

Support to Military Veterans
Workshop 29th June 2017

Event Report



Acknowledgments

Healthwatch Rutland and Rutland County Council would like to thank all those who took part in this event. Some are represented below; the full list of participants can be found on page 4.



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1. Introduction

Healthwatch Rutland (HWR), as the organisation with the statutory responsibility for gathering the views, concerns and experience of the people of Rutland in all matters regarding Health and Social Care, had heard from the public that some confusion existed surrounding the provision of support to military veterans in the county. In addition, Rutland County Council (RCC) has shown its support of military veterans by planning to re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant in October 2017 (Annex 1) and remains engaged in ensuring that support to both serving personnel based in Rutland, and veterans living in the county, is good. Therefore, it was decided that both organisations would host a workshop on the 29th June 2017 to explore what support, both statutory and charitable, was available to veterans in Rutland.

Alongside HWR and RCC personnel, the event was supported by the statutory health sector, military charities, Rutland based military units and other interested organisations. The following attended the event:

Statutory Health Sector:

- East Leicestershire and Rutland Clinical Commissioning Group (ELRCCG)
- Leicestershire Partnership Trust (LPT)
- Midlands & East Veterans Service (MEVS) Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)

Military Charities:

- Royal British Legion (RBL), including Veterans Gateway
- Royal British Legion - Oakham Branch
- Soldiers Sailors Airmen & Families Association (SSAFA)
- Royal Air Force Association (RAFA)
- ABF the Soldier's Charity (ABF)
- Help for Heroes (H4H)

Rutland Military Units:

- 2 Royal Anglian
- 7 Regiment RLC
- 2 Princess of Wales Royal Regiment
- 2 Med Regiment
- 1 Military Working Dogs Regiment

Other Organisations:

- Armed Forces Champion University Hospitals Leicester
- Regional Resettlement Centre
- Oakham Medical Practice
- Vista Blind
- Rutland Community Agents
- Age UK
- Let's Talk Wellbeing (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, IAPT)

The aims of the workshop and the focus of discussions were:

- To gain an understanding of what support is currently available in Rutland
- To explore what could be done better for Rutland veterans
- To find out how other organisations can help/support the Statutory organisations
- To explore how all organisations can work better together
- To find out how veterans find out about support available

Presentations were given by RCC, ELRCCG and MEVS to explain what statutory support was available, and how these organisations were working to ensure that military personnel, military veterans and their families were not disadvantaged due to military service. Military charities presented what their organisations provided regarding support to veterans in Rutland over and above what is available to the general public. These presentations were followed by group discussions. Each group fed back to the workshop the top few points or questions that these discussions had raised and other points raised during the discussions were collected. This report captures these discussions and aims to make suggestions for a way forward in improving the support available to military veterans in Rutland.

2. Summary of Points Raised

The following areas were identified:

- Organisations Working Together
- Finding and Negotiating Available Support
- Veterans' Mental Health
- Transition from Military to Civilian Life
- Identifying Veterans
- Awareness of Veterans
- Serving Personnel Comments

3. Organisations Working Together

It was felt that all the organisations represented at this event could work more closely together for the benefit of Rutland veterans. It was believed that this event was the first step in identifying how this could be achieved going forward.

For example, if RCC were involved in providing housing for military families, contact with military charities could aid the supply of fittings, furnishings and white goods.

There was perceived to be an undercurrent of inter-service rivalry between organisations that needs to be resolved if they are to work effectively together. It was understood that pressures on the charity sector have made it a more

competitive environment, but that effective partnership working would increase the benefit to those that the charities serve.

It was suggested that there are so many military charities, that those seeking help may have to complete a multitude of different forms etc to access help. There was a feeling that people may be 'passed around' charities looking for the correct place to get the support they needed.

It was suggested that there is a need to provide a local forum for veterans to meet together in a social atmosphere i.e. a monthly breakfast club, where veterans and their families can have a chat over a cup of coffee/tea and/or a breakfast. This would provide an opportunity for organisations to share information about support available.

