



Meeting the Needs of Commonwealth Personnel and Families: A Map of Service Provision

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Foreword – ABF The Soldiers’ Charity

This timely report comes at a point when the British Army is once again recruiting from Commonwealth countries, albeit in small and controlled numbers. It is still important though that we learn from the experiences of the current cohort of serving and ex-serving Commonwealth personnel, and their families, so that we can avoid the future generation suffering the same challenges and disadvantages that they have. As with many issues affecting the ex-Service community, preventing is far better than curing. Whilst responsibility for the former lies squarely on the shoulders of the State, and in particular the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office and other government departments, the consequences of shortfalls in support here can be left to the third sector to resolve. This is placing additional pressure on organizations such as the Army Families Federation and SSAFA at a time of rising overall demand for their services.

We recognize of course that immigration regulations are complex, and that national policies are not immune to the changing winds of politics. But the mechanism whereby the challenges facing Commonwealth families can in part be overcome arguably already exists. Two of the key tenets of the United Kingdom’s Armed Forces Covenant are that no-one should be disadvantaged by their service, and that in some cases special treatment might be appropriate. Viewed through the prism of the Covenant, many of the recommendations in this report are not just good ideas, in some cases they are simply fair treatment.

Elsewhere within this report, there are clear recommendations on improving communications: with potential recruits; with serving and ex-serving personnel; with their families; and with those charged with supporting them in both the public and voluntary sectors. It is a familiar conclusion when working with the Armed Forces Community, that it’s less about needing greater resources, and more about making better use of what is already there.

In closing, and to underline the credibility of this report, I commend the proactive work of the Confederation of Service Charities’ Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster, ably led by the Army Families Federation. Being near the coalface and with considerable equity in this research, the Cluster has been enabled by the funding and independence of the Forces in Mind Trust. I expect, as a Director of the Trust, that this partnering approach will find further outlets. And as the Chief Executive of The Soldiers’ Charity, I hope that the recommendations within the report are carefully considered and acted upon. Which is no more than our Commonwealth serving and former serving personnel, and their families, deserve.

Major General (retired) Martin Rutledge CB OBE
Chief Executive, ABF The Soldiers’ Charity and Director, Forces in Mind Trust

Foreword – Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group

As a relatively new Cobseo cluster, the Foreign and Commonwealth group decided early on that, before we could determine our agenda, we needed to have a better understanding of how we as military charities, along with the MOD and Home Office, are dealing with Serving Personnel, veterans and families from the Commonwealth community.

We are grateful to FiMT for agreeing to fund this research and to the Veterans and Families Institute at Anglia Ruskin University who were commissioned to determine whether current provision of service is meeting the needs of our Commonwealth families.

In addition to being the Chair of the F&C Cluster Group, I am the Policy & Research Director at the Army Families Federation (AFF). The AFF deals with over 2,000 enquiries a year from Serving Personnel, veterans and families who are clearly struggling to understand the immigration process and the implications of immigration costs on their household finances, and the potential impact on their wellbeing and access to wider family support. MOD believe immigration to be a personal issue for families, and military charities rarely help fund visa expenses that can cost a family of four over £9,000.

What is clear from this research is that immigration legislation has a profound impact not only on the individual and the Commonwealth community but the organisations that are trying to support them.

In helping develop the recommendations for this report it became clear that we need to focus our attention this year on ensuring that our Commonwealth families have a clear understanding of what they are signing-up for when joining the Armed Forces.

Immediate priorities for our Cluster is to engage with the MOD to ensure that any new push to recruit Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel is supported with accessible information that clearly outlines the immigration policies and financial implications of bringing themselves and their family to the UK. This support must be ongoing throughout their Service life, and those with welfare functions (including charities) supporting these families must also have a clear understanding of these issues.

Alongside these we must acknowledge that this process can cost thousands of pounds and that our families need support mechanisms put in place that will help them to save the money they need. We will therefore be exploring with the MOD the provision of a savings scheme that will help them do so.

Lastly, we need the MOD and government to acknowledge that the Minimum Income Threshold for bringing family members to the UK not only fails the Families Test but also it fails the principle of the Armed Forces Covenant pledge to treat our families fairly. No person serving our country should be forced to decide which members of their family they have to leave behind.

We look forward to taking these findings to the MOD and working with them to ensure that current provision of service is meeting the needs of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families.

Louise Simpson
Chair Cobseo Foreign & Commonwealth Cluster Group

Executive Summary

This report considers the extent to which current service provision is meeting the needs of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families. The report focuses on data collected by survey from the military charity sector and information collected by telephone interview from experts in the field of service provision.

This analysis identified a number of key issues. Firstly, information gathering and recording (particularly with regard to the number and nature of incoming inquiries and who is making them), in relation to Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families, is limited across the charitable sector. There is restricted understanding, therefore, regarding the number of Commonwealth beneficiaries and this prevents forward planning for service provision.

Secondly, issues of immigration, settlement and visas have a considerable impact on Commonwealth Personnel and families especially due to recent increases in the costs of the application process. The financial pressures this process creates can in turn lead to additional burdens in terms of debt, employment, housing and marital issues, which make transition to civilian life for Commonwealth Service Personnel and their families exceptionally and unnecessarily difficult.

Thirdly, the services provided by the military charity sector are wide-ranging and open to Commonwealth recipients but take up of these services amongst the Commonwealth cohort is indicated to be relatively low. This may be due to the tendency for the Commonwealth community to seek assistance with immigration enquiries whilst many charities offer welfare based services which are not immediately relevant to the needs of the Commonwealth community.

Finally, improvements in service provision have been identified, to co-ordinate provision from the Armed Service through transition and into civilian life, to achieve a more joined-up approach, which recognises and respects cultural differences, supporting those who are assisting Commonwealth Personnel, as well as providing more tailored assistance to the Commonwealth cohort itself.

Recommendations

The following list of recommendations is made on the basis of the findings from this report, and is broken down into specific recommendations regarding immigration issues and other, general recommendations.

Immigration Issues

- **Costs of visas and immigration**

An acknowledgement of the financial impact of increased costs of visas and immigration for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families is sought from the Home Office and relevant Ministerial departments. It could be argued, that

there is scope for addressing the high cost of visas and the complicated settlement process for Commonwealth Personnel and their families.

- **Review of minimum income threshold**

An urgent review of the minimum income threshold is recommended to enable Service Personnel to be able to afford to bring their families to the UK. A further in-depth study is required to investigate the costs of various options and their implications. There may be scope to consider whether – under the auspices of the Armed Forces Covenant and/or the Government’s Family Test – the hardships faced by Commonwealth families (for example, the right to a family life and to live with a spouse and children) equate to disadvantages experienced as a result of service to the British Armed Forces.

- **An incentivised savings plan for Commonwealth Service Personnel**

The introduction of an incentivised savings plan for Commonwealth Service Personnel to save a proportion of their salaries towards future immigration costs for themselves and their families, should be considered through a credit union organisation on an opt-in basis.

- **Introduction of an online information training programme on immigration rules**

An online information training programme should be considered for new recruits from the Commonwealth to complete at the point of recruitment to make them aware, at the earliest opportunity, of the implications of the immigration rules on their ability to bring their families to the UK. This training programme should also inform new recruits that, they cannot rely on bringing family members to the UK to assist with childcare responsibilities, owing to UK immigration rules.

- **Regular information to be provided on immigration rules to Commonwealth Personnel**

Commonwealth Personnel should receive regular information on immigration policy throughout their career in the Armed Services so that they can prepare to cover the costs of their own settlement and that of their families. A more in-depth consideration of the practical delivery of this proposal is required by the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group.

- **Assistance for welfare services advising on visa and immigration issues**

Recognition of the increased workload placed on welfare officers dealing with Commonwealth visa and immigration issues is called for. A review of Armed Forces’ welfare staff arrangements is recommended to ascertain who is best placed to offer such assistance and whether there might be more appropriate avenues of support from specialist advisors who could alleviate some of the burden placed on Armed Forces welfare officers. Alternatively, the Chain of Command might consider providing welfare officers with enhanced specialist training to assist them in dealing with visa and immigration issues.

- **Definitive reference guide to immigration issues**

It is acknowledged that, a definitive tri-Service reference guide is being developed and led by the Army, to assist welfare services in dealing with immigration issues for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families and this will be a welcome and timely resource. Greater clarity is also sought regarding the MoD's obligations towards Commonwealth Service Personnel and the responsibilities of Commonwealth Service Personnel at the end of their period of Service.

General Recommendations

- **Greater collaboration across the military welfare sector**

Increased co-ordination between charities, the Cobseo cluster groups and the Armed Forces and Commonwealth representatives would enable greater joined-up thinking across the sector. Smaller military charities should be given more opportunity to engage with larger charities to develop Commonwealth Service provision.

- **Continuing the work of the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group**

Linked to the above recommendation for greater collaboration across the military welfare sector, this report validates and extends the need for a Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group of Cobseo member organisations. This group will play key roles in coordinating care for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families across the sector, and helping to action the recommendations of this report. The Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group is keen to engage with representatives from other Cobseo cluster groups, to ensure representation both nationally and across the sector.

The Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group will serve to represent the voice of charities dealing with the UK based Commonwealth community's experiences to Government organisations, the Chain of Command and welfare services, in order to ease settlement issues and social integration at the earliest opportunity.

- **Data collection on Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families**

Data on Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families seeking support should be captured at the earliest point of contact with welfare services to assess patterns of need and inform future service provision. This data would be collected not to differentiate but to provide a better understanding of Commonwealth needs. An exploration of the practical delivery of this proposal is required.

- **Communication barriers**

It is acknowledged that health-focused charities, and those charities providing employment advice to Commonwealth veterans and families, experience problems with language barriers owing to the complexity of the issues under consideration. Translation services could be considered for specific purposes where maximum benefit can be achieved. Service delivery organisations may also wish to consider allocating funding to utilise interpreters as necessary.

- **New models of support**

The expansion of volunteer caseworkers who have a greater understanding of welfare needs has been shown to increase welfare output and provide more targeted advice. More visible welfare outlets in city centres serve to attract informal enquiries in a relaxed setting and digital access services enable more informal approaches that appeal to younger veterans and families. It is proposed that the production of an information leaflet on the common issues affecting Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families would raise awareness of Commonwealth matters amongst caseworkers.

- **Research into Commonwealth perspectives**

As described in the introduction to this report, the research undertaken was considered a 'first step' in improving support to the Commonwealth Armed Forces community. Given the paucity of other research in this area, this community remains poorly understood within the context of the British Armed Forces, and further research is called for to increase such understanding, particularly from the perspective of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families themselves.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century, the British Armed Forces recruited Personnel from Commonwealth nations to support British intervention in major global conflicts. Service Personnel from nations that now form part of the Commonwealth contributed to the British war effort during the First and Second World Wars and, in 1961 a campaign was launched to encourage recruitment from Commonwealth nations such as Fiji, coinciding with the end of National Service in the UK. From 1998, a further substantial and ongoing recruitment campaign amongst Commonwealth nations was initiated. This has supported the British Armed Forces by bolstering the numbers of Service Personnel, contributing to global campaigns and bringing specialist skills to the Services. Given the contribution that Commonwealth Personnel make to the British Armed Forces, it is important to consider the additional burdens that they, along with their families, face by offering their service in a foreign country and having to cope with the cultural adjustments, costs and resettlement issues that this entails. Whilst many of the issues (e.g., housing, employment, health and welfare) that occur in transition from Armed Service life to civilian life will be equally applicable to British Service Personnel, the complexities of applying to remain in the UK for Commonwealth veterans and families adds a further dimension to these issues that calls for more specialist advice.

Issues affecting Commonwealth Personnel have been the subject of recent media articles and these have demonstrated the degree of public support for Commonwealth Personnel who have given their service to the British Armed Forces. Members of the public and charities have lobbied MPs and signed petitions to support the applications of Commonwealth veterans and their families who wish to settle in the UK.

To date, no research has been undertaken to understand the services available to support the Commonwealth community in the UK Armed Forces, and very little research has considered how the Commonwealth cohort has adapted to life in Service and beyond into civilian life. In particular there is a lack of understanding regarding the landscape of service provision for this group. Enhanced understanding of the current state of provision is required to be able to target assistance more effectively.

