

The Welsh Government's Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2019

Presented to Senedd Cymru/ Welsh Parliament pursuant
to Standing Order 15.2 of the Government of Wales Act 2006



Her Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown and their Families.

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the 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 the 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.

Joint Ministerial Foreword

Our Armed Forces are, and always have been there for us during the most challenging of times.

The first half of 2020 has provided, yet again, ample evidence of both the commitment and the abilities of our Armed Forces, and as a nation we are immensely proud of and grateful to them.

We would like to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to the men and women of our Armed Forces who this year have and continue to work tirelessly alongside others, to help our nation overcome the unprecedented challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

We also recognise the significant support provided by our partner organisations during this challenging time.

Our Armed Forces community have supported our NHS and the most vulnerable in our communities when they needed it most.

They have worked with the Welsh Government, with our Local Health Boards and key partners, to provide vital expertise, knowledge and skills to help tackle Covid-19, and make a significant and positive difference to the lives of the people of Wales.

In May 2018, as a Government we launched our first Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report.

We did this because we felt it right that we outline the work being undertaken in Wales, our ongoing commitment to support the Armed Forces community and the huge contribution they make to our communities.

The document was laid in the Senedd for the people of Wales to assess and scrutinise.

It also identified key commitments for 2019/20 that the Welsh Government and our key partners would take forward.

We are pleased to see that significant progress has been made on all of those commitments, and many new ones too.

However, there is always more we can do.

We will continue to promote the skills and experience of our Armed Forces community, to ensure they are able to maximise the use of the skills they have gained when they re-enter civilian life.

Our Armed Forces community are a huge asset to our nation.

We recognise their invaluable contribution and will continue to support them.

We will look at what support we can provide to more vulnerable families who often face upheaval during the transition from Service life, and we will strive to increase the awareness and knowledge amongst service providers about the Armed Forces community to help ensure that support is available when needed.

This reporting year we marked the seventy-fifth anniversaries of D-Day and VE Day.

We paid tribute to veterans who fought bravely and those on the home front during the Second World War.

We did so in circumstances none of us could have foreseen and although the restrictions in place due to Covid 19 meant we had to change the way we marked this important milestone, it did not reduce the outpouring of respect and recognition from the people of Wales for all our veterans have done to help shape our society today.

Some, but by no means all, of our current Serving personnel, ex-Service community and their families need support.

This report includes numerous examples of where we are providing that, investing in services, working with partners and targeting resource at areas of need.

None of this can be achieved successfully without listening to our Armed Forces community and those who work with them.

We know that people's needs change and to understand those changing needs we undertook our Veterans Scoping Exercise last year which collected the views, experiences and feedback of veterans and organisations.

We are pleased that the recommendations emanating from that work are now being taken forward and we will be closely monitoring delivery.

Our Armed Forces community are a huge asset to our nation.

We recognise their invaluable contribution and will continue to support them.



Julie James MS
Minister for Housing and
Local Government



Hannah Blythyn MS
Deputy Minister for Housing and
Local Government

Observation

Feedback from the Armed Forces Expert Group Members

The Armed Forces Expert Group brings together people and organisations 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 suggestions on how service delivery might be improved.

The Armed Forces Expert Group members are generally supportive of the 2019 Annual Report and appreciate the commitment of the Welsh Government to progress this agenda.

Comments from the Expert Group members:

The Royal Navy, Army and RAF Families Federations very much appreciate the close collaborative working relationships we have with the Welsh Government in supporting our Armed Forces communities in Wales.

We acknowledge the progress made against the commitments as listed and see Wales as a welcoming and positive location for our Armed Forces and families to live and work.

We would like to see more prominence given to the Forces Families Jobs platform and we encourage all Local Authorities and Local Health Boards to advertise vacancies through this portal.

We would like to see acknowledgement of the great work of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in enabling through policy, the easier access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for Service children.

This should be celebrated under the Priority Treatment section and we would very much like to see this replicated throughout Wales.

Although understandable in the extenuating circumstances it is disappointing to learn of the delay in the school admissions code review, we hope this commitment can be re-confirmed soon.

We note there is still further work to be done to address issues some Service personnel and families are facing with regards to council tax charges.

Where it is mentioned that places on waiting lists when moving within Wales are honoured – we would like confirmation if this will be expanded to include family members moving into Wales from other parts of the UK in accordance with the Armed Forces Covenant commitment.

We would like agreed time scales for the improvement of data on Service children in welsh schools as there appears to be little progress.

NHS and Veterans NHS Wales would like the Veterans' healthcare in prison guidance to be updated to take account of the SToMP work in prisons and lack of referrals to Veterans NHS Wales from veterans in prison.

Veterans NHS Wales has submitted a business case to Welsh Government including an option to employ six additional veteran therapists and peer Mentors to work in prisons and community.

The Royal British Legion works closely with the Welsh Government, and all parties in the Senedd to support the Armed Forces community.

The continued financial support by the Welsh Government for the Armed Forces Liaison Officers is excellent news.

These posts do the important job of ensuring Local Authorities are meeting their Armed Forces Covenant commitments.

The funding for Service Children is also to be welcomed. Some Service children can face additional challenges with increased school moves and added emotional stress.

We have seen this funding used in innovative ways to provide extra support to those vulnerable pupils.

After over four years of campaigning by the Royal British Legion, for the first time ever there will be a question on military service in the 2021 census.

We hope this will help governments and charities better target services to our community. We are grateful to all those who supported our “Count Them in” campaign.

Of course, the work is never done and we are still pushing for improvements in areas including, social isolation in the Armed Forces community, tackling substance misuse, housing and improving the transition of people from a military to a civilian life.

We will continue to collaborate with colleagues from the public, private and charity sectors to achieve this.

National Probation Service in Wales are encouraged by the Welsh Government’s confirmation of the Armed Forces Liaison Officers further funding of £275,000 for the next two years, from April 2021.

We are looking forward to being part of the Action Groups that have been established to take forward the recommendations/ findings from the Veterans Scoping Exercise.

The funding of primary health services in prisons is a real positive.

We will continue to collaborate with colleagues from the public, private and charity sectors to achieve this.

Executive Overview

Delivering for our Armed Forces Community

We are pleased to be able to present our second Armed Forces Covenant Annual report to the Senedd Cymru and the people of Wales. As with our first report, it aims to outline progress and achievements in supporting our Armed Forces community, including highlighting the collaborative and partnership approach that is so important in delivering successful outcomes for our Armed Forces community in Wales.

Supporting Welsh Communities through Covid-19

The latter part of the period covered by this report has been dominated by our national response to Covid 19. Since March 2020, the pandemic has, and continues to have, a huge impact on our nation and sadly, many people have lost their lives.

We wish to pay tribute to the role the Armed Forces community has played in our response to Covid-19. Our Serving personnel have been key in supporting our NHS and local communities. Our veterans and support organisations have been heavily involved in helping their local communities.

What we have seen are many examples of communities coming together and supporting one another and our Armed Forces have often been at the heart of that effort. In recent months we have witnessed first-hand, the skills, commitment and experience of our Armed Forces in providing support during very difficult times.

Listening to our Armed Forces community – taking action

At the time of the publication of last year's report, our Veterans' Scoping Exercise was underway with the aim to collate feedback from the ex-Service community and their families on any perceived gaps in service provision. That work was completed during the Autumn of 2019, and we are now taking forward the findings. The Scoping Exercise also represented the Welsh Government's input into the new UK-wide Veterans Strategy. We are pleased to have had the opportunity to work collaboratively with the UK and other devolved Governments on this important work. That collaborative approach will continue with the establishment by the UK Government of the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

Working with the Experts

We have continued to engage directly with the Armed Forces community. This has involved visiting support groups and speaking directly with veterans, families and those who work with them along with the military in Wales. The Armed Forces Expert Group continues to provide valuable support to delivery of services across Wales, as do members of the regional and local Armed Forces fora.

In the last year, we have seen progress against the four priority areas the Expert Group members outlined as important in last year's report – priority treatment, supporting veterans requiring through-life support, supporting and embedding the work of the Armed Forces Liaison Officers and work towards improving data on Service children.

We also continue to provide annual support for Armed Forces Days in Wales, offering an opportunity for the public to express their support and thanks to the wider Armed Forces community.



Key achievements in Wales

Health and Well-being

- » We continue to provide £700,000 per annum for the Veterans NHS Wales service, which has supported veterans through mental health treatment.
- » We have supported 94 veterans with access to prosthetic services via the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service (ALAS).
- » 31 fast-track treatments have been approved this year at an estimated cost of £72,473, ensuring Service personnel receive the treatment they require to enable them to return to their Service roles.
- » We launched the first Loneliness and Social Isolation (LSI) Strategy for Wales, recognising how some members of the Armed Forces community can be vulnerable to LSI. We provided £120,000 to tackle this issue amongst the Armed Forces community and some of this funding has also supported charities in supporting the ex-Service community during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- » The Service Children Support fund has provided £250,000 to help schools in Wales understand the needs of Service children and equip them with the skills to cope with the challenges of the Armed Forces lifestyle throughout their schooling.
- » Through our Further and Higher Education Scheme, we have provided £200,441 in 2018-19 enabling Service leavers and veterans across Wales to benefit from Further and Higher education, improving their confidence, education and employment opportunities.

Housing

Education

- » We continued to support the SSCE Cymru project, providing Service children, families and schools with valuable resources and guidance.
- » We supported SSCE Cymru, University of South Wales and the Service Children's Progression Alliance to establish a SCIP Alliance hub in Wales to develop research, data, collaboration and capacity in the sector.
- » In March 2020, the Welsh Government announced £10 million to support Local Authorities secure the accommodation needed to protect those most vulnerable to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- » We worked closely with Local Authorities to identify and secure a range of accommodation and facilitate appropriate levels of support, to house vulnerable and displaced persons including ex-Service personnel.
- » £20 million has been made available to ensure those in temporary accommodation, including any ex-Service personnel, can move onto long-term sustainable housing.

Benefits and finance

- » We have established a multiagency Information and Awareness Action Group to improve the information available to the Armed Forces community and raise awareness of the benefits, and financial support available.

Support on return to civilian life

- » The Welsh Government will provide £275,000 per annum of further funding for our Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) for 2 years from April 2021.
- » We have supported the new Defence Transition Services which is helping those leaving the Armed Forces and returning to Wales.
- » In January 2020, we published our Armed Forces community Scoping Exercise report. Work is now ongoing to take forward the recommendations.

Employment

- » In collaboration with Business in the Community (BITC) Cymru and the Scottish Government we are developing an addendum to our Employers Toolkit aimed at Military partners to advise employers how they can best tap into the skills of Military families.
- » We continue to work with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on new Wales-specific information for Service leavers to ensure those coming to Wales after Service can access up to date information on the support available here.

