



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Support for the Armed Forces in Wales**

DATE **23rd April 2018**

BY **Alun Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services**

Today, I am publishing my assessment of the benefits and value of appointing an Armed Forces Commissioner for Wales. This follows my commitment during Plenary on 29 November, to meet with the Cross-Party Group for Armed Forces and Cadets and make an informed decision following the meeting.

Having met with the Cross-Party Group and considered the work being undertaken in Wales, and across the UK and beyond, I set out my decision below;

A tremendous amount of progress has been made in Wales over the last two years. Working closely with the Armed Forces Expert Group, we have delivered on key areas including;

- Revision and promotion of the Package of Support for the Armed Forces community, and the development of the *Welcome to Wales* document for serving personnel and their families.
- Armed Forces free swimming scheme.
- A Housing Referral Pathway and Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness – this provides early assistance to veterans at risk of becoming homeless.
- Total disregard of War Disablement Pension for veterans accessing social care.
- Further financial support to Veterans NHS Wales to alleviate waiting lists and increase capacity to treat veterans with mental health issues.
- Revision of the *Healthcare Priority for Veterans Guidance*.
- Support for veterans in the criminal justice system.

The work of the Armed Forces Expert Group has been at the forefront of this. Unique to Wales, it provides a collective voice and platform to identify and deliver services and support for our Armed Forces community.

Supporting the Armed Forces Expert Group is the work of the WLGA's Networking Group, and regional and local fora. They engage with issues identified by veterans, thus ensuring key issues are identified and acted on by the Expert Group. The appointment of Armed Forces Liaison officers across most of Wales also provides us with a unique means of supporting Local Authorities, to ensure consistent delivery of policies and procedures that support the Armed Forces community.

Wales has punched above its weight in obtaining Covenant Funds to deliver initiatives and projects in support of this sector, many of the larger projects being approved by the Armed Forces Expert Group. Governance and monitoring of the projects are the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence through the UK Covenant Fund Board. The Expert Group is kept informed of progress and outcomes of the projects.

Moving forward, the Expert Group will be leading on the development of an Employment Pathway and Employers' Toolkit to support those needing help in accessing meaningful employment. Recently commissioned research into Adverse Childhood Experiences and Early Service Leavers will give us an insight into triggers for their early release, and help identify specific support that may alleviate this.

The launch of the Veterans Gateway not only provides 24 hour access to support for veterans and their families, it will also provide us with qualitative data to direct our resources to specific identified needs.

We have made tremendous progress in Wales in delivering services and support for our Armed Forces community. However, that is not to say there is not more we can and will do.

I have reviewed the structures we have in place, our progress to date, and our ability to build on these. The cost of approximately £550k per annum to fund a Commissioner and support staff would divert resources from practical services and support for the Armed Forces community in Wales.

I have made an informed decision, that I do not consider the appointment of an Armed Forces Commissioner for Wales would add any further benefit or value. However I do also recognise that we need to continue to invest in, and to strengthen, the support we provide to those delivering services to veterans. I am therefore asking my officials to strengthen the veterans unit within Welsh Government and to provide me with a further detailed assessment of gaps in service delivery. I will seek to provide additional funding where I find that it is needed to maintain the quality and breadth of the services required by the Armed Forces community.

Welsh Government remains totally committed to providing services and support that meets the needs of our Armed Services community. I will also give an undertaking to provide annual report to the National Assembly on our progress in delivering our commitments.