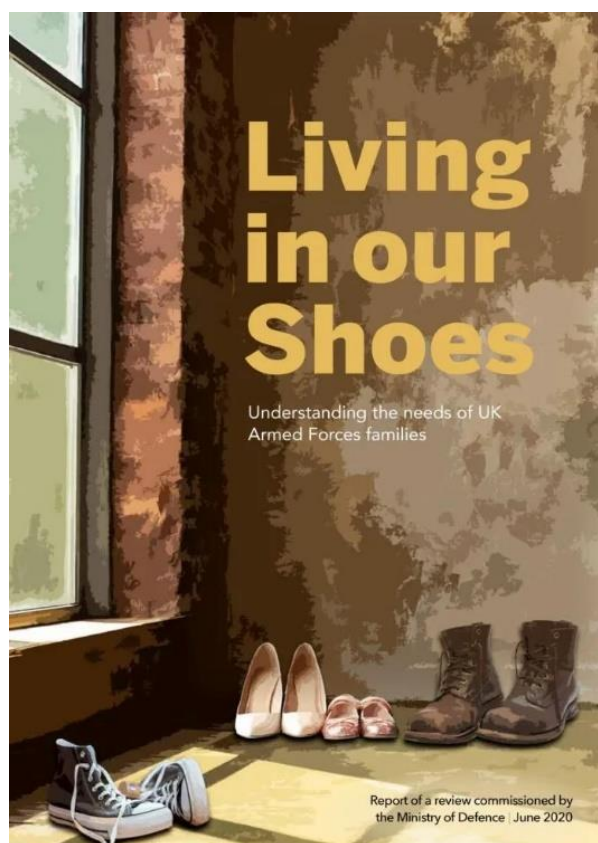


Briefing 2. *Living in Our Shoes* - Key Themes: a place to call home; growing up in the military; partner employment; and health and wellbeing.

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Introduction to the briefing

Briefing 1¹ described the context for the review of the needs of UK Armed Forces families commissioned by the Secretary of State for Defence and conducted between 2019 and 2020. Briefing Two highlights the main concerns which were raised during the review about the challenges relating to Service life, and summarises the actions which the review team recommended should be taken to address them. Briefing Three looks specifically at the support available to Armed Forces families in 2020 and the recommendations for enhancing this to better meet their needs.



During the *Living in Our Shoes* review, many members of the Armed Forces community provided rich evidence about their lived experiences. Their evidence is presented in detail in the report, using the voices of military personnel, non-Serving partners, and children and young people.² During the review, four key themes emerged from discussions with and submissions received from the Armed Forces community, relating to aspects of military life that were most pressing and could result in dissatisfaction with both Service and family life. These themes related to:

1. Military accommodation
2. Growing up in the Armed Forces
3. Employment challenges and opportunities for non-Serving partners
4. The health and wellbeing of military families

For each theme, a number of recommendations for change were offered, recognising that some changes should be relatively straightforward to implement in the short term, while others would require a longer time period and, possibly,

considerable financial investment. The review team were not asked to consider the financial implications as part of their remit, however, nor how the recommendations should be implemented. In total 110 recommendations were made.

¹ Walker, J., Misca, G. and Davis, P. (2025) *Living in Our Shoes Revisited. Briefing 1: Setting the context*. DOI: <http://doi.org/lios-r/brief1>. Available: <https://www.fim-trust.org/about/lios/>

² Walker, J., Selous, A., and Misca, G., (2020) *Living in Our Shoes: understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces Families*, MOD.

The Government Response to the themes raised in *Living in Our Shoes*

The review report was warmly welcomed and the Government provided a detailed formal response in 2021.³ The government response refers to each recommendation in turn, indicating whether the recommendation was accepted in full, accepted in part, or rejected. Of the 110 recommendations made, 86 were accepted in full, 20 were accepted in part, three were not accepted, and one was directed at the charitable sector and therefore did not require a government response. A commentary about the reasons for the decision was provided for each recommendation and an indication of the work being undertaken and planned. This detail is not included in this Briefing. At the time of the Government response considerable work was already underway to address the recommendations and this will be discussed in future Briefings.

