

## **Strategy for Our Veterans – UK government consultation paper**

### **Draft – Gateshead response**

#### **Cross Cutting Factor 1 - Collaboration between Organisations**

**2028 Outcome** - Improved Collaboration between organisations offers Veterans coherent support

**Key Focus Area** - Establish where greater collaboration could be achieved in services for Veterans, especially between the charitable and public-sector organisations

- 1. If you have experience of a successful multi-organisational collaboration that we could potentially learn from, please provide details including what sector it was in, who the recipients were, which organisations were involved and contact details of one of the organisations (if possible)**

The Armed Forces Outreach Service is led and managed by Gateshead Housing Company working in partnership with Gateshead Council and currently covers five local authority areas which include Gateshead, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Durham and Northumberland. The service is a crisis prevention service provided within housing services and staffed by ex-service leavers, which provides direct assistance, support and signposting to other relevant organisations and covers all the areas of need highlighted by the Covenant.

The draft veterans' strategy highlights the importance of a holistic and joined up approach to further improve services for veterans by being wider and more rounded and bringing an understanding of the connection between issues and offering advice on how to tackle them. It also notes that effective delivery of services to veterans require the public, private and charitable sectors to work closely together.

The Armed Forces Outreach Service already operates such a holistic and joined up approach and looks to tackle the root causes of why veterans are presenting to the service with a view to addressing their overall needs. The service works closely with a wide range of partner organisations from both the statutory and charitable sectors which provide support and assistance to veterans operating a successful two-way referral process, co-ordinating work at a local level and sharing good practice across the whole patch.

The Armed Forces Outreach Service supports 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade's Housing briefings. They provide SME advice directly to soldiers serving across the North East, dispelling myths that social housing is not available and also reinforcing the benefits of planning a successful transition.

The Regular Forces Employment Association(RFEA) has also been co-located with the Armed Forces Outreach Service in the Civic Centre to support referrals between the two services. The RFEA provides support via the ABF "Bridging the Gap" Programme which offers specialist vocational support to ex service personnel facing problems and via the RAF Benevolent Fund Wellbeing and Employment Programme, where it provides vocational advice to those involved in the programme who have not been able to access the transition support now available through CTP.

The Service also currently hosts the Regional Manager of Walking With The Wounded in the Civic Centre and he will continue to have a desk here even when the new Walking With the Wounded Veterans Hub is established in Gateshead.

The Armed Forces Outreach Service began as a pilot, initially only in Gateshead, in 2012 with funding from the Community Covenant Grant fund and, due to the service's success in achieving outcomes for ex-service leavers, has subsequently been rolled out over the last few years to the other local authority areas mentioned above again initially with support from the Community Covenant Grant Fund.

This award-winning Service (The Municipal Journal (MJ) 'Delivering Better Outcomes Award 2013) is now very well established and has a proven track record of positive joint working across several local authority areas. The service is recognised as best practice by The Royal British Legion and is currently exploring potential membership of the Confederation of Service Charities and has applied to become a member of the Veterans Gateway - which are organisations referenced as good practice within the Strategy.

(Contact: [abigailsmith@gatesheadhousing.co.uk](mailto:abigailsmith@gatesheadhousing.co.uk) for further information regarding the Armed Forces Outreach Service)

#### **Cross Cutting Factor 2- Co-ordination of Veterans' Services**

**2028 Outcome** – The Co-ordination of Veterans' provision delivers consistent aims and principles over time and throughout the UK, ensuring Veterans, their families and the bereaved are treated fairly compared to the local population.

**Key Focus Area** – Mechanisms for the co-ordination of UK Government and wider public-sector provision on Veterans issues.

- 2. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being extremely effective) how effective is the UK Government in delivering support to Veterans to enable them to be valued, contributing and supported? What are your reasons for this score?**

At this stage we consider we don't have a sufficient level of information to be able to indicate a score. However, we consider that the very welcome establishment of the Veterans Strategy and the proposed updates on progress against the Strategy in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Review and the Review of the Strategy at the half way point in 2023 should provide greater clarity and potentially change that position going forwards?

