

## **Response to the publication of the 'Strategy for our Veterans' UK Government Consultation**

### **OVERVIEW**

Overall, Help for Heroes is encouraged by the positive intent of the UK Government's response to the publication of the 'Strategy for our Veterans' consultation', but we would welcome more specific information on how responsibilities will be assigned and a greater clarity on measures of success for outcomes.

In the UK, support for veterans remains confusing and disjointed, and the consultation reinforces the need for a more joined-up way of the UK Government and third sector in working together to simplify the process. The Action Plan contains some promising commitments and Help for Heroes welcomes the positivity of the UK Government in working with veterans and charities to improve and shape the policy landscape.

That said, the UK Government's response gives little indication of what success looks like. Outcomes and objectives of the Action Plan are vague and there is a lack of focus on the Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS). There is also no mention of the medical discharge process, despite there currently being significant gaps in support, and no solutions to the challenges veterans face in dealing with the overly complex medical and financial processes.

Ultimately, however, Help for Heroes look forward to working collaboratively with the Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA) on defining future actions and representing WIS veterans within this.

### **What's Positive**

- Help for Heroes is encouraged that veteran engagement levels with the consultation have been high and that the UK Government is receptive to working with veteran charities to improve and shape the policy landscape.
- The charity is also encouraged by the Government's acknowledgement that there is no room for complacency and that Ministers are keen to emphasise that the Action Plan is 'just the beginning'.
- The UK Government's Action Plan is clearly ambitious and contains some promising commitments to develop a mechanism for accountability and reviewing delivery on a regular basis.
- Help for Heroes also welcomes the positive rhetoric of the UK Government regarding further collaboration with veteran charities and we welcome suggestions to include the views of more veterans in joined-up initiatives.

### **What's Missing**

- While the 2028 Outcomes are ambitious, the Government gives little indication of what success looks like. Outcomes and objectives of the Action Plan are vague and there is no stated responsible agency for delivering the 'co-ordination of Veterans provision'.
- There is limited focus on WIS throughout the Government's response. Help for Heroes would like to see WIS veterans, or at least Very Seriously Injured (VSI) veterans recognised as a priority group.

- There is no mention of the medical discharge process, despite there currently being significant gaps in support.
- There is also a lack of response to the challenges veterans face in dealing with persistent issues around data sharing, outdated record systems and an overly complex verification process for confirming that an individual has served in our Armed Forces.
- While the Government acknowledges that implementation of services remain inconsistent across the UK, its suggestions towards improving this fail to specify how co-ordination across service deliverers will be improved or any detail on how information will be shared between public sector bodies to achieve a greater understanding of local differences in veteran needs.

## **SPECIFIC AREAS**

### **Wounded, Injured and Sick**

Although Help for Heroes acknowledges existing support for WIS veterans, such as the Veterans Prosthetics Panel and IPC4V, there is a limited focus on WIS throughout the UK Government's consultation response.

Help for Heroes would like to see WIS veterans, or at least VSI veterans, recognised as a priority group, especially given "the majority of respondents believed that those with life-changing injuries should be recognised, and that more support was needed, with mental health as a prominent theme".

### **Employment**

Help for Heroes is encouraged by the UK Government's commitment to support veterans enter appropriate employment, but there is a gap in its response to those who won't be able to work again as a result of life-changing injury/illness.

### **Housing, Finance & Debt**

Help for Heroes is encouraged by the UK Government's commitment to help those who leave the Armed Forces be financially self-supporting and resilient, but the consultation response fails to mention how the UK Government will provide financial security for WIS who are medically discharged.

The consultation response also fails to address the delay in the final Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) award and to recognise the inconsistencies across Local Authorities regarding benefits and the AFCS, which has a significant impact on the financial security of WIS veterans.

### **Health & Wellbeing**

The consultation response gives no specific mention of the medical discharge process where there are currently significant gaps in support. Evidence from Help for Heroes beneficiaries which showed that almost 70% said they had a negative or very negative experience of transition following medical discharge and over 60% felt they did not receive enough support while transitioning out of the Armed Forces.

The Government's response also fails to give solutions around gaps in Secondary Healthcare and on the issues around cross-border transfers to provide the best possible clinical outcomes. Equally, it fails to mention the numbers of veterans receiving Integrated Personal Care or how effective this has been, and we would like to see the GP friendly service monitored and audited.

We are also disappointed by a further delay in the Cortisone Project, which has been running since 2015, to provide electronic transfer of medical records.

That said, Help for Heroes welcomes the increased pace of change on the roll out and expansion of Veteran-friendly GP practices (though this could be improved further still), the transfer of medical notes on discharge and aligning IT systems between service providers.

We also welcome the upcoming Review of definition of 'priority treatment' within healthcare and are keen to collaborate with the UK Government on this to educate GPs and Veterans on what this means and how it should work.

### **Welsh Submission**

Help for Heroes recognises the key themes for consideration in the Welsh Government's Report. We welcome our contribution to the scoping exercise and the positive approach the Welsh Government has taken to involve others in the charity sector.

We would also like to highlight the positive initiatives taken by the Welsh Government to collaborate with charities and individuals to improve the lives for veterans in Wales more broadly. However, we now urge the Welsh Government to make swift progress on the future provision of mental health services for veterans, given that the current round of funding ends in October. We would also like to see improvements made with regard to waiting times.

Help for Heroes will continue to contribute to the Welsh Government's work in this area and to monitor progress on how the recommendations in the Report are developed.