

Consultation response

Scotland's Veterans and Forces' Communities: meeting their well-being and welfare needs

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Shelter

Introduction

Shelter Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposals to improve services for Forces personnel and their families. Our response focuses on proposals under the theme of housing, which we have addressed in the paragraphs below. As the 2012 homelessness target approaches it is imperative that everyone in Scotland has fair and equal access to housing and housing-related support services. We are encouraged by the Scottish Government's attention to this issue, however we feel that more emphasis on homelessness prevention work is needed.

Summary of key points

- Current proposals are weak on prevention work.
- Exit interviews for all Service leavers need to be given a greater profile as they provide a good opportunity for signposting to local authority housing and related support services.
- Abolishing the means test for adaptations grants should be combined with publicity for the grant scheme.
- Any new guidance on allocations for social housing for injured ex-Forces personnel needs to be based on evidence.
- The definition of local connection should be broadened to include military service.
- Current proposals do not go far enough to address the issues surrounding ex-Service personnel, housing and homelessness.

Need for prevention work

Our main observation is that the proposals surrounding housing are based on the assumption that ex-Service personnel are either accessing mainstream housing services, making homeless applications, or are aware of available support and housing services. The Homelessness Task Force (HTF) has repeatedly stressed the need for prevention work to be undertaken for groups of people deemed 'at risk' of homelessness, such as Service leavers. There is a distinct lack of emphasis on prevention work in the current proposals and we feel that a key element of addressing the housing needs of ex-Forces personnel is providing comprehensive information about the range of available housing and related support services.

Exit interviews and prevention

We believe the Armed Forces' policy to conduct exit interviews with all Service leavers provides a good starting point for prevention work amongst ex-Forces personnel. There should be a good working relationship between local authorities and the Armed Forces in

their area to ensure all Service leavers are signposted to housing and related support services in the area. This co-operation could form a key element of ex-Service prevention work. Information gathered by the Armed Forces at exit interviews could also be shared with local authorities to help them to better understand the range of housing intentions and support needs of Service leavers in their local area. This information could also be used to identify potential risk factors for homelessness amongst people leaving the military.

Adaptations grants

The proposal to abolish the means test for adaptations to properties would benefit injured ex-Service personnel, however this needs to be combined with publicity for the scheme specifically targeted at individuals who have been injured in service. This is another service that could be highlighted to Service leavers during their exit interviews.

Allocations and priority

We note that the Scottish Government has highlighted injured Service personnel as a priority for adapted social housing in future guidance on allocations to social landlords. However, there needs to be better evidence of the scale of need and current levels of priority given before new guidance is written.

Local connection

Shelter supports the proposal to include service in the Armed Forces in the definition of a local connection to an area. However we see this as a short-term solution and Shelter would like to see swift progress made towards removing the local connection test.

Conclusion

Shelter welcomes the Scottish Government's attention to the issue of homelessness and housing amongst Service leavers, however we feel it is important that any provision to improve services for ex-Service personnel include a variety of prevention activities. If local authorities and local Armed Services are able to work together then good signposting to housing and support services can be undertaken at the point of discharge from the Forces. This prevention work may reduce the pressure on local authority homelessness resources if Service leavers are provided with as much information as possible about the support that local councils and voluntary agencies provide before they need to access it.