

Former members of the Armed Forces

Headlines

- 1 in 12 (8%) Kirklees adults have served in the Armed Forces at some time, more than 9 out 10 (94%) of those were men.
- The picture for those aged 67 and over who might have completed National Service is different from those aged 66 and under.
- The National Service personnel needs are broadly similar to the rest of the Kirklees population of that age.
- Many younger ex-Service personnel have moved successfully into civilian life and are reasonably well qualified, have a reasonable income and own their own homes.
- Some younger ex-Service personnel face challenges due to disability (particularly mental health issues), low level of qualifications and low income.
- These challenges are more common amongst those who have served for shorter periods, especially those who left before completing their initial four years of training (“early service leavers”). Those who have served a shorter time find the transition harder, with problems most likely to occur in the first two years after discharge, especially amongst those who were vulnerable before joining and experienced poor mental health in service.

Why is this issue important?

There are an estimated 4.8 million ex-Service personnel in the UK. Yorkshire and the Humber has historically had one of the highest recruitment rates, providing around 1 in 5 (18%) of all those who joined the Services.

The circumstances of individuals are very different and their needs are determined by factors such as their experience before, during and after their service, the conflict(s) they experienced and their transition from military to civilian life.

To equip their personnel with the necessary skills and attitudes for military life, the services instil a culture of discipline, reliance on others and acceptance of orders. Although personnel can have a long and fulfilling career, the majority will leave at least 25 years before the current national [retirement](#) age and will need to pursue a second career.

The Ministry of Defence Strategy for Veterans divides the ex-Service community into three broad groups:

1. Those who, following a Service career, return successfully to civilian life.
2. Those who have suffered ill health or injury as a result of service.
3. Those who have been unable to make a successful transition to civilian life.

Since 2007/8 approximately 21,000 men and women have left the British Armed Forces every year and entered civilian life. There is increasing recognition, both within the military and in civilian society, of the health and social needs of ex-Service personnel, in particular mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social exclusion.

In Kirklees:

- 1 in 12 (8%) of those aged over 18 have served in the Armed Forces at some time, more than 9 out of 10 (94%) were men.
- Of all those aged 67 and over 1 in 3 (36%) had served, half (49%) of all men. (NB. Those aged 67 and over could have done National Service.)
- This compares to 1 in 20 (5%) men aged 66 and under who had served or were still serving.
- Of those aged 66 and under who had served, 2 out of 5 (39%) had served less than five years. The rate was higher in those aged 67 and over who might have joined for two years' National Service.

National research shows that³:

- More than 1 in 4 service leavers reported that they found the return to civilian life was not as they expected, or harder.
- A small minority of service leavers experience severe difficulties such as homelessness.
- The most common mental health problems for ex-Service personnel are depression and anxiety disorders.
- Levels of alcohol misuse in ex-Service personnel are double those of the general population.

- Early Service leavers are more likely to have adverse outcomes (e.g. suicide, [mental health](#) problems) and risk-taking behaviours (e.g. heavy [alcohol](#) consumption, suicidal thoughts) than longer serving veterans.
- The National Ex-Services Association indicates that up to 7% of the UK prison population (over 6,000 prisoners) are ex-Service personnel.

In Kirklees half of all those who have served said their health was “good” (50%), only 1 in 8 (13%) said it was “poor”. However, those who had never served were much more likely to say their health was “good” (67%) and less likely to say their health was “poor” (8%). Those who had served five or more years were more likely to say their health was “good” (57%). There is little difference in the overall health between those aged 67 and over that have served and those that have not.

More than half of those who have served (54%) had a long-term health condition that limited their daily activities compared with 1 in 4 (27%) of those who had never served. There is a higher rate at all ages – amongst 18-66 year olds the gap is 13% (37%-24%) and amongst those aged 67 and over it is also 13% (62%-49%) .

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

Nationally a 2010 study of serving personnel showed that:

- 4% reported probable post-traumatic stress disorder – the same as the general population.
- 20% reported other common mental disorders – the same as the general population.
- 13% reported alcohol misuse – twice the rate in the general population.
- Regulars deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan were significantly more likely to report alcohol misuse than those not deployed.
- Reservists were more likely to report probable post-traumatic stress disorder than those not deployed.
- Regular personnel in combat roles were more likely than those in support roles to report probable post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Experience of mental health problems was not linked with number of deployments.

- The overall rate of veteran suicide is no greater than in the general population. However, the risk of suicide in men aged 24 and younger who have left is two to three times higher than men of the same age in the general and serving population.

In almost every offence group, including violence against the person, the general population has a higher offending rate than the regular veteran population. Veterans are also less likely to be in prison than the general population, taking into account age, gender and socio-economic profile. Of those veterans who do have contact with the criminal justice system 6 out of 10 (59%) offended more than 10 years post discharge .

More than 9 out of 10 (94%) non-early Service leavers are in employment six months after leaving the Services, but only half (50%) of early Service leavers are.

Which groups are most affected by this issue?

Locally:

- 2 out of 5 (39%) of those under 67 who have served are living alone, compared with less than 1 in 4 (22%) who have never served. The gap is much smaller in those aged 67 and over (39-46%).
- 2 out of 3 (64%) of those under 67 who have served were qualified to at least level 2, which is lower than the rate amongst those who have never served (73%). They are also less likely to own their own home (58-68%), and more likely to have a household income below £20,000 (56-46%).

Where is this causing greatest concern?

The national picture shows that there are a higher proportion of veterans in Yorkshire and the Humber than nationally. There is no comparable data available to show whether Kirklees is similar to, or different from, similar areas. Given the higher levels of low skills, low income, low home ownership and higher levels of disability amongst those who have served who are under 67, there is likely to be a higher concentration of younger ex-Service personnel in areas of higher deprivation.

Views of local people

The level of support for the Armed Forces and those who have served is “overwhelmingly positive” and the military is more highly respected than other professions such as doctors and the police.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

The Council is a co-signatory to the Kirklees Armed Forces Community Covenant and has pledged to:

- continue to have a Cabinet Member act as the Champion for the Armed Forces whose role will be to lead on the issues relating to the Covenant.
- develop a Community Covenant Board comprising of all relevant Council Services and its key partners and chaired by the Cabinet Champion.
- ensure a senior manager supports the Armed Forces Champion, services the Community Covenant Board and is the lead contact within the Authority for liaison with the Armed Forces.
- produce a “SMART” action plan based on the key issues of health, [housing](#), education, community and employment with a particular focus on those ex-Service personnel who are struggling with the transition to civilian life and the “pathways” of support available to them.
- work to improve the identification of Armed Forces personnel/veterans by Council, NHS and other services within the Borough.
- take part in wider regional initiatives designed to improve the support provided to residents who have served in the Armed Forces.

References

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