

## Unforgotten Forces Consortium Consultation Response: UK Veterans Strategy

February 2019

### Summary

- The Unforgotten Forces Consortium is an exemplar for **collaboration** amongst military and civilian charities.
- The consortium illustrates successful joined up working in terms of the design and delivery of services and also achieves **high impact and value for money** in support of older veterans who require extra support.
- On tackling **social isolation and loneliness**, while practical steps have been taken to address this issue, too often partners in the consortium have seen first-hand how veterans have not had access to local facilities, poor transport and digital links, and support services or even been unaware of their existence.
- Older veterans with **sight and hearing loss** often miss out on a wealth of support available to them, either because they are unaware it is available, or because they don't realise they count as a veteran. As one gets older, so it becomes more challenging to keep abreast of changes and feel comfortable as one's own needs change.
- To counter illnesses that affect older veterans such as Dementia and Parkinson's, the Unforgotten Forces consortium calls upon the UK and Scottish Government, along with the wider public and third sectors to **give greater prominence to the wellbeing of older veterans** amongst the other issues they may encounter.
- Consideration should be given as to continuing and **improving practical support and experiences for older veterans**. This includes the provision of the 'Break Away' service, investing in more social opportunities, and using music, art, dance, and drama to bring older veterans together in order to address their various needs.
- As the UK Government **currently funds** the Unforgotten Forces consortium, we call on the UK Government to **explore future funding pathways** with consortium leads to ensure the continuation of tailored support for older veterans living in Scotland beyond June 2020.

## **Overview**

The Unforgotten Forces consortium welcomes the draft UK Veterans Strategy published by the UK Government with support of the devolved administrations in November 2018.<sup>1</sup> We are taking up the opportunity to respond through both the UK Government's formal consultation process and the informal process being simultaneously run by the Scottish Government.

As collaboration and partnership underpin our existence and work as a consortium, so too does it underpin our response to these consultation processes. The consortium is a prime example of successful joined up working both in terms of the design and delivery of services but also achieving high impact and value for money in support of older veterans who require extra support.

Our response also illustrates key public policy matters affecting older veterans today. Social isolation and loneliness, sensory impairment, and physical health and wellbeing are all areas in which practical and meaningful change is required to improve the lives of older veterans - giving them the quality support in later life that they deserve.

While the consortium enters the second half of its current three-year funding cycle, the need for quality, substantial support for older veterans does not. Therefore, it is right that we as partners look to develop a plan for what the future may hold. However, we must also work with the UK and Scottish Governments and indeed wider Scottish society, such as commercial trusts and business, to build a sustainable legacy for the consortium.

## **Collaboration**

The Unforgotten Forces consortium is a prime example of collaboration amongst military and civilian charities. Led by Poppyscotland, the Unforgotten Forces consortium is a partnership between 16 organisations that have come together to undertake a three-year delivery plan worth £4 million to improve the coordination of existing charitable provision and introduce new services aimed at supporting veterans aged 65 and over.<sup>2</sup>

Partners involved are: Action on Hearing Loss Scotland; Age Scotland; ILM Highland; Citizens Advice Scotland; Defence Medical Welfare Service; Erskine; Fares4Free; Legion Scotland; Luminare; Music in Hospitals & Care Scotland; Poppyscotland; Scottish Older People's Assembly; Scottish War Blinded; SSAFA - the Armed Forces Charity, and the University of West of Scotland. See Annex 1 for more detail on specific service delivery. In January 2019 the Royal Air Forces Association became the 16th member of the consortium.

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<sup>1</sup> UK Government, November 2018, UK Veterans Draft Strategy Consultation.

<sup>2</sup> The Unforgotten Forces Consortium Website.

In its first eighteen months of service delivery, the Unforgotten Forces consortium has delivered almost 6,000 interventions for older veterans by providing free support and services including tackling loneliness and social isolation, advice, transport, assistance with hearing and eyesight loss, handyman help in the home, music and art in care settings, access to an Activity Centre, comradeship, holiday breaks and assistance in the NHS pathway.

