

Shared Intelligence

Action research on the presence and needs of the Armed Forces Community in the South West of England

Final report

October 2018

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Shared Intelligence was commissioned by councils in the South West of England to facilitate an Action Learning Set to enhance understanding of the presence and needs of the local Armed Forces Community (AFC) in the area.
- 1.2 This work was commissioned to ensure that those members of the AFC who are in need of help are known and that the delivery of support by relevant organisations is appropriate.
- 1.3 There were four key areas which this research was designed to consider which form the following key research questions:
 - What work has been done to identify the size and makeup of the Armed Forces presence in the South West and their needs?
 - How many members of the AFC live in the South West?
 - What are the needs of the AFC in the South West?
 - How are the needs of the AFC being met in the South West?
- 1.4 Further details of these research questions can be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 Over 9 months Shared Intelligence has worked in partnership with David Wood, Armed Forces Project Officer for the South West, to facilitate an Action Learning Set with councils within the South West. This was to explore the key questions stated above and to also identify ways councils can look to acquire and build on existing data going forward.
- 1.6 This work has engaged with the following councils:
 - Wiltshire Council
 - Devon County Council
 - North Somerset Council
 - South Somerset District Council
 - Somerset County Council
 - Plymouth City Council
 - Cornwall Council
 - Bristol City Council
 - Gloucestershire County Council
- 1.7 This work has also engaged with stakeholders from a number of other organisations:
 - Royal British Legion Devon and Cornwall
 - SSAFA Devon
 - Army Families Federation South West
 - Reserve Forces and Cadets Association
 - Citizens Advice South Somerset
 - The Warrior Programme
 - NHS England

- Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare
- RAF St Mawgan
- Career Transition Partnership South West

- 1.8 A literature review of existing research and data sets was carried out at the beginning of the research to identify what we currently know about the presence and needs of the AFC in the South West. It also identified where there are gaps in knowledge and understanding.
- 1.9 To supplement this eight focus groups were carried out by David Wood to identify areas of need amongst the different Armed Forces Communities.
- 1.10 This report sets out what we know about the presence and the needs of the AFC in the South West based on existing literature and data sets, and findings from the focus groups. The report then presents an overview of the actions being taken by councils in the South West to address the needs of the AFC. The report then concludes with a set of recommendations on the actions councils could take in acquiring and using data on the presence and needs of the AFC going forward.

2 What do we know about the presence of the Armed Forces Community in the South West?

2.1 This section presents what we currently know about the presence of the Armed Forces Community (AFC) in the South West.

Serving personnel

2.2 To build up an understanding of the presence of Serving Personnel in the South West data has been brought together from the quarterly statistics published by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and data from existing local research studies.

MOD quarterly statistics

2.3 The MoD publish quarterly statistics on the location of stationed UK regular Service and civilian personnel. The data excludes Gurkhas, Full Time Reserve Service personnel and mobilised Reservists. The figures show that as of October 2017, there were a total of 55,060 UK regular and civilian Service personnel in the South West (MOD, 2017a). This includes 36,790 Serving personnel and 18,270 civilian personnel. The Serving Personnel comprises 20,060 Army personnel, 15,390 Royal Navy/Royal Marine personnel and 1,340 RAF personnel in the region (MOD, 2017a). Wiltshire has a significant number of Army personnel. Devon and Somerset predominantly have Navy with some Army Personnel – Plymouth within Devon has a significant Navy presence. Cornwall predominantly has Navy and RAF personnel.

2.4 Figure 1 on page 6 shows the Local Authority areas in which the military personnel are employed, at a county or unitary level. As expected, Wiltshire has the biggest number of military personnel with just under 15,000 in October 2017. This is followed by Plymouth (5,420) and Devon (3,620). These figures do not take into account dependents of Serving personnel.

2.5 South Gloucestershire has a high number of civilian personnel employed by the MoD which totalled 9,560 in October 2017 (MOD, 2017a). It is understood that this is due to Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) which has its headquarters at MoD Abbey Wood and provides support to the military, such as the procurement of equipment and services.

Basing

2.6 It was reported in March 2013 that Wiltshire would be gaining an estimated 4000 Service personnel and their families by the end of the decade as part of the Army Basing Programme (Wiltshire Council, 2018). In particular many of these would be Based in the Salisbury Plain area (Wiltshire Community Foundation, 2014). Basing has already commenced with personnel and families relocating to Wiltshire over the summer of 2019, taking the total number of the Serving population to 19,000.

Spouses, partners and children

- 2.7 Data on Spouses, partners and children of Serving personnel is limited as there is no public data available providing this information.
- 2.8 While slightly out of date, Wiltshire Council's 2009 report on the Military Presence and Economic Significance in the South West estimated that there were 42,000 spouses, partners and children of Serving personnel in the county. The majority of these are located in Wiltshire and Plymouth, followed by Devon, Cornwall and Somerset (Wiltshire Council, 2009).
- 2.9 In 2014 the *Veterans' Health Needs Assessment* report (Devon County Council, 2014) for councils in the South West Peninsular (Devon, Plymouth, Torbay, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly) estimated that there were 1,233 service children in schools in Devon, a rise from 842 on the previous year.

