of ESAG initiatives such as Veterans Aid, the Ex-Service Resettlement Project, Home Base or Project Compass – despite already having been integrated within the homelessness 'system' at the point of first interview. In one extreme case, an individual had been street homeless for 18 months before becoming aware that accessing help from such agencies was even an option. The following comments exemplified widespread views:

> *There's not enough information out there for [ex-Service] people who are on the streets about where they can get help. I never knew this existed. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *I didn't know these places existed, so I couldn't access them. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *They're not advertised. You only hear about them if somebody you know knows about them. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *There seem to be loads of places out there that'll help ex-Servicemen, but the problem is unless you know then you've had it, because there's no advertising. We don't know about them. How can you ask for help if you don't know where to go? (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Furthermore, there was a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding amongst ex-Service personnel regarding the types of, and their eligibility for, services offered by national ex-Forces welfare charities. For example, a few thought that SSAFA assisted families only (not single people), several that they did not qualify for assistance from The Royal British Legion because they had not seen active Service, and a few that they would not be eligible for

support from any such agency because they had served too long ago. For example:

> *[The Royal British Legion] really caters for World War II vets, not able-bodied 50-somethings. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I am not really a veteran… Veterans are supposed to be the ex-combat soldier and I didn't see any active Service. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *I'm not sure how 'ex' they're talking about. Is there a cut-off? (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

More encouragingly, there appeared to be a differentiation in levels of awareness regarding ex-Services welfare agencies (including ESAG initiatives) between younger and older interviewees, thus suggesting that recent attempts to improve awareness of available help are having an impact. Older respondents who left the Services some time ago were far less likely to be aware of ex-Service welfare agencies than younger men and those who had left more recently. Several of the younger ex-Service personnel and/or those most recently discharged explained that they had found the contact details of ESAG initiatives (such as Veterans Aid) within their resettlement information packs, and a few others had been signposted by the SPACES office in Catterick. The additional information provided prior to discharge does therefore appear to be having a positive influence on the awareness of help available, for recent Service Leavers at least.

Temporary accommodation

All ex-Service interviewees had had experience of hostel accommodation at some point in their homeless histories, and the vast majority of cohort study participants were living in a hostel when first interviewed (Figure 2). Ex-Service personnel have an advantage over other groups as they can use mainstream homelessness provision and may also access temporary accommodation in a number of ex-Service specific projects, including New Belvedere House, Home Base, and Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest:

> *Ex-Service personnel have a better chance of getting in somewhere when they're homeless than other people because there's more available to them. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Notably, the 'ex-Service route' appeared to provide faster access to emergency accommodation than did the mainstream homelessness route. For, whilst a few interviewees reported that they had had some difficulty accessing emergency assistance from SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division representatives at mainstream day centres because of the limited hours of their (voluntary) operation, individuals referred (or self-referring) there, or to Veterans Aid, were almost always able to access a bed in New Belvedere House or Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest that day. Those referred to mainstream providers, especially when an ex-Serviceman did not have a

CHAIN referral number[20], often took longer to be given a hostel bedspace. Rapid access to temporary accommodation is a very beneficial element within the ESAG service network, as it limits the negative effects of rough sleeping on health and reduces the likelihood of newly homeless people becoming entwined in street culture (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007).

Opinion amongst ex-Servicemen regarding the relative benefits of ex-Forces specific or mainstream homeless hostels varied. Some deliberately sought out, or reported a preference for, ex-Services hostels because they appreciated the company of residents with shared experiences, and/or the support of staff who 'understood' their Service background:

> *For us it's great because it means that we can share what we're saying to people that we know understand rather than people who are going 'Yes yes I understand' but they don't really and have to get their textbook to find out what you're talking about. It's important, you know. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *All the help and everything that has happened here [hostel] is down to being in the Services. I wouldn't have had the help and attention I've had if I'd moved to another hostel … In those places you are just a number … Here you are a person. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

A number were nevertheless aggrieved that people who did not complete basic training and/or were discharged dishonourably – that is, those they deemed less 'deserving' of specialist support – were eligible for the same services:

> *My only beef about it [the hostel] is that guys that have only been in the Army for a week and are kicked out and find themselves homeless are allowed the same. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Many consciously avoided ex-Service specific hostels because of their aversion to 'military-style' hostel dynamics, shame regarding the manner in which they were discharged from the Armed Forces, or bitterness regarding their prior military experiences:

> *When they wanted me to reenlist I told them to get F'd, you know. I wasn't very pleasant to them. No, I'm finished with the military. I've got no connections with them. I don't heed any help from them. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *He [a client] was complaining a lot that he didn't want to get back into the organisation, because it's all too regimented for him … He thought that the way he was spoken to was too like he was in the Forces again. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

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[20] Being recorded on the CHAIN database (see Chapter 2) can increase an individual street population member's access to gate kept or limited resources in London. For example, a record on CHAIN is normally required before an individual can access accommodation via the Clearing House system.

Whilst a few residents did not particularly like the dynamics of ex-Services hostels, the majority reported appreciating the support of staff and stability offered (see for example Grant's account of hostel life in Box 4):

[The hostel] picked me up, turned me round. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)

To be honest I owe my life to X [hostel staff member] and these people… (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)

…they basically allowed me to heal the stuff that was going on in terms of finance, in terms of emotion. Allowed me time to get back on my feet. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)

I had given up, but X [hostel] and all the supporting staff have given me a reason to try to take that one more step forward. I feel very humbled by all the work that all the staff do for people. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

The practical support of hostel staff and resettlement workers – especially in applying for suitable move-on housing and dealing with official forms – was particularly valued by the ex-Servicemen, and deemed to be crucial in facilitating their successful resettlement.

Similarly, the support of staff to acknowledge and, where appropriate, access additional help to address debt problems were seen by many ex-Service personnel as vital in assisting their progress in life (see for example Thomas' experiences in Box 1).

Prolonged stays in (all) hostels – necessitated by lengthy waits for settled housing (see below) – were however very frustrating for the majority of residents. Approximately one third of cohort study participants were still in hostel accommodation 12 months after initial contact (Figure 2), with some having already been living in hostels for two or more years prior to first interview. Many described hostel life as a 'waiting game', or reported that they felt their lives were 'on hold' or 'in limbo':

I've been really impressed with this place [hostel]. Now I am just waiting for something to come up, it could be tomorrow, it could be next year... (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

Sometimes I thought I was never going to get out of it [the hostel]. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)

Frustration regarding the wait for settled accommodation was more acute in some ex-Forces hostels than others. A few had in fact left one ex-Services hostel and moved into another because they felt their chances of being rehoused would be improved:

I don't think that in this particular project they are providing anything really like coherent – there is no practical – like they aren't trying to find you somewhere to live. They are sort of filing papers and having a chat with you once a week. The whole thing lacks direction really. They don't do anything practical. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

Similarly, another project had a particularly low move-on rate, and resident interviewees had become increasingly despondent by the lack of progress in supporting them to access independent accommodation during the course of the year. One ex-Serviceman had lived there for four years, even though he was being supported by another ex-Service welfare agency.

Similar problems were reported in some of the mainstream hostels utilised by cohort study participants:

> *I spent 14 months inside X [hostel] and nothing shifted … It had got to a point where there was no progression, so I shipped out. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Concern regarding this lack of move-on and/or dissatisfaction with hostel life – particularly a lack of privacy and/or exasperation regarding the behaviour of other residents – caused a small number of interviewees to abandon their hostel place during the course of the year-long study. These individuals normally returned to the street, although one moved into a private residential hotel to 'try again' with a different support agency (see Figure 2). They were nevertheless mindful of the fact that 'taking matters into their own hands' could be regarded as intentional homelessness by councils, thereby lessening their priority for social housing yet further.

Notably, a few ex-Service personnel reported that homelessness agencies – ESAG initiatives and mainstream providers alike – seemed 'at a loss' regarding what to do with ex-Servicemen (including those at risk of homelessness) who did not want to utilise hostel provision. They called for more innovative approaches which might circumvent the need for individuals with low or no support needs to use hostels – particularly for those capable of maintaining a private rented sector tenancy (see below).