Now in its second year, the consortium aims to further advance its aims by focusing on a range of activities that include promoting ways to spot the signs of sensory impairment, improve the physical wellbeing of older veterans, and developing a sustainable legacy for the future.

## **Social Isolation and Loneliness**

### **High Priority**

Tackling social isolation and loneliness was a key reason for establishing the Unforgotten Forces consortium so we welcome the focus that the UK and Scottish Governments have placed on this topic. Through the appointment of a dedicated Minister and the publication of a strategy which recognises the specific needs of veterans, helpful steps have been taken to support older veterans impacted by social isolation and loneliness.

The consortium believes that the Scottish Government's Social Isolation and Loneliness Strategy will take forward the aims of "*Renewing our Commitments*" which sets out the Scottish Government strategy to support veterans, complementing the Armed Forces Covenant. If the ambitions of *Renewing our Commitments* on issues including housing, healthcare and employability are fulfilled this will do much to tackle loneliness in the veterans' community.

### **The Evidence Base**

The most common reasons veterans gave for feeling lonely and isolated was: losing touch with friends in the Forces (43 percent), physical or mental health issues (41 per cent), struggling to relate to anybody in civilian life (34 percent), and struggling to fit into civilian life (25 percent). A third (33 percent) of the veterans surveyed stated that they felt they would benefit from meeting someone regularly from a military background to talk to someone who can empathise with their experience of the Armed Forces.<sup>3</sup>

Age Scotland research indicates that around 100,000 older people in Scotland are lonely all or most of the time. Scottish War Blinded and the Age Scotland Veterans Project held a joint focus group which showed that many of the problems which create loneliness in the wider community affect veterans too, including accessing public

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<sup>3</sup> SSAFA, October 2017, "Invisible Enemy Project"

transport, receiving timeous support from public services to deal with issues like depression, and better information about what support is available.<sup>4</sup>

Specific issues for veterans included a wish to maintain contact with their military services and better support with transition. Scottish War Blinded conducted a survey which showed that nearly two thirds of respondents said their sight loss had directly contributed to feelings of loneliness.<sup>5</sup> This builds upon Poppyscotland's earlier research in 2014 that found that 44% of the ex-Service community reported that they had experienced welfare difficulty. Social isolation was reported as affecting 15% of the Scotland ex-Service community. 7% were affected by loneliness and 6% by bereavement.<sup>6</sup>

### How The Consortium Tackles Isolation and Loneliness

The organisations involved in the Unforgotten Forces consortium work to provide veterans with this support on a daily basis.<sup>7</sup> This includes:

- Poppyscotland delivers a Break Away holiday service and works with Citizens Advice Scotland to provide the Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) which provides information, advice and support to older veterans.
- Legion Scotland offering one on one support to veterans suffering from isolation and loneliness. This could be home visits, a walk to the shops or an outside event such as the ever popular veterans' breakfast clubs. Legion Scotland also provides Unforgotten Forces veterans with the opportunity through Comradeship events to re-live old memories and renew old friendships.
- Fares4Free provide free 'essential transport' to connect older veterans to each other as well as take them to undertake basic things like going shopping, seeing family and attending social events as well as helping them attend vital welfare and hospital appointments.
- Scottish War Blinded provides specialist advice, equipment and support to veterans with a vision impairment in order to maintain their independence after sight loss as well as providing social activities for them.
- Action on Hearing Loss Scotland's Hearing Forces service works to support older veterans affected by hearing loss to benefit from hearing aids and assistive equipment, rebuild their confidence, increase their engagement in social situations and remain active in their community.
- Erskine have established a new Activity Centre which delivers meaningful social and therapeutic activities, skills training and comradeship. Veterans who have been affected by social isolation and loneliness have described the Centre as "life-changing and life-saving.
- The Defence Medical Welfare Service reaches those in need at the immediate point of crisis within NHS medical centres and hospital wards. Welfare Officers

<sup>4</sup> Age Scotland, website, "Campaign to tackle loneliness".

<sup>5</sup> Scottish War Blinded, April 2018, Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey.

