

PAWS FOR SUPPORT

ASSISTANCE DOGS
FOR ARMED FORCES
VETERANS



SHAUN BAILEY
GLA CONSERVATIVES
GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Veterans in London	2
Post-traumatic stress disorder	3
PTSD and Armed Forces veterans	5
Available treatments for PTSD	6
Assistance Dogs	7
Assistance dogs for Armed Forces veterans	8
Supporting Armed Forces veterans in London	11
Case Study – Richard Mearns	11
Supporting London’s Armed Forces veterans with PTSD	13
Conclusion	15
List of Recommendations	16
Help and Support	17
Feedback	18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greater London Authority (GLA) became a signatory of the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2012, as did the London Fire Brigade, the Metropolitan Police Service and Transport for London.

This means that the GLA and its associated organisations have confirmed their moral obligation to support the Armed Forces. This includes supporting both serving and veterans of the Armed Forces in areas such as housing, medical and welfare pathways, work and training, and in the transition to civilian life.

An area where the GLA has carried out little work under the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant is in the support it provides to Armed Forces veterans dealing with medical conditions – such as Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Estimates suggest that around 4 per cent of veterans develop PTSD – this would mean that approximately 5,360 Armed Forces veterans in London have in the past, or are currently, suffering from PTSD-related symptoms.

The use of specially trained assistance dogs for Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD-related symptoms has proven to be hugely beneficial. There are countless examples of how an assistance dog can provide both emotional and practical benefits.

In the UK, the charity Veterans with Dogs works with Armed Forces veterans suffering from conditions like PTSD in order to provide them with assistance dogs, however it struggles to cope with the ever growing demand.

As part of the GLA's commitment to the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant, there is an opportunity for the Mayor of London to work with charities such as Veterans with Dogs to help those Armed Forces veterans most in need access an assistance dog.

Through introducing a pilot scheme, whereby 100 of the most at need Armed Forces veterans in London suffering from PTSD would be given access to an interest-free loan – the Mayor of London would be able to help them access the support provided by an assistance dog.

With the Government's renewed focus on tackling mental health problems, and the GLA's commitment to supporting the Armed Forces, specifically veterans, a scheme such as this offers a unique opportunity to provide long-term support for those veterans suffering from PTSD.

INTRODUCTION

London owes a duty to those individuals who are currently, or who have previously, served in the Armed Forces.

Those who choose to join the Armed Forces, in order to keep the United Kingdom (UK) safe deserve the support of Londoners both while they are serving and once they return to civilian life.

However, given the unique and often traumatic experiences those who serve in the Armed Forces can regularly face, they often require help and support once they have left the Armed Forces.

As a huge global city, London will constantly be judged on how it looks after those who are most in need, and how it looks after those who have sacrificed the most on behalf of their fellow Londoners, countrymen and women.

With the UK undergoing a renewed focus on supporting those who suffer from mental health problems, London has an opportunity to be a leader in supporting those Armed Forces veterans suffering from mental health problems.

VETERANS IN LONDON

Nobody knows exactly how many Armed Forces veterans there are in the UK, nor those living in London.

More is known about the number of 'Jedi Knights' in the UK – as of 2011 there were 176,632¹, with 21,391 living in London alone², than the number of individuals who previously served in the Armed Forces.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) does commission research each year to estimate the number of veterans across Great Britain – which combines information from a number of sources such as the Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey. As respondents to that survey were asked a number of questions to identify if they were a veteran, and the size of the survey sample, these estimates are considered to be the most reliable available, however the information provided only covers Great Britain, not the entire UK.

The most recent version of the Annual Population Survey was released in 2015, and estimated that there were 2,560,000 armed forces veterans currently resident across Great Britain. It was also estimated that 134,000 Armed Forces veterans lived in London³. This means that approximately 1.5 per cent of London's population has previously served in the Armed Forces.

1. Census 2011 data on religion reveals Jedi Knights are in decline, The Guardian, December 2012: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/dec/11/census-data-religion-jedi-knights>

2. Star Wars: The Force Awakens – Where do the majority of Jedi knights live in England and Wales?, Independent, December 2015: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/star-wars-the-force-awakens-where-do-most-jedi-knights-live-in-england-and-wales-a6775916.html>

3. Annual population survey: UK armed forces veterans residing in Great Britain, Ministry of Defence, May 2016: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-population-survey-uk-armed-forces-veterans-residing-in-great-britain>

Significant issues arise from the lack of available accurate data on the number of Armed Forces veterans. For example, when a local authority wishes to provide services directed solely at veterans as part of their commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, it is completely reliant upon crude estimates rather than accurate data such as that provided in the census.

The Royal British Legion has launched the 'Count Them In' campaign, the aim of which is to lobby the Office for National Statistics to introduce new questions to the 2021 census, thus providing accurate data on the number of Armed Forces veterans throughout the UK.

The Royal British Legion have suggested that the introduction of these questions to the census is a "once in a generation opportunity" to help improve the understanding of the unique Armed Forces veteran community and to ensure that local and national government, charities and service providers fully meet the needs of serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families⁴.

The London Assembly and the Mayor of London have already pledged their support for the 'Count Them In Campaign'⁵, however there is an opportunity for continued lobbying of the Government and the Office for National Statistics to ensure that additional questions are added to the 2021 census.

Should these questions be added to the 2021 census, it will allow the gathering of important data that will allow the Government and local authorities, alongside the Greater London Authority (GLA) the ability to accurately prepare and provide services for Armed Forces veterans, without relying upon generalised estimates.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should continue to support and lobby the Office for National Statistics to include questions related to the number of Armed Forces veterans living in the UK in the 2021 census.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder brought on if a person experiences very stressful, frightening or distressing events.

