The needs of the Armed Forces community across Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire:

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Prepared on behalf of the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership

15 April 2016
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report covers a broad range of issues concerning the Armed Forces Community across Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (CSW) and draws upon a multitude of data sources. Most members of the Armed Forces community are healthy, well and transition successfully into the civilian world. However, a significant minority will experience problems either during transition or in future years. In the CSW area there are:

- Nearly 700 serving Army personnel, 165+ Reservists and their dependents
- 464 CSW pupils attracting the £300 Service Pupil Premium (2014)
- An average of 154 trained and 121 untrained Service leavers discharged into the CSW sub-region each year
- Approximately 90,000 ex-Service personnel (2017 estimate)

The data suggests the following Wards are hotspots:

- **Coventry**: Foleshill, Radford, Henley, Lower Stoke and Binley & Willenhall
- **Solihull**: Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Chelmsley Wood
- **Warwickshire**: Camphill, Abbey, Wemblebrook and Atherstone Central

All the Local Authority housing departments in CSW have re-configure their Housing policy following the changes in legislation, regulations and guidance. Gaps still exist, especially for young male Early Service Leavers. The Veterans’ Contact Point and SSAFA regularly support ex-Service personnel to access accommodation support.

The Royal British Legion and SSAFA have provided £620,095 of almonised monies to 1335 beneficiaries in the CSW area over a 2 year period. The average grant spend is £465. Both SSAFA and The Royal British Legion have indicated difficulties in accessing Occupational Therapist reports for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) within the 6 month timescale with a consequent delay in the DFG adaptation being fulfilled.

There are a number of cross cutting issues and themes underpinning this report recurring in a number of chapters. These are:

- **Mental health**: The most common mental health problems for Ex-Service personnel are alcohol problems, depression and anxiety. The prevalence of Common Mental Health problems are estimated to be over twice as common for serving personnel as for the general population. The rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are comparable to rates within the civilian community. There are higher rates of incidence of Adjustment Disorder for Warwickshire ex-service personnel in comparison to other normal Service leavers across the UK
- **Alcohol misuse**: the prevalence of hazardous drinking for both serving and ex-service personnel is higher than the general population. Warwickshire has
higher incidence levels of alcohol misuse among their normal service leavers when compared to other normal service leavers in the UK

- **Early Service Leavers:** Early Service leavers are the most vulnerable and most at risk of poorer life outcomes
- **Demographic issues:** Over the next 10 years there will be a bulge in the 65+ age cohort, but a reduction in absolute numbers due to mortality plus a significant increase in the ex-service population who will be of working age.
- **Financial and Life skills:** this is a recurring issue across transition and post-transition life.
- **The reluctance to ask for help:** The Forces culture of being stoic, self-sufficient and able to cope plus a reluctance to ask for help, especially when this may impact on career and employment, stays with people long after they have left the Armed Forces. This can create a significant barrier to recognising the need for and seeking support across a range of dimensions.
- **The need to ‘Ask the question’ if someone is ex-Armed Forces or not:** The importance of asking the question isn’t just about identifying an individual as ex-service and understanding what disadvantage they may experience or priority they may be given, but in opening up the wide range of military and other charities who provide support to this group.
- **The importance of providing support to families:** The Veterans’ Transition Review and the Transition Mapping Study both highlight the importance of supporting families as a means of supporting serving and ex-Service personnel during transition. A key finding from the Nutting Inquiry of ‘Ex-Armed Forces personnel in the Criminal Justice System’ is that many found it difficult, psychologically and emotionally, to transition and adjust from the military into the civilian world.
- **Limitations of the data and evidence base:** This report makes the best use of the available data sources; however, there are still gaps and significant limitations in the data at both a national and local level.

A number of principles and methods of practice can be used by statutory and voluntary sector agencies, whether military or not, to improve services and support to the Armed Forces Community in CSW. These include:

- Ask the Question if someone is ex-Armed Forces and record the answers
- Develop Armed Forces ‘Champions’ within organisations
- Provide training on the Armed Forces Community and the differences between military and civilian experiences
- Target resources to areas and issues most in need
- Prioritise interventions which have the most impact on those at greatest risk
- Provide support for the psychological and emotional impact of transition
- Use ‘Veteran to Veteran’ methodologies when developing interventions
• Address issues such as over self-reliance, perceptions around loss of pride and/or stigma preventing ex-Service personnel from asking for support
• Target support to the individual, not just ‘one size fits all’

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations follow the format of the Report as well as the Cross Cutting Issues chapter and apply to all agencies signed up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant and/or who provide support to the Armed Forces Community.

