



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT, DOCUMENT

Armed Forces Covenant: annual report 2022 to 2023

What the Welsh Government has achieved from April 2022 to end of March 2023 to ensure fair treatment of serving Armed Forces people, Veterans and their families.

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The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is an enduring covenant between the people of the United Kingdom, His Majesty's Government and all those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown, and their families.

The first duty of the UK Government is defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty.

Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

The Duty of Due Regard

The Armed Forces Act 2021 places a legal duty on specified public bodies to

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have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising certain **statutory functions** in the fields of healthcare, education and housing.

When a specified body exercises a relevant function, it must have due regard to:

- the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces
- the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces
- the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces

Specified bodies are responsible for providing local services in the areas of healthcare, education, and housing. These include local authorities, school governing bodies and local health boards.

Ministerial foreword

I am pleased to present this report which covers activity delivered by Welsh Government to support the Armed Forces Community in Wales from April 2022 to end of March 2023.

In June 2022 we marked the 40th anniversary of the Falklands Conflict. We were able to remember those who served at a National Service of Commemoration at Llandaff Cathedral in June and again at the Festival of Remembrance at St Davids Hall, Cardiff, in November.

This reporting period also saw the passing of Her Majesty The Queen in September 2022 and the accession of His Majesty King Charles, and with it an

extended period of ceremonial activity for all three of our Armed Services in which they should take great pride.

This is a year in which the results of the 2021 National Census provided us with confirmation of how the tradition of Service in Wales follows through to a Veteran population higher than the UK average. The results showed that in 2021 the percentage of the 115,000 Armed Forces veterans for Wales was 4.5% of population compared to a UK average of 3.8%. The results also showed that the percentage of households with one or more persons who had served in the UK Armed Forces was higher in Wales (8.1%) than in England (7.0%). These, and the other results that are being released, indicate the size and importance of this community in Wales and working with partners, we are using this evidence to inform our delivery.

Identifying our Armed Forces Community and asking the question 'Have you previously served in HM Forces?' has become more important this year as the Due Regard Duty in the Armed Forces Act came into force in November 2022. I know that local authorities and Local Health Boards in Wales have been active in raising awareness of this new requirement and that the Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officers, whom we fund to assist delivery of the Covenant locally, have been working hard in this area.

The appointment by the UK Government of a Veterans Commissioner for Wales in June 2022 brought an additional level of advocacy and scrutiny to delivery for Veterans in Wales. The Commissioner's engagement and reports have provided a helpful focus on Veterans matters.

Departments across the Welsh Government continue their support for the Armed Forces Community. Support continues for Service children so that they do not face educational disadvantage; Veterans NHS Wales continues to provide a service for the unique needs of Veterans' mental health in Wales; in Housing, plans to consult on reform to homelessness legislation will include consideration of the Armed Forces Community.

And finally, during this reporting period we have seen the important work commence on the 'LGBT Veterans Independent Review'. Veterans impacted by the ban on homosexuality in the Armed Forces before the year 2000 bravely came forward and shared their experiences. Action to support the LGBTQ+ community in Wales is important across Welsh Government and we will work towards ensuring those affected find a supportive environment here.

Hannah Blythyn MS

Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

Introduction

This report sets out the activity in Wales delivered by the Welsh Government in support of the Armed Forces community, upholding the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces community network in Wales is a strong one, involving the Armed Services and their Service People, charities, Regimental Associations, support groups and a wide range of public and private sector organisations who are all united in their respect for what the Armed Forces do, and have done, over so many years.

Whilst the report seeks to capture activity across a range of sectors, the breadth of work is such that it is not possible to do full justice to all the individuals and organisations who work tirelessly to make good the nation's commitment under the Armed Forces Covenant.

The report outlines activity across a wide range of policy areas, linked to those that feature in the Armed Forces Act 2021 and the UK Strategy for our Veterans.

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Armed Forces Expert Group comments

The Armed Forces Expert Group brings together people with detailed knowledge of issues which affect the Armed Forces Community in Wales. The Group provides advice, feedback and information to the Welsh Government to improve understanding of the needs of the community and how service delivery might be improved. Group Members have had the opportunity to feed into this report and overall are supportive of the 2022 Annual Report and appreciate the commitment of the Welsh Government to progress this agenda.

