



# Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Single Veterans in Great Britain

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In the summer of 2013, the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York was commissioned by Stoll and Riverside to undertake research on the accommodation and housing related support needs of single veterans in Great Britain<sup>1</sup>. The research was funded by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), a £35 million funding scheme run by the FiMT using an endowment awarded by the BIG Lottery Fund.

## Background to the study

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the duty of care the UK owes its serving personnel and veterans, including the publication of the Armed Forces Covenant in 2011 which sets out the responsibilities of the Government and the Nation to those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces and to their families. Whilst the vast majority of individuals leaving the Armed Forces make the transition from Service to civilian life without significant difficulties, there are some who face problems in the short or longer term, including homelessness, and need additional support. Whilst some research has been conducted in the area, overall there is a paucity of knowledge about the level and nature of demand for accommodation and housing related support for veterans

in England, Scotland and Wales and how best to meet these needs.

This research study sought to address this research gap and had three main aims:

- To establish the current and perceived future need for accommodation and housing related support for single veterans who are homeless/at risk of homelessness in England, Scotland and Wales and to identify gaps in knowledge about current and future levels of need
- To examine the extent and nature of provision of accommodation and housing related support for single veterans in England, Scotland and Wales with a particular focus on veterans who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness
- To make practical recommendations to Government (central and local), service commissioners, service providers and veteran organisations, regarding the effective planning and delivery of future provision

A second stage of the study will evaluate the relative effectiveness of dedicated supported housing services for (potentially) homeless single veterans, compared to mainstream services available to the general population.

<sup>1</sup> The research does not cover Northern Ireland because it was felt that the issues faced by veterans in Northern Ireland are more complicated than those faced by veterans in Great Britain and that this was a highly sensitive area of research that might be better undertaken by researchers with an in-depth understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland.

The study utilised a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- **A review of the available UK research studies on homelessness among single veterans** - undertaken using standard review techniques including a search of electronic databases and a review of relevant organisation and government websites
- **Secondary analysis of existing data sources on housing and support for single veterans** - including homelessness statistics, Supporting People data, CORE and other relevant data sources
- **An electronic survey of all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales** - in 2013, 113 authorities completed a short online survey, a response rate of 35%
- **A survey of dedicated single veteran service providers** - 18 of 22 identified providers participated in a survey on their provision in late 2013/ early 2014
- **Interviews with key national stakeholders from generic and veteran organisations** - with 28 respondents from 24 organisations conducted in 2013
- **Case studies** - undertaken in 22 local authorities (16 in England, 4 in Scotland and 2 in Wales) including 44 interviews with service providers in late 2013/ early 2014
- **Focus groups with single veterans** - three in England and one in Scotland (with 18 participants) conducted alongside the case studies

## What do existing studies tell us about homelessness and single veterans?

The overall scope and quality of existing literature is limited. Most of the research studies on homelessness amongst single veterans over the last twenty years have been small-scale qualitative studies. There are no UK peer-reviewed studies of homelessness amongst single veterans and no UK evaluations of service provision for homeless veterans. Further, there are no UK national cohort studies of homeless single veterans or longitudinal studies that can provide insights into pathways into homelessness or long term outcomes.

Nonetheless, the review of existing studies highlighted a number of pertinent findings:

### Housing related disadvantage

- Low rates of home ownership and experience of the civilian housing market places many of those leaving Service, particularly among non-officer ranks, at a disadvantage in accessing housing.

**Extent of homelessness** - Varying, but reducing, rates of homelessness among single veterans has been recorded since the 1990s. There are some indications of higher prevalence in the most severe and enduring types of homelessness, and also in Scotland. There is very limited evidence on spatial patterns of homelessness, though some evidence that the majority of veterans return 'home' after discharge.

**Welfare needs** – Although no large scale cohort studies have been undertaken since 1993, many studies report that homeless veterans tend to be older than other homeless people, more likely to have slept rough, to suffer from physical and mental health or alcohol problems (complex needs), and/or to be homeless for long periods. They may also experience social isolation.

