

Armed Forces Covenant Fund

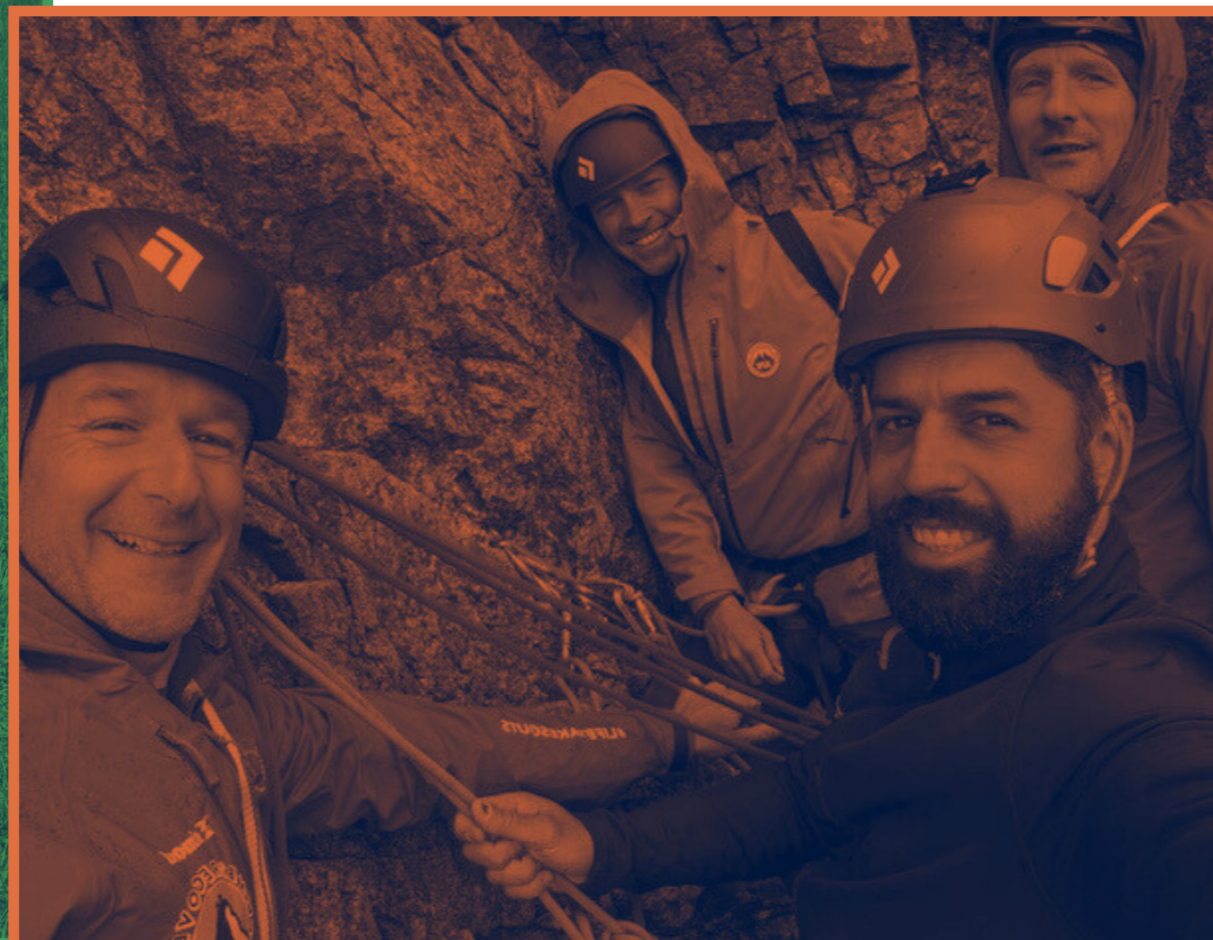
Funding Framework
consultation and
development
2023/24





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Introduction



As its raison d'être, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund is focused on delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant promise by the nation to ensure that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. Thus, as a priority, the funding will address disadvantage that is experienced by those serving or who have served, and their families, and offer support to those who have given the most.

As the Trust has continued to grow and develop, the Trust Board took the strategic decision to develop a three-year Funding Framework for the Covenant Fund, moving away from the previous annual priorities. The rationale for this change is to enable the Trust to adopt a more strategic approach to funding; to allow adequate time for consultation with stakeholders to inform the design of grant programmes and, importantly, to enable grant applicants more time to look ahead and plan their own work.

This does not mean any change to the overall amount of funding available and, of course, it will not be possible to design a funding programme for every issue that affects members of the Armed Forces community.

However, the Trust recognises that those organisations that are working at the coalface to support the Armed Forces community are experts in identifying need and can continually engage in consultation with their beneficiaries. All of which is hugely valuable in terms of informing programme design.

The Trust's three-year Covenant Funding Framework builds on past themes and extensive learning from previous Covenant programmes, the findings from our formal consultation and broader research, including an in-depth literature review. It has taken us a year to develop; delivering this work as we have continued to deliver an ambitious programme of grant delivery. We are most grateful to everyone who has contributed to its development, especially to those who took part in the consultation.

We hope that this significant change and new approach to funding will be welcomed by potential applicants and other funders and stakeholders, as it will offer increased transparency, the opportunity to participate in aspects of the design of effective and impactful grant programmes and, significantly, provide a more strategic approach to the delivery of funding to honour the Armed Forces Covenant promise.

***Anna Wright, Chief Executive
Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust***

Executive Summary

The Covenant Fund is moving to a three-year funding cycle guided by our new Funding Framework. The Trust's three-year Framework will build on the past themes and learning from Covenant programmes, the findings of our consultation and broader research, including an in-depth literature review. It will deliver programmes that support the Nation's Covenant promise to our Armed Forces, Veterans and their families. Moving to a three-year cycle of funding delivery helps us to design and implement strategic funding programmes which will enable us to support effective outcomes for Armed Forces communities, while also providing a clearer focus on where we will be investing our funds.

Making these changes will enable the Covenant Fund to work more closely with our stakeholders when we develop our strategic themes into programmes, to help us ascertain and help define the need, explore how to achieve the greatest impact and ensuring there is no duplication.

In developing our first strategic Funding Framework, we ran a wide-ranging stakeholder consultation, having first considered themes under a literature review. In our literature review we looked at published academic research on areas of need, published government strategies, and we also looked at the learning that has come through evaluations of programmes which we have run in the past.

The Trust ran an open consultation in June and July 2023, to gather views from a wide range of stakeholders regarding the development of the Covenant Fund three-year Framework, the shape of new programmes and to gather views on grants generally.

We devised the consultation to reach a broad cross-section of people and organisations from across the Armed Forces community.

540 respondents took part in the main consultation, which is the highest number of participants ever achieved by the Trust in a consultation exercise.

The consultation was very important in informing the direction of the three-year funding Framework. Drawing on the findings of the Trust's consultation the top three issues overall for people from Armed Forces communities were:

- support with family life
- reducing isolation/loneliness
- being able to access support/advice when needed.

The resulting Framework sets out the themes for delivery of the Covenant Fund between April 2024 and March 2028. These themes will be further developed into comprehensive, outcome-focused programmes in each of the three years that this Framework will be delivered.

The Covenant Fund Funding Framework: 2024-27

Over the next three years we'll address the challenges and disadvantage faced by our serving and Veteran community and their families, while extending crucial support to those who've made sacrifices.

Our Framework has a strong focus on the principles within the Covenant of no disadvantage due to Service, and extra support for those who have given the most.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

Its two principles are that, recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces:

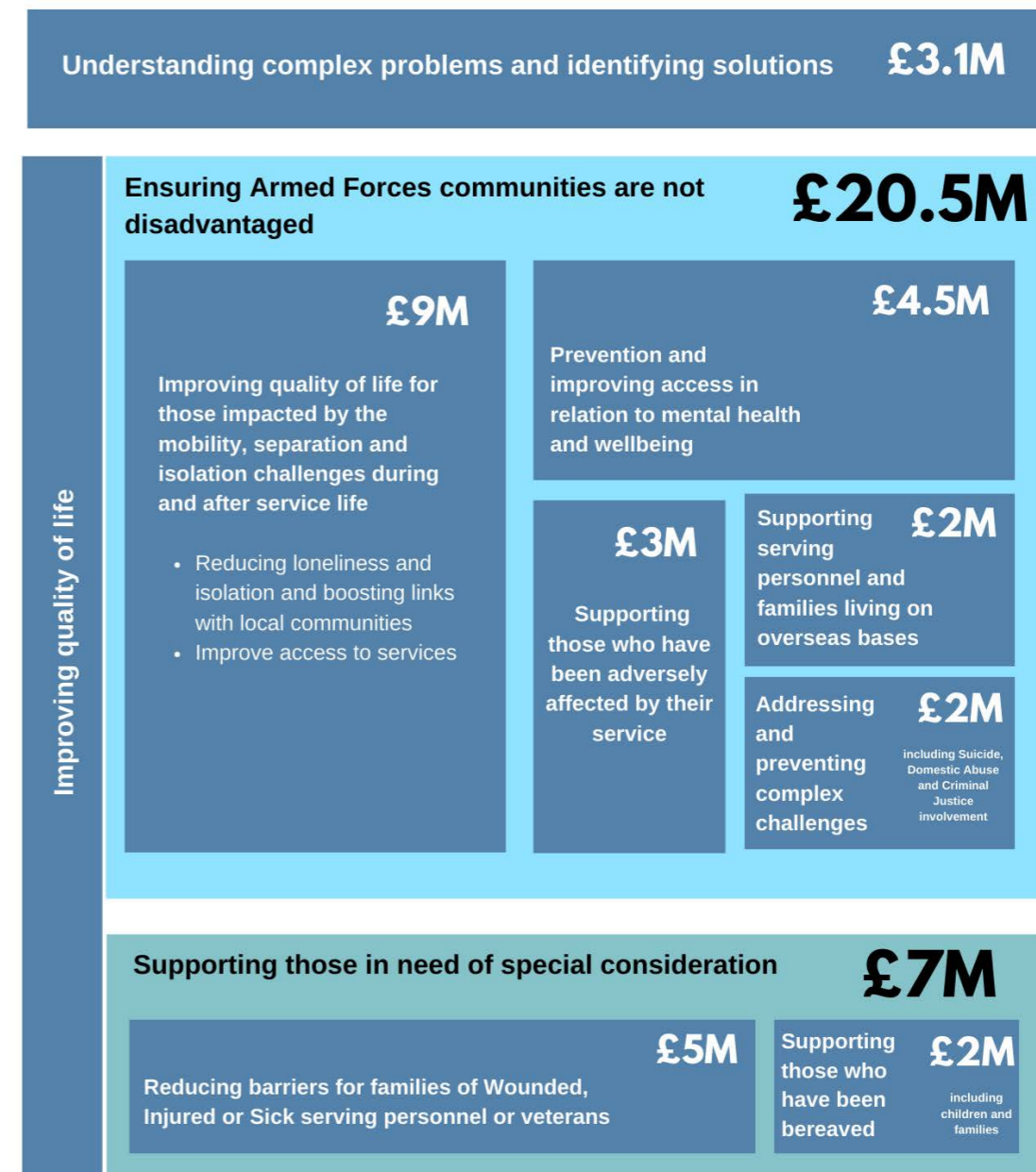
- those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services
- special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

Our Funding Framework is ambitious and will be delivered over a three-year period with £10 million committed each year to projects and activities that support these themes, through funding programmes that specifically address each theme. We'll collaborate with a range of stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and experts in the development of these programmes.

