

Armed Forces Personnel 10 November 2011

Local councils have a long and lasting relationship with the United Kingdom's armed forces and are deeply grateful to our servicemen and women for their commitment, service and sacrifice for our country. The armed forces are an integral part of who we are as a nation, and an inspiration to us all.

Councils also recognise the specific needs which overseas deployment places on servicemen and women, on reservists, and on their dependants. In addition, there are veterans with special needs, whether these are physical or psychological, that we must care for to the best of our ability. Local authorities across the country are taking steps to help service men and women return to civilian life.

The Armed Forces Community Covenant

The LGA and its member councils have proudly supported the introduction of the Community Covenant. This builds on the strong foundation of work already carried out by local councils, charities and voluntary groups to support the armed forces and their families. Community Covenants are already in place in Oxfordshire, Hampshire, North Yorkshire and Vale of Glamorgan.

On 1 November 2011 the LGA hosted a Community Covenant Conference with the Ministry of Defence. Councillors, council chief executives, serving and retired military personnel and representatives of Armed Forces charities, veterans associations and organisations that support military families, met to discuss the implementation of the Community Covenant by councils.

The Armed Forces Community Covenant is a statement of mutual support between civilian and armed forces communities. The aim of the Community Covenant is to encourage communities to support in a tangible way their local service community. It promotes understanding of the unique circumstances of service life, and encourages activities which help integrate the armed forces community into local life.

There are many positive examples of where local government and the armed forces can come together. These range from free gym membership to shopping discounts which are being offered to former and current military men and women in some parts of the country. Several councils have joined forces with the Royal British Legion to enhance the support they provide to current and former members of the armed forces, whether it is offering career advice, financial assistance or help finding a home.

Councils can also help play a role in identifying potential veterans and dependents. They can ask those they come into contact with whether they are the dependent of a current or former member of the armed forces. This can be done through housing services, the education department or the council one-stop-shop.

Veterans who miss out on potential support

Publicly-available information on the whereabouts of ex-servicemen and women is difficult to obtain. Councils are concerned that millions of veterans could be missing out on the support they are entitled to because of a lack of single, coherent information set about soldiers leaving the services. We echo concerns of the Royal British Legion that the Ministry of Defence could do more make information available to councils and support organisations to help them assist vulnerable former servicemen and women.

Currently only limited information is available which identifies the rough location of those in receipt of an Armed Forces Pension or Disablement Pension [see the map at Appendix A]. However, this information only accounts for 10 per cent of the 4.8 million veterans (roughly five per cent of the 10 million veterans and dependents) identified by the MoD.

[Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant, September 2010](#)

Councils recognise the need for privacy and data protection laws. However, we want to work with the Government and other bodies to find a way to share data that will benefit our brave servicemen and women. As we approach Remembrance Day, we urge the Government to help us to go further in fulfilling our duty to our servicemen and women for their commitment, service and sacrifice to our country.

Better sharing of data by the Ministry of Defence and Department for Work and Pensions, combined with the introduction of more robust data collection on the numbers of service personnel in each local authority area, would enable councils and voluntary organisations to better target their support. For example, in America comprehensive information about the armed forces community is publically available. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) annually collects information on the total number of veterans in each state under a National Survey of Veterans, which helps to inform policy decisions and improve benefits.

Another option to help identify veterans and their dependents would be to include a question in the national census which asks whether anyone in the household has served in the armed forces.

Examples of support being offered by councils include:

- **Birmingham City Council** is building new homes especially for ex-service personnel. The development of 12 new houses, bungalows and apartments is due to be completed next year and priority will be given to ex-servicemen and women with disabilities.
- Former armed forces personnel returning to **Barnet** will now find it easier to get social housing after the council last month amended its allocation policy. The change means that ex-forces personnel who lived in the borough at least six months prior to enlisting will be given special status – shared by hard-working volunteers and foster carers – which will push them up the housing waiting list.
- War heroes returning to **North Tyneside** will now benefit from free use of the council's gym and leisure centres. The scheme is open to armed

forces personnel, who live in the borough and are on leave from a period of active service, and any immediate family who accompany them to the council's facilities. Those eligible will also be entitled to free hire of CDs and DVDs from libraries and entry to popular tourist attractions.