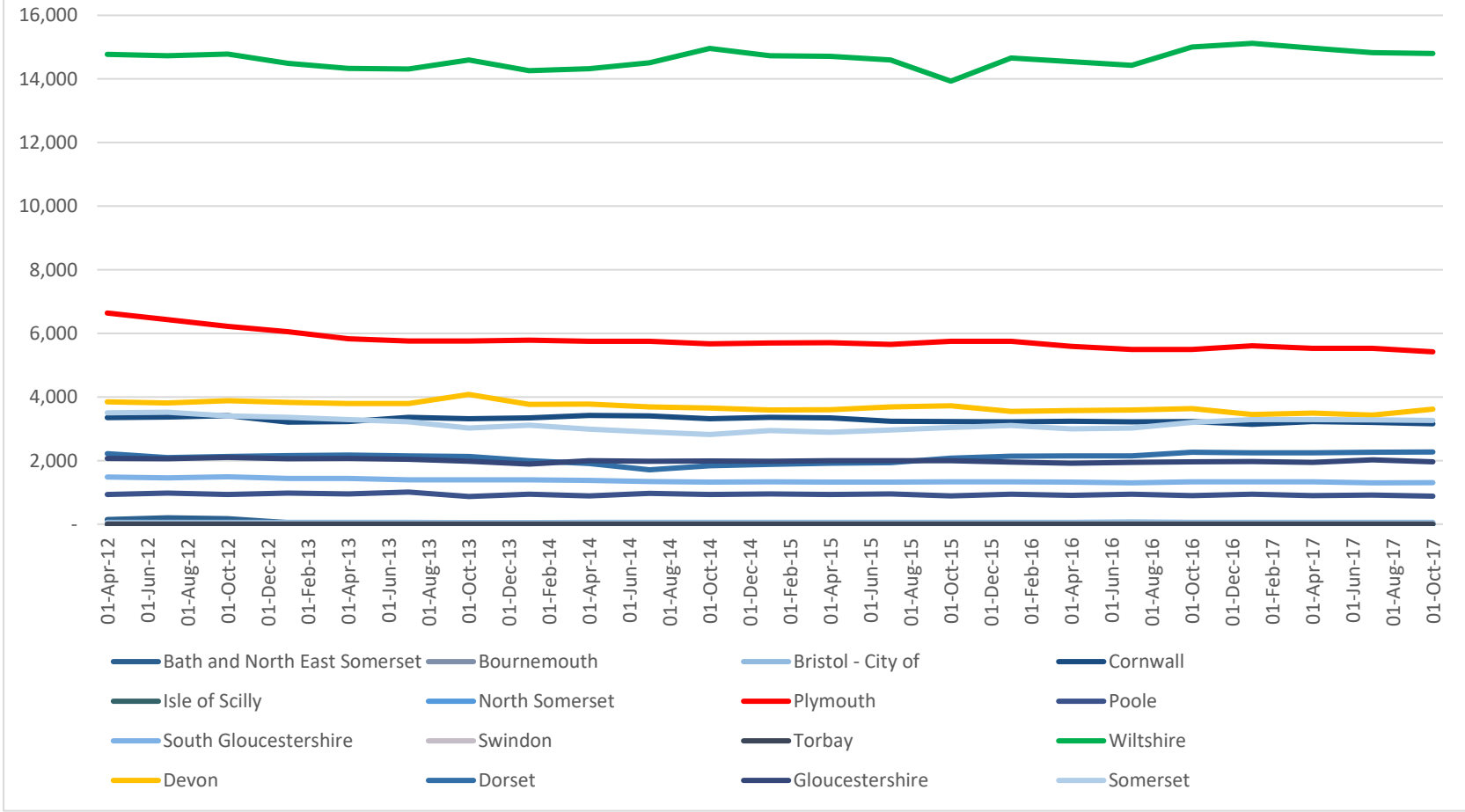
Freedom of Information (FOI) request

- 2.10 Shared Intelligence know through their work with North Yorkshire County Council that the MOD hold more detailed information on Serving personnel and their families. This data includes: where Serving personnel live and where they are employed; those in Service Accommodation; those receiving housing allowance; and leaving data on the first address of Service personnel. At the time of writing this report the MOD do not currently make this data available.
- 2.11 In this work with North Yorkshire Council (detailed on page 20) Shared Intelligence have submitted an FOI request for the MOD to release this data that relates specifically to councils within North Yorkshire. If this request is successful, either fully or partially, we recommend that the Local Authorities within the South West region do the same.

Summary

- 2.12 The quarterly statistics provided by the MOD present a good overview of the number, type and distribution of Service and civilian personnel across the region. The areas of the region with the largest numbers of Service personnel are Wiltshire, home to the highest numbers of Army personnel, and Plymouth, home to the largest numbers of Royal Navy/Marine personnel. However public data on Spouses, partners and children of Serving personnel across the region is limited.

Figure 1: South West MOD military personnel by Local Authority area as at 1 October 2017



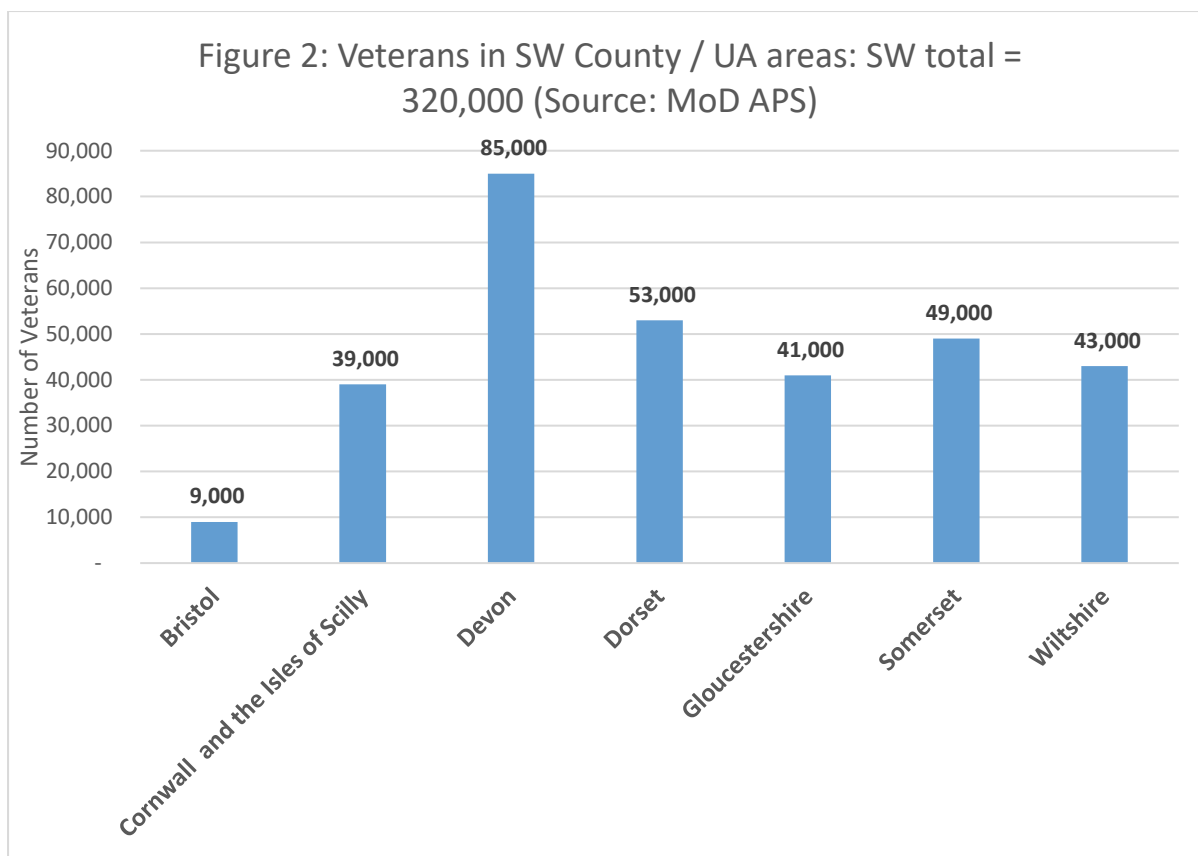
Ex-service personnel

- 2.13 This section presents what we know about the numbers, location, and demographics of the ex-Service community and their families within the South West.
- 2.14 There is no comprehensive data on the ex-Service community as there is no one measure currently in place to provide this information. However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will recommend the inclusion of a question to identify Veterans in the 2021 census.