We will publish information every year on how we are delivering against our Framework.



Covenant Fund: 2024-27



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUND TRUST

Summary of Key Consultation Findings

To help us develop a three-year funding cycle we ran an open consultation, from June to July 2023. We gathered views from a wide range of stakeholders regarding the development of the Covenant Fund 3-year Framework, to shape new programmes and to gather views on how we distribute grant funding.

We had a total of 540 responses to our consultation. 76.48% took part as an individual (giving personal views) and 23.52% took part on behalf of an organisation.

We constructed the question set for our consultation using the knowledge gained through a complete and in-depth literature review. The consultation was designed to capture as much bespoke data as possible, from across the Armed Forces community and beyond, which enabled us to compare different cohorts' responses, and ensure that individual groups received their own focus and voice.

The consultation reached a broad cross section of people from Armed Forces communities and from organisations that supported them:

The most common age bracket of respondents was **55–64-year-olds**

Male respondents outnumbered females, but only by 7%

41% of respondents said they had a physical or mental health condition or illness that had lasted, or they expected to last, longer than 12 months

64% of respondents stated that their condition or illness did not reduce their ability to carry out day to day activities

79% of respondents did not consider themselves disabled

Most responses from organisations were from national charities that support the Armed Forces community

There were some smaller, or more hidden, cohorts within the consultation respondents, particularly from people who have been bereaved.

The survey asked participants to rank issues. The top three issues overall for people from Armed Forces communities were:

- support with family life
- reducing isolation/loneliness
- being able to access support/advice when needed.

Respondents were asked to identify the aims they thought should be a particular focus for the Covenant Fund over the next three years. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose from seven statements and could choose more than one, including the ability respond with their own aims, using the 'other' choice. Across all groups the top three priorities were:

- helping Veterans with significant mental health needs
- reducing loneliness and isolation for Armed Forces communities
- reducing stress and challenges for Armed Forces families

However, there was some variation between different groups, and we explore this later in this document.

A total of 124 organisations took part in our consultation, with the greatest number of responses from national charities that support the Armed Forces community. The second largest group of respondents were local charities or Community Interest Companies (CICs) that support the Armed Forces community, followed by local authorities.

Who took part in our consultation and where were they located?

- Our main consultation had 540 responses and we had 81 responses to our separate 'Tell us One Thing' campaign.
- Most respondents were from England, followed by Scotland, Wales, outside of the UK and Northern Ireland, in that order. The top three participant groups were: Veterans, serving personnel/Reservists, serving/Reservists' families, in that order.
- Due to the bespoke design of our survey, we were able to capture the opinion and voices of smaller communities, such as people working within Local Covenant Partnerships.

What were the demographics of the respondents?

- The most common age bracket of respondents was 55-64.
- Over three quarters of respondents were heterosexual.
- Nearly half of the participants said they had a physical or mental health condition or illness that had lasted, or they expected to last, longer than 12 months.
- 64% of respondents stated their condition or illness did not reduce their ability to carry out day to day activities.
- 79% of respondents did not consider themselves disabled

What is important to Armed Forces communities?

We summarised the key issues for each group. The percentages show which theme received the highest number of respondents telling us that it was an issue for them within each demographic category.

Group	Top Issues
Serving Personnel/ Reservists	59% cost of living 58% support with family life and access to skills and training 53% accessing healthcare
Serving/ Reservist families	77% having enjoyable family time together 71% support with family life 56% mental health/wellbeing
Bereaved Veterans' families:	50% reducing isolation/loneliness 50% accessing healthcare 15% engaging with civilian communities
Bereaved serving/ Reservists' families:	86% being able to access support/advice when needed 71% reducing isolation/loneliness and support with family life 64% mental health/wellbeing - children and young people
Veterans	78% mental health/wellbeing 71% reducing isolation/loneliness 65% being able to access support/advice when needed
Veterans' families	76% being able to access support/advice when needed 56% transition after service 52% reducing isolation/loneliness

Respondents were also asked to consider particular themes. Overall, respondents thought it was very important/important that programmes focus on preventing problems and to have targeted funding programmes. People also wanted programmes to have long term impact and for funding to build wider partnerships.

There were different views across different groups. When asked to consider wider priorities, these were the top three priorities within each group:

	Top issue	Second top issue	Third top issue
Veterans	Mental health and wellbeing	Reducing isolation and loneliness	Access to support and advice when needed
Veterans' families	Access to support and advice when needed	Transition after service	Reducing isolation and loneliness
Currently Serving Personnel/ Reservists	Cost of living	Support with family life & Access to skills and training	Support with family life & Access to skills and training (joint second)
Currently Serving/ Reservists families	Having enjoyable family time together	Support with family life	Mental health and wellbeing
Bereaved Veterans' families	Reducing isolation and loneliness	Accessing healthcare	Engaging with civilian communities
Bereaved Serving/ Reservists' families	Access to support and advice	Support with family life	Mental health/wellbeing - children and young people

How we award grants

Respondents thought it is important for the Trust to award longer grants to fewer projects, acknowledging that this may result in a higher rejection rate.

They also thought the Trust should try to achieve a good geographic spread of projects, even if this means making smaller grant awards.

There was a mixture of opinions on how funding should be allocated, but overall, respondents felt it should be based on need, on outcomes and on population.

What should the Covenant Fund focus on?

Respondents indicated that it is very important that programmes should focus on preventing problems, be targeted and collaborative in nature, have long term impact and build partnerships.

What should the themes and aims of the Covenant Fund be?

Across all groups, participants felt that the top three aims of the Covenant Fund should be to:

1. help Veterans with significant mental health needs
2. reduce loneliness and isolation for Armed Forces communities
3. reduce stress and challenges for Armed Forces families.

Overall, the overarching priorities for participants from Armed Forces communities were:

- access to support /advice when needed
- support with family life
- reducing isolation
- mental health/wellbeing.

The consultation, combined with the literature review and learning from earlier programmes, helped to identify some key themes. These have directly shaped the Covenant Fund Framework for programme delivery between 2024-27.



Exploring wider learning to inform the Funding Framework

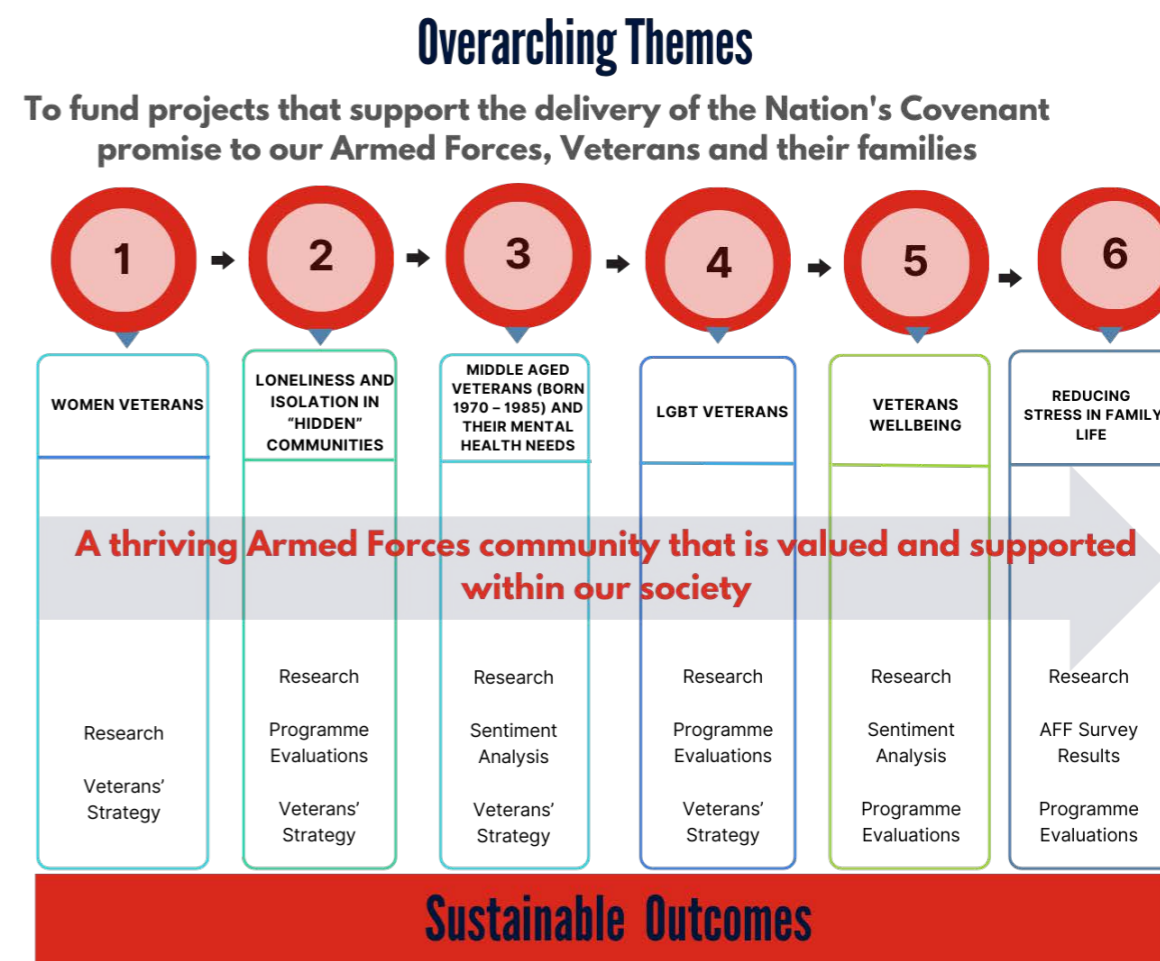
As part of the development of the Funding Framework, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust considered emerging themes from wider published research and reports, along with findings from programmes we have run in the past.