Settled housing and support

Accessibility and quality of accommodation

Symptomatic of broader housing market conditions in London, the resettlement of homeless ex-Service personnel by ESAG and other mainstream initiatives is severely impeded by a shortage of suitable settled housing:

> *We just don't have enough housing. The pathway we've established is good, but it ends with us and there's no-one else doing this. We know there are a lot more people at the beginning of that pathway than we can take. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

> *The whole process is jammed up essentially, I think because of the lack of adequate housing at the far end of the system. Consequently there's a backup all the way down through the hostels, onto the streets, into the day centres… There are people who want to move, but the whole system is just clogged up … There's frustration throughout, from the clients, from the staff, from the managers. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

As is the case with temporary accommodation, ex-Service personnel have access to a greater range of routes into settled housing than most other homeless people. Not only may they be allocated social housing or access the private rented sector, but they may also apply for specialist ex-Forces provision from organisations such as The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, Haig Homes, or E. Hayes Dashwood Foundation, for example[21].

Of the options available to them, many ex-Service personnel considered specialist housing provided by ex-Forces agencies to be the best in terms of quality and security of tenure. A number also cited a preference for this type of housing because of the value accorded to their Service history by support staff, described by an ex-Services welfare agency representative in the following way:

> *…while they are [serving] they are valued by their comrades and by their officers, and they get awarded and rewarded as a result of the things that they do … And then they come into civilian life … and they go down the local pub and people say 'Who are you?', sort of thing … They lose that value, and that self-esteem … One of the things that works here is that they've only got the flat because they're ex-Service. So we've already valued them for what they've done … I think that gives us an edge. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

The availability of such housing is however very limited – particularly given that tenants of such schemes tend to remain in residence for the duration of their lifetime (as is the case in the The Sir Oswald Stoll Mansions, for example). Criteria utilised by these and other ex-Services housing projects (e.g. Haig Homes or E. Hayes Dashwood Foundation) – such as priority being given to families, those with a disability, or those with the strongest Service connections – further limited the feasibility of such options, as did a reluctance on the part of many to move out of London given ties in the city. Reflecting these influences, only three of the 11 individuals who were rehoused during the course of the cohort study had moved into ex-Forces specific settled accommodation (Figure 2).

A greater proportion of cohort study participants had moved into social housing – council or Housing Association properties – by the end of the year (Figure 2). This route was regarded as a more 'realistic' option by many. Residents of New Belvedere House aged 50 or older were given greater priority by Tower Hamlets Council and thus typically experienced a shorter wait for a tenancy offer than younger residents. Three formerly homeless interviewees had accepted Housing Association properties outside London – a strategy they regarded as expanding their housing options significantly.

The quality of social housing properties offered to homeless ex-Service personnel was highly variable. Some were reported to have been newly decorated and in excellent condition when interviewees had moved in. Others

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[21] It must be noted, however, that much of the housing stock offered by some of these providers is outside London.

were described as 'dumps' in such a poor state of repair that the ex-Servicemen had turned them down.

Only one of the cohort study participants moved into a private rented sector (PRS) tenancy – see Sam's journey described in Box 4. Many others had contemplated it because they saw it as a potential means of expediting their exit from hostel accommodation but had not done so for a number of reasons. The main barrier to the PRS reported was the lack of resources for the advance rent and deposit. One interviewee had been provided with money for this via a grant from The Royal British Legion, but the others were unaware that this was a possibility. Other deterrents – identified by fewer individuals – included poor security of tenure and the expense of PRS rent. One had recently lost a tenancy because he could no longer afford it when an injury prevented him from working.

Resettlement and tenancy support

The support of hostel staff and/or resettlement workers (from the Ex-Service Resettlement Project, for example), were regarded by the vast majority of ex-Servicemen as having been crucial in identifying potential housing options, completing necessary paperwork for applications, and accompanying interviewees to assess the suitability of potential properties. A few did nevertheless report that they felt that 'everything had been done for them' – to the extent that they were still heavily reliant on homelessness agencies for filling in any official forms after being rehoused.

Almost all the settled accommodation provided to ex-Service personnel was unfurnished, thus the assistance of support staff was also appreciated in sourcing resources to furnish flats and, sometimes, access grants for redecorating. Notably, individuals moving from ex-Service specific hostels or supported in a move from mainstream hostels by ex-Service specific resettlement teams were almost always provided with substantial furnishing grants or packs by The Royal British Legion or other ex-Service welfare organisations (e.g. the Scottish Veterans Society). The others, however, were unaware of their eligibility for such resources and limited to Community Care Grants or (lesser) provisions made by mainstream homelessness agencies. Indeed, access to resources for furnishing settled homes appeared to depend to a significant degree on the knowledge of specialist ex-Services resources amongst support staff – which was often very limited within mainstream homelessness projects (see below).

Most of the ex-Servicemen – including those in Ex-Forces specific and social housing – were happy with their settled accommodation, felt safe, and appreciated the independence that their tenancy afforded:

> I feel like I am one of the luckiest men in the world. Before I came to X [housing project] I had been running around like a headless chicken, I'd been sleeping on the streets... I was just in a state of complete confusion but now I can see things coming together and where I want to be. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

Virtually all rehoused interviewees – with the exception of the small number in the private rented sector – were in receipt of some form of tenancy support. For some this was provided on-site in supported accommodation projects, for others (in independent housing) it was offered via a floating support service. This support – most especially help with utility bills, budgeting, and welfare benefit problems – was greatly valued by the vast majority of interviewees. A small number of particularly vulnerable individuals were very anxious about the potential future withdrawal of such support, thus highlighting the need for the long-term support for some:

> *I really need them [support workers] around me because if I have any problems with a bill or anything they are there to help me. Without that who would I turn to? (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

The post-resettlement support provided by some ex-Service projects was nevertheless described as informal, unstructured, and appeared to be overly reliant on the goodwill of a very small number of staff who 'go the extra mile' in supporting former hostel residents in independent settled housing. Many respondents valued the relationships they had with such staff members, and felt secure in the knowledge that they could call on them for practical help or emotional support whenever necessary. The susceptibility of such arrangements to lulls in activity if staff are off work or busy with other clients, and the fact that support cannot be maintained *ad infinitum* as the list of former residents grows ever longer, means that these arrangements are however fragile and unsustainable in the long term. Furthermore, given growing emphasis on professionalism within the homelessness sector, it may not be viewed as appropriate in going forward for such support to be as dependent as it is on the strength of personal relationships between staff and clients.

Shortages of settled housing for homeless people dictate that allocations are sometimes driven by *availability* rather than *need* (Quilgars et al., 2008). Reflecting this, there was an evident mismatch between the levels of need and support provided for some ex-Servicemen – social housing tenants in particular. For example, one ex-Serviceman in his 60s with a disability had been taken to hospital 'very ill' after spending a period confined to his council flat, drinking excessively and not eating. In stark contrast, another interviewee was 'driven mad' by excessive staff attention in a sheltered housing unit:

> *I had a year of it. I had people knocking at the door, 'Are you alright, do you want any shopping, do you need your washing doing'?' One day I just said 'That's it, enough is enough, I'm not 86, I'm 56, I'm out of here'. And out I walked. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Some providers suggested that the 'jump' from hostel accommodation to an independent tenancy (even with support attached) was too great for some vulnerable ex-Service personnel, and that the existing service network might be strengthened via the development of 'second stage' or 'transitional'

supported accommodation. This, they believed, would provide individuals with medium or high support needs an opportunity to develop important life skills in a supportive environment. This view was shared by a number of ex-Service personnel:

> *Sometimes I do wish they'd [ex-Service agencies would] do what they do in other places. A friend of mine is in a hostel and when they are ready they move into bedsits – still in the same building – to see how they get on. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

An important area of ongoing concern for formerly homeless ex-Service personnel – articulated by a significant number – was social isolation. For some, loneliness was a defining feature of everyday life:

> *It is still a bit odd. Half of me wants to go back to the streets and half wants to stay here [in my flat]. It's my mental condition – and I miss my friends… I miss my friends… The way I feel at the moment I haven't any friends, no companionship, or anything… My condition doesn't help There is no-one around me, no-one to talk to. The only time I see people is when I go to the handouts [soup runs] and see all my friends. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

> *I am still very isolated and lonely… You soon find out who your friends are when you've been homeless and bankrupt… I have to be careful who I mix with – there are a lot of drinkers at X [housing project]. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman)*

Training, employment and recreational activities

A number of interviewees were involved in formal employment and training initiatives provided via Project Compass or New Deal. These were valued for alleviating the boredom of hostel life and combating the loneliness felt by some rehoused ex-Servicemen, and also had a positive impact on feelings of self worth:

> *That turned my life around. If I had just had my accommodation I might have gone wandering again… I did find it hard to adjust. (formerly homeless ex-Serviceman*

> *[The course is] a break from routine. It makes me get out of the hostel … I'm sorry to say it, but as much as anything it is something to do … There's a reason to get up in the morning other than breakfast! (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *It [the training course] was really good. I felt like a normal person again, you know, getting up at eight o'clock and going to work and doing your course and then coming back. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

Voluntary service user involvement in the operation of hostels and supported housing projects, and part-time paid employment secured by some, was reported to have had a similar positive outcome for interviewees.