**Explanations for homelessness** – Explanations are complex and competing and there is no clear evidence that Service does, or does not, increase the risk of homelessness. There is some evidence that dedicated veteran services provide ‘fast-track’ access to support and that take-up might be greater if services can provide military ‘knowledge’ or experience.

**Policy** – There is a lack of research into the discharge and interpretation of local authorities’ obligations under the Armed Forces Act 2011 and homelessness legislation.

## What do available statistics tell us about the extent of homelessness amongst veterans?

The absolute numbers of veterans utilising generic housing and homelessness services were relatively low and typically represented a small proportion of the services’ total users. This was particularly the case for the number of veterans accepted under the homelessness legislation in England, Scotland and Wales, for example, 58 veterans were

accepted as homeless in England in 2013 because they were vulnerable due to having served in the Armed Forces (representing 0.11% of total acceptances). However, it should be emphasised that these categories are very specific and narrowly defined, so great numbers would not be expected.

Higher numbers of veterans were utilising generic accommodation and housing related services, including:

- Just over 2,500 people (most of whom were single) entering Supporting People services were veterans in 2013/14 (1.8% of all new clients)
- Just over 1,000 single veterans (with just under 500 homeless at the time) accessed new social housing lets (CORE general needs statistics) in the first three quarters of 2013/14 (less than 1% of all lets)
- According to Homeless Link’s Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP), veterans represented 2-3% of users of day centres, direct access hostels and second stage clients in 2013
- The Combined Homeless and Information Network (CHAIN) recorded that 3% of outreach service users in London were veterans (from the UK) in 2012/13
- The Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex- Services (SPACES) service has been assisting between 1,000-1,500 veterans per year since 2000

The data available does not allow accurate assessment of the extent

to which veterans are over- or under-represented in homelessness and housing need. There is no accurate up-to-date data on the number of veterans in the general population, although estimates suggested that approximately 9-10% of the UK adult population were veterans in the mid-2000s. Considering the present focus on single people only, and the likely reduction in veteran numbers in recent years, single veterans do not appear to be substantially over-represented in the data-sets on housing need. However, it should be noted that US research has indicated that using self-reported veteran status is likely to under-estimate homelessness significantly.

## What specialist accommodation provision exists for veterans?

The research identified 17 providers (separate organisations) of dedicated accommodation based services for single veterans<sup>2</sup> across Great Britain, providing a total of 910 bed spaces/units across 46 schemes, including:

- 156 direct access beds
- 377 second stage accommodation beds, and
- 377 long-term housing units<sup>3</sup>

Available information suggested that dedicated provision for veterans is likely to increase by at least 235 bed spaces/units for single veterans over the next few years (an increase of 26%), through planned developments including via LIBOR funding.

Only five floating support services

(tenancy related support) for vulnerably housed veterans were identified across the UK, supporting an estimated 276 veterans at any one time. Only one future further scheme was identified of this nature, providing an additional 15 floating support places (a very modest 5% increase).

The present provision is not evenly distributed throughout Great Britain. Unsurprisingly, given the pressure on housing in London and the South East, the greatest amount of dedicated provision in England was located here. After London, Scotland had the next highest number of dedicated bed spaces for veterans. There was no provision in Wales or the East Midlands. Planned developments include some new provision in Wales, London, Scotland, the North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside and the South East.

Overall, the existing dedicated provision appeared to operate relatively broad eligibility criteria. For example, the existing dedicated provision was almost exclusively provided for both men and women. Most had no minimum length of Service. However the schemes appeared to be more accessible to veterans with mental health problems than veterans with substance misuse problems (only one in six schemes always accepting someone with substance misuse problems). Most schemes took referrals from a wide range of agencies, though only 43% accepted self-referrals.