Annual Population Survey

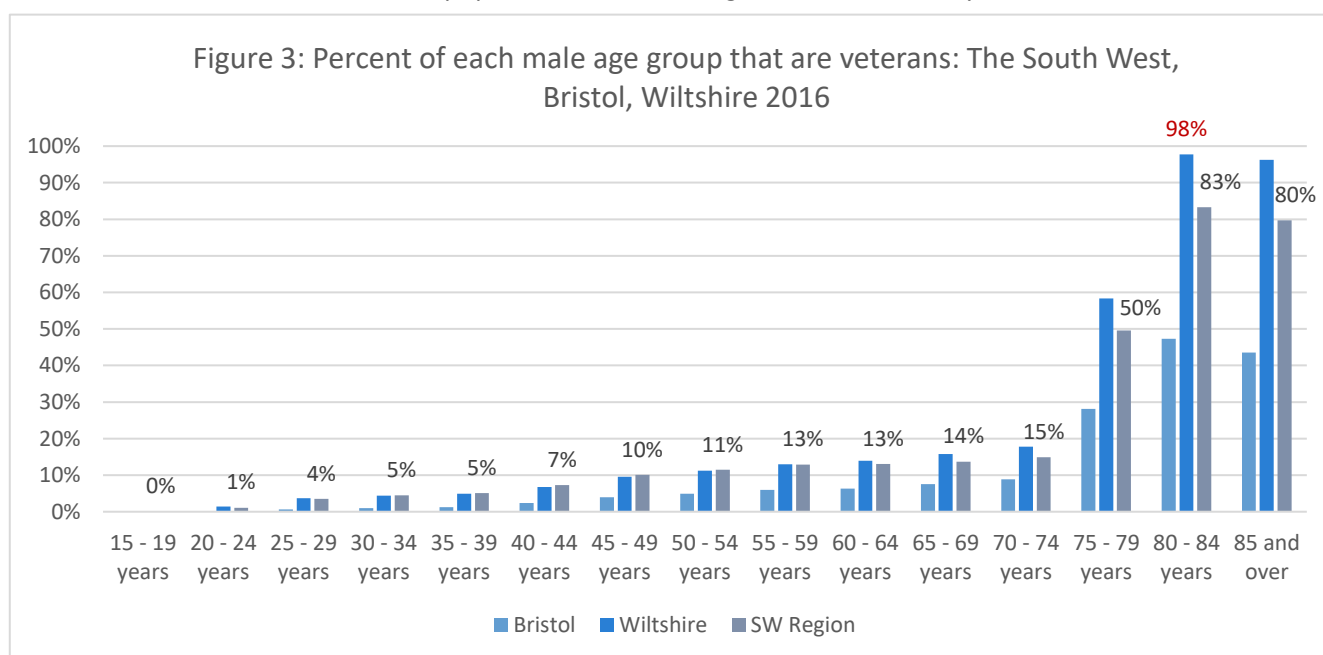
- 2.15 In 2016, the Annual Population Survey (APS) on UK Armed Forces Veterans estimated a total number of 2.5 million UK Veterans (MOD, 2016a). It estimates that there were 320,000 Veterans in the South West (not including Spouses/partners), with this number estimated to be 12% or greater of the population of the South West as a whole.
- 2.16 **Figure 2**¹ identifies the number of Veterans in each county of the South West. It shows that Devon is estimated to have the most (85,000), followed by Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.
- 2.17 It is therefore worth noting that whereas Wiltshire has the highest amount of Serving personnel, Devon has the highest amount of Veterans. Plymouth, which has a significant serving Navy presence, is situated in Devon which may explain the high estimation of Veterans within this area. This figure may also reflect movement of Veterans to Devon from other places.

¹ It is important to note that the North Somerset stats have been subsumed into the Somerset figures and Plymouth has been counted within the Devon figures as this is the lowest Local Authority level the data can be split down to.



2.18 In order to understand the significance of the Veteran population in the South West Figure 3 presents APS data that has compared estimates of the number of Veterans with the number of people in each male age group. Up to half of 75-79 year olds are estimated to be Veterans across the South West, rising to 80% of those over 85.

2.19 Bristol contains the lowest number of Veterans therefore Bristol Veterans make up lower proportions of all age groups than the wider region. Wiltshire by comparison has a high number of Veterans relative to the [male] population size, showing that 58% of 74-75 year olds, 98% of 80 to 84



years olds and 96% of 85 years old and over are estimated to be Veterans². The data therefore suggests that the South West is home to a growing ageing population.

Pension data

- 2.20 Personnel on completion of a full career will receive an immediate pension, whereas personnel that do not serve a full career and do not qualify for an immediate pension will receive a preserved pension on reaching age 65.
- 2.21 The MoD publishes accurate data on pension receipts in the UK which is particularly useful in showing distribution of those in receipt of an immediate pension across the region. Figure 4 shows that the greatest number of pension receipts is in Devon, followed by Wiltshire and Dorset (MOD, 2017b). This is in line with the APS data which estimates the highest number of Veterans are located in Devon.
- 2.22 However it is important to note that those in receipt of pensions are not necessarily of pension age (65+), and those in receipt of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme may still be serving. Furthermore, not everyone who has served in the Armed Forces is eligible or is in receipt of an Armed Forces pension. Therefore the pension data will only show those in receipt of an immediate pension and not those on a preserved pension.

Figure 4: Pension receipts across the South West

Area	All		Of which veterans	All AFPS	All WPS	Veterans (Disablement Pensioners)	War Widow(er)s	Other War Pensioners	All AFCS	Serving Personnel	Veterans
South West	73,263	100%	67,608	58,757	17,743	15,230	2,426	87	6,593	3,284	3,309
Bristol	1,200	2%	1,087	885	377	295	78	4	82	36	46
Cornwall	8,544	12%	8,012	7,114	2,165	1,870	276	19	479	259	220
Devon	18,668	25%	17,215	14,697	5,609	4,874	505	21	1,534	747	787
Dorset	10,110	14%	9,370	8,238	2,512	2,094	225	0	614	341	273
Gloucestershire:	7,824	11%	7,249	6,299	1,675	1,401	141	7	642	317	325
Bath and North East Somerset	1,019	1%	953	818	235	195	~	~	44	27	17
North Somerset	1,866	3%	1,746	1,526	465	368	94	3	58	25	33
Somerset:	7,307	10%	6,825	5,996	1,789	1,542	58	0	478	245	233
Swindon	2,370	3%	2,248	2,034	496	438	55	3	141	66	75
Wiltshire	14,342	20%	12,891	11,140	2,413	2,147	257	9	2,521	1,221	1,300

Local research

- 2.23 The report by Wiltshire Council (2009) on the *Military Presence and Economic Significance in the South West* estimated that there are around 4,000 Service leavers each year, with the highest

1.1 ² The result showing that up to 98% of 80-84 year olds in Wiltshire are Veterans is an estimate based on official data, though should be treated with some caution due to potential errors being larger for single districts. Estimates of the proportions of Veterans in each age bracket at the national level are highly accurate, though may vary by +/- 5% at the regional level (or by more for districts).

number in Wiltshire, followed by Plymouth. The majority of these leavers are from junior ranks, and an even split between those aged 16-24 (early Service leavers) and 25-54.