It was suggested that military charities may be able to help if statutory services were under strain for example, Combat Stress may be able to help if statutory services' waiting time was considered too long.

Suggestions:

In order to continue the good work commenced by this event a regular forum of relevant organisations should be set up to generate joint working and understanding of problems and bottlenecks that are getting in the way of organisations working effectively together. Decisions would need to be made as to who took ownership of such a forum. There may be military charitable funding available to support this initiative. It was suggested that this forum address issues of:

- Promoting and gathering information on local support available
- Acting as a way for organisations to work together and collaborate better
- Potentially have a signposting role

That a social club, supported by all relevant organisations, be considered for Rutland veterans and their families.

That statutory services are informed, and staff educated on additional support that veterans may be able to access through military charities.

4. Finding and Negotiating Available Support

It was noted that in recent years the number of military charities has increased dramatically. The public support for the armed services was extremely welcome, but has resulted in a confused picture for veterans seeking support.

It was felt that there was a wealth of information regarding support out there, but that this information is not effectively communicated to those who may need it.

There was a concern that these days most organisations, due to limited resources, relied heavily on the internet for offering support. It was felt that other means of

communication should be considered for those that can't or won't access support through this medium.

The workshop was informed of the new 'Veterans' Gateway' project. This jointly funded MOD and RBL project aims to be a single point of contact nationally for veterans to signpost them to relevant support. The Veterans' Gateway had signed up with a few partner organisations, but it was noted that this did not include all military charities, or organisations that provide support (either statutory or voluntary). The question was asked as to how the Veterans' Gateway would know what support was available locally to a veteran in Rutland. RBL answered that the intention was that the national Veterans' Gateway would have local representation in Rutland, so that a veteran accessing the national helpline number would be signposted to Rutland RBL, who needed the information on all support available locally to ensure that the support offer to the veteran was the best at a local level.

It was believed that the Veterans' Gateway had the potential to help negotiate the complicated military charity picture, and to signpost veterans to the best local support available. However, it would require the support of other organisations to achieve this.

Suggestions:

There could be publicity for service/veteran support contacts in NHS patient facing facilities e.g. GP surgeries and A&E. This could also be used in other locations such as Citizens Advice, Job Centres and Libraries etc.

How information is shared with Rutland Veterans should be reviewed. This should include consideration that although electronic means are useful, not everyone accesses information in this way.

The new Veterans' Gateway project should be included in discussions about the future of support to veterans in Rutland. Specifically, how this initiative will ensure that anyone accessing this route to support in Rutland has details of ALL support available locally.

5. Veterans' Mental Health

Mental stresses encountered by personnel who have been in a combat zone are often different from those experienced by the general public, and those suffering need access to someone who understands, not just sympathises with, their problems. The question was asked of MEVS/TIL as to whether their personnel are experienced in the particular mental problems that can be suffered by ex-serving personnel such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? The answer was 'yes' personnel are specifically trained in the needs of veterans.

Veterans developing mental health problems would benefit from earlier intervention. It is believed that an element of 'handholding' is needed, not just

signposting to services, but also to help the individual navigate the various agencies involved.

The TIL service in Leicestershire and Rutland has not yet been launched due to insufficient funding and lack of capacity. It is likely to be some time before this can get underway.

Suggestions:

A way of supporting veterans with mental health problems to access services should be explored. This could be a volunteer or peer support role.

Health commissioners should confirm when the provision of TIL services will be launched and what this will provide for Rutland.

6. Transition from Military to Civilian Life

Those who leave the services early often need more help than those who serve to the end of their engagement, and then go through the normal resettlement procedures.

It was mentioned that local information at the point of discharge for veterans settling in Rutland could be improved.

Peer support was seen as a positive means of support for service leavers. This was not only helpful for those who had recently left, but for anyone who has transitioned into civilian life.