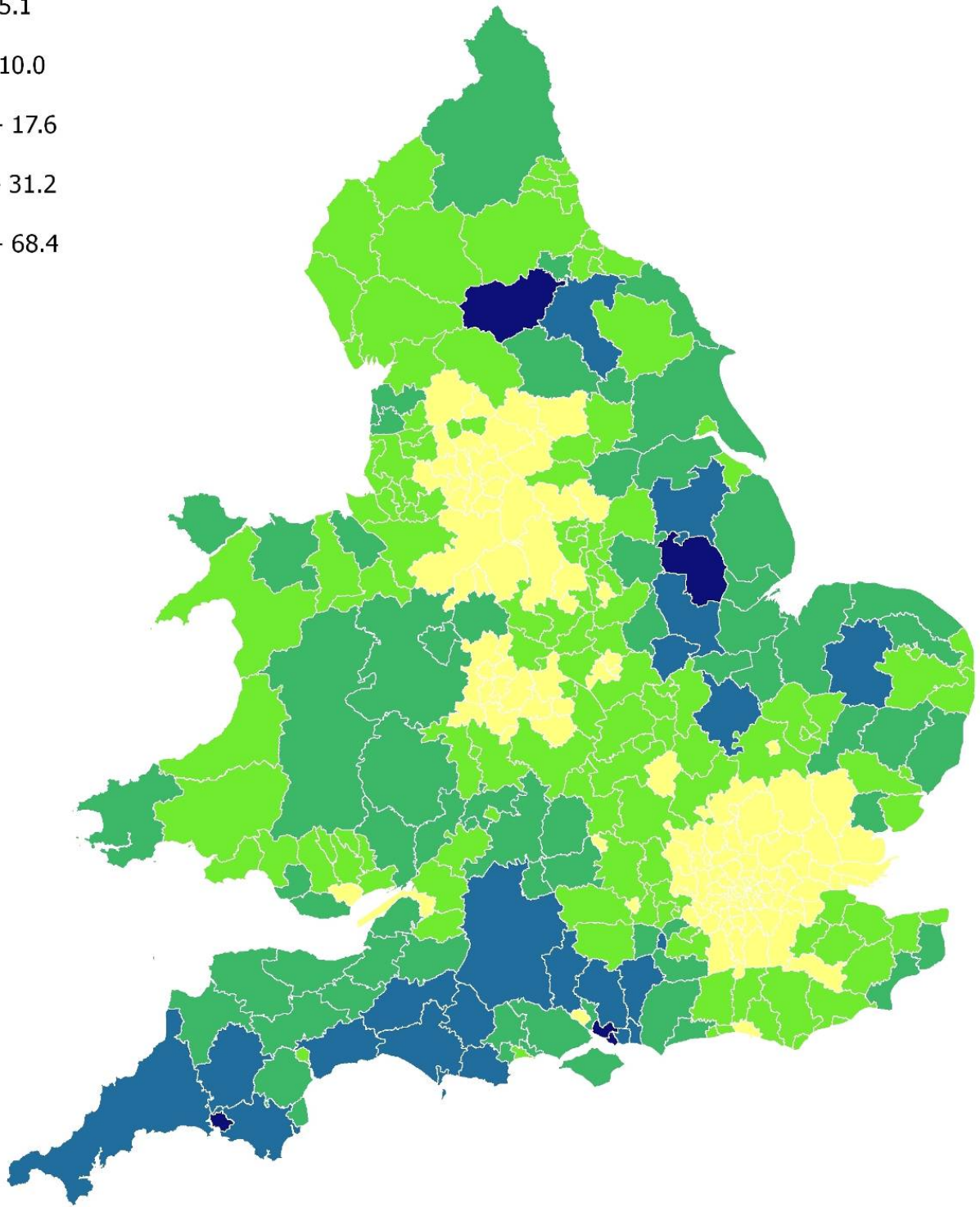
- Councils in the north east have been working with the Royal British Legion to identify the needs of the ex-service community. All 12 councils have signed up to a review pledging to start identifying members of the armed forces in need of support before they leave the military. They have also pledged to ensure housing allocation policies give special consideration to the needs of former members of the armed forces. The councils involved are: Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumbria County Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, South Tyneside Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Sunderland City Council.
- **Mansfield District Council** created a Veterans' Charter which commits the local job centre, NHS and police force to work alongside charities including the Royal British Legion to provide health, financial and career support to ex-service personnel.
- **Wychavon District Council** has published a directory of contacts for servicemen and women leaving the army with contact details for council services and dozens of charities and voluntary organisations which support retired members of the Armed Forces.
- **Oldham Council** has worked with the Royal British Legion to make it easier for former members of the armed forces to claim benefits like housing benefit and council tax benefit, if they need to. Current members of the armed forces are also being offered discounts in local shops as part of a scheme organised by the town centre partnership.
- **Wigan Borough Council** provided a council grant to help fund the Wigan Borough Veterans Council's office expenses for 12 months.

For more information please contact:

Ben Kind, LGA Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager
Telephone: 0207 664 3216
Email: ben.kind@local.gov.uk

Appendix A

Numbers in receipt of AFPS or Disablement Pension per thousand population



Source: Ministry of Defence (pensions) and ONS (population, mid-2010)

Reproduced with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of HMSO. © Crown Copyright and database right 2008. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100030882