<sup>6</sup> Poppyscotland and Compass Partnership, 2014, "Health and Welfare of the ex- Service community in Scotland"

<sup>7</sup> The Unforgotten Forces Consortium website.

deliver a bespoke medical welfare service to veterans, their families and carers. This unique service also includes work in the community. For example, Veterans Breakfast Clubs, provide a regular place to provide direct support and referrals to other agencies.

- SSAFA's Volunteer Caseworkers visit referred veterans in their homes to assess their needs and acts as a catalyst for coordinating financial & practical support.
- Age Scotland is enhancing what its services, including its helpline and information guides plus membership groups, offer for older veterans.

### Progress To Date

Partners in the consortium have seen first-hand how veterans have not had access to local facilities and support services, or even been unaware of their existence. This includes such services not being readily available in their geographic locations or restricted by poor transport links and lack of digital connectivity. When veterans do have problems that bring them into contact with public services, often they are not given information about organisations which could provide them with support.

This is why the Unforgotten Forces consortium called upon the Scottish Government to publish a strategy which was underpinned by action. We are pleased that the final strategy committed to breaking stigma and looking at ways to build practical support that match the needs of veterans including those supported by the consortium. The consortium is pleased that one of its members, Age Scotland, is also on the National Implementation Group for the strategy. It is vital that work to address the specific needs of veterans impacted by loneliness is prioritised.

The consortium is also grateful to the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, Charlie Wallace, for placing a focus on this area so early in his tenure. In January 2019, Scottish War Blinded hosted a roundtable discussion involving veterans and the commissioner to talk about the impact of social isolation and loneliness affecting our Armed Forces community and what solutions could be used to tackle it.<sup>8</sup>

### Next Steps

The research conducted within the consortium shows that while some of the problems of veterans with regard to loneliness are shared by other groups in society, there are specific issues such as support with transitions into the community and also for those veterans who are disabled. The needs of veterans often intensify as they grow older and the support networks based around them reduce.

To ensure progress moves in the right direction, the Unforgotten Forces consortium will call on the Scottish Government to consider taking further steps including exploring options to share best practice and revise existing guidance to local authorities. This would put help put the aims of "*Renewing Our Commitments*" into practice while

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<sup>8</sup> Scottish Veterans Commissioner Visited Scottish War Blind's Hawkhead Centre on 16 January 2019.

ensuring that veterans receive the support they need to prevent and overcome loneliness.<sup>9</sup>

## **Sensory Impairment**

### **Sight Loss**

The likelihood of being impacted by visual impairment increases with age. One in eight people age 75 or older, and one in three people age 90 or older, live with sight loss.<sup>10</sup> Age can make people more sensitive to glare, and it can also take them longer to adjust to changes in the light. Individuals may be less able to see contrasts between colours, and colours may appear more muted. They may find the need to use glasses or antiglare spectacles more often. Some changes in vision are normal, are low risk in terms of a person's health, and can be corrected with glasses and contact lenses.

However, as an individual gets older, there is a greater risk of a number of age related eye conditions. These include cataract, glaucoma and macular degeneration. Conditions such as these can occur alongside normal age-related changes to vision. Health issues like a stroke and diabetes can also affect sight. Therefore, early diagnosis can make a big difference especially when it comes to prevention, cure and quality of life.

For example, glaucoma can be treated to prevent further sight loss. Someone diagnosed with a sight loss condition can be offered an opportunity to be registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired. This can help them to access additional support.

### **Hearing Loss**

Veterans who were exposed to loud noise from small arms fire, artillery, engines, other machinery or explosives are at particular risk of developing hearing loss. Research has also found links between hearing loss and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

However, evidence suggests that the causes of hearing loss vary with the most common type being age related. In the main, this is caused by wear and tear to tiny sensory cells known as hair cells in the cochlea (hearing organ in your inner ear). More than 55 percent of people aged over 60, and more than 70 percent of people over 70, have a degree of hearing loss.<sup>11</sup>

Age-related hearing loss results in a gradual reduction in a person's ability to hear; especially high-frequency sounds such as women's or children's voices or birdsong. In Scotland around one in six people have some form of hearing loss. On average it is

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<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government, February 2016, "*Renewing Our Commitments*".