Briefings Two and Three should be read as an aide memoire to the detailed research that was undertaken to inform the recommendations which are being revisited in Phase One of the current *Living in Our Shoes* – Revisited study, funded by Forces in Mind Trust,⁴ which is assessing the extent to which changes have been made in the last five years and the concerns raised by Armed Forces families mitigated.

Under each theme below we summarise the content of the *Living in Our Shoes* recommendations. and draw attention to the key actions that the government indicated would be taken forward in respect of each of the four themes.

Theme 1. A Place to Call Home

During the review, the topic most frequently raised by Service personnel and their families was accommodation. In the past, the majority of married couples were most likely to live in Service Family Accommodation (SFA), often referred to as ‘married quarters’. Increasingly, families had opted to find alternative accommodation which they either own or rent, in an area of their choosing, often some distance away from the Serving partner’s home base, in order to avoid frequent moves and to create some stability in their living arrangements. In 2019 there was a marked difference between the three Services in respect of living arrangements: with some 68 per cent of Army families, 53 per cent of RAF families and 34 per cent of RN/RM families choosing to live in SFA.⁵ The demand for SFA was highest amongst Army families. In 2019, in total, some 40,000 occupants were living in SFA.

The poor state of Service Family Accommodation

The majority of concerns in 2019 related to the poor state of the accommodation and the challenges associated with getting repairs and maintenance undertaken. Personnel in the Chain of Command at various military bases described accommodation problems as one of their biggest issues. While

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-our-shoes-understanding-the-needs-of-uk-armed-forces-families/living-in-our-shoes-understanding-the-needs-of-uk-armed-forces-families-government-response-accessible-version>

⁴ <https://www.fim-trust.org/about/lios/launch-event/>

⁵ UK Tri-Service FamCAS Survey 2019

Service personnel acknowledged that SFA offered a relatively inexpensive way to live, in their view that was no excuse for houses being damp and mouldy and for repairs to take months. Those who reported satisfaction with SFA tended to feel that they had been 'lucky' compared to other families, with the quality of housing described as being 'the luck of the draw', since families had little choice about the properties offered to them. The review team were made aware of the difficulties experienced by families with members with special needs, particularly when a non-serving partner or a child had a long-term illness, special educational needs or disability. Long delays in ensuring that houses were suitably adapted to meet the family's needs could impact on the Serving person's ability to work effectively.

The Living in Our Shoes report raised concerns about:

- the poor state of some SFA
- the length of time repairs were taking
- the requirement to undo any improvements made to the property by the family when moving on to another posting
- the lack of entitlement to SFA for couples in long-term cohabiting relationships despite a recognition of eligibility. Senior staff and welfare officers in all three single Services highlighted the unfairness of the four-year policy.

A new accommodation model

There was widespread recognition that the current accommodation model was not sufficiently agile to meet changing demands and expectations and to mitigate the level of dissatisfaction with SFA, and the report recommended that it should be reviewed in the light of modern family life. A number of positive changes were already being made by the MOD and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and, during the review, plans progressed to pilot a new accommodation model which was designed to increase choice and encourage stability. The Future Accommodation Model (FAM) featured a basic accommodation allowance, supplemented by additional payments, depending on whether the Serving person chose to be mobile or stable.

There was agreement that Defence accommodation must be of sufficient quality to be a place that families could be proud to call 'home', and that the poor state of the housing stock had negative impacts not only on military family life and relationships, but also on retention. The *Living in Our Shoes* report emphasised that investment in improvements and ongoing maintenance of SFA needed to be made immediately, and that the vision of creating regional clusters that would provide a range of accommodation choices and options would need investment and careful planning. The expressed aim of the DIO in 2020 was to deliver a more modern, fit for purpose and right-sized estate and a more agile accommodation strategy that would meet the needs and aspirations of Service families in the twenty-first century.

Living in Our Shoes Recommendations about military accommodation

The report made 14 recommendations about accommodation issues, summarised below.

