

# THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

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## PLAN FOR LONDON 2020



LIVE ON 



Registered charity number 219279  
[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

# ABOUT THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports serving members of the Armed Forces, ex-serving personnel and their families, ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten.

We are the country's largest Armed Forces charity, with 217,000 members, 120,000 volunteers and a network of partners and charities who help us give support wherever and whenever it's needed. We've been here since 1921 and we'll be here as long as they need us.

We provide lifelong support to our serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

We support them with:

- Physical and Mental Wellbeing
- Financial and Employment Support
- Care and Independent Living
- Local Community Connections
- Expert Guidance

The Legion also works with politicians and officials at all levels to bring the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant to life, and to further the interests of the Armed Forces community.

Through our research and campaigning, we seek to inform welfare service providers and challenge myths about the Armed Forces community.

We also raise the profile of issues affecting serving and ex-serving personnel and their families and seek to improve government policy.

For more information contact us at:

[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)  
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# FOREWORD



This document started life very differently to what you see before you now. The Royal British Legion has long engaged with governments and parties of all persuasions, from national to local government, to implement practical measures that improve the lives of the Armed Forces community; and this document was originally the Legion's first manifesto for a London mayoral election.

Of course, events have overtaken all of us and the 2020 Mayoral election has now been postponed until May 2021. Nonetheless, the work of the Legion carries on and we must continue to support those who require our assistance.

Much of the work we do centres on the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, which the Legion was proud to have played a leading role in developing. They are:

- Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured and the bereaved.

London has a long and deep connection with the Armed Forces. The city is home to some 9,000 serving personnel and their families, and an estimated 123,000 veterans. The majority of these members of the Armed Forces community live happy and successful lives. But for those that struggle from time to time we must ensure London comes together and gives them the help they need.

The recommendations in this document are a result of listening to the Armed Forces community and those across London who support them. We are proud to have brought together so many different voices and to have proposed solutions that will work in London. We hope these recommendations will be considered now, and we look forward to working with the Mayor, the London Assembly, the whole Greater London Authority and all our partners in London over the coming year.

**Ryan Allain**

Area Manager, London  
The Royal British Legion  
April 2020



# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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## THE LEGION BELIEVES THAT THE MAYOR OF LONDON SHOULD:

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Ensure the future success of the Armed Forces Covenant

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Support veterans and Armed Forces family members  
into successful and sustainable employment

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Improve the health and wellbeing of London's  
Armed Forces community

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Support members of the Armed Forces community  
facing homelessness or unsuitable housing

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Assist the London boroughs in their work with  
London's Armed Forces community

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# Ensure the future success of the Armed Forces Covenant

Every local authority in Great Britain; over 4,000 businesses, charities, and other public sector organisations; and the GLA itself have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and pledged to uphold its key principles of removing disadvantage and giving special consideration in certain circumstances. However, the Legion's own experience and recent research shows that the Covenant is not fully understood by service providers and businesses, and there is still much to be done to increase its effectiveness. A 2016 report<sup>1</sup> examined local authority Covenant work and recommended the adoption of a 'core infrastructure' to improve the delivery of services to the Armed Forces community. This included appointing an Armed Forces Champion, holding regular meetings with the Armed Forces community, drafting an action plan, and communicating clearly with the public.

The Mayor of London, the London Assembly, and the GLA signed the Covenant in 2012 and renewed that commitment in June 2019 with a new set of pledges. 2019 also saw the appointment of an Armed Forces Champion for the GLA and the first meetings of a new Armed Forces community roundtable, where concerns are raised and the GLA reports on activity to address them. These are welcome steps, however, there continues to be room for further improvement.

Continuing the work already begun, the Mayor of London should build on the emerging infrastructure of the Covenant in the GLA. Doing so will ensure its effective implementation across the GLA group in the years ahead and allow a strong example to be set to other public services and businesses in London on how best to honour and implement the Armed Forces Covenant.

## The Mayor of London should:

- Work with the London Assembly to appoint a GLA Armed Forces Champion who will coordinate and lead on implementing and improving the Covenant at the GLA.
- Ensure that regular meetings with the Armed Forces community take place and that a Covenant action plan is put in place.
- Report annually to the London Assembly on work undertaken to implement the Covenant each year.
- Raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant among all employees of the GLA group by celebrating its successes and promoting its implementation.

