



**OFFICE FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS: A PAPER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION
COMMUNITY WELLBEING BOARD**

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) is a non-statutory unit in the Cabinet Office responsible for championing veterans' interests at the heart of Government. Launched formally in 2019 it is a visible manifestation of the Government's commitment to veterans and their families. The OVA will act as a fulcrum at the centre of UK Government to help realise the ambition set out in the [2018 Strategy for our Veterans](#) of making the UK the best place to be a veteran anywhere in the world. The OVA reports to the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Rt Hon Michael Gove MP), who is the representative for Veterans in Cabinet and the Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer MP), who is a joint MOD and Cabinet Office Minister, reflecting the OVA's position as a Cabinet Office Unit.

2. The creation of the OVA has seen the traditional convening role for veterans and the veterans sector in central Government move from the MOD to the Cabinet Office where the OVA is better able to provide dedicated oversight to the support veterans and their families need, drawing on all parts of Government to assure improved delivery and support on behalf of veterans. As such the OVA has taken responsibility for the UK Government's delivery and measurement of the Strategy for our Veterans and its associated [Action Plan](#), published in January 2020. Individual departments remain responsible for delivering their services and support to veterans, working with their stakeholder communities, but the overarching policy leadership for veterans within Government is now being discharged from the OVA and Cabinet Office. In addition to ensuring the delivery of the Strategy for our Veterans by the UK Government the OVA will ensure that the Government tackles two challenges set by the Prime Minister at its inception:
 - A. changing perceptions about veterans in society and tackling negative stereotypes; and,
 - B. ensuring that veterans and their families know where to find information to support them; should they need help. There is already a lot of public-funded support available for veterans, from Government and local Government levels. The public consultation in 2019 on the Strategy for our Veterans revealed many individuals are not aware of this provision or find it complicated to navigate through.

3. The MOD remains responsible for the Armed Forces Covenant, supporting as it does both serving personnel, their families and veterans and their families. We recognise it is around the Covenant, as well as the delivery of statutory local services, that much support and delivery for veterans and the wider Armed Forces community pivots. The Covenant seeks to ensure no disadvantage as a result of military service and the MOD is leading legislation to further strengthen this is law. The OVA is distinguished from this in that whilst the Covenant commitment of no disadvantage remains the baseline for support and opportunity, part of what it has been asked to do consciously advantages veterans as a result of their service; this reflects a step change in the Government's approach to some policies and services. Examples include both a railcard for veterans and guaranteed Civil Service interviews.

OVA PROGRAMME

4. The OVA is building its full capacity and capability but is already delivering an extensive programme of work. This includes:

- Leading the delivery of the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan which was published in January. This sets out the initial steps to realise the ambition of making the UK the best place to be a Veteran. Major commitments included £5m for Armed Forces Champions in JobCentre Plus, new mental health services for the NHS, a campaign to change perceptions of veterans and plans to deliver new digital services for veterans, making it easier for them to access information and services from GOV.UK. These latter two are designed to tackle the Prime Minister's core purpose in creating the OVA.
- Supporting the Delivery of Manifesto & New Decade, New Approach Commitments. These include leading a programme aimed at making the Civil Service (and wider public sector) a great place to work for veterans, including the introduction of guaranteed interviews for veterans. It also includes supporting the delivery of a veterans' railcard and supporting the creation of a Veterans' Commissioner in Northern Ireland.

5. The OVA is exploring other facets of veterans support which may need improvement and opportunities to promote the Government's support for veterans, for example through the National Disability Strategy, Loneliness and Rough Sleeping strategies. It is also developing a research strategy for veterans, this will include funding a long running study by the King's Centre for Military Health Research which is the richest source of veteran data in the UK, capturing life outcomes (including health) for veterans. We are also setting up a new Veterans Advisory Board to provide an advisory and challenge role for the Government. The OVA is also developing a new strategic partnership with the charity sector to ensure this is a sustainable and resilient part of the veterans support system, able to complement the delivery of Government and statutory services.

WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT & THE LGA: KEY QUESTIONS

- We recognise that many of the services veterans depend on are delivered through local Government - thank you for all you and your colleagues already do. Are there systematic issues (beyond financial) at a local level that the OVA could possibly assist whether directly or in concert with MHCLG?
- Are there existing local networks that should be the OVA's engagement point routinely with local Government? How can we work together to ensure all veterans know where to access services irrespective of who is leading their delivery? What are the examples of good practice?
- Some Local Authorities have a very proactive approach to veterans employment. Is there good practice you can share to help the Civil Service introduce its own employment schemes for veterans and how would we encourage all public sector employers to adopt such an approach?
- You are transforming the delivery of local services through technology and digital platforms. What opportunities are there to collaborate on this and can you share experience of good practice we can learn from at central government level?
- How can we fuse local health and wellbeing community services more effectively with NHS and third sector provision, creating a single, easily accessible pathway for veterans to use?

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