

Cross party Group on the Armed Forces and Veterans Community submission of 16 October 2023

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

It is vital that members of the armed forces and veterans are able to receive the support they are entitled to when dealing with service-related injuries. Where it is demonstrated that they are experiencing adverse treatment in either regard, we would support action to improve that position.

The first proposal in the petition calls for “*ensuring there are clear patient pathways for their injuries to be treated by appropriate consultants*”. We believe this is already being addressed by the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) and the Defence Transition Service who have a responsibility to ensure individuals receive support when leaving the armed forces.

As such, we contacted the VWS to enquire about support for those leaving the services who have been identified as vulnerable. In response, the VWS affirmed that: *‘The Veterans Welfare Service, and Defence Transition Services, seek to ensure that those identified as vulnerable, including those pending medical discharge, are provided with support during and after the discharge process. This includes being connected with appropriate NHS Services for health conditions experienced during Service.’*

Similarly, we note the second proposal to establish “*a veterans trauma network, similar to that which operates in England and Wales*” is also being addressed with the creation of a Scottish Veterans Treatment Pathway. It has been confirmed to us that “*The Scottish Veterans Treatment Pathway (SVTP) will replicate closely the NHS England Veterans Trauma Network (now Op Restore) but within the different structure of NHS Scotland.*” Included in the new Scottish system will be a Veteran In-Service Injury Review (VISIR) to assess the need for specialised clinical routes.

The SVTP has been in development for 18 months and has involved close cooperation with Op Restore Staff. Once ministerial approval is granted the service should be introduced in 2024.

Regarding the final two proposals, we would always encourage public bodies and officials to respond to correspondence in a timely manner and seek to fully resolve enquiries and complaints. We do not have sufficient data to assess whether armed forces personnel and veterans are specifically experiencing undue problems in this regard. However, where there are problems in response times of complaint handling for the public as a whole it seems reasonable to assume that includes armed forces personnel and veterans.

As such, we are not convinced armed forces personnel and veterans need to be treated as a specialised grouping for the purposes of either response times or complaint resolution. Rather, it might be more useful for public bodies to review their response times and procedures to identify where general improvements can be made to benefit everyone, including armed forces personnel and veterans.

One potential exception where it might be useful to specifically group armed forces personnel and veterans might be regarding cases involving treatment of a service-related condition. Even so there is an expectation that the Veterans Welfare Service and the Defence Transition would provide support in such cases.