Existing providers of dedicated accommodation provision for veterans were routinely turning away

<sup>2</sup> There is more extensive provision for veterans with care needs and nursing needs; veterans with disabilities and for veteran families. More information can be found at: <http://www.veteransscotland.co.uk/pillars/housing/> at <http://www.veterans-uk.info/welfare/housing.html> and <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/can-we-help/who-else-can-help>

<sup>3</sup> Direct access hostels - providing emergency or short-term accommodation; including via self-referral and referral from local authority etc.; Second stage accommodation projects - longer term accommodation for people, accessed by referral only, clients often moving on from direct access hostels; Dedicated long term housing for veterans - providing settled accommodation, with or without support.

veterans because their services were full, however the extent to which this happened varied. Eighteen providers stated that they occasionally turned away veterans (with at least 30 veterans being turned away across 188 bed spaces) whilst seven providers frequently turned away veterans (with at least 263 veterans turned away across 212 bed spaces).

## What do key stakeholders tell us about the nature of housing need amongst single veterans?

Most respondents believed that single veterans experienced housing difficulties for the same reasons as other single homeless people. However, some of the difficulties single veterans faced could be attributed to their experience of Service. For example, unfamiliarity with civilian life (e.g. housing markets, the welfare system and budgeting) made it difficult for single veterans to secure housing and to manage tenancies. Respondents cited a number of key reasons why veterans experienced housing difficulties:

- A shortage of affordable accommodation
- Problems sustaining a tenancy
- Substance misuse
- Mental health issues
- Relationship breakdown
- Inadequate transition planning from the Armed Forces

- Other pre-existing problems

Overall, respondents from generic services felt there was little expressed demand from single veterans although they tended not to ask clients about any Armed Forces history (although this was beginning to change). Dedicated veteran organisations and service providers tended to report quite significant levels of demand for their services.

Rough sleeping amongst veterans was not thought to be a significant problem. However, 'hidden homelessness' and various forms of unsustainable housing arrangements were not uncommon.

A few of the case study areas reported a relatively high demand for accommodation and housing related support from single veterans. These were: Preston; Gateshead; Hull; Plymouth; Highland; Colchester; Rushmoor; South Ayrshire; Aberdeen, and Perth and Kinross. Many of these areas had already developed dedicated services to meet these needs (including accommodation, advice centres, outreach and drop-in centres).

## Changing need?

Overall respondents found it difficult to comment on changing needs and demand because they lacked data. In London, respondents reported that they were working with fewer rough sleeping veterans and were now working with veterans whose problems were not as entrenched as in the past. Respondents from generic services and veteran services in London attributed this to improvements in services for veterans.

A few services reported working with more veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) who had served in conflicts some years ago but this was thought to be primarily because of the greater awareness of PTSD rather than an increase in the number of veterans affected. Many felt that more veterans were approaching services for help as awareness of the help available increased but also because many of the problems veterans presented with could be attributed to the recession and general economic climate, public spending cuts and the shortage of affordable housing.

Respondents were unsure whether demand from veterans would change in the next five to ten years. However there was a broad assumption that the need for services would increase following the restructuring of the Armed Services and that there would be increased demand from veterans who had served in recent conflicts.

## What do key stakeholders tell us about gaps in provision and what is needed in the future?

### Improvements to generic housing and support services

Many stakeholders felt that the types of services and provision required by single veterans were often the same as those needed to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerably housed people generally. These were:

- Emergency and temporary accommodation

- Alternative forms of permanent independent accommodation (with support provided where necessary) e.g. 'housing first' models
- Affordable move on (permanent) housing
- Floating support/tenancy sustainment services
- Mental health and substance misuse services
- Outreach services, advice centres and drop-in/day centres
- Befriending and counselling services and opportunities for veterans to socialise

In addition, respondents felt there should be far more emphasis on the prevention of homelessness amongst veterans including improved transition planning for all Service personnel.

