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Llywodraeth Cymru
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Consultation – summary of response

National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel

November 2016

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

On 13 October 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children published, for consultation, the draft National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel, intended to help provide advice and support on housing options for those due to leave the armed forces.

The purpose of the consultation was to gather views and feedback on the Pathway.

Consultation

The consultation period ran from 15 September 2016 to 13 October 2016. On-line versions of the consultation document and response forms were provided.

Five questions were asked within the document and 10 responses to the consultation were received. The list of respondents is shown below and includes responses from local authorities, third sector organisations, umbrella organisations.

Additionally a workshop took place at the launch of the consultation, along with three workshops held in Llandudno Junction, Newtown and Merthyr Tydfil. This document also includes responses and comments from discussions during those workshops.

Respondents

Respondents to consultation document	
Tai Ceredigion Monitoring Group	Torfaen County Borough Council
Royal British Legion	Housing Law Practitioners Association
Flintshire County Council	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Community Housing Cymru	Cymorth Cymru
Barnardos	Conwy County Borough Council
Participants in the workshops	
Veterans	Conwy Housing Solutions
SAFA	Change Step
National Probation Service	HM Forces – Army
Powys County Council	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Hire a Hero	Wales Homes for Veterans
Gwent Regional Development Co-ordinator	Gwalia Care and Support
Alabaré	North Wales Housing

This document summarises the responses to the consultation questions. The responses have been considered and have informed the further development of the *National Housing Pathway for Ex-Service Personnel*.

Responses to consultation questions

1. Do you agree a Housing Pathway for ex service personnel is needed?

Of the 10 responses received, 100% felt there was a need for this Pathway.

- Feedback on the Pathway indicated there was considerable support for the Pathway as set out and that it took a positive step in recognising the contribution service personnel have made to the country.
- Flintshire County Council commented that the Pathway will be a useful tool to guide ex service personnel and practitioners through the process and ensure a consistent and shared understanding of responsibilities.
- Cymorth Cymru commented that 'a coherent and consistent Pathway that addresses the needs of veterans is a positive step'.
- There were, however, concerns around the suggestion that support will last for around 2 years following discharge and it was widely acknowledged that issues around mental health, in particular Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, may not appear until some time after discharge and this may be well out of the two year period.

Further comments from the workshops include:

- There is need for further consideration of reservists and their access to housing although it was also recognised that with limited available housing stock support may need to be prioritised for those who were injured or affected as a result of their time in service.
- Further consideration should also be given to equalising support for non-UK Nationals/citizens who are not currently eligible for support.
- It was suggested that the Pathway could include advice on support for spouses and families where there has been a bereavement or separation which has impacted on housing.
- Barnardos comment that the Pathway does not cover the additional support that may be needed for those that leave the forces unexpectedly such as medical discharges.

2. Do you agree the Pathways provided are appropriate for service personnel, pre and post discharge?

Of the consultation responses 80% felt it was appropriate.

- Royal British Legion suggested the Welsh Government take the distinction further and consider the publication of the document, both combined and in separated versions, providing the option of availability of standalone "in Service" and "Veteran" Pathways for those looking for the simplest way to access services.
- Cymorth Cymru commented that the Pathway is broadly appropriate for service personnel. They have concerns that there is no specific question that addresses

mental health for example, 'What if I have been injured or disabled while in service?' does not address mental health at all.

- Tai Ceredigion Monitoring Group commented it would be helpful if there was a Wales wide consistent approach and format of Housing registers, including the ability to bid for available properties in other areas.
- Conwy County Council commented it is for the individual service personnel to identify their priorities for their own resettlement post discharge and work with housing options staff if needed. Conwy also felt it was important that links are developed with the resettlement teams within the Armed Forces to ensure good information exchange and a better understanding of the messages being passed to service personnel and what expectations they may have.

20% did not feel the Pathways provided were appropriate.