We also considered where there could be complementary links to wider government strategy or reports.

The most significant themes which emerged were as follows.

- Family Support, including bereavement, and a holistic approach to support ('holistic', in this context, refers to a person-centred approach in the belief that the parts of something are interconnected and can only be referenced by the whole. For example, programmes aimed at families could encompass multiple aspects of their life).
- Loneliness and Isolation.
- Mental health and wellbeing support. There could also be consideration in this for whole family aspects (for example, a Veterans' mental health programme could also look at mental health and wellbeing aspects within the Veteran's wider family).
- Reducing stress and challenges that are unique to the Armed Forces community.

This diagram shows these emerging themes which helped us to identify areas to explore more within the consultation.



Learning from previous programmes

Evaluations of earlier programmes delivered by the Trust also helped to shape the themes that we explored within the consultation.

Here is a selection of key evaluations that we explored.

Veterans' Places, Pathways and People (VPPP) Programme

Overview

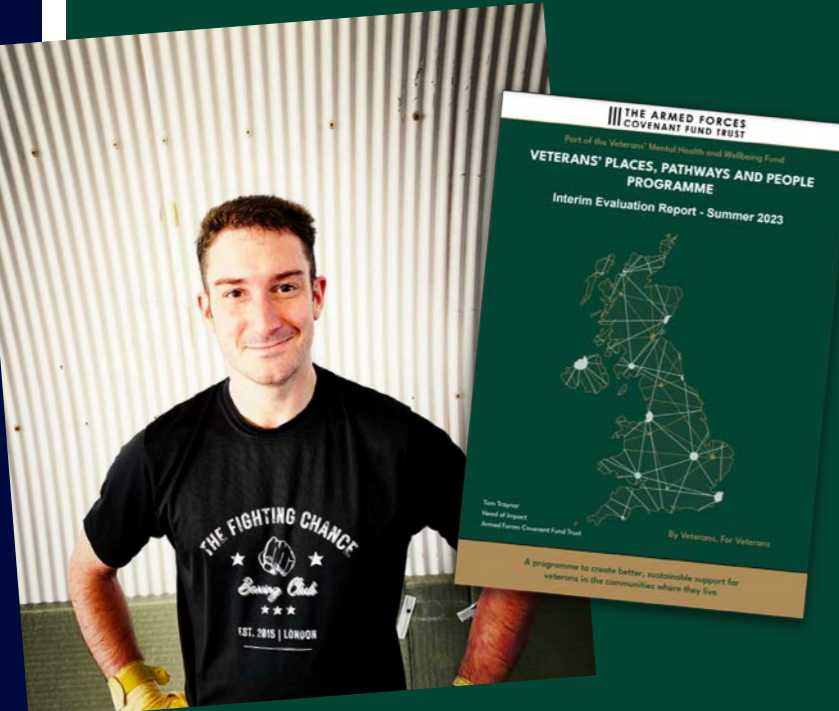
The VPPP programme aims to give Veterans safe places in their local area where they can access help and treatment that supports their mental health needs. The programme also aims to ensure that the people who support Veterans through these projects, both paid staff and volunteers, can access good quality training and are equipped to better connect Veterans into appropriate pathways and wider networks of support.

Evaluation Findings

The full evaluation of this two-year programme is due in 2024 following the completion of funded projects. The interim evaluation report, published in September 2023, explored the challenges and the needs of Veterans that are being addressed by the programme, and the achievements to date. Portfolio partners and the Veteran community they support face growing concerns about the cost-of-living crisis and its effects. Mental health and an increase in the number of complex cases are reported as growing challenges. Veterans in need asking for help, or waiting until they are in crisis, is still seen as a big challenge despite significant progress in recent years. Ensuring support is accessible to all Veterans in need, particularly in rural communities, is a concern for many. Isolation and loneliness, even in cities and urban areas, remains an issue. But the remarkable projects, services, infrastructure and people within the VPPP programme will be at the forefront of addressing these challenges.

The programme has been the catalyst for greater collaboration and partnership working among organisations and agencies in different sectors, coming together in a joined-up way to support Veterans and their families. They have taken a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing and supporting the individual, which can be seen in the diverse range of organisations that make up the VPPP network.

There have been other challenges to overcome during the first year of the programme, in establishing portfolios and ways of working, and with the external environment. There have also been achievements and meaningful impact in the first year of the programme, as evidenced by the many testimonies from Veterans and their families that have been helped so far.



One Is Too Many Programme

Overview

Eight awards of up to £300,000 were made to organisations across the UK who have experience in working with individuals who are at increased risk of suicide. Three projects are working to provide support to Veterans in the Devolved Nations, and the remaining five have dedicated their support UK-wide.

Evaluation findings

The Trust commissioned the University of Chester's (UoC) Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans to conduct an independent evaluation. Nearly 600 Veterans took part in the projects examined in depth by the evaluators. The Veterans had multiple aspects within their lives that were sources of stress to them. The majority of service users had an average service of 12 years. Most were male with an average age of 45.

Some key findings from the evaluation include:

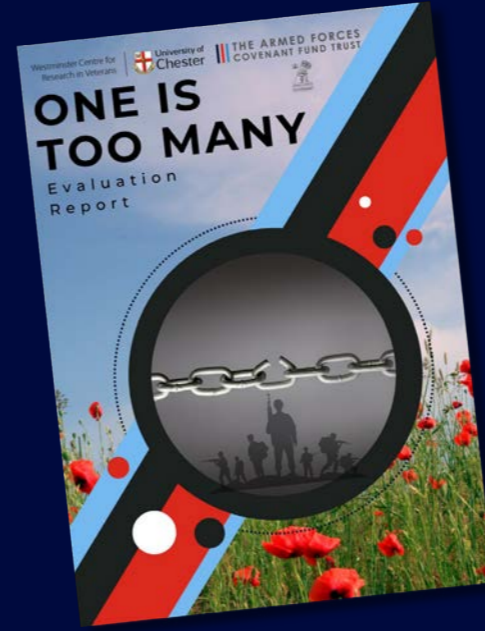
- 77% reported being exposed to a traumatic event during Service with an average of two each
- 83% of Veterans taking part in projects reported long-standing physical or mental health illness.
- 3% of project participants were homeless on entering the programme
- the evaluation notes that the programme has illustrated suicide risk factors leading to Veterans' self-harm, suicide risk and protective factors.



The evaluation report showed that projects were successful in improving the health and wellbeing of Veterans.

The evaluation report notes several recommendations. These include additional resources and research and developing strategies to reach under-represented and minority groups and developing new ways to encourage help-seeking behaviour.

There is a need to further explore initiatives to engage with female Veterans. Research is also needed to examine the impact of gender-related experiences during military Service on female Veterans' help-seeking behaviour.



Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans, Their Families, and Carers

Overview

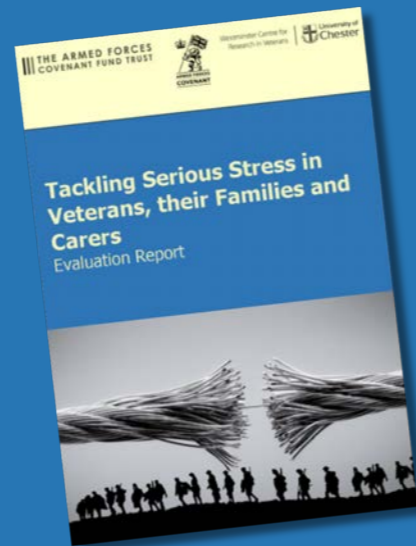
In 2018, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (the Trust) awarded £4m in grant funding to seven portfolio projects to address the problems caused by serious stress in Veterans, their carers, and families.

The seven organisations awarded grant funding worked with 69 regional delivery partners. Through these, nearly 1,000 participants accepted entry into the Tackling Serious Stress (TSS) programmes. Referral partners included charities and statutory bodies; however, it was found that many of the beneficiaries self-referred to services. TSS projects started between May and October 2019 and concluded in September 2021.

Evaluation Findings

The Trust commissioned the University of Chester's (UoC) Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans to conduct an independent evaluation report of the TSS programme. The findings suggested that the projects had identified innovative and cost-effective ways to reduce depression, anxiety and alcohol misuse in UK military Veterans and their families.

- Participants voice: from the outset, representing the participant's voices was a key part of associate working, with participants welcomed as equal partners in conjunction with any other collaborator.
- Recommendations are that contributing situational stressors should be identified in the assessment process to ensure appropriate treatment and promote successful outcomes.
- It is recommended that assessments of people entering a programme and the subsequent evaluation should capture details surrounding the factors that negatively impact on help-seeking behaviour.
- The issue of engagement with family members remains one that needs considerable focus.
- Under-represented groups: communities such as ethnics minorities and Reservists were not well represented within people using the project.



Tackling Loneliness Programme

Overview

The Tackling Loneliness Programme was built on the back of a consultation run by the Trust in early 2020, whereby we sought to understand how important it was to reduce social isolation and improve integration and engagement with provision from within the Armed Forces community. 9 in every 10 respondents told us that we should focus on social isolation in our future grant making.

Evaluation Findings

The Tackling Loneliness evaluation report states that "Further investment in programmes and learning about what works best can help people find and develop the relationships that are at the core of a rich and fulfilling life".

The evaluation report identified key themes and good practice, throughout the Tackling Loneliness projects that helped to tackle loneliness in Armed Forces communities.

- Loneliness and Armed Forces communities: Some aspects of being in the Armed Forces community make people more likely to be lonely. Loneliness is often caused by change. Depression and anxiety disorders, alcohol misuse and post-traumatic stress disorder are more common in Armed Forces communities. LGBT+ communities, women, and UK Commonwealth soldiers, particularly Gurkhas, may have faced different forms of discrimination. All these issues can be profoundly isolating experiences. However, Armed Forces communities also have protective factors including the Armed Forces community strong sense of camaraderie, which can last for decades after Service and includes family members, which can provide people with strong networks after their Service. In addition to this, being in the Armed Forces gives people increased access to support from both charities and the public sector.
- Reaching out: Tackling loneliness is best done through services that help bring people together around shared interests rather than loneliness itself. Services need to be proactive and imaginative in how they find and reach people. The projects provided multiple ways of reaching out, supporting people, and creating engaging activities that are meaningful and interesting. Organisations worked best when they had clarity about who they were targeting and were creative in their outreach and service delivery, including the development of trusting, collaborative relationships with local partners.
- Improving social connections: The services that made the biggest difference in people's loneliness had several common characteristics. They were knowledgeable about how loneliness feels, when it can strike and what can make it better, in conjunction with a deep appreciation and knowledge of military culture. They also had ways of measuring need and collecting evidence about how to improve and adapt their work.