### Clear need for more dedicated support services for single veterans, alongside a more limited need for dedicated accommodation

Respondents reported a need for a range of dedicated non-accommodation based services for single veterans including floating support services, mental health and substance misuse services, outreach services, advice centres and drop-in/day centres. These services were thought to be required for a number of reasons including:

- A general shortage of housing and support services in most areas

- Because some veterans were more likely to approach dedicated services for support and/or advice
- Some veterans might require specialist advice and support which would be best delivered by workers with knowledge and understanding of the Armed Services, and
- Outreach services, dedicated advice centres, and drop-in/day-centres were seen to have an important role in identifying and attracting veterans with unmet needs

Generic service providers and some dedicated service providers (e.g. those providing floating support, advice, and outreach) believed that the housing and support needs of most single veterans could be met within generic services in the area where the veteran wished to settle, and that in some cases dedicated accommodation provision could hinder transition to civilian life. If necessary, these providers considered that specialist support should be delivered by dedicated veteran services working within mainstream services or in the community.

However, some service providers and veterans held dedicated supported accommodation services in high regard. They appreciated the high standard of accommodation and support provided and believed that they/ veterans fared better in dedicated accommodation where providers and other residents understood their needs and experiences. There was also some evidence of veterans with

unmet complex needs who might benefit from dedicated supported accommodation. Few respondents reported having sufficient demand from single veterans to warrant the development of dedicated supported accommodation within the local area; demand was more likely to exist on a wider geographical basis.

### Improved data collection

Respondents, including national level stakeholders, local authority representatives, housing specialists and dedicated service providers, recognised there was a need to collect robust data and many were planning to improve data collection. This recognition was in part in response to the introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Community Covenants and the high profile of veterans in recent years. A number of organisations reported that they were reviewing their monitoring systems and data needs in order to inform service development.

### Improved collaboration between key stakeholders

Most respondents, including national level stakeholders and interviewees across the case study areas, believed that there was a need for more effective collaboration and data sharing between national and local governments and the Ministry of Defence; between dedicated veteran services; and between dedicated veteran services, local authorities and generic homelessness and housing support services. Generic providers in particular thought that veteran organisations

should work more closely with mainstream providers as well as with other organisations in the veteran sector.

## Recommendations

There are four high level recommendations arising from the work, with a number of more detailed proposals related to each recommendation.

### Recommendation 1:

**Housing strategies for veterans should be developed, led by the Scottish, Welsh and UK governments in collaboration with key housing and veteran agencies, supported by a clear implementation framework.**

At present, the Ministry of Defence has responsibility for transition planning (with housing as one component) and local authorities assess housing need locally. Some of the necessary tools and building blocks are in place to meet the needs of veterans, such as the Covenant, however these are not being leveraged. Whilst the evidence base is currently weak, it does highlight areas of unmet housing and related support needs amongst single veterans. However, this need is most clearly seen at a regional or sub-regional level, rather than individual local authority level. Data collection processes need significant improvement in order to adequately inform national and regional planning in this area. The strategies should be firmly linked to discharge patterns and existing knowledge of vulnerability as part of the transition process.

### A: What the strategies should include:

- i. The strategies should establish a national commissioning framework/revenue funding for accommodation and support services to ensure that services are developed in a coordinated way in response to identified need
- ii. The strategies should separately address the needs of the total ex-Service population including single veterans and families with dependants and the specific needs of each sub-group
- iii. The strategies and funding framework should take account of housing need at a regional/sub-regional level, alongside any unmet local authority level needs

### B: Information needed for the strategies:

- iv. The Ministry of Defence should identify vulnerable service personnel and share information about all Service leavers (including Early Service Leavers, vulnerable personnel and Service personnel who are to be made redundant) to inform the national strategy and local and regional/sub regional planning
- v. The strategies should establish a national framework for improved data collection and recording of veterans, with specific requirements placed on local authorities and service/accommodation providers