The potential loss of Housing Benefit if (re)entering employment and high cost of hostel accommodation strongly deterred some hostel residents from pursuing paid work, however:

I'm in a catch 22 situation here. If I go out to work, then a lot of the Housing Benefit stops, so then we end up paying £176 a week rent, plus the £17 service charge … But then if you don't work, you sit here and get bored, but they will pay your rent. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

Several service providers emphasised that a number of their clients had such complex support needs that reintegration into the mainstream workforce was not a realistic option:

Some of the people who come in, of working age, are so damaged that they won't go back to work. (ex-Services welfare agency representative)

We try very hard to do that [move people into training/education/employment]. But there are a good element of the people we will deal with who will never go back to work, because they're not capable of doing that. (ex-Services welfare agency representative)

Many of the older ex-Servicemen believed that their employment prospects were severely constrained by their age – and several were already over retirement age (see Chapter 2). This fact, combined with the alternative prospect of a low income on welfare benefits, served as a major disincentive for some ex-Servicemen to move from the street into settled housing. For example, one explained that:

To get a job at my age [late 50s] is really difficult. It would be low paid, menial. And again, at the end of the month, I would end up with nothing in my pocket. To me, that would be a downward movement, because that would put me in accommodation in a place of isolation away from the world to which I have become accustomed. I would have no companionship, no social life, because I couldn't afford a social life. So at the end of it I would be far worse off. I would have a roof over my head but I would be worse off, because on the street I have companionship. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

Whilst most of the ex-Servicemen in settled housing reported that they were coping financially – sometimes only just – very low incomes further constrained the inclination or ability of many to socialise and/or participate in recreational activities. Some filled their days with trips to the library, went on walks, or visited friends etc., but a number spent the vast majority of their time alone in their flat. Some were happy doing so, others were not and reported feeling bored and isolated. There is a need, therefore, to consider how best to combat the loneliness common in independent settled housing, and also mitigate the boredom reported by those in hostels:

I drink too much, because I'm so bored. It's the boredom that does it. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

Health care

The medical care of Service personnel transfers to the National Health Service after discharge. A significant number of ex-Servicemen were receiving NHS treatment for physical health problems and were, overall,

satisfied with the service received. Provision for mental health problems was however considered to be far from adequate:

> *The fact is that the mental health provision is not what it should be. Not just for Servicemen, but across the board. (central government representative)*

Echoing existing reports regarding the availability of mental health care for homeless people more generally (Quilgars and Pleace, 2003), service providers expressed especially grave concerns about the length of time their clients had to wait for treatment, and the thresholds for service eligibility:

> *There are not enough services out there on the NHS. The lists are too long to treat these people … The criteria for accessing many of these services is very very narrow, in terms of resources, so unless people are in crisis… There's real frustration watching someone gradually go downhill, and knowing that the point at which they're going to get help is the point at which it is too late. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

The secondment of a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) by The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation was regarded as a positive step forward, but several service providers cautioned that this was still 'not enough' to meet demand. Many of the ex-Servicemen interviewed had benefited from the services provided by Combat Stress, but here too demand was regarded as exceeding the supply of places available.

Several ex-Servicemen expressed frustration at the tendency for GPs to prescribe medication but downplay requests for counselling or other therapies for conditions such as depression or anxiety. Many service providers agreed that difficulty accessing counselling represented a major gap in existing services, and that greater investment in such treatment could facilitate the resettlement of homeless ex-Servicemen significantly.

Many of the alcoholic ex-Servicemen had undergone residential detox/rehab programmes and/or utilised the services of agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Most considered these to have been very helpful – indeed sometimes lifesaving – but emphasised the importance of ongoing support to prevent relapses. Alcohol treatment programmes suitable for homeless people have been shown to be a gap in provision (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007), but the tendency for homeless ex-Servicemen to seek camaraderie by drinking in groups might perhaps represent a more significant barrier to the prevention of problems relating to excessive alcohol consumption. Clearly, any attempts to reduce alcohol consumption by homeless ex-Service personnel must consider ways of meeting the social need that group drinking acts as a conduit for.

Inter-agency joint working

There was a clear consensus amongst service providers that joint working between ex-Service welfare agencies had improved considerably since the development of ESAG:

> *[Joint working has] improved massively with ESAG, as people have begun to realise that other are people around the table with expertise in almost every area of homelessness … Signposting … wasn't always happening in the past. Some of the charities were trying to help people in areas that they had no skills or expertise in. So the umbrella effect of ESAG has been very good. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)*

Client referral procedures between ESAG and other ex-Forces projects were reported to have improved, thus facilitating ex-Servicemen's access to many other services. Some communication problems remained, however. A few ex-Servicemen had felt let down after being assured of their registration on certain training courses, only to turn up and discover that there they were not because of administrative errors or miscommunications between the referring agency and course provider:

> *There could be much better communication between all the services that are there for us. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

In a small number of cases, the reasons for referral to other agencies were not understood fully by the ex-Servicemen involved. Some were unsure why they were being supported by particular services and/or were unclear about the project objectives or the kinds of support they should expect, or might legitimately request, from support workers.

There remains significant scope for improvement in relationships with mainstream homelessness agencies. Importantly, interviews with mainstream agency representatives and ex-Servicemen revealed that staff knowledge of the services available to ex-Service clientele (a few projects excepted[22]) is generally poor:

> *[Street outreach teams and hostel key workers] don't give you any information about those services. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

> *I don't think the day centres and things know much about the services available to ex-Servicemen. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)*

As a consequence, many ex-Servicemen had not been informed about their eligibility for support such as the furniture packs and grants provided by The Royal British Legion when being moved into settled housing, nor the housing opportunities offered by agencies such as Haig Homes or The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, for example.

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[22] An important exception is Connections at St Martins, for whom one member of regular staff also operates as a SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division volunteer.

Concerted, but relatively informal and piecemeal, attempts have been made by some ESAG services to advertise their provisions amongst, and improve working relationships with, a number of mainstream service providers in recent years. The benefits of doing so have nevertheless been short-lived or otherwise limited for two reasons. First, given the high turnover of staff (particularly key workers) within most mainstream hostels and day centres, improved awareness of ESAG provisions has often had a short 'shelf life' among frontline staff in any given project. Second, some mainstream providers had been deterred from engagement with (any) welfare organisations catering specifically for ex-Service personnel because of prior negative experiences dealing with ex-Forces welfare charities (not necessarily ESAG providers). Most notably, some mainstream staff resented having to 'prove' that their clients had 'left well' – i.e. had not been dishonourably discharged from the Armed Forces – in order to secure assistance. They also expressed concern about the lack of professionalisation of ex-Forces charity representatives and/or were critical of the manner in which their (often very vulnerable) clients had been treated in communications:

> It used to be lot of work trying to identify which service/agency could help... Then when you did identify the right organisation, the workers – often volunteers – were not actually very good. Either because they didn't know what they were doing or because they were retired officers which is not very helpful for men coming from the ranks. It was the wrong approach, a very paternalistic approach... I think it is better now … But there are still difficulties in working between generic and specialist services... (mainstream homeless service provider)

Whilst acknowledging that different funding and governance arrangements present a number of challenges to joint working, service providers and homeless interviewees argued that the needs of homeless ex-Service personnel would be better met if existing services were more 'streamlined', and there was a single (or at least a 'main') well-advertised central point of access providing consistent and accurate information. This would also potentially mitigate the need for multiple assessments and minimise the tendency for ex-Service personnel to feel that they are passed from pillar to post or given conflicting advice:

> There should be one place where you can go for decent advice, with informed staff who won't send you somewhere where you'll just get bounced back. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

> The services [for homeless ex-Service personnel] are bitsy. There's no central control over anything … You get told different things by different people. (currently homeless ex-Service cohort study participant)

> It's nonsense that it's all split up. It should all be under one roof. We end up working with the same people anyway. It doesn't make any sense … It needs to be more joined up … We could possibly do better for Servicemen. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)

Looking beyond London

It was noted in Chapter 2 that the proportion of homeless people with a military background may potentially be higher in other parts of the UK than the figures here reported for London. Some ESAG services – particularly Veterans Aid – frequently receive requests for assistance from homeless ex-Service personnel outside the capital. Several of the ex-Servicemen interviewed had moved to London after encountering housing crises elsewhere in the UK – often attracted by the employment opportunities and higher salaries – but sometimes because of assumptions regarding the greater availability of services for homeless people. The replication of elements of the ESAG service network in other parts of Britain may therefore be a welcome development if indeed there proves to be a need for such services outside London.

