
Lest We Forget

Ex-servicemen and homelessness

Scott Ballintyne

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Crisis is the national charity for homeless people, especially those for whom there is no legal right to accommodation. Our mission is to find lasting solutions to end street homelessness for good.

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Foreword

If this research proves anything, it's that it's good to talk. It's nearly seven years since Crisis' groundbreaking *Falling Out* first drew attention to the plight of homeless ex-servicemen. *Lest We Forget* – rooted in the cross-sector work championed by the Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness – has revitalised that debate.

The very act of researching this report stimulated discussions and opened up lines of communication not only between the Armed Forces, ex-Service organisations and homelessness agencies, but also within Whitehall itself.

The Rough Sleepers Unit and the Ministry of Defence have begun to meet regularly, while the former has funded a number of homelessness and ex-Service organisations helping to house ex-Service personnel. The MoD is expanding quality resettlement programmes at Catterick Garrison and Colchester's military prison and is already looking closely at our proposals for early identification of serving personnel who may be at risk of homelessness. The Directorate of Military Outplacement is even conducting a full-scale review of resettlement entitlement.

This top-level concern to tackle homelessness among ex-servicemen must be applauded. It is almost more than we could have hoped for. *Almost but not quite.*

Because there are still ex-servicemen sleeping in hostels, B&Bs, on friends' floors – and on the streets too. There are still yawning gaps in the provision of advice and support, let alone housing, to people preparing to leave the Armed Forces and to those who have already left.

Lest We Forget reminds us all of these people. The measures which it proposes are not a pick 'n' mix, but taken as a package of cultural and structural change, they should ensure that everything that can be done *is* done to prevent homelessness among ex-servicemen. Because ultimately, there will only be two benchmarks against which success is measured – what has been done prior to discharge and what has been done post-discharge to minimise the chances of future homelessness? If we can answer these questions comprehensively, we will have served those servicemen comprehensively too.



Shaks Ghosh
Chief Executive, Crisis

Summary and recommendations

Social exclusion takes many forms, the most visible of which is homelessness, particularly rough sleeping. But not all sections of society run the same risk of exclusion or homelessness.

The individual pathways to homelessness are many but there are several recurring ‘institutional’ features. Nearly half of homeless people under 25 have been in local authority care, many have spent time in prison – and up to three in ten have served in the Armed Forces.

This summary sets out the main findings and recommendations from a study into ex-servicemen and homelessness (*men* because they almost exclusively are – up to 98 per cent of homeless ex-Service personnel are male). This built upon earlier work which highlighted the proportion of homeless people with a service background and explored their routes into homelessness. It also acknowledges recent substantial developments in the Armed Forces’ approach to resettlement, which, in themselves, may help reduce the likelihood of future homelessness among ex-servicemen.

The research set out to answer two questions:

- 1 what is currently being done before and after personnel are discharged from the Armed Forces to prevent the likelihood of them becoming homeless?
- 1 what more could be done before and after discharge from the Armed Forces to prevent homelessness and reduce the proportion of those already homeless who have a service background?

It builds upon the common service background shared by many homeless people as an opportunity for early intervention and prevention. Ultimately, this study takes prevention as its starting point and reduction as its goal.

The past few years have seen significant improvement in resettlement support and services available to personnel leaving the Armed Forces and many successfully re-enter civilian life. However, more than three in four (77 per cent) agencies involved in working with homeless ex-servicemen believe there are gaps in current provision. If we are to maximise prevention there is scope for improvement in two main areas:

- 1 ensuring all relevant sections within the Armed Forces are aware of their role and responsibilities in preventing homelessness among ex-servicemen
- 1 identifying those ‘at risk’ of experiencing difficulties after discharge and ensuring they have access to a full resettlement programme and extended support in partnership with non-Service agencies.

Recommendation 1

The Ministry of Defence should lead a short-life Task Group involving ex-Service and homelessness organisations as well as all the appropriate government departments (Health, Education, Environment). This Group would have the following remit:

- 1 conduct a homelessness prevention audit of all services and agencies
- 1 establish an early warning system to identify personnel ‘at-risk’ of experiencing difficulties on discharge. This could be actioned through an advisory checklist for senior officers indicating predictive factors for homelessness or via the regular personnel assessment undertaken by commanding officers. However this is achieved, it is vital that senior officers support such a preventative system actively
- 1 revisit current eligibility for full resettlement and consider extending the scope of the programme to include personnel identified as being at risk
- 1 revisit the long-term aim of making full resettlement an entitlement for all personnel being discharged and bring forward a timetable and action plan for achieving this within three years
- 1 investigate a ‘spend-to-save’ homelessness prevention programme
- 1 consider setting up an alternative resettlement programme delivered by trained ex-Service personnel for discharges who are disillusioned with the Armed Forces.

Despite some recent developments between the Armed Forces, ex-Service agencies and newer, smaller voluntary sector organisations there remains a clear gulf between service delivery

before and after discharge. The Armed Forces take primary responsibility for preparing Service personnel for discharge. Welfare organisations and specialist agencies pick-up discharged personnel through limited referral or more often through self-referral.

Partnership working remains low key and is needs rather than prevention driven. Over nine in ten (92 per cent) agencies report organisational links with other homeless and ex-Service agencies. But nearly two in three (62 per cent) of these links are informal and are maintained through personal networking. If we are to maximise prevention before discharge and reduce the likelihood of homelessness after discharge, we need to:

- | engage ex-Service organisations in the design and delivery of resettlement programmes and joint initiatives before discharge
- | build on recent improvements in the medical discharge process by involving ex-Service organisations in the early identification of 'at-risk' personnel and planning appropriate handover and longer-term support programmes.

Recommendation 2

The Ministry of Defence in partnership with other government departments, ex-Service and homelessness agencies should hold a working conference which:

- | receives up-to-date information on joint initiatives both before and after discharge which are directly and indirectly related to ex-servicemen and homelessness
- | considers the need for a standing partnership forum to prevent and reduce homelessness among ex-servicemen
- | plans the extension of partnership working by involving ex-Service agencies not only in the design and delivery of an ongoing 'learning for life' development programme, but also in the early identification of 'at-risk' personnel, establishing effective tracking, adequate handover procedures and the provision of longer-term support.

Ongoing access to employment and housing advice and support is critical to preventing

homelessness. Access needs to be easily available, encouraged and provided for a long period after discharge.

Recommendation 3

The Ministry of Defence jointly with the Departments for Education and Employment and for the Environment, Transport and the Regions as well as appropriate voluntary and private sector organisations should consider establishing on-line jobs and housing services for ex-Service personnel and their dependents. This should be accessible before discharge and at any future time.

It could build upon the existing SkillBank service provided by the Service Employment Network and The Link, the present on-line employment agency. However, as they stand these services need to be substantially upgraded so that they fulfil a central function for personnel and prospective employers. They should become the recognised and preferred one-stop employment and advice shop for ex-Service personnel and employers.

Ex-servicemen are an enduring group within the longer-term homeless population. Continuing to improve resettlement programmes before discharge and building effective partnerships which deliver continuing support will, over time, help to reduce the numbers of ex-Service homeless people. But such measures will not reduce the present number of homeless ex-servicemen.

If we are to tackle that, we must:

- | identify a homeless person's service background as early as possible and determine whether it is an important contributory factor for that individual
- | develop local joint service delivery to meet the needs of ex-Service personnel
- | overcome barriers between the Armed Forces and homeless ex-servicemen.

Recommendation 4

All homelessness organisations should review their initial contact procedures and ensure that service in the Armed Forces is recorded as part

of initial client contact. All homelessness organisations should take the necessary training and awareness steps to ensure outreach and reception staff understand the significance of a service background and build this understanding into their service development plans.

Recommendation 5

The Rough Sleepers Unit in partnership with the Ministry of Defence, ex-Service and homelessness agencies should set up a joint pilot project in London to:

- | jointly review the need for specialist support for homeless ex-servicemen
- | design and deliver ongoing support, training and employment search services to a pilot group of ex-Service personnel picking them up before discharge and following them through resettlement
- | establish a joint outreach programme, including joint training of all staff (who should include serving and ex-Service personnel), to focus upon existing homeless ex-servicemen. This would provide in-depth rehabilitation, support, skills development, training and access to employment and appropriate housing.

Recommendation 6

The Ministry of Defence in partnership with ex-Service and homelessness agencies should investigate ways in which the Armed Forces could become involved post-discharge, including:

- | participating in and jointly providing ongoing advice and support on accommodation, employment and other needs to maintain a live connection with ex-Service personnel in difficulty
- | establishing a joint programme for serving personnel which encourages them to continue to see the Armed Forces as a resource after discharge
- | work with ex-Service organisations to train serving personnel so they can assist in joint initiatives to contact ex-Service homeless personnel and assist in their rehabilitation.

Improving and extending joint working is central to preventing and reducing homelessness. The ground needs to be prepared for partnership. Individual agencies and organisations can take stock of their prevention potential, expenditure on ex-Service homelessness and service design and delivery. In itself, this can improve awareness of ex-Service homelessness and better address needs.

Recommendation 7

All government departments, ex-Service and homelessness agencies should assess their role and responsibilities for preventing and reducing homelessness among ex-servicemen. This includes:

- | establishing systems to identify and assess the needs of homeless ex-servicemen as part of initial contact and ongoing support
- | internally auditing services for their prevention capacity and whether they meet the needs of ex-Service personnel
- | reviewing existing links to the Armed Forces and other appropriate voluntary sector agencies
- | review expenditure on homelessness and ex-servicemen and make the costs of delivering services to homeless ex-servicemen transparent.

Ongoing improvements in the Armed Forces resettlement programme, accompanied by a growing willingness for agencies to work together, provide a potentially strong platform from which to prevent and reduce homelessness among ex-servicemen. But not all these initiatives have yet delivered and there is scope for more, targeted change. Unfortunately, ex-servicemen continue to become homeless and remain homeless longer than other homeless people. By pursuing this package of recommendations, at last, we have an opportunity to break the cycle.

Introduction

Homelessness has risen to prominence in the United Kingdom on the strength of its increasing visibility on the streets and the public's unease at seeing people living their lives there. It is the most visible manifestation of social exclusion, where the general public come face to face with others who are disconnected from the social and economic mainstream. Unemployment, urban decay, discrimination, inequality and even poverty can be viewed from a distance by most of the population. But homelessness is hard to avoid when it is a daily feature of public life.

It has therefore slowly crept up the public agenda. The government is tackling homelessness as a priority, drawing policy, funding and coordination together under the Rough Sleepers Unit. It has also set the target of reducing rough sleeping by two-thirds by 2002.