Family Support

- » We have updated our **Welcome to Wales** document, providing information and advice for Serving personnel and their families wishing to relocate to Wales.

Commemoration

- » With partners and people across Wales we commemorated the 75th anniversary of VE Day, along with the liberation of the Dutch city of s’Hertogenbosch.
- » We also continue to provide annual support for Armed Forces Days in Wales, offering an opportunity for the public to express their support and thanks to the wider Armed Forces community. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this initiative was delivered “virtually” this year and plans are underway for future Wales Armed Forces days working with the Military, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and other partners.

Review of our 2019/20 commitments

What we said we would do:	What has been done since last year:
Continue to fund Veterans NHS Wales to enable veterans to access treatment specifically targeting mental health issues.	Provided £700,000 funding for veterans to receive mental health treatment. We have also provided £85,000 in additional funding to support veterans' therapists.
We will also invest in the creation of national and regional initiatives to prevent suicide and self-harm.	Regional approaches established across Wales through our NHS providers to tackle suicide and self-harm.
Continue to review delivery of the Fast Track Referral Pathway to ensure optimum service delivery.	31 fast-track treatments were provided between April 2019 and March 2020 at a cost of £72,473.
Continue to fund free bus travel for injured veterans.	The provision of concessionary bus pass entitlement for those in receipt of Armed Forces Compensation payments continues.
Continue to fund free swimming for veterans and Serving personnel until 2021.	The provision of funding has continued. Despite the closure of leisure facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic 8319 free swims were recorded.
Ensure veterans, Serving personnel and their families are part of ongoing work to deliver our first Loneliness and Social Isolation (LSI) strategy.	<p>The potential impact of LSI on the Armed Forces community is reflected and recognised in our new Welsh Government strategy.</p> <p>£120,000 funding provided to organisations in Wales to tackle loneliness and social isolation amongst the Armed Forces community.</p>
Continue our engagement with Swansea University to support research into gambling in the Armed Forces community.	<p>Promoted the research across the Armed Forces sector in Wales through national and regional fora.</p> <p>The Welsh Government has facilitated the listing of the National Gambling Treatment Service on the Veterans' Gateway.</p>

What we said we would do:	What has been done since last year:
Consult with the Armed Forces community on the status of veterans as part of our housing priority need consultation.	Our Scoping Exercise collected experiences and feedback from veterans on housing provision – this will help inform housing policy going forward.
Update the Code of Guidance for Housing Allocations and Homelessness – including consideration of support for divorced or separated spouses and civil partners of Service personnel.	This has been delayed due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
Provide further funding for the Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) for 2 years from 2019.	Funding of £275,000 for each of the next two years, from April 2021 has been confirmed.
Working with the Veterans' Gateway, Northumbria University and the WLGA to publicise local services, including veteran support groups and hubs, to enable the Armed Forces community to access peer support and services locally.	Veterans' Gateway has been updated with information on support groups/ hubs in Wales. The Welsh Government is a designated 'Covenant officer' able to upload information to the Directory of services.
Continue to provide support to our Armed Forces Fora across Wales to identify emerging issues and good practice.	Welsh Government Officials continue to attend regional Armed Forces fora to collect feedback on and influence Covenant delivery across Wales.
Work with Business in the Community Cymru to promote the benefits of employing members of the Armed Forces community and 'Veterans Awareness Week'.	Development of an Employers Toolkit Addendum aimed at military families is underway and will be published later in 2020.
Work with key partners to support and promote Reservists Day.	In 2019, with Reserve Forces and Cadets Association Wales, the Welsh Government contributed to an event in the Senedd to celebrate the contribution Reservists make to our Armed Forces.

What we said we would do:	What has been done since last year:
As part of the Cymru'n Cofio programme, consider how this legacy and stories can be accessed by future generations.	A document is being produced to reflect on the significant commemorative activity undertaken in Wales and further afield over the last six years. The Cymru'n Cofio website will also serve as digital legacy for the programme and will be available for the next five years.
Continue to support commemorative events, including the 75 Anniversaries of D Day, VE Day and the S'Hertogenbosch Welsh liberation.	<p>The First Minister attended the D-Day commemorations in France and spoke to veterans via telephone, due to Covid-19 restrictions, to mark VE Day commemorations.</p> <p>The First Minister represented Wales at the s'Hertogenbosch commemorations in Holland.</p>
Produce a report detailing the findings and recommendations from our Scoping Exercise, and work with key partners to identify the means of delivering identified issues.	<p>Report produced and published January 2020. Response to UK Veterans strategy published in co-ordination with the Welsh, UK, and Scottish Governments.</p> <p>Action Groups established to consider and respond to issues raised (see Scoping Exercise section).</p>
Work with the Families Federations to identify the support needs for Service families living in Wales.	<p>Regular engagement with Families Federations.</p> <p>October 2019 saw the Wales launch of Forces Families Jobs service.</p>
Refresh our Welcome to Wales document for Serving personnel.	Completed. Updated document published and circulated to all key partners.
Continue to promote and support the recruitment of Reservists within Welsh Government and the wider public sector, as part of ongoing communications on Armed Forces Day and whenever the opportunity arises.	Highlighted role of Reservists within Welsh Government as part of Armed Forces week.

What we said we would do:	What has been done since last year:
Continue to progress the work to enable the collection of data on Service children in schools through the Pupil Level Annual School Census.	Work is continuing to explore options for collecting data on Service children in schools in Wales.
Continue to review the Service Children's Admission Code to ensure that service families are not being disadvantaged through the interpretation of the Code.	The School Admissions Code is subject to ongoing review. Delays have been experienced due to COVID-19.

The Welsh Government is committed to upholding the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.



Governance

How we work to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales

The Welsh Government is committed to upholding the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. Working closely with our partners – the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Office for Veterans' Affairs, the Tri-Services, Local Authorities, Local Health Boards, military charities and organisations supporting the Armed Forces community – our aim is to ensure the provision of efficient and effective services that meet the varying needs of this community.

UK Engagement

Engagement has continued in the last year with UK Government and the other devolved nations. Work has included:

- » **Covenant Legislation:** The Welsh Government has helped ensure the views of the Armed Forces sector in Wales have been included during the development of the planned UK Covenant Legislation.
- » **Covenant Delivery Group:** Officials attend the UK Covenant Delivery Group, which monitors delivery of key policies across the UK.
- » **Devolved nations:** Wales is represented on the MOD devolved nations' forum, highlighting best practice from across Wales and flagging up areas of concern that are raised through AFLOs and partner organisations.

Developments in the last year

In 2019, all UK nations have come together on the new **Cross-UK Veterans Strategy Coordination Group**, which enables all four UK nations to coordinate delivery of the Strategy for Veterans across the UK.

This year we have established a new **Programme Board** and **Cross Government Group** with key partners to help ensure the recommendations of the veterans' Scoping Exercise are delivered.

Action Groups have been established to take forward the recommendations, on issues as diverse and important as Employment, Transition, Information/Awareness and Finance. Reflecting the breadth of issues to be considered, the membership of these groups is equally diverse. To avoid duplication, existing networks and forums will be utilised to take forward recommendations relating to health, housing, education and criminal justice. (see diagram below):

Veterans Scoping Exercise – governance structure

Armed Forces Expert Group



Programme Board

To include chairs of the Action Groups, key external Stakeholders and internal cross-Government members.

Cross-Government Armed Forces Group

Deputy Director level Welsh Government officials to discuss Welsh Government – led actions from the delivery plan.



Thematic action groups and discussion fora



Criminal justice



Housing



Health/
wellbeing



Information/
awareness
and finance



Education



Employment/
skills



Transition/
resettlement

Listening

The Welsh Government, working closely with partners, has structures in place to identify key issues and take action, share information and best practice, and ensure we are hearing the collective voices of the Armed Forces community in Wales.

- » **The Armed Forces Expert Group** – is chaired by the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government. Meeting bi-annually, its members provide a strategic voice on behalf of the Armed Forces community in Wales, considering key issues and collective methods of resolving these.

Chaired by the WLGA and meeting twice yearly the **Armed Forces Network** considers issues of local and regional interest to the Armed Forces community. The group comprises representatives from Local Authorities alongside representatives from other organisations involved in supporting the Armed Forces community.

- » **Regional and Local Authority Armed Forces Fora** – organised regionally and at Local Authority level, these groups bring together Local Government, health, the Military, statutory agencies and Service charities to examine key issues, identify best practice, co-ordinate services, and highlight areas for further consideration at an all-Wales level.
- » Local issues are captured through Local Fora and **Armed Forces Liaison Officers** (AFLOs) across Wales, ensuring Covenant guidelines and services are embedded within Local Authorities. The AFLOs are also key members of the Armed Forces Network and the **Regional and Local Authority Armed Forces fora**.

Support groups – Welsh Government officials attend veteran/family support groups to collect the views of the Armed Forces community. As part of our Scoping Exercise, officials attended over 40 veteran support groups/hubs during the consultation period. During summer 2019, an additional 5 stakeholder sessions were held across Wales attended by 77 charities and statutory agencies, to explore potential actions to be taken forward, ensuring recommendations were informed by those who work with our Armed Forces community. The final recommendations are now being delivered.

Ministerial engagement – The First Minister, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government and other Ministers regularly meet with senior Military leaders in Wales to discuss issues of shared interest and concern. Opportunities to engage and collaborate are explored and this year we have seen partnership working on key events including the D-Day celebrations, Armed Forces Day and VE Day, and attendance at the Armed Forces Cambrian Patrol training exercise.