Areas identified by the Group as a priority for action in the next reporting period comprise:

- Continuing to raise awareness of the Due Regard Duty in the Armed Forces Act 2021 within local authorities and Local Health Boards so that Armed Forces Community needs can be identified and staff are aware of, and can act on, potential disadvantage
- Supporting Service Families posted to, or living in, Wales so that the potential for disadvantage, particularly in relation to accessing health or education is minimised. Particular areas for focus:
 - Accessing childcare support
 - Developing Service Families' understanding of the education system and support available in Wales
 - Reducing the friction of moving into Wales in respect of Service Families' primary healthcare needs
- Helping service leavers and veterans find appropriate employment in Wales through a continued focus on employment events and collaboration with the Tri Services, the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) and the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
- Encouraging participation in the GP Accreditation Scheme when launched
- Ensuring plans for new Homelessness legislation considers the needs of Veterans and Service People transitioning into civilian life

- Making sure support hubs and groups across Wales supporting the Armed Forces Community are kept informed of cost of living advice and assistance
- Supporting LGBTQ+ Veterans in respect of the findings of the 'LGBT Veterans Independent Review'
- The Royal Navy Families Federation, Army Families Federation and RAF Families Federations in particular, were pleased to see reference to service families within the report and ongoing engagement via the Families federations
- The Royal British Legion in particular, highlighted a need for further consideration of Veterans within the criminal justice system and the support available in Wales

Armed Services highlights

This report traditionally includes an update from the Armed Services.

Royal Navy/Royal Marines

The last year has seen period of growth for the Royal Navy in Wales family. There are still approximately 1,500 members of the service living in Wales, often commuting from their places of work outside of the Welsh border. Based on total population estimates this represents approximately three times more Naval Service personnel per capita living in Wales than live in England.

The Royal Navy Leadership Academy in Tal y Bont, Mid Wales, has witnessed an increased throughput to 3,500 sailors. At this site both Officers and Ratings experience a period of controlled 'stretch', designed to bring Leadership and Teamwork skills to the fore. The 'Grow the Navy' initiative will increase these numbers to just under 4,000 for the next 10 years.

RAF VALLEY is the home to 13 Sailors who assist in the training of the next generation of Royal Navy fixed and rotary wing pilots. This involves advanced jet training on the Hawk T2, the same aircraft used by the Red Arrows, basic jet training on the Texan and rotary wing training conducted on the Juno and Jupiter for all Royal Navy secondary roles. Annual Training throughput is forecast for this training year is 38 Pilots, 15 Observers and 35 Aircrew.

HMS CAMBRIA, the home to the Maritime Reserve in Wales recently hosted a number of civic dignitaries and industry partners at a reception as the Royal Navy revealed mezzo-soprano singer Katherine Jenkins OBE as the Ships Sponsor for the next HMS CARDIFF. Prior to the reception the announcement was made onboard the Aberystwyth affiliated ship HMS EXPRESS in Cardiff Bay. HMS CARDIFF is currently being built in Glasgow and will commence 'crewing up' in late 2023.

Swansea affiliate HMS SCOTT the largest Ocean Surveying vessel in Western Europe will receive a major life extension refit and her service life will now be extended up to 2033.

HMS SEVERN continues to conduct Fishery Protection Patrols around the UK whilst also training the Royal Navy's next generation of navigators. The ship was crowned a joint winner in the Wales Armed Forces Awards 2023 for the crew's endeavours in saving of lives when an immigrant boat sunk in rough seas in the English Channel.

The Engage and Attract teams continue to provide the everyday face of the Royal Navy here in Wales and continue inform, inspire and break down barriers. They can often be seen supporting multicultural events as well as attending shows such as the Wales Airshow and the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show. The team regularly use Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to engage with an audience as well as Virtual Reality equipment so that participants can experience what it's like to be an F35 pilot or take off from a ship in a Merlin Helicopter.

Army

The Army in Wales has continued to support the people of Wales through preparations to deploy troops in case of industrial action as well as participating in UK resilience operations training opportunities with partner agencies in Wales.

This year was different to any other in terms of the ceremonial commitments around the passing of Her Majesty The Queen and arrangements in Wales for the accession of the new King, requiring an intense period of ceremonial and supporting activity.

The Brigade Engagement Team have continued to be exceptionally busy, using such events as the Armed Forces Day celebrations, Royal Gun Salutes, the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show and a number of Army Engagement Group briefings to inform the public of what the Army does and the opportunities it can provide to someone wishing to consider a career in either the Regular Army or the Army Reserve. In addition, we have delivered appropriate youth engagement activity in support of educational establishments across Wales.

There are circa 1,200 regular and 1,000 reservist members of the Army in Wales and Wales contributes approximately 7% of the total UK Army strength. In addition, Welsh veterans account for over 4% of the population and we are highly appreciative of the Welsh Governments ambitions to making Wales the best place for a member of the Armed Forces to serve or a veteran to settle. Examples of this commitment include support to enable the Wrap around Childcare Scheme, the funding of the Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru (SSCE) team, support to the Career Transition Fair and the continued support to the AFLO's.