To achieve this target and maintain street homelessness at 'near zero' levels, it is clear that efforts must be focused on stopping people sliding down the homelessness ladder. In other words, prevention is the key.

Prevention should not simply be generic. Research consistently shows that there are a number of groups more susceptible to homelessness than others, and so specific tactics for prevention need to be developed for these 'at-risk' groups.

Those who have served in the Armed Forces are one such group. Up to 30 per cent of homeless people in Britain, particularly longer-term rough sleepers, have served in the Armed Forces at some time before becoming homeless.

The research: aim, approach and methods

This research builds upon earlier work which highlighted the proportion of homeless people who had served in the Armed Forces and examined their routes into homelessness (Randall and Brown, 1994; Gunner and Knott, 1997). It also builds upon recent substantial developments in the Armed Forces' approach to resettlement, which in themselves, may help reduce the likelihood of future homelessness among those leaving the Forces today.

This report does not seek to cover the same ground of those earlier studies, nor does it seek to attribute blame for some ex-servicemen's homelessness. Rather, we aim to take the common service background for many homeless people as an opportunity for early prevention and as a key to intervention.

The investigation set out to answer two questions:

- | what is currently being done before and after personnel are discharged from the Armed Forces to prevent the likelihood of them becoming homeless?
- | what more could be done before and after discharge from the Armed Forces to prevent homelessness and reduce the proportion of those already homeless who have a service background?

The investigation had five tasks:

- | to draw together the main research findings about homelessness and ex-servicemen
- | to map existing provision before discharge, after discharge, after arrival on the streets or presentation to a homeless agency, and after resettlement
- | to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of existing provision with particular reference to the government's 2002 target for reducing rough sleeping by two-thirds
- | to draw up recommendations on where and how ex-Service resources could be applied to provide more effective interventions
- | to identify gaps and make recommendations for government, for the Armed Forces, for ex-Service welfare organisations and for the wider voluntary sector.

Details of the issues investigated in the survey and a list of participating organisations are set out in the appendices at the end of the report. The remainder of this report sets out the findings from the investigation.

Chapter 1 explores earlier research on ex-servicemen and homelessness. It sets out the main findings from those studies, examines the key characteristics of ex-servicemen who become homeless, their routes into homelessness and it assesses the implications for preventing and reducing homelessness.

Chapter 2 investigates pre-discharge services to identify how they might help prevent homelessness among ex-servicemen. It sets out the range and scope of services before discharge, identifies gaps in service provision before looking briefly at funding and expenditure.

Chapter 3 examines post-discharge services to see how they might help reduce the likelihood of homelessness after discharge and reduce the numbers of ex-servicemen who are currently homeless. It sets out the range and scope of post-discharge services, identifies gaps in those services and looks at expenditure and performance monitoring. It also explores some possible lessons from the United States.

Chapter 4 looks at desired improvements in tackling homelessness among ex-servicemen. It sets out the improvements that are preferred by agencies and organisations working in the field, identifies possible barriers to making such improvements happen and sets out responsibilities for their implementation.

Finally, *chapter 5* identifies areas of emerging consensus for action to prevent and reduce homelessness. It sets out recommendations to stem the flow of ex-servicemen into homelessness by reducing both the likelihood of them becoming homeless for years after discharge and also the numbers who are currently homeless.

I. People, pathways and needs

Over the past ten years, successive investigations into homelessness in the UK have concentrated on three main questions.

- | How many people are homeless?
- | How do people become homeless?
- | How do we best meet the needs of homeless people?

The reasoning is straightforward. By determining the number of people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, government and welfare agencies are better placed to understand the scale of the problem. By working out how different people or groups of people become homeless, agencies can fashion interventions which reduce the risk of homelessness. By assessing the needs of homeless people, organisations can tailor services to meet immediate needs and start to plan the steps which are required to help homeless people re-enter the social and economic mainstream.

As a consequence three debates have dominated the homelessness landscape. The first has centred upon definitions and numbers. A narrow definition of homelessness, of course, produces lower numbers and reduces responsibilities upon statutory agencies. A broader definition generates higher numbers and a higher demand for action. The importance of this debate reached its zenith in the mid-1990s when numbers ruled the funding world. It has eased a little because government has raised the overall priority for tackling homelessness and injected more funding. But the interplay between numbers and funding continues to rumble along beneath the homelessness agenda, particularly when homeless funding is seen to be placing pressure upon agencies' mainstream expenditure.

A second debate focuses on the pathways into and out of homelessness. It has two main components – firstly, which people or groups of people are at greater risk of becoming homeless? And secondly, what common elements are there, if any, in the slide into – and the climb out of – homelessness? This debate has shed light upon early intervention, where agencies and organisations are able to maximise their preventative role. It has also helped establish better and best practice once an individual's risk

of homelessness increases. In short, the issues raised by the 'pathways debate' have moulded the preventative responses for people at risk. The difficulty such an approach faces is that it often requires agencies and organisations, whose connection to homelessness seems remote and marginal to their primary purpose, to reassess what they can do to reduce a future risk of homelessness. Its present impetus owes much to its inclusion as a priority by the Rough Sleepers Unit.

The third debate is about the immediate versus longer-term needs of homeless people. It is currently more topical and heated than the other debates because it is a proxy for a long overdue discussion about the future shape of service provision for homeless people. This debate contends that some, if not most, 'emergency' homelessness services – such as soup runs, medical cover and even hostels – may in fact make it easier for some people to remain homeless. This is likely to be true in the same way as it is also true that such services help homeless people stay alive. The importance of this debate is twofold.

It highlights the need to reshape services so that they meet immediate needs in such a way as to support intervention and help homeless people move away from the street. But it also highlights the ineffectiveness of unbalanced homelessness services, irrespective of their source – either when services are overwhelmingly geared towards providing immediate support without meaningful intervention or when such support becomes conditional upon homeless people having to jump through hoops.

But what does this all mean for ex-servicemen and homelessness? It is the backcloth against which any review of what we currently know about ex-servicemen and homelessness takes place. Just as the three main issues of scale, pathways to homelessness and service needs inform investigations into homelessness, so too do they inform research into homeless ex-servicemen. Just as the three major debates on numbers, prevention and the shape of services underpin the ways in which we tackle homelessness, so too do they inform how best to tackle homelessness among ex-servicemen.

Key features of existing research on homeless ex-servicemen

Two major investigations into ex-servicemen and homelessness have mapped the overlap between homelessness and past service in the Armed Forces. *Falling Out* (Crisis, 1994) and *Homeless on Civvy Street* (ESAG, 1997) placed homelessness among ex-servicemen on the public agenda and provided the long overdue catalyst for recent improvements. Figure 1 sets out the key characteristics of homeless ex-servicemen as detailed in those reports.

Figure 1 Key characteristics of homeless ex-servicemen

Proportion of homeless people who had served in the Forces:

Up to 30 per cent of homeless people in hostels, day centres and soup runs
22 per cent of homeless people surveyed in London on a single night

Service background:

Only eight per cent had served as part of National Service
86 per cent had joined voluntarily

Length of service:	1994	1997
Up to three years	19%	44%
From three to six years	30%	26%
Over six years	51%	30%

Main reasons for joining Forces:

Active wish to join Forces	20%
Employment	16%
Leaving home/family pressure	14%
Adventure/to see the world	12%
Because friends joined up	10%

Main reasons for leaving Forces:

End of contract	78%
Health/disability	10%
Disciplinary	6%
Bought themselves out	4%

Clearly, there is no question that there is an issue which needs to be addressed. Between one in three and one in five homeless people have spent some time in the Armed Forces. And compared to other homeless people, those with a service background are more likely to be male, older, sleep rough and to have been homeless and unemployed for longer.

Specifically, homeless ex-servicemen are more likely to have been homeless for longer than non-Service homeless people. *Falling Out* found that half of homeless ex-servicemen had been homeless for ten years or more, while *Homeless on Civvy Street* found that 55 per cent had been homeless for more than five years, compared to just 30 per cent of non-Service homeless people.

They are also more likely to have given up looking for accommodation, to have slept rough and less likely to stay in a hostel. Over half of those surveyed for *Falling Out* (51 per cent) said they were not looking for alternative accommodation. *Homeless on Civvy Street* found that nearly two in three homeless ex-servicemen (63 per cent) had slept rough in the previous 12 months, compared to 54 per cent of non-Service homeless people. It also found that only 59 per cent of homeless ex-servicemen stayed in a hostel, compared to 73 per cent of non-Service homeless people.

At the same time, ex-servicemen are more likely to be successful at surviving on the streets – squaddies, after all, are trained to sleep rough – and less likely to take advantage of the support on offer. Over one in five (21 per cent) of those questioned for *Homeless on Civvy Street* did not require help, compared to only seven per cent of non-Service homeless people. Finally, they are less likely to have stayed with family or friends – whereas one in two non-Service homeless people had done so before becoming homeless, only one in six ex-servicemen had.

As for how they ended up in this situation, most join the Forces voluntarily (86 per cent), leave because their contract ends (78 per cent) and have no problems while serving (82 per cent). In other words, it is often difficult to map out the pathways an ex-soldier travels into homelessness. (By and large, they *are* soldiers – two in three homeless ex-servicemen have served in the British Army rather than the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force.)

Certainly, little can be found when examining health issues. While 70 per cent of those interviewed for *Homeless on Civvy Street* had physical health problems, only one in ten was discharged from the Forces for health-related reasons. Drug and mental health problems are relatively rare too. The only real exception to

this is alcohol misuse. Two in five homeless ex-servicemen have alcohol problems (compared to only one in four non-Service homeless people), and nearly half of these reported problems with alcohol while in the Forces.

Homeless ex-servicemen are also reasonably unlikely to have become homeless immediately on discharge. *Falling Out* reports that more than half (53 per cent) of homeless ex-servicemen had left the Forces more than 20 years earlier and one-third (33 per cent) between ten and 20 years ago. Taking into account the greater length of time ex-servicemen are likely to have been homeless it would still appear that a number of years are likely to pass before ex-servicemen become homeless.

That said, insecure housing does seem to be a feature of post-discharge life. From the previous research, it can be said that homeless ex-servicemen are likely to have:

- | initially moved into accommodation which was not what they wanted (51 per cent)
- | stayed in their first accommodation for less than a year (60 per cent)
- | taken five years to find a home they regarded as settled (58 per cent)
- | never had a home since leaving the Forces (39 per cent).

It also showed that one in six (18 per cent) had no place to go on leaving, and more than one in five (22 per cent) moved directly into a B&B, hostel or started sleeping rough.

A number of ex-Service personnel also have difficulties settling into employment – nearly one in five homeless ex-servicemen say they had no transferable skills on leaving.