- 2.24 The *Veterans' Health Needs Assessment* report by councils in the South West Peninsular (Devon County Council, 2014) estimated there are between 174,041 to 191,839 Veterans living in the area. Most of these in the older age groups: 30-35% aged 75+ and 26-30% aged 65-74.
- 2.25 The estimates of Veteran population made in both the South West Peninsular report, and Wiltshire Community Foundation's (2014) report suggest that Devon has the highest population of Veterans, with estimations between 68,432 and 73,891 Veterans (*South West peninsular*), to around 170,000 including dependents (*Wiltshire Uncovered*).
- 2.26 The Northern Hub for Veteran and Military Families' Research (2018) reported that based on numbers of Royal British Legion (RBL) hardship calls there may be hot spots of young Veterans in Bristol and Swindon. The report also found the hotspots for Service families with dependent children living away from military installations were in Torbay. This finding contrasts with the estimates that the highest number of Veterans are in Devon.

Summary

- 2.27 The South West is home to a large proportion of Serving personnel, Veterans and their families. The largest proportion of Serving personnel is located in Wiltshire and this is set to increase as a result of the Army Basing Programme. Wiltshire also has the highest number of Service leavers which will also continue over time.
- 2.28 At the moment estimates show the highest number and proportion of Veterans are located in Devon and are an ageing population. However other organisations believe there are emerging hotspots of young Veterans in Bristol and Swindon. This data therefore shows a changing picture and one that needs to be closely monitored by Local Authorities.

3 The needs of the Armed Forces in the South West

- 3.1 This section brings together findings from existing research that has been carried out into the needs of the Armed Forces Community (AFC) nationally and locally across the South West.
- 3.2 This section also incorporates the findings from the eight focus groups David Wood facilitated as part of this current research project. These focus groups brought together 70 participants in total. All participants were members of the AFC and included Serving personnel (three focus groups), including one focus group of three participants from a Welfare Team who were Serving personnel, personnel in transition from being in the Services (four focus groups) including one focus group with Wounded Injured and Sick personnel, and Armed Forces Family members (one focus group).
- 3.3 Through consolidation of key findings from the literature and focus groups a number of themes were developed which identified the main areas of need experienced by different members of the AFC. These themes are:
- Service personnel and families: financial services, healthcare, divorce,
 - Spouses: Spouse Employment
 - Armed Forces Children: Education, Service Pupil Premium
 - Personnel transitioning: Housing
 - Veterans: Veteran Employment
 - Older Veterans: Comradeship
 - Mental health

Serving personnel & families

Financial services

Disadvantage due to mobility

- 3.4 The mobile nature of military life can lead to a number of difficulties for those currently serving and their families, and those who have left the military, in accessing and using financial services.
- 3.5 In many cases access to financial products and services may require applicants to have had a permanent address for a given amount of time, for example 3 or 5 years. This criteria therefore immediately deems those Service families that have undergone regular relocations ineligible.
- 3.6 For processes that have long registration or processing times, AFC members that are relocated, sometimes at short notice, struggle to adhere to the timescales required by the financial organisation (in the case of re-mortgaging homes).

- 3.7 Regular moves can also have a negative impact on the applicant's credit history. Poor credit history as a result of moving was a topic discussed multiple times within the focus groups, with one individual stating that it can also be impacted by the history of the accommodation being moved into:

"Your credit history takes a hit every time that you move and being on a military estate affects it too, particularly if the previous occupant had a poor credit history."

- 3.8 In addition to this, the regular moves themselves can lead to expensive administration and installation charges and financial penalties. Furthermore, being posted overseas can lead to continuous charges for products that aren't being used. Many financial services are therefore unsuitable for the needs of Armed Forces Communities.
- 3.9 Many businesses and organisations have taken measures to address some of these disadvantages members of the AFC face in accessing financial services, for example the four main mobile phone providers agreed to pause service contracts of Service personnel and their families who are posted overseas (MOD, 2016b). However there are still areas for improvement. The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report (2017), for example, called out to insurance providers to offer the right to a pro-rata rebate of insurance premiums and the right to preserve no claims bonuses to those posted overseas.

Disadvantage due to living 'behind the wire'

- 3.10 A number of issues were also identified for those living 'behind the wire' in accessing insurance products. For example, a number of individuals in the focus groups stated that when applying for car insurance, the nature of their occupation and that their cars would be parked on base would result in higher premiums:

"Insurance companies don't recognise a secure camp as somewhere safe to keep your car, which increases premiums"

- 3.11 Participants who live 'behind the wire' also shared experiences of their difficulties in accessing services due to companies not recognising British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses:

"living in a BFPO area meant it was difficult to get car finance, any finance really and mail, companies won't recognise the BFPO address"

Accessing healthcare

- 3.12 Issues have been identified around members of the AFC accessing healthcare, in particular as a result of relocations. For example, concerns have been raised around individuals losing their places on waiting lists for health services and moving to the end of the new waiting list on being relocated (North Somerset Council, 2012).
- 3.13 In addition to this, participants in the focus groups discussed the issues caused by differences between NHS trusts' treatments and services in the different locations they have been moved to, including the availability of certain treatments and the funding between locations.

"Under the NHS in [previous location] my Post Natal Depression was funded whereas here, I was asked to go to [another town] for treatment and no funding was offered."

- 3.14 The issues around accessing healthcare are widely understood which has led to a lot of progression in addressing this disadvantage, however this still continues to be an area for improvement (Armed Forces Covenant, 2018).

Divorce

- 3.15 The *Wiltshire Uncovered* (Wiltshire Community Foundation, 2014) report found that divorce was twice as likely in an Army family. They state that this can be due to long periods of separation, not being close to family and friends, and also due to the pressure of being a single parent raising a family for long periods of time.
- 3.16 Not only is divorce more likely to occur in an army family it has also been reported that divorced and separated Veterans were more likely to suffer from depression and bad nerves (22%) than Veterans in all other marital groups (MOD, 2016a).