Led by the Army Families Federation, efforts have been made by the military charity sector to improve service delivery for the Commonwealth Armed Forces community, particularly in relation to issues regarding immigration and settlement. The AFF has had to work within the framework of new immigration rules regarding the dependants of Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel, which came into effect in 2013, and thus continues to receive a high volume of enquiries over complex issues of immigration status. The AFF successfully campaigned for a clarification of the regulations regarding the status of spouses and dependants of Commonwealth Personnel, which were incorporated into the new Armed Forces immigration rules in December 2013, and have led to a clearer pathway for Commonwealth families regarding immigration status. However, subtle differences remain regarding the immigration status of spouses of Commonwealth Personnel whilst in-Service, compared to British Service Personnel. The AFF also deals with additional immigration

complications created by issues of domestic violence and divorce among Commonwealth families occurring in-Service, in transition and post-Service. All of these issues hinder a smooth transition to civilian life.

The recent establishment of the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group, instituted by Cobseo and chaired by the AFF, aims to better coordinate the support provided to Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families amongst the various Cobseo members and the UK-based military charities sector. Mapping existing service provision, therefore, was identified by the Cluster Group as an important first step in developing priorities for future work and research in this area. Accordingly, this report aims to enhance the understanding of the welfare support provided to Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families, by providing an overview of current service provision for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families in the UK Armed Forces. The primary focus has been on the military charity sector – both Cobseo member organisations and other bodies – to answer and understand:

- What welfare support is currently being provided to Commonwealth Personnel?
- What needs and issues have been identified by organisations supporting Commonwealth Personnel and families?
- How might support for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families be enhanced?

The project has been funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) and supported by the Army Families Federation and other members of the Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group.

2. Background

2.1 Who makes up the Commonwealth Armed Forces Cohort?

Commonwealth nationals are those from any of the 52 member states that make up the Commonwealth nations. At the time of writing, Zimbabwe and Gambia are no longer part of the Commonwealth but these countries do have significant numbers of soldiers in the British Army.

As a result of both the Act of Settlement 1700 and the Army Act 1955, Service Personnel from the Republic of Ireland are recognised as foreign nationals by the British Armed Forces. The Service Personnel from the Brigade of Gurkhas are also categorised as foreign. Details of the nationalities of Foreign and Commonwealth regular Personnel serving in the British Army as at 1st October 2017 are given in Appendix One.

This project has, therefore, focused on Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families only and has not included an assessment of provision among other foreign cohorts such as Gurkha Personnel and families. The reason for this is that it was felt by the Army Families Federation and wider Cluster groups that, the needs and issues of the Gurkhas are substantially different to those of Commonwealth Personnel and families, owing to the distinct terms and conditions surrounding their service, right to remain and settlement applications.

The British Armed Forces' most recent policy of recruitment of Commonwealth citizens began in 1998 due to a shortfall in British recruiting. Citizens of the Commonwealth are legally entitled to join the British Armed Forces and the recruitment drive removed any requirement for applicants to have lived in the UK for a minimum period of time. Officer recruits did have to be resident in the UK for five years before applying to join the Armed Forces. Owing to the decision to reduce the size of the regular Armed Forces, the policy of recruiting Foreign and Commonwealth Service Personnel was altered in 2014 by reintroducing the five year UK residency requirement for all recruits. This had the effect of reducing Commonwealth applications to the Armed Services but in 2016 the Government removed the five year residency requirement in order to recruit skilled Commonwealth Personnel to specialist Armed Services roles (Greene 2016, p. 196). The AFF has raised concerns that external agencies employed by the Armed Services have over-recruited Commonwealth applicants in this latest recruitment campaign and that the extent and requirements of the roles defined as 'specialist' is unclear. The AFF's Foreign and Commonwealth Team has been put under increasing pressure to advise on visas for these new recruits, some of whom have to wait up to a year in the UK before an Armed Forces vacancy arises. There is also concern that recruits are not receiving adequate or consistent information on their immigration status from external agencies.

The British Army has been the main recipient of Commonwealth recruits (see Section 3: Demographics), with the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force recruiting much lower numbers. However, the issues affecting Commonwealth Service Personnel, which this report outlines, are common to all three Services.

2.2 Previous research with Commonwealth Armed Forces Personnel

There is no academic literature available on the subject of support requirements for Commonwealth Personnel in the British Armed Forces, and no major report or review of Commonwealth recruitment has been published. The paucity of information on provision, not only for serving Commonwealth Personnel but also for Commonwealth veterans and families, demonstrates further the timeliness of this report.

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken at the inception of this project and three key academic studies on the impact of Commonwealth Personnel in the British Armed Forces identified: Greene's (2016): *The Experience of Foreign and Commonwealth Soldiers in the British Army: An Exploration and Methodological Commentary* (London School of Economics); May's (2014): *A Fighting People? Fijian Service in the British Army and the Production of Race and Nation* (University of Chicago); and Ware's (2012): *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country* (Palgrave Macmillan). All three studies consider the recruitment of Commonwealth Personnel to the British Army. There is no equivalent study for the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force available. All three studies share similar findings, highlighting problems associated with immigration, assimilation and settlement for Commonwealth applicants at recruitment, during Service and at the point of transition. All three draw on interviews with serving Commonwealth Personnel and provide an insight into the experience of Commonwealth soldiers within the British Army. However, none of the studies consider provision of services for Commonwealth Personnel or their families in any detail, particularly at the point of transition and resettlement. This report, therefore, explores the under-researched area of service provision for this particular cohort and their families.

2.3 Experiences of Commonwealth Personnel in the British Army

Greene analyses the experiences of Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel who largely feel they are 'a subordinate group' (Greene 2016, p. 170), owing to the impact of immigration issues, visas, travel and cultural differences on their experiences of Army life. Issues of racism and diversity are highlighted in the study and both British and Foreign and Commonwealth soldiers expressed a lack of confidence in reporting issues of diversity because they did not feel that their superior officers possessed the necessary understanding to tackle diversity issues (Greene 2016, p. 144). The difficulties of integration experienced by Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel suggests that this cohort may experience additional adversities as they prepare for transition to civilian life. This is because they may not have gained a full awareness of their immigration status as they leave Armed Service or be aware of the welfare and support services that are available to them at the point of transition and beyond.

Another aspect of Greene's research showed that ethnic minority and Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel felt they were not receiving opportunities for promotion and were not drafted into the roles they had applied for due to racial prejudice and a lack of assimilation within the British Army's cultural traditions (Greene 2016, p. 155-157). This is echoed by both May (2014, p. 244) and Ware (2012, p. 60-64). Greene concludes that whilst not all Foreign and Commonwealth recruits have negative experiences of British Army life, certain types of Foreign and Commonwealth soldiers (e.g., white Foreign and Commonwealth recruits and

officers) integrate better and feel more welcome within the traditions of the British Army than others because of their easier acceptance of British culture (Greene 2016, p. 203).

2.4 Contribution of Fijian Recruits to the British Army

May's thesis analyses the contribution of Fijian recruits to the British Army and highlights the economic impetus that drives Fijians to apply for the Armed Forces, as well as the complex colonial and historical relations between Fiji and the UK which have influenced Army recruitment drives in Fiji. Fijians tend to commit to a full twenty-two years' Service in the Army to qualify for an Army pension, which will allow them to return to Fiji and support their communities (May 2014, p. 232-240). This commitment is 'valued by the British military command and government, for whom high turnover of Personnel incurs significant recruitment and training costs' (May 2014, p. 240). Other nationalities, for example, serve a minimum term of four years enabling them to claim British settlement at the end of their period of Service (May 2014, p. 242).

Importantly, for the purposes of this research, May identifies instances of the British Army's commitment to the welfare of Fijian soldiers and their families. The Army maintains a family liaison and Army support officer in Fiji to assist Personnel and families, and Fijian soldiers credited this local support, alongside that of Unit Welfare Officers, the Royal British Legion and the Poppy Appeal, in supporting those injured on operational tours as well as assisting with personal and domestic issues (May 2014, p. 260-261).

In addition, the formation of the Fijian Support Network in 2009, to champion welfare support for Fijian Personnel and their families, acts as a conduit between Fijian Personnel and the Chain of Command. The Fijian Support Network remains the only Commonwealth organisation in the UK representing a particular nationality within the Armed Forces. The Caribbean Support Network, formed in 2015, represents the interests of those of Caribbean nationality serving in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. The Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League is linked to a large network of Commonwealth veteran support groups but all of these, with the exception of the League, are based in the country they represent and have not, therefore, been included in this research.

2.5 Settlement Issues for Commonwealth Personnel and Families

Ware's study of Commonwealth recruits highlights the contribution of this migrant labour force to modernising Army traditions (Ware 2012, p. 4) and sustaining recent Army deployments (Ware 2012, p. xvii). However, Ware also describes the British Army's inadequate preparation for dealing with the settlement requests of this cohort (Ware 2012, p. xvii).

Ware interviewed families of Commonwealth Personnel and highlights the difficulties they face in terms of integration. The immigration issues affecting Commonwealth families create a sense of isolation, which is exacerbated by language barriers, difficulties in the transfer of qualifications, childcare, employment issues, Service base life and deployment (Ware 2012, p. 203-205). Ware's research found that '... welfare services were unwilling to listen or simply unable to help' (Ware 2012, p. 224). Consequently, the Army Families Federation has drawn

attention to these issues and recognises the dual role of the spouse as 'a support network for their soldier' whilst coping alone with family commitments during deployment periods (Ware 2012, p. 205-208). The AFF created a dedicated Foreign and Commonwealth Specialist to address these concerns in 2009. Due to the demand for the service they offer, AFF employed a second member of staff in 2013 and are currently looking into taking on a third person to handle the consistently high number of enquiries they receive. AFF successfully campaigned for clearer regulations on immigration for Armed Forces families which were incorporated into the new Armed Forces immigration rules, effective from 1st December 2013.

The role of the Army's Unit Welfare Officers is also highlighted by Ware because Foreign and Commonwealth issues have created a new layer of advice work regarding immigration regulations, spousal visas and settlement applications, personal problems and cultural differences (Ware 2012, p. 212-213). The Armed Services have also established a welfare department (PS4) (now Personnel Capability Officers (Pers Cap)) to compile evidence to influence Government policy.

Ware draws attention to the role of Foreign and Commonwealth spouses in supporting their peers, for example, in cases of domestic violence or childbirth. Domestic violence amongst Commonwealth Personnel has been identified as an issue of concern and tends to increase when soldiers return from combat and where soldiers 'feel threatened by their partners' growing independence in their absence' (Ware 2012, p. 213). Victims of domestic violence, however, find it hard to seek help from their husband's employer and as their status to remain in the UK can be threatened by divorce, these issues can remain hidden (Ware 2012, p. 229-230).

Ware sees the British Army as negligent, in saying they support families but not anticipating the responsibility of hiring non-UK nationals into the British Army. Issues of increasing fees associated with visas, immigration and settlement of families, as well as travel prohibitions and travel segregation, have created a sense of resentment amongst Commonwealth Personnel who feel they are not being treated the same as their UK peers (Ware 2012, p. 230-242). Ware concludes: 'My evidence collected during two years' research suggested that the army welfare services throughout the organisation were unevenly informed and ill-equipped to deal with the particular issues raised by being a cultural minority as well as a migrant' (Ware 2012, p. 211).

3. Demographics

Demographic information on the ethnic breakdown of the Regular British Army, from figures compiled in 2017 and supplied by the Army Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, is given below. The Army then employed approximately 7.1% (5,820) of its Personnel from Foreign and Commonwealth nations. Of these, the majority were black, from African, Caribbean countries and from Fiji. They were generally concentrated in the lower ranks. Approximately 58% (3,310) of all Foreign and Commonwealth soldiers were black, and 13.6% (770) were white. Of the Foreign and Commonwealth officers in the Army, 80% (120) were white and 6.7% (10) were black. In 2017, the total number of officers in the British Army was 12,960 and the total number of soldiers was 69,220. Less than 1% of black Foreign and Commonwealth Serving Personnel were officers.