In the short term, the recommendations related to the following actions:

- ensuring immediate investment in improving poor-quality SFA, undertaking swift repairs and maintenance, and developing a more responsive and transparent complaints system
- removing the distinction between eligibility and entitlement to SFA including the removal of the 4-year rule for couples in long-term partnerships
- securing the Help to Buy scheme for the long term
- providing greater information about and choice relating to SFA properties
- ensuring social housing assistance for non-serving partners when relationships end, and appropriate accommodation for separated parents to execute shared parenting arrangements

In the medium-term recommendations related to actions which would:

- provide greater choice in accommodation options; promote regional clusters to reduce the number of housing moves; and rethink the need to move home when the Serving person is assigned to a different location.

The Government Response to those recommendations

The Government accepted 13 recommendations and rejected one. Key actions agreed:

- investment in accommodation should be an urgent priority and allocations of funding announced
- comprehensive information about available SFA to be provided
- those responsible for the maintenance of SFA would be held to account
- suppliers would be incentivised to shift to a preventative maintenance philosophy
- to promote geographical clustering of SFA to minimise moves and support stability
- to review the rule about time-limited removal expenses
- some improvements made by families living in SFA would be allowed to remain when that family moved out
- the complaints system to be more responsive and transparent
- family accommodation and contact facilities would be available on every base for parents who had separated
- the Cohabitation Policy and the evidence requirements placed on Service personnel in long term relationships would be refined to be fair and inclusive

Theme 2. Growing up in the Armed Forces

The impact of service life on children proved to be one of the most sensitive issues. It featured highly during the *Living in Our Shoes* review, and led to the largest number of recommendations for change. The majority of military parents raised concerns about the effect of their lifestyle on their children and, in particular, on their education. While there were no accurate records of the number of military children in the UK, the 2019 FamCAS Survey indicated that 79 per cent of Service families had children, 53 per cent of all Service families had at least one child of school age, and just over a third (34%) of families with children required early years (0-4) childcare.⁶

The *Living in Our Shoes* report explores in detail the:

- factors which impact negatively on Service children
- impact of repeated cycles of deployment
- evidence relating to the educational attainment of military children and entry to higher education
- transitions which disrupt schooling and sever friendships

⁶ Ibid

- support needs of military children, especially those with special educational needs
- support needs of young carers
- ways in which children and their parents could be better supported.

Military children and young people face the same challenges as civilian children, but having a parent in the military creates unique stressors which were not always recognised by the military or addressed in schools and in wider society. These included: high mobility; long periods of parental separation; the revolving shift from a two-parent to a one-parent household; and disruptions in education and friendship networks.

Deployments

Parents referred to deployments as a catalyst for difficulties for their children, and the longer the deployment the greater the perceived negative impact. At the time of the review, the UK Ministry of Defence Harmony Guidelines varied between the three single Services, and were measured slightly differently. The Royal Navy experienced the highest number of days away from home, and the longest deployments of up to nine months, which were considered by most families and the Chain of Command to be too long, especially for children. Families stressed that 4 months is about the right length of time for a deployment in normal circumstances, and that 6 months and over is simply too long when children are growing up. A number of research studies showed that lengthy deployment has an adverse impact both academically and pastorally on children.

Education

The impact of Service life on children's education was raised repeatedly. In January 2018 the number of Service children estimated to be in schools in England was 76,153,⁷ and the vast majority of Service children attended schools with fewer than 10 Service children on the school roll. The support available to them differed considerably between schools: those with a high percentage of Service children were far more likely to understand their needs and challenges.

The majority of concerns were about the frequency of school moves, the potentially negative consequences of disruptions to education, and the variable nature of the support provided, particularly the use of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP). The use of the SPP was a controversial issue and the SCiP Alliance had identified ten areas for action. While being a child in a military family does not necessarily impact negatively on educational attainment, if military children and young people are to thrive at school it is imperative that they have some stability in their education and receive appropriate support at all times. The reality for many children, however, was disruptions in education and their learning being challenged, and new friendships having to be made. Moves between the devolved nations of the UK triggered additional concern given the variations between education systems and the support on offer. Parents, children and young people were especially unhappy about having to change schools during the academic year. Concern about the frequent disruptions in their children's education could contribute to a decision to leave the Armed Forces. There was a general and heartfelt plea from parents and young people for fewer and less frequent moves and greater stability in education.

