

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

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RESEARCH INTO THE NEEDS OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY IN KENT AND MEDWAY

Report from: Kent & Medway Civilian Military Partnership Board

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Summary

This paper summarises the findings of the research commissioned by the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Partnership Board into the needs of the armed forces community.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This report is for information and there are no immediate budget or policy implications, although the research should inform the next iteration of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community. It is intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at the local level. The purpose of the Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community working and residing in Medway and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this armed forces community. The Kent & Medway Civilian Military Board oversees the implementation of the Covenant, and Cllr Mike O'Brien represents Medway Council on the Board, along with Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation.
- 2.2 Just over a year ago, the Board decided to carry out specific research into the needs of the armed forces community in Kent and Medway in order to inform future action planning and ensure efforts are being targeted at those issues most important to the community. The report was launched in March 2016 at the Board's annual conference, and Cllr O'Brien has requested that the findings of the research be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board because this provides information that will be useful for the Joint Strategic

Needs Assessment, and also links to previous reports about emotional wellbeing support to the armed forces community.

3. The Research Findings

3.1 The project comprised:

- A review of national and local evidence, to focus the subsequent research
- An on-line survey, which was completed by over 700 people (serving personnel, Reservists, ex-service personnel and spouses)
- Qualitative research to explore the issues raised in the on-line survey, which comprised 28 one to one interviews, and three focus groups involving a total of 29 people.

3.2 The evidence review, detailed results from the on-line survey, qualitative report and a summary overview report pulling everything together, can all be found on this website:

<http://www.kentcouncilleaders.org.uk/military/research/>

3.3 The research covered the whole gamut of needs of the armed forces community, including education of service children, housing, transition, employment, finances and relationships (all of which have an impact on wellbeing) as well as health. In essence, much of the research was consistent with other information sources, and it is also important to note that the overall message is a positive one – most people were enjoying life, and most ex-service personnel had made the transition to civilian life with relative ease. But there were some clear areas where further action is needed. Appendix 1 provides a brief overview of the key messages that we have taken from the research, but the focus of this report is on the health and wellbeing aspects that might be of particular interest to the Board.

3.4 A general theme emerged about how to ensure that people have the information they need at the point at which they need it. This is not a surprising finding, but it has added impetus to the Civilian Military Partnership Board's action to develop one page 'pathways' for different services/themes across Kent and Medway, building on the successful project implemented by Kate Parkin in Sussex (the current pathways can be seen here:

<http://www.sussexarmedforcesnetwork.nhs.uk/pathways/>)

3.5 The participants in this research came forward in response to publicity, and the results have not been weighted in any way, so it is not a statistically representative sample. It is also likely that those with particular issues and concerns would be more likely than others to take the trouble to participate. Nonetheless, the sheer numbers involved provide a very useful source of information that is worth taking seriously. Bearing the caveats about the sample in mind, it is still noteworthy that a third of respondents considered themselves to have a long-term illness or disability, and of that third, 67% reported that this was associated with their time in service.

3.6 The proportion of people who said they had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or mental health issues was higher than expected. Whilst this does not necessarily mean that actual incidence of these conditions is higher in Kent and Medway, for the reasons set out in the previous paragraph, it

emphasises the importance of good quality and responsive mental health support.

- 3.7 In the qualitative research it emerged that physical disabilities were often associated with ‘wear and tear’, so conditions such as arthritis or hearing impairment for people in their 60s and above were seen by some ex-service personnel as being caused by their service.
- 3.8 An interesting finding from the qualitative research was that some ex-service personnel who had only recently left the service, and Reservists, had examples of primary care services failing to appreciate their high levels of physical fitness, and as a result were not meeting their needs. For example, physiotherapy that would be appropriate for most people may not be effective for very fit individuals.
- 3.9 Those individuals who do not have a close-knit network of family or friends seemed to be more likely to find it difficult to transition to civilian life and more vulnerable to having problems. We are working with the armed forces to see if such individuals can be identified before they leave the forces, and given targeted support. It is also worth reflecting that ex-service personnel and Reservists have skills that are incredibly useful within communities, as well as in employment, and using those skills in a voluntary capacity can really help people to become part of their local civilian community.

4. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
A failure to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the Armed Forces Community.	<p>Services fail to meet the needs of veterans, reservists and their families for one or more of the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need is unrecognised (eg service provider is unaware of the armed forces connection) 2. Inappropriate signposting 3. Service provider is unaware of the implications of the armed forces connection. 	<p>Joint Strategic Needs Assessment incorporates consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces Community, and specifies how the needs will be met.</p>

5. Financial and legal implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or legal implications arising from this report.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The Board is asked to consider the results of this research, and agree that this should be fed into the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and used to inform any other strategic development where consideration of the needs of the armed forces community is key.

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Appendices

Executive Summary of the research report

Background papers

None

KENT & MEDWAY CIVILIAN MILITARY PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH INTO THE NEEDS OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

Executive Summary

We now have a wealth of information about the 704 members of the Kent & Medway armed forces community who contributed to this research. When put alongside other national and local information gathered in recent years, it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees. We have made all the detailed research information available on-line so that those who are interested in specific themes can investigate those areas further, and draw to our attention any important points that we may have overlooked.

The key messages we have taken from the research so far are as follows:

- **The majority of the armed forces community are enjoying life, and most service leavers resettle to life on 'civvy street' with relative ease. The overall picture is a positive one.**

The Armed Forces Covenant:

- There is still a need to raise understanding and awareness about the Covenant amongst the armed forces community, as well as the wider community.

Health and wellbeing:

- The online research identified that a third of ex-service personnel have a long-term illness or difficulty linked to time in active service. Half of these have a physical disability, around a quarter have mental health problems and hearing impairments and 21% (of the third) report that they have PTSD.
- Ex-service personnel are more likely to have 'wear and tear' physical problems and hearing impairment than the general population, or to have those conditions to a worse degree due to the nature of service demands.
- Rehabilitation after injury was a particular issue for reservists and ex-service personnel as the health care they receive is not of the same quality as that received by serving personnel. Participants reported that the physiology of someone who has had years of training would be different from the general population, so fitness and injury rehabilitation required more specialist support as the usual physiotherapy, for example, may not be effective. This was particularly pertinent for reservists as they are expected to have service levels of fitness but do not have access to Military healthcare.
- Relationships are put under particular stress when service personnel are deployed, and when people transition to civilian life. We need to ensure that suitable, specialist if necessary, support is available at these times to those who need it.

Support within the community:

- Families tend to be close-knit but those without support networks are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and difficulties with transition. Efforts need to be made to identify such individuals before they leave the service and ensure they know how to access support.

- Many say they do not know what support is out there – we need to make it easier for people to find what they need.
- A number of people said they felt abandoned by the armed forces when they left – they lose their friends and their “armed forces family”. Participants suggested that the services should connect more closely with the ex-service community.

Transition:

- Unsurprisingly, those who prepared for their transition (buying a house, saving money, sorting out a new job) managed the transition most successfully.
- Peer support (“hearing from someone who’s done it”) was thought to be particularly helpful. Improved signposting would also be of assistance.
- The Career Transition Partnership had mixed reviews.

Schools:

- Problems getting children into the right school were largely resolved, but with considerable effort on the part of the parents.
- Syllabus changes when children moved schools were a problem (across the age groups)
- Some parents were concerned by the number of moves their children had to make, had worries about their attainment and stated that some children felt isolated.

Housing:

- This was the area where people felt more advice and support was needed. Just under half of ex-service personnel had owned their own home prior to leaving the forces, however lower ranks were under-represented in our research. 37% of ex-service personnel said it was not at all easy or not very easy to find suitable housing when they left the forces.

Employment and Skills:

- This was quite a positive picture, with those who are still serving already doing vocational training that is recognised by employers, and those who have left mostly finding employment reasonably quickly. Unsurprisingly, those with a vocational route plan were most successful at finding employment and had more job satisfaction.
- Nonetheless, there is still more we could be doing to raise awareness amongst employers about the benefits of employing reservists or ex-service personnel, and to facilitate the transfer of skills from the armed services to civilian employment.

Reservists:

- As the proportion of the armed forces who are reservists increases, it is even more important to ensure that their particular issues are addressed – e.g. encouraging employers to be supportive; ensuring reservists’ children are well supported in schools, even though they are not eligible for pupil premium; ensuring the health service is responsive to the specific needs of reservists.

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