Family Life and the Armed Forces Community

Families in Stress Programme

Overview

The Families in Stress programme awarded 13 grants of up to £300,000 in February 2018, for projects that are supporting the families of serving personnel facing stressful circumstances requiring immediate short-term intervention.

Projects we have funded cover a wide range of issues for both partners and children, from domestic abuse through to debt management, caring responsibilities, bereavement, personnel in the criminal justice system and supporting families with young children who are experiencing a particularly difficult challenge.

Removing Barriers to Family Life

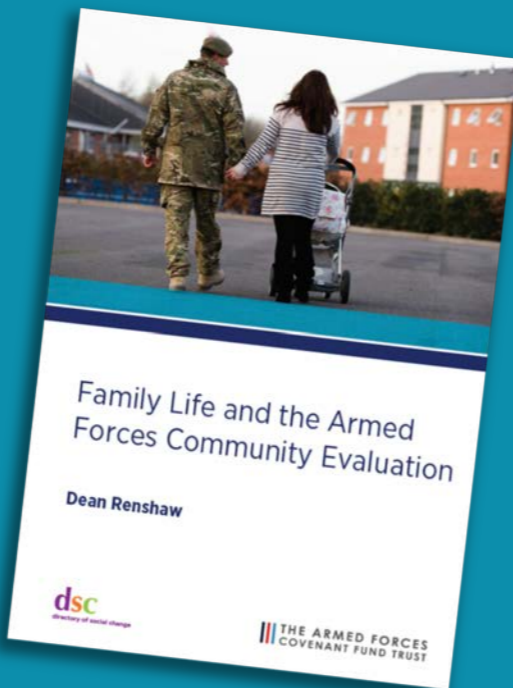
Overview

The Removing Barriers to Family Life programme made 60 awards totalling just over £7 million to support Armed Forces families. Projects delivered innovative work to reduce domestic violence, supported military spouse and partner employment and the development of the co-working hubs at or near various military bases, and supported families that are transitioning out of the Armed Forces or becoming more geographically dispersed. Notably, projects were able to support Service children during significant life events including deployment, illness or injury of a parent, moving home and school, parental divorce or separation, and distance from extended family.

A joint evaluation of both programmes was delivered by the Directory of Social Change.

Evaluation Findings

- Grants awarded through this programme had transformative effects for Armed Forces families.
- There was evidence of excellent partnership working.
- When exploring the needs of Armed Forces families, a range of complex needs were noted within projects including those resulting from geography, the culture and shared experiences in the Armed Forces, and the changing nature of the Armed Forces.
- Other complex needs identified included isolation, poor health and wellbeing, and difficulties brought about by the transition to civilian life.
- Evidence of emerging needs of Armed Forces families: there were relatively few findings from the secondary data regarding needs that may be under-researched or less well understood. Future end-of-grant reports and progress reports may benefit from directly asking organisations about them.
- Findings were typically related to the population each project was targeting, such as the unique circumstances of individuals in the Royal Navy that may not be found in other branches of the Armed Forces. The survey data revealed less widespread but interesting needs that were under researched or not well understood, such as a high proportion of spouses being unable to drive, resulting in an inability to access services.
- The barriers faced by Armed Forces families supported by the projects: stigma was one of the most common barriers identified in the analysis of the secondary data. Trust was also identified by several organisations as a major barrier, and some organisations detailed the ways in which they attempted to gain the trust of their beneficiaries.
- Needs of Armed Forces families that have relocated were highlighted as particularly complex.



Knock on the Door

Overview

The aim of this study was to explore and understand the impact that death, whilst in military Service, has on the surviving family. Specifically, it focused on how casualty notification was undertaken and the impact the current process had on the long-term wellbeing of the family.

Evaluation findings

- In the absence of literature on bereaved military families, the current findings offer a unique insight into the experiences of bereaved family members. Whilst the findings of this mixed methods study provide a useful starting point for further investigation into the impact of death on surviving family members, the data was collected from a non-probability purposive sample and therefore cannot be generalised.
- Whilst the majority of participants in this study were bereaved widows or partners, future research would benefit from focusing on children and parents of the deceased. There is an increased likelihood that the deceased are relatively young, meaning that families left behind will also be relatively young. Consequently, extending the scope of this current investigation would help to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of death on the wider family.
- Despite some minor limitations, this study provides a useful insight into traumatic bereavement, and helps to inform policy and procedures.



Our consultation: exploring the findings in greater depth

How did we design our consultation?

We devised the consultation by carrying out a thorough literature review surrounding the UK Armed Forces community. We combined this with learning from our previous programmes, including evaluations, which helped us to devise the question set of our consultation.

We developed and tested a comprehensive online survey, using a specialist online survey product.

The data and comments received helped us identify common themes.

In the following sections, we have provided an analysis of the key findings, alongside a selection of comments received for each section.

All respondents were asked how we could best ensure that our funding achieves our mission and what challenges funding could help to address.

Each cohort was asked to consider a series of themes and aims, in conjunction with learning from current programmes and wider research. Participants were offered the opportunity to express their individual comments, as well as place suggestions in order of importance.

Participants were offered the opportunity to give us a little more information about themselves, or the organisations they represented, to help us make sure that our results not only represented the voices of a cross-section of the Armed Forces community, but also the Devolved Nations.

Tell Us One Thing

The Tell Us One Thing campaign aimed to help us additionally reach people who may not have engaged with the full consultation survey. We devised a simple question "Tell Us One Thing we should know about..." and then four topics: local services, families, serving personnel, and Veterans. Respondents then had the opportunity to answer the question, giving the Trust a valuable insight into what was on people's minds regarding these topics.

To participate, respondents clicked on a link and were taken to a secure Microsoft Form, where they were able to answer the question using as many words as they wished. The question changed each week.

Who took part in our main consultation?

The groups who took part in the consultation were:

- serving personnel/Reservists
- Veterans
- serving personnel/Reservists' families
- Veterans' families
- organisations
- individuals.

We had a total of 540 responses to our consultation. We designed the consultation to capture as much bespoke data as possible, from across the Armed Forces community and beyond. This enabled us to not only compare different groups responses, but to also make sure that individual groups received their own

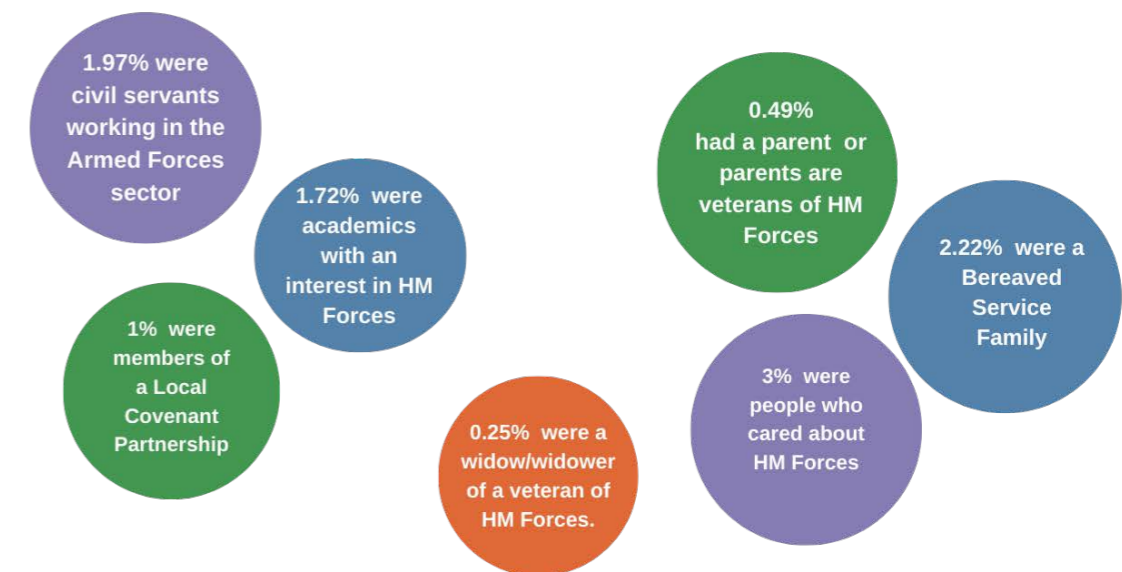


focus and voice, as well as the autonomy to decide which questions they would like to answer, which is important to note when reading this report.

We used a mixed method of data collection which enabled responders to answer closed questions, in conjunction with open ended questions.

Due to the design of our survey, we were able to capture the opinions of smaller cohorts within these larger groups of people from Armed Forces communities or organisations that support them. This was particularly evident when it came to bereaved members of the Armed Forces community, whereby we adapted our consultation, following feedback, to include more opportunities for this groups to have their voices heard.

Hidden cohorts



How were Armed Forces communities represented with the consultation findings?

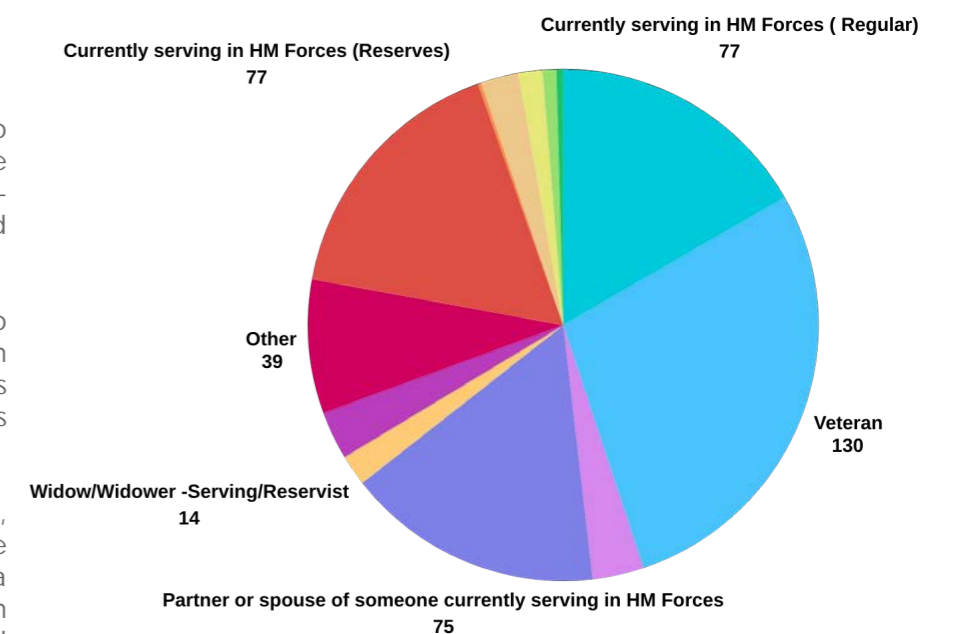
The top three respondent groups were:

- Veterans
- serving personnel/Reservists
- serving/Reservists' families.