The issue of relationship breakdown is more complex. It is the most common catalyst for homelessness for both ex-Service and non-Service homeless people. But only one in ten reported that they had marital problems while in the Forces, and seven in ten homeless ex-servicemen were single when they left. This would suggest that relationship problems are likely to occur after leaving the Forces.

And yet, most homeless ex-servicemen viewed their time in the Forces to have been detrimental

to family life and believed that they had never developed any motivation to settle down. They saw this as contributing to their homelessness. Few conclusions about any connection between service and later relationship breakdown should be drawn from this limited data, though any steps to reduce the potential for relationship breakdown which could be taken while personnel are in the Forces are also likely to reduce the risk of homelessness.

Implications for preventing and reducing homelessness among ex-servicemen

Given all the above, it is clear that there is a problem. But it is also clear that, given the ascendancy of ‘the numbers game’, things do need to be put in their proper context.

The Rough Sleepers Unit estimates that around 1,200 people sleep rough on the streets of England every night, round about 6,000 every year (Rough Sleepers Unit, 2000). This would mean, at most, that 360 people with a service background sleep on the streets every night – less than 2,000 every year – and these numbers are going down.

They are also not large, and given that over 22,000 personnel were forecast to leave the Armed Forces in 1999/2000 – the overwhelming majority of whom make successful transitions to civilian life – it can reasonably be argued that disproportionate attention is being given to the relatively small number who end up on the streets (Ministry of Defence, 1999).

But successive governments have thrown their weight behind dealing with rough sleeping. The Rough Sleepers Unit, for instance, has a budget of £200 million to help 1,200 people off the streets. Ultimately, ‘the numbers game’ masks the real issue – that rough sleeping degrades us all.

Even more important, it must be remembered that homelessness is about more than rough sleeping. Hostels, shelters, B&Bs and friends’ floors hide a homeless ‘population’ the size of Oxford, Cambridge and Canterbury combined – 400,000 people who are effectively homeless (Alexander, 1998). Allowing for the evidence that ex-servicemen are less likely to stay in

hostels, we are still looking at an ex-Service homeless population of up to 100,000.

As well as the issue of perspective, it is also difficult to pinpoint causal relationships between homelessness and a service background. Relatively few people go *straight* from service into homelessness. But once they are homeless, ex-servicemen are more likely to remain in that state, and it is likely that the difficulties of settling into civilian life, particularly finding accommodation and employment, accompanied by a long-standing disconnection from civilian life and a place to call home are contributory factors. This can be exacerbated by a lack of transferable skills and alcohol misuse among some personnel – with the paradox that some of the skills acquired while in the Forces help sustain them on the streets.

This poses a number of questions.

- | What can be done that is not already being done while people are still serving to maximise the prevention of homelessness and reduce the likelihood of future homelessness?
- | What can be done, again that is not already being done, to ensure a smooth transition from service to civilian life, especially for those who are likely to be at greater risk of future homelessness?
- | What can be done after discharge from the Forces to reduce the likelihood of ex-servicemen becoming homeless at some future point?
- | And what can be done to reduce the number of existing homeless people, particularly long-term homeless people, who have spent some time in the Forces?

This suggests that there are four tasks confronting government, the Armed Forces, ex-Service welfare organisations and public and voluntary agencies.

Firstly, they could look at ways of stemming the flow from within by building connections between service and civilian life during service. This could be accomplished by improving transferable skills and working to reduce the incidence of alcohol misuse and relationship breakdown. It would seem to be important to provide all serving personnel with stakes in

future accommodation and a connection to a particular locality.

Secondly, they could look at how to smooth the transition from service to civilian life by further improving preparations for discharge. Access to accommodation and employment advice would again be important here, as well as working with specialist welfare agencies to provide continuing contact, support and advice from the onset of the discharge process through the most difficult period up to a year after discharge.

Thirdly, they could maintain that momentum by providing timely access for ex-Service personnel to advice and support at the point of need, which may be some time after they have left the Forces. The implication for the Forces is that they may have to find ways of extending their involvement in providing advice and support in partnership with other agencies. The implication for ex-Service welfare organisations is that they may have to provide more accessible, welcoming advice and support services at places where ex-Service personnel are likely to go and in ways which encourage take-up. The implication for generic homelessness agencies is that they must learn to recognise the potential of a service background from initial contact, as well as building local networks with the other key stakeholders.

Finally, they could try to reduce the number of existing homeless people who have at some time served in the Forces by ensuring that all outreach and hostel staff recognise the importance of a service background. The upshot of such a long overdue recognition could be to build specialist local outreach programmes to contact and work with homeless ex-servicemen.

Much of this is already underway. Significant and substantial improvements have been made and are continuing to be made in the Forces' Resettlement Programme. *Falling Out, Homeless on Civity Street*, the leading work of the Ex-Service Action Group and the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review have all come together to greatly improve services for the majority of people leaving the Forces and thereby to reduce the likelihood of future homelessness.

Key recommendations from the previous research have been or are being implemented. For example, the Joint Service Housing Advice Organisation was set up in 1994 to provide structured housing advice to Service leavers, and the renting of Ministry of Defence housing to housing associations in return for nominations now takes place.

The main question is how we maintain this momentum, continue to build upon existing developments and further improve the range and quality of services. The next two chapters set out what is currently available before and after discharge, look at the gaps identified by agencies and examine ways of further preventing and reducing homelessness.

2. Preventing homelessness before discharge

The past few years have seen significant developments in services before discharge which are likely to help prevent homelessness among ex-servicemen in the future. In particular, four developments are likely to have a positive impact upon future homelessness:

- ▮ the re-organisation of resettlement services, including the establishment of the Career Transition Partnership
- ▮ the provision of improved employment and accommodation services
- ▮ wider access to skills and qualifications which are recognised across civilian life
- ▮ improved provision for medical discharge, particularly access to a full resettlement package and a smoother handover from military to civilian services.

This has not always been the case. *Falling Out* found that in 1994, 85 per cent of homeless ex-servicemen reported they had received no advice or assistance on accommodation when leaving the Forces. This was despite the fact that 30 per cent said they had needed help. The position on other advice, mainly employment advice, was strikingly similar – 79 per cent of homeless ex-servicemen received no other resettlement advice, although 42 per cent said that they had wanted it.

Three years later, *Homeless on Civvy Street* found that four in five homeless ex-servicemen reported they had not been offered resettlement advice. Where advice was on offer a majority took it up. But at the end of the day, fewer than one in eight (12 per cent) had received advice on resettlement.

This may reflect a situation many years in the making, given that most homeless ex-servicemen had served in the Forces a number of years earlier. But it does highlight the importance of timely access to advice, particularly employment and accommodation advice, if we are to prevent homelessness.

This situation has, however, greatly improved. In 1995, following the initial round of redundancies arising from the Strategic Defence Review, the Ministry of Defence reported that 60 per cent of personnel leaving the Forces had

been assisted into employment and that three months after leaving only 20 per cent were still looking for work. In 1999, the Directorate of Military Outplacement reported that up to 70 per cent of personnel leaving the Forces found employment for themselves and six months later, 85 per cent were in work or training. This shows a small, but significant reduction in the number of ex-Service personnel having difficulty transferring into civilian employment.

Three improvements on the accommodation front also indicate some progress. The growth of the Ministry of Defence Nomination Scheme within a fairly short space of time – rising to 1,000 ex-Service personnel being nominated to 26 Housing Associations – is a positive demonstration of practical action. The issues here are the extent to which this can continue to expand and whether it is possible to make a proportion of this accommodation available to personnel who may be more at risk of becoming homeless.

A second indicator of progress lies in the number of Service leavers receiving advice and support on resettlement. In its first year of operation from October 1998 to October 1999, the Career Transition Partnership, which was set up to oversee resettlement, saw more than 11,000 Service leavers, almost 90 per cent of those eligible for resettlement services. This is a substantially better picture from that painted by homeless ex-servicemen in the previous research. Similarly, the proportion of housing briefings to unmarried servicemen from the Joint Service Housing Advice Office has risen from one in ten in 1994 to three in ten by 1999.

Thirdly, there has been progress on accommodation for personnel who are medically discharged with mental health difficulties. Initial results from a study being conducted by the Defence Secondary Care Agency show that most Service leavers who are psychiatrically discharged (52 per cent) are in housing need at the time of discharge. Three months later, though, only three per cent are.

In the face of these developments, two questions need to be answered. What more can be done while someone is in service which will continue

to diminish a possibility of future homelessness? And what enduring issues still need to be tackled if we are to continue to make progress? To address these issues, the range of services presently available before discharge need to be set out.

The range and scope of pre-discharge services

The primary provider of pre-discharge services are the Forces themselves, either as single Services or on a 'tri-Service' basis through the Directorate of Military Outplacement (D-MOS). Each Service (British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force) provides informal help and advice on housing, employment and training. Since October 1998, the Career Transition Partnership has become the main vehicle through which D-MOS oversees resettlement across the three Services. Housing briefings are available to all serving personnel throughout their service from the Joint Service Housing Advice Office.

While ex-Service welfare agencies have advice services which are available to serving personnel, in practice these services start to operate after discharge and there is little involvement 'inside the gate' (during service). However, specialist ex-Service welfare organisations are becoming involved at an earlier stage in the specific case of medical discharges. There is a great deal to be learned from this development, and substantial scope to expand the involvement of ex-Service welfare agencies in the resettlement process.

Three recent developments should strengthen the Forces' own resettlement programmes. A growing commitment to life-long learning means that current personnel have an opportunity to gain the six key skills identified by the Department for Education and Employment as being essential in the workplace, as well as achieve recognised qualifications to S/NVQ Level 2 within three years of joining. All personnel also have access to personal development records setting out the qualifications and experience gained throughout their career in the Forces.

This should go some way to providing transferable skills while at the same time helping

to move the relevance of resettlement towards the mainstream of service life.

Employment services are also being upgraded. The Career Transition Partnership is working to install a centralised job matching service which will be available to the Regular Forces Employment Association and all regional resettlement centres. This should help further reduce the 15 per cent of ex-Service personnel who are still looking for employment after six months.

Finally, the extension of the full resettlement package to all personnel who are being medically discharged should assist over 500 people every year. Coupled with the work of the Defence Secondary Care Agency to provide structured support and handover, this should result in fewer ex-servicemen with medical difficulties becoming homeless.

The growing quality of the resettlement programme supported by these other developments augurs well for the prevention of future homelessness among ex-servicemen. But, two issues weaken the structure – eligibility and take-up.