## Our Community – Our Covenant, Core Infrastructure to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant

### Individuals

- An elected member Champion.
- An officer point of contact within the authority.

### Vision and Commitment

- An action plan that leads to action and is monitored and reviewed.
- Policy reviews.
- Enthusiasm and commitment.

### Communication

- A web page or presence to support delivery of the Covenant with key information and links for members of the Armed Forces Community.
- A clear public statement of what members of the Armed Forces Community can expect from the authority.
- A route through which concerns can be raised.
- Training of frontline staff.
- A vehicle for reporting action and achievements such as an annual report, newsletter or forum minutes.

### Collaboration

- A Covenant Forum or co-ordinating group that meets at least twice a year. It includes the following: military representatives; military charities; public sector representatives; effective authority members; and the officer champion. Each forum should review its membership, agenda and frequency of meeting every three or four years.
- In some places (for example London) authorities and their partners may wish to establish a mechanism for collaboration at a sub-regional level. This could include: joint forums and action plans, applications for the Covenant fund, training packages and a shared web presence.

## Support veterans and Armed Forces family members into successful and sustainable employment

For working age veterans, securing stable employment after leaving the Armed Forces is a vital part of a successful transition to civilian life. In the year to September 2019, over 15,000 people left the Armed Forces and over half do so before age 30.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these veterans will search for new employment and most will do so successfully. However, challenges remain for a minority of veterans and more can be done to support them. Those struggling to find a job must be supported before they become long-term unemployed or underemployed. 2014 Legion research found that 60,000 members of the ex-Service community reported having to take a job for which they felt overqualified or underpaid.<sup>4</sup> In 2019 a survey of senior HR professionals found nearly one-fifth are unlikely to consider hiring veterans due to negative perceptions of time spent in the Armed Forces.<sup>5</sup>

We must also not forget serving personnel and their families. There are around 4,500 Regular

Service personnel and 4,500 Reservists, and their families, based in Greater London.<sup>6</sup> Military spouses and partners can face a number of disadvantages when looking for employment, due to the nature of military life. This includes frequent relocations as a result of moving with the Service partner, an employment history with frequent job changes or gaps, and a higher need for flexible working hours. Resulting unemployment or underemployment adversely affects personal wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> While the UK's Reserves are a critical component of the nation's Armed Forces, personnel can find it hard to juggle Reserve and work commitments without the understanding and support of their employer.

The GLA group employs around 80,000 people and through its own practices can support employees who are veterans, serving Reservists, or military spouses. In doing so, the GLA would set an example of best practice for other employers in Greater London to follow.

### CASE STUDY: Chris Cole from Bedfont

Chris Cole, 57, served for three years in the Army. He got in touch with the Legion following the death of a family member, and when he was struggling to cover his living costs. Chris was due to move house but couldn't afford to cover the removal costs. The Legion helped to get him relocated to his new home, and also provided advice and guidance to help him re-train and find a new job.

Chris completed 18 short courses over a 16-month period – from maths to construction courses – which really boosted his confidence and improved his employability prospects. The skills he learnt helped him to gain his HGV driving licence and shortly after, he found work in the transport industry.

Chris said: "Without the help and guidance I received, I wouldn't have been able to get the job I wanted. When you leave the Army there's a pride that stops you asking for help. You keep winning your fights and then suddenly you get knocked down. You either stay down or get back up and sometimes you don't want to ask for help because it's easier to stay down. I'm sure there are veterans in London who feel the same way and it is important for them to know that there is help available and there is light at the end of the tunnel."

### The Mayor of London should:

- Continue the *Forces for London* programme with RFEA - the Forces Employment Charity, which supports veterans into new jobs in the civilian workplace.
- Support military spouses and partners by advertising GLA jobs on the *Forces Families Jobs* website.
- Champion the value of the Armed Forces community in the workplace by striving for a Gold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme award and encourage employers across London to value the skills and experience of veterans.
- Ensure there is an HR policy on Reservist employment including, for example, 10 days extra fully paid leave for Reservists to undertake training.

