

**Summary of key recommendations**

**1. Armed Forces Community Covenant**

The Community Covenant has its roots in a successful US scheme in which states and towns (incorporating local government and local service providers, the voluntary sector and private companies) voluntarily pledge support for the Armed Forces family? (including Service personnel, veterans and their respective families, including the bereaved) in their area.

Who could pledge support to the Community Covenant? Local Authorities (including county councils) would provide an ideal focus, depending on local needs (for example, in some areas the regional military structure might work more effectively with county councils; in other areas Local Authorities might be a more appropriate focus). There is nothing to stop a county and a town within that county both pledging support, as in the US. Private companies could also pledge to work with Local Authorities or sign up individually to offer benefits or services to the military community. Community Covenants also provide a framework for charities to cooperate with each other, and with the public and private sector, at the local level. Individuals would be encouraged to show their support as part of the Community Covenant for example by volunteering to work with a charity, organising events, or making donations.

How could communities be encouraged to get involved? It could in principle be possible to impose a duty on Local Authorities to make provisions under the Community Covenant. However, the example of the US, and of existing civil-military partnerships in the UK, shows that a voluntary scheme can be equally, if not more, effective. Public commitment (via a pledging ceremony or similar) creates pressure to meet obligations and raises public awareness, encouraging community groups and individuals to take part. Potential benefits to civilian authorities, companies and charities include: better targeting of resources; sharing facilities and land; good publicity and ongoing good news coverage. Meeting obligations to the military community should not impose significant costs on local government.

Existing examples of civil-military partnerships in the UK and of public support for the military demonstrate the potential of the Community Covenant to gain local support and improve life for the local Armed Forces community.

**Central government role** Support could come in a number of forms, depending on the level of central government participation deemed necessary. Given the scope for local variations in the adoption and delivery, central government's role in promoting the "key ingredients" of a Community Covenant could be particularly valuable.

Examples could include: provision of a Community Covenant template document for organisations to pledge to; guidance on key areas of priority (such as disregarding compensation payments for means testing); a central Community Covenant website (to link to news stories and information about local schemes); issuing of formal scroll/certification or logo for businesses; organisation/funding for formal pledging ceremonies; funding to cover any initial start-up costs (though these should be minimal). Funding might not be available from central government but sponsorship could be sought from private companies or charities.

The Task Force sees Community Covenants as a framework for providing much of the support needed by Service personnel and their families, although we have also identified a number of other low-cost measures which could improve support for serving regulars, reservists, and families (including the bereaved).

**2. Recognition for the Armed Forces Family**

**Policy options:** Veterans? Privilege Card funded by charitable funding, charging users, or updating Service ID cards. Service Families? Card similar to above, although uses (such as access to military bases) could vary. Army Reservists? ID cards these would be similar to Service ID cards used by Regulars. Charging is not a practical option, as the cards would need

to be the property of the MOD.

**Rationale**

Veterans? Privilege Cards and Service Families Cards would allow veterans and Service families to identify themselves to service providers and to claim any discounts offered by private companies under the Community Covenant. A more secure chip-and-pin card could also allow veterans internet access to online pension details, and could enable access to bases at the discretion of commanding officers. This also applies to Service families. Some Army Reservists have no formal means of identifying their status between deployments, and a Reservist ID card would allow this.

**3. Explore options for increasing home ownership among Service families**

**Policy options:** Encouraging home ownership is a long-term aspiration, and in particular is difficult to achieve while mobility forms a central part of Service life. Most options involve upfront costs, while reduced reliance on Service accommodation would generate cashable savings only when pockets of estate were vacated and could be handed back. Options recommended for further exploration include: enhancing accommodation allowances; expanding a pilot shared equity scheme (launched in January 2010 and funds for the first year have been fully taken up); exploring options for boosting take-up of the Government?s low cost home ownership programme "HomeBuy", including raising awareness; encouraging a bank or banks to offer favourable mortgage rates to Service personnel. The Task Force suggests holding a PM/Chancellor-chaired summit of major banks at No. 10 to explore this last option further.

**Rationale**

**Service Families Accommodation (SFA)** costs around £285m per annum; some of this accommodation is in poor condition, and the cost of upgrading these 50,000 homes is substantial. Encouraging families to move into home ownership would benefit the families by giving them a foot on the housing ladder, and family stability for education, healthcare, partner?s career, etc. This would generate savings to the MOD in the long term.

**4. Veterans? policy and coordination of veterans? charities**

**Policy options :** A Veterans? Commissioner or Champion, to act as the champion of veterans and guide veterans? policy (possibly operating through a department external to the MOD such as the Cabinet Office). The Commissioner or Champion could be supported by a cross-departmental advisory committee including representatives of charities.

Separately from this, options for better coordination of veterans? charities include:

- o Services and Veterans? Charities Advisory Board (SVCAB) responsible for determining priorities for veterans (possibly based on the existing Central Advisory Committee on pensions and compensation within the MOD. This could report to a Commissioner (or Champion), if such an option were pursued, or could stand alone.
- o A framework for coordinating the activities of veterans? charities (as is provided by Veterans Scotland). This could be coordinated by the suggested SVCAB.
- o A "shopping list" of areas of greatest need could be compiled to help guide charities on how their funding could best be directed. (Possibly compiled by the suggested SVCAB or Commissioner/Champion, although other options should be explored.)
- o Local coordination of charities through the Community Covenant.

**Rationale**

There is some contradiction between the MOD?s principal aim of delivering military capability and the task of administering veterans? welfare services, and the Task Force has found widespread stakeholder support for a Veterans? Commissioner or similar. Collectively the numerous Service charities have considerable resources and many offer excellent support, particularly to veterans. However, the sheer diversity of the sector can cause confusion and there is concern that their full resources are not currently being tapped. Charities? activities can be determined by their own priorities rather than the needs of veterans.

**5. Education throughout Service**

career

Policy options: Support for Service personnel in career planning, through a clear, and jargon-free personnel strategy. Build more personal responsibility into service life to improve the self-reliance of personnel at little or no additional cost. Ongoing formal education during military training, including making Service personnel aware of existing schemes and providing more options at an earlier stage of a service career. ♦Life skills? training throughout service (as opposed to concentrating training at the end of a career). Some Service personnel have little knowledge of everyday tasks such as opening and managing a bank account, securing housing, understanding benefits, or drawing up a will.

**Rationale**

Those who are well educated in service both stay longer, giving better returns on their training, and are better prepared for their transition to civilian life.

**6. Strengthening links between civilians and the military**

Policy options: Covenant or Chief of Defence Staff Commendation ♦ for those institutions and individuals outside the service who do outstanding work for the military community. Greater community engagement by the military ♦ encouraging civic participation; greater sharing of facilities; encouraging the military to talk about experiences. Increase the visibility of the Armed Forces ♦ building on Armed Forces Day and encouraging homecoming parades and open days. Encouraging wider cultural engagement ♦ such as ♦War Story?, and Imperial War Museum Project; theatre productions such as The Great Game; and stronger links with universities.

**Rationale**

Public awareness of the work of the services has increased enormously, and there is widespread sympathy for the losses of life and limb sustained by those who serve. However, sympathy does not generate understanding. Many people in Britain have little or no contact with the Armed Forces and have little understanding of military life. There is a need to build on public support to create a greater and more enduring understanding.