<sup>10</sup> Scottish War Blind, Age Scotland, and Action On Hearing Loss, January 2019, "*Guide on Combatting Sight and Hearing Loss*".

<sup>11</sup> Scottish War Blind, Age Scotland, and Action On Hearing Loss, January 2019, "*Guide on Combatting Sight and Hearing Loss*".

about ten years from the time that someone first notices hearing difficulties before they get their hearing tested.

For hearing aids to be most effective, however, they are best fitted as soon as possible to reduce the impact of the brain needing to re-learn sounds that have not been heard for many years. Older veterans who were exposed to loud noise from small arms fire, artillery, engines, other machinery or explosives may have noise induced hearing loss, if they served at a time when adequate hearing protection was not available.

### What The Consortium Has Done On Sensory Impairment

In January 2019, consortium partners Scottish War Blinded, Age Scotland and Action on Hearing Loss produced a Combating Sight and Hearing Loss guide advising where older veterans can get help and support. The purpose of the guide was to raise awareness among veterans of the risks of losing their sight or hearing. The guide can be accessed online with free copies on request from the Age Scotland Helpline (0800 12 44 222).<sup>12</sup>

Older veterans with sight and hearing loss often miss out on a wealth of support available to them, either because they are unaware it is available, or because they don't realise they count as a veteran. As one gets older, so it becomes more challenging to keep abreast of changes and feel comfortable as one's own needs change. This practical guide for older veterans who are living with sensory loss, primarily sight and hearing, details in clear and concise language the advice and support available.

It is vital that older veterans who are concerned about their sight and/or hearing have it checked as soon as possible. This will allow them to access the support they require including through consortium partners Scottish War Blinded, Age Scotland and Action on Hearing Loss.

### Physical Wellbeing

Having poor levels of vision can lead to difficulty in negotiating steps or uneven ground. Poor vision also affects balance, co-ordination and mobility. People with hearing loss can also have problems with balance which increase the risk of falls therefore, leading to a potential negative impact on the physical health and wellbeing of older veterans.

Another potential consequence of sensory impairment is the risk of dementia. People with mild hearing loss have nearly twice the risk of developing dementia compared to people with normal hearing, and the risk increases for people with more severe hearing loss. People living with dementia may have problems with their sight caused by their dementia. They may even have difficulty making sense of what they see because of brain damage, rather than a problem with their eyes.

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<sup>12</sup> Scottish War Blind, Age Scotland, and Action On Hearing Loss, January 2019, "Guide on Combatting Sight and Hearing Loss".

Sensory impairment and mobility issues all exacerbate the loneliness and isolation that veterans encounter. This in turn can lead to a cycle of deterioration in physical wellbeing and poor mental health. Suffering from depression, for example, which in turn can reduce a veteran's ability to resist long term or degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and dementia.

To counter these and other illnesses that affect older veterans, the Unforgotten Forces consortium calls upon the UK and Scottish Governments, along with the wider public and third sector to work together in ensuring that health and wellbeing is central to any package of support delivered to the veteran community as a result of this strategy.

In 2019, the consortium through Age Scotland and Scottish War Blind will identify at least four local groups and services for older veterans across Scotland that are willing to participate in a physical activity initiative. They will broker a series of visits by physical activity providers to these groups, giving older veterans an opportunity to try them out in a relaxed setting with comrades. Potential activity providers include: Walking Football Scotland, Table Tennis Scotland, Paths for All and Age Scotland Body Boosting Bingo.

After the 'tasters' the consortium will facilitate follow-up discussions with veterans to find out what they did and did not enjoy, and which if any activities they would like to pursue further. Where veterans say they would like to do more of an activity, the consortium will encourage and support the group or service to work with the physical activity provider to enable this. Through Age Scotland, the consortium will record the above process on video.