- 3. What other mechanism could be effectively used to co-ordinate provision?**

#### **Cross Cutting Factor 3 – Data on the Veteran Community**

**2028 Outcome** – Enhanced collection, use and analysis of data across the public, private and charitable sectors to build an evidence base to effectively identify and address the needs of Veterans.

##### **Key Focus Areas**

- Exploitation of existing data sets, encouraging innovative use and analysis to provide comprehensive evidence base.

- Identification of areas where organisations could collect more data on Veterans so that a richer evidence base may be developed.

**4. What barriers does your organisation currently face on sharing existing data on Veterans?**

We have struggled to obtain regular tri - service data on service leavers indicating that they are returning to our locality which could act as a guide when planning to meet local need. Whilst armed forces transitions' colleagues on our Armed Forces Network have been helpful and proactive in trying to obtain the data on our behalf we have yet to receive this due to difficulties around getting appropriate/ relevant permissions from the MOD for this information to be released in a format that can be shared with officers in local authorities such as Gateshead. Armed Forces colleagues on our Armed Forces Network have indicated that one of the challenges for the armed forces is that this information is not currently well captured at the departure point.

**5. What more can be done to improve data collection.**

The Council has previously submitted a motion on 16 June 2017 to support and promote The Royal British Legion's call to include a new topic in the 2021 Census that concerns military services and membership of the armed forces and ensure that the 2021 census includes questions concerning our armed forces community. This would then provide the Council with some baseline information on the numbers of veterans living in Gateshead although future work will be necessary to understand annual trends, how transient veterans are through their post service life course; annual rates of household formation; migration in and out of the borough and age and household profiles.

We therefore welcome the fact that the Strategy indicates that, as a first step in better understanding the profiles and needs of veterans, there is now a recommendation to introduce a new question to identify those people, aged 16 years and over, who are serving or who have ever served in the UK armed forces (which will include regulars, reservists and those who served as part of National Service) in the 2021 Census in England and Wales and in Scotland ( White paper "Help Shape Our Future – the 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales – Dec 2018). Including this question in the census in 2021 will provide an accurate estimate of the size of the veterans' community and will include data on other characteristics such as their housing situation, general health indicators and their activity in the labour market, for small areas. This will help local authorities develop a better understanding of where veterans live and their needs and help ensure that the right level of support can be provided.

We would also encourage all local authorities to work closely with their local clinical commissioning groups to carry out work to encourage veterans to register at local GP practices.

Within Gateshead, as a result of issues highlighted at Gateshead Armed Forces Network, the clinical commissioning group agreed to carry out a project aimed at increasing the numbers of veterans registering at GP practices. This involved including Veterans in the list of Quality Indicators for 2014-15. At the start of the project there were only 368 veterans identified

and coded in Gateshead. During 2016-17 Veterans came out of the Quality Initiative and became part of core business and Veterans were added to the CCG master templates. As a result of veterans being recorded on master templates, practices are now able to identify how many veterans recorded have long term conditions or issues such as anxiety and depression which might be as a result of service. This can then be correlated and will mean veterans can then be sent to appropriate NHS services which may be veteran specific. Subsequently, the Network has monitored progress and currently the number of veterans recorded is 7000 +. Work has also started on coding veterans' families although this is in its very early stages. The CCG also covers Newcastle as well as Gateshead and has now started working to share and extend this work / best practice across Newcastle. It is hoped that this work will be assisted by the new approaches outlined in The NHS Long Term Plan and the requirement for all practices to be part of a Primary Care Network with priorities which have a population health focus. Currently, the Primary Care Network in Central Gateshead has listed Veterans Health as one of its priorities and Newcastle West are now following suit.

The work of the CCG has been showcased at our NE Armed Forces Forum (covering 12 local authority areas) as best practice with a view to encouraging other areas to pick this up.

Armed Forces colleagues on our Armed Forces Network have highlighted the work of the CCG as an area of local success and consider it rightly lauded as best practice. They have highlighted that whilst ID cards for veterans is a positive move the government needs to mandate the common benefits nationwide, and particularly with business, to really get buy in.