The below table shows Foreign and Commonwealth and UK composition of the Regular Army by ethnicity as at 1st October 2017, the latest date for which statistics are available. (Figures obtained under a Freedom of Information Request from the Army Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, 29th January 2018).

| Ethnicity | Foreign and Commonwealth Soldiers | Foreign and Commonwealth Officers | UK Soldiers | UK Officers | Total Soldiers | Total Officers |
|----------------------|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| White | 770 | 120 | 59,650 | 12,380 | 60,420 | 12,500 |
| Asian | 1,050 | 20 | 1,230 | 90 | 2,280 | 110 |
| Black | 3,310 | 10 | 1,290 | 50 | 4,600 | 60 |
| Chinese | - | - | 60 | 10 | 60 | 10 |
| Mixed | 150 | - | 1,020 | 170 | 1,170 | 170 |
| Other | 370 | - | 190 | 30 | 560 | 30 |
| Unknown | 10 | - | 60 | 40 | 70 | 40 |
| No value held | 10 | - | 50 | 40 | 60 | 40 |
| Total | 5,670 | 150 | 63,550 | 12,810 | 69,220 | 12,960 |

Notes:

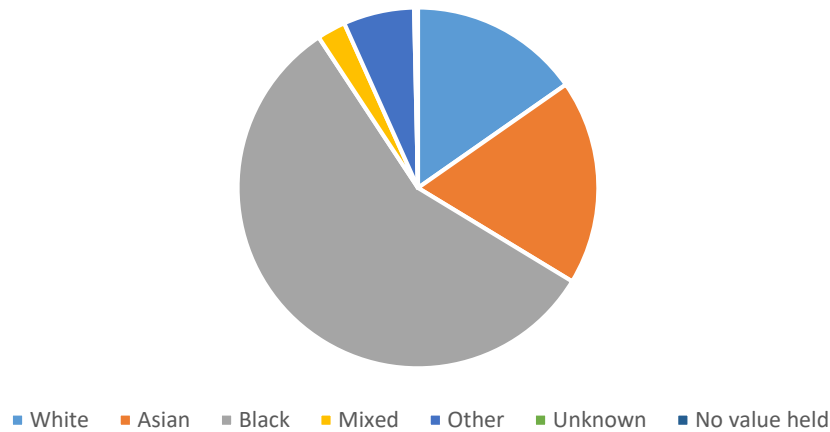
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10, except where specified; numbers ending in 5 have been rounded to the nearest multiple of 20 to prevent systematic bias, ‘-’denotes zero or rounded to zero.
2. Where rounding has been used, totals and sub-totals have been rounded separately and so may not equal the sums of their rounded parts.

The British Army has been the main recipient of Commonwealth recruits, with the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force recruiting much lower numbers. The Royal Navy, for example, employed 519 Commonwealth Personnel in the Naval Service (as at 1st December 2017) and 97.7% were Ratings. Of these, 80% of Commonwealth Personnel in the Naval Service were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and in terms of nationality, 38% were Vincentian, 18.7% were Fijian and 13.1% were South African (statistics supplied by the Naval Families Federation). Details of the nationalities of Foreign and Commonwealth regular

Personnel serving in the British Army as at 1st October 2017, as supplied by the Army Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, are given in Appendix One.

Figure 1

Composition of the Foreign & Commonwealth Cohort in the British Army by Ethnicity, 2017



In 2017, the trained strength of the Regular British Army was 82,180 Personnel. Of these 5.3% of all Army Personnel were British ethnic minority recruits and the Armed Forces are shifting their focus to more effectively target and recruit these sectors of British society.

4. Methodology

The Veterans and Families Institute at Anglia Ruskin University worked directly with the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group, to identify significant gaps in knowledge and information regarding Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families in the UK.

This report addresses four key questions in relation to service provision for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families:

1. What data/demographic information do organisations collect regarding Commonwealth Personnel and families?
2. What services are being provided and by whom?
3. What needs are Commonwealth Personnel and families presenting with, and what needs are unmet?
4. What are the relevant policy frameworks affecting Commonwealth Personnel and families?

In order to answer these questions, three sources of data were collected and analysed. These included a desktop review of organisations and available services, an online survey of Cobseo members and other organisations, and telephone interviews with experts from the military third sector with a special interest in supporting the Commonwealth Armed Forces community. Independently of this research project, a survey of welfare officers and HIVE officers was conducted by the Army Families Federation http://aff.org.uk/linkedfiles/aff/aff_in_action/research_papers/UWO_F&C_Command_Brief_FINAL.pdf. We refer to the results of this survey in this report in order to provide further detail on the experience, developments and limitations of current Armed Forces' welfare provision.

4.1 Desktop review

We first conducted a desktop search and review of publically available information pertaining to service provision for Commonwealth Personnel and families. This search included reviews of academic literature, articles and reports as well as website information, and was intended to establish (a) a 'baseline' level of information on service provision and (b) what information is freely and publically available to Commonwealth Personnel and families.

The main website sources included those provided by the Army Families Federation, who provide dedicated webpages for Foreign and Commonwealth issues and direct support via their trained Personnel. The Armed Forces Welfare Services and HIVE information network provide a comprehensive overview of information and website links for issues affecting all members of the Service community. Other website resources include the Ministry of Defence guidance on immigration and transition for Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel and the Ministry of Defence/UK Government providing advice for veterans. Individual Commonwealth countries provide guidance via the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League

website and individual UK charities offering services to Armed Forces Personnel, veterans and their families can be located via the Cobseo website.

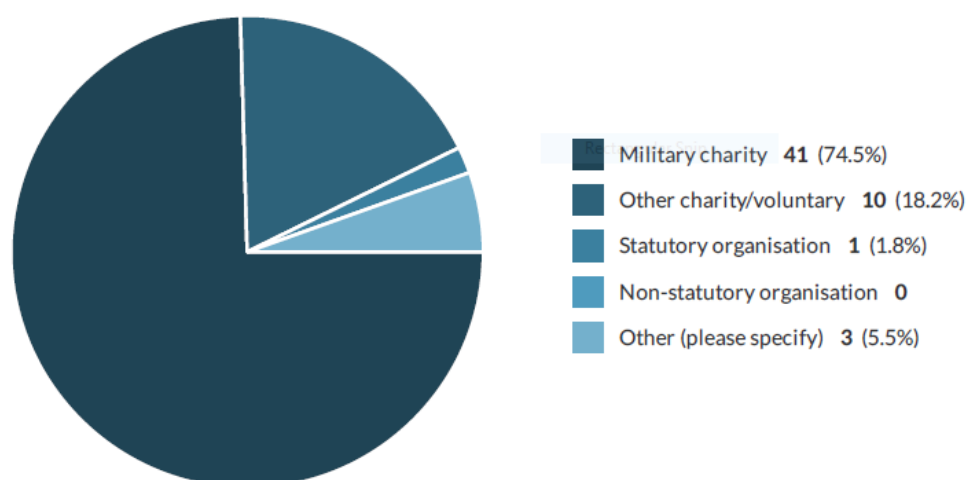
The advice offered by these websites focuses on immigration and transition issues and also contains advice on divorce and domestic violence. However, owing to the complex nature of both immigration and family issues of this nature, the level of persistence, resilience and commitment required from Commonwealth Personnel, veterans or their families to locate advice and overcome such issues may appear challenging.

4.2 Online survey

An online survey was designed using the Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) survey tool and was delivered primarily to Cobseo member organisations (and other organisations identified as relevant to service provision for Commonwealth Personnel and their families). The purpose of the survey was to identify key trends and emerging issues across the military charitable sector with regard to service provision for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families. The survey was thus used in order to develop a broad overview of the 'landscape' of service provision.

The survey was emailed to 181 potential participants and 55 respondents (30%) completed the survey. The survey questions and quantitative analysis of the results can be found at Appendix Two. Of those charities that did not complete the survey over 50% were small, single purpose charities whose association with the Commonwealth cohort was minimal. An analysis of the charities that responded to the survey showed that 74.5% were military charities; 18.2% were other types of charity/voluntary organisations; 1.8% were statutory organisations and 5.5% were other types of organisations such as friendly societies or pressure groups. The survey showed a split between services offered across the UK nationally (34.4%) and overseas (27.1%) with a number of charities offering regional assistance in the UK (26.1%) or offering digitally based services (6.3%). Overseas support in this context was largely being offered to overseas Personnel, veterans and families living abroad as a whole, rather than specific cohorts such as the Commonwealth sector alone.

Figure 2 *Survey respondents by type of organisation*



A survey of welfare officers and HIVE officers by the Army Families Federation provided information on the common issues arising for Commonwealth Service Personnel and their families whilst serving in the Armed Forces, and sheds light on the work of the welfare officers and HIVE officers in dealing with these enquiries. Welfare officers are members of the Armed Services and serve in all units. Their role is to assist Service Personnel and their families with integration and to provide ongoing personal support and advice on a wide range of welfare and personal issues. The HIVE Information Centre officers provide information from the Armed Forces to Service Personnel and assist the Armed Forces community with welfare enquiries, as well as feeding back concerns to the Chain of Command.

A summary of the data from these surveys has been published in the Army Families Federation Command Brief at:
http://aff.org.uk/linkedfiles/aff/aff_in_action/research_papers/UWO_F&C_Command_Brief_FINAL.pdf

A combination of key issues and statistics from each of these surveys has been incorporated into the results below to provide a comprehensive overview of provision across the sector.

4.3 Telephone interviews

Whereas the online survey was used to develop a high-level overview of the service provision landscape, telephone interviews with 'sector experts' (i.e., those with a particular role or interest in supporting Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families) were used to obtain more detailed reflections on the current state of service provision and to help unpack the core issues affecting the Commonwealth Armed Forces community.

Those selected to take part in the interview process covered a wide range of expertise in the field including representatives from military charities, Commonwealth interest groups, charities dispensing funding to military charities, health charities, charities supporting veterans and families, and representatives from the three Armed Services and/or their associated organisations. Eleven organisations contributed to the interviews and these are listed in Appendix Four together with a list of the interview questions. All interviewees

consented to participate in the interviews and their responses were anonymised for the dissemination of the research. Interviews were analysed for content and key ideas and recurrent themes identified. The findings were then collated with the survey results to highlight patterns of provision, to recognise areas of common need and to identify key areas for improvement.

4.4 Analysis

Data from the online survey is presented using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data collected during the interviews (together with the open response survey questions) was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a six-step process for identifying key findings in qualitative research. These include 1) data familiarisation, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Results from the thematic analysis of telephone interviews were combined with statistical analysis from the online survey, and a distillation of the key themes from the AFF welfare officer and HIVE officer survey.

The analysis identified the following issues as being the major themes to emerge from the research: (a) information gathering; (b) immigration and settlement; (c) current service provision; (d) perceived needs; (e) potential improvements in service provision.

5. Results

This section of the report provides an overview of the core themes identified from the analysis. Recommendations are included where relevant throughout (a full list of recommendations is also produced at the end of the report).

5.1 Information gathering

Evidence from both the interviews and the online survey results showed that the numbers of charities that collected or reported information on beneficiaries from Commonwealth countries was relatively low with only 23.7% recording such data. This is a reflection of standard data capture methods where ethnicity is recorded as a routine statistic rather than country of origin or Commonwealth status. Several charities noted, however, that the lack of recorded data on the Commonwealth cohort made it difficult to assess Commonwealth needs specifically or to assess the numbers of the Commonwealth cohort who had sought, or were in receipt of, charitable support. Additionally, only 5.5% of those charities that responded to the survey make this data publically available, which prevents full statistical analysis of the number of Commonwealth beneficiaries across the sector.

Figure 3 *Charities recording data on Commonwealth beneficiaries*

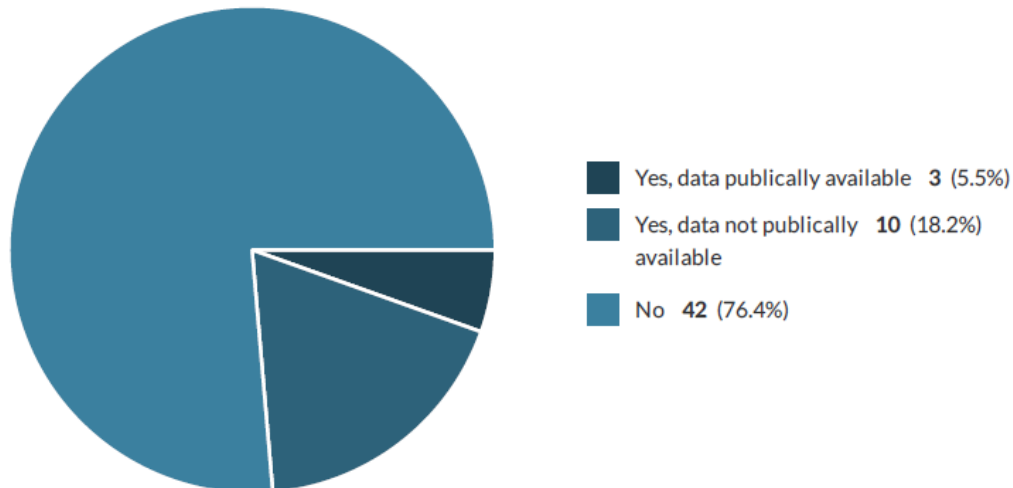
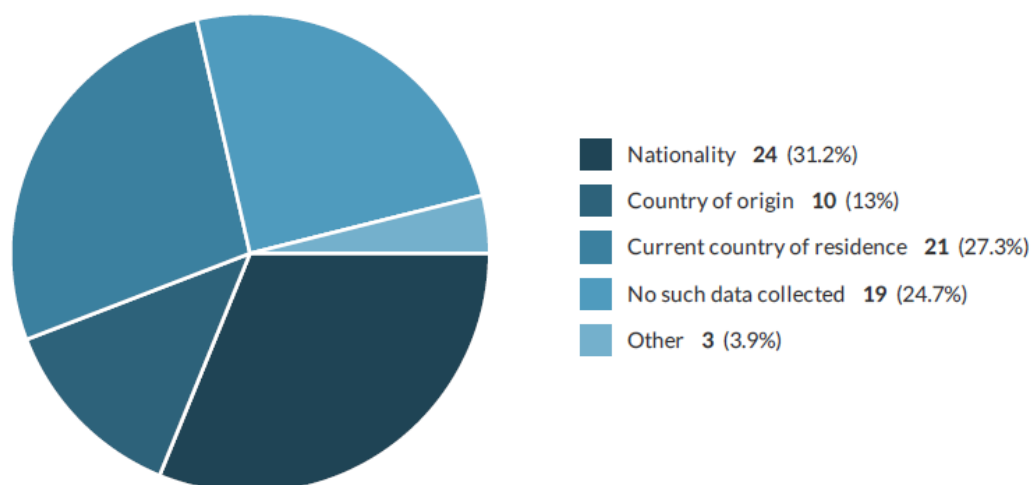