Using the video material generated, and with additional material from Unforgotten Forces partners, Age Scotland will lead the creation of a resource which illustrates the benefit to individuals and to highlight what works, and what doesn't work, in promoting physical activity to older veterans. The resource will be aimed at service and group organisers, policy and decision-makers and funders.

Following this, Erskine plans to host a seminar for key individuals from local authorities, NHS, sport and funders; to launch the video resource, and to highlight the importance of sustained work to promote physical activity by older veterans. The seminar will take place on the same day and in the same place as Erskine's annual Senior Sporting Games, giving delegates an additional opportunity to see the benefits to older veterans of physical activity first hand. Erskine will also continue working with another consortium partner, Luminare, on the elderly/dementia art project which takes place in Erskine's homes and out in the woodlands.

### **Practical support to enhance veterans' experiences**

Veterans engaged with Unforgotten Forces partners have told us that they value the wide ranging experiences they get to benefit from as a result of the consortium. From going away on a Break Away holiday to participating in new experiences through music, art and holistic therapies, for example. The levels and range of support and

opportunities have made a real difference in improving the quality of the lives of older veterans.

This is why consideration should be given as to continuing and improving practical support and experiences for older veterans. This includes the provision of the Break Away service, investing in more social opportunities and group therapies, and using music, art, dance and drama to bring older veterans together in order to address their various needs. Veterans engaged with consortium partners have also noted that they feel more comfortable opening up about traumatic experiences and issues related to their service within a group setting involving other veterans, rather than open up in front of their families.

### **Building A Sustainable Legacy**

By looking at and assessing the work done and impact collectively achieved by all the partners of the Unforgotten Forces consortium, it is clear it has been a success. It is a prime illustration of successful collaboration and partnership working in action. The consortium is also an example of service and civilian charities working together in support of older veterans.

**As the UK Government currently funds the Unforgotten Forces consortium, we call on the UK Government to explore future funding pathways with consortium leads to ensure the continuation of tailored support for older veterans living in Scotland beyond June 2020.**

Currently, partners are looking at the consortium continuing beyond the end of June 2020 - its current lifespan. Partners have been asked if they would be interested in continuing being part of the consortium and how the current £4 million budget over three years could be replaced going forward. **Partners have responded to this positively and work is ongoing to collaborate with UK and Scottish Governments, the wider public, private and third sectors to address this funding challenge.**

The consortium believes that the upcoming Older People's Framework announced in the September 2018 Scottish Government Programme for Government also provides an opportunity to ensure the needs of older veterans are recognised and that the support required by them is put in place.

### **Conclusion**

The Unforgotten Forces consortium welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft UK Veterans Strategy. We have used this opportunity to feed in ideas and progress made to date on the work done by its partners in Scotland. However, the consortium is a prime example of a successful collaboration which sees the service and non-service charity sector work together to give older veterans the support they require.

Our response illustrates key public policy matters affecting older veterans today. Social isolation and loneliness, sensory impairment, and physical health and wellbeing are all

areas in which practical and meaningful change is required to improve the lives of older veterans – giving them the quality support and life that they deserve. The main challenge that now faces the consortium is how it can continue beyond its current three-year funding lifespan. This is why consortium partners look to the UK and Scottish Governments, plus the wider public, private and third sectors to develop a sustainable legacy for the future of the Unforgotten Forces consortium in support of older veterans.