Health

1. Support the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Warwickshire Veterans Mental Health Needs Assessment and consider it’s applicability across Coventry and Solihull

2. Encourage ex-service personnel to register for GP services and for GPs to access their medical records from Defence medical Services. In particular, those who have been involved in combat operations.

3. Encourage and support NHS agencies to facilitate ex-Service personnel to register with a GP service and to make their former status known.

4. Support the continued development and sustainability of the Ex-Armed Forces Mental Health project provided by Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust.

5. Raise awareness and promote access to other mental health support for the Armed Forces community such as Combat Stress and Big White Wall.

6. Encourage ex-Service personnel to access advice, information and support, including countering any mistaken beliefs they may hold re mental health services.

7. Promote public health safer drinking messages to the Armed Forces community, through the collaboration of Public Health departments, Community Safety Partnerships, alcohol services and military establishments within the CSW sub-region.

8. Promote access routes into alcohol service providers and ensure access to treatment is fair for those from the Armed Forces community and that they are not disadvantaged in accessing treatment. Ensure additional support is given to those injured or bereaved, where appropriate.

Housing

9. Review policies and practice of Housing Departments to ensure access routes into housing and accommodation provision is fair for those from the Armed Forces
community and that they are not disadvantaged in accessing accommodation. Ensure additional support is given to those injured or bereaved, where appropriate.

10. Discuss with Occupational Therapy departments the difficulties of accessing Disabled Facilities Grants within the expected timescale and how ex-Service personnel are given fair treatment with additional support given to those injured or bereaved, where appropriate.

**Resettlement and Transition**

11. Investigate the potential for developing an ‘Integration’ transition support project using Peer to Peer support, focused on those most at risk during the transition process. This may involve a bid to the AFCC Fund and would include supporting individuals to develop financial management skills, address cost of living and accommodation issues, improve their mental health and emotional wellbeing, identify sources of support as well as involve ex-military or civilian trainers.

12. Apply the Guiding Principles for supporting transition developed by the Transition Study within policy and practice of all organisations signed up to the Community Covenant and/or who provide support to the Armed Forces Community.

**Ex-service personnel in the Criminal Justice System**

13. Support the submission and implementation of the Stage Two bid to the Community Covenant Fund for an intervention, support and diversion scheme across the CJS in Warwickshire and West Mercia.

**Early Service Leavers**

14. Investigate the potential for an intervention to address the support needs of Early Service Leavers, such that they are provided with more structured support and do not fall ‘between the cracks’ of the various agencies, which could support them. This may involve a bid to the AFCC Fund.

15. Investigate the potential of the MOD providing information on Early Service Leavers who return to or transition into the CSW sub-region.

**Financial and Life Skills**

16. Support military establishments within the CSW sub-region to raise awareness and competence of financial and life skills.

**The reluctance to ask for help**

17. Ensure all future projects or interventions on behalf of the Armed Forces Community address the issue of the reluctance of serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel to ask for help, whether due to pride, stigma or self-reliance. This is a
cross cutting issue and should be addressed explicitly within interventions designed to encourage individuals to access advice, information and support.

**The need to ‘Ask the question’ if someone is Ex-Service or not**

18. Ensure all agencies involved in providing support to the Armed Forces Community develop and implement appropriate systems and procedures to ‘ask the question’ of an individual’s Armed Forces status and record this against the presenting issue.

19. Ensure all agencies involved in providing support to the Armed Forces Community develop appropriate systems and procedures to inform their own agency of the numbers and needs of the Armed Forces community and ensure this information is fed into LA/NHS commissioning processes.

20. Develop ‘Armed Forces Champions’ within organisations to more effectively engage with members of the Armed Forces community and support those members accessing their support and services.

21. Ensure all future projects or interventions on behalf of the Armed Forces Community address the issue of the reluctance of serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel to self-identify as members of the Armed Forces community.

**The importance of providing support to families and young military carers**

22. Ensure all future projects or interventions on behalf of the Armed Forces Community address the issue providing support to families and young military carers. This is a cross cutting issue and should be addressed explicitly within interventions designed to encourage access to advice, information and support.

**Limitations of the Data and Evidence Base**

23. Support the process of collecting data from relevant agencies to inform future action plans and commissioning processes.

24. Develop a standardised survey questionnaire or set of questions to be used to gather information on the needs and issues of the ex-service community.

25. Provide a systemic review of the numbers, needs and issues of the Armed Forces community, as an update to this report, in 3 years time.

**Principles of ways to improve services and support to the AF community in the CSW sub-region**

26. Promote and support the implementation of these principles and methods of practice by all agencies involved in providing advice, information, support and services to the Armed Forces community.