Across all cohorts who are or who have served, there were more responses from Regular non-commissioned personnel and Veterans.

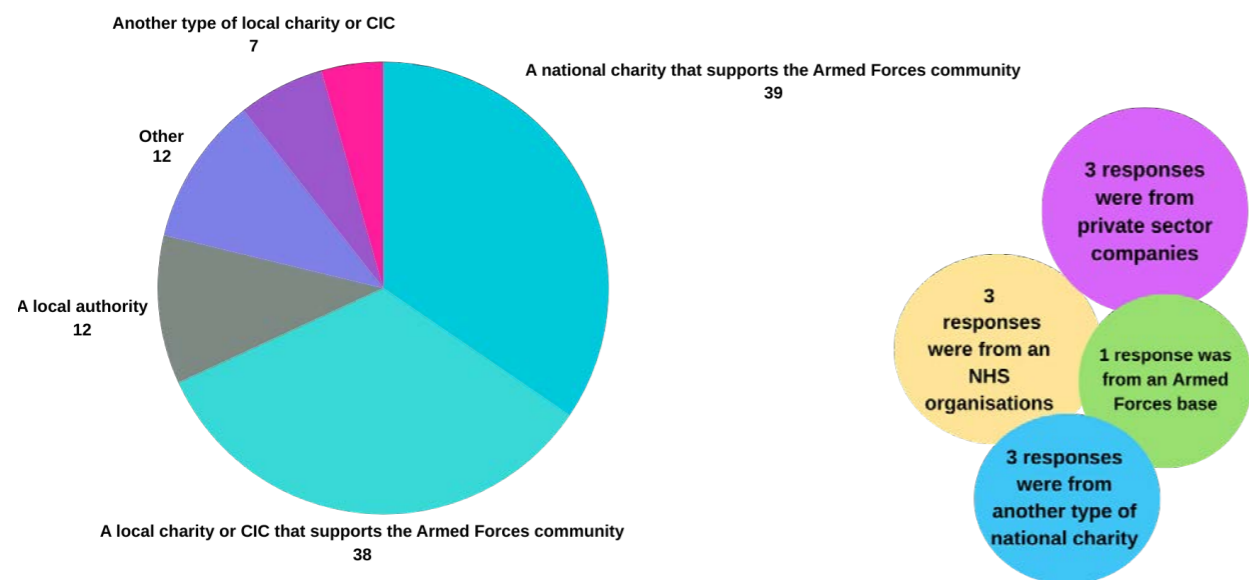
Responses included people who have served or who are serving in the Navy, Army and RAF. Responses from Reservists and Royal Marines were the least common.

Participants were wide ranging, but all were either part of the Armed Forces community from a personal perspective or involved in supporting, working, or interested in the community.



How were organisations represented in our consultation?

A total of 124 organisations took part in our consultation, with the greatest number of responses from national charities that support the Armed Forces community. The second most popular respondents were local charities or CICs that support the Armed Forces community, followed by local authorities.



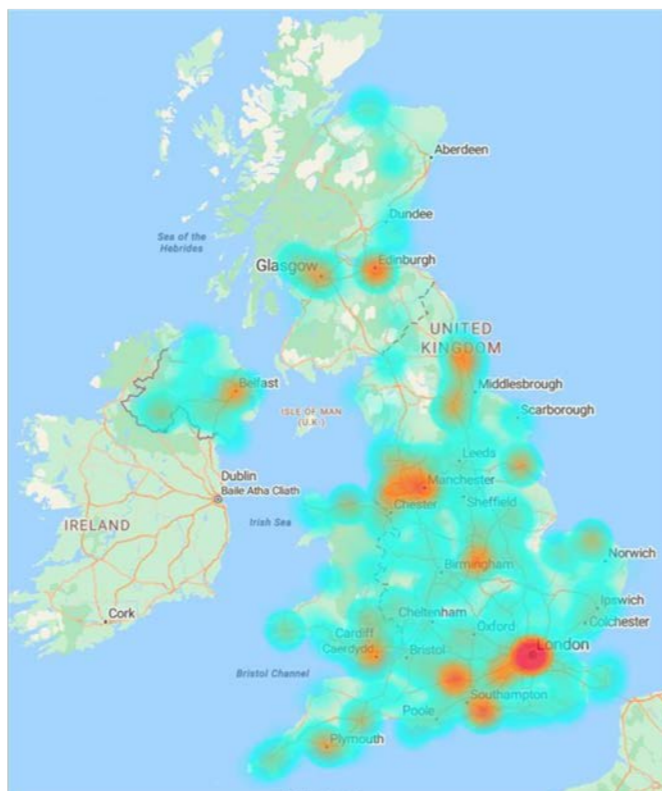
Demographics:

Where were respondents located?

Most respondents were from England, followed by Scotland, Wales, outside of the UK and Northern Ireland, in that order.

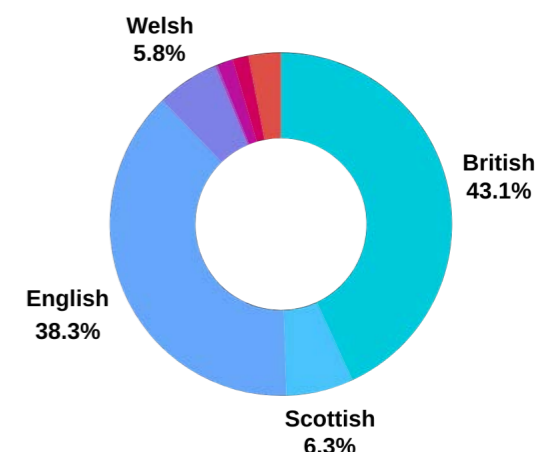
Our consultation was not only successful in capturing the opinions of the whole Armed Forces community, but also from the whole of the UK. Respondents were offered the opportunity to identify where they were located, and tell us the first half of their postcode, to enable us to create a heatmap to illustrate the reach of the survey.

466 respondents provided us with the first half of their postcode. We then used this information to create a heat map to illustrate the breadth and reach of our consultation across the United Kingdom.



What were the demographics of the respondents?

- The most common age bracket of respondents was 55-64.
- Over three quarters of respondents were heterosexual.
- Nearly half of the participants said they had a physical or mental health condition or illness that had lasted, or they expected to last longer than 12 months.
- 64% of respondents stated that their condition or illness did not reduce their ability to carry out day to day activities.
- 79% of respondents did not consider themselves disabled.

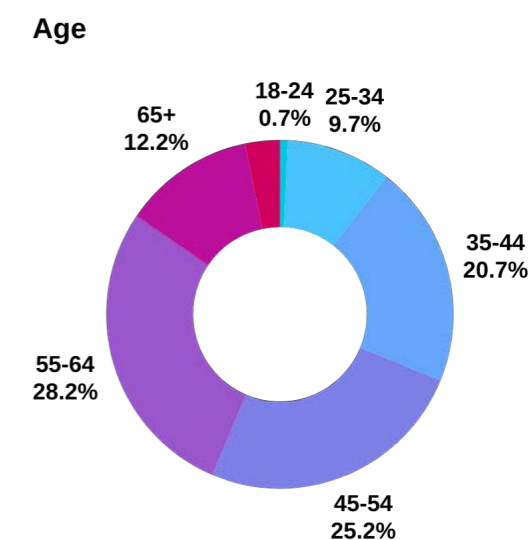


Participants were offered the opportunity to answer a range of questions concerning demographics. It is important to note that any part of this section could be skipped either in part or as a whole, and therefore the data might not be representative of all participants.

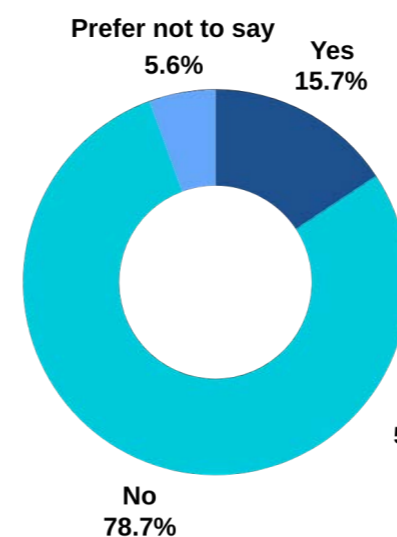
Most participants identified as British, with English the second largest category, followed by Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish. A small number of responses were received from Veterans living overseas.

Responses were received from participants with a range of ages.

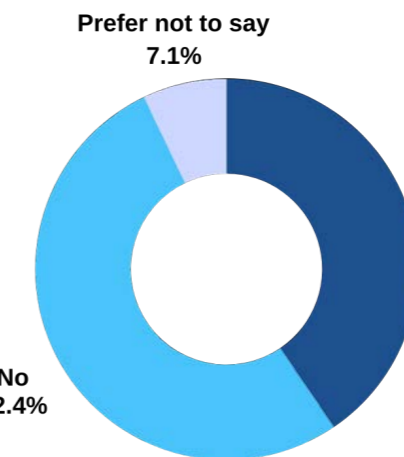
While most respondents did not have a disability, 40% indicated that they currently live with a physical or mental health condition.



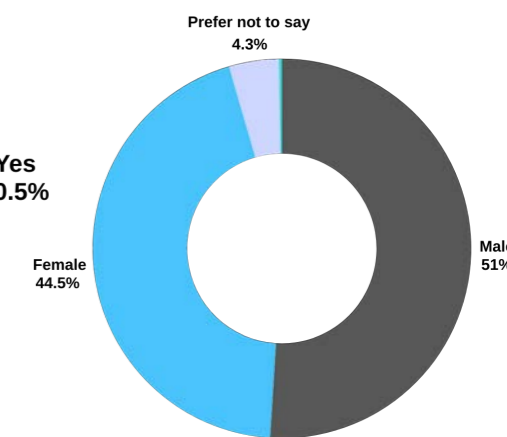
Do you consider yourself to be disabled?



Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?



Gender



There was a reasonably even split between genders of people taking part in the consultation survey.

What is important to Armed Forces communities?

Being able to access support/advice when needed, featured in both Veterans and Veterans' families top three priorities.

People who have been bereaved identified reducing isolation and loneliness as a top priority.

Across all cohorts there was support for the reducing isolation theme. Half of individual respondents chose support with family life within their top three priorities.

Overall, the following issues for the Armed Forces community seen in our consultation were:

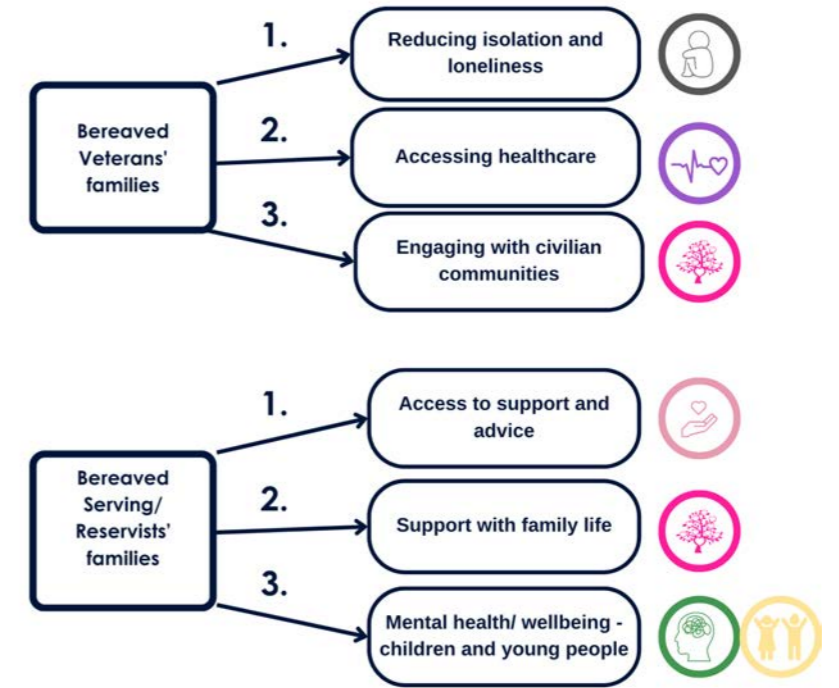
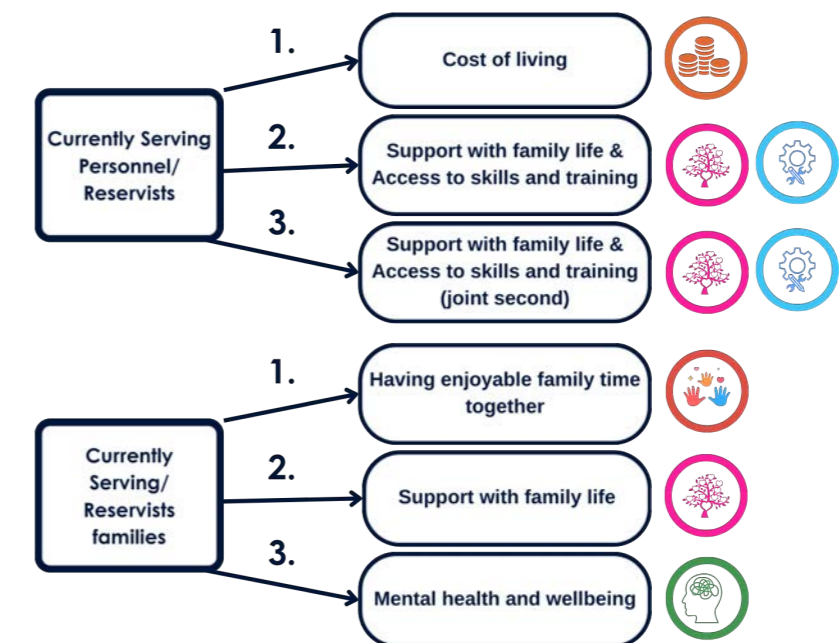
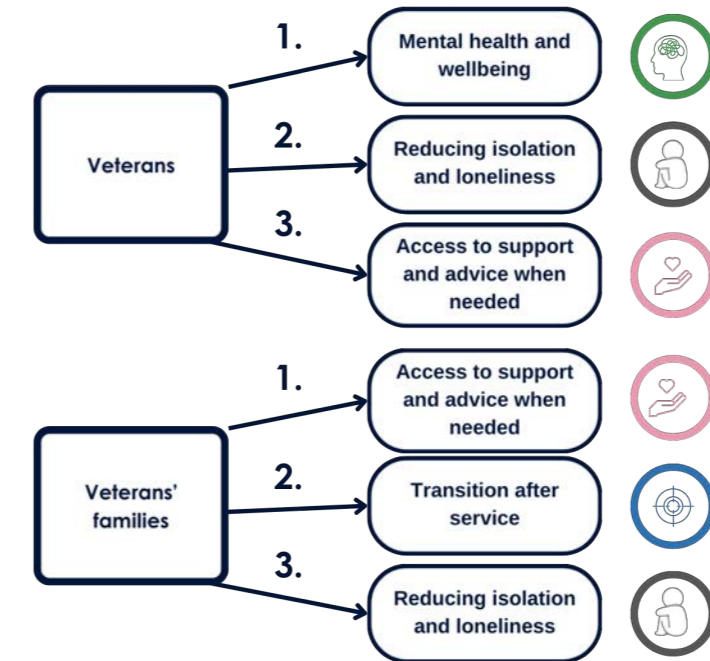
- access to support /advice when needed, with two thirds placing it as their top priority
- support with family life featured in half of the top priorities
- reducing isolation featured in half of top priorities
- mental health/wellbeing featured in half of the top priorities.

Our consultation gave responders the opportunity to tell us what was important to them. Respondents could choose from the 18 statements offered, or they could add their own within the dialogue box, 'other'. We did not want to be limiting or prescriptive in our survey, therefore respondents could choose as many statements as they wanted and were then asked to rank their choice, according to priority on the following page.

Using external research and learning from Trust evaluations and previous programmes, the following categories were offered as choices to a question titled, 'What is important to you?'

- Reducing isolation/loneliness.
- Support with family life.
- Additional needs and disabilities.
- Preparing for life outside the Forces (Serving personnel/Reservists, Serving families and bereaved families).
- Transition after Service (Veterans and Veterans' families).
- Mental health/wellbeing.
- Mental health/wellbeing - children and young people.
- Cost of living.
- Engaging with civilian communities.
- Being able to access support or advice when needed.
- Access to skills and training.
- Addictions, including gambling and substance.
- Access to high quality childcare.
- Access to education for Service Pupils, including continuity of education (Serving personnel/Reservists, serving families and bereaved families).
- Supporting Veterans in the justice system or criminal justice system (Veterans and Veterans' families).
- Moving locations due to Service life (Serving personnel/Reservists, Serving families and bereaved families).
- Employment.
- Debt and money management.
- Accessing healthcare.
- Having enjoyable family time together.
- Other.

We have listed each cohorts top three issues on the next page.



What is important to organisations who represent or work with Armed Forces communities?

124 organisations took part in the consultation survey.

Participants representing a national charity that supports the Armed Forces community were the largest group of responders. Participants representing a local charity or CIC that supports the Armed Forces community saw the second most responses. The least number of responses were from an Armed Forces base or a local branch of a national charity that supports the Armed Forces community.

72% of the organisations who took part in our survey had applied for an Armed Forces Covenant Fund grant before. 74% were successful in their application.

Some of the free text comments included:

“It is very important/important for programmes to have long term impact.”

“The timeframe was too short for small charities with limited resources. The application was not explicit enough and the level of detail required was not available within the time limit.”

“More clear guidance that’s less wordy, more succinct and clearer on what it wants to achieve instead of highly contradictory objectives seen recently.”

Although we have submitted several successful applications it still feels like we’re starting from scratch as ‘strangers’ each time we begin an application. Could some of our basic information not be retained?

What should our funding focus on?

We asked some questions to help us better understand how funding could be targeted.

Overall, respondents thought it was very important/important that programmes focus on preventing problems and to have targeted funding programmes. People also wanted programmes to have long term impact and for funding to build wider partnerships.

There are some differences in what the focus of our funding should be between different groups.

Theme	Observations
How important is it that our funding builds partnerships between Armed Forces communities and wider society?	Organisations: 61% thought it was very important, followed by Veterans (52%) and serving personnel (35%). Overall, most respondents felt that it was very important/important that funding builds partnerships.
How important is it that our programmes focus on preventing problems from occurring?	Overall, respondents thought it was very important/important that programmes focus on preventing problems.
How important is it for our programmes to have long-term impact that prevents future problems for the Armed Forces community?	Overall, respondents thought that it was very important/important for programmes to have long-term impact.
How important are targeted funding programmes that help Armed Forces communities find and access the support they need?	Overall, respondents thought that it was very important/important for the Trust to have targeted funding programmes.
How important is it that we support projects that help Veterans who live overseas?	Overall, respondents thought that it was important/somewhat important that we help Veterans who live overseas. This category did, however, also have activity within the ‘not very’ and ‘not at all’ categories.
How important is it for the Trust to encourage collaborative projects where different organisations work together?	Overall, respondents thought that it was very important/important for the Trust to encourage collaborative projects where different organisations work together.

What should the themes and aims of the Covenant Fund be?