Figure 4 *Type of information gathered by Armed Forces charities as part of standard data capture*



Instead, charities were responding to Commonwealth needs on the basis of trends and evidence of heightened workload, which indicated where demand for services had increased, rather than evidence gathered through data collection. It was, therefore, recognised by several charities that better information gathering and interpretation were required in their own organisations and across the sector. There was also recognition that military charities and other organisations could improve the ways in which information is shared across the sector. Where specific Commonwealth cases were being referred across organisations, case notes were being shared with the consent of the Commonwealth applicant and according to standard Armed Forces consent form procedures. However, owing to Data Protection regulations, data collected on beneficiaries as a whole was not shared across military charities and organisations and was not targeted for Commonwealth beneficiaries.

The provision of membership data, data relating to the number of cases involving Commonwealth beneficiaries, statistics on Commonwealth Personnel leaving the Armed Forces, and Home Office records on their decision to remain in the UK or return to their country of origin, were all recognised as data elements that would assist in planning and targeting support for the Commonwealth cohort both in the UK and overseas. Charities also agreed that data on the numbers of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families who are seeking support (for example, through the Veterans Gateway) needs to be captured at their earliest point of contact with welfare services, as once these enquiries have been signposted to individual charities, the data will be dissipated and difficult to collate. It is suggested, therefore, that organisations that are providing initial advice and signposting to Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families could capture data on the numbers of enquiries received from the Commonwealth cohort and this data, combined with Home Office and Armed Forces statistical data, could inform service provision across the sector and enable better planning.

RECOMMENDATION: Data on Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families seeking support should be captured at the earliest point of contact with welfare services to assess patterns of need and inform future service provision. This data

would be collected not to differentiate but to provide a better understanding of Commonwealth needs. An exploration of the practical delivery of this proposal is required.

5.2 Visas, immigration and settlement

The most prevalent issues identified among the Commonwealth Armed Forces community by all interviewees and survey participants, were those associated with the cost of visas to enter and remain in the UK and the complexities of the immigration rules. Respondents considered that these issues were responsible for creating additional pressures within Commonwealth families, such as difficulties in finding employment, delaying treatment for health concerns, increases in debt and a loss of educational opportunities. As one respondent commented: 'All aspects of life unravel' in the face of dealing with the complications of the immigration process and the length of time that applications can take. This can mean that Commonwealth Personnel and veterans are unable to deal with health issues or employment matters until their immigration status and that of their families is confirmed.

The effect of immigration policy, governance and regulatory issues on the Commonwealth community drew the following survey response: 'Lack of understanding of current policies, processes and procedures by relevant authorities ... result in unintended consequences that penalise Foreign and Commonwealth individuals seeking assistance'.

5.2.1 Policy frameworks

The policy frameworks affecting the Commonwealth cohort stem from the effects of the changes to the Armed Forces immigration rules in December 2013. This has confirmed the existing requirement for those Commonwealth Personnel seeking settlement in the UK to have served a four year probationary period before being eligible to apply for settlement and (at the time of writing) to be earning an individual salary of £18,600, or to have a salary of £22,400 if they are seeking to bring a spouse and child to the UK, or to provide a further £2,400 for each additional child (referred to as the 'minimum income threshold'). In line with UK policy on immigration, restrictions have also been introduced on parents and grandparents of Commonwealth families migrating to the UK unless they require long-term personal care not available in their own country. Knowledge of the English language and of 'Life in the UK' are also requirements for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families seeking to become UK citizens, in accordance with UK policy for all those applying for citizenship.

Commonwealth Personnel and their families are supported by the commitment provided by the Armed Forces Covenant which attempts to ensure that they should receive respect, support and fair treatment, and should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.

5.2.2 The Personnel Capability (Pers Cap) (formerly PS4(A)) Unit Guide to Supporting Non-British Nationals

The British Army has published guidance notes (The Pers Cap Unit Guide to Supporting Non-British Nationals) to assist the Chain of Command, units and Non-British Service Personnel to manage their service life and transition to civilian life. An induction and welcome brief to Commonwealth Personnel and their families is available to units and the Guide encourages units to 'engage, signpost and support' Non-British nationals and their dependants, particularly in dealing with key concerns such as immigration, transition and discharge.

The focus of the Guide is to ensure that Non-British nationals and their families are made aware of immigration issues and their responsibilities therein. Whilst serving, Commonwealth Personnel are exempt from UK immigration control. However, it is the responsibility of Commonwealth Personnel to keep their dependants' passports and visas up to date and, to prepare to cover future costs of visas following discharge, should they wish to remain in the UK. Veterans have two years to apply for settlement after discharge. Since 2013, when the new Armed Forces immigration rules were introduced, families joining Commonwealth Service Personnel must meet minimum income thresholds and initial entry English language standards. Spouses can only apply for settlement after five years' residence and only if the marriage is still subsisting.

It is recommended that Commonwealth Personnel receive regular information on immigration policy throughout their career in the Armed Services so that they can prepare to cover the costs of their own settlement and that of their families. The complications of the immigration system, however, means that Commonwealth Personnel frequently struggle to fully understand the legal implications whilst also having to deal with these issues in conjunction with an Armed Forces career in a foreign country. Misinformation, confusion and stressful situations can easily ensue especially where families are concerned.

The Pers Cap Unit Guide also provides information on other Commonwealth issues that arise such as relationship breakdown and domestic and child abuse. Relationship breakdown is treated in the same way as for British citizens but can mean that Commonwealth spouses and dependants become subject to immigration issues as a result. Clearly this can have far-reaching implications for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families.

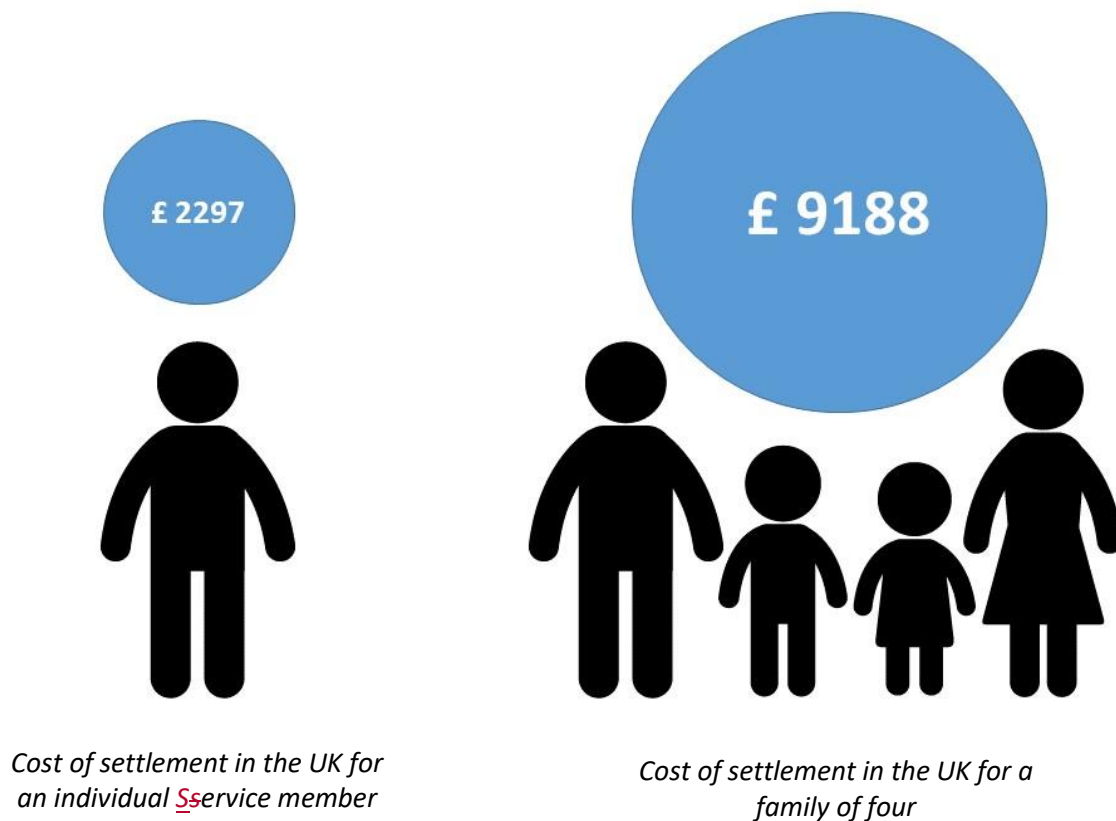
The Guide states explicitly that domestic and child abuse are not tolerated in the UK and will be treated as criminal offences. Following a successful campaign by AFF, concessions for victims of domestic abuse were included within the new Armed Forces immigration rules in 2013. Spouses who meet the requirements can now apply to settle in the UK and can apply for additional financial support whilst the application is being processed. The advice provided in the Guide on these matters, therefore, provides an indication of some of the main topics affecting Service Personnel and their families and the concerns raised by welfare officers.

Nonetheless, the Pers Cap Unit Guide does not appear to be fully utilised as a source of information on immigration matters. The AFF's survey of welfare officers and HIVE officers showed that 46% of welfare officers and 37% of HIVE officers sometimes referred to the Guide where it was relevant to a particular issue but 4.5% of welfare officers and 16% of HIVE

officers never used the Guide (although it should be noted that it may not fall within their remit to do so), and 9% of welfare officers and 42% of HIVE officers had never heard of the Pers Cap Guide. 40% of welfare officers and 5% of HIVE officers do use the Guide regularly but the data suggests that the Guide is not fulfilling requirements or is too generic to deal with individual cases. Welfare Officers' calls for additional training on immigration issues further suggests that the Pers Cap Guide is not meeting their needs in terms of dispensing advice. Recent discussion between Army Personnel Capability and the Home Office will result in the publication of new guidance documents on immigration for the Commonwealth cohort in 2018, which will be a welcome and timely means of providing clarity and early intervention in these matters.

RECOMMENDATION: Commonwealth Personnel should receive regular information on immigration policy throughout their career in the Armed Services so that they can prepare to cover the costs of their own settlement and that of their families. A more in-depth consideration of the practical delivery of this proposal is required.

Figure 5 *Circles show the cost of settlement in the UK for an individual Service member and for a family of four as of April 2017. Circle sizes are proportional to illustrate the additional financial burden faced by Commonwealth Service Personnel, and Commonwealth Personnel wishing to bring family members to the UK*



5.2.3 Increasing visa and immigration costs

There was universal agreement between interviewees of all sectors that the issue of immigration legislation has a major impact on the Commonwealth community and those trying to advise and assist them. This has become even more prevalent since the changes to the immigration rules in 2013 introduced a minimum income threshold, English language entry requirements for families joining Service Personnel and the ability to support regular annual increases in the application cost of bringing family members to the UK. Large annual increases in visa costs have meant that the Commonwealth cohort need to undertake considerable forward financial planning to cover these costs both during and at the end of their term of service.