Concerns were also raised about Service children's educational outcomes being lower at some Key Stages than those of children in the general population. However, a close examination of the data and of various research studies indicated that generalisations about Service children's attainment were problematic and needed to be treated with considerable caution and that more rigorous

⁷ Service Children in State Schools (2018) *Service Children Footprint in England, January 2018*

research was needed to understand the factors impacting the educational outcomes of Service children.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Families with children with special educational or additional needs or disabilities (SEND) described a number of challenges exacerbated by military life. Many parents felt that the Armed Forces did not understand the pressures on parents with additional needs children and that these were not taken sufficiently into account. These children were considered to be especially vulnerable, particularly if their family was posted to another country in the UK as different nations had different systems for supporting SEND children. The clear message from all the work that was being undertaken across the UK was the importance of ensuring as far as possible that policy-makers collaborate to find common principles and pathways to support Service children through their formative years.

Young Carers

Young carers also faced challenges and were rarely recognised by the Armed Forces. Unfortunately there was no reliable evidence in 2020 about the numbers of young carers in the UK within Armed Forces families, and they were a hard to reach group. This could make providing support difficult, particularly as Service children move around.

High-level recommendation

The review made a high-level overarching recommendation about support for children in Armed Forces families, which the government accepted:

‘The Governments of the UK to make ‘getting it right for Service children’ a national education priority in all nations of the UK, and take all necessary steps to ensure that Service children, especially those with special education needs and disabilities, are not disadvantaged by Service life’.

Living in Our Shoes Recommendations relating to children and young people:

The report made 31 recommendations relating to the needs of children and young people.

Overall, the review argued for:

- more stability in education with fewer school moves, especially during term-time
- the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) to be primarily based on educational needs
- children to be given some priority on waiting lists to access youth clubs and other activities
- better and more consistent use of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP).

Short term recommendations related to:

- minimising disruptions to education, especially when children have special educational needs or disabilities
- strengthening the SEND Code of Practice and continuity of provision through Education, Health and Care Plans (ECHP)

The Government Response to the recommendations:

The Government accepted 24 recommendations in full and 6 in part.

One recommendation was rejected.

It agreed actions which would:

- work to minimise short-notice postings and ensure smooth school transitions, especially for children with SEND, and promote education stability
- consider the best way to update the SEND Code of Practice to support military families
- improve awareness of the needs of partners and children when planning the career progression and relocation of a Serving partner
- ensure a more consistent interpretation of the Schools Admission Code (consultation was to be published in 2021) and new guidance for families

Living in Our Shoes Recommendations relating to children and young people:

- providing information and guidance directly to parents and children about deployments
- tracking children throughout their educational journey
- encouraging all local authorities to appoint a Service Pupils' Champion
- ensuring appropriate support and information for young carers

In the medium term, recommendations related to:

- informing school and early years professionals about the support needs of children, and developing evidence-based resources
- reconsidering the obligation for children at school in Wales to learn the Welsh language
- including the voices of children in the development of policies and support services which impact on them
- collecting information to understand how dispersed living impacts on time spent apart over and above Harmony guidelines

In the longer term:

- aligning educational management systems across the UK to enable smooth transfers

Recommendations for more robust **research**:

- into children's academic choices, attainment levels, educational outcomes and career progression, and exploration of the factors which might hinder educational outcomes
- to understand the needs of children with caring responsibilities

The Government Response to the recommendations:

- consider how to track military children through education with a marker
- better support children's education and wellbeing through the Service Pupil Premium (SPP)
- appoint a Minister and Director General as Service Pupils' Champions
- provide information to children to help them understand emotions and cope with deployments
- develop evidence-based resources for education professionals through the SCiP Alliance
- increase guidance for military children in higher education
- support young carers in military families
- consider recommendations relating to the CEA
- hear the voices of military children and young people in the development of policies and practices
- consider whether and how to align education management systems across the UK
- prioritise robust research into children's education progression

Theme 3. Partner employment challenges and opportunities

Pursuing a career

Balancing paid employment with bringing up children and navigating a military lifestyle presented a number of additional challenges for non-serving partners and for dual-Serving parents. Non-Serving partners were often restricted in the choice of employment and frequently took jobs that did not make use of their education and/or academic qualifications or technical skills. Non-Serving partners often felt that they had to make a choice between moving with the Serving partner or having a stable base and pursuing their career, but that they could never have both.

