



Supporting those who Serve Us

Wales Manifesto 2026

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Foreword

Lynda Atkins

“Our Armed Forces community make immense sacrifices to protect the United Kingdom and the freedoms we all enjoy. In Wales, as across the rest of the UK, they deserve not only our recognition and gratitude, but meaningful, sustained support that reflects the depth of their service.”

For over a century, the Royal British Legion has championed the Armed Forces community. We believe in the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant; that no one should face disadvantage due to their service, and that special consideration is appropriate for those who have given most, and we believe these must be made real in daily life across all the nations of the UK.

Wales has a proud military heritage and diverse Armed Forces community presence. Yet, as this manifesto shows, the Covenant’s promise is not being fully delivered. The UK Government’s move to extend the Covenant Duty to all departments as well as the Devolved Nations is a major step forward. It offers the Welsh Government a chance to lead in setting a consistent national standard.

This manifesto offers practical recommendations that would enable Wales to become a model of best practice, ensuring fair treatment for the Armed Forces community. We look forward to working with candidates and parties who will form the next Welsh Government to turn these proposals into reality, ensuring that service and sacrifice are met with the respect and support they deserve.

Warmest regards,

Lynda Atkins

National Chair of the Royal British Legion



Introduction

This manifesto is the product of engagement with the Armed Forces community in Wales, analysis of the latest data, and an assessment of current policy. It identifies a number of key areas where targeted intervention by the Welsh Government will have the most impact on the lives of the Armed Forces community.

The Royal British Legion in Wales is committed to working collaboratively to implement our recommendations. We present this document as our contribution to a shared goal: building a Wales that truly honours its Armed Forces community.



Our recommendations

RBL recommends that the Welsh Government must:



- Create dental registration flags for Armed Forces children (children of current serving Regulars), enabling Health Boards to offer priority placement where capacity allows and facilitating prompt, integrated health and care experiences.
- Permit temporary access to Community Dental Services for Armed Forces Children when no NHS dentist is available within 8 weeks of relocation, ensuring coordinated treatment pathways that address all dentistry needs.
- Ensure that Armed Forces Covenant duties are embedded into dental contract terms and commissioning guidance through the new GDS contract framework, with mechanisms for public bodies to be held accountable for meeting Covenant obligations.
- Actively promote participation in the Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation Scheme across healthcare settings in Wales to improve uptake and consistency.
- Introduce a national training programme for all frontline NHS staff in Wales to identify and support patients with Armed Forces backgrounds, including Serving personnel, their families and the bereaved community.

Strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales:

- Reference the Armed Forces Covenant principles, and policy implications in relation to them, across strategies, guidance and reporting templates across Welsh Government. This includes the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, local authority Wellbeing Plans, and Equality and Impact assessments undertaken across statutory services in Wales.
- Implement an accessible, dedicated programme of promotion activity to support the Armed Forces Covenant. To ensure the expanded Covenant Duty is implemented to its full effect, the Welsh government must apply appropriate resource, guidance, and robust evaluation mechanisms to measure impact across all relevant policy areas and public services.

Improve Access to tailored healthcare:

- Establish formal identification mechanisms within NHS dental systems by requiring all public bodies to ask individuals whether they or a family member has served in the UK Armed Forces, with data recorded and published, to understand needs and provide appropriate support.



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Treat Military Compensation Fairly:



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- Ensure that any devolved statutory means-test for welfare benefits fully disregards military compensation.
- Review and revise statutory guidance to ensure local authorities' means-testing policies in Wales fully disregard military compensation payments for locally administered benefits.

Identify Service Children:

- Demonstrate its commitment to Service children by adding a field to the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to enable their identification. The identification of Service children is the cornerstone in mitigating the unique challenges associated with the Armed Forces lifestyle, such as high mobility and prolonged periods of separation from their serving parent.

The Armed Forces Community in Wales

There are around
115,331
veterans in Wales



This reflects 4.5% of those aged 16 and over. Of these, 76.3% had served in the Regular forces, 19.3% in the Reserves, and 4.5% had served in both.

Source: Census 2021.

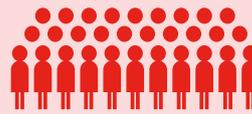
In Wales, the local authorities with the highest proportion of veterans were:



**Conwy 5.9%,
Pembrokeshire 5.7%,
The Isle of Anglesey 5.6%.**

Source: Census 2021.