**6. What gaps do you perceive there are in the currently available data on veterans and their families?**

We do not have continuous comprehensive data on veterans, their families, location and their needs although we have been seeking to address this through a variety of mechanisms eg armed forces pension information, pupil premium figures, Gateshead Residents Survey in 2012, information from CCG's re numbers of veterans registered at GP practices, receipt of adhoc information regarding numbers of service leavers returning to Gateshead/numbers of Gateshead veterans requiring support from Northumbria CRC / Probation etc.

Including members of the armed forces within the 2021 Census will allow ex-service personnel to declare their service and help local authorities develop a better understanding of where veterans live and be able to effectively plan to meet their needs/ help ensure that the right level of support can be provided (See response to Q 5 above).

**7. What more can be done to further encourage declaration and / or identification of service at the earliest opportunity to enable better data on the numbers of veterans in the criminal justice system?**

Early intervention appears key through identification of veterans in custody suites followed up by contacting /informing/involving relevant partner organisations who may provide appropriate support.

Ensure that as part of any early intervention work individuals are made aware that declaring their service may well be key to ensuring that they receive appropriate support, advice and assistance/potential prioritisation from relevant organisations, in key areas such as housing and health etc when returning to local communities?

Currently Northumbria Police work with Project NOVA to operate a Veterans Pathway for offenders whose offences mean they are eligible for a conditional caution. The Project looks at why individuals have offended and what support can be provided to stop this happening again. Support is offered for up to 12 months after the conditional caution has been completed and veterans can be referred to a range of agencies.

In Gateshead we provide veterans with the facility to declare their veteran status on the Tyne and Wear Homes Housing Application form (choice-based lettings system). Our Lettings Policy recognises these applicants and a priority status of “substantial need” is provided.

The date of the housing application is recorded as the date the person entered the forces. Applications are initially placed in the “Substantial Need” category.

Personnel leaving the armed forces will be awarded “Urgent Housing Need” priority status three months before their discharge date; this level of award recognises the potential threat of homelessness.

An applicant approaching our housing options service would be asked a standard question about being in the forces and would be directed to our Armed Forces Outreach Service for further support and advice

Our Private Sector Housing Team also works to drive up standards within private homes in Gateshead, in particular to ensure that the private rented sector offers a safe and attractive alternative to social housing. The Team provides advice, carries out inspections, investigates requests for help from tenants and carries out enforcement where landlords persistently offer substandard accommodation or seek to exploit tenants. The Team also proactively works in neighbourhoods blighted by low demand (high number of empty homes, lower than average rents and values, high turnover, high number of complaints, higher than average crime and ASB), and proactively inspect every home, require landlords to meet safe standards and fit and proper person criteria and meet with tenants to help to tackle the underlying causes of deprivation (we link with employment, health, probation, third sector, families to draw in the support that people need to thrive).

When the Team respond to a request for help for housing purposes, meet with a tenant within a neighbourhood where they are working proactively or investigate an allegation of noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour we are likely to uncover whether our client or the person about whom they are complaining has a history of military service. Where the Team think that the individual requires help or support they will draw in our Armed Forces Outreach Service.

The Team will now amend their records so that this information is available for reporting in future.

#### **Cross Cutting Factor 4 – Public Perception and understanding**

**2028 Outcome** – The UK population value Veterans and understand their diverse experiences and culture.

##### **Key Focus Areas**

- Identify how a more balanced national conversation about Veterans can be achieved.
- Address public misperceptions about Veterans

#### **8. How could the misconceptions about Veterans be effectively challenged?**

Partnership work between the Armed Forces and Gateshead has always tried to set its work with the armed forces community in the context that the vast majority of armed forces service leavers do well when they return to civilian society with only a small number requiring specific support and assistance.

The Council takes steps to promote the positive benefits that military service can develop in individuals in areas such as employing veterans and reservists and ensures that there is recognition and remembrance for their service.

However, a key part of Gateshead's work is also to focus on those members of the armed forces community that for a variety of reasons struggle to make an effective transition into civilian life within our area and highlight the work it is doing to provide effective support to these individuals. In times of reducing budgets it is both important and necessary that the public understands why certain groups of individuals, such as veterans who struggle with transition etc have such support funded.