Any plans to roll out services for homeless ex-Service personnel beyond London should nevertheless be preceded by an intensive audit of need – focusing not just on the prevalence of ex-Forces homelessness, but also the adequacy of existing mainstream provisions, in any given area. Given that many ex-Service personnel return 'home' after discharge to the area in which they grew up (see Chapter 3), and that Homeless Link (2007) discovered higher levels of ex-Service homelessness in communities close to military bases, research might perhaps be targeted in areas of concentrated recruitment and garrison towns in the first instance.

Any audit of need must take into consideration arrangements at all stages along the journey to resettlement, including: frontline advice and practical assistance (e.g. street outreach teams and day/drop-in centres); temporary accommodation for homeless people with low and high support needs, including second-stage supported accommodation where appropriate; settled housing; and tenancy sustainment and related services.

It must be borne in mind that gaps in provision affecting homeless ex-Service personnel elsewhere might be addressed most appropriately and cost effectively by strengthening existing mainstream homelessness services in the area – particularly given the strong parallels between the support needs of the majority of homeless ex-Service personnel and other homeless people more generally (e.g. provision of treatment for mental health problems, physical health care, budgeting advice, strategies for addressing social isolation etc.).

Given the lack of awareness of ex-Service specific provision amongst mainstream providers in London, it is imperative that the development of any additional or expanded services be done in close liaison with existing local or regional inter-agency forums, and accompanied by extensive advertising campaigns reaching staff (at managerial and frontline levels) from a wide range of support agencies. Ideally, homeless ex-Service personnel should be able to access a whole range of services from a 'one stop shop' or central referral point:

We need something to pull it all together, to give us a common umbrella. That would improve the lot of ex-Servicemen on the street. Particularly if you could come into one venue and plug into all the services … There'd be one place that people could go to get the help that they need, whatever that need might be. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)

The development of new, or additional support of existing, provision elsewhere may potentially alleviate, to at least some extent, the existing pressure on settled housing for this group in the capital. Providers must however be mindful of the likely added social housing burden placed on the host local authority – and implications for Supporting People funding in particular.

Whatever the measurement of need outside London reveals, and nature of subsequent action to redress gaps in provision, it is clear that the circumstances of homeless ex-Service personnel throughout the UK would be greatly improved if mainstream homelessness agencies were better informed about specialist resources available to ex-Service personnel. This being so, a case could be made for developing resources – perhaps akin to the service directory provided by ESAG (2004a) – containing details of the whole range of specialist support to which ex-Service clients may be entitled at the national and/or regional levels.

Should ESAG projects be replicated, or different programmes developed, for homeless ex-Service personnel elsewhere, providers should ensure that the resultant local service networks incorporate elements that are widely regarded as effective in meeting the needs of homeless people. It should be noted that many of these 'accepted wisdoms' are not based upon formal evaluations – indeed many programmes used in the UK homelessness sector have not been subjected to rigorous independent evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Pawson et al., 2007; Quilgars et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the following are generally regarded to be good practice:

- Rapid referral to emergency accommodation by street outreach teams, day centres, advice centres and other 'first ports of call' for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al.*,* 2005; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007).

- The provision of a range of temporary accommodation schemes, with different models and levels of support, thus catering for different needs and offering service users a degree of choice (Jones and Higate, 2000; Fitzpatrick et al., 2005). It is widely acknowledged that smaller, more specialised, schemes are preferable to larger generic services.

- Providers should avoid assuming that homeless people should necessarily follow a 'linear' path though a progressive network of services (e.g. from street outreach, to a direct access hostel, to second-stage accommodation, then an independent tenancy). In some instances it may be appropriate for an individual to move into settled housing more directly, with tailored support (e.g. floating support).

- Detailed evaluations of clients' health care and/or other support needs should be conducted early. These should assess substance misuse and mental health problems etc., but also consider what might be done to combat boredom and/or social isolation, where applicable. Service users should be fully involved in care planning.

- Joint assessments and effective information sharing between relevant agencies using agreed procedures can reduce the need for multiple evaluations, help to avoid duplication of effort, and ensure that the needs of clients are addressed. Effective multi-agency working also reduces the risk of homeless people becoming 'fed up having to repeat their story' and thus disengaging with support interventions.

- Where support needs such as mental health or substance misuse problems are identified, in-house programmes should be implemented, or referrals to external programmes made, as soon as feasibly possible. Resettlement is unlikely to be successful if these other needs are not adequately catered for (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). Providers should ensure that clients understand fully why they have been referred to a specific programme, and what they might expect from service providers.

- Temporary and transitional accommodation schemes should, from the first contact with clients, work towards moving them on and, where necessary, provide opportunities for residents to develop independent living skills in a supportive environment (Jones et al., 2001). Models may include, for example, pre-tenancy education programmes and/or the use of 'training flats'. Transitional housing services can act as a smaller scale and lower cost alternative to hostels for some homeless people, and may be a logical option in some rural areas (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003).

- Help with identifying and applying for appropriate settled accommodation is widely regarded as essential in facilitating successful resettlement (as noted above). Ex-Service personnel should be encouraged to consider *all* appropriate housing options so that they do not constrain their choices unnecessarily. Although the private rented sector may not be suitable for all clients it can offer greater choice of type of accommodation and location. Providers should explore the use of rent deposit / rent deposit guarantee schemes and, where necessary, the provision of support to tenants in the private sector (Rugg, 2003; Pawson et al., 2006; Hoffland and Watson, 2007; Jones, 2007).

- The desire to avoid fostering unnecessary dependency on resettlement services must be balanced with an acknowledgement that some homeless people – particularly older individuals and/or those with complex needs – will require support in the long term (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003).

- Floating support is generally regarded as effective in helping formerly homeless and vulnerable individuals sustain independent tenancies (Quilgars et al., 2008). It can be employed flexibly, in a client-centred

manner. Furthermore, because floating support is not tied to a specific accommodation project, its provision ensures that recipients do not need to move if their support needs change over time.

- Tenancy sustainment schemes are highly diverse in character but typically provide help with claiming benefits, budgeting, debt management, accessing community resources, and finding appropriate work, employment, training or other activities. It is important to note that:

  ➢ Practical assistance in moving, furnishing and decorating a new home is important in helping people feel confident about moving and in settling into their new homes (Jones et al*.,* 2002).

  ➢ Help with financial management and dealing with official forms is commonly regarded by homeless people as key in helping them maintain their tenancies, yet is often identified as an unmet need (Pleace et al., 2008; Quilgars et al., 2008). Providers should work towards helping service users deal with bureaucracy and form filling independently.

  ➢ It is widely acknowledged that boredom and social isolation can lead to failures in resettlement (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003; Jones and Pleace, 2005), and tenancy support services should work with clients to find suitable activities (work, training, employment or leisure pursuits and interests). This can also help clients avoid or reduce harmful behaviour such as excessive drinking (Jones et al., 2001).

- Key elements of 'what works' in tenancy sustainment and other provision for homeless individuals include:

  ➢ flexible and client centred provision where the intensity and duration of support is determined by the needs of individual recipients and changes, as necessary, over time;

  ➢ close liaison, effective information sharing and joint planning with key agencies, building in support from other organisations when necessary (Jones and Higate, 2000; Pawson et al*.,* 2007); and

  ➢ where appropriate, clear exit strategies negotiated with the client.