Most services available to Service personnel before discharge are advisory, optional, reliant upon self-referral and subject to eligibility. As a result, despite the improvements, there are unresolved issues about the timeliness of the information, access, take-up and contact with personnel who are either ineligible for particular resettlement components or who may be less well disposed towards advice provided by the Forces themselves. Figure 2 sets out the range and scope of pre-discharge services, as well as the barriers to them.

Current resettlement provision is an 'eligibility' not an 'entitlement' for personnel leaving the Forces. While there are a few services which are available to all serving personnel, a Service leaver becomes eligible for the full range of resettlement services according to the length of time served. Eligible Service personnel who receive the full range of resettlement services include those who have:

- | served over five years
- | been discharged on medical grounds
- | been made redundant
- | reached 50 years of age.

Figure 2 The range and scope of pre-discharge services

	Housing	Employment/training	Benefits	Financial aid
<i>Single Service</i>	Yes (optional)	No	No	No
<i>Tri-Service</i>	Yes (optional for those with under five years' service; compulsory for those with five years or more)	Yes (for those with three years' service)	No	Yes (dependent on length of service)
<i>Ex-Service charities</i>	Available	Available	Available	Available to certain groups
<i>Other charities</i>	No	No	No	No
<i>Statutory agencies</i>	No	Possible	Yes (eg, War Pension Agency)	No

Resettlement help and support for personnel serving less than three years remains less than adequate. Yet, in some ways these are the same personnel who are less likely to have gained transferable skills by their time of discharge and may therefore be more vulnerable on the two key fronts of employment and immediate accommodation. It is a long-term goal of the Directorate of Military Outplacement to make resettlement an entitlement, but partly because of 'the numbers game', this is not seen to be practicable in the short to medium term.

After three years' service, personnel become eligible for structured employment help which can be accessed up to six months before leaving. Applicants do, however, have to be of 'good character' to be eligible for this help. They have to wait a further two years before the full resettlement programme kicks in, which includes:

- | a personal consultant to develop a resettlement plan
- | workshops during which interview techniques are practised, a CV is produced and wider self-marketing skills are covered
- | access to 40 job-related courses at the Resettlement Training Centre
- | familiarisation visits and civilian attachments, where days are spent with a civilian employer for work experience and hands-on training
- | graduated resettlement time, where increased length of service is rewarded with extra time preparing for resettlement.

Of the 22,000 or so personnel leaving the Forces in 1999/2000, nearly two in three (63 per cent) qualified for this full package. Nearly one in ten (nine per cent) had between three and five years' service, thereby being eligible for some resettlement support, while another one in ten (around 2,370 people) were forecast to leave with under three years' service and therefore no eligibility for assistance. Finally, one in six (18 per cent) were expected to leave because they failed training.

Extending eligibility for full resettlement to all leaving personnel, except those who fail training, would increase volume from approximately 14,190 eligible personnel to 18,710 – an increase of 32 per cent. This is not insurmountable, especially if it is broken down into two steps.

Firstly, the 'three-year service' eligibility criterion could be removed. All resettlement services currently available to people serving between three and five years could then be extended to everyone with under five years' service. This would double the number of personnel eligible for three- to five-year resettlement services to approximately 4,520. Given current take-up rates which are set out later in this chapter, this need not lead to an unmanageable rise in service demand. Secondly, the five-year service distinction could be removed and full resettlement made an entitlement for all personnel who have served in the Forces, irrespective of length of service.

Resettlement for personnel with less than honourable discharge is more thorny. Few employers see themselves as having any responsibility towards employees whose conduct in employment has been difficult. Yet, from a prevention perspective these may be personnel who are at greater risk of failing to make a successful transition into civilian life. The human cost and the later cost to the public purse may outweigh the difficulty in providing resettlement services.

The number of personnel involved are relatively few, and they are also unlikely to be well disposed towards the Forces. It may be that resettlement services for these personnel could be delivered as a specialist project by ex-Service welfare agencies in partnership with other voluntary sector agencies which have a track record in working with clients with similar difficulties. There may be a case for a pilot project through which ex-Service personnel who have been down this route provide resettlement support, advice and assistance. Such a pilot project need not be costly and may well save public resources in the longer term.

Eligibility is one thing. Take-up is a different matter. The major difficulty, of course, is that entitlements and eligibilities are voluntary and personal matters. Figure 3 shows that nearly nine in ten (88 per cent) pre-discharge services are optional and that over two in three of these (69 per cent) rely on self-referral. It is difficult to see how services could be made compulsory but it is clear that to be fully effective, resettlement services need to increase their take-up rates.

Figure 3 The nature of pre-discharge services

88 per cent of pre-discharge services are optional
69 per cent of optional services are self-referral
69 per cent of services are specific to Service personnel (ie, they are not provided as part of a wider client group)
With one exception services are delivered to target client groups of fewer than 15,000 potential clients per annum
Nearly half (44 per cent) of optional services are not aware of the proportion of eligible clients which take up their services
Smaller, specialist services claim to have a greater take-up rate from eligible clients

Yet, despite the optional nature of most resettlement services, the take-up rate for the full resettlement programme is encouraging. The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) reports a first year throughput of almost 90 per cent of Service leavers with over five years' service. The Regular Forces Employment Association reports a take-up rate of around 50 per cent of eligible personnel with three to five years' service.

This does mean that up to 6,000 personnel may still be leaving the Forces every year without any employment advice at all, but if the success of the CTP could be replicated throughout the Services, there would be a good chance for near universal coverage.

The obvious way to do this would be to make full resettlement an entitlement. It could also be achieved by linking employment and accommodation advice to personal development records, with officers being required to ensure all serving personnel are accessing advice and support on future employment and accommodation as part of their service. This should help shift resettlement into mainstream service life, and by entering attendance at employment and accommodation advice sessions in personal development records, resettlement can also become a measurable aspect of all personnel's careers.

Bridging service gaps

Despite recent advances the Forces, ex-Service welfare agencies, specialist agencies and homelessness organisations have identified a number of continuing gaps in preventative services both before and after discharge. These fall into four categories:

- | people gaps, where there is a need to try to identify Service personnel who are more 'at risk' of becoming homeless as early as possible
- | structural gaps, where shortcomings within an agency's approach to homelessness stop the organisation from making a more effective contribution
- | range gaps, where there are too few facilities to meet the needs
- | funding gaps, where the overall lack of resources or inability to direct existing resources towards prevention holds back the development of preventative services.

The building blocks for these gaps are mapped out below.

Figure 4 Gaps in services

- People gaps:**
 - | identification of those at risk
 - | early warning system
 - | targeting and delivering information
 - | awareness of services among clients
 - | eligibility for services
- Structural gaps:**
 - | failure to take responsibility
 - | lack of overall coordination
- Range gaps:**
 - | shortage of specialist facilities
 - | too few follow-through services
 - | limited long-term support
- Funding gaps:**
 - | lack of preventative resources
 - | insufficient transparency on costs

Widening eligibility and improving take-up are two examples of how the people gap might be tackled. However, these improvements alone are unlikely to fully address the problem. To be fully effective, those most at risk of homelessness have to be identified in sufficient time for targeted services to benefit them.

The creation of an early warning system to help identify those at risk of future homelessness is perhaps the most appealing way to do so. But such a system is easier said than done, and should not be seen as an alternative to widespread preventative advice and support. The challenge would be to establish a system which fits within existing structures and is therefore part and parcel of the general management of service life.

Any early warning system needs an index of appropriate risk factors. A great deal of work has recently been conducted into this area in the general homelessness field, and a number of relevant indicators have been developed which can help identify those at greatest risk of homelessness (Bruegel and Smith, 1999). From a Forces' perspective the following indicators could help identify those at risk:

- | few family or problematic family connections before enlisting
- | family difficulties during service

- | no connections maintained outside the Forces
- | problems with alcohol, including binge drinking
- | few transferable skills for civilian life
- | low employment prospects
- | a record of under-achievement during service
- | medical discharge (although this is now being picked up under the new system)
- | dishonourable discharge.

Personnel satisfying three or more of these indicators could be picked up and their progress tracked at two points – by using this checklist as part of the personal development record and through assessment at the first stage of the full resettlement package. Ideally, integrating the checklist into the personal development record should highlight vulnerability at an early stage in a service career. This is particularly the case for personnel who are not acquiring transferable skills and who are under-achieving or having difficulties during their service. At the very least, it should help raise awareness among officers who are tasked with conducting developmental interviews.

If personnel *are* identified as being at risk, then steps can be taken to reduce that risk. This might include additional skills training or referral to the relevant section for employment and accommodation advice. If 'at-risk' personnel are picked up at the start of the resettlement process, then for those eligible for the full resettlement package, special attention could be paid at the assessment stage to ensure their specific needs are being met. For those currently ineligible for the full package, classification as 'at-risk' *could* qualify them for full resettlement. And for those who do not want to maintain contact with the Forces, there could be referral to a specialist project, run in partnership by the Forces and ex-Service agencies, and delivered by ex-Service personnel.

Having successfully identified those at risk, the next task is to deliver appropriate services and to manage the resettlement process before, during and after discharge. To complement the early warning system, then, overall awareness of homelessness and resettlement services must be raised across all personnel. Officers responsible for managing personal development need to be targeted and provided with relevant information

on what it means for them and the tasks they need to undertake. More generally, all personnel should be made aware of the risks of homelessness and afforded the time and encouragement to take up relevant briefings and training.

The structural gap with the greatest impact upon pre-discharge services is the perceived failure to take responsibility for preventing homelessness. This was identified both by the Forces and by agencies working with homeless ex-servicemen.

Again, despite recent advances and a rising awareness of the importance of resettlement across the Forces, a consensus emerged that more work would need to be done to ensure that officers can take responsibility for making an early warning system work and for ensuring that personnel are aware of the issues and services available. This may require a shift in thinking for some personnel, as well as a specific promotional programme for key individuals.

As for range gaps, a testament to the recent improvements is that no gaps in the services provided by the Forces could be detected by the organisations we spoke to. Eligibility, take-up and service awareness were matters of concern, but in general, the service gaps which caused greatest concern centred not upon pre-discharge services but the handover between pre- and post-discharge. These are explored in later chapters, but at this point, the challenge is to improve the transition and handover process to the same degree to which pre-discharge services are being improved. If this is not achieved, the potential benefits of a good quality pre-discharge resettlement programme will be lost and demand will grow for the Forces to take more direct responsibility for longer periods after the point of discharge.

Meeting the costs of preventing homelessness

Expenditure on preventing homelessness before discharge is mainly indirect and comes from the Armed Forces in five ways:

- through the resettlement service (which has £8 million annual funding delivered mainly through the Career Transition Partnership)

- through individual service expenditure, particularly on any resettlement advice provided to personnel with less than three years' service
- through the provision of wider training and skills development as part of personal development
- through housing briefings and services provided by the Joint Service Housing Advice Office
- through medical services provided as part of the medical discharge process.