Whilst Gateshead aims to provide a balance picture of the armed forces community it may be that publicity in relation to the latter work, highlighting personal struggles and challenges etc strikes a deeper cord within the public perception.

However, there may be scope for further publicity at both a national and local level highlighting the benefits of service / instances / personal stories where local communities have been positively supported by individual veterans/ local armed forces regiments eg helping local councils in times of flooding / work supporting local initiatives etc may help in redressing the balance.

#### **Cross Cutting Factor 5 – Recognition of Veterans**

**2028 Outcome** – Veterans feel that their service and experience is recognised and valued by society

**Key Focus Area** – Recognition for those who have served in the UK armed forces, especially those who have sacrificed most, so they feel their service was appreciated and their experience is valued.

- 9. Do Veterans and their families deserve greater recognition than they receive currently?**
- 10. Do the families of deceased Service Personnel, whose deaths are attributable to Service, receive appropriate support and recognition?**
- 11. Should there be recognition for those suffering life-changing injury in the service of their country?**

**Above three questions for veterans and their families to respond to rather than Council.**

## **Key Theme 1 - Community and relationships**

**2028 Outcome-** Veterans are able to build healthy relationships and integrate into their communities

### **Key Focus Areas**

- Exploring how existing loneliness initiatives can be inclusive of Veterans
- Encouraging integration into a Veteran's chosen communities, whether retaining a link to the service or not.

#### **12. Do you specifically include Veterans in your initiatives to tackle loneliness and/ or social isolation?**

Yes. Currently our Armed Forces Outreach Service is working in partnership with Age UK and SSAFA in relation to its Joining Forces Veterans Project in relation to veterans born before 1950 which offers a quality marked advice service and social activities via a range of social and interest groups as well as a befriending service. This work has been promoted through our Armed Forces Network.

The Armed Forces Outreach Service also works in partnership with Gateshead Clubhouse a mental health community hub run entirely by its members which provides a service open to all Gateshead residents whereby individuals with mental health needs can access peer support / peer led courses and a range of facilities / social activities / share skills / develop resilience within a safe and supportive environment.

The Council and Newcastle Gateshead CCG have also previously collaborated on an innovation fund aimed at the voluntary and community sectors focused on addressing social isolation and raised awareness of this opportunity with voluntary / community organisations supporting veterans on our Armed Forces Network and invited them to submit applications/bids for projects addressing social isolation.

Further opportunities to link with the charitable voluntary sector in Gateshead in relation to work to address social isolation and loneliness are also currently being considered.

#### **13. Where they have not already, how could Veterans be encouraged to integrate into communities?**

It is considered that they could spend more time with civilian communities when they serve or as part of the transition period. It is also suggested that they consider the potential for work experience within civilian sector once the decision has been taken that they will be leaving the forces.

It is also considered that pooled funding for Armed Forces and other groups in need in the community would be helpful so that projects aren't always veteran specific projects and they are given the opportunity to integrate with other sectors of the community.

There should be a continued focus on utilising activities that appeal to veterans with the emphasis on social inclusion. These may be gender specific or categorised by age cohorts. Younger veterans (although not specifically) may for example be engaged by outward bound activities.

## **Key Theme 2- Employment, education and skills**

**2028 Outcome** – Veterans enter appropriate employment and can continue to enhance their careers throughout their working lives.

### **Key Focus Areas**

- Continuing to prepare Service Personnel while in-service for employment outside the military environment and understanding what barriers they may face.
- Supporting those leaving the Armed Forces by offering services that are flexible to an individual's needs.

#### **14. If you are an employer, what else do you think Veterans need to prepare them for civilian employment?**

Work experience prior to leaving or upon leaving. Currently applications for work experience within the Council are considered on a case by case basis. However, it is intended that in the longer - term guidance is developed in relation to work experience and veterans will be included in that along with other groups.

Our Economic Development Team links with our Armed Forces Outreach Service to identify specific needs and sign post support/training activity.