Figures supplied by the Army Families Federation (see figures below) show that visa costs have increased by 580% over seven years between 2010 and 2017, whilst the cost of family members remaining permanently in the UK has increased by 173% for adults and by 1,680% for children over the same period. Conversely, the Armed Forces Pay Review Body Annual Report (April 2015), Appendix 5, para 21, shows that the 'take home pay' for a private soldier increased by 10.7% (RPI) over the corresponding period. In addition, a Commonwealth soldier who remained on the basic pay of OR-2 (pay range 1-4) for a Private (up to £22,255, British Army pay scales 2017-18) could not meet the minimum immigration income threshold of £22,400 to bring a spouse and child to the UK.

Figure 6

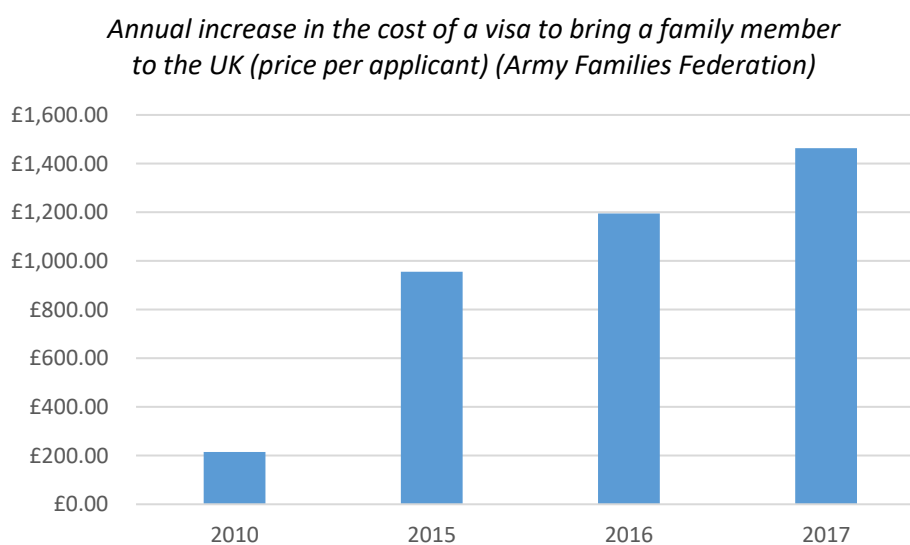
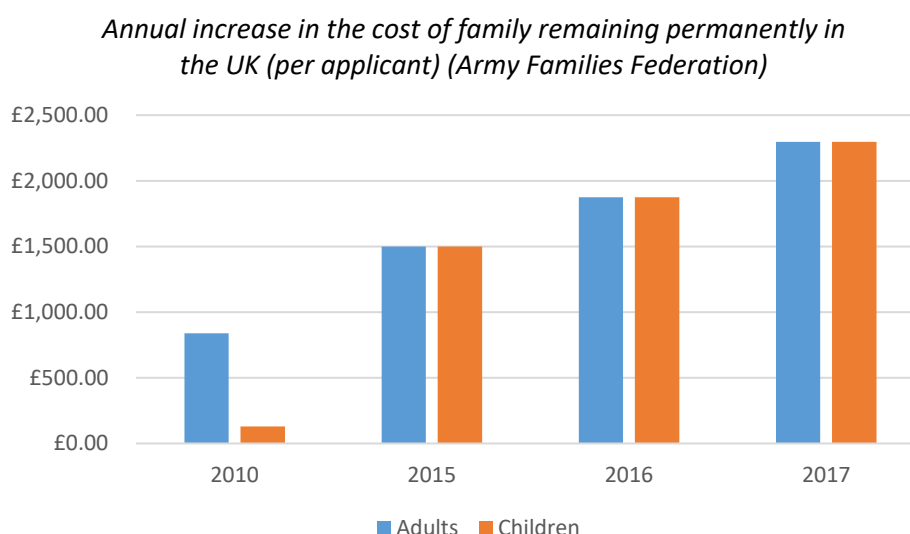


Figure 7



Unfortunately, many Commonwealth Personnel and veterans are unprepared to meet these increased costs and the issues that arise from ignoring advice, receiving misleading information from peers or simply neglecting to prepare, create many associated difficulties that may be brought to the attention of the charities and organisations involved at a point of crisis. Further complications arise because family members of some Commonwealth Service Personnel and their families will be subject to immigration rules prior to 2013, according to when the spouse came to the UK. Thus families of more recent recruits who came to the UK to join Service Personnel since December 2013 are subject to the new immigration rules. This causes confusion because within their peer groups, the Commonwealth cohort can receive misinformation relating to the earlier period of immigration regulations.

Commonwealth Service Personnel also have the added pressure of sending money home to families and communities in their country of origin, paying back sponsors who supported their recruitment costs, paying intermediaries to assist them with their applications for settlement and the high costs associated with living in cities such as London, where the greatest proportion of Commonwealth veterans and families settle. Welfare officers who were serving overseas encountered additional problems with the cost of flights for Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel and their families because the Armed Forces are only committed to paying for the cost of flights to the UK, although this allowance can be put towards the cost of a flight to the country of origin.

Several interviewees expressed a view that the annual increase in visa costs was too expensive and that the UK's immigration policies failed to take account of Commonwealth Armed Forces Personnel who at the point of transition are considered alongside other immigrants, with no distinction made for their period of service. The numbers applying for settlement from the Commonwealth cohort are relatively low compared to immigration numbers as a whole, but interviewees recognised that this is a difficult and contentious issue, which makes no concession for the Commonwealth cohort.

The AFF's survey of welfare officers also demonstrated a great deal of sympathy for the plight of the Commonwealth cohort and the costs that are imposed on them with regard to immigration and visas:

'The cost of visas and naturalisation is high and can be ill afforded by Ptes or LCpls.'

'These people are serving the crown and moving where they are needed. They shouldn't have to pay for visas!'

There is broad agreement, therefore, that the increased costs of immigration on Commonwealth Service Personnel and veterans, who have offered their lives to serve in the UK Armed Forces, is a heavy burden in addition to the complexity of the immigration rules. It is recognised that Ministerial approval to grant discretion relating to the minimum income requirement to allow soldiers to bring families to the UK will be a slow and lengthy process, with no guarantee of a successful outcome. Nonetheless, the Home Office and Ministerial decision makers should be kept apprised of the situation and consider an exceptional dispensation for the relatively small numbers of Commonwealth Armed Forces Personnel and their families who wish to settle in the UK. Alternatively, a reduction in the cost of visas for the families of Commonwealth Service Personnel might assist in enabling Commonwealth Service Personnel to save for the future costs of settlement. A more detailed statistical analysis from the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office on Commonwealth veteran settlement in the UK would be required to assess these issues in full and target support more effectively. Additionally, it has been suggested by interview respondents from the military charity sector that one way of alleviating the crisis of debt affecting Commonwealth communities might be to introduce an incentivised savings plan option for Commonwealth Service Personnel, to save a proportion of their salaries towards immigration costs for themselves and their families at the end of their period of service.

Several interviewees expressed a degree of support for the idea that Service charities should join together to lobby on this issue and draw attention to the complications it creates for the Commonwealth community. The issue of family settlement, in particular, was seen as a matter that was all too frequently ignored in preference for the immigration status of Service Personnel. The combined pressure of charitable organisations could highlight this concern and perhaps secure a means of better assistance and support through the immigration process if change to the immigration rules cannot be realised. This would also have the benefit of encouraging earlier intervention, decreasing the pressures experienced by Commonwealth Personnel and families, and lowering the costs to charities of assistance before the point of crisis and its associated debts are reached.

There is consensus, therefore, that immigration is the major issue affecting the Commonwealth community and other issues such as debt, employment, housing and family breakdown can emanate from the pressures of immigration. It is apparent to many charitable organisations that it is necessary for the individual concerned to solve their immigration issues before any other support work can take place in health, welfare, family or employment matters.

RECOMMENDATION: An acknowledgement of the financial impact of increased costs of visas and immigration for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families is sought from the Home Office and relevant Ministerial departments. It could be argued, that there is scope for addressing the high cost of visas and the complicated settlement process for Commonwealth Personnel and their families.

RECOMMENDATION: An urgent review of the minimum income threshold is recommended to enable Service Personnel to be able to afford to bring their families to the UK. A further in-depth study is required to investigate the costs of various options and their implications. There may be scope to consider whether – under the auspices of the Armed Forces Covenant and/or the Government’s Family Test – the hardships faced by Commonwealth families (for example, the right to a family life and to live with a spouse and children) equate to disadvantages experienced as a result of service to the British Armed Forces.

RECOMMENDATION: The introduction of an incentivised savings plan for Commonwealth Service Personnel to save a proportion of their salaries towards future immigration costs for themselves and their families should be considered through a credit union organisation on an opt-in basis.

5.2.4 The effect of immigration issues on Welfare Services

Charities that participated in this research agreed that more clarity was needed from the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Services Welfare organisations on immigration, to make it clear to Service Personnel and their families of the implications of the Armed Forces immigration rules at the earliest opportunity and throughout their Service careers. Charities recommended that earlier intervention, before immigration issues reach crisis point, would not only assist Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families but would reduce costs to those charities involved in relieving immigration crisis issues. The existence of veterans and families in crisis also suggests that there are larger numbers of the Commonwealth cohort who may be close to crisis but not yet admitting their need and consideration should be given to their likely requirements and included in forward planning.

The AFF and the Fijian Support Network have raised further concerns that the effect of Brexit for those serving in Europe, and the recent recruitment of specialised Commonwealth Personnel, who do not appear to have been informed about the implications of immigration costs at recruitment, will cause further complications if attempts to prepare them for the immigration process are not undertaken at the earliest opportunity and continued through their Service careers. Home Office preparations to meet the end of five year residency visas in 2018 would also assist charities and organisations in planning ahead to meet future immigration complications. It was further noted that the focus of immigration is frequently directed towards Service Personnel rather than their families and this leaves families unprepared for the changes to the immigration rules introduced in 2013. For example, a particular difficulty for Commonwealth Naval Personnel has arisen from family members being unable to enter the UK temporarily to assist with childcare responsibilities when Service Personnel are deployed for nine months at a time. It has been suggested, therefore, that an

online information programme, which Commonwealth Service Personnel have to complete on recruitment, would ensure that they are made aware of the implications of the immigration rules on their ability to bring their families to the UK. A similar online programme has to be completed on discharge and this would complement this programme and ensure that the message is transmitted from the earliest point of service.

RECOMMENDATION: An online information training programme should be considered for new recruits from the Commonwealth to complete at the point of recruitment to make them aware, at the earliest opportunity, of the implications of the immigration rules on their ability to bring their families to the UK. This training programme should also inform new recruits that they cannot rely on bringing family members to the UK to assist with childcare responsibilities owing to UK immigration rules.

One of the costs to welfare services dealing with visa and immigration matters is the effect on staff capacity and working time. Immigration issues take up a considerable proportion of working time for welfare officers, HIVE officers and Service Personnel and for organisations such as the Army Families Federation's Foreign and Commonwealth Specialist. The AFF survey of welfare officers and HIVE officers illustrates that 62.5% of welfare officers and 36% of HIVE officers spend up to 20% of their working time dealing with Foreign and Commonwealth issues and 26% of welfare officers spend 21-40% of their time on these issues. Given the relatively low proportion of Foreign and Commonwealth Service Personnel relative to British Service Personnel, suggests that the time-consuming nature of complicated issues such as immigration is having a disproportionate impact on the time capacity of welfare officers and HIVE officers. The Army Families Federation's Foreign and Commonwealth Specialist has also reported that the organisation often struggles to cope with the increasing numbers of enquiries from new Commonwealth recruits (following the British Armed Forces' recent recruitment drive), existing Personnel, veterans and families as well as immigration enquiries from welfare officers and HIVE officers and charities dealing with the Commonwealth community. In order to cope with demand, the AFF had to hire a second member of staff in 2013 and is currently looking at hiring a third.

It was further recognised that welfare officers may only stay in post for two years and the regular change of Personnel and knowledge levels prevents continuity of advice on in-depth issues such as immigration to Service Personnel. This is also reflected in the survey analysis of welfare officers themselves, who admitted to struggling to understand the complexities of immigration requirements and the difficulties of imparting this in lay terms to Commonwealth enquirers:

'I feel out of my depth sometimes as I do not have enough knowledge of this subject [of immigration]. I do not think Foreign and Commonwealth soldiers are given the correct information at recruitment stage. I would be interested to know if there is any campaign taking place to get these regulations changed for the military. If not this is going to become a major problem for the British Army.'