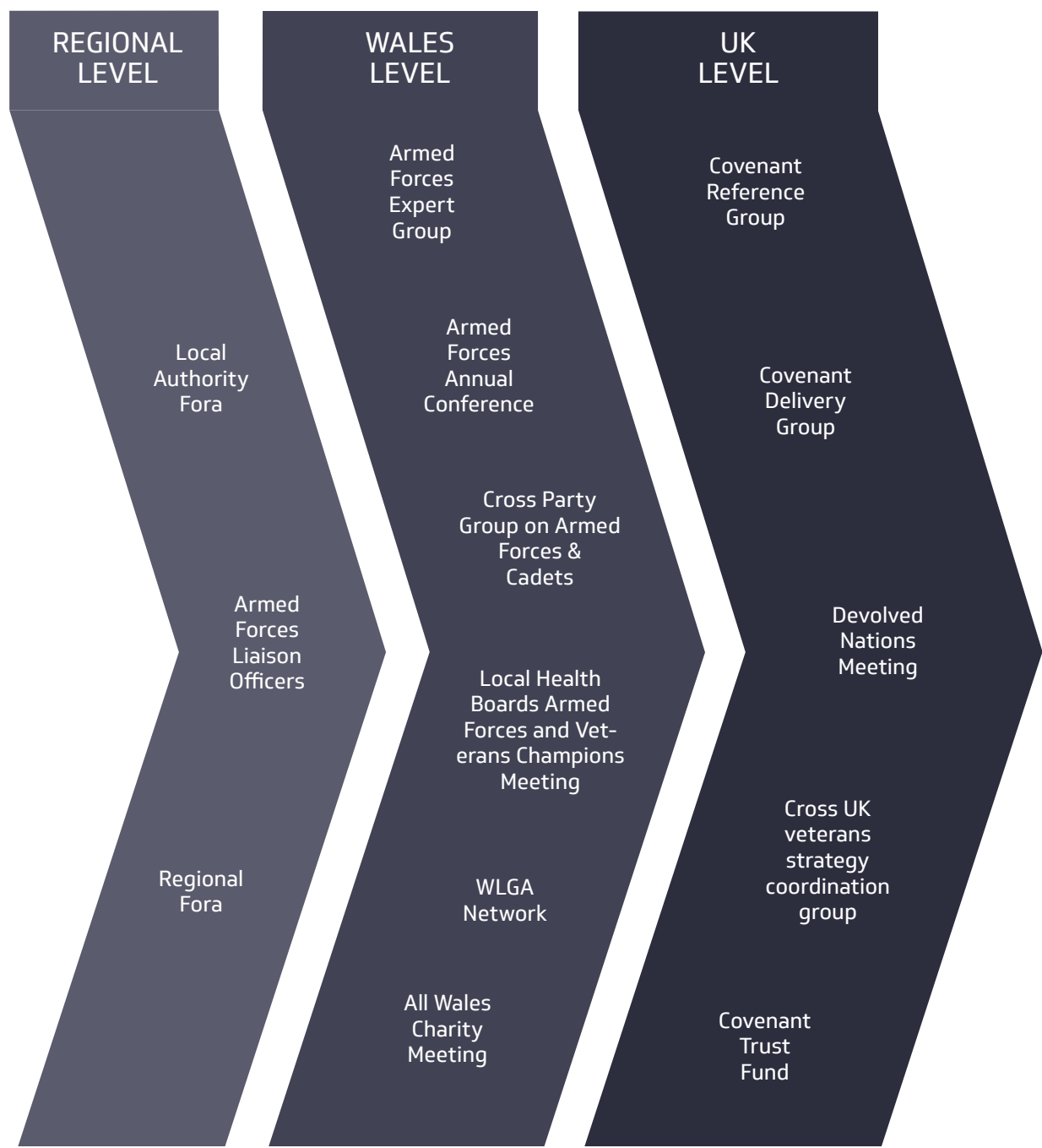
The Welsh Government also recognises the value in wider engagement with our partners and the Armed Forces community.

Held annually, our **Armed Forces Covenant Conference** attracts a diverse audience from across Wales.

It provides an opportunity for Local Authority and Local Health Board Armed Forces Champions, Third Sector, MoD, the Family Federations, as well as many others with an interest in Armed Forces issues to discuss new initiatives, share good practice and consider opportunities for further collaboration.

We attend the **all-Wales Service Charities meeting**, convened by the Royal British Legion, which enables us to share information and good practice and discuss key issues with organisations supporting veterans and their families.

A framework is in place to encourage collaboration and to identify issues and share good practice. The structure in Wales, and wider across all four UK nations is captured below:



A senior Welsh Government official attends the UK Government **Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group** to ensure good practice and issues relating to the Armed Forces community are shared. We work with partners across the UK to ensure we coordinate policies but also reflect the differing situations across Wales and other parts of the UK.

Metrics – Improving Data and Evidence

We have long supported work – started by the Royal British Legion – to include a question on present and past membership of the Armed Forces in the UK Census. In July 2020, legislation was passed by the UK Parliament to amend the census in England and Wales and for the first time, it will provide information on whether someone has served in HM Armed Forces.

This will allow Governments and support providers to better understand the profile and needs of the ex-military community.

National Population survey

In May 2020, The National Survey for Wales included questions related to service in the Armed Forces to identify people who had previously served in the Armed Forces and those with an immediate family or household member Serving, or who had previously served. Of the 3,000 respondents for the month:

- » **25% of respondents** had an immediate family or household member either Serving or a veteran;
- » **5% of respondents** identified as an Armed Forces veteran.

This information will help inform policy across Welsh Government.

Map of need

Key highlights

There are approximately **140,000** veterans living in Wales.



82,000 of these are aged **65** years and over.

As at 31 March 2019, there were **19,173** Military pension and compensations attributable to veterans in Wales.



Between 2014 and 2018 the average age of veterans referred to Veterans' NHS Wales was **41 years**.

Data courtesy of Northumbria University Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research

Based within Northumbria University, The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research is a collective of academics, service providers and service users with an interest in improving the health and social wellbeing of veterans and their families. The Hub has developed an online directory of services available to the veteran community. The Map of Need project provides evidence-based findings about the veteran population.

Data for Wales from the Map of Need

The available data estimates that:

- » Approximately 140,000 veterans are residing in Wales¹. Veterans aged above working age (65+) are estimated at 82,000.
- » In 2011 there were approximately 50,000 working age veterans in Wales. In 2017, this figure was estimated at 58,000. Therefore, an increase of 8,000 working age veterans over six years.
- » Isle of Anglesey, Conwy, Flintshire and Pembrokeshire Local Authorities each have a percentage of working age Veterans higher than 3% of the total working age population. The Local Authorities where the proportion of working age veterans is lowest is Ceredigion (1.78%) and Cardiff (1.59%).
- » There are no estimates of the total veteran population or veterans aged above working age (65+) at the Local Authority level. However, figures for recipients of military pension and compensation are available².

- » As at 31 March 2019, there were 19,173 military pension and compensations attributable to veterans in Wales. Amongst the Local Authority areas the Vale of Glamorgan stands out with 1,557 (8%), followed by Rhondda Cynon Taf with 1,258 (7%) and Flintshire with 1,249 (7%).

Findings from the Map of Need research project show that several areas of third sector assistance can be found in Wales. Amongst the three branches of the Armed Forces the pattern is identical, and some areas stand out across Wales.

The main areas for **Royal Navy** veterans in receipt of assistance are Colwyn Bay, Wrexham, Newtown, Llanelli, Swansea and Cardiff.

Army veterans in need of assistance can be predominantly found in Caernarfon, Bangor, Colwyn Bay and Rhyl in the North. In the South, the areas that stand out are Pembroke, Carmarthen and the corridor between Llanelli and Cardiff, including Swansea and Pontypridd.

RAF veterans in need of assistance follow a similar pattern to the other branches. However, there is a focal point of need in Merthyr Tydfil that is not as evident as in the other hotspots.

This year we again provided approximately £700,000 to Veterans NHS Wales (VNHSW) enabling the service to deliver evidence-based treatment for service-related mental health conditions.



Health and Wellbeing

Though the majority of Armed Forces personnel leave the forces healthy and ready to move onto the next stage of their lives, others may return from conflict or leave the Armed Forces with complex healthcare needs. These may not surface until years after the individual has left the Services. We are continuously working to ensure healthcare provision meets the needs of those who require support.



ACHIEVEMENTS



£700,000
provided annually
to provide
treatment for
veterans with
mental health
issues

486
veterans
assessed by
Veterans NHS
Wales from
April 2019 to
March 2020



12
requests for
War Veteran
prosthetics
between
April 2019 to
March 2020



£85,700
interim funding
provided by Welsh
Government for
veteran therapists
until March 2021

14
organisations
supported to tackle
loneliness and social
isolation amongst the
Armed Forces
community in Wales



94
members of
BLESMA the limbless
veterans accessing
prosthetic services



£113,40
invested in new
prosthetics for
veterans in Wales

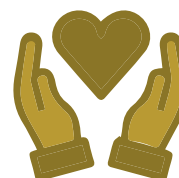


84
successful applications
to the Veterans
Hearing Fund from
Wales during 2019

31
fast track treatments
provided for Serving
personnel in Wales



329
veterans who are
receiving/have
received treatment for
alcohol or drug misuse



Veterans NHS Wales

This year we again provided approximately £700,000 to Veterans NHS Wales (VNHSW) enabling the service to deliver evidence-based treatment for service-related mental health conditions.

795 veterans have been referred to the service from March 2019-April 2020. Since it was established in 2010, VNHSW has received over 5000 referrals.

Veterans NHS Wales data below:

- » Figure 1.
Referrals April 2019-March 2020
- » Figure 2.
Treatment April 2019-March 2020
- » Figure 3.
Assessments April 2019-March 2020

Figure 1

Sum of Referrals	1 Apr-Jun 2019	2 Jul-Sep 2019	3 Oct-Dec 2019	4 Jan-Mar 2020	Grand Total
Swansea Bay	28	39	31	31	129
Aneurin Bevan	18	47	40	22	127
Betsi Cadwaladr	34	41	37	35	147
Cardiff and Vale	16	24	29	18	87
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	44	40	40	40	164
Hywel Dda	32	42	38	29	141
Grand Total	172	233	215	175	795

Figure 2

Sum of In Treatment	Swansea Bay	Aneurin Bevan	Betsi Cadwaladr	Cardiff and Vale	Cwm Taf Morgannwg	Hywel Dda	Grand Total
Apr-19	22	43	38	25	16	19	163
May-19	20	40	51	25	17	20	173
Jun-19	22	42	46	28	19	22	179
Jul-19	34	37	49	27	19	22	188
Aug-19	33	33	45	23	29	19	182
Sep-19	30	34	45	21	34	18	182
Oct-19	39	36	46	17	35	18	191
Nov-19	36	37	46	20	37	15	191
Dec-19	34	32	35	23	35	16	175
Jan-20	34	34	50	21	38	20	197
Feb-20	29	33	46	20	34	19	181
Mar-20	25	27	48	19	30	17	166

Figure 3

Sum of Assessments Completed	1 Apr-Jun 2019	2 Jul-Sep 2019	3 Oct-Dec 2019	4 Jan-Mar 2020	Grand Total
Swansea Bay	17	31	14	23	85
Aneurin Bevan	27	29	26	28	110
Betsi Cadwaladr	38	21	34	27	120
Cardiff and Vale	8	13	14	15	50
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	12	11	25	26	74
Hywel Dda	13	6	18	10	47
Grand Total	115	111	131	129	486

In May 2020 the Welsh Government provided **interim funding of £85,700 to cover the staff costs from October 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the 3 posts previously funded by Help for Heroes.** This will maintain capacity to provide services. Consideration will be given to the future capacity and service needs of VNHSW.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in March 2020 VNHSW took the decision to postpone face-to-face assessments and therapy. Therapists continue to offer veterans a mixture of videoconference therapy using Attend Anywhere (or other platforms), telephone triage, assessment and support, face to face contact for certain veterans and walk and talk therapy (for PTSD and depression). It continues to signpost and refer to other stakeholders.