Spouses

Spouse employment

- 3.17 Both the literature and discussions in the focus groups highlighted spousal employment as being a particular area of disadvantage and one that is a central issue to many military families.
- 3.18 The Army Families Federation survey (2015) found that spousal employment was one of the top three concerns and the impact an army career had on spousal employment was one of the top three compromises to Service members staying in the Services. The survey also stated that 70 per cent of Army Corporal respondents felt it was important to have a second income, subsidised childcare and spousal training, suggesting that spousal employment is important to the family's financial circumstances, as well as to the interests of the Spouse and the family as a unit.
- 3.19 Many barriers have been discussed around spouses maintaining employment, such as access to childcare. The Army Families Federation (2016) reported this as being one of the top challenges in spouses and partners maintaining employment due to cost and lack of appropriate provision. One participant illustrated this issue:

“Options are work or don’t work; childcare costs make it difficult to work because unless you have a well-paid job (most are not) it is not worth doing”

- 3.20 Being unable to fit employment around the changing routines of their Serving partner has also been highlighted as a barrier, with spouses having to sacrifice their own careers and a second income as a result. One focus group participant stated that she felt disadvantaged in:

“Not being able to work or having to work around husbands’ schedule because his work is more important”

- 3.21 Where employment has been secured short notice postings have led to spouses having to use up annual leave to take care of their children in their partner's absence, leaving less annual leave time to be spent with the family as a whole.

“For short notice things, I have to take holiday to work around my husband’s routine – this reduces available holiday time, when he has leave and we want to have family time.”

- 3.22 Employers themselves have been discussed as being a barrier to employment. Focus group participants stated that they perceived that organisations didn't want to employ spouses of military personnel as they would be perceived as needing to relocate soon after becoming employed.

"If you tell an employer your husband is in the Army, they won't employ you as they expect you will move on in a year or two"

- 3.23 Relocations are a key influencing factor in whether spouses are able to maintain employment with employment opportunities depending on what is locally available. The Wiltshire Community Foundation (2014) reported that many Army wives based in Tidworth do not work because of a lack of jobs available to them locally. Opportunities can also be affected by the quality of transport links, which focus group participants stated were sometimes poor or even non-existent.

- 3.24 The disadvantage spouses face in being unable to maintain employment can therefore affect their own career paths and personal development, the financial circumstances of the family, and also the long term ambitions of their Serving partner's Service. However a significant factor that focus group participants discussed was how inability to work could lead to isolation of spouses and therefore have implications for their mental wellbeing and the quality of family relationships as a whole. As a way of addressing this issue, one participant suggested:

"It would be good if the Local Authority could put on jobs fairs for spouses and help with training and education"

Armed Forces Children

Education and school places

- 3.25 Accessing new school places as a result of relocation is an issue many military families face and that affects Armed Forces Children primarily.
- 3.26 Similarly with accessing healthcare families face challenges as a result of registration processes which misalign with timings of relocations (North Somerset Council, 2012). The delay in accessing places can lead to children being out of school for significant periods of time, and this issue can be exacerbated when parents are trying to locate multiple places in one school for siblings (North Somerset Council, 2012; Children's Commissioner, 2018).
- 3.27 Disadvantage was also identified in circumstances where children required a consultant to support their specific educational needs as issues arose when transferring to a different consultant within the new location (Children's Commissioner, 2018). This process has been reported as complicated and lengthy and also results in children being out of school for significant periods of time. With already existing needs this can lead to further challenges experienced by both child and parent. One participant of the focus groups discussed their requirement to change their consultant due to relocation. Their son who had ADHD had to wait 10 months for an initial appointment as there was no transfer process in place so they had to start the application process from the beginning.
- 3.28 Even on finding school places these relocations present unique challenges for the Armed Forces Children themselves. The Children's Commissioner (2018) reports how schooling was most significantly affected by a highly mobile lifestyle, with children finding themselves missing out parts of the curriculum and duplicating learning of other parts when being relocated to new schools.

Moves can also result in significant practical (e.g. taking on more responsibilities at home), social (e.g. leaving friendships and having to start over again) and emotional challenges (e.g. dealing with the issues of an absent family member) (Children’s Commissioner, 2018).

Service Pupil Premium

- 3.29 Research by North Somerset Council (2012), the Children’s Commissioner (2018), and the discussion in the focus groups have identified issues in the way Service Pupil Premium (SPP) is being used in schools. Specifically, there is no toolkit for the way schools should use SPP which leads to various interpretations of how it should be used. This can lead to some members of the AFC feeling disadvantaged. One focus group participant stated:

“[The] issue is how the money is used – schools don’t apply its use the same way, their interpretation of the criteria varies.”

- 3.30 Another individual stated:

“it is not used to directly support military children. When I’ve asked I have been told it is used to benefit the whole school. The school decides how it spends it”

Personnel in transition

Social housing

- 3.31 A longstanding issue has been around access to social housing when individuals and families have transitioned. Previously a local connection was needed for housing to be granted in Local Authority areas. This presented challenges for those leaving their Service and for spouses and partners of Service personnel who go through divorce or become widowed as they would need to leave Service accommodation.
- 3.32 In April 2018 the MOD published new guidance stating that Service Personnel can apply to any LA area and that they must be accepted on the Housing Needs register in their area of choice (MOD, 2018). Although this seeks to address the disadvantage, it was made clear that if LA waiting lists were too long applicants may still be refused or advised to try elsewhere. The current practicalities of housing provision in general therefore still apply, and could therefore still result in members of the AFC experiencing the same housing issues as before the policy change.
- 3.33 Social housing was discussed in the focus groups as being an area of disadvantage for members of the AFC due to the understanding that a local connection was needed. However it was also identified that there was a lack of knowledge around what the regulations were in accessing social housing.

Homelessness

- 3.34 Homelessness is often considered to be an issue personnel in transition and ex-Service personnel face, however it only affects a small minority. It is difficult to know what percentage of those who are homeless are ex-Service personnel as there is no standard identifier in place. However, previous literature has reported that homeless Veterans are more likely to be older, have slept rough for longer, have alcohol related problems, and be suffering from mental health issues than homeless non-Veterans (Royal British Legion, [undated, accessed 2018], Deakin, P., 2016).