160th (Welsh) Brigade have delivered another very successful Exercise CAMBRIAN PATROL, the world-renowned patrolling exercise with over 1,000 participants comprised of teams of 8 and including 43 teams from foreign

nations. Its reputation as the 'Olympics of Patrolling' is in no small part due to the Welsh climate and terrain, whilst having both national and international participation puts Wales on the world map.

Royal Air Force

The RAF in Wales has had a busy year delivering essential training outputs to ensure that the RAF has the necessary air and groundcrew it requires to achieve the Defence Mission.

RAF Valley continues to be the main hub of RAF activity, carrying out the training of fast jet pilots and helicopter aircrew, also supporting over 1200 highly skilled civilian jobs. The RAF Resilience Centre at Crickhowell also trains around 2,500 RAF personnel a year, using the great Welsh outdoors to give initial recruits a range of adventurous training related challenges to build up personal resilience and teamwork skills.

Over the last year, the RAF have arranged and supported a wide variety of engagement events in all corners of Wales, giving the people of Wales the chance to meet RAF personnel and understand more about the work we do. The period was dominated by the funeral of Her Majesty The Queen and the accession of His Majesty King Charles, in which the RAF played a full role. Other major events of scale have included Wales Armed Forces Day, attendance at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show at Llanelwedd, together with the Wales Airshow at Swansea and the Rhyl Airshow.

In conjunction with the Wales Aerospace and Space Forum, the RAF jointly sponsored a Space Workshop in Cardiff in April. The aim of the Space Workshop was to ensure the Wales Space Sector was aware of MOD Space investment plans and give them the opportunity to engage.

Other smaller events have included support to various veterans' activities in

Wales, which included an Air Officer Wales visit to one of the largest veterans' hubs in South Wales ("Valley Veterans" in Ton Pentre), talking to them about the RAF in Wales and also seeing the wide range of activities they arrange for their substantial veteran community. The RAF also supported an event that was arranged by KIRAN Cymru (a Welsh anti-racist organisation), which involved a World War 2 related exhibition highlighting people of Indian descent who had served in the British Armed Forces.

Finally, the RAF STEM programme continues its excellent work here in Wales. During the 2022/23 school year, this programme directly engaged 165 Welsh schools, also delivering 7 multi-school events (involving a total of 81 schools) and we finished the school year by holding award ceremony events in both north and south Wales to celebrate the achievements of Welsh schools in some of the RAF STEM competitions we have run throughout the year. Taking account of all aspects of our STEM programme, which also includes STEM Camps, direct and indirect (virtual) engagements, access to free curriculum mapped STEM resources and partnered programmes, we estimate that some 440 Welsh schools and 65,000 Welsh pupils have got involved in our STEM programme over the last year.

The RAF STEM programme, which is focused upon the 9-13 year old age group, and which particularly focuses upon promoting the benefits of STEM to girls, together with socially disadvantaged children more widely, will continue to be an important element of RAF engagement in Wales in the years to come.

Armed Forces liaison officers (AFLO) delivery

The Welsh Government has continued its annual grant funding of £275,000 to local authorities in Wales to maintain a network of AFLOs across this period. AFLOs work on a regional basis supporting 7 clusters of local authorities and partner agencies. Much of their effort over the period of this report has been increasing awareness of the Due Regard Duty for the Armed Forces Covenant,

but support through signposting, co-ordination of activities and supporting local initiatives has continued alongside this. The following provide examples of AFLO activity.

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

- Improving awareness and learning: Training on the Due Regard Duty has been delivered to 345 staff from across the 6 local authority areas since October 2022. Following the training, 86% of those trained stated that following the session they would be 'asking the question' and seeking to identify the Armed Forces community.

South West Wales: Swansea, Neath Port Talbot (NPT), Bridgend

- Collaboration and supporting the whole Armed Forces family: Worked with Regional Schools Liaison Officer (RSLO) to deliver Port Talbot Service Children Event in Ysgol Cwm Brombil; 40 service children from NPT from Foundation Phase to 16 years old attended. The AFLO also worked with the West Wales AFLO on a service children data workshop with respective local authorities.

West Wales: Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire

- The AFLO has continued to link veterans with support providers in the community. This includes continued development of a Breakfast club project with locations in Pembrokeshire (Pembroke Dock and Haverfordwest VC

Gallery), Llanelli Drill Hall (Links), and Aberystwyth Football Club (Woody's Lodge). An additional location in Carmarthen is being pursued.

Powys

- Supporting the Armed Forces across rural areas: Veteran support groups/hubs have increased across the county with 6 fixed monthly drop-ins now active in Brecon, Hay on Wye, Newtown, Llandrindod Wells, Welshpool and Machynlleth. Also, the reporting period saw the addition of the only 'Mobile Veterans' Hub' in Wales.

Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf

- Meeting the needs of diverse groups of veterans: The AFLO established a new veteran and blue light services support group/drop-in in Pontypridd in January 2023 with Woody's Lodge, and co-run an LGBTQ+ veterans support group working with Fighting with Pride.

Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan

- Supporting employment and casework for the Armed Forces: Guaranteed Interview Schemes included in HR policies of Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan councils. Delivering Veteran Advice Service and working with clients to resolve issues including housing.

Gwent

- Supporting delivery of the Armed Forces Act and the Due Regard Duty: In the Gwent area (Caerphilly, Torfaen, Newport, Monmouthshire and Blaenau

Gwent) since October when training started, 222 staff had accessed the AFLO training across housing, education, elected members, senior leadership, customer services and social services. Sessions are held on a monthly basis and also include external agencies such as Citizen's Advice.

Veterans scoping exercise/UK strategy for our veterans: progress update

The **Veterans Scoping Exercise** represents the framework of Welsh Government-led activity contributing to the ongoing delivery of the UK Strategy For Our Veterans. The final report and recommendations were published in January 2020, in coordination with the UK and Scottish Governments.

Below is an update on progress achieved to date:

Progress against recommendations

Housing

Recommendations

- Review and recommend any updates to the Welsh Government housing guidance to ensure greater consistency and awareness of Armed Forces amongst housing staff.
- To consider amending priority need to include veterans with Service-related conditions.
- To consider amending housing guidance to provide recognition of divorced / separated spouses.

- To encourage and promote the collection of data on veterans applying for social housing, ensuring they are identified at point of access.
- Requirement for local authorities and housing associations to identify Armed Forces community.

Progress to date

- We have worked with the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust on the delivery of Operation Fortitude in Wales. Alabaré has been chosen as a delivery partner in the programme, designed to eliminate veterans' homelessness.
- We worked with the Expert Review Panel examining homelessness legislation in Wales to ensure they received feedback from charities representing veterans in Wales.
- AFLOs are working with local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to promote the recording of Armed Forces status in housing-related services.

Healthcare

Recommendations

- To promote and encourage the identification of veterans within the healthcare system.
- Promote and raise awareness of veterans' issues amongst health staff.
- To ensure Veterans mental health treatment in Wales is meeting current need.
- To ensure mental health support providers, such as Veterans NHS Wales, engage with prisoners prior to release.
- To ensure veterans experiencing substance misuse issues have the support required to access services.

- To ensure ALAC prosthetists have the appropriate training to respond to new technological advances. Establish a forum to consider delivery of prosthetic services for veterans.

Progress to date

- We have provided £920,000 to support Veterans NHS Wales to provide mental health support for veterans with service-related conditions.
- Substance misuse services in Wales have supported 253 veterans during 2022 to 2023.
- We have provided £332,535 via our Veterans Prosthetics Policy to ensure veteran patients have the prosthetics they need.
- We have provided £50k so that prosthetists could be trained in new technologies they need to support veterans.
- We established a new forum in 2020 bringing together NHS, BLESMA, WHSSC to share information and identify issues facing the Armed forces community.
- We worked with the health service in Wales and South Wales Trauma Network to develop the Wales Veterans Trauma Network, ensuring those veterans with the most serious service-related conditions have the care they require.
- Work took place towards new guidance to Local Health Boards in Wales regarding priority consideration of veterans. The guidance also includes information on support for Service families and is expected to issue in June 2023.
- Work also took place towards a new Veteran GP Scheme supporting GP surgeries and ensuring they have more knowledge and awareness of veterans and the wider Armed Forces community. This is also expected to launch in May 2023.

Employment

Recommendations

- To promote the skills and benefits Service leavers and veterans bring to the workplace.
- To launch and promote Forces Families Jobs with Families Federations in Wales. Partners and the sector to promote this initiative to beneficiaries.
- To help ensure veterans can relate the skills gained during Service to skills required in the civilian workplace.

Progress to date

- We have worked with the RFCA, CTP and Careers Wales to establish a new Veterans Employment event in South Wales. This was delivered in 2021 and 2022 and will run again in 2023.
- We have committed to delivering a North Wales Armed Forces jobs fair in 2024.
- We have supported the Your Skills Your Future Programme, developed by Places for Growth and the Gwent AFLO.

Case study

In November 2022, the Welsh Government and partners delivered a second service leaver and veterans' employment fair. The 2022 event was developed by the Welsh Government Employment Action Group, which is taking forward the UK Strategy for our Veterans. The work of the Group is informed by evidence from the Veterans Scoping Exercise consultation which heard from over 1,000 service leavers, veterans, families and organisations.