- Barnardos commented that 'more needs to be done to support ex-service personnel at both the pre and post discharge stage'.
- Torfaen County Borough Council commented that there does not appear to be specific Pathways for armed forces personnel over and above what is available through the current Housing (Wales) Act 2014 duties. They also suggested that there needs to be greater emphasis on local schemes and contact with the relevant local authority.

Further comments from the workshops include;

- The need to produce short sharp leaflets which help direct people needing support according to their current situation, which could include contact points – potentially at a local level.
- People who may have a housing need should be encouraged to contact the local authority around six months prior to discharge to maximise the authority's ability to help find appropriate accommodation prior to discharge.
- Appropriate advice and links should be made to the support available through social care and other health services.

3. As a veteran do you feel the Pathway would assist you, and/or others, in understanding the housing options available to you in Wales?

This question was not answered as part of the formal consultation responses, however, there was feedback through the workshops and in discussions which included:

- It is vital that timely support is made available to veterans as they make the readjustment to civilian life, and must take into account the ongoing effects of trauma.
- It is recommended the final version is written in clear language, and use more bullet points to ensure shorter, more accessible reading.

4. As a practitioner, do you feel the Pathway will assist you in helping to guide serving and ex-serving personnel to appropriate housing solutions to meet their needs?

Where comments were received from practitioners they were generally positive in terms of the assistance this Pathway may provide.

- The Royal British Legion commented that the inclusion of the flow charts, as they currently stand, do not complement and summarise the information presented throughout the Pathway. They feel greater detail is needed, for example, at what point a Service Leaver should contact the local authority or Joint Service Housing Advice Office. Further, they suggest an alternative format which could involve dividing the charts into three separate elements covering private renting, social renting and purchasing a house – with the specific information related to each.
- Similarly, Community Housing Cymru has recommended that the flow charts be amended to a series of Pathways such as home-ownership options. Further, that the reference to the Supporting People Programme should be removed as it will not apply to everyone and other funding is available.
- Cymorth Cymru commented that the document provides clear steps for practitioners and an excellent way for practitioners to understand where their organisation or service will fit into the Pathway.
- It was noted that the geographical variants across Wales meant it was difficult to understand what support may be available locally. Therefore there needs to be localised promotion of the Pathway and support opportunities that are available, as well as promotion of fact sheets on available support by local authority.
- Flintshire County Council commented that the Pathway will be a useful tool for third sector organisations when supporting veterans through a process. However, whilst it is helpful to raise awareness of what can be expected in terms of reasonable steps the need for engagement from the applicant is also useful.
- Conwy County Council advised that the Pathway was a good reference point for focusing discussions with Veterans, however there are different challenges in each local authority area in terms of available housing stock and early contact (6 months prior to release) with the local housing options team will help to ensure the service personnel are best informed about the local situation especially in terms of limited social housing availability.
- However, Housing Law Practitioners Association considered that the Pathway could be greatly improved by inserting a section at the beginning to set out the relevant legal framework in respect of homelessness and allocations, namely the key duties and to whom they are owed. Further, that it would be helpful to refer practitioners to the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Further comments from the workshops included:

- The legislative context may be useful for practitioners but may not be helpful for ex service personnel and should be at the back of the document and as concise as possible.

5. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Pathway?