Whatever decisions are made, it is imperative that agencies work together effectively to maximise beneficial outcomes for homeless, or potentially homeless, ex-Service personnel:

There are all sorts of organisations doing all sorts of bits and pieces all over the country. Most of them are doing it against each other. They're all trying to get the same money. I think sometimes there's a tendency to forget what they're doing it for, i.e. the veteran, or the homeless. (ex-Service welfare agency representative)

Conclusion

The preventative initiatives employed via the pre-discharge resettlement programme appear to be having a positive impact, in that recent Service Leavers are more aware of the support available to homeless people than those who left the Armed Forces many years ago. More could however be done to ensure that the wellbeing of Service Leavers – particularly Early Service Leavers – is proactively monitored after discharge. This is of particular importance given the tendency for Service Leavers to (optimistically) regard housing advice as irrelevant to them at the point of discharge.

Despite such improvements in awareness, there remains a cohort of ex-Service personnel who did not benefit from the enhanced resettlement package and will thus remain unaware of the provisions available to assist them should they experience, or find themselves at risk of, homelessness. Importantly, knowledge regarding the ESAG initiatives and resources available from other ex-Forces welfare agencies is generally poor amongst homeless ex-Service personnel and mainstream homelessness agencies.

Ex-Service personnel have a greater range of temporary accommodation and settled housing options available to them than do most other homeless people. The ex-Service route typically provides quicker access to emergency accommodation and the specialist ex-Forces settled housing is of high quality, but the availability of ex-Forces specific settled housing is limited given low client turnover. Specialist ex-Forces provision is seen by many as offering a number of advantages – particularly the company of people with shared experiences and the value accorded to their Service history. Some ex-Service personnel do not like the dynamics within such projects and/or refuse to utilise such provision, however.

The expansion of priority need categories in homelessness legislation to include people who are vulnerable as a result of having served in the Armed Forces has had little tangible effect on the experiences of homeless ex-Service personnel in London. In practice it is only those with serious physical or mental health problems who are deemed to be in priority need and owed the main homelessness duty. The majority of homeless ex-Servicemen are low priority for social housing, as are other single homeless men more generally.

The support of staff prior to, during, and after a move into settled housing was considered crucial to successful resettlement. The structure of post-tenancy support varied, but was in some projects delivered in an unsustainable manner and requires greater formalisation. The quality of life of some rehoused ex-Service personnel was severely compromised by social isolation and loneliness.

The most significant shortfalls in provision were poor availability of settled housing, and gaps in mental health provision – particularly treatment for lower level mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

Inter-agency joint working had improved significantly in recent years – due at least in part to the co-ordinating influence of ESAG. There was nevertheless still scope for the 'streamlining' of services to ease access and improvement in communication with mainstream homelessness agencies. Doing so would not only expedite ex-Service personnel's access to assistance when in crisis, but increase awareness of the resources to which they are entitled when being rehoused.

The question of whether there is a need for services similar to those provided by ESAG outside London will only be determined after an intensive audit of need elsewhere. Any attempts to replicate elements of the ESAG service network – should there prove to be a need for such interventions – should incorporate those factors identified in this chapter as facilitating the resettlement of ex-Service personnel, whilst taking into account the recommendations arising from the study outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to assess the scale and nature of homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in London and to evaluate the effectiveness of existing provision in reducing ex-Service homelessness in the capital. This chapter summarises the key conclusions of the study and outlines recommendations arising from the research.

Conclusions

Number, characteristics and experiences of homeless ex-Service personnel in London

At approximately six per cent, the current proportion of London's non-statutory (single) homeless population having served in the Armed Forces appears to have reduced significantly since the mid-1990s. The number of such individuals experiencing homelessness does however remain significant – there being an estimated 1,100 non-statutory (single) homeless ex-Service personnel, and 2,500 ex-Service personnel within a statutorily homeless family, living in London on any given day.

Homeless ex-Service personnel are almost exclusively male, most are of White ethnic background, and they have an older age profile than the homeless population as a whole. Their vulnerabilities and support needs are, on the whole, very similar in *nature* to those of other homeless people, but a greater *proportion* of ex-Service personnel have alcohol, physical and/or mental health problems. Only a minority report vulnerabilities and support needs that are unique to those with a history of the Armed Forces.

The personal histories and pathways into homelessness reported by ex-Service personnel vary significantly. It would be inappropriate to assume that the figures cited above consist solely of individuals who have spent the greater part of their adult life serving Queen and country and later became homeless because they were 'institutionalised' or suffered from the after effects of active Service.   Some did attribute their homelessness to problems arising during their Service (most commonly alcohol or mental health problems), or to difficulties adjusting to civilian life (particularly employment and 'normal' family life). Many others – and indeed the greater majority – believed that their homelessness derived at least in part from vulnerabilities that preceded enlistment, or resulted from an entirely unrelated personal crisis later in life (such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, or financial problems). Many had devoted a significant proportion of their working life to the Armed Forces, but others had left after only a very short time – sometimes before completing basic training.

There are many parallels between the causes of homelessness amongst, and support needs of, ex-Service personnel and the wider homeless population. It is clear, however, that a Service history influences – and often quite

profoundly – *how* ex-Servicemen *experience* homelessness. They consider themselves better equipped to endure, and are less fearful of, the hardships of street life. They are also less inclined to seek or accept help given their elevation of the perceived 'shame' of their situation. These factors, together with their greater tendency to drink heavily – which many claim was initiated or exacerbated by the military lifestyle – combine to make them more susceptible to sustained or repeat homelessness.

Thus, whilst the overwhelming majority of ex-Service personnel make a successful transition to civilian life and only a very small minority experience homelessness, the characteristics and experiences of those who do dictate that a particularly proactive and co-ordinated response is required.

Effectiveness of provision for homeless ex-Service personnel in London

A greater range of support options is available to homeless ex-Service personnel than most other members of the homeless population in London. In addition to mainstream homelessness services, they are eligible for specialist ex-Forces hostels, resettlement support, settled housing schemes, and employment initiatives – many of which are supported by ESAG. Some ex-Service personnel prefer ex-Service specific provision because they enjoy the company of people with shared experiences and appreciate the way staff value and 'understand' their Service history. Others, however, will not utilise dedicated projects given their dislike of the dynamics in such provision, elevated feelings of 'shame', and/or negative feelings toward the Armed Forces.

The reduction in the proportion of London's homeless population with a history of the Services and successful resettlement of many homeless ex-Service personnel indicates that the current service network is leading to positive outcomes. Most notably, the ex-Service 'route' provides quicker access to emergency accommodation than does generic provision; the specialist settled accommodation is regarded to be of high quality; and individuals rehoused via the ESAG network are provided with more resources to furnish their new tenancy.

There are, however, also a number of weaknesses in the existing service network for ex-Service personnel in London. Perhaps most importantly, awareness of services amongst potential clientele and mainstream homelessness agencies regarding ESAG initiatives and the more general provisions offered by other ex-Forces organisations is generally poor. Recent Service Leavers are however more aware of such provisions than their older counterparts, suggesting that the influence of ESAG and enhanced pre-discharge resettlement package offered by the Armed Forces may have a preventative impact in the long term. There will nevertheless remain a cohort of older ex-Service personnel who have not had the benefit of this information and advice for a number of years yet.

The resettlement of homeless ex-Service personnel in London is impeded by a serious shortage of settled housing, as is the case for homeless people

more generally within the capital. Lengthy stays in hostels whilst awaiting settled housing – often long beyond the point at which ex-Servicemen felt ready to move into independent settled accommodation – meant that many felt that their lives were 'on hold'. Service providers identified a particular need for more 'transitional' models of accommodation to bridge the gap between hostel accommodation and independent living for ex-Service personnel with medium or high support needs.

Support provided in the lead up to, and period following, rehousing was greatly valued by ex-Service personnel, and deemed critical to the tenancy sustainment of many. It was however often provided in an unstructured and potentially unsustainable manner – particularly to those rehoused in independent social tenancies.

The quality of life of a significant number of formerly homeless ex-Service personnel was severely compromised by social isolation and loneliness. Tenancy support was considered critical in alleviating this, as well as in supporting ex-Service personnel with money/debt management in their new home.

Provision for homeless ex-Service personnel with mental health problems – particularly 'low-level' conditions such as depression – was considered insufficient to meet levels of demand.

Notably, the expansion of priority need categories in homelessness legislation to include people deemed vulnerable as a result of having served in HM Forces has had little observable effect on the experiences of homeless ex-Service personnel. In practice, only those with serious physical or mental health problems are accepted as being owed the main homelessness duty. Most homeless ex-Servicemen are low priority for social housing, as are single homeless men in the general population.

Recommendations

The prevention of homelessness amongst, and resettlement of, ex-Service personnel may be further enhanced if a number of issues are taken into consideration.