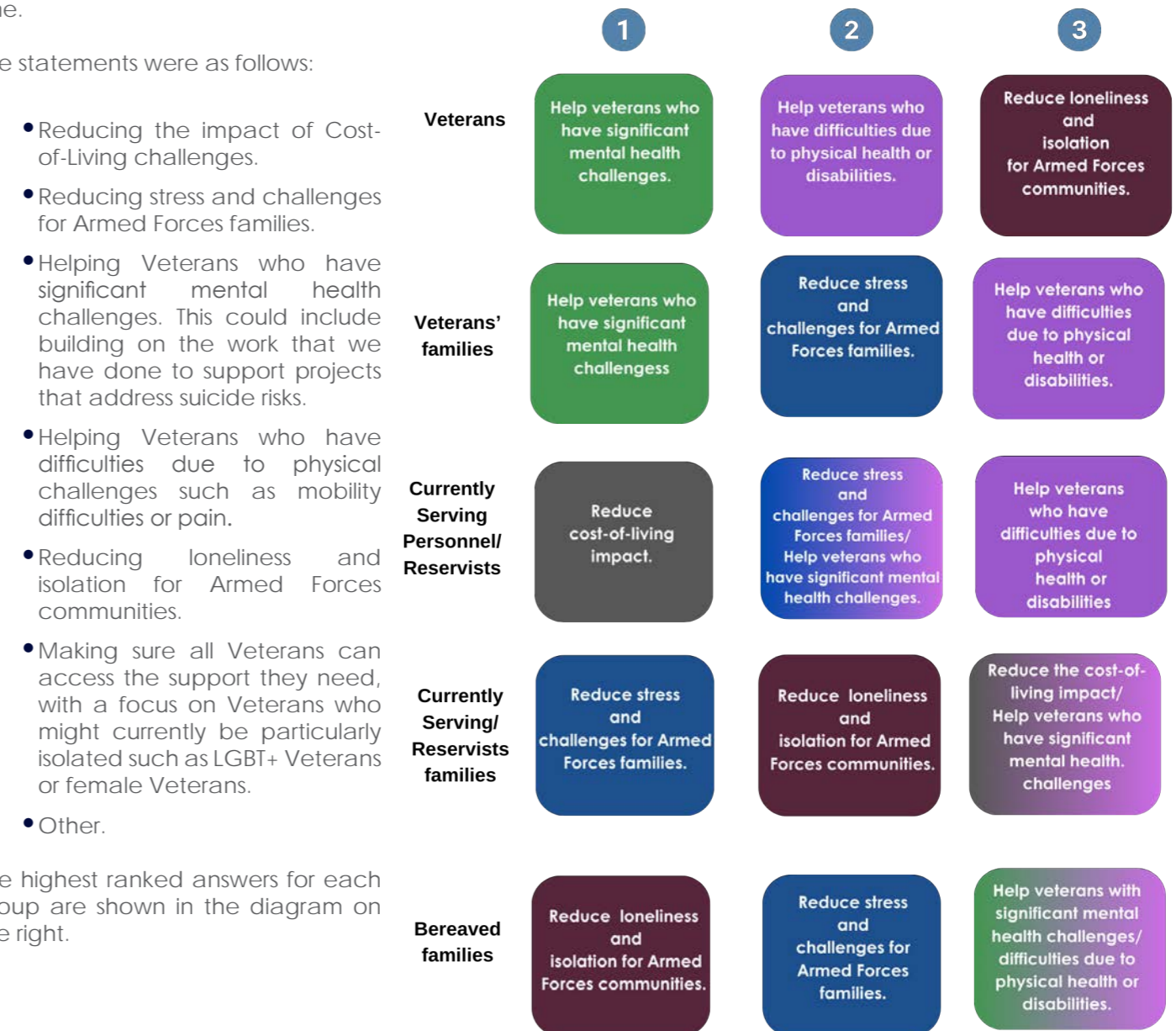
Respondents were asked to identify the aims they thought should be a particular focus for the Covenant Fund over the next three years. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose from seven statements and could choose more than one, including the ability to respond with their own aims, using the ‘other’ choice.

Across all groups the top three priorities were:

- helping Veterans with significant mental health needs
- reducing loneliness and isolation for Armed Forces communities
- reducing stress and challenges for Armed Forces families.

Survey participants were asked which statements they thought were important and were given the opportunity to choose more than one.

The statements were as follows:



The highest ranked answers for each group are shown in the diagram on the right.

Themes of the Covenant Fund

There are four themes for the Covenant Fund, now, and in the future.

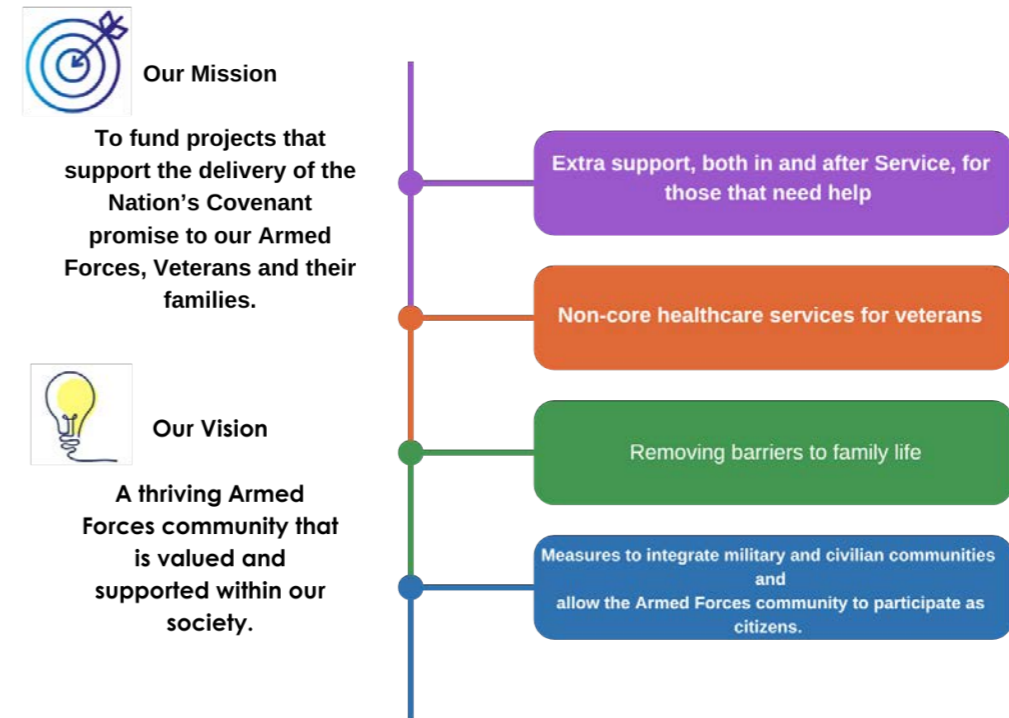
- Non-core healthcare services for Veterans.
- Removing barriers to family life.
- Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.
- Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.

Respondents were asked to put the above four themes of the Covenant Fund into the order they thought was the most important for the Trust to focus on, for the next three years.

Different groups ordered these priorities in different ways. We have set these out below. Providing extra support and help to reduce barriers to family life were significant priorities across all groups, apart from organisations and individual respondents.

	Top Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Fourth Choice
Veterans	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Non-core healthcare services for Veterans	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.	Removing barriers to family life.
Veterans' Families	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Non-core healthcare services for veterans	Removing barriers to family life.	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.
Serving Personnel/ Reservists	Removing barriers to family life.	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Non-core healthcare services for veterans	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.
Serving Families	Removing barriers to family life.	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Non-core healthcare services for Veterans	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.
Bereaved Families	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Non-core healthcare services for Veterans	Removing barriers to family life.	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.
Organisations	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.	Non-core healthcare services for Veterans	Removing barriers to family life.
Individuals	Extra support, both in and after Service, for those that need help.	Measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the Armed Forces community to participate as citizens.	Non-core healthcare services for veterans	Removing barriers to family life.

The graphic below shows the overall order that respondents thought the four themes of the Covenant Fund should be, over the next three years.



How we award grants

Respondents were asked a range of questions relating to the mechanics of grant making, including how important it is for the Trust to award longer grants to fewer projects, and should grants consider geographical spread.

Additionally, respondents were also asked to suggest how much funding they thought the Trust should award to projects lasting one and three years.

Respondents thought it more important for the Trust to award longer grants to fewer projects. There could be a risk of more applications being unsuccessful in their applications under this approach.

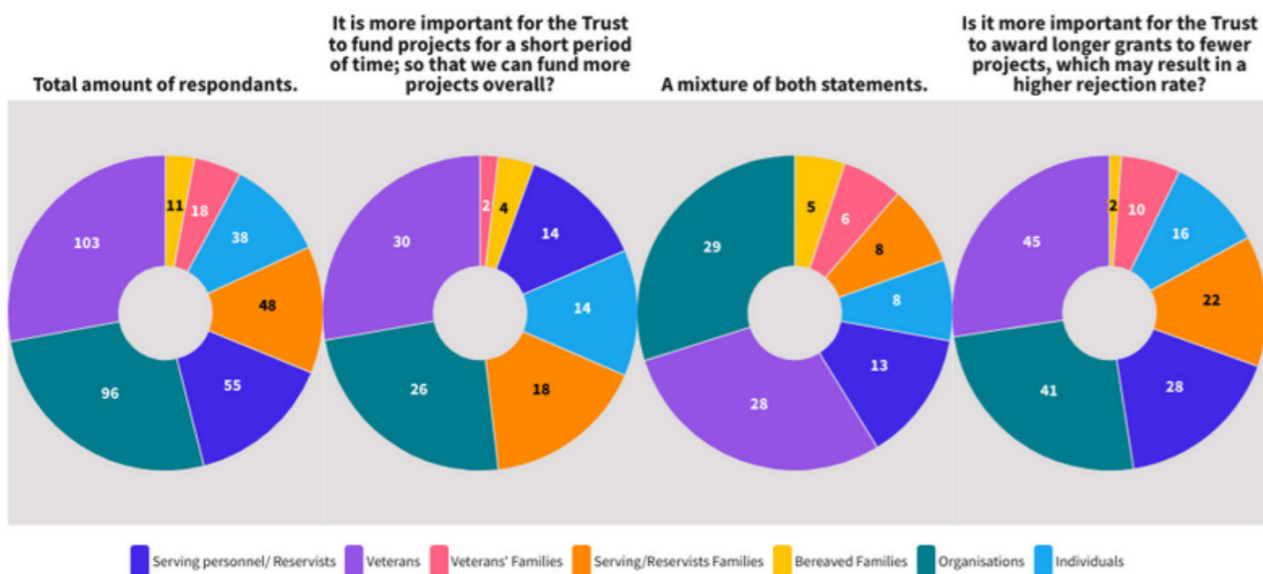
Respondents also thought that the Trust should make lots of smaller grants to ensure a good geographic spread of projects.

Taking the median average, respondents considered that grants in the region of £30,000 should be awarded in one year. As a three-year grant, the median suggested average was £120,000.

There was a mixture of opinions on how funding should be allocated, but overall, respondents felt it should be based on need, based on outcome and on population.