The Career Transition Partnership(CTP), which offers one to one guidance and training to those exploring new careers after leaving the military should also provide thorough up to date information on the labour market and how recruitment works.

Wherever possible CTP should work in partnership with others to provide such information on a localised basis as huge variations are apparent across the country. Self- employment opportunities should continue to be promoted.

#### **15. If you are an employer what do you do to maximise the previous experience of employees like Armed Forces Veterans?**

Provide opportunities to support fellow veterans through the Armed Forces Outreach Service but also share experiences and knowledge of culture within the Armed Forces with other professionals who could be supporting members of the Armed Forces Community to make them aware of the issues that members of the AF community could be facing.

As with any employee of the council, employees who have previously served will participate in the Council's Appraisal and Development process which looks at maximising employee potential and how we build on this.

#### **16. What are the potential barriers (systemic, cultural, psychological, educational, experience etc) to Veterans sustaining employment?**

Disillusionment due to high expectations of how things should work but which don't always materialise in the civilian working world. A buddy mentoring system could be developed where veterans who have transitioned into civilian life support those who have recently left

the forces and are taking up new civilian employment to provide the support and understanding of working in a new environment. This could be provided within larger organisations with existing staff.

### **Key Theme 3 – Finance and Debt**

**2028 Outcome** – Veterans leave the Armed Forces with sufficient financial education, awareness and skills to be financially self-supporting and resilient.

#### **Key Focus Areas**

- Preparing serving personnel for the financial realities of civilian life.
- Reducing potential financial disadvantage encountered due to service by veterans.

#### **17. What are the current financial issues faced by Veterans and their families?**

Lack of savings and debt. Salaries earned in the Armed Forces don't always match paid salaries in the civilian world and can be lower and this can cause financial hardship particularly when outgoings also increase in the civilian world.

#### **18. How can the current financial issues be tackled?**

There needs to be more preparation for this prior to leaving the forces, with serving personnel being encouraged to save from the day they join the forces using an Armed Forces savings scheme. We therefore welcome the MOD move to explore the establishment of a savings plan scheme with Joining Forces Credit Unions and also the introduction of a Defence Holistic Transition Policy, which will provide life-skills material earlier in an individual's career. Information on other/local credit unions could be provided during the transition phase and the more financial education that can be provided at whatever point the better.

At a local level, the Council has promoted the benefits / use of Credit Unions for veterans via its Armed Forces Network.

#### **19. What financial information, training or support would Service Personnel benefit from receiving before they left the Armed Forces?**

As above.

### **Key Theme 4 – Health and Wellbeing**

**2028 Outcome** – All Veterans enjoy a state of positive physical and mental health and wellbeing, enabling them to contribute to wider aspects of society

#### **Key Focus Areas**

- Enabling consistency of medical outcomes for Veterans, through a smooth transition of provision from in-Service to post -Service and sharing effective practices amongst clinical and healthcare communities.

- Providing bespoke treatment for those veterans who have bespoke needs because of their service.
- Targeting any identified health and wellbeing needs of Veterans in comparison to the general population

**20. What are the shortfalls in current provisions of ongoing rehabilitation, recovery and continuous health care through life for those Veterans with attributable physical and / or mental illnesses or injuries?**

We understand that NHS Veterans Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service North is currently in discussions with NHS England regarding future development of the service.

NHS colleagues have also flagged up the benefits of social prescribing to tackle ongoing rehabilitation and recovery / continuous healthcare for veterans and consider that more resources should be made available for additional community provision for veterans / more frequent after work activities – as many current activities are scheduled during the working day.

See also response to Q 24.

**21. Is there evidence that there are further physical and / or mental health and wellbeing issues that affect Veterans more or differently than the general population?**

In Gateshead data from GP Practices as at March 2018, comparing the health of veterans with that of the general population, has highlighted a higher prevalence of some conditions / behaviours – see below:-

Whilst it is noted that there is evidence that over the last few years numbers of individuals in the armed forces who smoke appear to be in decline, data collected by Gateshead GP Practice Registers / North East Commissioning Services as at April 2018,in relation to veterans registered with Gateshead GP Practices, indicates that there is a 12.5% prevalence of smoking amongst veterans compared with 9.3% of other adults and a prevalence of asthma amongst veterans of 8.8% compared with 7.4% of other adults and a 9.1% prevalence of COPD amongst veterans compared with 3.4% of other adults.