**The Unforgotten Forces Consortium Led By Poppyscotland - Partners are:**



## Annex 1: Unforgotten Forces Consortium Partners – Service Delivery

Partner	Service Delivery
Action on Hearing Loss Scotland	Our service provides support to older veterans, their families and/or carers on issues surrounding their hearing loss or tinnitus and offers a pathway of support alleviating concerns over their hearing loss.
Age Scotland	Our service provides information, friendship and advice through the Age Scotland helpline 0800 12 44 222: including on issues such care, benefits, housing, legal issues, veterans' rights and services. Our community development work involves training member groups on veterans' rights and issues, linking to opportunities, digital inclusion. Policy and influencing work entails using evidence from service delivery to inform policy developments.
ILM Highland	The ILM Highland Veterans' Handyperson service provides small repairs/handyperson work to the homes of older veterans. We provide maintenance, telecare, home security and safety measures that will enable the veteran to have more confidence in their home. The project is based in Alness north of Inverness and covers the Highland and Moray areas.
Citizens Advice Scotland	Advising Older Veterans: The Armed Services Advice Project provides information, advice and support to the Armed Forces Community, through citizens' advice bureau. We work with organisations supporting older people, reaching out to older veterans, and work with other organisations to help people access the support they need.
Defence Medical Welfare Service	DMWS deliver a holistic medical welfare service, providing emotional and practical support for older veterans, their families and carers, in health care pathways. Working with partners, we enable early supported referrals to appropriate local support and services thereby improving recovery, wellbeing, discharge planning, independent living, and reducing social isolation.
Erskine	The Erskine Activity Centre provides daily activities to older veterans living at home within Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire to benefit veterans affected by loneliness and social isolation. Activities include cookery, woodwork, art, music, computing, and exercise. Transport and refreshments are provided.
Fares4Free	Fares4Free is a charity (SCIO) that coordinates and provides free transport by asking taxi drivers to give up to 4 fares per month to help us help Veterans access important services and combat loneliness and isolation. Our aim is to fight loneliness and isolation one mile at a time.
Legion Scotland	Legion Scotland's community support and comradeship service is effective for combating loneliness and isolation. Veterans become engaged with the community following befriending and comradeship activities that are tailored to meet the needs of the individual taking part. The focus of comradeship events is to get veterans to mix with fellow veterans.
Luminate	Luminate works with Erskine on an artist in residence programme in Erskine's care homes. Two artists collaborate with veterans and their spouses over a period of three years, to create works of art in different art forms which will be shared with the care homes' communities.
Music in Hospitals & Care Scotland	Music in Hospitals & Care's project Play it Again SAV will enable older veterans to design musical programmes full of their own personal choices. Professional musicians work with people living in designated care homes for retired service personnel to co-produce playlists which will ultimately be played live for them and for other audiences in the future.



Poppyscotland	Poppyscotland provides life-changing support to our Armed Forces community. We reach out to those who have served, those still serving, and their families at times of crisis and need by offering vital, practical advice, assistance and funding. The new “Break Away” service provides bespoke holiday packages for older veterans and their families to counter loneliness and isolation and increase well-being.
Royal Air Force Association	The RAF Association is committed to supporting the RAF Family, whether currently serving, or former-serving, in a wide range of ways, delivering help and support where it is needed. The development of a strong sense of community and feeling of wellbeing amongst all Service personnel and their families helps make our Air Force better by encouraging unity, and helping to ensure that the men and women who come into service want to stay.
Scottish Older People's Assembly	The Scottish Older People’s Assembly (SOPA) exists to give a strong voice to older people about their concerns and experience of life, raises issues about age inequalities and identifies issues that worry the older population. It conveys messages direct to Scottish and UK Governments and supports policy that has a positive impact on later life and challenges. Although SOPA is not a service provider, it is therefore a member of the project in a consultative and advisory capacity.
Scottish War Blinded	SWB supports ex-services personnel with a visual impairment that impacts on their independence. The sight loss does need not be a result of their service. With two Activity Centres and Outreach Teams, SWB works throughout Scotland and provides specialist equipment and training to maintain independence, financial and practical help to improve quality of life and social opportunities.
SSAFA	SSAFA is the UK’s oldest military charity with branches in all parts of Scotland. With an extensive network of Volunteer Caseworkers who visit referred veterans in their homes to assess their needs, SSAFA generally acts as a catalyst for coordinating financial and practical support to individual veterans. SSAFA’s Branches will identify and refer older veterans to appropriate UF Partners. Conversely all Partners can also make referrals of older veterans to SSAFA.
University of West of Scotland	UWS supports the service delivery of this initiative by undertaking an action-based evaluation which will take cognisance of the experiences of both service providers and their client groups: quality and referrals between services, examples of good practice and areas where there is a gap in/the opportunity to develop the service/s further.