# Improve the health and wellbeing of London's Armed Forces community

Research indicates that the health of members of the Armed Forces community is worse than the general public in specific areas. For example, working age veterans are more likely than the general population to report a number of musculoskeletal long-term health conditions and difficulty in hearing.

Recent research for the Legion revealed that members of the Armed Forces community are exposed to events and challenges that make them more vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. The frequent house moves, long periods of separation from family and friends, and the challenge of transitioning out of the Forces are just a few of the factors that raise the risks and have left one in four respondents to our survey saying they felt lonely or isolated 'always' or 'often.'

The majority of members of the Armed Forces community do not experience mental health problems, but those that do can experience them in a unique way. Depression and anxiety are the most common mental disorders in the Armed Forces community, with veterans being nearly twice as likely than the civilian population to experience depression.<sup>10</sup> Approximately 7% of veterans experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a rate 3% higher than the UK civilian population.<sup>11</sup> While specialised services such as the NHS's Veterans Mental Health Transition Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) exist, there is evidence of continued stigma and reluctance to seek help with mental health problems in the Armed Forces community.

## The Mayor of London should:

- Include the specific health and wellbeing challenges of the Armed Forces community in health planning in London, for example by including vulnerabilities such as loneliness and social isolation in the *London Health Inequalities Strategy*.
- Work with the Armed Forces community on initiatives to support better mental health, such as *Thrive LDN*, and reduce the stigma around seeking help for those experiencing problems.



### CASE STUDY: Anthony Muckell from Morden

"I joined the Royal Marines when I was 16 years old and was medically discharged when I was 27. A number of years later my mental health took a turn for the worse. I attempted to take my own life, had stays in hospital, and ended up in prison because of what I did to myself.

On leaving prison I didn't own anything other than the clothes I wore. I had no home, no job and I was suffering anxiety and deep depression with little hope of getting through each day. One thing led to another and I visited the Royal British Legion in London who introduced me to the London TILS mental health specialists. They diagnosed that I was suffering from PTSD and other mental health problems and gave me help. I am now much healthier mentally than I have been in a long time.

If I am honest, I was very embarrassed to ask for help. I felt like I was begging for help when many more needy people should have been helped, but I shouldn't have been worried. There are so many other people that are afraid to come forward and ask for help and try and change their lives. I feel I got lucky with a chance outing to the Legion and this was the turning point in my life."

## Support members of the Armed Forces community facing homelessness or unsuitable housing

Greater London is one of the only parts of the UK that consistently records rough sleeping veterans through the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) system. Over the past few years CHAIN reports have recorded that around 2-3% of people using outreach services were former members of the UK Armed Forces.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, this does not diminish the importance of acting to reduce rough sleeping and homelessness among veterans and the Legion is working with charity and public sector partners on the *No Homeless Veterans* campaign to bring the number of homeless veterans as far as possible down to zero.<sup>13</sup>

The experience of many members of the Armed Forces community who apply for social housing is that it is not always a smooth process. Legion services are frequently required to help veterans and their families navigate their way through the complex process. Legion research in

2014 found that 6% of those who had been discharged from the Armed Forces in the past five years experienced some difficulty in applying for council or housing association accommodation.<sup>14</sup> Legion staff and volunteers in London report that many people who approach us for assistance with housing difficulties find it hard to navigate through the 33 different local authorities in London. Each borough's different policies and procedures results in a confusing system that is difficult for vulnerable people to understand.

Specialist support to rough sleeping veterans across Greater London is part funded by the GLA, currently via the charity Veterans Aid. This London-based charity offers immediate accommodation, followed by access to structured pathways into independent living. The charity's 'no first night out' approach means that, wherever possible, it will act to support UK veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless in London.

### The Mayor of London should:

- Continue to provide specialised services that will help Greater London's rough sleeping veterans off the streets and into sustainable accommodation.
- Facilitate improved cooperation between the rough sleeping and social housing teams across all the London boroughs, taking inspiration from existing pan-London housing approaches.



### CASE STUDY: David from London\*

David served in the Army and planned to resettle in London when he finished his service. He ended up homeless, moving between various temporary accommodation sites, and didn't receive useful advice from the authorities.

If David had been identified as a veteran sooner and been provided with specialised advice and help for veterans at an earlier stage, he could have avoided most of his difficulties.