The event featured a keynote address by the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership Hannah Blythyn. During the day, service leavers and veterans could engage directly with almost 50 employers in a dedicated jobs fair, along with other support organisations. Employers including Palletways and Allan Webb provided key information to attendees about the roles available within their organisations and the opportunities for the Armed Forces community. Over 160 service leavers and veterans were in attendance and at least 21 offers of employment were made as a result of the event. There has also been a record number of placements across Wales via CTP since the event.

In addition, employers and organisations took part in a conference session which promoted the value and skills of the Armed Forces Community. This session featured Welsh Government and Defence Relationship Management alongside public and private sector employers.

Transition and community support

Recommendations

- The Welsh Government to work with the Armed Forces sector in Wales to support and enhance CTP/Defence Transition Services in Wales.
- To improve the signposting and information available to Service leavers, veterans and families to support them on settling into the community.

Progress to date

- A Transition Action Group was established in 2020 and has regularly brought together partners supporting transition support in Wales to work collaboratively and build links across key agencies.
- We produced the first Wales Resettlement Guide working with the CTP, Tri

Services and the Transition Action group, published in June 2021. This has been promoted across the Tri Services and Families Federations.

- Over this reporting period, 5 Career Transition workshops have been held in Chepstow and 3 in Cardiff, supporting 96 Service leavers and veterans.
- Since February 2023, 132 new employers in Wales have been engaged with the CTP, advertising live jobs via the Right Job platform, attending Employment Fairs, contributing to a newsletter that has regional and national reach and participating with Virtual Employer presentations which are available to service leavers and veterans in Wales. Placements to employers in Wales are currently at a 5-year high.
- Welsh Government officials meet regularly with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Talent Skills Learning and Development (TSLD) team to support the transition offer in Wales and has provided feedback from service leavers and veterans in Wales to the MOD to help inform future provision.

Education

Recommendations

- To raise the profile of the needs of Service children in schools in Wales, providing support where needed and improved data.

Progress to date

- The Welsh Government continued to provide annual funding of £270k to support Service children throughout Wales in 2022 to 2023.
- Schools and local authorities are able to apply for funding to run projects in the 2022 to 2023 academic year, supporting service children.
- Welsh Government officials have commenced a cross-departmental project to explore existing sources of data and mechanisms for collecting

information for service children, and 2 other groups of vulnerable learners: adopted children and young carers.

Information/awareness and finance

Recommendations

- To raise the profile and information flow amongst Local Authorities and front-line staff on support and services available to the Armed Forces community.
- To provide clear information and training on financial management and accountability prior to transition.
- Support existing work by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and partners to engage with the Armed Forces community and promote veterans' networks/groups.

Progress to date

- The AFLOs have delivered training for local authorities and public sector bodies on the Armed Forces community, including oversight of the Armed Forces Act and the Due Regard Duty.
- We have promoted cost of living and financial support available in Wales via resettlement officers working across the Tri Services. we have also promoted the support available from the charitable sector.
- We have arranged a 1-day conference for May 2023 focusing on support for the Armed Forces community and supporting delivery of the due regard duty.
- We worked with Warwickshire council and the AFLOs to develop a training package on the Armed Forces Covenant and the Due Regard Duty for frontline staff. This is available in both Welsh and English.

Criminal Justice

Recommendations

- To build on the support already in place for the identification of veterans entering the criminal justice system.
- To raise the awareness of information available on support at a local level for those leaving custody.

Progress to date

- A forum was established in 2021 to bring together Veterans NHS Wales, Veterans in Custody support officers and AFLOs to improve support for veterans in the Criminal Justice system. It also offered an opportunity to exchange key information.
- Veterans NHS Wales in collaboration with Welsh Government and the prison health care estate piloted an integrated care pathway (ICP) for veterans with service-related mental health problems who are currently detained in Welsh prisons.
- With the Ministry of Justice and partners, we have worked with Police and Crime Commissioners and Police Forces to assist with the identification and signposting of veterans in the Criminal Justice System.
- AFLOs have delivered training to staff within the criminal justice system to increase knowledge and awareness of local Armed Forces support services.
- We have supported veterans' support services, including at HMP Berwyn in North Wales.

Additional activity

Whilst the Veterans Scoping Exercise has been a focus for activity and a constant point of reference, there are also other areas of activity to highlight in this report. Below is a selection of relevant activity and additional detail on key developments:

Armed Forces Day

The Welsh Government continued to support a local authority each year to host the Armed Forces Day celebration for Wales, providing a grant of £20,000. In 2022 Wrexham County Borough Council hosted the event with over 300 service personnel and veterans marching through the city. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership and the Minister for Rural Affairs North Wales and Trefnydd joined the crowds to pay tribute to the work of the Armed Forces and engage with the Tri Services.