Postings overseas presented the most serious challenges. The difficulties faced by partners in securing a satisfying and worthwhile career while moving frequently were clearly drivers in Serving partners' decisions to leave the military. Partner employment emerged as a significant factor in the Serving partner's retention, readiness for Service, and well-being.

The review found a general perception amongst Serving and non-serving personnel that employers discriminated in various ways when military partners applied for jobs, particularly: if they thought that the family would be posted again fairly soon; when spouses/partners' had gaps in their CV and showed evidence of frequent changes of employment; when employers questioned their commitment to a job they might be offered; and when a SFA address indicated a perceived lack of stability.

Childcare

Decisions about whether to work and the kind of job to pursue were often associated with the availability, accessibility and affordability of childcare. The availability of high quality childcare was a challenge for civilian families also, who encountered high costs in some areas, and many of whom struggled to pay for it in order for both parents to work. However, the challenge for military families who moved around on accompanied postings was the obligation to move if they wished to stay living as a family.

Military families were encountering long waiting lists for childcare in some areas. There were waiting lists on most bases that had a nursery/childcare facilities and, for some, the waiting list was between 12 and 18 months. Many Commanding Officers on bases with inadequate childcare facilities expressed their desire to provide more childcare facilities wherever possible, and many could identify buildings on the patch which would be suitable. The review suggested that Commanding Officers on each base, using the Community Needs Analysis and Childcare Sufficiency Reports, should assess: the demand for childcare; whether this could be met locally outside the military estate; and the benefits of establishing childcare and nursery provision on their base. While the Community Needs Analysis was a mandatory action it was not being universally completed.

Scotland was due to introduce an early years' offer in August 2020 with parity with the hours that were currently offered for 3 and 4 year olds in England. Arguably, the most challenging factor for military families was locating childcare services that offered extended hours during the school day and coverage during school holidays. During the review, various initiatives, such as the RAFA Kidz Project which offered childcare training for military spouses and partners, were being developed on military bases to better support childcare and family life. The review suggested that these initiatives should be evaluated with a view to extending effective practice.

Employment initiatives

The MOD readily recognised that mobility and repeated transitions could have a seriously detrimental impact on partner employment and, therefore, had included the employment of spouses and civil partners as one of seven priority areas of activity within the original Families Strategy. At the time of the *Living in Our Shoes* review, a number of other initiatives to support partner employment were underway, including:

- a revised MOD Spousal Employment Support Trial
- Barclays Military Spouses/Partners Programme in HMNB Clyde
- Co-working hubs enabling spouses and partners to work in the same space together near or on military bases
- Recruit For Spouses; Supporting the Unsung Hero; The Independent Spouse; and the RFEA Families Programme
- Forces Families Jobs
- the Employer Recognition Scheme via the Armed Forces Covenant

Studies had shown that being in employment is associated with non-serving partners having lower levels of distress and better well-being and quality of life. Although there were many new initiatives taking place, it was clear that limited awareness of support opportunities among spouses/partners pointed to an urgent need for better information and a more joined-up approach to coordinating them.

Culture change

The review concluded that a culture change and more holistic approach to planning in the military must take account of the whole family and not simply prioritise the Serving person. The loss of confidence and self-esteem and the loss in earnings reported by some partners was clearly having a negative impact on their relationship with their Serving partner, resulting in high levels of stress within the family.

Living in Our Shoes Recommendations relating to partner employment

The review made 17 recommendations in respect of partner employment.

In the short term, the recommendations related to actions which would:

- raise awareness amongst employers of partners' significant skills and expertise
- strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant and require employers to give awards only to those who evidence this commitment
- facilitate continuity of employment when partners are relocated and eliminate real and perceived discrimination
- ensure that JobCentrePlus staff understand the challenges for military partners, and advise them appropriately
- enable non-Serving partners to take advantage of training opportunities available on a base, and to apply for 'gapped' civil service jobs
- support the development of Forces Families Jobs to become the 'go-to' place for high quality information, advice, guidance, training and job opportunities, and partner employment support
- assess the demand for childcare on or near each military establishment; encourage affordable nursery and child care facilities; and enforce mandatory completion of the Community Needs Assessments by Commanding Officers
- work closely with local schools in the provision of before -and after-school clubs-