VNHSW, in partnership with Cardiff University, funded by Forces in Mind Trust, led research into **3MDR (Modular Motion-assisted Memory Desensitisation and Reconsolidation) Therapy**, to investigate whether 'virtual reality' therapy with the aid of a treadmill reduces symptoms of PTSD in treatment-resistant military veterans.

A full copy of the report is available at:

<https://www.ncmh.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Cardiff-3MDR-Study-Final-Report-with-cover-21.5.20.pdf>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/acps.13200>

Psychological therapies

Psychological therapies, such as cognitive behaviour therapy and mindfulness, can help those suffering from PTSD. Welsh Government is committed to continuing the provision of psychological therapies in adult services **and from 2018 we have provided Health Boards with an additional £4million in funding for this purpose.**

In January 2020, the Welsh Government published the **Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-2022**, which outlined our priority areas for action. This included improving the access, quality and range of psychological therapies. A specific action asks Health Boards to continue to support Veterans NHS Wales to deliver timely and appropriate services and, alongside Welsh Government and the third sector organisations, to raise awareness of veterans' mental health needs with medical professionals and the general population.

Supporting amputee veterans

We have supported veterans who have lost limbs during their service, to ensure they have the prosthetics they require to help them succeed in their future lives. From April 2019 to March 2020, the Welsh Health Specialised Service Committee **agreed 12 requests for War Veteran prosthetics at an estimated cost of £113,401.** These provisions included replacement devices, upgrades and specialist blades.

Our War Veterans – Enhanced Prosthetic Provision policy provides veterans in Wales with the same level of support to that provided by the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford hall. Veterans in Wales can also access microprocessor knees for service related injuries through our Enhanced Prosthetics Provision policy for a Service attributable injury.

In April 2019, the Welsh Government **provided £50,000 to fund specialist prosthetic socket training.** This has ensured veterans may receive the ongoing support they require within Wales. This will also offer improvements for other core service users.

BLESMA: The Limbless Veterans Charity assist limbless veterans to lead independent and fulfilling lives. Key figures for 2019/20:

- » **165** BLESMA members in Wales (includes all Amputees, those with Loss of Use of Limb and Widow[er]s being supported)
- » **94** (Amputees) veterans requiring access to prosthetic services
- » **52** veterans with Service attributable injury

BLESMA members accessing services at each of the ALACs:

- » **43** in Cardiff
- » **24** in Swansea
- » **23** in Wrexham

Identifying the Armed Forces Community

In collaboration with NHS colleagues, we developed a national poster for display in GP surgeries and wider community to further raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans policy and encourage veterans to self-identify so medical staff are aware of any service related conditions.

Electronic versions were issued in June 2019, to all GP practices for display on television screens or print. A further print version was sent to Local Health Board Champions in October 2019 to ensure wider coverage across primary care settings.

The GMS form includes questions on military service to enable identification when registering with a GP practice.

The guidance also promotes the use of standard read codes for recording on health information systems. This is to help ensure veterans are identified and able to access priority treatment should their condition be the result of their time within the Services, and so family members' time on waiting lists is honoured if posted in from another area.

The guidance is scheduled for review in 2020/21.

Veterans Trauma Network

In October 2019, the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government launched the Veterans Trauma Network Wales (VTN). VTN Wales will form a collaboration of specialists in the Welsh tertiary centres with relevant expertise who are interested in veterans' care.

The VTN will deal with problems related to a veterans' time in service. A veteran will be prioritised for treatment on a clinical basis only, just as with any other NHS patient.

Over the last eighteen months significant work has been undertaken to implement the new South, Mid and West Wales Major Trauma Operational Delivery Network (ODN). When the ODN becomes fully operational, hosted by Swansea Bay University Health Board, it will also provide oversight for the Veterans' Trauma Network Wales. The ODN was planned to go live in April 2020, but was postponed due to Covid-19, work is currently being undertaken to establish a new Go Live date.

Patients in North and Mid-Wales, will be closely linked to the equivalent members of VTN England working in Liverpool, Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent.

The VTN webpage will be hosted on www.veteranswales.co.uk during the coming year.

Loneliness and Social Isolation strategy



In February 2020, we launched **‘Connected communities: a strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger connections’**. In the strategy, we recognised the potential challenges that some members of the Armed Forces community may face, drawing on research from organisations such as The Royal British Legion. Using the feedback from our Veterans Scoping Exercise and other existing evidence, we know that experiences such as leaving the Forces, feelings of loss, or loss of value can perpetuate the struggle with loneliness and social isolation.

In the strategy we committed to providing additional funding to undertake targeted activity to alleviate loneliness and social isolation amongst members of the Armed Forces community.

Working with key partners in the sector, in **Spring 2020, grants worth £120,000** were provided to meet those objectives.

CASE STUDY

VC Gallery

Veterans with the Community – the aim of the project was to provide a safe and open environment for lonely and/or isolated veterans to engage with art and express themselves through creativity.

It predominantly targeted spouses of Serving military personnel in the Pembrokeshire area, members who had difficulty accessing existing provision and those who may be digitally excluded. Individuals were encouraged to use their ‘artistic voice’ to express emotions, relieve stress and combat social isolation by offering a variety of activities in many different locations.

The project reached out to families that had relocated to the area and were struggling to integrate. It provided the support needed to establish valuable connections and friendships.

The project held 40 sessions across Pembrokeshire (pre-Covid 19), reaching over 400 veterans from across the Services.

Following the onset of Covid 19, some of this activity was re-directed to support charities to respond to the pandemic, ensuring help for the ex-Service community could continue and be adapted in line with Government guidance.

CASE STUDY

Army Families Federation

Loneliness and Isolation –

Armed Forces Community in Wales –

Face-to-face events have been delivered across a number of locations including Brecon, St Athan, Chepstow and Haverfordwest. Tailored to meet the specific needs of families the events were delivered in a variety of formats including coffee and chat, bingo, connect and chat, virtual groups and dispersed family connect. Just under 300 individual families were reached through these events, with many families attending more than one.

A four week survey of Army families in Wales and their views on social isolation and loneliness whilst part of the military in Wales was also undertaken. This highlighted that the most significant contributors to social isolation were the absence of the Serving partner due to service requirements and the lack of access to local support services. A programme of additional needs groups was set up in three locations and these are now self-sustaining.

CASE STUDY

BLESMA

Brunch and Digital Inclusion Project –

A programme of informal mealtime and social events was established to bring BLESMA Members (limbless and limb-injured veterans) their partners/ carers and widows together in local communities throughout Wales.

98 Members and their families came together to share experiences, build connections, and friendships to reduce feelings of isolation, and receive tailored digital training to help them access the new BLESMA Connects mobile and web-based App.

This also enabled access to wider services on the internet including food shopping; or being able to connect with friends and family on Skype or other video calls.

Testimony from BLESMA member, Roy, from Aberdare –

I am attending a Blesma dinner helped by funding from the Welsh Government. I am completing this Blesma Members feedback survey and I have too many comments to cram in here. Blesma has helped me and my wife Diane in so many ways we can hardly thank Tom and Jason enough. They have really helped my wellbeing during a critical time and helped me to attend various activities with Blesma over the past year, including a Seniors Week and a trip to Normandy. Tom is also helping with my prosthetics needs and helped me get access to a micro-processor knee. The Blesma Wales team has made a significant and positive impact on mine and my wife's life. Just knowing that you are part of a wider family, with the help and support on offer is fantastic. I now feel less isolated and enjoy getting together with others who struggle like me. I can talk to them and find out their story, and we can swap advice about our own issues.

Fast-track Referral Pathway

We recognise the valuable work carried out through the MOD Fast-track Pathway in Wales. Providing secondary and specialist care, the service prioritises access to treatments for Service personnel who are actively serving but are currently graded as 'medically not deployable'. From April 2019 to March 2020, the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee agreed funding for **31 fast-track treatments at an estimated cost of £72,473**. The majority of treatment requests were related to orthopaedic injury.

Free swimming

Service personnel can access free swimming at Local Authority swimming pools across Wales using their Defence Privilege Card. Launched in 2015 the scheme has been extended until 2021. **A total of 8,319 free swims were recorded during 2019/20.**

Veterans Hearing fund

The Veterans Hearing Fund provides support to veterans who suffered hearing loss during service when their needs cannot be provided by statutory services such as the NHS. The Royal British Legion has been administering the Veterans Hearing Fund on behalf of HM Treasury since 2015.

In 2019 there were **84** successful applications to the fund in Wales, worth a total value of **£284,746³**.

Substance Misuse support

Working Together to Reduce Harm is the Welsh Government's Substance Misuse Delivery Plan. Focussing on both mental and physical wellbeing it also considers substance misuse. In Wales, Area Planning Boards have been established in each Health Board area. The Boards are responsible for the development and management of substance misuse services. **During 2019/20 329 veterans** received treatment and support across Wales.

Number of veterans in Wales receiving treatment for substance misuse between 2014-15 and 2019-20

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of veterans who are receiving/ have received treatment for alcohol or drug misuse	306	345	295	292	355	329

*Annual numbers adjusted for data reconciliation

3 The fund is not currently accepting new applications.

Gambling

The Welsh Government has **facilitated the listing of the National Gambling Treatment Service on the Veterans' Gateway**, ensuring that people who use the Gateway are able access to support, information and treatment should they have an issue with gambling.

The Welsh Government continues to support the UK Armed Forces Veterans' Health & Gambling Study being undertaken at Swansea University. The study is the first in the UK to investigate gambling experiences in a large sample of Armed Forces veterans. Recruitment of veterans for the study is ongoing and participation is actively encouraged, with the recruitment phase closing in November 2020. More information about the study, and how veterans can take part can be found at:

www.veteranshealthandgambling.org/

Veteran Friendly GP Practices

The Royal College of General Practitioners has produced a Veterans Healthcare Toolkit as a resource to support GP practices on how to deal with veterans' healthcare needs. Welsh Government is working with partners to explore the development of a resource for Wales and roll-out across Health Boards has been deferred during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Veterans' healthcare in Prison

The **Partnership Agreement for Prison Health** sets out agreed priorities between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and Health Boards for improving the health and wellbeing of those in prison. One of these priorities is to develop new standards for mental health services in prisons in Wales. This work has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Alongside work being taken forward to deliver the Partnership Agreement, **Welsh Government has also provided an additional £1million per annum to fund primary health services in the prisons**, which will include a specific focus on mental health services.