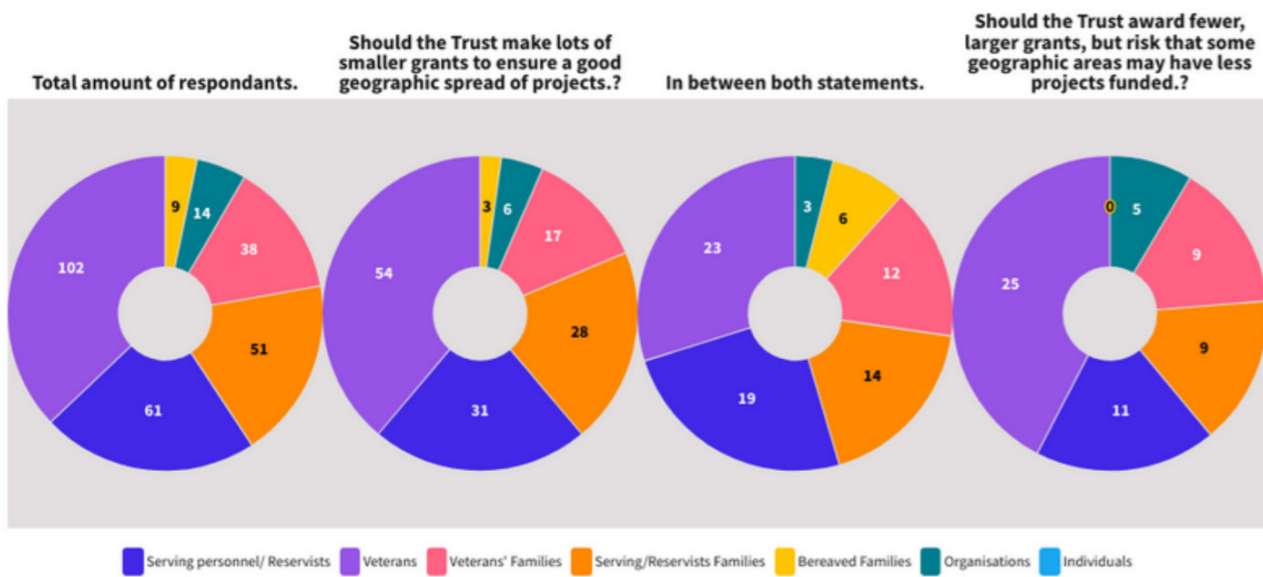
Respondants were asked to indicate whether they considered the statements below to be important, on a sliding, 0-100 scale.

For analysis, we used 0-49 on the scale for the first statement
50-69 for a mixture of the two
70-100 for the last statement.



Respondants were asked to indicate whether they considered the statements below to be important, on a sliding, 0-100 scale.

For analysis, we used 0-49 on the scale for the first statement
50-69 for a mixture of the two
70-100 for the last statement.



There were some comments made as free text responses, and a selection is below.

“Longer term funding would be helpful. It can be incredibly challenging to create long term sustainable outcomes in 2 or 3 years.”

“Making sure that all Veterans have access to the resources and agencies to support them regardless of their situation and position in society.”

“Offer grant funding to organisations that are doing good work already.”

How do you think we can best achieve sustainable outcomes in our work and support long-term change?

Participants were offered the opportunity to add their own comments to this question and the next four questions.

We received:

- 92 responses from Veterans and 15 responses from Veterans’ families
- 99 responses from organisations
- 40 answers from current serving personnel/Reservists and 28 responses from serving families
- 5 responses from bereaved families
- 38 responses from individuals.

Generally, participants wanted longer, more sustained funding, in conjunction with consistent organisation support. They felt this could affect more change, leading to sustainable, long-term outcomes for the Armed Forces community. Participants suggested this could be achieved by providing value for money, evidence-based, long-term programmes.

Comments included the following:

“By talking with the wider community and concentrating on themes that regularly occur or where a specific need is often not met or well-funded.”

“By providing longer term project funding.”

“To provide consistency rather than stop start.”

“Focus on prevention and make continuation funding available for projects that work. Encourage skills and knowledge sharing.”

“Carefully chosen projects which are based on validated principles where these exist, but also considering and supporting innovation where appropriate. Also, we need to manage expectations regarding measurable outcomes.”

“By extending the grant funding period beyond 2 years. Too many important and effective projects lead a ‘hand to mouth’ existence. Instead of frequently looking to fund new projects, which force bidders to create new initiatives, consider longer-term funding for the most effective ongoing projects.”

What outcomes are most important for us to focus on (by outcomes we mean the long-term changes that projects make)?

We received:

- 38 responses, to the above question, from currently serving personnel/Reservist, and 32 responses from serving families
- 5 responses from bereaved families
- 91 responses from Veterans, and 15 responses from Veterans’ families
- 97 responses from organisations
- 35 comments from individuals.

Generally, participants thought the Trust should focus on:

- Family support
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Integration into civilian life
- Collaboration
- Diverse funding and support/Long-term funding

Some of the comments included:

“Veterans’ mental health and actual physical health.”

“Collaboration, keep asking the service users. Research like this to establish what the key issues are.”

“Health of Veterans, transition from the Forces, employment, supporting families.”

“All family members receive expert support at the point they need it when health has been impacted by Forces life.”

“Prevention support delivered by Allied Health Professionals in collaboration with families would be helpful.”

“Service children. Education and wellbeing”.

“The improved mental health of people impacted by military life. Especially families.”

How can we ensure that we spend funding fairly across the UK and that our programmes have a good geographic reach?

We received:

- 90 responses from Veterans, and 14 responses from Veterans’ families
- 41 from currently serving personnel/Reservists, and 29 comments from serving families
- 5 responses from bereaved families
- 97 responses from organisations
- 34 responses from individuals.

In summary, some participants felt that we could concentrate on population density, including the number of garrisons or Veterans in a chosen area. Other participants felt that it is unfair to look at population density as rural areas would then be overlooked. There were a high proportion of responders who wanted programmes to make sure they were funding fairly across the UK to concentrate on Devolved Nations and suggested that need should take over where geographical spread is concerned.

Some of the comments included:

“It’s got to be prioritised on need and accept that there may be regional disparities.”

“Not interested in geographic equity..... go where the need is!”

“Spending money fairly across the UK can only happen if bids are received from all parts of the UK. Certain parts of the UK will have more Service / Veterans than other parts, which means they will mostly get a bigger slice of the cake.”

“Northern Ireland has the highest trauma burden per Veteran including children and families anywhere in the UK. There are constant reminders of the conflict, and many Veterans feel unsafe and still feel their lives are under threat.”

We also asked a broad question Is there anything else that you would like us to know? in order to capture any additional views that participants wanted to share with us.

We received:

- 26 responses from currently serving/Reserves in relation to the above question, and 15 responses from serving families
- 4 responses from bereaved families
- 62 from Veterans, and 11 from Veterans’ families
- 71 responses from organisations
- 24 from individuals.

In summary, respondents wanted us to know that integration into civilian life (and widespread support) was important to them, as was the Trust, and that it was important to reduce loneliness and isolation for Armed Forces communities.

Comments included:

“Successful integration into civilian life.”

“Integration of AF communities within broader communities.”

“The AFCFT plays a massive part in help Armed Forces, veterans and their families alike.”

“The Armed Forces Covenant Fund has provided crucial funding that has made a real difference to people at a local level.”

Tell Us One Thing

Our separate ‘Tell us One Thing’ campaign ran alongside the main consultation survey to help us reach more people, particularly those who may not wish to engage in a longer survey. It received 81 responses. It enabled responders to tell us, from their perspective, one thing that was important to them, surrounding four topics.

- Local services
- Serving personnel
- Veterans
- Families

In summary, participants told us that:

- they wanted more mental health support which extends to all branches of the Armed Forces community, including families. There was a consensus that mental health support for serving personnel is lacking
- participants wanted better access to charities, and more signposting to how Veterans can access available help
- financial concerns including cost of living, wages and access to pensions were also a common theme
- Veterans want more integration into both the Army community and civil community
- Veterans wish to change how they are perceived within society
- participants would like more collaboration between services in conjunction with enhanced family support, specifically support for children
- there were topics raised regarding access to funding and expressed need for more continuous funding.



Conclusion

The Trust ran an open consultation in June and July 2023, to gather views from a wide range of stakeholders regarding the development of the Covenant Fund three-year Framework, shape new programmes and to gather views on grants generally.

The consultation was informed from a research review which included published research and learning from earlier programmes which we have run. This identified some initial themes.

- Giving better, more holistic support for families including those who have been bereaved.
- Reducing loneliness and isolation.
- Mental health and wellbeing support, for all parts of the Armed Forces community.
- Reducing stress and challenges that are unique to the Armed Forces community.

We devised the consultation to reach a broad cross-section of people and organisations from across the Armed Forces community. Our consultation was delivered through different forms, including a main consultation and a shorter, 'Tell us one thing' campaign.

Respondents from across the Armed Forces community and beyond responded to our consultation, resulting in the highest ever number of participants the Trust has had in a consultation exercise.

As part of our consultation exercise, we offered respondents the opportunity to add comments and opinions, in conjunction with answering carefully devised questions.

Key findings from the consultation with over 600 responses, including 124 organisations, together with learning from the delivery of previous programmes and from the literature review, identified key overall themes.

Across all groups, participants felt the top three aims of the Covenant Fund should be to:

1. Help Veterans with significant mental health needs.
2. Reduce loneliness and isolation for Armed Forces communities.
3. Reduce stress and challenges for Armed Forces families.

Overall, the overarching priorities for participants from Armed Forces communities were:

- Access to support /advice when needed.
- Support with family life.
- Reducing isolation.
- Mental health/wellbeing.

Respondents to the consultation survey thought it was very important that funding programmes:

- focus on preventing problems
- have long-term impact
- are targeted
- encourage collaborative projects where different organisations work together.

There were differing views on how funding could best be distributed, with support for both small grants and larger grants awarded over longer periods of time.

The resulting strategic Framework for the Covenant Fund between 2024-27 has three core themes with strong alignment with the Armed Forces Covenant.

- Understanding complex problems and identifying solutions.
- Ensuring Armed Forces communities are not disadvantaged.
- Supporting those in need of special consideration.

What happens next?

The Framework will shape the development of demand-led and strategically designed programmes of funding over the next three years, which will aim to enable sustainable change for Armed Forces communities. Consultation and engagement will continue as the Trust develops funding programmes under the Framework; and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who has helped us so far by taking part.

The Trust is excited about this significant change, and we hope that it will offer increased transparency, the opportunity for stakeholders to participate in the design of effective and impactful grant programmes and, significantly, provide a more strategic approach to the delivery of funding to honour the Armed Forces Covenant promise.



www.covenantfund.org.uk

Awarding grants that support the Armed Forces community

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust | Chair: Hans Pung Chief Executive: Anna Wright

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust Limited (CRN11185188) acting as the trustee of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund (CC1177627)

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