Smoking is still the largest cause of premature death and is responsible for the deaths of 445 people a year in Gateshead from smoking related diseases. Half of the difference in life expectancy between Gateshead and England is due to higher smoking prevalence and the resultant premature deaths. As a result, the above data was shared with our Armed Forces Network and the benefits of / opportunities to engage with Stop Smoking Services / work with the Council to provide very brief advice on stopping smoking have been outlined.

The data from GP practices has also highlighted a 29.2% prevalence of depression amongst veterans compared with a 20.6% prevalence compared with other adults. However, our Veterans Health Needs Assessment carried out in 2015 highlighted a lower use of IAPT psychological services, 2% of veterans against just over a tenth of non-serving population

The data from GP practices has also highlighted a 19.9% prevalence of obesity amongst veterans compared with 13.7% of other adults. Obesity population levels are a key preventable cause of death and disease in the UK and over the next twenty years rising levels of obesity could lead to an additional 4.62 million cases of type 2 diabetes, 1.63 million cases of coronary heart diseases and 670,000 new cases of cancer (UK Health Forum & Cancer Research UK, 2016). Obesity can also harm people's prospects in life, their self-esteem and their underlying mental health.

The numbers of veterans the above figures are based on is 6261 and the general population over 18 years of 170,213.

Our Veterans Health Needs Assessment in 2015 also highlighted a higher percentage (43%) of veterans whose activities were limited a little or a lot as opposed to 27% of the general population.

#### **Key Theme 5 – Making a home in Civilian Society**

**2028 Outcome** – Veterans have a secure place to live either through buying, renting or social housing

#### **Key Focus Areas**

- Enabling Service Personnel to find suitable private accommodation
- Assisting those leaving the Service early to find accommodation

#### **22. Do Service Personnel and their families need to be better prepared to find accommodation on leaving the Armed Forces?**

Preparation around finding accommodation needs to start earlier.

Armed Forces colleagues on our Armed Forces Network have indicated that they need to obtain information regarding the actual situation regarding housing in the area they want to settle in, as widespread generalisations are all too common, leading to false expectations. Service leavers need to be prepared for the fact that even being a "priority" in terms of housing can mean a wait of months and this issue is most acute in admin and discipline discharges, where the notice for leaving is particularly short.

At present our Armed Forces Outreach Service provides information in relation to housing options in all the local authority areas covered by the service. (see response to Q23 below)

It would be helpful if estate agents or social housing providers can link into those who are leaving the forces at the earliest opportunity to discuss options and discuss the process of obtaining properties, in which areas and at what cost. Forms can be completed, processes can be started and this will save time as well as provide some re-assurances to those who are planning to leave.

Although there are incentives for estate agents to engage with Armed Forces at the earliest opportunity at different bases or garrisons, local authorities are already over stretched with demand and there may need to be some financial incentive or additional resources so advice

and support on accessing social housing can be effectively provided at the earliest opportunity.

**23. What more could be done to specifically assist those leaving the Armed Forces earlier than planned to find suitable housing?**

As above. In addition, it is considered that the Armed Forces should consider what more can be done to ensure that those leaving the services earlier than planned still have a planned and managed discharge which refers them to relevant organisations that can offer appropriate support and advice.

Currently, our Armed Forces Outreach Service works proactively with armed forces located at Catterick around housing options available in all the local authority areas covered by the service/levels of housing priority for service leavers (including early service leavers) and has provided Housing Briefings for service personnel prior to leaving the armed forces.

As outlined in response to Q 7 in Gateshead we provide veterans with the facility to declare their veteran status on the Tyne and Wear Homes Housing Application form (choice-based lettings system). Our Lettings Policy recognises these applicants and a priority status of “substantial need” is provided.

The date of the housing application is recorded as the date the person entered the forces. Applications are initially placed in the “Substantial Need” category.