Also this year:

» Promoting awareness of Priority Treatment

Following the issuing of our ***Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans*** guidance to NHS staff in September 2017, the Welsh Government along with Health Board Champions and lead executives with responsibility for Armed Forces and veterans, have continued to promote awareness of the policy across the NHS and the wider community.

Good practice:

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board upholds their commitment to the Armed Forces covenant by having access to a priority treatment service for Service children and young people, who need emotional wellbeing and mental health support under Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

» Action to prevent Suicide

The Talk to Me 2 Strategy has led to an increased focus on multiagency working to prevent suicide, with plans established in all areas of Wales. This will be supported **by an additional £500,000 a year** to be invested in specific national and regional approaches to tackle suicide and self-harm prevention.

» Dentistry

The Welsh Government continues to provide **an additional £1.3m per annum to help create 10,000 new NHS dental places across Wales**. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has commissioned additional primary care dental services across North Wales, including the practice at Valley on Anglesey.

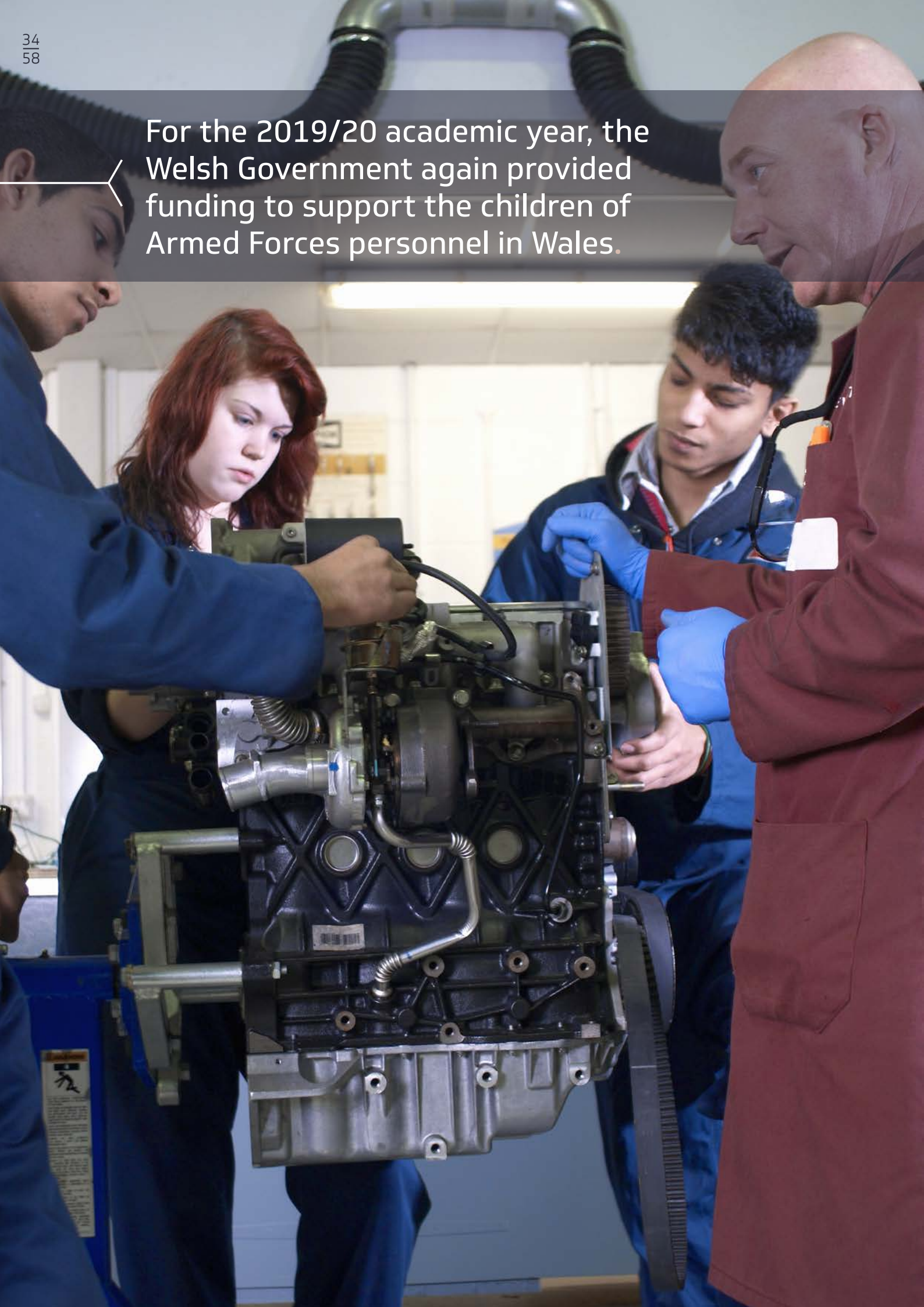
While not specifically aimed at RAF families based at Valley, the families have benefited from the additional access that the commissioning has provided.

» Honouring time spent on NHS Waiting Lists

In Wales, we continue to honour the time spent on an NHS waiting list in other areas. If a member of the Armed Forces or their immediate family is on a NHS waiting list and are posted to another part of the country, any waiting time accrued will be carried forward with them.

All Local Health Boards in Wales are aware of this commitment.

For the 2019/20 academic year, the Welsh Government again provided funding to support the children of Armed Forces personnel in Wales.



Education and Skills

The Welsh Government recognises that on return to civilian life Service leavers and veterans may want to expand and build on the skills gained during Service.

We are also aware of the challenges that Service children may face as a result of parental employment and the emotional pressures this can cause. In collaboration with the Armed Forces Families

Federations and other key partners, we are continually seeking to improve our understanding of the needs of families and how we can support them.



ACHIEVEMENTS

£249,891

provided to schools and Local Authorities to provide targeted help for Service children



27

successful bids to the Supporting Service Children in Wales fund



£68,550

provided for scholarships for children who have lost a parent in Service

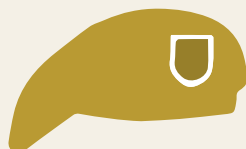
£131,891

to support Service leavers and veterans across Wales in Further and Higher education



10

Combined Cadet Force (CCF) units in schools in Wales



£3.4 million

the value of Cadet activities in schools and the wider community in Wales

Supporting Service Children in Wales fund

For the 2019/20 academic year, the Welsh Government again provided funding to support the children of Armed Forces personnel in Wales. A total of 27

submissions from individual schools, groups of schools, and Local Authorities successfully secured full or partial funding totalling £249,946.63.

The Welsh Government continues to fund the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru programme, whose mission is to provide the best possible educational support to Service children in Wales. In response to Covid 19, SSCE Cymru has also established a new web page, which provides information, advice, and signposting to organisations and resources relevant to supporting Service children during the pandemic.

This year, SSCE Cymru launched a suite of new resources aimed at supporting schools, families and Service children. SSCE Cymru also ran a number discussion groups in schools across Wales, to hear from Service children about their experiences of education in Wales. These findings fed into the SCiP Alliance Year of the Service Child Voice project report.

In collaboration with HQ 160th (Welsh) Brigade, SSCE Cymru has secured funding for four Regional School Liaison Officers for a two-year project. The project will focus on supporting schools to understand the needs of Service children and embed activities to ensure sustainable support systems.

Data collection

Work is underway to explore options for collecting data on Service children in schools in Wales.

The collection of this data will enable a better understanding of their attainment levels and educational requirements to better address their needs.



Further and Higher Education Commitment scheme

The Welsh Government contributed a total of **£131,891** in financial year **2018-19**, towards the Further and Higher Education Scheme enabling Service leavers across Wales to benefit from further/higher education.

Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme

In Wales, the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme provides children of those who have died in the service of their country a head start in life by providing a scholarship.

In financial year 2018-19, the Welsh Government contributed a total of £68,550 supporting students on this scheme.

Service children and school admissions

The School Admissions Code is subject to ongoing review but the work has been delayed due to Covid 19.

Cadets programme in Wales.

Phase 2 of the Cadet Expansion Programme (CEP) ended in March, having met its UK National target of 500 Combined Cadet Force (CCF) units in schools.

Five new Cadet Units were established in schools and Colleges in Wales, making a total of 10 CCFs in Wales.

The ongoing study by University of Northampton's Institute of Social Impact and Innovation (ISII) recently reconfirmed the positive benefits for pupils attending Cadet Units in schools and community Cadet Units.

Additionally, the ISII has calculated that in Wales, **engagement in Cadet activities in schools and the wider community Cadet units is worth £3.4 million**, while the activity of Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAV) is worth £20 million.

Also this year:

» **SCiP Alliance Hub Cymru established.**

The SCiP Alliance champions the progression of the children of Armed Forces personnel (Service Children), so that they can make informed and confident transitions through further and higher education into thriving adult lives and careers.

» **Additional Learning Needs**

A new system for supporting learners, including Service children, with additional learning needs (ALN) will be implemented on a phased basis from September 2021. The ALN Code will include specific guidance relating to Service children with ALN.

The Welsh Government announced funding of £10 million in March 2020, to support Local Authorities to secure the accommodation needed.



Housing

It is recognised that having suitable affordable accommodation when leaving the Armed Forces is pivotal to a successful transition.

In collaboration with our partners we will continue to ensure the housing provision meets the needs of our Armed Forces community in Wales.

Covid 19 support

The Welsh Government announced funding of £10 million in March 2020, to support Local Authorities to secure the accommodation needed, to ensure those without a home can be protected, supported, and self-isolate if necessary.

Since the Covid 19 lockdown began, over 800 people who were previously sleeping rough or in inappropriate temporary accommodation or 'sofa surfing' have been provided with shelter and support to keep them safe.

Officials continue to work closely with Local Authorities to identify and secure a range of accommodation, and facilitate appropriate levels of support to house vulnerable and displaced persons including those from the ex-Service community.


In the next phase of our response, **the Welsh Government is investing up to £50 million** to both transform services and ensure that those in temporary accommodation can move on to long-term sustainable accommodation and to ensure dignified suitable options are made available for those who face homelessness in the future, including those from the ex-Service community.

Homebuy



Veterans have priority status in the Welsh Government Homebuy scheme.

Widows and widowers of personnel who have been killed in Service are also eligible for the scheme.