It could be argued that the ex-Service homelessness prevention remit lies primarily in the hands of the MoD and Armed Forces resettlement and post-discharge support programmes. For, by the time most ex-Service personnel seek help, or are 'discovered' by frontline support agency staff (e.g. street outreach teams), they are already homeless. Early indications suggest that these preventative measures are beginning to have a positive impact, but their influence might potentially be enhanced by:

- Firstly, considering ways of breaking down the 'shame' barrier that inhibits ex-Service personnel from accepting help. Organisations involved in the resettlement housing and finance briefings may potentially play a role here by emphasising ex-Service personnel's 'entitlement' to services, as a

means of overcoming the connotations of 'failure' commonly associated with their utilisation. Alternatively, it might be appropriate for independent civilian agencies to play a greater role in the assessment and provision of support to Service Leavers. This may avoid the problem of Service Leavers being reluctant to discuss housing or other difficulties with their superiors.

- Either way, the relevance of the resettlement programme housing and financial briefings must be actively promoted given the widespread assumption amongst Service Leavers that 'everything will be fine' after discharge and that such information will be of little value to them. It must also be made clear that information about where and how to access advice and support will remain available to Service Leavers throughout their post-discharge lives.

- There is an apparent need for Commanding Officers and resettlement staff to be trained in detecting symptoms of vulnerability or risk factors for social exclusion amongst Service Leavers – Early Service Leavers in particular.

- In addition, the Armed Forces might valuably be more proactive in monitoring the welfare of ex-Service personnel – especially those identified as at risk of social exclusion – at defined periods following discharge so that they might be signposted to welfare services as appropriate.

There is a clear need for ESAG to increase awareness of the services available amongst the ex-Service community and mainstream homelessness providers – at both managerial and frontline levels. In particular, staff should be alerted to the types of support offered by dedicated homelessness projects in London as well as the more general provisions made by national ex-Forces welfare agencies such as The Royal British Legion, SSAFA and so on. Furthermore, the accessibility and effectiveness of ESAG services would be improved if they were more streamlined and had a well-advertised central point of contact or access.

Given the shortage of settled housing within London, there is a case for providing more settled accommodation in a range of forms to cater for differing levels and types of support need. In particular, greater provision of 'transitional' or 'second stage' accommodation is needed for ex-Service personnel with medium or high support needs who currently find the 'jump' from hostel accommodation to an independent tenancy very difficult to cope with. Such projects should enable them to develop the skills needed and build confidence in their ability to live independently within a supportive environment. Referrals to such projects should operate in such a way as to ensure that they are needs- rather than supply-driven, and offer continuity of support to individual ex-Service personnel.

Greater use might also be made of the private rented sector to provide settled accommodation for ex-Service personnel, with associated support. Whilst this

option must always be adopted very carefully given the 'risks' involved (see Chapter 4; also Jones, 2007), doing so may circumvent the need for individuals with minimal support needs to have to navigate the orthodox (and often lengthy) 'homelessness route'. Ex-Forces welfare organisations might potentially play a valuable role in facilitating this by developing rent deposit schemes. Any such scheme should nevertheless include appropriately tailored tenancy support provisions, ensure that private rented accommodation will remain affordable for ex-Service personnel re-entering paid employment, and offer tenancies of a reasonable duration.

Given the inadequacy of existing support provided to some ex-Servicemen after being rehoused – and reliance on the strength of personal relationships between clients and individual staff members – there is a compelling need for the formalisation of such arrangements, including the development of structured procedures with clear exit strategies that will not be vulnerable to collapse in the event of staff absences, for example. Only then will the sustainability of support provided to formerly homeless ex-Service personnel be assured in the long term.

Advice and assistance with budgeting and debt management should be integral to all programmes utilised by tenancy support schemes, and within hostels, given their effectiveness in facilitating tenancy sustainment.

Further consideration should be given to combating the social isolation amongst ex-Service personnel in independent settled housing, and the boredom experienced by many in hostels. This is especially important for individuals with substance misuse problems who are particularly prone to drink in excess in such situations.

On a related note, it is imperative that support agencies work towards devising means of filling the social 'vacuum' that a reduction in drinking leaves in the lives of alcoholic ex-Servicemen. Doing so will not only reduce the likelihood of recidivism after substance misuse treatment programmes, but enable ex-Service personnel to engage more proactively with other support interventions, whilst also improving their overall quality of life.

In addition, greater provision of treatment for mental health problems amongst homeless ex-Service personnel is needed, particularly for individuals with less severe conditions that do not meet current treatment eligibility criteria (e.g. depression). Particular consideration should be given to offering counselling services, thus potentially preventing the deterioration of individuals' psychological wellbeing to the point that they 'qualify' for oversubscribed NHS provisions.

There is also a need for research into the numbers and needs of homeless ex-Service personnel in other parts of the UK. Measurement of the issue might be aided if ESAG were to advocate the adoption of an agreed definition of ex-Service homelessness which could then be rolled out across as many internal record keeping systems and shared databases as possible. These might include, for example, records kept by hostels, street outreach teams,

supported housing projects, and training and employment programmes, alongside systems employed by social landlords. The agreed definition should be utilised in any future survey work relating to this group. The exact nature of the question to be adopted in client assessments would need to be negotiated, but must be employed uniformly. It might however be phrased something along the lines of: "Have you at any point served in the British Army, Royal Air Force or Royal Navy (including basic training), or in the Merchant Navy in a conflict zone?".

A thorough audit of need should be conducted before replication of elements of ESAG provision outside London is considered. It is imperative that any consequent action – should there prove to be an identifiable need for such resources – be preceded by liaison regarding the nature and adequacy of existing provision with providers and local authority representatives in potential recipient localities. Integral to this process should be careful determination of the extent to which the numbers of homeless ex-Service personnel are high enough to warrant dedicated provision, and/or the extent to which existing mainstream service networks may be modified to meet identified needs. This should be accompanied by an assessment of the relative cost implications of specialist versus enhanced mainstream service development.

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Appendix I: Glossary

'Statutorily homeless people'
Statutorily homeless people are within households that are entitled to be accommodated under the terms of the homelessness legislation. To qualify for accommodation, a household must usually contain dependent children and/or an adult with support needs. In most instances, lone individuals will only be accommodated under the terms of the legislation if they have a vulnerability (i.e. a support need) which makes them unable to secure housing without assistance. Households must also not be 'intentionally' homeless, i.e. homeless through deliberate action or inaction. If households do not have a local connection to the local authority area where they apply for assistance, and do not have a local connection to another UK local authority in which they are not at risk of domestic violence, then the duty to accommodate can be transferred to that other authority. Since July 2002, applicants seeking help from a local authority who are unintentionally homeless and vulnerable as a result of having been a member of HM Armed Forces are in a priority need category, and are owed a main homelessness duty. Prior to this amendment to the law, experience of having served in the Armed Forces did not, in itself, place someone in a priority need group.

'Single homeless people' or *'non-statutorily homeless people'*
The phrase 'single homeless people' is used to broadly describe those people who are ineligible for accommodation under the terms of the homelessness legislation (hence 'non-statutorily' homeless people). The term 'single' is used because it is overwhelmingly lone person households without children who are ineligible. In practice, the term has a broader applicability, because all those individuals in temporary accommodation, night shelters and short stay supported accommodation, who are *not* in the process of being accommodated by a local authority, fall within the 'single homeless' group. This group includes homeless individuals who have not have approached a local authority for assistance and who might be found to be eligible for rehousing, due to vulnerability, if they had done so.

'*Rough sleeping'*
There is no exact definition rough sleeping, but it is generally taken to mean sleeping outdoors or in buildings not normally used for human habitation (e.g. a car park) when an individual has no accommodation.

'Homeless Ex-Service Personnel'
Homeless people (in any of these groups) with experience of being in the Armed Forces. It is important to note that this includes those individuals who leave the Services prior to completion of basic training, and merchant seamen who have served in a theatre of war.

 'Service Leavers'
Personnel discharged from the Armed Forces.

'Early Service Leaver'
Personnel leaving the Armed Forces with less than four years service or as a result of compulsory discharge.

'Theatre'
The location or area in which a military operation takes place.

'Basic training' or 'Initial training'
The Common Military Syllabus is undertaken during basic training by all recruits who join the Armed Forces. It consists of learning basic military skills such as weapon handling, drill, security procedures, basic field craft, physical fitness, education (the organisation of the military and what it does worldwide), and military history. It also involves map reading, first aid, and time for sport and adventurous training. This common syllabus moulds recruits to a standard at which they can progress onto the specialist military training for which they have been selected.