Personnel leaving the armed forces will be awarded “Urgent Housing Need” priority status three months before their discharge date; this level of award recognises the potential threat of homelessness.

An applicant approaching our housing options service would be asked a standard question about being in the forces and would be directed to our Armed Forces Outreach Service for further support and advice.

In addition. when the Private Sector Housing Team respond to a request for help for housing purposes, meet with a tenant within a neighbourhood where they are working proactively or investigate an allegation of noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour they are likely to uncover whether the client or the person about whom they are complaining has a history of military service. Where the Team think that the individual requires help or support they will draw in our Armed Forces Outreach Service.

Partner organisations on our Armed Forces Network have also been briefed on the new duties arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and advised that it is important for everyone to recognise that homelessness is not just a housing issue and that early intervention and support from a variety of agencies can help prevent and relieve homelessness. The Network were asked to support the local authority and Gateshead Housing Company by raising awareness of the new legislation within their own organisations and work in partnership to prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping in Gateshead.

Within Gateshead there is also Veteran Specific Supported Housing for vulnerable service leavers. Gateshead Council continues to work in partnership with Changing Lives who lease "Bibby House", a Veterans Centre in Gateshead, from the Council at a peppercorn rent. The Centre helps homeless service leavers and provides supported accommodation for up to five former service personnel. It also offers advice and activities relating to employment and training, welfare and debt advice, family liaison and counselling to help people integrate back into society and health and well-being programmes. Bibby House was launched in early January 2013.

#### **Key Theme 6 – Veterans and the law**

**2028 Outcome** -Veterans leave the Armed Forces with the resilience and awareness to remain law - abiding citizens

#### **Key Focus Areas**

- Building on provisions in-service and during transition to lower the risk that future Veterans will engage with the criminal justice system.
- Expanding the good practice initiatives that work collaboratively across sectors to support Veterans and the likelihood of reoffending.

#### **24. What more can be done to support Veterans in the criminal justice system, including reducing the likelihood of reoffending?**

##### Early Intervention is key.

Ensure all offenders are asked "Have you ever served in the military" when being booked into Police custody.

As highlighted in the response to Q7 Northumbria Police work with Project NOVA to operate a Veterans Pathway for offenders whose offences mean they are eligible for a conditional caution.

In Gateshead, the Council is currently working in partnership with Walking with the Wounded, a lead organisation in the military charity sector, to develop a North East Veterans Hub situated in Gateshead. The focus of the Hub will be early intervention for those harder to reach veterans who have found transition to civilian life more difficult and this will include Project Nova – the programme of support for vulnerable veterans coming through the criminal justice system who are at risk of offending. The aim is to integrate vulnerable veterans back into their communities and ensure a sustainable pathway to a stable future.

Currently in our area when a convicted person enters prison he / she is asked in reception as part of the initial paperwork, if they have ever served within the armed forces and this information is then flagged on the system, Establishments have a designated veteran lead who will / can organise events. Probation staff will then make referrals to the Veteran Support Worker – contracted by the prison to work with them upon release.

Vulnerable Veterans who have left prison and are at risk of reoffending can be referred to Project Nova by other charities or they can self-refer.

Recognise/ take account of the link between settled accommodation and re-offending.

At a local level Gateshead is working with a range of partner agencies including the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) National Probation Service, Prison Service and Northumbria Police to develop a clear rehousing pathway for offenders, including veterans, to access housing and homeless advice when leaving prison. Our aim is to ensure that tenancies can be sustained for offenders.

in Gateshead we have developed a very strong partnership approach to rehousing and support for offenders and ex-offenders. We have a co-located team comprising of housing options officers, housing support officers, police, probation and CRC working jointly to ensure that access to accommodation and housing support is available for offenders and where possible we support people to break down any barriers to accessing housing.

Address delays in veterans accessing mental health services

In addition, whilst there appears to be significant provision for veterans requiring access to mental health services some veterans appear to be facing a minimum of six weeks wait, following initial triage, before any face to face work commences - this will be dependent on the mental health speciality the client has been identified as requiring. As a result, some veterans are not following through in seeking the appropriate support they need. It is considered that further resources should be put in place to reduce these waiting times.