

Armed Forces Veterans' survey – Executive summary

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Herefordshire Council Intelligence Unit

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ARMED FORCES VETERANS' SURVEY - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Armed Forces Veterans' Survey was commissioned to provide data to inform an Armed Forces Needs Assessment. It was modelled on a similar survey undertaken by Worcestershire County Council, but differed quite significantly with regard to content to better represent local circumstances and issues, and to allow comparison with data from the UK census and other sources.

All Armed Forces veterans who had served one day or more at any time in the past and in any occupation in the Royal Navy, Army, or Royal Air Force (including Reservists and National Service personnel) were eligible to take part in the survey.

The survey was publicised on the Herefordshire Council website (with a link to the online questionnaire), through local veterans' charities, libraries, GP surgeries, through a press release, internally through News Core, and through email links sent to relevant individuals and organisations. Paper questionnaires and alternative formats were available on request.

The questionnaire asked for demographic information about the respondent, their service history, and reasons for leaving the Armed Forces. There then followed groups of questions relating to access to services, current accommodation, skills, education and employment, and health and wellbeing.

HEADLINE RESULTS

The survey took place between 22 August 2019 and 7 October 2019. In total, 169 responses were received from a veterans population believed to number around 14,000.

97% of responses were from veterans themselves and 78% of responses were from former Army personnel.

The age of respondents was not representative of the Herefordshire population. Partly, this is likely due to the over-representation of older age groups in the veteran population: the legacy of the very significant and sustained decline in the size of the Armed Forces since the 1960s. By age group, the proportion of responses was 18 to 24 years 0%, 25 to 34 years 3%, 35 to 44 years 9%, 45 to 54 years 26%, 55 to 64 years 14%, 65 to 74 years, 31% and 75+ years 17%.

The largest proportion of respondents cited retirement as their reason for leaving the Armed Forces (34%) followed by the impact of service on their family and personal life (31%).

59% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the Armed Forces Covenant and knew what it was.

Of those respondents who indicated that they had approached a charity of help or information (44%), by far the largest proportion had contacted the Royal British Legion (60%). The next most contacted charity was SSAFA (30%).

Two thirds of respondents (66%) indicated that they have not needed any help since leaving the Armed Forces.

The most common ways of finding out about available support and services were friends or family and internet searches (both 17% of all respondents, including those who hadn't needed help).

The most frequent difficulties respondents reported facing were difficulty finding out about services or benefits you may be entitled to (40%), having to take a job for which you are overqualified, or at a lower rate of pay than you would have liked (33%), not having enough savings to buy or replace items you need (31%) and difficulty getting medical treatment you need (30%).

Those services with which the highest proportion of respondents were satisfied were the Ambulance service and Fire and Rescue.

82% of respondents lived in owner occupied housing (with or without a mortgage). 4% of respondents indicated that they had, at some point, been homeless.

The highest proportion of respondents (23%) indicated they had a degree level qualification (or equivalent); a higher proportion than in Worcestershire (16%).

47% of respondents indicated that, when applying for jobs, their military qualifications and experience were recognised by employers.

39% of respondents indicated that they make no, or little, use of their experience, skills and abilities they gained in the Armed Forces in their current job.

When asked what they were doing at present, 44% of respondents indicated that they were now retired (whether receiving a pension or not) and 33% that they were employee in a full-time job (30 hours plus per week).

46% of respondents reported finding it very or fairly easy to find suitable employment when they left the Armed Forces and 29% reported finding it very or fairly difficult. However, 69% of respondents who looked for work after leaving the Armed Forces reported finding employment within three months of leaving, a similar proportion to Worcestershire.

47% of respondents indicate that they give unpaid help to a group(s), club(s) or organisation(s) at least once a month.

When asked whether they were asked, or felt able, to discuss their Armed Forces background with their dentist or GP, 76% answered 'no' with regard to their dentist and 62% answered 'no' with regard to their GP.

40% of respondents reported having a disability, long-term illness or health problem (12 months or more) which limits daily activities or the work they can do.

When asked about whether they look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either long-term physical or mental ill-health / disability or problems related to old age, 29% indicated that they do.

Excluding respondents who answered "not applicable", the statements that had the highest levels of support among respondents were "I have a secure place to live" (91% agreed) and "I find it easy to speak about my Armed Forces background" (73% agreed). The statements with the lowest levels of support were "I feel settled in civilian life but looking back found the transition difficult" (30% disagreed) and "I've been able to get support when needed" (29% disagreed). Asked about whether they felt in a state of positive mental health and wellbeing 20% of respondents disagreed.

NEXT STEPS

The findings from this survey have provided us with better insight and understanding of the needs of the veteran community in Herefordshire and will contribute to improving services and networks for the Armed Forces community through the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership. Based on the survey results we will be undertaking further research in the coming months with focus groups addressing issues such as 'not feeling valued or respected' and 'lack of understanding of where to seek help.' The findings from the survey will also contribute to the forthcoming Armed Forces Needs Assessment for Herefordshire, through which our aim is to be able to provide:

- Better signposting to local sources of support for Veterans and their families.
- More local assistance around benefits and pensions.
- More local assistance around Veteran employment and converting military qualifications.
- More local assistance around debt and managing finances.
- Non-medical interventions to help support wellbeing and mental health.
- Work closely with NHS Services to improve positive outcomes for the Armed Forces community.