Appendix II: Interview Topic Guides

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND FRONTLINE STAFF
TOPIC GUIDE

Introductions. Explain research, confidentiality and ask for permission to record interview. Consent form.

Project description:
- target group
- aims/ethos
- services provided
- # of clients on casebook/through doors/resettled etc. annually
- funding sources
- 'position' within service network etc.

(Change in) proportions of ESP in London's homeless population / project clientele (esp. since 1997)? Possible explanations for change?

Describe characteristics, experiences and needs of homeless ESP in London – identifying/emphasising differences between ESP and other homeless people:
- age, gender, ethnicity
- background (childhood/family life, employment, housing history etc)
- length of time between leaving Armed Forces and homelessness
- length of time served in services
- physical health
- mental health
- substance misuse (drug/alcohol)

Any changes/trends in composition/needs of homeless ESP?
- Possible explanations?
- How do these changes compare to those witnessed within the homeless population generally?
- Implications for service provision/policy?

What are the most common reasons for/ routes into / triggers for rough sleeping and homelessness amongst ESP? How do these compare to those of the general homeless population?

Why do some ESP appear more likely than other homeless people to experience sustained periods of homelessness? Implications for service providers?

What measures/strategies might be used to prevent homelessness amongst ESP?

What are the key factors facilitating/inhibiting successful and sustained resettlement of ESP?

What do existing projects do well / not so well in dealing with homeless ESP? (probe temporary accommodation, move-on accommodation, physical/mental health, substance misuse, meaningful occupation, education/training/employment etc). In particular, probe re ESAG initiatives:
- Ex-service Resettlement Project
- Ex-service Fellowship Centre (New Belvedere House)
- Home Base
- Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation
- SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division
- Project Compass

Any gaps in provision for this group? How might these be addressed?

Extent of knowledge of / access to Local Authority services amongst ESP? Any barriers to accessing these? If so, how might these be overcome?

Should/how might successful services or aspects of services be 'rolled out' beyond London?

Where do ESP feature in terms of funding priorities / homelessness policies? [probe re effect of changing priority need categories]

To what degree are the needs of homeless ESP recognised within current funding/commissioning arrangements?

Anything else we should have asked?

Other - potential contacts/interviewees:
a) people in policy / strategy / commissioning roles
b) service providers (management and staff)

FORMERLY HOMELESS EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL
TOPIC GUIDE

Introductions. Explain research, confidentiality and ask for permission to record interview. Consent form.

1. Current Situation

I'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about yourself and your current situation.

- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
    - How long have you been living here?
    - Type of accommodation (flat/house, shared/independent)

2. Routes into the services

- Which service were you in?
- *How long was your total length of service?
- Why did you want to join? (probe push/pull factors)
- How old were you when you joined up?
    - What were you doing immediately before joining up? (school, college, university, training, employment)?
    - Qualifications on joining service.
- *Where were you living at the time you joined up? (location and housing situation e.g. with parents, partner, friends, care leaver etc).
[probe for childhood experiences esp history of care, abuse etc.]

3. Experiences of services

- Where did you do your initial training?
    - Where were you based afterwards?
    - (if did not complete explore reasons why and what happened next)
    - *Were you involved in active service? Where? When?
- *Looking back at your time in the service can you tell me a bit about your experiences (good and/or bad) (probe for problems such as bullying, racism, homophobia, PTSD etc)
- *You said that you were in the service for x years – what was your rank and trade when you left?
    - *And what about relationships at the time – did you marry/have a partner/children?
    - Had you stayed in contact with family/friends when in the services?
- *When and why did you decide that you were going to leave the service?
    - Did you think about what you would do when you left? (where to live, housing, employment, other?).
    - Did you prepare for discharge in any way? How?
    - Were you offered advice from the service about what you would do when you were discharged/left the service? Was this helpful? Why/why not?
- What did you do when you were discharged/left the service?
    - work
    - housing
    - contact with family/friends etc.?
- What happened next?
    - Any problems finding work, housing, in resettling in general?

4. Experiences of homelessness

- When and where did you become homeless?
- What happened? (reason for homelessness)
- What did you do when you first found yourself homeless?
    - Did you know what to do/where to go?
    - Did you think of asking for help from someone from the services at the time?
- What happened then? (brief homelessness history etc).
- *Did you ever sleep rough? How often? (when was last time?, total duration)

5. Service Use

- Did you go to your LA (council) for help?
    - Why/why not?
    - What happened?

Services for ex-Service personnel
If not mentioned earlier check whether used or heard of any of these services.
Did you approach any of the following for help/have you heard of these?
    1) *SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division* (assessment and support, housing advice/referrals, welfare grants; accessed via Connections at St Martins after initial assessment)
    2) *Ex-service Fellowship Centres*:
        a) *New Belvedere House* (hostel for ESP in East London)
        b) *Relief Centre* (in SW1, offers cash grants, clothing, meal/travel vouchers, advice/assistance with benefits and job applications etc.)
    3) *Ex-service Resettlement Project* (comprehensive assessment and resettlement for ESP with history of homelessness, poor mental health and/or alcohol problems; works from a number of centres)
    4) *Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation* (supported housing for disabled ESP incl those with mental health and/or alcohol problems)
    5) *Home Base* (supported housing for ESP looking for home and job in London)
    6) *Project Compass* (assistance for return to sustained employment and independence)
    7) *The Royal British Legion* (local branches offering wide range of welfare grants, advice re war pensions/benefits etc.)

For those used,
    - what sort of help did you receive?
    - what were the good and bad things about it?

- If not used – why not? (lack of awareness, access, barriers, choice?).

Other Homelessness Services
- Did you use any other services for homeless people?
    - If so what services? e.g., day centres, night shelters, hostels, soup runs etc
- If not used – why not? (access, barriers, choice?).

6. Resettlement process / current situation
- Which agencies/services helped you get your current accommodation?
- Can you explain what happened – how they helped?(finding accommodation
- Did you have any choice in where you moved to (type of accommodation/area)? Any problems with this? (Happy with accommodation/area or not?).
- How long did you have to wait before being given this accommodation?
- Were there any problems with the accommodation (state of decoration/repair)? If so did you receive any help to address these problems?
- Was your accommodation furnished or unfurnished when you moved in? If unfurnished, were you given any help with getting furniture, white goods etc.? Who by?

- Did you feel ready to move on and live on your own?
- How settled do you feel living here now?
- How do you feel you are managing? Any problems with bills or benefits? If having difficulty, are you getting any help with this? Who from?
- What about finding things to do with your day – what do you do? (work, training, education, day centres etc).
- What would you hope to be doing in a couple of years time (in terms of work, training etc.)?
- Where would you hope to be living in a couple of years time? (type of accommodation, location etc.)
- Do you know people around here? (Friends/people you can socialise with).
- Are you still in contact with your family? What about friends from the services?

7. Support needs and help provided

Thinking back over the time you have been/were homeless I'd like to ask you about the help you needed at certain points and whether you feel you were provided with appropriate support.

- Thinking back, did you need (and were you given) any of these forms of help at different times?

Ask for each of the following for the time periods listed below:
a) physical health
b) drug/alcohol
c) mental health
  - Before discharge from service?
  - When you first left the services?
  - When homeless (sleeping rough, in temporary accommodation, at move on)
  - Now (since being rehoused)

- And what about these other forms of help – did you need / were you given these at different times?

Ask for each of the following for the time periods listed below:
d) Managing a home (finances, cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry etc).
e) things to do during the daytime (sport, leisure pursuits etc)
f) education, training or employment
  - Before discharge from service?
  - When you first left the services?
  - When homeless (sleeping rough, in temporary accommodation, at move on)
  - Now (since being rehoused)

- If sustained period of homelessness and/or repeated episodes - why do you think that is?
  - What kinds of support might have helped prevent these prolonged or repeated episodes?

- Is there anything else that would have been helpful?
  - Should anything have been done differently?

- If getting help/support in current accommodation – do you know how long this will continue?

- If support ended, when was this? How long did support last? How did it end (planned, tapered off?). Did you feel okay about support ending?

- Do you think you'll need more/less or different types of help in the future? If so, please explain. Where you would go to ask for this help?

- Looking back over everything we've talked about, do you think that your experience of the services has had anything to do with you becoming homeless or do you think it would have happened anyway?

