

Scottish Government submission of 17 July 2023

PE2032/A: Improve the support available to injured soldiers and veterans in Scotland

I refer you to your email of 20 June asking for the Scottish Government's views on the actions called for in petition PE2032. I have addressed the requests contained in the bullet points of the petition below.

- **ensuring there are clear patient pathways for their injuries to be treated by appropriate consultants; and establishing a veterans trauma network, similar to that which operates in England and Wales**

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all serving Armed Forces personnel and veterans living in Scotland, as well as their families, are able to access the best possible care and support, including safe, effective and person-centred healthcare.

The Armed Forces Personnel & Veterans Health Joint Group ("the Joint Group") works on priority areas to drive progress towards our commitments in meeting the health needs of Armed Forces personnel and veterans. It was refreshed in 2018 and brings together NHS Champions, representatives of the serving community, veterans organisations, Scottish Government officials and other stakeholders. The Joint Group's structure consists of a Strategic Oversight Group (SOG) which sets strategic direction and an Implementation Group (IG) which reports to the SOG. The Groups have broad membership, harnessing a range of expertise.

The priorities set by the Joint Group in May 2021 included, as is mentioned in the above petition, exploring setting up a Scottish Veterans Trauma Network.

To reflect the holistic approach needed by such a service, the Scottish Government are working with colleagues across the NHS and the veteran's community to help develop a Scottish Veterans Treatment Pathway (SVTP).

The Scottish Government has been working with the Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) in England, to understand the principles of, and the

approach taken by, the VTN and how this could be applied to a similar service in Scotland.

The intention of the SVTP is to support any veteran presenting with a service-related physical injury, which remains a cause for concern despite treatment, either previous or current. The proposed pathway aims to supplement and support existing service provision, and provide a dedicated pathway to explore treatment options and enhanced co-ordination of care where required.

It may also be relevant to note that NHS Scotland has pledged to support the Armed Forces Community and honour the Armed Forces Covenant. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise that those in the Armed Forces Community should be treated fairly and receive no disadvantage when accessing public services.

For the purposes of upholding the Covenant, disadvantage is described as being *‘when the level of access a member of the Armed Forces Community has to goods and services, or the support they receive, is comparatively lower than that of someone in a similar position who is not a member of the Armed Forces Community, and this difference arises from one (or more) of the unique obligations and sacrifices of Service life’*.

The Armed Forces Covenant Duty came into effect on 22 November 2022, and this places a legal obligation on certain public bodies, which includes healthcare services to ‘have due regard’ to the principles of the Covenant. The Covenant Duty is not prescriptive about the actions that specified bodies should take in order to comply with their legal obligations.

Scottish Government has shared the [Statutory Guidance produced by the MOD](#) to help organisations in scope of the Covenant Duty understand and comply with it. The guidance explains the Armed Forces Covenant, and includes examples of where disadvantage can arise, of good practice, and other useful information.

- **ensuring all correspondence, raising concerns or making complaints about their treatment, from veterans to the Scottish Government, is acknowledged and responded to**

All correspondence received by the Scottish Government is logged centrally and the aim is to reply to such correspondence within 20 days of receipt. Details on how to contact a cabinet secretary or minister can be found at the link below, this link also provides contact details for local MSPs [Contact a cabinet secretary or minister - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

However, it should also be noted that, for individual cases, Scottish Ministers will signpost to relevant local support or complaints processes.

- **reviewing and seeking to update the way in which the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman handles complaints from veterans about health service.**

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is independent from the providers of healthcare and Ministers. Given the independence of the SPSO from Ministers, it is for the SPSO to comment on its processes and any potential review of how it handles complaints from veterans about the health service.

The SPSO's role is set out in the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (Scotland) Act 2002. It includes investigating complaints about most organisations providing public services in Scotland and driving learning and improvement from complaints. The SPSO makes independent and impartial decisions.

As an alternative, or in addition, to making a complaint, there is the option to contribute to the Care Opinion website. Care Opinion allows people to post public but anonymous stories about the services that they, or someone they know, have received in NHS Scotland. When a story is published online a notification is sent to the appropriate service provider (health board, hospital ward, surgeon, doctor, nurse etc.) and they have the opportunity to respond to your story in the public forum.

I hope this response is helpful both to the Committee and to the petitioner.