- The Royal British Legion advise that although the section 'I'm not sure I will be able to cope with life outside the Forces' is of value it does not go far enough in identifying other areas where support may be needed over and above mental health support provided by Veterans NHS Wales, and there may need to be support offered outside of that which is currently available through that route.
- The ending of priority need for those leaving the forces following one night in 'settled accommodation' appears to restrict the support this Pathway can offer to veterans who may have left some time earlier, but who may develop substantial issues further down the line. This needs further consideration as the Armed Forces Covenant encourages greater flexibility and discretion around this issue.
- Cymorth Cymru commented that in terms of maintaining tenancies, only the Supporting People Programme was mentioned. They feel there is potential for other services to be recognised.
- Conwy County Council commented that there could be more information about support and assistance for families and the transition from family quarters into civilian life. In particular should or can a family leave early with a view to setting up home ahead of the veterans discharge.
- Tai Ceredigion Monitoring Group commented that the Pathway is an excellent document but they would like to emphasise the need for the continuous review of Housing Standards across Wales in both the Public and Private sectors.
- There needs to be clear and dedicated referral routes and the sharing of relevant local information at an early stage to ensure personnel are adequately supported.
- There are references in the Pathway to "Tenancy Support", however, it should be recognised that some support services are not tenure specific so using the broader term 'Housing related support' may be more appropriate.
- There are comments in the Pathway relating to benefits, however, there is little by way of helping those who are seeking to get back into work or on low wages where managing finances more generally may be more important.
- The Vale of Glamorgan Council commented that individual councils and housing associations also operate help through their own schemes. Furthermore, while social landlords and councils do not usually require a bond, the private rented sector may require high rents.
- The Royal British Legion noted that advice on benefit and welfare support is available from charities such as the Legion and this should be highlighted in the document.
- Community Housing Cymru suggested a section should be added detailing access to housing benefit and the forthcoming restrictions to this should be included, detailing the impact on 18-21 year olds and 22-35 year olds, giving options they can take such as shared housing.

- Barnardos commented that the statement that Private Rented Sector offered less security of tenure is a little unhelpful as it undermines the progress that has been made to encourage people to see the private sector as a viable housing option.
- Barnardos also commented they would like to see an employment pathway embedded into the Housing Pathway, or sitting alongside, as this will directly impact on what housing options are available.
- Housing Law Practitioners Association noted some references to legal documents and legislation needed to be updated.

Further comments from the workshops included:

- The promotion of bond schemes across Wales is substantially varied and awareness of these schemes is not universally high. More could be done to ensure service personnel and providers are aware of what is available in their localities, and in particular through the local authority. This could be achieved by the publication, on a local authority by local authority area, of individual 'fact sheets' that can be made available to those wishing to return to the area.
- The need for ex service personnel to contact the local authority at an early stage needs to be highlighted earlier in the document, and clearly referenced in the flow charts.
- It is suggested that the advice contact list helps to ensure that statutory obligations are fully utilised and appropriate contacts should be provided to ensure this can be accessed. However, where there is additional needs the contact list of the organisation that may be able to assist should be comprehensive and up to date.
- The workshops identified the need to provide clarity around issues of local connection, what would count as having a local connection and the increased likelihood of finding suitable accommodation on, or following, discharge.
- It was noted both in the formal responses and through the workshops that there needs to be information on the assistance available to families of those who are going into prison or serving time in military prison.
- It is vital that the expectations of the individuals are managed appropriately to ensure they are aware both of the need for them to look to resolve their own housing issues, but what help may or may not be available to them.
- Links need to be made to health boards, GP's and others to ensure that they are aware of the Pathway and how it may link into services they already offer.

Barriers to implementation

As part of the workshops we asked a series of questions around barriers to successful implementation of the Pathway. The response are summarised below:

- There needs to be a structured plan of dissemination of the final Pathway, with links into Armed Forces units to ensure the information is available to serving personnel ahead of discharge.

- Better use needs to be made of the local authority Armed Forces Champions in order to support the awareness of/and use of this Pathway.
- There needs to be something shorter and sharper developed for the veterans and their families to better understand what they need to do to help themselves and what support is available to them in their current position.
- General awareness that where people have already become homeless it can be very difficult to know if they are ex Service Personnel and even harder to ensure those people are aware of this Pathway in Wales.
- Many of the key stakeholders may be based outside Wales and it is vital we ensure they are aware of the Pathway for personnel returning to Wales.
- The move to Universal Credit was a substantial concern and there needs to be awareness of this and other welfare reforms which may have an impact on the ability of an individual to find a home. Shared accommodation may be a good fit with this group.

Concluding remarks

There is support for the Pathway across the board. The consultation has identified a number of additional areas for further consideration and development, which will be considered when the Pathway is refined.

We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to respond to this consultation, and attend the workshops. Your views have been important in informing the continued development of the Pathway and we are very grateful for your contributions.