

POLICY BRIEFING

Exploring the Need for a Veterans' Centre in Northern Ireland (NI)

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The research discussed in this briefing is based on **Exploring the Need for a Veterans' Centre in Northern Ireland** (Armour et al, 2018) which is the third report from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study (funded by Forces in Mind Trust). The aim of the research was to create a better understanding of the attitudes of veterans and service providers in Northern Ireland (NI) towards having a dedicated Veterans' Centre, to provide a safe space to get advice, support and treatment. The findings are based on perspectives collected through veteran focus groups, and interviews with representatives from service providers in the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector and Ministry of Defence. The current briefing also draws on answers to questions about a Veterans' Centre that

are being collected in the ongoing Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Survey. This report adds to findings already obtained from two previous reports - Supporting & Serving Military Veterans in Northern Ireland (see Armour et al, 2017a), which scoped the services available to veterans in NI, and the Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland (see Armour et al, 2017b). Veterans reported coming up against a range of barriers to accessing services, and felt many barriers could be removed if a dedicated, 'one-stop shop' existed, where veteran-specific services could be delivered in one place. However, providers had mixed views about a dedicated centre. Further discussions need to take place to explore the feasibility of a dedicated Veterans' Centre at this time.



Key Findings And Recommendations

Key Findings	Implications	Associated Recommendations
Veterans in Northern Ireland overwhelmingly support the establishment of a Veterans' Centre in a central location, staffed by ex-Service personnel. However, many service providers are less convinced of the need for a dedicated Veterans' Centre.	There is a need for further exploration and discussion of the practicalities and feasibility of a Veterans' Centre. If located in Belfast, public transport links may not exist for those living a considerable distance from Belfast.	An exploratory committee formed of veterans, service providers, potential funding bodies and decision-makers should examine the specific issues surrounding the appropriateness and feasibility of a dedicated Veterans' Centre.
In an age of austerity, funding for a dedicated centre is likely to be scarce and the most cost-effective way of developing a centre is likely to be the most successful way of securing funding.	There is a need to explore the potential mix of governmental and philanthropic investment and funding in the development and sustainability of a centre.	The exploratory committee should undertake a cost analysis for the development of a centre, or refurbishment of an existing centre and potential funding mechanisms.
Veterans would use the centre as a "safe space" for social activities, education, training and accessing mental health services. Some service providers had concerns that such a centre could create unnecessary or unhealthy dependencies.	There is a need to balance veterans' need for face-to-face interaction when accessing services with concerns about 'dependencies' and the need to streamline services.	Examining evidence of best practice, and the effectiveness of other veteran and ex-security force centres, could provide an evidence base that will assist in the design of appropriate services for veterans in NI. The exploratory committee could examine what services can or should be provided to cover the range of current and future needs. This should include discussions of how to avoid any duplication of services.
There is disagreement over the geographical location of a potential Veterans' Centre.	For a centre to be sustainable, its location would need to maximise accessibility and footfall.	Veterans, service providers, decision-makers and potential funding bodies would need to work together to explore the possible location of a centre that also addresses security concerns.

References

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