There are **1,870** Regular serving personnel based in Wales.



Source: Annual Location Statistics 2025.

49.8% of veterans in Wales are aged 64 years and younger.

Source: Census 2021.

13.8% of veterans living in Wales were female.

Source: Census 2021.

56.2% of veterans living in Wales were married or in a civil partnership.



Source: Census 2021.

90.4% of veterans living in Wales reporting a sexual orientation of Heterosexual or Straight.

Source: Census 2021.

17.2% of veterans in Wales lived in a household with dependent children. A total of **49,270** children and stepchildren lived in the same household as a veteran: **58.1%** of these were classed as dependent.

Source: Census 2021.



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Strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales

The Armed Forces Covenant¹ was introduced as part of the Armed Forces Act 2011 after a successful campaign led by the Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland. The Covenant outlines the nation’s obligation that members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their families should not face any disadvantage due to their service, and provides special consideration in certain circumstances, such as for those who have been injured or bereaved.

The Armed Forces Act 2021 (‘the [Covenant] Duty’) introduced a legal duty for specific organisations to give “due regard” to the promise of the Covenant, meaning that they must consciously consider the principles of the Covenant. This Duty applies to bodies responsible for local healthcare, education, and housing, such as local authorities and NHS bodies. However, the Duty notably excludes central or devolved government departments and other policy areas.



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Following the 2024 manifesto pledge to put the “Armed Forces Covenant fully into law”, the Government has introduced legislation to extend the Covenant Duty. This seeks to address the limitations of the 2021 Act by making the ‘due regard’ duty legally binding on all central government departments for the first time. The Duty will also be extended to the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The extension aims to ensure a consistent UK-wide approach to supporting the Armed Forces community.

Whilst all local authorities in Wales have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, its implementation remains inconsistent. This is not due to varied legal responsibilities, which are uniform under the Covenant Duty, but rather the ambiguous nature of the ‘due regard’ clause, differing local priorities, and challenges in cross-sector coordination. The practical delivery of the Covenant is primarily driven by Welsh Government, regional Armed Forces Liaison Officers, the Wales Veterans’ Commissioner, and extensive third-sector support networks.

Currently, there is a limited understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant. An August 2025 survey, conducted by YouGov on behalf of RBL, found that 67% of people in the UK had never heard of the Armed Forces Covenant, and only 15% had heard of it and knew something about it². The 2025 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) noted that more than one quarter (27%) of personnel had never heard of the Armed Forces Covenant, with Officers considerably more likely to know at least a little about it compared to Other Ranks (84% vs. 45% respectively).³

Members of the Armed Forces community in Wales access public services through a mix of national, devolved, regional, and local bodies. RBL maintains that introducing a common Duty across all levels of both UK and Devolved Government will help ensure consistency and clarity in the commitments the Armed Forces community can expect. In Wales, this Duty will complement existing devolved strategies and strengthen the delivery of services by embedding Covenant principles across all tiers of public service provision.

Whilst the expansion of the Armed Forces Covenant will be led by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the Welsh Government must build upon its support for the Armed Forces community. By ensuring that policy and guidance continue to reflect the unique needs of this community, and by aligning with Covenant principles, the Welsh Government can enhance its existing strategies and plans. This will help deliver a more comprehensive and consistent UK-wide approach, where services are planned, delivered, and reviewed with the Armed Forces community in mind.

RBL recommends that the Welsh Government must:

- Reference the Armed Forces Covenant principles, and policy implications in relation to them, across strategies, guidance and reporting templates across Welsh Government. This includes the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, local authority Wellbeing Plans, and Equality and Impact assessments undertaken across statutory services in Wales.
- Implement a dedicated programme of promotional activity on the Armed Forces Covenant and Covenant Duty across Wales.
- Dedicate appropriate and sustainable funding to ensure that the Welsh Government, and statutory services, are able to effectively implement the Covenant Duty, supplemented by consistent training and robust impact evaluation mechanisms.

1. Ministry of Defence (2011), The Armed Forces Covenant, available at: [the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf](#)

2. Total sample size was 2,169 adults. The survey was carried out online between 16th–23rd August 2025. Figures are weighted and representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

3. Ministry of Defence (2025), UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2025, available at: [UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2025](#)

Health and wellbeing: Improving access to healthcare for the Armed Forces community



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Access to dentistry for Service children

Serving Armed Forces personnel receive dental care through Defence Medical Services (DMS), but their families are required to access NHS dental services for their care. Unlike GP services, there are no standardised patient codes or “flags” to recognise the children of serving personnel within dental systems. Whilst children of service personnel are entitled to free NHS dental care in Wales, the system lacks any formal mechanism to identify them or mitigate the disadvantages caused by higher mobility than their civilian peers.

