

SP 29

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee
Ymateb gan: Y Lleng Brydeinig Brenhinol
Response from: The Royal British Legion

Submission on behalf of:

The Royal British Legion
Alabaré Christian Care & Support Wales Homes for Veterans Initiative
Change Step
SSAFA The Armed Forces Charity
Combat Stress
Veterans NHS Wales
Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI)

About the Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion was created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of WWI, and still remains one of the UK's largest membership organisations. We are the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, providing financial, social and emotional support, information, advice, advocacy and comradeship to hundreds of thousands of Service personnel, veterans and their dependants every year. In 2014, we responded to over 450,000 requests for help – more than ever before – and spent £1.4m every week on welfare support.

About Alabaré Christian Care and Support

Alabaré is a charity that supports vulnerable, homeless and marginalised people by supporting them to transform their lives, providing accommodation and helping them gain the skills, confidence and opportunities to live a fulfilled life. Alabaré was founded in 1991 and now offers support to over 3,000 people in need through its homes and services across the South West of England and Wales. We provide specialist support for young mothers and their babies, people suffering from addictions, young people and those leaving the care system, those experiencing mental ill health, adults with learning difficulties, and Armed Forces Veterans who struggle to cope with life outside of the military. Overall Alabaré provides, in 24 dedicated veterans' homes, 110 bedspaces of supported accommodation and resettlement support for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Of these, 10 homes and 53 bedspaces are in Wales. This year we will support over 100 veterans in Wales.

About Change Step

Delivered by veterans for veterans, Change Step offers peer mentoring and help to access relevant services — including support with mental health, substance misuse, criminal justice and housing issues.

Our peer mentors deliver support at drop-in locations throughout Wales, plus activities and one-on-one support, while dedicated staff work with veterans' families.

Change step helps anyone who has been a member of the UK Armed Forces. We can also provide practical and confidential support for family members or carers — either alongside or independently of the veteran.

About SSAFA

SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity are the longest serving national tri-service military charity. For over 130 years, we have provided lifelong support to those who are serving or have ever served in our Armed Forces. Our support covers both regulars and reserves in the British Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force and their families, including anyone who has completed National Service. They are all entitled to lifelong support from SSAFA, no matter how long they have served. Every year we support around 60,000 people - that's about 165 every day. Our network of around 7,000 committed volunteers worldwide offer welfare support for people from throughout the military community, from World War Two veterans to the families of young service personnel wounded in Afghanistan. Our network of branches provide help for veterans and their families in the community. Our service volunteers work on military bases to help families meet the challenges of service life.

About Combat Stress

Combat Stress is the UK's leading mental health charity for veterans. We provide free specialist clinical treatment and practical support to ex-servicemen and women with mental health conditions in Wales.

We treat conditions including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety through a range of services including short-stay clinical treatment at our three treatment centres, a specialist PTSD Intensive Treatment Programme, occupational therapy, community support and a 24-hour Helpline.

About Veterans' NHS Wales

Veterans' NHS Wales since its launch in April 2010 continues to develop its military mental health expertise and reputation across Wales and the UK, as the first point of contact for veterans, health professionals and the third sector charities who work with military veterans. Veterans' NHS Wales (VNHSW) remains the only UK national NHS veterans' service. VNHSW continues to retain close and strong relationships with colleagues across the border in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We continue to lobby Welsh Government and NHS Wales for increased resources and funding to be able to continue to expand our capacity to provide a first class service to veterans and in the future their families in Wales.

About Royal British Legion Industries

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Training Services Team of Royal British Legion Industries delivers LifeWorks in Wales. LifeWorks is an innovative and personalised guidance course to those transitioning out of the Armed Forces or Veterans who need to review their employment options or general career direction. Building on existing skills for employment beyond the Armed Forces, Lifeworks is designed to maximise potential for a successful and sustainable career in civvy street. As an integral part of the course, a holistic, lifelong support service is provided to all delegates. This support requires close working with other military charities when advising delegates about training courses, funding streams, housing related issues and other welfare matters.

1. Consultation response

The signatories above welcome the opportunity to contribute to the consultation that will help inform potential topics of consideration during the Assembly term. The Legion has a longstanding relationship with the National Assembly, regularly submitting consultation responses and engaging with all parties within the Assembly to highlight issues relating to the Armed Forces community in Wales.

We believe that there would be considerable merit in the committee undertaking a review of the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales, with a focus on local government and partner agencies. Specific issues that could be examined as part of such a review may include:

- How the Covenant is progressing locally across Wales within local authorities and partner agencies.
- What support is available to local authorities / partner agencies including via Armed Forces Covenant fund.
- The interaction between public and charitable / third sector support.
- The principles of 'no disadvantage due to service' and 'priority treatment' – their application in public services.
- Data regarding location / needs of Armed Forces community.
- Identifying good practice and highlighting policy areas that require additional focus.
- What more could be done nationally/locally to ensure that good intentions translate into tangible policy improvements.
- Is there any further action the Welsh Government / MOD / Charities could take to support and improve delivery.
- Whether the needs / demands of the Armed Forces community are changing and potential impact on existing services and the development of new services.
- The interaction between veteran-only services and integration of veteran support into generic services.
- Accountability – how is the covenant monitored / upheld.

- Sustainability of Covenant-funded services.

Covenant background

The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant were enshrined into law via the Armed Forces Act in 2011. Therefore, five years on from this date represents an opportune moment to reflect on progress and identify areas where improvement can be made. We believe that considerable progress has been made in Wales with regard to awareness of the issues that may potentially face some members of the Armed Forces Community, and the associated services available to this group. Examples include:

- Community Covenants signed by every local authority – the second country in the UK to achieve full sign up;
- Armed Forces Champions appointed in all local authorities;
- Collaborative working between local authorities, local health boards and providers via regional Covenant forums.

It is clear however that challenges remain in the delivery of the covenant in terms of consistency, support and prioritisation which the Ministry of Defence has itself recognised and sought to tackle, stating in the 2015 Armed Forces Covenant Annual report: *'To address concerns regarding delivery of the Community Covenant we have hosted four regional MOD Community Covenant conferences to promote best practice and understanding within local authorities'*.

The 2015 report also committed to conducting a review of the effectiveness of the Covenant locally, which the LGA and forces in Mind Trust are now conducting, with results expected at the end of Summer 2016.

Such work is to be welcomed in order to highlight, and share, best practice but there is also a requirement to support, and challenge all signatories of the Covenant to ensure momentum is maintained and outcomes are being delivered. This includes local government, charities, Third Sector, Ministry of Defence, Welsh Government and health bodies.

Whilst we recognise that the remit of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee may not extend to all of the above named delivery partners in the Covenant process, local authorities remain the key coordinating agents at a local level and their role is fundamental in any successful Covenant work at a local and national level.

The consultation document ('Priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee') identifies areas of work that may be included in the Committee's long term programme. Of these, areas such as housing supply, homelessness and welfare are highly relevant to the experiences of our beneficiaries so we would hope that this is captured as part of this work.

The above representatives of the Armed Forces sector encourage the committee to examine these issues as part of an ongoing work programme.