In the medium term, the recommendations focused on actions which would:

- consider ways to address variations in childcare costs in different bases and localities
- ensure that child care professionals are provided with information/training about the specific challenges of the military lifestyle

The Government Response to the recommendations

The Government accepted all the recommendations and agreed actions which would:

- strengthen the Employer Recognition Scheme and raise awareness of the significant skills partners can offer
- ensure that Armed Forces Champions in JobCentrePlus have a thorough understanding of the needs of military partners and ensure frontline staff understood the specific needs
- consider and evaluate various initiatives to support partners into employment and to upskill them
- support the Forces Families Jobs platform and links to the Civil Service Jobs platform
- address the challenges of childcare, create a Childcare Support Team, roll out wraparound childcare, and address the variations in childcare provision and costs across the UK and elsewhere
- transform and expand the mental health support for military children, establish a holistic approach, and ensure childcare professionals understand the needs of Service children
- facilitate childminding and childcare training for partners supported by the Defence Childcare Strategy
- comprehensively evaluate the Spousal Support Programme and other initiatives

Living in Our Shoes Recommendations relating to partner employment

- take account of the nature of a non-serving partner's employment when relocating the Serving partner
 - review the necessity for frequent relocation and consider whether the current military model could be redrawn without compromising operational effectiveness
- Recommendations about future research:
- discerning the most appropriate evidence-based practice to enhance childcare provision, mitigate any risks, and encourage the sharing of good practice
 - ensuring robust evaluation of individual employment initiatives to assess their effectiveness and impact on retention
 - developing greater understanding of what works best for which military partners, and fostering collaboration across the nations of the UK.

The Government Response to the recommendations

- give greater consideration to the pathways to more joined-up partner employment support and help partners to navigate these
- commission work to consider a more flexible approach to career management of Serving personnel which would take account of partner employment.

Theme 4. Health and Wellbeing: Looking after Military Families

The review drew attention to the differences in the provision of healthcare for Serving personnel and healthcare for their families, and highlighted the challenges family members face as a result of mobility. The primary healthcare, including community mental health of Serving personnel is taken care of by Defence Medical Services (DMS) who provide an all-inclusive, comprehensive package of health services. While this extended to family members living overseas with the Serving person, in the UK families were primarily dependent on the national health services provided by the four nations. Serving personnel who contributed to the review were extremely positive about the healthcare they received but expressed concerns about that received by non-serving family members in the community.

Challenges with accessing healthcare for non-Serving family members

Families raised a number of concerns, including:

- difficulties registering with and accessing GPs and dentists, and moving from one waiting list to another, particularly for mental health services, resulting in discontinuity in healthcare
- repeated assessments for special educational needs and disability
- the slow transfer of patient records
- variations in healthcare provision in different localities and in the Devolved Administrations.

Disruptions to treatment

One of the most difficult and upsetting experiences for non-serving partners and their children was the repeated disruptions to their treatment and care when the Serving person was assigned to another area. Concerns were heightened by the frequency of relocation. In order to support fair access to treatment, the Armed Forces Covenant sets out a number of health commitments for the Armed Forces community which should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen in the area in which they live. Moreover, family members should retain their place on any NHS waiting list if moved around the UK due to the Service person being posted.

Access to healthcare varied across the country and between the four nations of the UK. Moreover, there was a general difficulty in accessing dentists and GPs, such that a more integrated system of medical care was regarded by many families as being enormously helpful. Furthermore, DMS staff indicated that it was extremely difficult to ensure that families received the necessary support from the Chain of Command if civilian GPs felt unable to share concerns with DMS staff and vice versa.

The need for integrated care

A more integrated system of medical care was regarded by many families as being enormously helpful since it enabled doctors to be aware of the issues facing families in respect of the health and wellbeing of each member, an advantage which is lost when non-serving family members are obliged to register with a completely different practice. The Catterick Integrated Care Centre scheme which aimed to provide safe and effective primary care to Service personnel, veterans, reservists, families of Serving personnel and the wider local civilian community, represented an opportunity for the NHS in England and the MOD to work collaboratively to deliver a unique model of healthcare that met the needs of both the military and civilian populations. DMS doctors suggested that there were significant benefits associated with families being able to access their services. The scheme was expected to be operational in 2022/3.