It was felt that Rutland employers could be encouraged to consider apprenticeships for service leavers.

Suggestions:

Early leavers should be specifically identified if they require more help transitioning.

Rutland organisations should be involved in the discharge process, perhaps a 'Leaving the Military to Settle in Rutland' pack could be produced.

Consideration should be given to support to spouses and families when armed forces personnel leave the services.

Peer support should be considered as a means of supporting veterans in Rutland.

Rutland employers are approached to consider service leavers' apprenticeships or information to service leavers on jobs/careers available in Rutland.

7. Identifying Veterans

It is believed that the majority of serving personnel do not have mental health problems at the time of discharge, but a number can develop them in the years after military service. It is therefore important that veterans are identified so that any additional support available can be accessed.

There currently did not appear to be processes in place to identify veterans. RCC reported that they had already raised the possibility of having a question on the next national census to allow them to identify veterans this way. Health care representatives said there is no formal process for identifying veterans in the NHS that were known of.

Each military charity has a database of member's names that could be accessed to ascertain veterans within the Rutland County. Delegates thought that there would be Data Protection problems and also, unless continuously updated, the database would quickly become out of date.

Some people raised the concern that younger service leavers may not identify themselves as 'Veterans'. The use of the term 'Service Leavers and Veterans' may be more appropriate.

It was mentioned that not all veterans would want to be identified as such, and therefore it must remain an individual choice as to whether to do so or not.

Many of the organisations present confirmed that support is available to service families as well as those who have served in the armed forces. These people, if the serving family member is no longer around (bereavement or separation/divorce) can be even harder to identify.

Suggestions:

Statutory and other organisations could be asked to put up signage asking veterans to identify themselves, therefore giving the organisations the opportunity to access the best support for the individual. However, consideration must be given to the fact that veterans may not want to identify themselves as such. In addition, consideration should be given to using the term 'Service leavers and Veterans'. Consideration could also be given to trying to identify ex-service families who may be entitled to support.

A scheme could be considered for veterans to self-register veterans in Rutland. This could be linked to social media (a Facebook page etc). Perhaps a 'Rutland Service Leavers and Veterans' association would address the issue of the diverse provision for this group. The question remains as to who would run this.

8. Awareness of Veterans

Organisations in Northants where veterans may go for help, i.e. County Councils, Citizens Advice and doctors' surgeries have started training or have trained front line staff so that they are more informed about military veterans' problems. These organisations also display signage on arrival to indicate that they would like to be told if the applicant is a military veteran.

On a national level, the UK falls well behind the United States and Australia on recognition of military veterans and the status given to them. At present, MOD houses the Veterans' Advisory and Pensions Committee which is purely an advisory non-departmental public body that contains the new Veterans' Gateway. It is early days and it will be a little time before the effectiveness of the new body can be assessed.

Suggestions:

Rutland considers training for organisations to allow staff to be aware of veterans' issues.

RCC considers recommending to the Department for Communities and Local Government that the profile of military veterans be raised within the Governmental structure by the formation of a Military Veterans' Department.

9. Serving Personnel Comments

The Army feels it has a responsibility to look after veterans, but does not have the resources to do so as welfare staff are already fully committed looking after serving personnel.

A greater percentage of staff are now serving unaccompanied in an effort to gain stability for the family. This can lead to more frequent family breakdowns.

10. Conclusion

Much useful discussion and information sharing was gathered at this event. Of major importance now is how to progress the issues and suggestions raised. It appears that a Rutland forum or group is required to take this work forward and improve support to veterans in our county. Without such a group, the diversity of statutory, charitable and other organisations available to provide support will remain unreachable for many veterans who may need help.

Therefore, HWR will establish a small working group to convert the suggestions from this event into an action plan. The working group will then develop a bid for funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund for Rutland to allow for a properly resourced project to take this important work forward.

12. Annex 1 - The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant

An Enduring Covenant Between
The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government

- and -

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown
And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

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 most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

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