- vi. In order to better meet the identified needs of veterans, systems should be established to improve information flows, dialogue, and collaborative working between all relevant organisations – including the Ministry of Defence, other government departments, local authorities, veteran organisations, and housing providers. Cobseo (The Confederation of Service Charities) should take a leading role in this process

### **C: The Armed Forces Community Covenant**

- vii. The Ministry of Defence and the Scottish, Welsh and UK governments should require local authorities to meet the provisions of the Community Covenant especially in relation to housing single veterans in the social housing sector to ensure that those who serve or have served in the British Armed Forces are not disadvantaged

### **Recommendation 2:**

**The Ministry of Defence, working in collaboration with other key agencies, should improve transition planning for all Service leavers to maximise people's ability to achieve and maintain sustainable housing after Service.**

Single veterans will face similar issues to other single people with low priority for housing, including a lack of affordable housing, public spending cuts and housing benefit changes. However, some veterans may face some issues including those that pre-date their Service, and physical or mental harm/damage from their experience of war.

Further, Early Service Leavers may experience some or all the above issues but often only have a few weeks to plan for discharge. There is a significant opportunity to improve the transition experience of all Service leavers.

- viii. The Ministry of Defence, working with veteran and other key civilian agencies, should do more to prepare every service leaver for transition via 'in-reach' services, including planning and preparation over the longer term and a focus on housing and welfare issues and the realities of civilian life (including implementing the Ashcroft Report (2014) recommendation of providing details of subsidised and unsubsidised cost of accommodation, Council Tax and utility charges payable in the civilian sector on pay statements)
- ix. The Ministry of Defence should do more to identify and support vulnerable Service-personnel, including Early Service Leavers who leave before completion of basic training and those who are dishonourably discharged, to minimise the risk of unsuccessful transition. More generally, they should also identify Service-personnel who may be at risk of difficulties to ensure preventative support is provided

### **Recommendation 3:**

**Strategies should support the development of coordinated services to meet the accommodation and housing related needs of veterans.**

The research mapped the provision of dedicated accommodation provision for single veterans and the use of other housing and related support services by single veterans. It showed that the dedicated accommodation sector has developed on an ad hoc basis, but is increasing in terms of numbers of beds offered. There is very little preventive work such as dedicated floating support services to support single veterans in their own accommodation.

#### **A: Support services:**

- x. Within the national commissioning framework (see Recommendation 1), high priority should be placed on the development of dedicated floating support services for single veterans. This housing related support should be aligned with more general welfare support provided by veteran organisations
- xi. The commissioning framework should also give a high priority to other preventative interventions which can also have an important role in identifying unmet need such dedicated outreach services, advice centres, drop-in centres and befriending/counselling services
- xii. New 'in-reach' services (see Recommendation 2) should be 'joined up' with floating support type services available post-discharge

#### **B: Accommodation services:**

- xiii. The provision of any new dedicated accommodation should be informed by needs assessment on a regional/ sub-regional basis (see Recommendation 1)

#### **C: Information sharing:**

- xiv. As recommended above, information sharing should be improved between generic providers and veteran organisations to ensure that providers are aware of services and other forms of support available to veterans and how to access these

#### **Recommendation 4:**

##### **There is a need for an improved evidence base on the long-term housing pathways of veterans.**

Little is currently known about the housing pathways of single veterans leaving the Armed Forces. Current, and emerging, service models have also rarely been evaluated in any detail. There is also a need for a better understanding of dedicated supported veteran accommodation provision and how this differs from generic provision (which will be addressed in the second stage of this study).

- xv. The Census should collect data on Armed Forces history
- xvi. More research into the levels of veterans' housing need and long-term housing pathways of veterans is needed
- xvii. There is also a need for independent evaluations of the effectiveness of accommodation and housing related support services for veterans and dedicated advice services such as JSHAO (Joint Service Housing Advice Office) and SPACES (Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services)



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