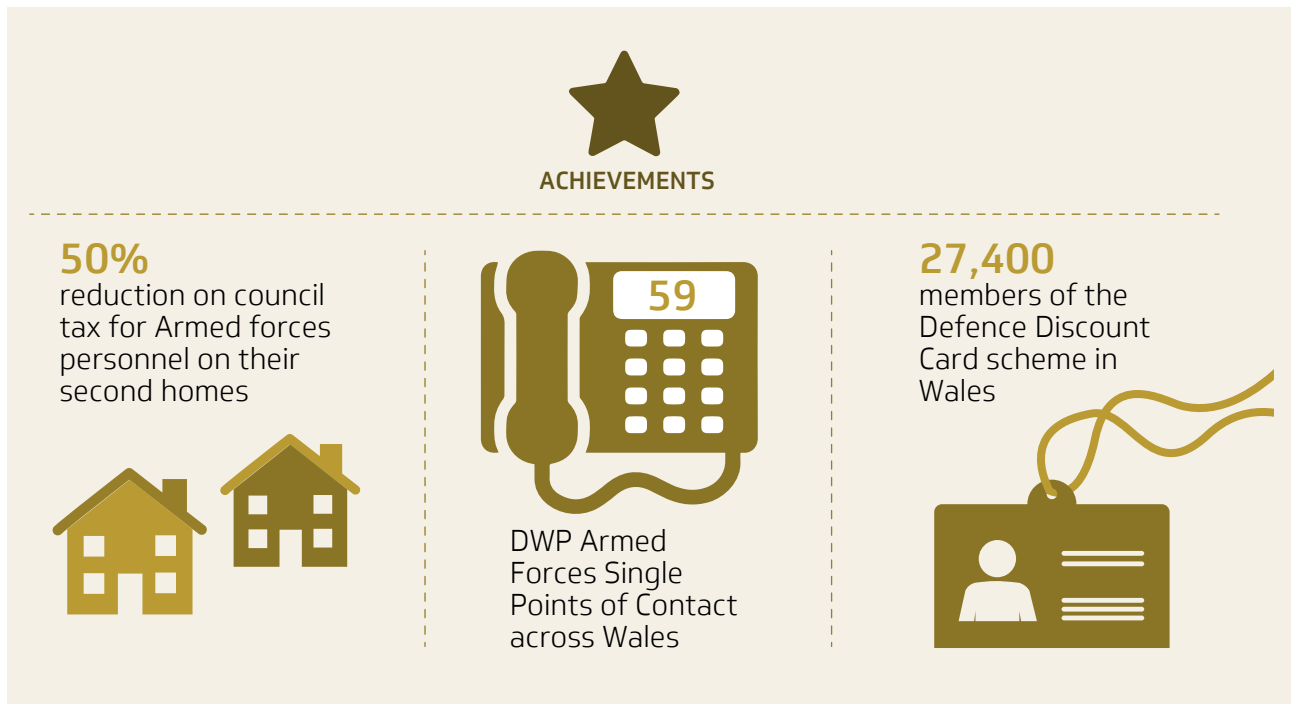


Across Wales, Armed Forces Single Points of Contact (SPoCs) are located in all 59 Jobcentre Plus sites, supported by district Armed Forces Champions and a Wales Champion.

Benefits and Finance

The Welsh Government is aware of the challenges that can be experienced by Service leavers and veterans when accessing benefits that they are entitled to.

We are continually working to ensure this process is as straightforward as possible.



Free Childcare Offer

The Welsh Government recognises childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing working parents in Wales.

Through our Welsh Government funded Childcare Offer we are providing 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three and four year olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year.

This support is available across all Local Authorities in Wales and can be accessed by working parents.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) in Wales ensures provision is in place for veterans, Service personnel and their families in need of advice and support.

Across Wales, Armed Forces Single Points of Contact (SPoCs) are located in all 59 Jobcentre Plus sites, supported by district Armed Forces Champions and a Wales Champion.

As well as the full range of existing Jobcentre Plus services available they provide an additional level of support to the Armed Forces community to access benefits, find employment and as a gateway to other support services and organisations.

CASE STUDY

The Communities for Work (CfW) team in East Wales identified an Army veteran who had served in Afghanistan and been subsequently medically discharged following a diagnosis of PTSD.

He was receiving psychiatric support and had recently completed a Methadone programme. In receipt of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) his partner also received Carer's Allowance for his care.

Adopting an approach supported by his Psychiatrist, the Champion engaged with and supported him over several months, eventually identifying a return to work as his preferred way forward. Being interested in asbestos removal the Champion arranged to fund a medical and asbestos training course for him, both of which he passed successfully.

Together they identified suitable job opportunities with the Champion providing advice and guidance on applying for work and interview techniques. A Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card was also arranged for him, and working with the Welsh Government, they were able to fund the specialist equipment he needed.

He has since started work and he and his partner no longer need to claim benefit. They have said they are delighted with the support available and when asked what more could be done to improve it commented "absolutely nothing".

Transport

Veterans in receipt of benefit provided under the Armed Forces and Reserved Compensation Scheme are entitled to a blue badge. Recent regulations extended the eligibility for a badge to veterans with cognitive impairment when in receipt of the relevant benefit award.

Seriously injured veterans are eligible for concessionary bus travel. The Welsh Government extended the entitlement to a concessionary bus pass in 2011 specifically to those in receipt of Armed Forces Compensations Scheme (AFCS).

Also this year:

» War Disablement Pension (WDP) and Armed Forces Compensation Schemes (AFCS) Disregarded

» Welsh Government guidelines have continued to disregard WDP and AFCS payments in the means test for social care.

» Council tax support provided

» In Wales, anyone in receipt of a war disablement pension, an Armed Forces compensation scheme or a war widow's/ widower's/civil partner's pension will have £10 a week of the income disregarded in calculating entitlement for the council tax reduction scheme.

» Council tax discount applied

Where a Serving member of the Armed forces occupies Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in Great Britain as their primary home but owns a furnished home elsewhere (for example: for use at weekends or when on leave), **they are entitled to a 50% discount on the council tax for that property.**

» Defence Discount Card promoted

The Welsh Government previously funded an awareness campaign to promote the benefits of the Defence Privilege Card and to ensure more Serving personnel and veterans were made aware of the benefits on offer.

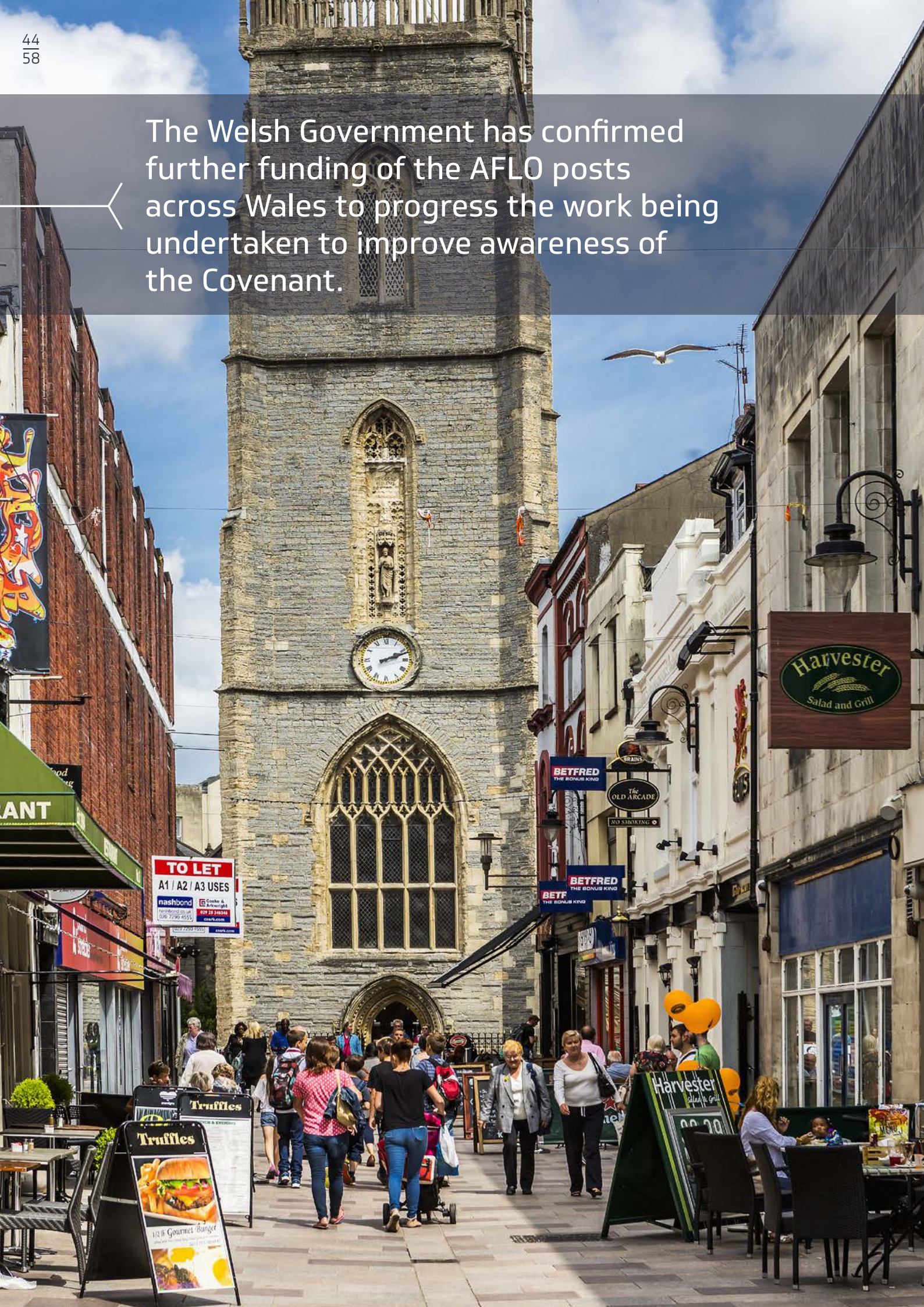


These include discounts, both online and on the high street, in retail, leisure and other venues.

To date there are 27,400 members in Wales with just over 17,000 card holders.