Health

Supporting amputee veterans in Wales

In Wales, there is a Veterans Prosthetics Policy which ensures that veterans with service attributable conditions can access the prosthetics they need to support them in their lives. During April 2022 to March 2023 spending on prosthetic support for veterans in Wales totalled £332,535 with 42 veteran patients registered across the Artificial Limb Centres in Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham.

The Welsh Government Armed Forces Prosthetics forum, that brings together

the NHS, BLESMA, the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee and Artificial limb centres, met twice. The forum, established in 2020, allows those delivering services for amputee veterans to share feedback and coordinate support.

Ian Massey, Clinical lead prosthetist, Cardiff Artificial limb and appliance centre:

“ We have a number of veterans who attend our prosthetic services and we have an all Wales policy for enhanced provision for those veterans whose amputations are service attributable. We have the full support of our commissioners in funding this level of service for our veteran community. Our internal processes for approval are fast and so far, we have been able to supply every request that we have made on behalf of this patient group.

“ We were invited to be a part of the Welsh Government Armed Forces group at its initiation. This allows us direct access to the representatives for the veteran community in Welsh government, including the newly appointed veteran’s commissioner for Wales. Other key members include BLESMA and our commissioners. This forum allows us to hear about up-and-coming developments for the veteran services and an opportunity to input first hand at this early stage into such developments.

“ It is an open forum that encourages and facilitates two-way discussions about the service levels we provide and progress of our services. It allows us to share directly both the successes and the challenges we face when delivering our services. This information sharing is essential to understand, develop and support any emerging issues that arise.

“ The forum is a very positive development I feel privileged to be a part of something that allows us to share best practice and promote the veteran services across all of the three prosthetic centres in Wales. ”

Veterans' Trauma Network: Wales

The Veterans' Trauma Network (VTN) in Wales continued to support veterans with the most complex physical injuries over the period of the report. The Service was promoted at the Adferiad Veteran Services Network Event, the Op Restore National Conference and the Fighting with Pride Wales Conference. Over the next reporting year, VTN representatives will attend regional Armed Forces covenant meetings, the All-Wales Armed Forces Health Board champions meeting, Female Veterans Conference in North Wales and the South Wales Trauma Network Conference to increase awareness of the Service. The Service has also been promoted to GPs across Wales.

Suicide prevention

In 2022, the Welsh Government established the Cross-Government Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Group. The Group's aim is to strengthen and drive cross-government working, including across health, housing, transport, education, social services, policing and custodial settings, welfare and employment. The Group will also ensure integration across multi-agency sectors.

Officials across Welsh Government, including the Armed Forces team, will continue to work collaboratively with the Armed Forces sector in Wales, as a new suicide and self-harm strategy is consulted on.

We have continued to support the Northumbria University 'One is Too Many' research project and will be considering the findings in the context of prevention services in Wales.

Working together to deliver the Duty Regard Duty

In May 2022, in partnership with Forces in Mind Trust, we delivered a one-day conference for the Armed Forces Community sector in Wales, focused on delivery of the Due Regard Duty. The conference was attended by over 120 delegates who heard updates from the MOD Covenant team, King's Centre for Military Health Research, the Wales Veterans Commissioner and Families Federations. Workshops were held covering the 3 policy areas subject to the Due Regard Duty; health, housing and education which allowed providers to share experiences and feedback.

Commemoration and recognition

As in previous years, the Welsh Government Ministers attended acts of National Remembrance.

June 2022 saw the First Minister attend a national service to mark the 40th anniversary of the Falklands conflict at Llandaff Cathedral, delivered with the South Atlantic Medals Association. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership attended the a Falklands 40 veterans' anniversary bike ride in Cardiff and the Royal British Legion's Anniversary Service at the National Memorial Arboretum.

In November 2022 the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership attended the War Widows Association act of Remembrance at the National Cenotaph. The First Minister attended the Royal British Legion's Wales Festival of Remembrance and the Wales act of Remembrance in Alexandra Gardens.

November 2022 also saw a new addition to National Remembrance in Wales with Race Council Cymru's co-ordination of a wreath-laying ceremony for Ethnic Minority and Commonwealth Servicemen and Women and the Windrush community in Alexandra Gardens which was attended by the Minister for Social

Justice.

Employer engagement

We worked closely with the MOD and CTP to highlight the employment support offer in Wales for service leavers and veterans. Since February 2023, 132 new employers in Wales have engaged with the CTP, advertising live jobs via the Right Job platform and attending Employment Fairs, contributing to a newsletter that has regional and national reach and participating with Virtual Employer presentations which are available to service leavers and veterans in Wales.