The Armed Forces Covenant places a duty on Health Boards to ensure service families face “no disadvantage,” this principle does not automatically extend to the individual dental practices commissioned to provide NHS care unless it is explicitly written into their contracts.

The 2025 Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) revealed that families in Wales were more likely than those in any other UK nation to report being unable to access dental treatment.

Key challenges include:

- Frequent relocations between postings creating gaps in continuity of care.
- Long NHS dental waiting lists with no priority pathways for military families.
- Children struggling to access routine dental care, missing out on vital preventative treatment.

- Families may have to seek private care due to NHS access barriers.
- Significant travel costs for families when continuity is lost between postings.

The forthcoming 2026 General Dental Services (GDS) contract reforms will see Armed Forces families face significant disadvantage through the new Dental Access Portal (DAP) system.

The DAP will become the only mechanism for new patients to access routine NHS dental care, with health boards allocating patients from a queue as appointments become available. Every time a military family relocates within Wales due to service requirements, they would re-enter the system as “new patients” and join the back of the queue, losing any continuity of care they had been previously established. This creates a cycle of disruption where frequent service-related moves mean armed forces families repeatedly lose their place in the dental care system.

Notably, Armed Forces families are not mentioned anywhere in the Equality Impact Assessment, and no provisions for priority access or exemptions for those who relocate frequently due to employment have been included in the proposed reforms.

RBL recommends that the Welsh Government must:

- Establish formal identification mechanisms within NHS dental systems by requiring all public bodies to ask individuals whether they or a family member has served in the UK Armed Forces, with data recorded and published to understand needs and provide appropriate support.
- Create dental registration flags for Armed Forces children, enabling Health Boards to offer priority placement where capacity allows and facilitating prompt, integrated health and care experiences for families.
- Permit temporary access to Community Dental Services for military children when no NHS dentist is available within 8 weeks of relocation, ensuring coordinated treatment pathways.
- Ensure that Armed Forces Covenant duties are embedded into dental contract terms and commissioning guidance through the new GDS contract framework, with mechanisms for public bodies to be held accountable for meeting Covenant obligations.

Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation Scheme

The Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation Scheme, launched in November 2023, aims to improve identification and support for veterans within primary care. The programme enables GP practices to sign up and undertake specialist training on veterans' health and wellbeing, as well as improve awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and the needs of the wider Armed Forces community.⁴

GP surgeries who join the scheme will routinely ask new patients if they, or a family member, have served or are currently serving in the Armed Forces. Practices will also be required to remain up-to-date with training and guidance on veterans' health, and the needs of the wider Armed Forces community, to maintain a tailored and evidence-based support offer.⁵

However, across Wales, uptake of this scheme remains voluntary and has been inconsistent across practices. The latest available data from Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) indicates that, of the 374 registered GP practices in Wales⁶, 63 are accredited as Veteran Friendly since the scheme launched in 2023⁷. This low uptake presents a significant barrier to the scheme's effectiveness. Greater awareness and promotion of the veteran friendly scheme is essential to ensure consistent standards of support for the Armed Forces community across Wales.

Many veterans are not being correctly coded in GP systems, which limits their access to appropriate care and limits appropriate data collection essential for service planning. Accurate identification of veterans in GP records is critical to ensuring they receive the care they are entitled to and to enabling better planning, delivery of services and signposting to additional support in the third sector. Improved data on the scheme's impact is needed to assess its benefits and encourage more veterans to disclose their status.

The Department for Health and Social Care has announced a National Training Education Program in England, that will see NHS staff receive dedicated training to help them identify patients with Armed Forces backgrounds and provide the right support. GPs, doctors, nurses, therapists and managers will work with regional trainers to embed this support across the NHS. A similar initiative in Wales would significantly benefit veterans. Progress has already been made through the work of HEIW in developing training specific to the Armed Forces community in Wales. It is vital that clinicians are given time and support to access and complete training, as this will help eliminate inconsistencies in how veterans access care and are directed to appropriate service.