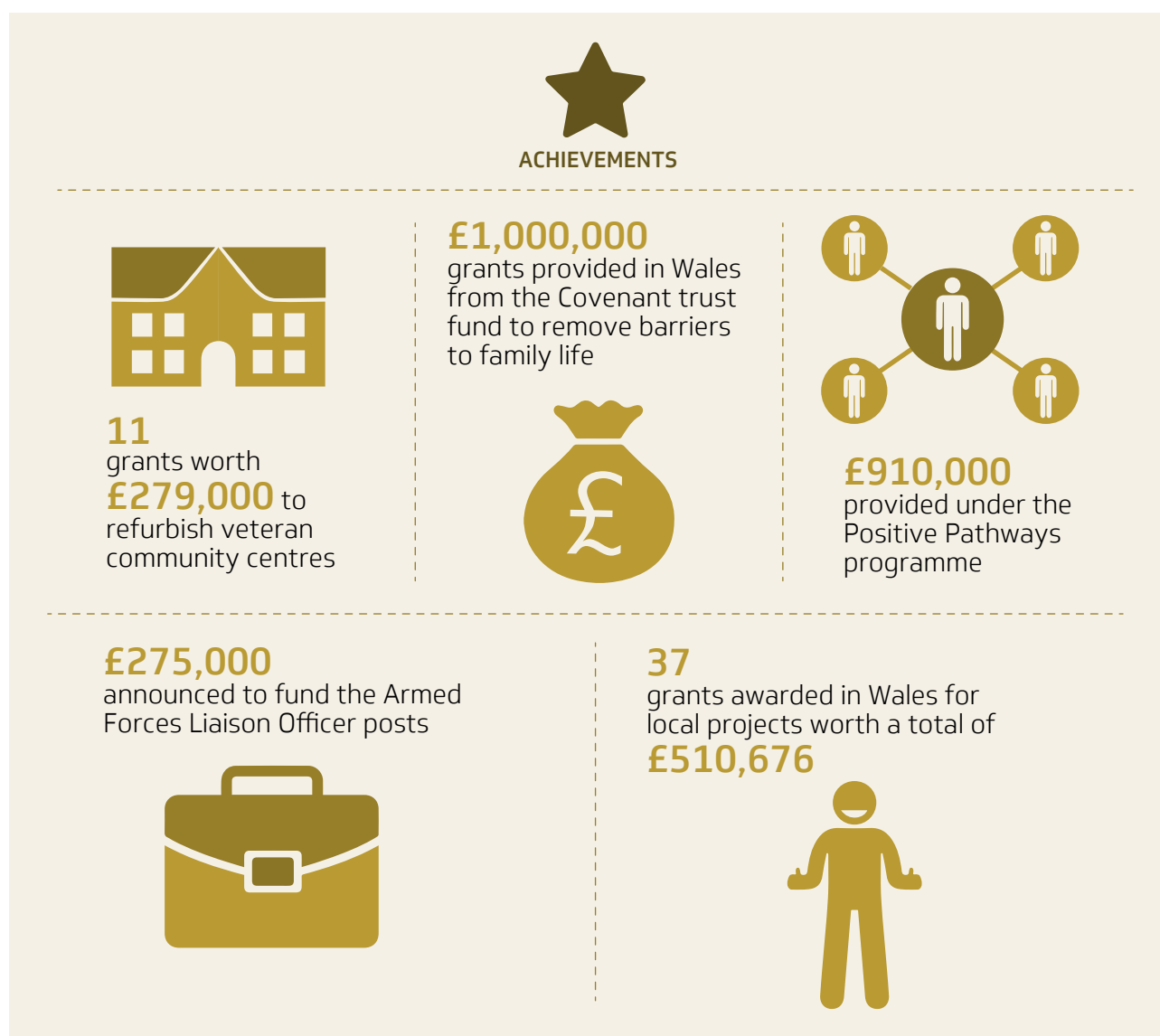
We have continued to promote the card within the Armed Forces community.

The Welsh Government has confirmed further funding of the AFLO posts across Wales to progress the work being undertaken to improve awareness of the Covenant.



Support on Return to Civilian Life

The majority of Service leavers transition from the Armed Forces well and integrate back into community life effectively. Having the right support in place on return to civilian life is crucial to a successful transition – and is something we are actively addressing, working in collaboration with our key partners to ensure that Service leavers and their families returning to Wales have access to information on the support available at a local level.



Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs)

The Welsh Government has confirmed further funding of the AFLO posts across Wales to progress the work being undertaken to improve awareness of the Covenant. **£275,000 per annum has been allocated for two years from April 2021.**

We have established a new reporting mechanism through the AFLOs, ensuring that regional Armed Forces fora can provide feedback on best practice and areas of concern for consideration at the Armed Forces Expert Group.

Scoping Exercise update

The Wales Veterans Scoping Exercise which began in October 2018 was a year-long consultation with the Ex-Service community to identify the gaps in services for them and their families in Wales. This year we have seen the recommendations of that work taken forward. Progress to date includes:

- » We have begun work with the Careers Transition Partnership, MOD and sector partners to explore how we can enhance and support the existing provisions for Service leavers coming to Wales, **including resettlement guidance specific to Wales;**
- » A one-off **loneliness and social isolation grant** for support organisations;
- » Updating the Veterans' Gateway with more Wales-specific services.

Criminal Justice

A key example of partnership working is the **Supporting the Transition of Military Personnel (SToMP)** project. The project was established to provide a whole system partnership approach to supporting ex-Armed Service Personnel (ASP) who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System in Wales.

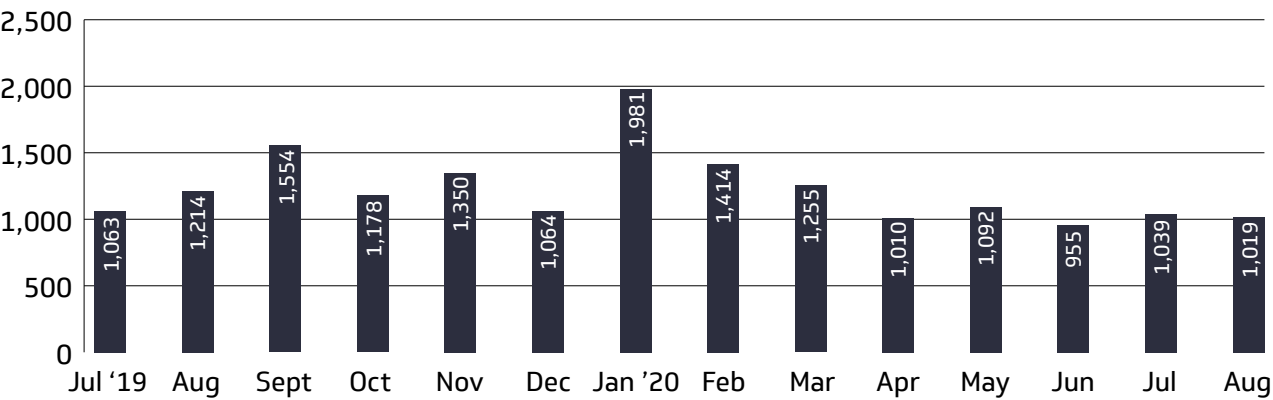
To support this, a network of champions has been established throughout Wales, across the National Probation Service, Wales Community Rehabilitation Company and many of the Police custody suites.

This year, SToMP helped John an ex-ASP access mental health services in Cardiff when he was released from prison. He has since been able to find a suitable place to live and access to job opportunities which means he is less likely to offend in the future.

Updating information on the Veterans' Gateway

The Welsh Government has worked with the University of Northumbria to update the **Veterans and Families' Directory of Services** through the Veterans' Gateway to ensure that information on local support – such as Armed Forces hubs and support groups – is available, up to date and visible.

The Veterans' Gateway has continued to deliver support to the ex-Service community in Wales.



The number of website users and sessions		
	Users	Sessions
Wales	10,546	15,129

Veterans' Gateway Geolocation & Hotspots

City	Users	Sessions
Cardiff	2,566	3,650
Newport	639	781
Bridgend	545	670
Pontypridd	535	2,190
Caerphilly	408	503
Neath	358	472
Cwmbran	316	404
Llanelli	311	402
Wrexham	267	330
Barry	262	347
Other	4,339	5,380
Grand Total	10,546	15,129

We continue to promote the Veterans' Gateway through our publications, and engagement with our partners.

The diagrams above demonstrate the location and volume of users' activity on accessing information and support on a range of topics. This is consistent with the data received by Northumbria University's Map of Need and highlights the geographical areas and specific needs of veterans and their families that the themed Scoping Action Groups will target going forward.

Supporting those working with the ex-Service community

Welsh Government funding this year has supported various projects to support the Armed Forces community including Bridgend Carers:

Bridgend Carers ran a reducing isolation project to support veterans and carers. 56 veterans/carers were helped with over 300 calls/engagements held. The project spent 16 hours at the Princess of Wales hospital running outreach services (pre-Covid 19 lockdown) and provided 38 digital tablets to veterans to keep in touch with family during lockdown.

Defence Transition Services

Defence Transition Services (DTS) started supporting clients in October 2019 in Wales. The service provides information and support for those Service leavers and families who are most likely to face challenges as they leave the Armed Forces. In Wales, DTS work closely with the Armed Forces Liaison Officers to link in with Local Government and third sector support to identify the most appropriate support available.

DTS have supported over 180 clients, a number of whom are leaving the Services from a Wales-based posting or who are looking to resettlement in Wales once they leave.

The Welsh Government has worked in partnership with DTS facilitating relations between the service and sector partners in Wales.

Family Support

In recognising the difference in policies that exist across all UK nations we have published our refreshed Welcome to Wales document. The document includes up to date details on the support in place in Wales.

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust⁴

The Covenant Trust continues to support the Armed Forces community in Wales, through the provision of ambitious, large-scale projects that change the way they approach provision of services down to smaller local grants that encourage community collaboration.

Examples include:

Change Step

Change Step is a Peer mentoring service who commenced delivery in April 2019, of the **Next Steps project** funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust's Tackling Serious Stress programme.

The aim of the project was to assist service users undergoing serious challenges, affect long-term change, and ensure they have robust self-management strategies.

Delivered by veterans, the project was developed following engagement with service users and partner organisations.

During the project, **902 referrals** were made to portfolio partners and **40% of service users were referred to 5 or more partner organisations.**

- » **42.2% of service users self-declared mental health and financial stress as key concerns**
- » **42.4% reported mental health and social isolation**
- » **42.8% stated that their mental health & stress levels were challenging.** PTSD was the most consistent factor in referral with **132 service users seeking support in relation to service-related trauma.**

At the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, the service adapted to ensure veterans could still access support.

Veterans' community centres

The £3 million funding programme funded renovations and improvements to veterans' community centres.

RAF ASSOCIATION LLANGOLLEN

Built in 1965 the RAF Association Community Centre in Llangollen was in need of repair and maintenance. The centre had become a hub where successive generations would meet, socialise and for some the twice weekly Bingo was the only time they had social contact outside their homes.

The Association Committee worked together to make a funding bid for £29,505.00 to the Armed Forces Covenant Trust under the Veterans Community Centres programme. They were delighted to get their bid approved by the Trustees before the August board meeting as a matter of emergency as the building was unable to open and deemed unsafe. Work was completed in just under a month, and the new roof was completed in September 2019.