There appear to be no specific pre-discharge budgets for preventing homelessness. This is understandable, as preventing homelessness is tackled indirectly through the resettlement programme and ongoing up-skilling.

Few non-Service agencies or organisations provide pre-discharge homelessness services – in fact, none reported having a specific pre-discharge homelessness budget. Those that do provide such services (mainly the ex-Service welfare agencies and the War Pensions Agency) do not differentiate between serving and ex-serving clients.

The upshot of this is that expenditure on preventing homelessness before discharge cannot be adequately measured, nor can it be determined whether the balance of current expenditure maximises prevention. Furthermore, it is difficult to estimate whether further improvements can be met by re-aligning existing budgets or whether they require additional funding.

A number of improvements which will have an impact on potential homelessness are already underway, such as the previously mentioned changes in medical discharge services. It could be assumed that since these developments are underway, any further streamlining to prevent homelessness should not add significantly to existing budget requirements. The costs of an early warning system are unlikely to be high, particularly if it is set up as part of the incoming personal development recording process. Likewise, costs arising from providing information could be met from existing administration and support budgets. This is more a setting of priorities than new expenditure.

However, two areas are more likely to add to costs – widening eligibility and improving take-up, and the setting up of a partnership project to deliver resettlement services to dischargees who don't want contact with the Forces. Both developments are critical to the further improvement of services prior to discharge and reducing the likelihood of future homelessness. Both are also critical to ongoing improvements in resettlement. The difficulty is that although they need to be funded in advance, they are likely to make savings to the public purse at some future point.

For instance, we can calculate quite accurately the cost of housing a homeless ex-serviceman – £7,277 per year. This figure is derived from two sources: the proportions of homeless ex-servicemen staying in hostels, social housing, B&Bs or sleeping rough as set out in *Falling Out* and the associated accommodation costs arrived at in the recent Revolving Doors Agency's report, *Mental Health, Multiple Needs and the Police*. There are no comparable figures for pre- or post-discharge resettlement, though it is clear that on a pound per person basis, many additional millions could still be spent.

That said, the issue of 'spend-to-save' is always thorny, especially when later savings do not accrue to the same agency which made the initial additional expenditure. But there are numerous examples where prevention has already been found to be less costly in both cash and human terms – crime prevention and drug treatment being among the most well-known. Homelessness among ex-servicemen should be no different. A full cost-benefit analysis is beyond the scope of this report, not least because of the indirect spend on Forces resettlement. But it needs to be undertaken.

We therefore propose that the short-life inter-agency Task Group set out in our recommendations investigates the establishment of a 'spend-to-save' homelessness prevention programme. If, as one homelessness agency has estimated, every pound spent on preventing homelessness saves up to ten pounds dealing with the outcome, prevention truly is better than cure.

3. Reducing homelessness after discharge e

However well the improvements being implemented prior to discharge might stem the flow, we are still faced with two pressing problems – what about those ex-Service personnel who have already left the Forces without the benefit of improved resettlement services and what about those who are already homeless?

Earlier research has established that few ex-servicemen go directly from serving in the Armed Forces to homelessness. The irony is that despite recent improvements ‘inside the gate’, unless post-discharge services continue to improve, the expected reduction in the number of ex-servicemen becoming homeless over the next decade may fail to materialise.

Between 1992 and 1996, 40,000 additional personnel left the Forces due to a 20 per cent reduction in the overall size of the Forces. Of these, 17,000 were redundancies. While initial evidence shows that four in five moved into employment within three months and 70 per cent had made arrangements for civilian accommodation, most left without the benefit of the recent resettlement improvements. Even a conservative assessment suggests that a number of these extra leavers are likely to encounter resettlement difficulties and may add to the numbers of homeless people over the next few years. The question is, what can be done to lessen that likelihood?

The answer requires the appropriate services to be delivered throughout the immediate discharge period, particularly in the months leading up to discharge and in those immediately afterwards. The challenge is to find ways of connecting post-discharge with pre-discharge services and to ensure that the delivery of diverse services is coordinated.

There is also the challenge of delivering appropriate interventions for ex-servicemen who *have* become homeless. The key here would be to offer services which build upon a service background rather than ignore it.

The range of services currently available after discharge are considered in the following section.

The range and scope of post-discharge services e

Most post-discharge services are advisory, optional, reliant upon self-referral and delivered by ex-Service welfare agencies, regimental organisations or charities. They are there to be taken up as and when ex-Service personnel may require them. As a result, take-up is subject to the ‘3As’ – awareness, accessibility and approachability.

Figure 5 sets out the range and scope of post-discharge services available. In the main, the direct involvement of the Forces ends at the metaphorical barracks gate. There are two exceptions. Recent developments in the medical discharge process afford longer involvement for the Defence Secondary Care Agency in the handover to civilian services. And personnel who have served over five years (most of those leaving the Forces) can access a job-finding service for up to two years after their discharge.

Turning to the services provided by ex-Service, charitable and regimental organisations, more than four in five post-discharge agencies provide general advice, while nearly half provide accommodation support. One in five provide employment assistance and a further fifth, welfare benefits advice. One in 12 provide

Figure 5 The range and scope of post-discharge services

	Housing	Employment/training	Benefits	Financial aid
<i>Single Service</i>	No	No	No	No
<i>Tri-Service</i>	No	Yes	No	No
		(for those with five years' service or a medical discharge)		
<i>Ex-Service charities</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Other charities</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Statutory agencies</i>	Possible	Possible	Possible	No

training and the same proportion, financial assistance.

Most post-discharge agencies provide advice alongside direct care (72 per cent) or medical related services (44 per cent). This is a positive link, since many ex-Service personnel requiring care and medical assistance are also more likely to be at risk of homelessness. But it has a potential downside as well. If accessing advice services is too closely connected to care and medical needs then it may inhibit other ex-Service personnel from accessing advice earlier. Wider studies have shown that the earlier people access advice when they are facing difficulties, then the less likely they are to become homeless.

Another positive development is that increasingly, agencies – particularly medical ones – are establishing an involvement ‘inside the gate’ which should help smooth the transition to civilian life. That said, two in three still only become involved after discharge. This is particularly the case for accommodation and housing advice. Few, if any, personnel now leave the Forces without accommodation. But we also know that those who become homeless at a later stage are only likely to have stayed in that first accommodation for a fairly short period of time.

Add in the possibility that a significant number of ex-Service personnel experiencing these difficulties may have served less than the qualifying five years, and there is a continuing shortfall in the services being provided.

There are a number of simple (though not necessarily easy) ways to counteract this situation. Firstly, access to advice services, particularly housing advice, must be simplified after discharge by developing a web of links between the pre- and the post-discharge periods. Ex-Service welfare agencies could be engaged in providing advice on accommodation to all personnel before discharge, something which could be undertaken in partnership with the Joint Services Housing Advice Office. This should improve the availability of information and people’s knowledge of who can help.

At the same time an accessible UK-wide advice network needs to be developed, either delivered through ex-Service agency ‘shop fronts’ or at easily recognisable sites such as Forces

Recruitment Offices. These could become one-stop advice centres where relevant advisors are available as required and onward referrals could be made. The message would be straight-forward: ‘Come to us if you need help’.

There are obviously some ex-Service personnel who may not want to walk through the doors of a recruitment office ever again. It is essential, though, that they do not miss out on any advice. This also relates to some people’s reluctance to approach their regimental organisations when in difficulty. There are, however, a couple of options which could be worth consideration. Either regimental organisations could actively promote themselves as access points for personnel in difficulty or they could simply advise ex-personnel where they can receive one-stop advice which does not require them to make their circumstances widely known.

Next, the proposed early warning system for personnel at risk of homelessness could be built upon to ensure a well-planned handover from Forces’ resettlement services to ex-Service welfare organisations. This could draw heavily on the good practice being developed in the handover procedures for medical discharge, and could go hand in hand with widening eligibility for the full resettlement programme, which would now include a longer-term accommodation support and advice component. Again, this would not necessarily be delivered solely by the Forces.

Finally, generic homelessness agencies which provide advice *inter alia* to ex-Service personnel must be made aware of the importance and potential needs of ex-servicemen. This has two requirements: to make sure previous service in the Forces is picked up at an early stage in the assessment process so that it can be factored into the planned solution, and to ensure outreach and casework staff are aware of the facilities and options available to help ex-servicemen.

Coordination of action

Central to all of the above moves is coordination. The Ex-Service Action Group has done much to highlight homelessness among ex-servicemen and to push for improvements in the

resettlement process. But there is evidence that a lack of overall coordination within the sector is making it more difficult to ensure ex-Service personnel get access to timely information and support. This could be resolved partly by adopting the one-stop service set out above.

Ex-Service welfare agencies fall into two broad categories – those such as the Royal British Legion and the Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association which provide wide-ranging services for all ex-servicemen and women, and smaller, specialist agencies such as Combat Stress and the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association. As with the homelessness sector in general, it could be said that the plethora of agencies confuses rather than

enriches. There is an argument that advice, particularly housing and accommodation advice, could be streamlined by bringing agencies together locally to deliver appropriate services through a single contact point. This would minimise service duplication, help release scarce resources and also function as a referral service for both ex-servicemen and generic homeless agencies.

The Ex-Service Action Group is probably the best-placed organisation to initiate discussions about such coordination.

Figure 6 provides further information on the main services which are currently available for ex-Service personnel after discharge.

Figure 6 Main providers of post-discharge services to ex-Service personnel

Employment:

Regular Forces Employment Agency

Job-finding service for ex-Service personnel with five years' service (which can be accessed for two years after discharge)

Royal British Legion

Employs around 3,000 mainly ex-Service personnel in Legion and related companies

Around 1,800 Service personnel attend qualifications and employment skills courses annually
Training college at Tidworth offers training to ex-Service personnel and their dependants

Small business advisory service and loan scheme lends around £310,000 annually

Job-finding service for around 1,500 ex-Service personnel annually

Employment centre for single homeless ex-servicemen in Maidstone

Employment Service (ES)

All ex-Service personnel with six months' service have preferential access to ES provisions

Accelerated access to New Deal for Employment (application can be made upon discharge rather than after six months' unemployment, as is usually required)

Accommodation:

Most ex-Service agencies provide housing advice.

The services set out here provide both advice and facilities.

Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association (SSAFA)

Specialist housing advisory service with accommodation databases

'Stepping stone' homes in London, Tyne and Wear and Manchester (for 20 Service and ex-Service families experiencing marriage breakdown)

SSAFA post-discharge adviser works alongside Joint Service Housing Advice Office to offer pre-discharge accommodation advice

HomeBase

Offers supported housing to seven single ex-servicemen looking for a home and employment in London

Jointly funded by National Lottery, SSAFA and Army Benevolent Fund

Each placement requires £1,000 in funding

English Churches Housing Association

Joint project with Richmond Council and the Joint Services Housing Advice Office providing eight-bed supported accommodation for single ex-servicemen without alcohol or mental health problems

A short-stay one-year project which also provides benefits and tenancy advice

Defence Secondary Care Agency

Supported housing project in Darlington in partnership with social services for ex-Service personnel who have been psychiatrically discharged

Eight residents catered for up to January 2000

All residents must be in receipt of war pension

Ex-Services Fellowship Centre
30-bed hostel and relief centre in Stepney, London
Jointly funded by organisations including the Army Benevolent Fund, King George Fund for Sailors, Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and the Royal British Legion
Provides advice on job applications, assistance with small grants for travel and subsistence and operates a clothing store

General welfare and financial support:

War Pensions Welfare Service
Provides war pensions to ex-Service personnel who have an injury caused or exacerbated by service in the Forces
Confidential benefits advice provided through welfare managers, including respite care, visits from befrienders and access to financial help from ex-Service charities

Royal British Legion
Provides welfare advice through County Field Officers, supported by a network of volunteers, with links to social services
Handles up to 30,000 calls for assistance annually
County Field Officers in some areas work with homeless hostels and may provide an advance for the deposit and rent of accommodation
Provides around £2 million annually in individual grants to ex-Service personnel in need

Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association
Network of unpaid volunteers across UK provide advice on a wide range of matters
Assist ex-Service personnel access financial help from all sources, including regimental associations and ex-Service charities

National Gulf Veterans and Families Association
Smaller agency with overall income of around £15,000
Provides advice and assistance on war pensions, benefit entitlements, medical entitlements and housing need
Currently have a small homelessness project to secure suitable accommodation and medical aid for homeless ex-Gulf War veterans

Alcohol:

Alcohol Recovery Project (ARP) and Ex-Service Action Group
Project to tackle alcohol-related problems among ex-Service personnel, set up as a result of the *Homeless on Civity Street* report

Provides immediate help to those who cannot afford private service help
Currently seven per cent of ARP clients have a service background

Helplines:

Veterans Advice Unit
Set up in 1998 as a helpline to advise individuals on where and how to access expert help
Aim is to maximise the impact of current health, social and welfare services provided by government departments, Armed Services and Non-Governmental Organisations
Works with Department of Health, Department of Social Security, War Pensions Agency, local authority social services and Non-Governmental Organisations
Open office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) and staffed by serving officers seconded for six months

Current practice on homelessness advice is to refer caller to Shelter
Report that 339 out of 7,000 enquiries were on homelessness

Royal British Legion
Operate a telephone advice line offering advice on benefits, resettlement training, employment and housing
Open office hours (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 6pm)

Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association
Offer a Forces Help Enquiry Line during normal office hours

National Gulf Veterans and Families Association
Operate two 24-hour telephone helplines for members to call in times of need

Mental health:

Combat Stress
Provides treatment, counselling therapy and respite care using a network of welfare officers
Helps around 3,700 active clients and take on a further 35 every month
Employ three psychiatrists
Jointly funded to the tune of £5.5 million annually by the Army Benevolent Fund and the War Pensions Agency

(Note: this service listing is not exhaustive. Agencies may provide additional services which are not listed.)

Bridging service gaps

The Forces, ex-Service welfare agencies, specialist agencies and wider homelessness organisations have identified a number of gaps in post-discharge services. Given the above, it is hardly surprising that they feel the main gaps are an overall lack of coordination and a lack of ‘through the line’ services.

This echoes the gap in pre-discharge services, where there is seen to be a problem in identifying ‘at-risk’ personnel and then providing them with sustained support and advice to reduce that risk.

But one of the main difficulties in improving ‘through the line’ services (available both before and after discharge) is that organisations are currently unable to identify those at greatest risk and to deliver the required joined-up service. Consequently these individuals are often lost on discharge and are already homeless before they are picked up again.

This can be addressed partly by improving the overall quality of services before and after discharge and by extending the involvement of ex-Service agencies into the pre-discharge resettlement programme. This would provide better links between the two parts of the process and enable ex-Service agencies to identify a number of personnel who might need more sustained support at an earlier stage. It should also further break down any barriers ex-Service personnel may have in seeking help, advice and assistance from Service-related agencies. If this were to be seen as part and parcel of everyday Forces life, then it is reasonable to assume that the discipline would carry through after discharge. Although this is better practice, it is not an alternative to an early warning system. Rather, it complements it, as the warning signs would then enable an ex-Service agency working ‘within the gates’ to target its services towards that individual.

Longer-term support services are more difficult to bridge, but again, a single, easy-to-access local advice network – run by a partnership of agencies and which ex-Service personnel can use irrespective of when they left the Forces – should go some way to meeting ongoing need.

Improving financial transparency and performance measurement

For most agencies, preventing homelessness among ex-servicemen is not an area with its own direct expenditure. As with Forces’ expenditure, it is therefore difficult to determine what is currently spent on ‘through the line’ services.

Only 17 per cent of the agencies we surveyed record a specific homelessness budget for ex-servicemen. These are all ex-Service agencies which deliver post-discharge services, and with the exception of two, the proportion they spend on ex-Service homelessness is less than five per cent of total expenditure.

But just because no-one really knows how much is being spent on homeless ex-servicemen, that does not mean expenditure is small. Where funding can be identified, it is fairly substantial.

For example, the King George’s Fund for Sailors reports an income of £3.25 million, of which £2.9 million goes on charitable expenditure, a substantial part of which is block grants to ex-Service welfare agencies and facilities. The Royal Air Force Association reports £4.7 million welfare expenditure, some 59 per cent of their total expenditure. The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund has a total welfare expenditure of £14 million, while the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust provided £1.6 million in grants in 1998.

Income for agencies delivering post-discharge services comes from three main sources. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) raise charitable funding, one-third (33 per cent) get government monies, while one in five (21 per cent) apply membership levies.

Despite the large sums being raised and spent, it is difficult to assess whether or not there is value for money, whether resources are being spent at the most effective point or whether there is an expenditure overlap. We do know, however, that there is service overlap, so it is not unreasonable to assume that there may be funding duplication – but we cannot be sure. Agencies should therefore consider reviewing their current expenditure on ex-Service homelessness and create separate budget headings for it. This would at least help to determine the real cost of

preventing and reducing homelessness among ex-servicemen.

There are similar gaps in measuring the performance of services for homeless ex-servicemen. This is the case for both pre- and post-discharge service deliverers. As already stated, nearly nine in ten (88 per cent) pre- and post-discharge services are optional, with medical services being the main compulsory exception.

And yet, nearly half (44 per cent) of pre- and one in three post-discharge services are unable to determine the proportion of eligible clients who take up their services (whether that eligibility is based on years served, specific problems or on simply having been in the Forces). With such a narrow client base, this is a major gap if any effective monitoring or evaluation of service delivery is to be undertaken.

It is not difficult to remedy this defect. Where it is not already being done, pre-discharge services need to be measured against the proportion of eligible clients and the range of services provided, as well as straightforward volume. Again, where it is not already being done, ex-Service status should be recorded by homeless agencies at the point of initial contact to help determine overall need. These will paint a truer picture of needs and service provision.

Learning from elsewhere – lessons from the United States

One of the precepts this research was founded upon was that effective solutions may not always be homegrown. Given the trans-Atlantic trade in ideas and practices – a trade which is not always positive – it was felt worthwhile to explore how America deals with some of these issues, so that the best can be adapted for the UK and the worst avoided.

Clearly, there are some major differences between ‘Veterans Affairs’ in the United States and ex-Service provision in the UK, the most critical of which is the strength of the VietVet movement. But the differing welfare systems are also important – British health and welfare provision is conceived as a universal service

which therefore requires only specialist provision (often medical) for ex-Service personnel. In America, welfare provision is less broadly defined and so a range of veterans medical and welfare facilities have grown accordingly. One outcome is that veteran welfare is a multi-billion dollar business. Another is that a range of national and state-run Departments of Veteran Affairs have sprouted, which operate as government offshoots.

However imperfectly these departments may function from state to state it still provides a vehicle for coordinating services to ex-Service personnel which does not exist in Britain. The opportunity is there to create local ex-Service networks in Britain which bring together relevant representatives of the Forces, ex-Service welfare agencies, homeless agencies and local authority services.

That said, the basic resettlement programmes in the United Kingdom and the United States now have much in common. The centrepiece of the US resettlement programme, the Transition Assistance Programme, has been in place since 1990, and the UK’s Career Transition Partnership mirrors much of the former’s philosophy. Both programmes focus upon preparation for a transition into civilian life, with the emphasis on a successful ‘career transition’ where employment holds the key to future success. But there are a number of differences which may be informative.

A note of caution, however. American veterans organisations would not claim to have solved homelessness among US veterans. Far from it. The few issues set out below represent those areas where Britain might usefully adopt or adapt existing practice which is in keeping with the social, political and military environments of Britain.

Significantly, ‘inside the gate’ involvement of ex-Service personnel is much higher in America. Transition Assistance Programme (TAP) workshops are delivered by trained facilitators from the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) in partnership with the Departments of Defence and Veteran Affairs. VETS is part of the US Department of Labor, and this may leave the impression that this is still a ‘public sector’ response.

However, in general, VETS employees and contractors are ex-Service personnel. They may not be working for what we in Britain would recognise as an ex-Service welfare organisation, but the result is the same – greater ‘inside the gate’ contact between serving personnel and ex-Service personnel.

It’s not all that straightforward. The operation of TAP workshops is subject to protocol agreement with base commanders which requires a high senior management understanding of the importance of investing in resettlement. This is not dissimilar to the UK, where the Forces themselves and ex-Service agencies acknowledge the amount of work which still needs to be done to ensure senior staff increasingly see the wider importance of effective resettlement.

This provides a couple of avenues which could be usefully explored in Britain. The first is the role of the Department of Labor in the provision of VETS. In the UK, while there is accelerated access to the New Deal and services provided by the Regular Forces’ Employment Association, those leaving the Forces could benefit from greater involvement with the Employment Service (ES). An enhanced role for the ES, accompanied by further employment assistance for ex-Service personnel over a longer period, might further reduce the one in seven who are still unemployed six months after leaving the Forces.

The second avenue is the involvement of ex-Service personnel in preparing serving personnel for discharge. The benefits have been set out earlier but they are worth remembering:

- | it helps break down barriers between service and civilian life
- | the information is more likely to be received and taken on board
- | it helps ensure Service leavers are more likely to seek assistance.