Veterans may be reluctant to self-identify due to complex feelings about the term "veteran" and their own experiences of service. Training staff to ask whether someone has "served in the UK Armed Forces" rather than if they are a "veteran" can improve identification and ensure veterans receive the support they need.

RBL recommends that the Welsh Government must:

- Actively promote participation in the Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation Scheme across healthcare settings in Wales to improve uptake and consistency.
- Introduce a national training programme for all frontline NHS staff in Wales to identify and support patients with Armed Forces backgrounds, including Serving personnel and veterans, their families and the bereaved community.



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4. Health Education and Improvement Wales, Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales, available at: [Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales - HEIW](#)

5. Ibid.

6. British Medical Association (2024), Save our surgeries, available at: [Wales save our surgeries campaign](#)

7. Health Education and Improvement Wales, Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales, available at: [Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales - HEIW](#)

Welfare and finance: Treating military compensation fairly

Welfare benefits are primarily administered through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). However, some welfare benefits are administered through local authorities in Wales, such as Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Discretionary Housing Payments, and Disabled Facilities Grants.

Where civilians seek compensation for harm through the civil justice system, veterans who are injured, or families who are bereaved, as a result of Service are awarded compensation by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Military compensation is regularly awarded as a lump sum, however, some compensation payments are paid monthly, leading to it being treated as normal income.

The treatment of military compensation within welfare benefit means tests varies; whilst some benefits disregard military compensation payments in full, others consider some or all payments as income.

As of 31 March 2025 in Wales, there were 5,125 recipients of compensation through the War Pension Scheme (WPS)⁸. Under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS), there were 2,241 injury/illness award recipients, including 284 veterans in receipt of a Guaranteed Income Payment⁹.

The 2021 England and Wales Census identified that the proportion of disabled veterans¹⁰ was larger than the non-veteran population: 32.1% compared with 19.6% respectively¹¹. Much of this difference is explained by the older age profile of veterans compared to non-veterans - when adjusted for age and gender to compare directly to the wider population, veterans are still slightly more likely to be disabled than non-veterans: 32.1% compared to 30% respectively. This higher proportion of disability was consistent in all age bands between 30-85¹².

Whilst not all disabled veterans will have a disability attributable to Service, it is reasonable to suggest that many will be in receipt of military compensation for their disability, and in turn be impacted by means-testing regulations that result in them losing their compensation payments.

The concept of fully disregarding military compensation in means tests has been accepted by governments throughout the UK. Universal Credit disregards both WPS and AFCS payments. Since 2021 this has extended to Service Invaliding Pensions (SIPs) and Service Attributable

Pensions (SAPs). Yet, these precedents are not replicated across the wider welfare benefits landscape, leaving some vulnerable groups to sacrifice their compensation, such as in the case of those older injured veterans who are struggling to make ends meet and need to access Pension Credit.

In many cases, where solutions have been introduced, they remain fragmented or rely solely on discretionary guidance. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, submitted by RBL to local authorities in Wales, indicated that, of the 20 responding authorities, only half (56%) fully disregard military compensation as income across all five key locally administered benefits including Council Tax Support, Housing Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payment, and both Small and Large Disabled Facilities Grants. This inconsistent approach risks disadvantaging members of the Armed Forces Community and undermines the principle of fair treatment and special consideration for those who have given most through their Service.

RBL recommends that the Welsh Government must:

- Ensure that any devolved statutory means-test for welfare benefits fully disregards military compensation.
- Review and revise statutory guidance to ensure local authorities' means-testing policies in Wales fully disregard military compensation payments for locally administered benefits.



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8. Ministry of Defence (2025), War Pension Scheme annual statistics: 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2025 [Table 13], available at: [War Pension Scheme annual statistics: 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2025.ods](#)

9. Ministry of Defence (2025), Armed Forces Compensation Scheme statistics: financial year 2024/25 [Table 17], available at: [Armed Forces Compensation Scheme statistics: financial year 2024/25 - GOV.UK](#)

10. Office for National Statistics (2023), UK armed forces veterans, health and unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021, available at: [UK armed forces veterans, health and unpaid care, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.



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Supporting children and families: Identifying Service children

Whilst the experiences of children in Armed Forces families mean that they demonstrate many strengths, the unique lifestyle can present specific challenges. These include long periods of separation from their serving parent, for example during operational deployments, and frequent relocations within the UK and overseas. This can cause significant disruption to educational journeys and support networks and have an impact on their wellbeing. In order to address these specific needs, tailored and effective support is required. The provision of this support relies upon the timely identification of Service children across educational settings.