The grant award from the Trust really was a lifeline to the Branch says Sheena

On behalf of the Llangollen Branch RAF Association and members, we would like to wholeheartedly thank the Trustees of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust for this grant award. Without it we would not have been able to re-open or invest our funds in further renovation and improvements for our members to enjoy.

Covenant Fund Programmes 2020/21

6

'Removing Barriers to Family Life' Grants in Wales totalling:

£1,030,000

37

Armed Forces Covenant Local Grants in Wales totalling:

£510,676

14

Grants awarded by Positive Pathways in 2019/20 totalling:

£910,000

11

Veterans Community Centre Grants totalling:

£279,044



The Welsh Government is developing a Covid Commitment to offer advice and support to people to find work, pursue self-employment or find a place in education or training, with hiring opportunities for employers.



Employment and Skills

The Welsh Government recognises the wealth of skills and experience that Serving personnel bring to the workplace. We are working with our partners to raise awareness of the benefits of employing ex-Serving personnel.

Scoping – Employment Action Group

As part of the Veterans Scoping Exercise we have established a new Employment Action Group to help improve employment support for the Armed Forces community. Membership of the group includes charities, statutory agencies and the MOD. Its focus is to support individuals and employers and provide coordination of service delivery. Plans for next year include an Employer-focused event.

Going Forwards into Employment and Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GFIE & GIS Schemes)

Officials are continuing to work with colleagues in the UK Government to implement the delivery of GFIE and GIS schemes within the Welsh Government. The work is scheduled to be completed in Spring 2021.

Forces Families Jobs

In October 2019 we jointly launched the Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) service with the Families Federations in Wales. FFJ is the go-to place for training and employment for family members of currently serving UK military personnel and we have promoted to all regional forums and partners.

Working with Business in the Community Cymru

We have continued our employment-focused work with BITC. Development of an **Employers Toolkit Addendum** aimed at military families is underway and will be published later in 2020.

Supporting those impacted by Covid 19

The Welsh Government is developing a Covid Commitment to offer advice and support to people to find work, pursue self-employment or find a place in education or training, with hiring opportunities for employers. This is especially to support individuals most affected by Covid-19.

The Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales has already signaled that the **Welsh Government will utilise up to £40m of Economic Resilience Funding for this support.**

Working Wales

Delivered by Careers Wales. Working Wales offer support finding a job, up-skilling through courses and training, and identifying funding opportunities. Working Wales are part of the Veterans Scoping Exercise Action Groups, and have been working with Armed Forces support providers to promote their services, and to inform veterans of the support available in Wales.

British Training Board (BTB)

This year BTB started the Positive Direction project with the aims of providing a more coordinated approach to engagement with employers; encouraging employers to support veterans/Reservists through work placements; supporting partners and spouses with career development; and providing upskilling and training to ensure beneficiaries are prepared for a new career.

During the project, engagement was made with 1284 employers including public and private sector employers. **22** Participants were supported through the project.

In total **62 qualifications were awarded** (average 3 per person) including the following sector specific subjects: Facilities management, Logistics and Education and Training.

All participants were provided with the opportunity to be interviewed by appropriate employers and/or took part in work placements. Of the 22 participants, **15 are now in employment and 4 are now self-employed.**

Business Wales

Business Wales is the Welsh Government's fully funded business support service which helps people to start, run and grow their own businesses

CASE STUDY: TODDLE BORN WILD

After 9 years as an Officer in the Armed Forces (RAF), Hannah Saunders decided to leave and set up her own adventure skin care business: "I was very adventurous before having my son, and just because I had a baby, this didn't mean I suddenly wanted to stay in. However, my son could get terribly chapped lips, especially in the British winter. So, I started looking around and couldn't find anything on the market for him. I then decided to make my own lip balm, in my kitchen, using natural ingredients. After much tinkering, I finally found a recipe that worked!"

Having secured a start-up loan through X-Forces, Hannah got in touch with Business Wales, whose start-up advisers helped her with setting up the business, formulating a business plan, sourcing finance and exploring opportunities to tap into the EU, US and Australian markets.

Toddle – Born Wild launched in 2018 from the Business Wales Wrexham Enterprise Hub and has been going from strength to strength ever since, making products for families who love the outdoors and want to protect and nourish their little adventurers.

The Welsh Government played a full part in the Welsh, UK and worldwide commemorations of D-Day 75.



Commemoration

The Welsh Government is proud of our vibrant Welsh nation with its own language, heritage and cultural identity. This includes a proud military tradition.

Our Armed Forces continue to contribute greatly to the communities in which they live and settle. We honour and recognise the sacrifices they have made during conflict.

The Welsh Government is fully supportive of Remembrance events across Wales, and as a means of thanking the wider Armed Forces community it provides **£20,000 per annum to support a National Armed Forces Day event in Wales.**

D-Day 75

The Welsh Government played a full part in the Welsh, UK and worldwide commemorations of D-Day 75.

In June 2019, the First Minister of Wales represented Wales at the events in Portsmouth and France to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day, meeting veterans of the campaign and paying tribute to those involved, alongside other world leaders.

VE day 75

The planned large-scale commemorations for VE Day 75 were disrupted by Covid 19, and the Welsh Government worked with partners to ensure the occasion was recognised in a way that paid tribute to the generation that saw victory in Europe.

The First Minister and Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government took part in a number of video calls to veterans of the Second World War, paying tribute to their service and hearing about their experiences.

Wales also took part in the UK-wide flypast of RAF jets to mark VE day.



Photo: Royal British Legion Remember Together

S'Hertogenbosch

During the weekend of 26-27 October 2019 the First Minister travelled to Holland to take place in the 75th anniversary celebrations of the liberation of the Dutch city of s'Hertogenbosch. The city was

liberated by the 53rd Welsh Division in 1944 and the First Minister joined veterans and dignitaries for a weekend of poignant events.



Photo: The Royal British Legion

Cymru'n Cofio

The Welsh Government's commemorative framework programme, **Cymru'n Cofio Wales Remembers 1914-1918, officially completed in March 2020.**

A final document is being developed by the Cymru'n Cofio team to reflect the significant commemorative activity undertaken in Wales, and further afield, over the last six years. **Publication is expected towards the end of 2020.**

The Cymru'n Cofio website will also serve as digital legacy for the programme and will be available for the next five years.

West Wales Veterans Archive

The West Wales Veterans' Archive (WWVA) coordinated by Age Cymru Dyfed, is a pioneering and evolving collection of veterans' histories held in the National Library of Wales. This digital Archive captures the contributions made by Armed Forces veterans with roots or links to the West Wales region since WW2 and has been designed to be authoritative, publicly accessible, and sustainable. The Archive, which commenced in the summer of 2020, already includes many contributions from veterans who served in WW2, National Service, Regulars, Reservists and Women's Land Army.

What we will do – Commitments 2020/21

Health and wellbeing

- » Review the capacity within Veterans NHS Wales to further expand the service for veterans with mental health needs.
- » Review our Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans Guidance, which promotes the identification of veterans by the NHS and enables veterans to access priority treatment if their condition is a result of their time in the Armed Forces.
- » Continue to monitor delivery of support for our ex-Service amputees.
- » Work with existing providers to promote substance misuse support services to the Armed Forces community.
- » Continue to promote our Talk to Me 2 Strategy within the sector to raise awareness of support available to help tackle suicide and self-harm.
- » We will continue to take forward the recommendations of the Veterans' Scoping Exercise in relation to healthcare.

Education

- » We will continue to work to improve data collection on service children in Wales.
- » Continue to support the SSCE Cymru project, providing Service children, families and schools with valuable resources and guidance.

Housing

- » Assess housing guidance to ensure the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant continue to be reflected.
- » Take forward the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping Exercise relating to housing provision for the Armed Forces community.

Benefits and Finance

- » Promote awareness of the benefits and provision in place for members of the Armed Forces community including those in receipt of compensation payments.
- » Take forward the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping Exercise relating to financial support available for the Armed Forces community.
- » Continue to provide free bus travel for veterans injured during Service.

Support on return to civilian life

- » Fund and support the work of the AFLOs, to identify key issues to be actioned at the Armed Forces Expert Group and Veterans Scoping work.
- » Continue to progress work with key partners through the Veterans Scoping Exercise Information and Awareness/ Finance Group to identify the most effective mechanism for sharing information and raising awareness of services available to support the Armed Forces community.
- » Progress the work of the Transition Action Group to ensure a collaborative approach in supporting and providing services for veterans and their families who need support on return to civilian life.
- » Work with the Careers Transition Partnership and HQ 160 (Welsh) Brigade to develop a Wales Resettlement Guide.

Employment and skills

- » Publish an addendum on supporting military spouses, in partnership with BITC and the Scottish Government.
- » Take forward the recommendations of the Veterans Scoping Exercise pertaining to employment for the Armed Forces community.
- » Progress the work being undertaken to introduce Going Forward into Employment and Guaranteed Interview Schemes into the Welsh Government.

Governance

- » Continue to work with UK departments and devolved nations on proposals for new Armed Forces Covenant Legislation.
- » Work with UK partners to ensure the Veterans Scoping Exercise continues to support delivery of the pan-UK Strategy for our Veterans.
- » We will continue to work with the MOD and UK-partners to deliver agreed objectives on Armed Forces Covenant delivery.

Commemoration

- » We will work with the WLGA, military, Local Government and Third Sector partners on plans for Wales Armed Forces Day. We will provide financial support for those events.
- » We will continue to work with our key partners to support Commemorative events, including the Battle of Britain and Remembrance.

Closing Words

This report provides a vivid picture of the work going on across Wales and beyond to provide support to our Armed Forces communities and our veterans.

This year, I would especially wish to highlight the invaluable work undertaken by serving Military personnel in our country's response to COVID 19.

Our veterans have also played their part too in a very practical way. Examples include the **Penparcau Veterans Hub, Aberystwyth**.

The veterans involved have been providing a buddy system, and help with shopping, and the delivery of medicines. **The VC Gallery, Haverfordwest** established an 'ops room' to coordinate telephone contact for vulnerable veterans, help with shopping, online workshops, and engaged with welfare providers/police/mental health teams supporting those more vulnerable in our communities.

We thank, and are grateful to those, and all the other individuals and organisations including Service charities, that have gone above and beyond to provide much needed support during these challenging times.

As I hope this report demonstrates, we remain fully committed to supporting our Armed Forces community in Wales, and will continue to work with the Armed Forces Expert Group and others to provide the support that's needed.



Hannah Blythyn MS
Deputy Minister for Housing and
Local Government