Similar benefits attach to using ex-Service personnel in post-discharge services, including working for generic homelessness agencies.

Another area where US practice might inform the UK is in the length of time ex-Service personnel can access services after discharge. It

can legitimately be argued that in Britain ex-Service personnel have access to advice and support throughout the remainder of their lives via ex-Service welfare agencies and regimental organisations, as well as through the general provisions of our welfare state.

This is true. But it is also true that many homeless ex-servicemen are reluctant to access that advice. Two US practices could help. The first is ongoing, lifelong access to employment advice for veterans and their dependents.

UK Service leavers with five years’ service currently have access to employment advice and job-finding for two years after discharge. But there are few defensible reasons for this arbitrary cut-off point other than cost. In fact, it could be argued that extending the employment advice and job-finding programmes to ex-Service personnel and their dependents throughout their lifetime, might in fact boost the desirability of a service background among employers. After all, a range of employers recognise the skills and experience which time in the Armed Forces can bring to their industries (one need only look to employer endorsement of the Territorial Army to clinch this argument).

Secondly, technological developments mean that job-finding services are easier and less costly to construct or maintain than ever before. For example, *vetjobs.com* provides increasing job-finding services for America and other countries. Work is underway in Britain to set up a centralised job-matching service as part of the resettlement programme, but it is important that this service is open to all Service leavers, extended throughout their working lifetimes and is available to dependants. In this way it can be built into an ongoing service, not a time-limited one.

Finally, US approaches to outreach can provide us with some good practice pointers. Little outreach in Britain is directed specifically towards homeless ex-servicemen. This is partly because homelessness among ex-servicemen remained hidden until very recently. But in America, homeless veterans’ organisations now run a successful outreach programme called *Stand Down*. These are local, well publicised one- or two-day events run by veterans where other veterans and their dependants are able to

come along and seek confidential advice, support and assistance on any issue. It works with those who are already homeless as well as helping to prevent homelessness.

Stand Down is provided by veterans for veterans. It helps break down barriers and promotes the view that ex-Service personnel are entitled to advice and assistance from colleagues whenever they need it. It continues the sense of service which informs many ex-Service personnel's lives. It may therefore be that similar 'self-help' outreach work is required in Britain.

Moving on

A great deal of useful work is already being carried out in Britain for those who have left the Armed Forces. The work of the Ex-Service Action Group in partnership with Crisis has done much to raise the profile of homelessness among ex-servicemen and to stimulate action. But as this chapter has shown, there are a number of tasks which need to be undertaken in order to see further improvement.

What runs through all these improvements – from greater 'inside the gate' working to educating homelessness workers about the importance of a service background – are the needs for greater coordination of local services and for more joint working. These require cultural as well as structural changes, though they are less daunting than they would first appear. But the alternative is to use duplicating funds to provide overlapping services which fail to meet the needs of homeless ex-servicemen.

4. Overcoming barriers

The quality and range of resettlement services available to Service personnel leaving the Armed Forces have improved in leaps and bounds over recent years. In particular, the commitment to life-long learning and the development of transferable skills for all Armed Forces personnel is a welcome development, as is the shift towards a greater coordination of resettlement services across the three Armed Forces.

A number of ‘through the line’ programmes are also being slowly upgraded – specialist (often medically focused) initiatives and housing projects are the two which most readily spring to mind. Again there are concerns over eligibility and the scale of services and facilities which are available. But the setting up of the Defence Secondary Care Agency’s psychiatric discharge support programme at Catterick, the supported housing projects in Richmond and Darlington, the HomeBase project and the Royal British Legion’s introduction of County Field Officers indicate the gradual evolution of a network of ‘through the line’ projects. The issues are whether such developments are moving fast enough, whether enough is being done to coordinate and plan their growth and whether, on current projections, they will provide sufficient, quality services to meet needs.

Post-discharge services are perhaps the most disparate and diverse. Despite the setting up of the Veterans’ Advice Unit in 1998, there appears to be little widespread awareness of its existence or any meaningful shift towards a fully supported, single network for ex-Service personnel. The most frequently cited complaint from ex-servicemen and homelessness agencies alike is that ex-Service personnel in housing difficulties are not aware of possible sources of assistance and are subsequently picked up too late. This suggests the need for better local coordination between ex-Services welfare agencies, specialist ex-Services organisations, homelessness organisations and public authorities – a coordination which could reach its apotheosis in a single, easily accessed advice point with no connotations of failure but rather of entitlement.

There is evidence that some partnership working *is* emerging post-discharge but progress is slow. Part of the problem is that joint working cuts across previous agency practices and

funding streams. Competition has created a confusion of services, with others left to carve out over-specialisation niches at a time when many homeless ex-servicemen have multiple and complex problems. Everyone, from government down, agrees that better local coordination is needed. It’s now time to put that ‘joined-up’ talk into action.

What agencies want

We asked all the organisations surveyed to indicate what improvements they would like to see in service delivery. The pre-discharge wish-list can be broken down into three main categories:

- ▮ expanding the catchment of existing programmes
- ▮ establishing mechanisms for identifying ‘at-risk’ personnel as early as possible
- ▮ delivering specialist programmes where needed.

A recurring request was for the extension of the full resettlement programme to all personnel, irrespective of length of service or the nature of their discharge. This stems from a widely held view that adequate preparation for a return to productive civilian life is not an unreasonable expectation for a person who has served their country within a very controlled institution.

Clearly, the cost of such a move is perhaps its biggest obstacle. But the burden could be shared in two ways: by linking such an extension to the planned expansion of life-long learning programmes and by working with the Department for Education and Employment to bring trained ex-Service personnel from authorised agencies ‘inside the gate’ to help deliver the wider programmes.

This would have two additional knock-on benefits. It would help with recruitment (service being more attractive if accompanied by an ongoing training commitment) and – because of its preventative nature – it would lead to an overall reduction in public expenditure on homelessness.

Stepping back from the full entitlement solution, agencies also favoured the idea of the early

warning system to identify vulnerable personnel. This is an attractive, less costly alternative to full scale entitlement, and could act as a first step towards the full resettlement programme envisaged by the Directorate of Military Outplacement. Its usefulness, however, is dependent upon a raised priority for resettlement and a raised awareness of the steps required to prevent homelessness. Ultimately, an early warning system is only a positive step if it is applied.

Agencies also wanted a third tier of pre-discharge improvements – specialist programmes to meet the needs of those identified as being at risk. To some extent this mirrors recent steps in medical discharge procedures which upgrade the programme, engage ex-Service agencies at an earlier stage, and provide for longer-term support and planned handovers. The features critical to success are individually tailored programmes and long-term support.

Again, it must be stressed that while specialist programmes alone may ameliorate the situation, they require a fully-functioning early warning system and a high commitment to resettlement to be effective. Otherwise, they are simply too little, too late.

As for the post-discharge wish-list, the extension, upgrading and coordination of support beyond the barrack gates was held to be vital, as was the provision of specialist assistance starting prior to discharge and extending well beyond it – perhaps indefinitely.

By far the most keenly desired specialist provision was that of improved access to housing – particularly supported, single person housing with employment links. Most felt that too few such facilities currently exist, as agencies are unable to meet demand or provide the add-on alcohol and mental health services, without which tenures can and do fail.

Standing in the way of better post-discharge facilities are the low level of contact between ex-Service agencies and Armed Forces personnel before discharge and the lack of an effective voluntary sector support network, particularly in London.

As already stated, the first difficulty could be lessened by widening the involvement of ex-Service agencies and voluntary sector organisations ‘inside the gate’. As for the second problem, the failure among agencies to coordinate can only be tackled by fostering a willingness to jointly review need and service delivery. This would not necessarily imply a ‘shakedown’ in the ex-Service sector. After all, the anticipated ‘rationalisations’ in the general homelessness sector on the arrival of the coordinating Rough Sleepers Unit have not materialised – in fact, it could be said that more services have actually been set up. But what the presence of the Rough Sleepers Unit has done – and this is the lesson for the ex-Service sector – is stimulate an expansion of joint working as part of everyday service delivery.

London, with some of the country’s most intractable homelessness problems, has a particular need for an effective support network – and has the potential (and proven) mechanism for this in the form of the Rough Sleepers Unit. Elsewhere, joint local agency forums could be established, mirroring Drug Reference Groups or Homeless Coordinating Groups. As for the mechanisms, the Royal British Legion County Field Officers could well play an important local role ensuring that an accessible advice service linking housing and support is set up.

Without these improvements agencies are unlikely to be able to pick up ex-Service personnel early in the process or to provide anything other than a generally fragmented service which lacks credibility among both users and service deliverers. The twin challenges of establishing an effective local support network and providing a one-stop ex-Service advice and assistance service could be met by expanding the role of the Veterans’ Advice Unit, while at the same time designating local recruitment offices or Legion premises as ongoing advice and support centres.

Introducing some of the desired improvements may, understandably, take some time. Agencies were therefore asked to identify their priority actions for preventing homelessness among ex-servicemen. Six priorities came through loud and clear:

- | a commitment that no-one would be discharged straight into homelessness
- | raise awareness and responsibility for reducing homelessness at all relevant levels across the Armed Forces
- | identify vulnerable personnel and provide planned resettlement programme and ongoing support for them
- | assess skills and abilities, improve them prior to discharge and maintain them after discharge
- | expand in-Service alcohol management programmes
- | ensure proper planned referral and handover before discharge.

These desired improvements are straightforward and many are already under way. But improvements are not always easily achieved. Four major barriers were also identified which need to be overcome.

Disjointed working

Agencies acknowledged that partnership working is picking up but they believed there are too few links 'through the line' and too many missed opportunities after discharge. There is a greater willingness to work together but it is not yet a reality for assessing local needs, providing coordinated advice and support or designing local services.

Access to services

Too many services are hard to access, particularly for ex-Service personnel who have not maintained contact with the Forces. A partial solution may come from the growing number of joint ventures to bridge the discharge gap and unite service delivery. But this may not be sufficient. There is a question whether existing housing for ex-Service personnel is sufficiently accessible for those who are homeless – in other words, whether those in greatest need have greatest priority. As well as working together to expand provision, there may also be a case for the Forces and ex-Service organisations to review access to existing provision to see whether it can be managed more effectively.

Funding streams

The call for more money is a perennial one, but the fragmentation of post-discharge services due to different funding sources and regimes is perhaps just as damaging.

This long-standing barrier to preventing homelessness is partly being addressed by government proposals to bring different funding streams together. To be effective, all levels of government also need to promote forms of partnership working where new and existing resources can be channelled towards joint service delivery.