- 3.35 A range of factors have been identified as contributing to homelessness among the Veteran population. Risk characteristics pre-dating time in the Services, difficulties during Service which continue after discharge, problems transitioning to civilian life, and specific changes in life circumstances later on in life have all been identified as influencing factors in personnel becoming homeless (Devon County Council, 2014). Further to this the Royal British Legion stated that rather than military life or institutionalisation being the cause of Veteran's homelessness, there is more evidence to suggest the factors of military life, for example the drinking culture, the trauma of combat, or the mobility of the job, could influence a minority of personnel's ability to cope post-Service (Royal British Legion, undated).
- 3.36 It is also understood that those most at risk of homelessness are single men as there is more statutory homelessness assistance for households with children (RBL, undated [accessed 2018]).
- 3.37 Recently, the Forces In Mind Trust (2018) stated that over one thousand ex-Service personnel each year in England require urgent support finding accommodation. They also cite findings from York University that many of the Veterans involved in their study had experienced an inconsistent quality of advice on transitioning from the Service and inadequate support from Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) after leaving (York University as cited in FIMT, 2018). The Armed Forces Covenant (2017) supports this latter finding, stating in their annual report that the level of coordination between housing providers was making the process of acquiring housing less straightforward than it could be.
- 3.38 The Armed Forces Covenant (2017) also cited findings from Stoll that in 2017 only 70 percent of Local Authorities across the UK were asking the question of whether those presenting themselves as homeless were Veterans. Furthermore even when LAs did ask the question this did not necessarily translate into action.
- 3.39 All of these findings therefore demonstrate that where there is an urgent need for housing support the support is inconsistent, with some members of the AFC not accessing the support available at all, that there are distinct experiences of homeless Veterans compared to homeless non-Veterans, and that there are some types of Service leavers more at risk of homelessness than others.
- 3.40 In an attempt to address some of these issues the MOD has now been given a new duty of care³ to refer personnel they understand to be at risk of becoming homeless to LHAs under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), 2018). This act requires that if a Public Authority suspects a user is at risk of becoming homeless they are to refer the individual to an LHA within 56 days, with the user's consent for both the referral to be made and to be contacted by the LHA.
- 3.41 In addition to this, Stoll and Riverside, in collaboration with COBSEO, have published recommendations to also address these issues. They stated that the government should improve the transition process to ensure no personnel becomes homeless after Service, that LAs should consistently ask if those presenting themselves as homeless are Veterans and to have a clear plan in place if they are, and that the government should ensure supported housing for Veterans is properly resourced (Forces In Mind Trust, 2018).

³ As specified in *The Homelessness (review Procedure etc.) Regulations 2018 (MHCLG, 2018)*

Veterans

Employment

- 3.42 A finding that has been widely documented is that nationally many Veterans leave their Service with a high level of skills and are trained to a high standard however they enter employment in low paid and low skilled jobs (Deloitte, 2016).
- 3.43 APS data (MOD, 2016a) shows that nationally Veterans aged 16 to 34 were significantly more likely to work as process, plant and machine operatives (19 percent) than non-veterans (8 percent), in transport and storage (13 percent Veterans) than non-veterans (6 percent), and were less likely to work in professional occupations. Further to this employed Veterans were more likely to work in Public administration and the defence industry than employed non-veterans (MOD, 2016a).
- 3.44 In the South West region, the APS data showed that the most common sector Veterans worked in was Associate Professional and Technical (18%). However, the roles within these sectors don't always match the high level of varied and translatable skills Veterans develop throughout their Service.
- 3.45 Employers of Veterans reported how they have a high standard of basic skills (i.e. picking up specialist knowledge, making speeches and presentations, communication), cross-functional skills (i.e. team-working, instructing and teaching others, problem solving), specialist skills and perform well across a wide range of areas (Deloitte, 2016). However Veterans are disproportionately more likely than non-veterans to work in employment where these high level skills are of less importance in their roles. For example, as drivers of heavy goods vehicles, security guards, or roles in metal-working production and maintenance fitters (Deloitte, 2016).
- 3.46 Reasons discussed as to why this may be the case include a misunderstanding amongst employers of the types of skills and qualifications Veterans possess, and also Veterans themselves focussing on their transferable skills rather than translatable skills leading to job fulfilment rather than seeking their potential and capability (Deloitte, 2016).
- 3.47 It has been reported that the areas in which businesses tend to report skills gaps are the areas in which Veterans possess high-level skills, for example strategic management, managing or motivating staff, and team working (Deloitte, 2016). Wiltshire Council also reported that the most desired areas for employment of those leaving the Services were many areas that reported hard-to-fill vacancies (Wiltshire Council, 2009).

Older Veterans

- 3.48 In general, older Veterans face the same challenges as older non-Veterans (MOD, 2016a; Royal British Legion, 2014), however they are more likely to miss the comradeship of the community from their Service. This experience becomes more likely in areas where an older Veteran population is more sparse.
- 3.49 A small-scale study identified that where Veterans were facing a difficult transition, providing them with the chance to engage with their military identity again has been shown to be beneficial to their health and wellbeing (Sheffield Hallam University, 2017). The provision of a similar concept could be beneficial to older Veterans presenting this need.

- 3.50 Furthermore, for older people in the general population who suffer from dementia, reminiscence therapies and therapies that use memory as a therapeutic trigger have been shown to be beneficial (NHS, 2017). We would hypothesise that similar concepts applied to older Veterans may also be beneficial.

Mental health

- 3.51 The message is clear from the literature that most of those within and leaving the Armed Forces face little to no issues and their transitions are smooth. However where transitions have been difficult mental health issues have been a significant issue.
- 3.52 Both regional literature (Devon County Council, 2014) and national research (Murrison, 2010; Deakin, 2016) have reported common mental health problems and excessive alcohol consumption as main issues affecting those who have left the services. Adjustment Disorder has also been reported to be more common than PTSD, and suicide rates are found to be more prevalent among Veterans than mainstream society, at more than four times the national average for civilians amongst some service groups (Devon County Council, 2014).
- 3.53 Literature has also reported that Veterans with mental health issues usually seek help late or may not do so at all (Murrison, 2010). This reluctance to ask for help highlights the significant issue of stigma many Veterans experience in seeking help and support (Deakin, 2016). It has also been reported that this experience can be worsened by the perceptions Veterans have of civilian healthcare staff; specifically that they lack an understanding of Armed Forces culture and therefore are unable to provide the help and support they need (Devon Country Council, 2014).

Summary

- 3.54 This section identifies a number of issues that the AFC face. Although specific AFC groups face different issues (for example Service personnel face different issues to Veterans) the effects of a military lifestyle can continue to affect families long after their Service has been completed.
- 3.55 All members of the AFC experience issues in accessing public services in a number of different areas, for example health, housing, and education, as a result of past relocations. Many times this is due to fixed, lengthy, and sometimes complex processes individuals must go through which are easier to accommodate for civilian families that are more likely to be fixed in one location for longer periods of time. However spouses and Armed Forces Children in particular face unique challenges as part of a military family that most civilian counterparts don't experience.
- 3.56 Although many of these areas of disadvantage are well established in literature and current policies which has led to a lot of progression in addressing these issues, this research identifies that there are still improvements to be made.
- 3.57 These findings were brought together from existing national literature and local research studies. Some of the authors of this literature collect and report data regularly, for example the Armed Forces Covenant team publish an annual report, however local studies are likely to be more one-off pieces of research. Furthermore some areas have not carried out any local research. In order to capture the needs of the AFC continuously going forward more regular collection and reporting of

data is required to ensure appropriate action is being taken. We suggest councils run regular focus groups with members of the AFC and discuss ways they could collect data from their front-line staff that would determine areas of need.