\*Name and some details changed to protect privacy.

Eventually, David contacted the Legion who worked with other military charities to help him to move into his own place. The Legion paid his deposit and first month's rent and furnished his flat.

# Assist the London boroughs in their work with London's Armed Forces community

Crucial to the successful implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant across Greater London is the work of other public service providers. Primary among those are the 32 boroughs and the City of London. The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust is funding a project in Greater London called *Renewing the Covenant in the Capital* until September 2020. This project has been developed to help improve the understanding and delivery of the Covenant across the capital's local authorities. This is in response to concerns that in the time since local Covenants were signed, changes in personnel and circumstances have led to a reduced understanding and visibility of the Covenant in the boroughs and their military communities. The project gives an opportunity and a platform for boroughs to reinvigorate their commitment to the Armed Forces community, share best practice, and adopt new approaches from across the country that may be applicable in London.

Renewing the Covenant in the Capital aims to:

- Ensure council policies have been adjusted to suit the Covenant and are accessible by all through dedicated council web pages.

- Make frontline staff aware of the Covenant and how to best signpost those in need.
- Develop a standard job specification for the role of the Armed Forces Champion for use by councils.
- Establish an Armed Forces network between councils, military units and service providers to share knowledge.
- Increase awareness of the Covenant within councils, military units and service families.

The project has created bespoke training packages for the London boroughs which have been accredited by CPD UK for use towards staff professional development. This includes an e-Learning package on Armed Forces Awareness which is tailored to each borough's individual military footprint and training requirements.

This is a large project involving numerous stakeholders and being run by a very small staff. With support, this project has the potential to significantly improve the lives of the Armed Forces community in Greater London and set a high standard for other parts of the UK to follow.

## Renewing the Covenant in the Capital

"Renewing the Covenant in the Capital is proud to be working alongside local authorities across Greater London to improve their commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. We have already trained hundreds of staff across multiple councils providing them with awareness, resources, and support to be able to make a difference to the Armed Forces community. We want to make sure that every person who is responsible for delivering or procuring front line services accounts for the needs of the Armed Forces community.

We hope the Mayor will continue supporting the Armed Forces Community by setting an example for the provision and delivery of public services. By working closely on this matter with London Councils, the local authorities, and other partner organisations we hope that the newly established GLA Armed Forces Champion can build on the progress that has already been made."

**Neil Osborne** – Project Manager,  
Renewing the Covenant in the Capital



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Forces in Mind Trust (2016) *Our Community – Our Covenant*
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid
- <sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Defence, *UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 2019*
- <sup>4</sup> The Royal British Legion (2014) *A UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community*
- <sup>5</sup> Forces in Mind Trust (2019) *Veterans Face Negative Stereotypes When Applying For Jobs*
- <sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Defence, *Location of UK regular service and civilian personnel annual statistics: 2019*; and the Greater London Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (2018) *London's Reserve Forces and Cadets Directory*
- <sup>7</sup> Forces in Mind Trust (2018) *Evaluation of Ministry of Defence Spouse Employment Support Trial*
- <sup>8</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Annual Population Survey: UK Armed Forces Veterans residing in Great Britain, 2017*
- <sup>9</sup> The Royal British Legion (2018) *Loneliness and Social Isolation in the Armed Forces Community*
- <sup>10</sup> 10% of the working age ex-service community reported feeling depressed, compared to 6% in the general population. The Royal British Legion (2014) *A UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community*
- <sup>11</sup> King's Centre for Military Health Research (2018) *The Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces Factsheet*; and Stevelink et al (2018) *Mental health outcomes at the end of the British involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts: a cohort study*
- <sup>12</sup> London Datastore, *Rough sleeping in London (CHAIN reports)*
- <sup>13</sup> For more information on the No Homeless Veterans campaign see [www.stoll.org.uk/no-homeless-veterans/](http://www.stoll.org.uk/no-homeless-veterans/)
- <sup>14</sup> The Royal British Legion (2014) *A UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community*

## The Mayor of London should:

- Support the *Renewing the Covenant in the Capital* project and facilitate the engagement of London boroughs where help is needed.
- Ensure that the aims of the project are sustained beyond the end of funding in September 2020.

# LIVE ON

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