Levels of awareness and unwillingness to take responsibility

The last major barrier forms two sides of the same coin. While applauding the advances which have been made across the Armed Forces as well as the commitment demonstrated by a number of senior officers, agencies still believe that preventing homelessness has too low a profile 'inside the gate'. Moreover, any efforts which are made suffer from a continuing unwillingness to take responsibility.

This is not a criticism of staff. Rather it is an organisational and cultural criticism, which many of the proposed improvements, such as the early warning system and awareness-raising among senior officers to link prevention with personal development plans, could address. A greater involvement of ex-Service personnel in preparing serving personnel for discharge could also accelerate the 'ownership' of the issue.

Finally, as for where responsibility ultimately lies, prior to discharge each Armed Service can make real strides towards early identification and eligibility. Common practices are the prerogative of tri-Service bodies, while ex-Services and homelessness agencies should aim to push forward joint programmes which increase their involvement 'inside the gate'.

After discharge, the only Armed Forces responsibility would be to encourage a culture to break down the barriers which inhibit ex-Service personnel from seeking advice and support. It is up to the ex-Services and homelessness agencies to improve local coordination, joint action and service delivery.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

A recurring difficulty in tackling social exclusion is that it often attracts widespread agreement that it is unacceptable and widespread disagreement on how to address it. The energy and momentum required to tackle social exclusion is often dissipated in the effort needed to get it onto the mainstream agenda. Ex-servicemen and homelessness is no exception. Much remains to be done. Yet, the degree of growing consensus on what needs to be done is a measure of the work which has already been undertaken. Even the very process of conducting this research has spurred all involved – from government down – to see what more they can do.

Three main factors have contributed to the current window of opportunity on ex-servicemen and homelessness:

- | the government's commitment to social inclusion, which has helped create a platform upon which the Social Exclusion Unit and Rough Sleepers Unit can showcase joint action
- | changing perspectives across the Armed Forces, partly in response to reductions in the number of serving personnel but also as a result of a widening commitment to Service personnel during and after service
- | work undertaken by the Ex-Services Action Group and other agencies to highlight the scale of homelessness among ex-servicemen and to push it onto the public agenda.

This is not to say that further action is not required. A lot of work is still needed to continue to shift attitudes towards preventing homelessness, raising awareness at all relevant levels and recognising responsibilities.

This research has shown that there was general agreement that agencies and organisations need to be engaged in prevention as well as intervention. It was also accepted that some service improvements have been made, though further improvements are needed. And running through all the research came the message that responsibilities must be shared more, while more joint working throughout the discharge process is essential.

Coupled with the provision of quality resettlement and training throughout an

individual's service lifetime, a guarantee that those in greatest need of resettlement support receive it and the fostering of a common understanding of ex-Service needs by joined-up service delivery, we have an agenda for continued improvement.

It needs to be acted upon. The following recommendations provide a framework which builds on this growing consensus.

Recommendation 1

The Ministry of Defence should lead a short-life Task Group involving ex-Service and homelessness organisations as well as all the appropriate government departments (Health, Education, Environment). This Group would have the following remit:

- | conduct a homelessness prevention audit of all services and agencies
- | establish an early warning system to identify personnel 'at risk' of experiencing difficulties on discharge. This could be actioned through an advisory checklist for senior officers indicating predictive factors for homelessness or via the regular personnel assessment undertaken by commanding officers. However this is achieved, it is vital that senior officers support such a preventative system actively
- | revisit current eligibility for full resettlement and consider extending the scope of the programme to include personnel identified as being at risk
- | revisit the long-term aim of making full resettlement an entitlement for all personnel being discharged and bring forward a timetable and action plan for achieving this within three years
- | investigate a 'spend-to-save' homelessness prevention programme
- | consider setting up an alternative resettlement programme delivered by trained ex-Service personnel for dischargees who are disillusioned with the Armed Forces.

Recommendation 2

The Ministry of Defence in partnership with other government departments, ex-Service and

homelessness agencies should hold a working conference which:

- | receives up-to-date information on joint initiatives both before and after discharge which are directly and indirectly related to ex-servicemen and homelessness
- | considers the need for a standing partnership forum to prevent and reduce homelessness among ex-servicemen
- | plans the extension of partnership working by involving ex-Service agencies not only in the design and delivery of an ongoing 'learning for life' development programme, but also in the early identification of 'at-risk' personnel, establishing effective tracking, adequate handover procedures and the provision of longer-term support.

Recommendation 3

The Ministry of Defence jointly with the Departments for Education and Employment and for the Environment, Transport and the Regions as well as appropriate voluntary and private sector organisations should consider establishing on-line employment and housing services for ex-Service personnel and their dependents. This should be accessible before discharge and at any future time.

It could build upon the existing SkillBank service provided by the Service Employment Network and The Link, the present on-line employment agency. However, as they stand these services need to be substantially upgraded so that they fulfil a central function for personnel and prospective employers. They should become the recognised and preferred one-stop employment and advice shop for ex-Service personnel and employers.

Recommendation 4

All homelessness organisations should review their initial contact procedures and ensure that service in the Armed Forces is recorded as part of initial client contact. All homelessness organisations should take the necessary training and awareness steps to ensure outreach and reception staff understand the significance of a service background and build this

understanding into their service development plans.

Recommendation 5

The Rough Sleepers Unit in partnership with the Ministry of Defence, ex-Service and homelessness agencies should set up a joint pilot project in London to:

- | jointly review the need for specialist support for homeless ex-servicemen
- | design and deliver ongoing support, training and employment search services to a pilot group of ex-Service personnel picking them up before discharge and following them through resettlement
- | establish a joint outreach programme, including joint training of all staff (who should include serving and ex-Service personnel), to focus upon existing homeless ex-servicemen. This would provide in-depth rehabilitation, support, skills development, training and access to employment and appropriate housing.

Recommendation 6

The Ministry of Defence in partnership with ex-Service and homelessness agencies should investigate ways in which the Armed Forces could become involved post-discharge, including:

- | participating in and jointly providing ongoing advice and support on accommodation, employment and other needs to maintain a live connection with ex-Service personnel in difficulty
- | establishing a joint programme for serving personnel which encourages them to continue to see the Armed Forces as a resource after discharge
- | work with ex-Service organisations to train serving personnel so they can assist in joint initiatives to contact homeless ex-servicemen and assist in their rehabilitation.

Recommendation 7

All government departments, ex-Service and homelessness agencies should assess their role

and responsibilities for preventing and reducing homelessness among ex-servicemen. This includes:

- | establishing systems to identify and assess the needs of homeless ex-servicemen as part of initial contact and ongoing support
- | internally auditing services for their prevention capacity and whether they meet the needs of ex-Service personnel
- | reviewing existing links to the Armed Forces and appropriate voluntary sector agencies
- | review expenditure on homelessness and ex-servicemen and make the costs of delivering services to homeless ex-servicemen transparent.

Ongoing improvements in the Armed Forces resettlement programme, accompanied by a growing willingness for agencies to work together, provide a potentially strong platform from which to prevent and reduce homelessness among ex-servicemen. But not all these improvements have yet delivered and there is scope for more, targeted change. Unfortunately, ex-servicemen continue to become homeless and remain homeless longer than other homeless people. By pursuing this package of recommendations, at last, we have an opportunity to break the cycle.

Appendix I. Research methodology

This research was conducted by Public Policy Research Associates, the consultancy arm of the Institute for Public Policy Research. It was funded by Crisis, the leading national homelessness charity, as part of its ongoing 'New Solutions' research programme. The work was co-sponsored by the Ex-Service Action Group (ESAG) which exists to coordinate work on homelessness among ex-servicemen. Crisis and ESAG were the sponsors of the two previous research studies – *Falling Out* and *Homeless on Civvy Street* respectively.

The fieldwork was carried out between September 1999 and February 2000. This included:

- | 40 one-to-one discussions with senior policy and decision-makers in the Armed Forces, ex-Service agencies and homelessness organisations
- | 35 in-depth surveys of major ex-Service and homelessness organisations
- | two discussion groups with ex-Service homeless people
- | discussions with 20 United States' Veterans' organisations.

Two seminars involving 24 government, Armed Forces, homelessness and ex-Service agencies were held in October 1999 and March 2000. The first seminar set out the aims and terms of the research and sought input on the key service issues before and after discharge. The second seminar considered the initial findings from the research and potential priorities for preventing and reducing homelessness among ex-servicemen.

A list of participating organisations is set out in Appendix 2.

Among other things, the in-depth survey covered:

- | organisational details
- | homeless-related services provided before discharge
- | homeless-related services provided after discharge
- | estimated annual expenditure on such services
- | gaps identified in own services
- | gaps identified in other agencies' services

- | links with other agencies
- | improvements which could be made to pre-discharge services
- | improvements which could be made to post-discharge services
- | barriers to implementing those improvements
- | single most desired action to prevent homelessness among ex-servicemen.

Appendix 2. Contributing organisations

The following organisations and agencies participated in, provided information or supported the research:

United Kingdom

Alcohol Recovery Project
Army Benevolent Fund
British Army
Combat Stress
Crisis
Directorate of Military Outplacement
(D-MOS)
English Churches Housing Association
Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness
(ESAG)
HomeBase
Joint Service Housing Advice Office
Ministry of Defence (Service Personnel Policy)
Ministry of Defence (Psychiatric Services,
Catterick Garrison)
Rough Sleepers Unit
Royal Air Force
Royal British Legion
Royal Navy
St Mungo's Association
Scottish Veterans' Residences
Single Homeless Project
Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation
Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families
Association (SSAFA)
Thamesreach
University of Bristol

United States

American GI Forum
California Association of Veterans Service
Agencies
Central Valley Homeless Veterans (Modesto,
California)
Department of Veterans Affairs, State of
California
Inter-City Services (Berkeley, California)
New Directions (Los Angeles)
Transition Assistance Programme, Department
of Labor
United States Veterans Initiative
Veterans Resource Center (Sacramento,
California)
Veterans Transition Center (Monterey County,
California)
Vetjobs.com
Vietnam Veterans of California (Santa Rosa and
Eureka)
Vietnam Veterans of San Diego

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Scott Ballintyne is a Research Associate with Public Policy Research Associates, the consultancy arm of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). His recent publications include *Unsafe Streets: Street Homelessness and Crime* (Crisis/IPPR, 1999) and *Secure Foundations: Key Issues in Crime Prevention, Crime Reduction and Community Safety* (IPPR, 2000) which he edited with Professor Ken Pease and Vic McLaren. He has consulted with police forces and government agencies across the UK. Previously he was a senior manager in local government and has 20 years' experience in policing and community safety. He lives in Los Angeles and can be contacted at scottballintyne@compuserve.com

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