Do you think the Forces could do more to prevent Ex Service Personnel from becoming homeless? If so, what? If not, why?

- What advice would you give to someone leaving the services?

- What advice would you give to a newly homeless ex-Serviceman/woman?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**CURRENTLY HOMELESS EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL
COHORT STUDY - INITIAL INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE**

Introductions. Explain research, confidentiality and ask for permission to record interview. Consent form.

1. Current Situation

I'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about yourself and your current situation.

- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
    - How long have you been living here?
    - Type of accommodation (hostel, temporary accommodation, sleeping rough, other?)
    - Are you happy with the area/location/situation?

2. Routes into the services

- Which service were you in?
- *How long was your total length of service?
- Why did you want to join? (probe push/pull factors)
- How old were you when you joined up?
    - What were you doing immediately before joining up? (school, college, university, training employment)?
    - Qualifications on joining service.
- *Where were you living at the time you joined up? (location and housing situation e.g. with parents, partner, friends, care leaver etc).
[probe for childhood experiences esp history of care, abuse etc.]

3. Experiences of services

- Where did you do your initial training?
    - Where were you based afterwards?
    - (if did not complete explore reasons why and what happened next)
    - *Were you involved in active service? Where? When?
- *Looking back at your time in the service can you tell me a bit about your experiences (good and/or bad) (probe for problems such as bullying, racism, homophobia, PTSD etc)
- *You said that you were in the service for x years – what was your rank and trade when you left?
    - *And what about relationships at the time – did you marry/have a partner/children?
    - Had you stayed in contact with family/friends when in the services?
- *When and why did you decide that you were going to leave the service?
    - Did you think about what you would do when you left? (where to live, housing, employment, other?).
    - Did you prepare for discharge in any way? How?
    - Were you offered advice from the service about what you would do when you were discharged/left the service? Was this helpful? Why/why not?
- What did you do when you were discharged/left the service?
    - work
    - housing
    - contact with family/friends etc.?
- What happened next?
    - Any problems finding work, housing, in resettling in general?

4. Experiences of homelessness

- When and where did you become homeless?
- What happened? (reason for homelessness)
- What did you do when you first found yourself homeless?
  - Did you know what to do/where to go?
  - Did you think of asking for help from someone from the services at the time?
- What happened then? (brief homelessness history etc).
- *Did you ever sleep rough? (when was last time?, total duration)

5. Service Use

If not mentioned earlier check whether used or heard of any of these services.

- Did you go to your LA (council) for help?
  - Why/why not?
  - What happened?

Services for ex-Service personnel
Did you approach any of the following for help/have you heard of these?
  1) *SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division* (assessment and support, housing advice/referrals, welfare grants; accessed via Connections at St Martins after initial assessment)
  2) *Ex-service Fellowship Centres*:
     a) *New Belvedere House* (hostel for ESP in East London)
     b) *Relief Centre* (in SW1, offers cash grants, clothing, meal/travel vouchers, advice/assistance with benefits and job applications etc.)
  3) *Ex-service Resettlement Project* (comprehensive assessment and resettlement for ESP with history of homelessness, poor mental health and/or alcohol problems; works from a number of centres)
  4) *Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation* (supported housing for disabled ESP incl those with mental health and/or alcohol problems)
  5) *Home Base* (supported housing for ESP looking for home and job in London)
  6) *Project Compass* (assistance for return to sustained employment and independence)
  7) *The Royal British Legion* (local branches offering wide range of welfare grants, advice re war pensions/benefits etc.)

For those used,
  - what sort of help did you receive?
  - what were the good and bad things about it?

- If not used – why not? (lack of awareness, access, barriers, choice?).

Other Homelessness Services
- Did you use any other services for homeless people?
  - If so what services? e.g., day centres, night shelters, hostels, soup runs etc
  - have you ever used training or education services for homeless people?
- If not used – why not? (access, barriers, choice?).

Other services
- NHS (general health, mental health) – can you get the services you need? (or have to use A&E etc)
- Have you done any training/education or used employment services since being homeless – who provided help? How useful? Any problems?

Other specialist services
- Drug/ Alcohol services
- Mental health

6. Support needs and help provided

Thinking back over the time you have been/were homeless I'd like to ask you about the help you needed at certain points and whether you feel you were provided with appropriate support.

- Thinking back, what sort of help did you need at different times? (if not already mentioned prompt for health needs, drug and alcohol, mental health, life skills, meaningful occupation, education, training, employment, basic skills).
    - Before discharge from service?
    - When you first left the services?
    - When homeless (sleeping rough, in temporary accommodation, at move on)

- If sustained period of homelessness and/or repeated episodes - why do you think that is?
    - What kinds of support might have helped prevent these prolonged or repeated episodes?

- Is there anything else that would have been helpful?
    - Should anything have been done differently?

- What about now your current situation? Would you like more/different forms of help or support?

- Do you think that your experience of the services has had anything to do with your current situation or do you think it would have happened anyway?
    - What do you think the Forces might do to help prevent Ex Service Personnel from becoming homeless?

- What advice would you give to someone leaving the services?

- What advice would you give to a newly homeless ex-Serviceman/woman?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

<p style="text-align: center;">**COHORT STUDY – FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE**</p>

Intro

Brief recap of the study, esp. purpose of cohort study follow-up interviews.
Ask for permission to record interview.

Housing situation

- Where are you currently living?

  If <u>still the same</u> place/situation as before:
  – how are you doing? are you happy with your accommodation/situation?
  – any plans/opportunities to move in the near future? do you know when this is likely to happen? [any opportunities arise but then fall through?]
  – is anyone helping you find more permanent accommodation? if so, who/which agency(ies)? are you receiving enough help?
  – could anything more, or different, have been be done to help you?

  If <u>NOT the same</u> place/situation as before:
  – what type of accommodation is it? (council/HA, PRS, another hostel etc.)
  – are you happy with the tenure?
  – did anyone help you find your new accommodation? if so who/which agencies? [probe for 'planned' vs. 'accidental' moves]
  – can you explain what happened – how they helped?

  THEN ASK EITHER

  a) If in 'settled' accommodation (i.e. rehoused):
  – are you happy with your current accommodation?
  – did you have any choice in where you moved to (type of accommodation/area)? Any problems with this?
  – were there any problems with the accommodation (state of decoration/repair)? If so, did you receive help to address these problems?
  – was your accommodation furnished or unfurnished when you moved in? If unfurnished, were you given help with getting furniture, white goods etc.? Who by?
  – Did you feel ready to move on and live on your own?
  – How settled do you feel living here now?
  – How do you feel you are managing? Any problems with bills or benefits [especially Housing Benefit]? If having difficulty, are you getting any help with this? Who from?
  – How much are you paying for rent? Is this affordable?
  – If receiving support in current accommodation, do you know how long this will continue? If support has ended, how long did it last? How did it end (planned, tapered off)? Did you feel okay about it ending?
  – could anything more, or different, have been be done to help you?
  – Do you think you'll need more or different types of support in the future? If so, please explain. Where would you go to ask for this help?

  OR

  b) If have moved, but into another form of temporary/insecure accommodation:
  – how are you doing? are you happy with your accommodation/situation?
  – any plans/opportunities to move on in the near future? do you know when this is likely to happen?
  – is anyone helping you find more permanent accommodation? if so, who/which agency(ies)? are you receiving enough help?
  – could anything more, or different, have been be done to help you?

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Provision of support

- have you sought help or received assistance from any of the following agencies since we last spoke?
    – Ex-service Resettlement Project
    – Home Base
    – New Belvedere House (hostel) / Ex-Services Fellowship Centre (drop-in)
    – Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation
    – SSAFA Forces Help Homeless Division
    – Project Compass
    If yes, which agency/ies, what happened, and how helpful were they?

- [Where relevant and not already covered above] are you receiving any help that you need for:
    – paying bills/budgeting
    – physical health problems
    – drug/alcohol problems
    – getting into education/training/employment
    – maintaining a home (i.e. cooking, cleaning, laundry etc.)

Life in general

- What are you doing during the daytime?

- Overall, would you say that life is better, worse, or about the same as when we last spoke?

- Where would you hope to be, and what would you hope to be doing, when I contact you again in six months time?

- Is there anything else that I should have asked you?

Conclusion

- Thanks.
- Reminder re final follow-up interview in 6 months.
- Update contact details where appropriate.