A number of family members and medical officers commented on a general lack of understanding amongst civilian GPs and dentists about the health needs of military families, especially relating to mental health. One of the key challenges was the long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS) in England so that by the time a child got to the top of the list they were moving on to another area and falling to the bottom of the list.

Barriers to seeking help

Military families highlighted the stigma of discussing mental health issues. Families were scared to admit to mental health issues in case this had a negative impact on the Serving person's career prospects. The Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022⁸ recognised that mental health problems were the second most common cause of medical downgrading and discharge in the Armed Forces.

Some Serving personnel had decided to leave the Armed Forces because of their inability to manage and ensure the healthcare needs of their families. It was generally acknowledged that if the Armed Forces were able to reduce the number of postings and enable greater stability in living arrangements, many of the healthcare concerns would disappear.

⁸ MOD (2017) *Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022* MOD

Living in Our Shoes Recommendations relating to the health and wellbeing

The Government Response to the recommendations

The review made 15 recommendations relating to the health and wellbeing of Service families.

The **short term** priorities related to actions which would:

- take account of the healthcare needs of families when posting Service personnel
- provide information, guidance and top tips for delivering healthcare to Service families to all GPs in the UK, implement Serving military family-friendly GP practices, and require GPs to transfer records speedily
- increase awareness and understanding of the health needs of military families
- ensure that an Armed Forces Family Code articulates what is required to deliver appropriate continuity of care and that information is available for families
- ensure that family members are able to retain their relative place on waiting lists when they move, and that GPs and other healthcare professionals support their transition in line with the commitments made in the Armed Forces Covenant
- ensure timely access to CAMHS and paediatric Services and that children and young people maintain their relative place on waiting lists when they relocate.

In the **medium term**, recommendations related to actions which would:

- ensure access to an Armed Forces Care Coordinator or Champion
- allow family members to access Defence primary care services wherever possible and appropriate
- refine a Parental Support Programme and facilitate roll out to bases in all three Services
- break down the stigma of mental health issues

In the **longer term**, recommendations referred to actions which would:

- ensure that future mental health and wellbeing plans include mental health awareness activities and communication strategies
- explore ways in which a range of mental health services could be better integrated to provide holistic care for Serving personnel and their partners and children.

- ensure evaluation of new models of integrated care.

More **research** is needed to understand:

- the complex dynamics of intimate couple relationships and to develop interventions and support
- how mental health issues are affecting children and young people and how their own mental health concerns impact on the wellbeing of their parents and siblings
- the incidence and nature of intimate-partner violence and domestic abuse in Serving military families.

The Government accepted 11 recommendations in full and 3 in part. It rejected one recommendation.

It agreed actions which would:

- provide tips for delivering healthcare to Service families to all GPs and healthcare providers
- transfer healthcare and dental records swiftly when Armed Forces families move
- extend veteran-friendly GP practices to include families of Serving personnel, and GPs to ask if a patient is a member of the Armed Forces community
- expect medical and healthcare professionals across the UK to undertake accredited training in the health needs of Service families
- deliver appropriate continuity of care when families move, ensuring access to an Armed Forces Care Coordinator or Armed Forces Champion
- ensure family members and children retain their place on waiting lists when relocating, in line with the Armed Forces Covenant
- take account of the healthcare needs of family members on relocation
- consider how to extend effective integrated primary care initiatives
- break down the stigma of mental health issues to promote community mental health awareness activities and better integrated mental health for all the family, including the Serving person

Concluding Comment

The review noted that many of the recommendations relating to children's education, partner employment, and health and wellbeing would require support from other government departments and the devolved administrations as well as the MOD and the single Services. The government response indicated that some recommendations could be accepted only in part because they were not considered appropriate or feasible by one or more of the devolved administrations.

The next Briefing summarises the support being offered to Armed Forces families in 2020, indicates the recommendations in *Living in Our Shoes* as to how this could be enhanced, and summarises the government response to the recommendations.

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