Other welfare officers called for additional training or simplified guides to be able to assist enquirers more efficiently. It is possible that the burden placed on welfare officers could be

relieved by a consideration of alternative support to assist their work and maintain continuity of guidance. One possibility might be to provide regular assistance from specialist advisors on visa and immigration matters to welfare officers. Respondents to the survey of welfare officers called for additional resources such as more internet resources, further assistance from the Army Families Federation, such as 'a helpdesk either at Army HQ level or within SSAFA/AFF that welfare officers could call for first hand advice as opposed to trying to trawl through policy documents to find an answer'. Another suggestion was to provide: 'A flow chart guide on the steps of settlement and visa application'. One other option, therefore, would be to provide a 'one-stop advice shop' to be operated by military welfare services or the military charity sector, to help provide a consistent line of advice to military organisations and charities on visa and immigration issues for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families.

RECOMMENDATION: Recognition of the increased workload placed on welfare officers dealing with Commonwealth visa and immigration issues is called for. A review of Armed Forces' welfare staff arrangements is recommended to ascertain who is best placed to offer such assistance and whether there might be more appropriate avenues of support from specialist advisors who could alleviate some of the burden placed on Armed Forces welfare officers. Alternatively, the Chain of Command might consider providing welfare officers with enhanced specialist training to assist them in dealing with visa and immigration issues.

5.3 Current service provision

The majority of charities that responded to the online survey indicated that their services were open to all (82.8%) and they did not wish to discriminate between UK and Commonwealth cohorts. As one respondent commented: 'We do not differentiate between veterans of different nationalities and aim to treat all veterans ... with the same respect and professionalism'. However, some charities had found that after an initial enquiry, Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families were less likely to follow up on the assistance offered. This was seen as being due to cultural differences which make it difficult for some members of the Commonwealth community to accept charitable assistance and also due to the practical difficulties of making an application for support. Once again, this is not dissimilar to problems encountered by UK veterans in accessing services, for example, with a recent report for the Forces in Mind Trust ("Stigma and barriers to care in service leavers with mental health problems", 2017) indicating that poor initial experiences with service delivery were off-putting for veterans seeking further care.

The online survey results confirmed a low take-up rate of charitable services by Commonwealth Personnel and their families, with 31% of charitable organisations suggesting that their services were under-subscribed in relation to Commonwealth Personnel and their families. This low take up rate by Commonwealth Personnel and families may be due to the type of charities that responded to the survey, many of which were focused on serving the social and welfare needs of veterans and their families in terms of housing, health, employment and financial support. Alternatively, this may reflect a mismatch between the services that Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families were seeking and those which

particular charitable organisations were able to provide. Indeed, few of these charities were dealing with some of the main issues identified as affecting Commonwealth Personnel and families by the AFF welfare officer survey, such as meeting the requirements of the immigration rules and costs of visas to enter and remain in the UK. Among those who were dealing with such issues, 25% of organisations indicated that their service was oversubscribed by Commonwealth beneficiaries.

Despite the perceived low take up rates of charitable assistance, 14.5% of charities had appointed dedicated staff to assist the Commonwealth cohort, whilst the remaining 85.5% of charities relied on their existing staff to field all enquiries. Those who had appointed specialist staff were more likely to receive referrals regarding Commonwealth concerns (27.3% receiving very frequent or frequent referrals). Those charities without staff dedicated to Commonwealth issues rarely or never received referrals (47.3%).

The majority of interviewees agreed with the evidence of the survey that the take up of charitable welfare support amongst the Commonwealth cohort was low. This was perceived to be related to cultural differences according to the tradition of their societies, and that the Commonwealth cohort were not as familiar with the concept of seeking charitable welfare. However, this adherence to tradition may mean that they miss out on the assistance that is due them. Future primary research with the Commonwealth Armed Forces community may be one way to discern attitudes toward help-seeking. It was also suggested that the Commonwealth cohort tend to seek assistance for specific issues such as visas and immigration and tend to focus on those organisations that can offer assistance in these areas. One respondent suggested that some British charities operate from a very formal military setting which can be off-putting to a Commonwealth applicant. Several interviewees recognised that if the Commonwealth applicant encountered an initial difficulty in applying for support, they would be unlikely to follow up the process. It was suggested, therefore, that more education and understanding of cultural differences for both the Commonwealth cohort and for British support agencies might help in enabling welfare benefits to be more equitably shared.

Charities dealing with those Commonwealth and ex-Commonwealth veterans who returned to their country of origin recognised that overseas provision, compared with that offered in the UK, is inadequate. The work of the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, for example, has traditionally relied on donations with the aim of providing 'a meal a day' to ex-Commonwealth veterans residing in their country of origin. Concern was also expressed that those Commonwealth Service Personnel who return to their country of origin at discharge may be missing out on vital health support which is not available in their own countries and that a duty of care is owed to these individuals if a system can be established to identify their health issues.

Interviewees from the charitable sector were in agreement that there is no shortage in services available to veterans and their families but that these services may not always be correctly targeted towards supporting the veteran Commonwealth community. An important distinction was made between the military welfare services which provide assistance to Service Personnel and families, the Veterans Gateway services which assist in transition to civilian life, and the military charity sector which tends to deal with veterans and their

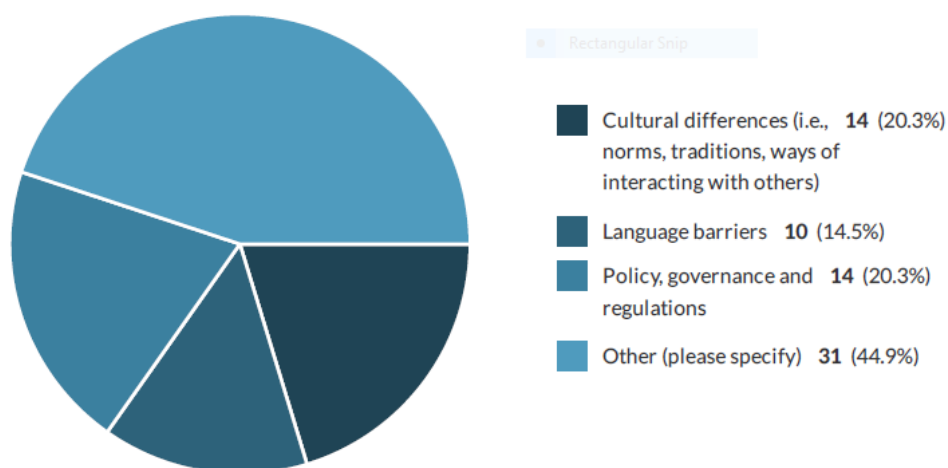
families. This potentially explains why the BOS Survey of Cobseo charities identified their main recipients as being veterans and families rather than Service Personnel. There was also a recognition that whilst the larger charities such as the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, and ABF: The Soldiers' Charity work in close proximity and are linked in terms of sharing information, awareness of policy changes and future planning, smaller charities do not benefit from such links and may not be so aware of changes in Commonwealth recruitment, policy and immigration legislation. It is more difficult, therefore, for smaller charities to target and plan their services to meet the needs of a relatively small group of Commonwealth veterans and their families. Greater sharing of information across the charitable sector could assist smaller charities in their remit to help veterans and families, and the existence of the Cobseo membership network provides a vital network to support this broader sharing of information. One further suggestion was to include a dedicated discussion forum on Foreign and Commonwealth matters at military charity conferences and training days, or in charity newsletters, to engage charities in these issues and disseminate information.

RECOMMENDATION: Increased co-ordination between charities, the Cobseo cluster groups, the Armed Forces and Commonwealth representatives would enable greater joined-up thinking across the sector. Smaller military charities should be given more opportunity to engage with larger charities to develop Commonwealth Service provision.

5.4 Causes of need amongst Commonwealth Service Personnel, Veterans and Families

There was broad agreement amongst survey respondents and interviewees alike that policy, governance and regulations (including immigration matters) were a major underlying cause of the issues affecting Commonwealth Personnel and their families. However, alongside this, issues of cultural differences (20.3%) and language barriers (14.5%) were recognised by charities as issues potentially affecting the Commonwealth cohort as they adjust to civilian life.

Figure 8 *Sources of Commonwealth support needs identified by survey respondents*



Language barriers were perceived as hampering understanding of official documentation on immigration, for example, or preventing access to health services where more specialised language abilities were required. It was suggested by health charities that resources for interpreters might be provided on an individual case basis in the health sector, where language assistance is seen as good practice in meeting the requirements on equality of access to healthcare. Nevertheless, several charities asserted that Commonwealth Service Personnel had already attained a level of competence in language skills in order to effectively undertake their Armed Services duties, which would allow them to transition to civilian life. Language issues amongst Commonwealth families, however, were potentially more problematic because they have fewer opportunities for integration within wider society. Charities also considered that translation services might be offered for specific purposes where maximum benefit can be achieved.

Communication barriers were also perceived as having an impact on spouse employment and preventing spouses from achieving their full employment potential. Commonwealth spouses were more likely to take up lower paid roles such as care work and cleaning jobs owing to language barriers; the temporary nature of work where deployment of the Service Person reduced permanent employment opportunities; and the lack of recognition by UK employers of educational qualifications obtained in Commonwealth countries. The problem of achieving parity in educational qualifications was considered a major difficulty for Commonwealth veterans and their families by charities assisting with employment issues. It was reported that the Commonwealth cohort tend to expect their qualifications will be equivalent to UK qualifications but find that employers are not prepared to accept that their qualifications have parity. Consequently, veterans and families are then faced with the problem of having to undertake further study to achieve the accepted level of qualifications before they can achieve higher paid jobs and more skilled work. One organisation also noted that the impact of the costs of immigration and visas is having an impact on the education of families of Commonwealth Personnel. As a consequence of these financial pressures, children's education can be overlooked or simply prove too costly in terms of dependants acquiring a university education, for example. Access to a university education is also denied to dependants where visas or immigration requirements have not been met.

The issues with immigration status and the effect that this has on families and employment prospects was also made apparent by one survey respondent: 'The other issue ... is around the Leave to Remain in the UK for veterans and their families after discharge. One of the Fijian veterans [we] supported [with employment] hadn't sorted out his Leave to Remain before he left and was then left with little support to complete his paperwork and legal bits. We struggled to find help for him with that and his family had to return to Fiji whilst he sorted it out which took ages'.

A further concern recognised by interviewees and survey respondents was the issue of domestic abuse across the British Army (Gray 2016). To reiterate, there was no indication that issues of domestic abuse were more prevalent among Commonwealth families than British ones, but rather, immigration pressures can create further complications around this problem for Commonwealth spouses. Victims are often reluctant to come forward owing to the difficulty of approaching their spouse's employer and the potential loss of financial stability,

housing and visas. Abuse can also take the form of Service Personnel withholding visa applications as a form of control over their spouse.

It is notable that marital issues, substance abuse and housing needs were seen as lower priority issues by the welfare officers and HIVE officers who completed the AFF's survey. This may be due to some welfare officers not being qualified to deal with such issues and 80% of welfare officers and 82% of HIVE officers indicated that they chose to signpost enquirers to other organisations to receive more specialised support. Nevertheless, the complicated nature of marital issues for Commonwealth families is apparent in the request of one respondent for: '[A] definitive 'quick reference' guide giving practical detail as to what is and is not available to spouse in regard to available benefits for onward settlement within the UK on breakdown of marriage; also Foreign and Commonwealth soldier's obligation to spouse should spouse return to country of origin. Also obligations/issues if soldier is UK citizen but spouse is Foreign and Commonwealth.' The AFF Foreign and Commonwealth team has suggested that their expertise in this area might be of assistance in producing a definitive reference guide to assist welfare officers and HIVE officers in their understanding of visa and immigration matters and enable them to impart this information to Commonwealth Service Personnel more readily. The production of a definitive guide could also be of assistance to military service charities dealing with immigration issues for Commonwealth veterans and families. It is noted that recent discussions between Army Personnel Capability and the Home Office will result in the publication of new guidance documents on immigration for the Commonwealth cohort in 2018, which will be a welcome and timely means of providing clarity and early intervention in these matters. In addition, greater clarity is sought regarding the Ministry of Defence's obligations towards Commonwealth Service Personnel, and the responsibilities of Commonwealth Service Personnel at the end of their period of service, as this is currently unclear under the terms of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Pers Cap Unit Guide.

RECOMMENDATION: It is acknowledged that health-focused charities and those charities providing employment advice to Commonwealth veterans and families experience problems with language barriers owing to the complexity of the issues under consideration. Translation services could be considered for specific purposes where maximum benefit can be achieved. Service delivery organisations may also wish to consider allocating funding to utilise interpreters as necessary.

RECOMMENDATION: It is acknowledged that a definitive tri-Service reference guide is being developed and led by the Army to assist welfare services in dealing with immigration issues for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families and this will be a welcome and timely resource. Greater clarity is also sought regarding the MoD's obligations towards Commonwealth Service Personnel and the responsibilities of Commonwealth Service Personnel at the end of their period of service.