4 Action taken to meet the needs of the AFC in the South West

- 4.1 This section provides an overview of the action being taken by Local Authorities to meet the needs of the Armed Forces Communities in the region.
- 4.2 The section begins with the presentation of data collected by Shared Intelligence as part of other research which shows how Local Authorities within the South West are implementing the Armed Forces Covenant, and then provides specific examples gathered from stakeholder interviews at the beginning of this research.
- Our Community – Our Covenant report (2015)***
- 4.3 Shared Intelligence carried out research in 2015 for the ‘Our Community – Our Covenant’ (Forces In Mind Trust, 2015) report. As part of this research data was collected through a survey to understand the extent to which Local Authority pledges were being implemented.
- 4.4 The data provided by Local Authorities in the South West has been extracted and is summarised below. This data can be used as baseline of the types of actions Local Authorities have taken to meet the needs of the AFC. The full tables can be found in appendix 3.
- 4.5 Twenty-four out of the 40 (60%) councils in the South West completed the survey. Of these there were 4 county councils, 13 district councils and 7 unitary councils.
- 4.6 The Armed Forces Covenant was found to be reflected to some extent across all council policies within the South West and targeted support and advice were being offered. The highest number of respondents reported that the Covenant was reflected either to a large extent or to some extent in housing (76%). Furthermore, when asked about the extent to which their council shows a clear understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the Armed Forces Covenant, the majority of councils stated they had a moderate or good understanding (81%). However, when asked whether their council currently reflected expectations of the Covenant in its role as an employer, half of the respondents said “no” (50%).
- 4.7 Of those that answered the questions, the vast majority of respondents in the South West had officer points of contact (90%) and member champions in place (72%), but fewer had a dedicated web page (57%) and far fewer had an up to date action plan which is regularly monitored (36%). This raises the question over the extent to which these councils are taking any action. The low proportion with actions plans raises questions over whether they are able to translate leadership level commitment into tangible action.
- 4.8 It was found that approximately 50% of the councils that responded to the survey in the South West brief public-facing staff on the Covenant.
- Stakeholder interviews***
- 4.9 Some of the actions that were being taken by Local Authorities in the South West were gathered during stakeholder interviews at the beginning of this project.

- 4.10 Most Local Authorities talked of having active connections with military bases or organisations within the South West to address needs that had been identified in their areas. However listed below are some specific examples stakeholders mentioned which demonstrate good practice:

Local Authority	Key actions:
Wiltshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness task group • Self-build scheme for Veterans • MCI programme – working with senior council officers, military personnel, and the third sector to look strategically across the county at delivery and tasks • Skills for Spouses programme – providing distance learning packages for spouses where there are skills needs, and engaging with Wiltshire College to help deliver the programmes.
North Somerset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Steps Scheme – an early intervention service for vulnerable people which helps them organise their council finances • Leisure Key Scheme – for those in Regular Service and their families which grants free access to leisure facilities. For personnel to keep up their fitness and as a respite for families. • Poppy Court - Self-build housing scheme for Veterans
Devon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several small projects that support ex-Service personnel who have had breakdown issues within the family – these projects help them access life skills.
Plymouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Veterans job fair in collaboration with employers in the city • Partnership with the Care Navigation Service – a specific drop in and advice service for the AFC
Somerset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arc (previously Taunton Association for the Homeless) – Victory House initiative for homeless Veterans

Summary

- 4.11 Local Authorities in the South West are currently taking actions to support the needs of the AFC which have been identified on a national basis (through the Armed Forces Covenant) and a local basis (through their own knowledge and partnerships).
- 4.12 However the data presented in the Our Community – Our covenant report was captured in 2015. If this data is still accurate today attention needs to be given to the small number of councils that don't have and/or don't regularly monitor an action plan. Without an action plan it is unlikely any action will be taking place.

5 Good practice example: North Yorkshire

Shared Intelligence have been carrying out a research project into understanding the presence and needs of the Armed Forces Community across North Yorkshire.

Councils within North Yorkshire collect a wide range of data on these topics through a range of methods and record the results. One method is through the different ways councils ask the question “have you served?”. Below is a list of the data councils have collected through this method:

Richmondshire:

- Housing
- Benefits
- GPs
- Possibly council tax

Scarborough:

- Housing (106 active applications, with 10 housed and 3 closed)
- Pension data (but difficulties in retrieving it)

City of York:

- JCP (used to ask Q)
- Possibly housing
- Possibly benefits

Selby:

- Housing

Other data that is also collected includes:

Richmondshire:

- Travel to work
- Data collected for Local Plan
- Information for Equality and Diversity Group

Hambleton:

- MoD properties (about 480)

RBL case and grant data

SSAFA case data (requested)

MoD data from FOI (requested)

By consolidating all available national and local data that North Yorkshire have access to it was possible to build up an understanding of the presence and the needs of the Armed Forces Community across the counties within North Yorkshire.

Below is a section of the data demonstrating what can currently be understood of the presence and needs of the AFC across one Local Authority area in the North-West of North Yorkshire:

Richmondshire

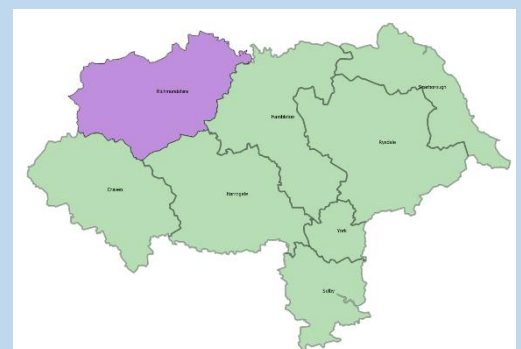
AFC presence

Serving:

- Catterick Garrison:
 - 4th Infantry Brigade (Regular and Reserve units)
 - Gurkha Company Catterick
 - 32 Engineer Regiment
 - 5th Regiment Royal Artillery
 - The Light Dragoons
 - The Royal Dragoon Guards
 - The Royal Lancers
 - 2 Yorks
- Family members of serving personnel
- Gurkha community
- Mon-Fri serving personnel
- Additional AF:
 - 1350 (+ 1000 family members) 2019-2023
 - 1350 (+1000 family members) 2027-2031
- 6940 MoD jobs (2017 figures from NYCC)

Ex-Forces

- Older Veterans (65+)
- Working age Veterans
- Gurkha ex-forces community



Areas of need where known:

- Access issues for those more rural
- Are there hidden needs for older Veterans?
- Gurkha community language barriers
- Employment – not an issue if skills match
- Spousal employment
- Hidden needs of AFC women

Gaps in services:

- Older Vets not recognising existing support
- Services for AFC women

6 The way forward

- 6.1 The findings from this research show that the shape of the Armed Forces Community (AFC) across the South West is changing. This is due to the current Basing programme that will be ongoing until the end of the decade, the ageing Veteran population, and the new younger Veteran population.
- 6.2 The Basing will further reinforce the Service personnel population in Wiltshire, but it also means that the shape and distribution of Veterans are likely to change. This is already being shown in areas that have been identified as young Veteran hotspots.
- 6.3 How these trends manifest on the ground need to be monitored closely. Shared Intelligence suggest the best ways this can be done is to:

Actions which South West Local Authorities should consider:

Explore with the MOD, including by submitting further FOI requests, how to maximise access to data which will help identify presence of Serving personnel and their families within the South West

Make the best use of the publicly available data on the Serving population

Acquire as much information as possible from the MOD on Service personnel who have embarked on transitioning and their plans after leaving the Services

Log the number of referrals made to Local Authorities within the South West by all public authorities under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Use the “Have you served?” question in any and all interactions with the public to track beyond Leavers’ first destination point and to identify areas of need

Triangulate the most recent data on the presence of the Veteran population based on national data and local research

Work with local Armed Forces support organisations to convene regular focus groups with members of the AFC to identify areas of need

- 6.4 There are also a number of proposals that the South West Armed Forces Consortium will be presenting to Local Authorities at the South West Armed Forces Champions Conference in November 2018. These proposals are detailed below:

Proposals to be presented at the South West Armed Forces Champions Conference

Adopt a regional identity - Forces Connect South West

This provides a simple collective reference name to the consortium and supports the wider potential use. Forces Connect South East has been established by the SE programme and endorsed by MOD. It provides a simple brand that reinforces the Covenant Lion logo and could be easily adapted by other Local Authority regions.

Mandate Training

Each Local Authority to adopt the Covenant Staff e-Module / Housing e-Module with Face to Face training provided for Champions, Councillors, Leaders and selected staffs. This would facilitate a programme of Mentors within select services acting as area specific Covenant Champions / Ambassadors.

Programme of education on the Covenant also to be provided to service personnel and families.

Agree a Forces Friendly Quality Mark

A proposal for a Forces Friendly Quality Mark has been produced to provide a series of criteria that will enable a standardised means of measuring a Local Authorities delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. This has been presented to the MOD Covenant Team with a view that it's utility be considered in other Local Authority areas. The intent is in conjunction with the MOD Covenant Team and Forces Connect South East to create a complete package of training and quality resources.

Scope in principle the creation of a South West Region Covenant Executive

Consider in principle the creation of a regional executive committee and engage with potential stakeholders and external agencies to develop the concept, to consider the feasibility of such a body, its membership and a set of Terms of Reference. This will provide a means of formalising regional coordination of activities in support of the military community. A range of collaborative options to be considered to enable such a body to function and would provide the link between the covenant's operation at community level and strategy developed by the Veterans Board.

Options to be considered: Formal, informal, virtual, tiered meetings.

Implement Asking the Question

Agree areas where data can be captured to inform the regional intelligence. Wiltshire Information Sharing Charter (WISC) is being developed and will provide a template for the partners. Intention is to establish information sharing agreements with RBL, SSAFA and MOD. Other data sources to be explored.

Launch Forces Connect South West

Formally adopt the collective reference name for the South West consortium focus on the Armed Forces Covenant.

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8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Key research questions

Key research questions	Sub-research questions	Sources of data
What work has been done to identify the size and makeup of the Armed Forces presence in the south-west and their needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What areas have undertaken needs assessments/projects to identify needs? • Are there any areas that have not undertaken a needs assessment/project into identifying needs? • What approaches have been taken to identify needs? • Have there been more successful approaches than others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature and existing data review • Scoping conversations with councils and organisations • Action research
How many members of the AFC live in the south-west?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the makeup of the SW in terms of serving/veterans/reservists/their families? • How is this likely to change in the next 10 years? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature and existing data review • Action research
What are the needs of the AFC?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of housing, employment, health, education, Children's services? • How do these needs differ across the different groups within the AFC mentioned above? • Are there any areas of need not covered above for the different groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature and existing data review • Scoping conversations with councils and organisations • Action research
How are the needs of the AFC being met in the south-west?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What suggestions/recommendations were given in previous needs assessments/projects that identified needs? • Which of these have been implemented? • What are some of the barriers to implementing some of the recommendations? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature and existing data review • David notes from previous conversations • Scoping conversations with councils and organisations • Action research

Appendix 2: Our Community – Our Covenant report data – Full tables for South West councils

a)

Of which of the following armed forces groups, if any, do you have a significant population in your area?				
	Serving population	Reservist population	Veteran population	None of the above
District	4		6	3
County	4	3	4	
Unitary	3	4	7	
Grand Total	11	7	17	3

b)

Does your council have any of the following practices in place, and if so, to what extent?					
	Yes this practice is in place and very active	Yes this practice is in place	No, this practice is not in place	Not sure	Total
An officer point of contact	12	8	2		22
An elected councilor covenant champion	10	6	6		22
A mechanism for collaboration and information sharing between relevant organisations who are supporting armed forces residents	7	8	6	1	22
A forum with relevant people/organisations which meets regularly	7	6	7	1	21
A clear public statement of what members of the armed forces community can expect from the council	6	9	4	2	21
A web page with information for armed forces residents	4	8	9		21
A route for members of the armed forces community to raise concerns	4	9	6	2	21
An action plan which is monitored and reviewed	3	5	14		22

c)

To what extent is the Covenant reflected in the council policies and criteria relating to the following areas?

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Not sure	Not applicable	Total
Housing	5	11	1	2	2	21
Public Health (including mental health and drug and alcohol problems)	3	7	2	3	6	21
Education	3	8	1	4	5	21
Employment	1	8	2	5	5	21
Cultural and leisure	1	8	2	7	3	21
Adult social care		8	1	7	5	21

d)

To what extent is the council offering targeted support and advice in the following areas?

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Not sure	Not applicable	Total
Housing	5	8	3	2	3	21
Public Health (including mental health and drug and alcohol problems)	1	8	1	5	5	20
Education	3	4	2	6	5	20
Employment	1	8	3	5	3	20
Cultural and leisure	2	5	4	6	2	19
Adult social care	1	4	2	8	5	20

e)

Is there currently a mechanism for briefing public-facing staff on the expectations flowing from the Covenant?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Total	
County		2	2	4	
District		4	5	2	11
Unitary		4	3	7	
Grand Total		10	10	2	22

f)

Does the council currently reflect the expectations of the Covenant in its role as an employer?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Total	
County		2	1	1	4
District		1	6	4	11
Unitary		2	4	1	7
Grand Total		5	11	6	22

g)

How far would you say your council has a clear understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the armed forces covenant?

	No understanding	A little understanding	Moderate understanding	Good understanding	Don't know	Grand total
County			1	2	1	4
District			2	7	2	11
Unitary			1	1	5	7
Grand Total			4	10	8	22

h)

To what extent would you say your council and central government share the same understanding of the expectations associated with delivering the covenant?

	Great extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	Not at all	Don't know	Total
County		1	1		2	4
District	1	6	1		3	11
Unitary	2	4	1			7
Grand Total	3	11	3		5	22