A South Wales Employment is planned for November 2023 and will also highlight live vacancies from Welsh companies that are suitable for Service Leavers, veterans and families to showcase the benefits of living and relocating to Wales.

RFCA worked with the Armed Forces Covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme signatories to improve engagement with employers to benefit service leavers.

At the end of 2022-23 there were 546 Armed Forces Covenant signatories in Wales. For the same period the MOD Employer Recognition Scheme totals for organisations in Wales reached 43 Gold, 55 Silver and 210 Bronze.

Family support

Forces Families Jobs (FFJ)

Working with the Royal Navy Families Federation, the Army Families Federation and the RAF Families Federation, during this period the Welsh Government and

sector partners continued to promote the FFJ website, which promotes employment opportunities for Service families.

We met with the Royal Navy Families Federation, Army Families Federation and RAF Families Federation to ensure the needs of service families are being considered in our work. Issues raised have included the MOD wraparound childcare scheme and access to dentistry services and we worked with colleagues across the Welsh Government, MOD and local services to ensure the priorities within the Armed Forces Families strategy are delivered in Wales.

Nuclear test veterans

In November 2022 the UK Government announced a new medal to recognise the contribution of British nuclear test veterans. Funding was also announced to support veterans' wellbeing and educate school children about the nuclear testing programme. Remember Together: Nuclear Test Veterans, was to be delivered by Big Ideas, an organisation that works with schools and local communities. Four films, featuring interviews with nuclear test veterans, were to be co-produced with secondary schoolchildren from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Data

This has been a significant year for data and Welsh Government officials worked closely with UK Government colleagues to ensure the first UK Veterans survey took Wales fully into account. The survey secured 1,534 responses from Wales representing 5.17% of the total for the UK.

This year saw the publication of the first datasets from the 2021 Census which for the first time asked a question about previous Service. This data is being used to inform local level decision making and Welsh Government officials

arranged training for AFLOs to enable our front-line people to create their own custom data sets.

Female veterans strategy

We funded our Gwent AFLO to run a female veterans' workshop in June 2022, bringing female veterans together to share experiences to inform future policy.

Service children

The Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru team, throughout the period of the report, worked closely with government officials, local authorities, schools, children and young people, education professionals, Armed Forces families and support organisations, as well as the Ministry of Defence.

They continued to provide a range of advice and assistance, including a website, plus information resources and toolkits for schools; awareness training for teachers; and manage school and local authority project funding from the Welsh Government's annual grant. Interest from schools increased, as did registrations, to gain the Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru accreditation. Project staff supported schools and local authorities hosting events to celebrate Month of the Military Child and Armed Forces Day.

LGBT Veterans Independent Review

The period of this report saw the 'LGBT Veterans Independent Review' chaired by Lord Etherton KC gather evidence to consider the impact of the 'Gay Ban' which existed across the Armed Forces prior to 2000. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership met with Lord Etherton as part of the process and agreed that the report should include suggestions for Welsh Government consideration. Both

Welsh Government officials and AFLOs worked with the Review Team to help their understanding of devolved services.

Engagement/visits

In addition to showing Ministers' support for Remembrance and Commemoration, this has been an active year in working with partners to raise the profile of the Armed Forces Community.

A key element of supporting public recognition of the Armed Forces every year is a Armed Forces Day. In 2022 this was hosted by Wrexham, with Newport due to host in June 2023.

The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership attended events to raise the profile of the 'LGBT Veterans Independent Review'. This included attending the charity Fighting with Pride's annual Veterans Retreat in Llanberis in September 2022, meeting with Lord Etherton the Review Chair in December 2022 and speaking at the Fighting with Pride Wales conference in January 2023.

The Deputy Minister also attended the Wales Veterans Awards in June 2022 and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold awards ceremony in December 2022, encouraging employers across Wales to support Service Leavers and Veterans.

Armed Forces Free Swimming scheme

Funding from the Welsh Government's Armed Forces Free Swimming Scheme provided 11,788 free swimming sessions for veterans and members of the armed forces over the reporting period.

Higher education

A total of £137,710 was provided towards the Further and Higher Education Scheme over the period of this report, enabling service leavers across Wales to benefit from Further and Higher education.

Bereaved children

The Welsh Government has contributed £55,160 during the period of this report towards the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme providing children of those who have died in service with a head start in life through scholarships.

Partnership working and coordination

We continued to work with partners to ensure our efforts to support the Armed Forces Community and deliver on the Covenant are coordinated with all our partners.