5.5 Perceptions of welfare needs among Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families

This section highlights the needs of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families *as perceived by service providers* (as opposed to Commonwealth communities themselves; see recommendation for future research). Issues that were regularly identified by respondents to the online survey as affecting Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families included healthcare, welfare, signposting and housing. This may well reflect the needs of Commonwealth veterans and families, because the charities that responded to the survey largely deal with veterans and families rather than Service Personnel. The remit of these charities regarding healthcare, housing, welfare and signposting also suggests that whilst these issues may appear to be regular Commonwealth concerns, this may not accurately reflect actual Commonwealth needs, and may not represent those of Commonwealth Service Personnel at all. The demand for signposting services may also indicate the extent to which immigration and settlement enquiries have to be signposted elsewhere by charities who are not equipped to deal with the complexity of these issues.

To meet this demand, some charities have designed or adapted their services to meet the needs of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families. Of these, the most common services being adapted were signposting (10%); welfare (10%); healthcare (8.6%); settlement and immigration (7.1%); domestic abuse/violence support (5.7%); financial (5.7%); and housing (4.3%). Housing charities identified specific concerns related to the Commonwealth cohort: 'Most Foreign and Commonwealth veterans apply for housing in the south and south-east of the UK, which is the most demanded area generally' and also highlighted the issue that 'Foreign and Commonwealth service leavers find it even harder than their indigenous colleagues to be housed by local authorities due to the lack of geographical connection'.

A number of other issues affecting Commonwealth Personnel have also been identified by the charity respondents to the survey, including resettlement post-Service (4.9%), financial issues (4.1%), legal issues (4.1%), employment (4.1%), social work and support (5.7%), education and training (2.5%), settlement and immigration (4.9%), domestic abuse/violence support (3.3%), and language barriers (1.6%). One respondent highlighted the difficulties of immigration for Commonwealth families, who receive less consideration than those who have served: 'The specific issue we see tends to revolve around settlement for both veterans and, more often, their families'.

Mental health difficulties and mental health support were also mentioned as Commonwealth concerns, as one respondent commented '... although services may be there [for] Personnel and their families, there may be challenges regarding access [to these] services – especially when it comes to mental health'. Another respondent drew attention to the 'lack of a co-ordinated approach to the needs of veterans in particular those with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health'. Pension related issues, flight bookings and child bereavement counselling were also identified as issues affecting the Commonwealth cohort. One further issue that was identified by one interviewee was the prevalence of applications for compensation for non-freezing cold injuries on the part of the Commonwealth cohort, which raises health concerns that have not been met for this group.

Other concerns identified in the online survey included lack of financial support; substance misuse; and the standard of written English when dealing with the recruitment process. The lack of a co-ordinated approach between the Armed Forces, charities and health organisations to the needs of veterans was also seen as a significant factor in creating additional issues for Commonwealth Personnel and their families. As a member of a front line service delivery team commented: 'More needs to be done at the point of leaving the military to ensure every veteran understands that they can contact the Royal British Legion, their Cap Badge Welfare Association, Combat Stress etc.'

Whilst the majority of these issues would also be applicable to British Service Personnel as they adapt to civilian life, the complexities of settling Commonwealth veterans and families adds a further dimension to the issues that arise from transition.

5.6 Potential improvements in service provision

All of the interviewees from charitable organisations recognised a need for greater clarity of information to show the pathways that Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families could take to access welfare services. The provision of information pathways would also be of assistance to welfare officers and HIVE officers, transition programmes and charities themselves, to be able to signpost effectively where they are unable to provide direct assistance within their own provision. Greater co-ordination between the Armed Forces, service charities and health charities would also be of benefit to provide a more joined-up approach to welfare provision. One suggestion was that there could be a central co-ordination point for signposting, supported by the Armed Services and charitable organisations, which would assist Service Personnel, veterans and their families whilst having the beneficial effect of aligning these organisations more closely together. The establishment of the Veterans Gateway service is providing the first point of contact for veterans to seek advice on welfare services but it may need to diversify its service to accommodate the needs of Commonwealth veterans and families more effectively.

Several charities offered useful models to establish a broader access route to welfare services. Some charities have expanded their pool of volunteer caseworkers and have introduced accredited training for all caseworkers in order to provide more targeted welfare advice. Other charities have established more visible welfare outlets in city centres, which serve to attract informal enquiries in a relaxed setting. Digital access to welfare services also enables more informal approaches that appeal to younger veterans and families. It is suggested that the production of an information leaflet on the common issues affecting Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families would help to raise awareness of Commonwealth matters amongst military charity caseworkers.

Another aspect of improving service provision is to enhance understanding amongst the military charity sector and the Armed Forces of how cultural differences create barriers amongst the Commonwealth community to obtaining welfare and prevent communication of need until a crisis point is reached. It was suggested that the creation of a more open atmosphere for discussion and understanding would enhance communication, prevent problems escalating and enable a reciprocal consideration of UK cultural issues. A network

of specialists who can represent the Commonwealth community's experiences and act as a conduit between Government organisations, the Chain of Command and welfare services would help to build communication links and help to ease immigration issues and other social concerns at an earlier stage to assist integration and transition. The formation of the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group could provide the forum to achieve this broader consideration of Commonwealth issues.

Commonwealth communication networks could also follow the example of the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League whose long-standing network of volunteers provide up-to-date information on issues affecting ex-Commonwealth veterans in 49 countries. Despite the difficulties encountered in terms of travel and communication in some of the world's poorest countries, the League's co-ordinated scheme of assistance is utilised by the Royal British Legion and ABF: The Soldiers' Charity to link to Commonwealth veterans overseas and to get assistance to the point where it is needed. This suggests that better provision could be offered to Commonwealth veterans who have returned to their country of origin via this scheme. It also suggests that a similar model could be operated in the UK to reach Commonwealth veterans and their families, although this will require the collaboration of the Home Office and Commonwealth networks, to provide statistical information on the numbers and location of Commonwealth veterans and families who settle in the UK, to assist them in their transition and integration within the UK.

There was also an emphasis on the part of those charities supporting charitable projects that these should aim to integrate Commonwealth groups within UK society rather than serve to isolate this cohort within their own communities. Projects to support events and groups within existing infrastructures that bring communities together, are therefore seen as preferable to projects for the benefit of a single nationality, for example. This was also seen as a concern within housing provision whereby those charities providing housing receive high levels of applications from Commonwealth communities, which might be to the detriment of establishing mixed communities within community housing projects.

One further area that has not been considered within the scope of this study is the impact of immigration and associated issues on those Service Personnel who joined as Commonwealth Reserve Personnel. These recruits are assessed for immigration purposes according to the civilian salaries and jobs that they hold but this alienates them from military support networks and distances them from charitable support at the end of their service.

RECOMMENDATION: The expansion of volunteer caseworkers who have a greater understanding of welfare needs has been shown to increase welfare output and provide more targeted advice. More visible welfare outlets in city centres serve to attract informal enquiries in a relaxed setting and digital access services enable more informal approaches that appeal to younger veterans and families. It is proposed that the production of an information leaflet on the common issues affecting Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families would raise awareness of Commonwealth matters amongst caseworkers.

RECOMMENDATION: Linked to the earlier recommendation for greater collaboration across the military welfare sector, this report validates and extends

the need for a Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group of Cobseo member organisations. This group will play key roles in coordinating care for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families across the sector, and helping to action the recommendations of this report. The Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group is keen to engage with representatives from other Cobseo cluster groups to ensure representation both nationally and across the sector.

The Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group will serve to represent the voice of charities dealing with the UK based Commonwealth community's experiences to Government organisations, the Chain of Command and welfare services in order to ease settlement issues and social integration at the earliest opportunity.

6. Conclusions

This exercise in mapping service provision for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families shows that there is a wide variety of services available for this cohort to access. There is also considerable goodwill to assist a sector which has been burdened by broader Government changes in the way immigration, in particular, is viewed and regulated. Nevertheless, there is recognition that welfare assistance needs to be better targeted by taking account of the cultures of the Commonwealth cohort and developing better co-ordination between the Armed Forces Welfare Units and the charitable sector and between charities themselves. Access to improved statistics on this cohort would also enable welfare assistance to be more efficiently directed. At the same time, the Commonwealth community must be encouraged to engage beyond its own peer groups to access up to date information, and improved communications would help to achieve this. A number of participants in this research have drawn attention to a contradiction between the tenets of the Armed Forces Covenant and the emphasis on the importance of the Armed Forces Family unit in supporting Service Personnel; and the complexities of the immigration rules, which can undermine Commonwealth family cohesion. In addition, there is a much wider welfare consideration regarding those members of the Commonwealth cohort who have elected to return to their country of origin. Ware is correct in asserting that, whilst further research is needed to capture the lived experience of individual Commonwealth soldiers and their families, it cannot be seen as being fully representative from a UK perspective alone (Ware 2012, xviii).

The most pressing and dominant issue that has been identified in this research, however, is that of the effects of the complexities of immigration on Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families. As a consequence, this report makes a number of specific recommendations on immigration matters, with the aim of prioritising and reducing the impact of immigration issues on members of the Commonwealth cohort at the earliest opportunity. If some of the complexities of immigration can thus be overcome for the Commonwealth cohort it will then enable other elements of military charity service provision to play an earlier role in assisting with the employment, health and welfare needs of Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families at the point of transition and beyond into civilian life.

A number of the issues highlighted in this report are major issues that will require broad discussion and reconsideration of existing policies. However, contributors to this study were also keen to stress that even small changes would enhance quality of life for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families. The following recommendations, therefore, offer some potential ways forward for rethinking service provision for the Commonwealth cohort.

7. Complete list of recommendations

The following list of recommendations is made on the basis of the findings from this report, and is broken down into specific recommendations regarding immigration issues and other, general recommendations.

Immigration Issues

- **Costs of visas and immigration**
An acknowledgement of the financial impact of increased costs of visas and immigration for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families is sought from the Home Office and relevant Ministerial departments. It could be argued, that there is scope for addressing the high cost of visas and the complicated settlement process for Commonwealth Personnel and their families. (Section 5.2.3, p.26)
- **Review of minimum income threshold**
An urgent review of the minimum income threshold is recommended to enable Service Personnel to be able to afford to bring their families to the UK. A further in-depth study is required to investigate the costs of various options and their implications. There may be scope to consider whether – under the auspices of the Armed Forces Covenant and/or the Government’s Family Test – the hardships faced by Commonwealth families (for example, the right to a family life and to live with a spouse and children) equate to disadvantages experienced as a result of service to the British Armed Forces. (Section 5.2.3, p.26)
- **An incentivised savings plan for Commonwealth Service Personnel**
The introduction of an incentivised savings plan for Commonwealth Service Personnel to save a proportion of their salaries towards future immigration costs for themselves and their families should be considered through a credit union organisation on an opt-in basis. (Section 5.2.3, p.26)
- **Introduction of an online information training programme on immigration rules**
An online information training programme should be considered for new recruits from the Commonwealth to complete at the point of recruitment to make them aware, at the earliest opportunity, of the implications of the immigration rules on their ability to bring their families to the UK. This training programme should also inform new recruits that they cannot rely on bringing family members to the UK to assist with childcare responsibilities owing to UK immigration rules. (Section 5.2.4, p.29)
- **Regular information to be provided on immigration rules to Commonwealth Personnel**
Commonwealth Personnel should receive regular information on immigration policy throughout their career in the Armed Services so that they can prepare to cover the costs of their own settlement and that of their families. A more in-depth consideration

of the practical delivery of this proposal is required by the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group. (Section 5.2.2, p.24)

- **Assistance for welfare services advising on visa and immigration issues**

Recognition of the increased workload placed on welfare officers dealing with Commonwealth visa and immigration issues is called for. A review of Armed Forces' welfare staff arrangements is recommended to ascertain who is best placed to offer such assistance and whether there might be more appropriate avenues of support from specialist advisors who could alleviate some of the burden placed on Armed Forces welfare officers. Alternatively, the Chain of Command might consider providing welfare officers with enhanced specialist training to assist them in dealing with visa and immigration issues. (Section 5.2.4, p.29)

- **Definitive reference guide to immigration issues**

It is acknowledged that a definitive tri-Service reference guide is being developed and led by the Army to assist welfare services in dealing with immigration issues for Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and families and this will be a welcome and timely resource. Greater clarity is also sought regarding the MoD's obligations towards Commonwealth Service Personnel and the responsibilities of Commonwealth Service Personnel at the end of their period of service. (Section 5.4, p.33)

General Recommendations

- **Greater collaboration across the military welfare sector**

Increased co-ordination between charities, the Cobseo cluster groups, the Armed Forces and Commonwealth representatives would enable greater joined-up thinking across the sector. Smaller military charities should be given more opportunity to engage with larger charities to develop Commonwealth Service provision. (Section 5.3, p.31)

- **Continuing the work of the Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group**

Linked to the above recommendation for greater collaboration across the military welfare sector, this report validates and extends the need for a Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group of Cobseo member organisations. This group will play key roles in coordinating care for Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families across the sector, and helping to action the recommendations of this report. The Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group is keen to engage with representatives from other Cobseo cluster groups to ensure representation both nationally and across the sector.