Statutory guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty¹³ states that all local authorities and governing bodies of maintained schools, should have an awareness of which children in their schools, or about to move to their school, are Service children. This is in order to improve the way in which the needs of Service children are met.

The pupil level annual school census (PLASC), the mandatory collection of data on the number and characteristics of pupils in Welsh maintained schools, does not include a field to identify Service children. Additionally, the data collected in PLASC provides far more detailed information, for example, type of additional learning needs and support.

RBL recognises the significant exercise conducted by Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales (SSCE Cymru) to encourage local authorities to identify Service children. There is, however, no mandatory requirement to provide this data to SSCE Cymru.

In March 2025, SSCE Cymru provided a snapshot of the number of Service children in Wales¹⁴. Amongst those who responded, 2,028 Service children were identified within the local authorities. Based on the number of serving personnel and veterans living in Wales, this would appear to underestimate the exact number of Service children.

In response to a UK Government initiative¹⁵ to demonstrate its commitment to the Armed Forces, the Department for Education in England included a Service child indicator in the mandatory School Census for the first time in 2008. From 2025, the Scottish Government will collect and publish data on the numbers of Armed forces children as part of the annual Pupil Census arrangements. In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education collates data on Service children that have been registered as such with their schools.

The needs and experiences of Service children need to be fully understood to ensure the provision of effective support. The lack of comprehensive data collection on Service children has resulted in limited understanding of how Armed Forces life impacts on the educational outcomes and well-being of Service children, the ability to access support and the prevalence of additional needs.

The Forces Children's Charter¹⁶ sets out the rights of all UK Armed Forces children, stating that 'My education helps me to be my best self now and, in the future'. The provision of effective support by the Welsh Government is predicated on an accurate understanding on the number, location and unique needs of Service children in Wales.

RBL recommends that the Welsh Government must:

- Demonstrate its commitment to Service children by adding a field to the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to enable their identification. The identification of Service children is the cornerstone in mitigating the unique challenges associated with the Armed Forces lifestyle, such as high mobility and prolonged periods of separation from their serving parent.

13. Ministry of Defence (2022) Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty Covering the United Kingdom available at: [Armed_Forces_Covenant_Duty_Statutory_Guidance.pdf](#)

14. Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales (2025) Service Children in Wales available at: [Data](#)

15. UK Government (2008) The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans available at: [Cm7424.pdf](#)

16. Forces Children Scotland (2025) Forces Children's Rights Charter, available at: [Forces Children's Rights Charter - Forces Children Scotland](#)

Endnotes

1. Ministry of Defence (2011), The Armed Forces Covenant, available at: **[the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf](#)**
2. Total sample size was 2,169 adults. The survey was carried out online between 16th–23rd August 2025. Figures are weighted and representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).
3. Ministry of Defence (2025), UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2025, available at: **[UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2025](#)**
4. Health Education and Improvement Wales, Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales, available at: **[Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales - HEIW](#)**
5. Ibid.
6. British Medical Association (2024), Save our surgeries, available at: **[Wales save our surgeries campaign](#)**
7. Health Education and Improvement Wales, Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales, available at: **[Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation in Wales - HEIW](#)**
8. Ministry of Defence (2025), War Pension Scheme annual statistics: 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2025 [Table I3], available at: **[War_Pension_Scheme_annual_statistics_1_April_2015_to_31_March_2025.ods](#)**
9. Ministry of Defence (2025), Armed Forces Compensation Scheme statistics: financial year 2024/25 [Table 17], available at: **[Armed Forces Compensation Scheme statistics: financial year 2024/25 - GOV.UK](#)**
10. Office for National Statistics (2023), UK armed forces veterans, health and unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021, available at: **[UK armed forces veterans, health and unpaid care, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)**
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ministry of Defence (2022) Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty Covering the United Kingdom available at: **[Armed_Forces_Covenant_Duty_Statutory_Guidance.pdf](#)**
14. Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales (2025) Service Children in Wales available at: **[Data](#)**
15. UK Government (2008) The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans available at: **[Cm7424.pdf](#)**
16. Forces Children Scotland (2025) Forces Children's Rights Charter, available at: **[Forces Children's Rights Charter - Forces Children Scotland](#)**



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