Armed Forces Expert Group

The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership chaired the Armed Forces Expert Group in October 2022 and March 2023. Members have considered key topics such as delivery of the Due Regard Duty, the work of the AFLOs and the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on the Armed Forces community. The Group will now embark on a series of 'deep dives' to examine key issues in detail and suggest actions for Welsh Government and partners to inform policy delivery.

Ministry of Defence

We worked closely with the MOD and partners from the other devolved governments to coordinate our work. This has included helping facilitate online training webinars on the Due Regard Duty for local authorities and local health boards in Wales.

Office for Veterans' Affairs

We are members of the OVA Devolved Administrations Working Group and worked closely with the Office for National Statistics and OVA on the UK Veterans' survey. We have also engaged with the OVA on Op Fortitude to provide homelessness support services. and continue to engage and share best practice in the delivery of the UK Strategy for our veterans.

Wales Veterans Commissioner

In June 2022 Colonel (Retired) James Phillips OBE was appointed by the Cabinet Office to be the first Veterans Commissioner for Wales. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership met with the Commissioner on a number of occasions, both formally and informally, and the Commissioner also met with Welsh Government Ministers across a range of portfolios.

In January 2023 the Commissioner presented his first report to UK Ministers. The Commissioner's assessment was broadly favourable stating that Welsh Government and service providers are Covenant aware and supportive of veterans. Pressures in healthcare and social housing were identified, though these were recognised as being not unique to Wales.

Areas of good practice highlighted include veterans' hubs, AFLOs and veterans

NHS Wales.

Welsh Government Local Health Board Champions Forum

Armed Forces and Veterans Champions exist in every health board in Wales to advocate for the Armed Forces community in their local health board area. These Champions are non-executive board members supported by a lead executive board member. The Champion role is to help ensure their needs of the armed forces community are met locally; and help improve links between health and other public advocates for the armed forces community.

Twice a year the Champions, along with representation from Veterans NHS Wales, 160th (Wales) Brigade and Defence Primary Healthcare, meet the Welsh Government's Armed Forces and Veteran's health policy leads to discuss progress on activity; new and emerging issues; share best practice; and promote consistency of provision to the armed forces community across Wales. The Champions met in May and November 2022.

In addition to the health board update on activity in their areas, the following items were discussed:

- The Veterans Commissioner for Wales highlighted areas of good practice in Wales and presented on his priorities. He cited the Champions Group as complementary to his role.
- Plans for publication of the Public Health Wales Veteran Friendly GP Practice guidance to GP and the development and launch of the new Veteran Friend GP Practice Accreditation Scheme, managed by Health Education and Improvement Wales.
- Plans for a revised Armed Forces Covenant, Healthcare Priority / Special Consideration for Veterans / Ex-Armed Forces Personnel guidance ahead of its planned reissue in June 2023 to all Local Health Boards, Armed Forces Champions and all GPs across Wales

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- Managing referrals cross border to the Veterans' Orthopaedic Service at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital in Oswestry and promoting the equitable services available in health boards across Wales.
- The Restorative Approaches Veterans' and Families Service provided by Tros Gynnal Plant and funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust.

All Wales Armed Forces Charities Group

Welsh Government officials attend the group, chaired by the Royal British Legion. The Group has continued to meet throughout 2022 to 2023, bringing together key UK and Wales-based charities to share best practice and receive updates regarding support delivery for the Armed Forces community. In March 2023 the group held a written exercise to collate examples of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the Armed Forces community in Wales and this was presented to the Armed Forces Expert Group.

Feedback was received from organisations including the VC gallery in Pembrokeshire who deliver advice and support to the Armed Forces community on cost of living help they can access. As a result of this work, key Cost of living support provided by Welsh and UK Governments has been promoted across the sector to help ensure members of the Armed Forces community in Wales have access to information on help they may be entitled to.

Glossary of terms

- AFC: Armed Forces Covenant
- AFCFT: Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
- AFEG: Armed Forces Expert Group
- AFLO: Armed Forces Liaison Officer
- ALAC: Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre

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- CTP: Careers Transition Partnership
- LHB: Local Health Board
- MODLAP: MOD Local Authority Partnership
- MDT: Multi-Disciplinary Team
- OVA: Office for Veterans Affairs
- RBL: Royal British Legion
- RFCA: Reserve Forces and Cadets Association
- RFEA: Regular Forces Employment Association
- SP: Service People
- SSCE Cymru: Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru
- STEM: Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
- RSLO: Regional Schools Liaison Officer
- VNHSW: Veterans NHS Wales
- VTN: Veterans Trauma Network
- WHSSC: Welsh Health Shared Services Committee
- WLGA: Welsh Local Government Association

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