The Cobseo Foreign and Commonwealth Cluster Group will serve to represent the voice of charities dealing with the UK based Commonwealth community's experiences to Government organisations, the Chain of Command and welfare services in order to ease settlement issues and social integration at the earliest opportunity. (Section 5.6, p.37)

- **Data collection on Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families**

Data on Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families seeking support should be captured at the earliest point of contact with welfare services to assess patterns of need and inform future service provision. This data would be collected not to differentiate but to provide a better understanding of Commonwealth needs. An exploration of the practical delivery of this proposal is required. (Section 5.1, p.21)

- **Communication barriers**

It is acknowledged that health-focused charities and those charities providing employment advice to Commonwealth veterans and families experience problems with language barriers owing to the complexity of the issues under consideration. Translation services could be considered for specific purposes where maximum benefit can be achieved. Service delivery organisations may also wish to consider allocating funding to utilise interpreters as necessary. (Section 5.4, p.33)

- **New models of support**

The expansion of volunteer caseworkers who have a greater understanding of welfare needs has been shown to increase welfare output and provide more targeted advice. More visible welfare outlets in city centres serve to attract informal enquiries in a relaxed setting and digital access services enable more informal approaches that appeal to younger veterans and families. It is proposed that the production of an information leaflet on the common issues affecting Commonwealth Service Personnel, veterans and their families would raise awareness of Commonwealth matters amongst caseworkers. (Section 5.6, p.37)

- **Research into Commonwealth perspectives**

As described in the introduction to this report, the research undertaken was considered a 'first step' in improving support to the Commonwealth Armed Forces community. Given the paucity of other research in this area, this community remains poorly understood within the context of the British Armed Forces, and further research is called for to increase such understanding, particularly from the perspective of Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families themselves. (Section 6, p.40)

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Appendix One

The nationalities of Foreign and Commonwealth regular Personnel serving in the British Army as at 1st October 2017. (Information obtained under a Freedom of Information Request from the Army Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, 29th January 2018).

Antiguan
Australian
Bahamian
Bangladeshi
Barbadian
Belizean
Botswanan
Cameroonian
Canadian
Citizen of Fiji
Citizen of Seychelles
Citizen of Sri Lanka
Citizen of St Christopher (St Kitts) and Nevis
Dominican
Gambian
Ghanaian
Grenadian
Guyanese
Indian
Irish
Jamaican
Kenyan
Malawian
Malaysian
Maltese
Mauritian
Mozambican
Namibian
Nepali
New Zealander
Nigerian
Pakistani
Papua New Guinean
Rwandan
Sierra Leonean
South African
St Lucian
Swazi
Tanzanian
Tongan
Trinidad and Tobago Citizen
Ugandan
Vincentian
Zambian
Zimbabwean

Appendix Two

Mapping Service Provision for Commonwealth Personnel and Families: Summary of BOS Survey Results

Responses and trends from all survey participants:

55 responses, response rate 30%, survey sent to 181 participants

Type of organisation:

- 74.5% are military charities; 18.2% are other charities; 5.5% are other types of organisations; 1.8% are statutory organisations.

Funding:

- 28.1% receive charitable donations; 17.8% receive funding from other charities; 14.4% receive funding from private donors; 11.6% receive covenant funding; 11.6% receive other forms of funding; 7.5% are funded as contract services; 6.2% receive Government funding; 2.7% are voluntary organisations and receive no funding.

Beneficiaries:

- 21.5% are veterans; 16% are Service Personnel; 16% are families of Service Personnel; 15.3% are families of veterans
- Families are the largest beneficiaries
- Commonwealth beneficiaries are low in number: Commonwealth Service Personnel (0.6%); Commonwealth veterans (2.5%); Commonwealth families of Service Personnel (1.2%); Commonwealth families of veterans (1.2%)

Services to beneficiaries:

- 34.4% of charities provide services in the UK as a whole and these are evenly split across the UK; 27.1% of charities provide services overseas; 6.3% of charities provide digitally based services

Data:

- 31.2% of charities collect data on nationality; 27.3% collect data on country of residence; 13% collect data on country of origin; 24.7% do not collect this form of data
- 78.4% record this data for their standard data capture
- 76.4% do not record Commonwealth beneficiaries or make this data publically available; 18.2% report data but do not make it publically available; 5.5% report on data and make it publically available

Commonwealth beneficiaries include those from Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Fiji, Cyprus and Brunei, S Africa, Ghana, Gambia

Staff:

- 14.5% have staff to assist Commonwealth Personnel
- 85.5% do not have dedicated staff to assist Commonwealth Personnel

Services offered:

- 13.1% offer Signposting; 12.7% offer Welfare; 9.5% offer other services; 8.1% offer healthcare; 8.1% offer housing services; 7.7% offer employment and training; 5.9% offer community integration; 4.5% offer financial services 4.5% offer resettlement post-service; 4.1% offer social work and support; 3.6% offer administrative services; 3.6% offer lobbying/campaigning; 2.7% offer Criminal justice support; 0.9% offer legal assistance; 4.5% offer financial services/support
- 2.3% offer advice on domestic abuse; 1.4% offer advice on settlement and immigration; 0.5% offer advice on language issues

Services adapted to Commonwealth beneficiaries:

- 82.8% offer services open to all
- 3.4% offer all services designed for Commonwealth beneficiaries
- 6.9% offer some services adapted for Commonwealth beneficiaries
- 5.2% offer some services designed for Commonwealth beneficiaries
- 1.7% all services adapted to Commonwealth beneficiaries

Which services have been adapted?

- 8.6% have adapted Healthcare services; 10% have adapted Welfare services; 10% have adapted signposting services; 7.1% have adapted settlement and immigration services; 5.7% have been adapted for domestic violence or 0% have adapted their services for language; 4.3% have adapted housing services; 4.3% have adapted education and training; 4.3% have adapted community integration; 4.3% have adapted lobbying services; 5.7% have adapted financial support; 2.9% have adapted employment services; 2.9% have adapted social work and support; 2.9% have adapted criminal justice support and 1.4% have adapted legal services; 1.4% have adapted resettlement services; 1.4% have adapted administrative services. 22.9% have adapted other services eg: rehabilitation; translation; clinical mental health services; friendship/comradeship; activities; training, education and motivation programme; children of the deceased

Service use by Commonwealth beneficiaries:

- 43.8% Service is about right
- 31.3% Service is not being taken up
- 25% Service is oversubscribed

Lack of services identified/unable to meet Commonwealth Personnel needs:

- 9.8% Healthcare; 11.5% Housing; 9.8% Welfare; 6.6% Signposting; 4.9% Settlement and immigration; 1.6% Language; 3.3% Domestic Violence; Employment 4.1%; Education and training 2.5%; Resettlement 4.9%; Financial 4.1%; Legal 4.1%; Social work and support 5.7%; Community integration 0.8%; Lobbying 1.6%; 23.8% Other eg: translations; respite breaks for families; mental health needs; digital access; pension related issues; insufficient volunteers to assist with enquiries; substance misuse; ticket limitations; English language support, mental health and suicide – lack of access to services that would have helped; child bereavement counselling; funeral finance

How frequently do the organisations receive referrals re: Commonwealth Personnel?

- 16.4% Very frequently; 10.9% Frequently; 18.2% Rarely; 18.2% Very rarely; 10.9% Never; 12.7% Unknown; 10.9% N/A; Other 1.8% (unknown numbers of referrals)

Underlying causes for Commonwealth Personnel needs:

- 20.3% Cultural differences; 20.3% Policy, governance and regulations; 14.5% Language barriers
- 44.9% Other: Lack of financial support; mental health difficulties; housing problems due to lack of geographical connection; lack of a co-ordinated approach on needs of veterans especially those with substance misuse/mental health issues; language issues; leave to remain issues; recruitment problems with written English and application form.

Appendix Three

Survey of Welfare Officers and HIVE officers undertaken by the Army Families Federation, July 2017.

Website reference:

http://aff.org.uk/linkedfiles/aff/aff_in_action/research_papers/UWO_F&C_Command_Brief_FINAL.pdf

Appendix Four

Mapping Service Provision for Commonwealth Personnel and Families: Telephone Interview Questions

Introduction and background

Thank you for giving your time to talk about service provision for the Commonwealth Armed Forces community. My questions are designed to highlight further detail on the issues relating to service provision for this cohort, and to enable us to elaborate on the information we gathered previously from the wider survey. So the reason we've asked to speak to you is because you have been identified as someone who may have a particular insight into the issues relating to service provision for Commonwealth Personnel, Veterans, and their families. [Please note that if you have already completed the survey, some questions will sound familiar – our intention here is to obtain further, more detailed information from experts in the sector]

Please could we begin with you describing in what capacity your organisation deals with the Commonwealth Armed Forces community, and what your role is in supporting them?

Thank-you. There are now five themes / groups of questions we'd like to focus on in this interview, including:

- 1) Information about the Commonwealth community
- 2) What needs are they considered to have and whether these are well catered for at present?
- 3) What services are being provided to meet these needs?
- 4) What impact does policy and legislation have on the Commonwealth Community?
- 5) Anything else that you think is important that we haven't covered by the end of the interview?

Information:

- a. Does your organisation collect data/information on Commonwealth beneficiaries as part of standard data capture?
- b. If yes, is this data collected used to inform service provision? (If yes, how?)

- c. Does your organisation share information (i.e., demographic information and/or case notes) with other organisations or military charities in order to coordinate support for Commonwealth beneficiaries (if not, why?)

Needs:

- a. What support needs exist among the Commonwealth Armed Forces community? (Break down by Service Personnel, veterans, families)
- b. Our survey identified mainly veterans and families – rather than Personnel in Service – in receipt of support from the military charities. Does this match with your experiences?
- c. What do you find are the most common concerns?
- d. What needs are not currently met, or what issues are not being addressed with this cohort? (Probe: in your own organisation, and across the sector)
- e. Are there any issues or needs which fall outside the remit of your organisation, or which you are not equipped to deal with? (Probe: our survey identified issues relating to immigration, domestic abuse, and language barriers that charities are not resourced to deal with)

Services:

- a. To what extent do existing services cater for the Commonwealth Armed Forces Community (in your own organisation, and across the sector)?
- b. What barriers or difficulties exist to the effective provision of services to the Commonwealth Armed Forces Community? (Probe: our survey identified issues relating to language barriers, cultural differences, and policy/legislation; does this match with your experience?)
- c. *How* do these barriers obstruct efforts to support?
- d. Our survey identified a low take-up of services from the Commonwealth Armed Forces Community. Does this match with your experiences, and if so, why might this be the case?
- e. To what extent are Commonwealth Personnel and their families made aware of the services on offer? (In your own organisation, and across the sector)
- f. How is service provision for the Commonwealth Armed Forces community coordinated across the military charity sector? (Probe: how can this be improved?)

Policy:

- a. Are you aware of any policy or legislation frameworks which have an impact on the Commonwealth Armed Forces community? (Do you feel there is an awareness across the military charity sector of these policy and legal frameworks?)
 - What has been the effect of the changes in immigration rules which took place in 2013?
- b. How are Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and their families affected by these issues?
- c. How are charities affected?
- d. Do existing policy and legal frameworks create specific disadvantages for the Commonwealth Armed community, and if so, how should these be addressed?

Organisations participating in telephone interviews:

- Interview 1 ABF: The Soldiers' Charity (16/10/17)
- Interview 2 Army Families Federation (25/10/17)
- Interview 3 British Army: Army Welfare Service (19/10/17)
- Interview 4 Combat Stress (9/10/17)
- Interview 5 Fijian Support Network (4/10/17)
- Interview 6 Naval Families Federation (22/11/17)
- Interview 7 Royal Air Force Association (3/10/17)
- Interview 8 Royal British Legion (18/10/17)
- Interview 9 Royal British Legion Industries (10/10/17)
- Interview 10 Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (11/10/17)
- Interview 11 SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) (16/11/17)