Someone who suffers from PTSD will often relive the traumatic event through flashbacks or nightmares – and this can often also be combined with feelings of isolation, guilt and severe irritability. It is also highly likely that someone suffering from PTSD may suffer from conditions such as insomnia, and struggle with their concentration.

PTSD usually comprises of three symptom clusters:

1. re-experiencing of the traumatic experience;
2. hyperarousal and emotional numbing; and
3. avoidance.⁶

PTSD is often severe – and remains persistent enough that it has a very real impact on a

4. Making the Census Count, Royal British Legion, May 2016: <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/count-them-in/>

5. Tweet from Royal British Legion, Twitter, November 2016: <https://twitter.com/PoppyLegion/status/799215758509244416>

6. What is PTSD, Combat Stress, January 2017: <http://www.combatstress.org.uk/medical-professionals/what-is-ptsd/>

sufferer's day to day life.

The diagnosis of PTSD was first used by veterans of the Vietnam War – but the problem and associated symptoms have been known for a long time, and have been known by a variety of names including: shell shock; soldier's heart; battle fatigue; combat stress; and post-traumatic stress syndrome⁷.

Types of events which are commonly linked to causing PTSD, according to the National Health Service (UK), include:

- serious road accidents;
- violent personal assaults, such as sexual assault, mugging and robbery;
- prolonged sexual abuse, violence or severe neglect;
- being held hostage;
- terrorist attacks;
- natural disasters, such as severe floods, earthquakes or tsunamis;
- a diagnosis of a life-threatening condition;
- an unexpected severe injury or death of a family member or friend;
- witnessing violent deaths; or
- military combat.

PTSD isn't regularly associated with situations that are simply upsetting – such as a divorce, job loss or failing exams. It is usually related to a severely traumatic experience – however, there is no definitive explanation as to what causes it.

The NHS estimates that around one in three individuals who have experienced a traumatic incident or event go on to develop PTSD – however there is no clear evidence as to why some individuals develop the condition, and some don't⁸.

Notwithstanding, there is some evidence that those who have experienced conditions such as depression or anxiety previously, are more susceptible to developing PTSD after a traumatic experience.

While it remains unclear as to why people develop PTSD, a number of potential reasons have been suggested following extensive research into the condition.

One such suggestion is that the symptoms of PTSD are as a result of an instinctive human mechanism which is intended to help those suffering from a traumatic incident to survive.

This possible cause is known as the survival mechanism.

For example, it has been suggested that the flashbacks many sufferers of PTSD experience may occur in order to force them to think about the event in detail so they are better prepared for it, should it occur again. Combined with this the feeling of being on-edge, known as hyperarousal – also a symptom of PTSD, may develop in order to help the individual respond quickly in another crisis.

7. What is post-traumatic stress disorder?, Mind, January 2017: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/#.WHiSFhuLS70>

8. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – Causes, NHS Choices, January 2017: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Post-traumatic-stress-disorder/Pages/Causes.aspx>

Another medical study has shown that individuals who suffer from PTSD can often have abnormal levels of stress hormones.

This possible cause is linked to the fight or flight physiological reaction.

Normally, when an individual is in danger or facing an imminent threat – the body naturally and instantly produces stress hormones such as adrenaline. The reaction of the human body to this hormone, often known as fight or flight, helps to deaden an individual's senses and reduce pain.

Sufferers of PTSD have been found in medical studies to continue to produce high amounts of hormones linked to the fight or flight reaction – even when there is no danger. It is considered by some that this chemical reaction may be responsible for the numbed emotions and hyperarousal experienced by some of those diagnosed with PTSD.

Another potential cause has been linked to changes in a sufferer's brain, which appear different in brain scans.

The part of the brain which is responsible for emotions and memory is known as the hippocampus. Brain scans of those suffering from PTSD have sometimes shown that the hippocampus appears smaller in size.

It is currently thought that this element of the brain may also be related to anxiety and fear, flashbacks and memory problems. Therefore, a malfunctioning hippocampus – as witnessed in brain scans of some of those individuals suffering from PTSD, may prevent flashbacks and nightmares from being properly processed. This would then result in the associated anxiety they generate not reducing in the usual manner over time⁹.

PTSD AND ARMED FORCES VETERANS

Most Armed Forces personnel do not experience mental health problems while they are in service, or afterwards when they re-enter civilian life¹⁰.

However, as members of the Armed Forces face unique risks and experiences as part of their service – they are often more likely than other parts of society to develop mental health problems, in particular conditions such as PTSD.

While the conditions that Armed Forces veterans suffer from are likely to be similar to those suffered by the general population, the unique situations they may experience as part of their service and any potential transition to civilian life may mean that their mental health conditions are triggered by different factors.

A great many of the UK's Armed Forces veterans, especially those who left the services more recently, have seen some form of combat as part of recent military incursions. This means that their experiences, and what they may have witnessed, makes them more susceptible to conditions such as PTSD.

9. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Your.MD, January 2017: <http://www.your.md/condition/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>

10. Armed forces and mental health, Mental Health Foundation, January 2017: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/a/armed-forces-and-mental-health>

For example, research conducted by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs estimated that in the USA, PTSD has effected:

- almost 31 per cent of Vietnam veterans;
- as many as 10 per cent of Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) veterans;
- 11 per cent of veterans who served in Afghanistan, and
- 20 per cent of veterans who served in Iraq.¹¹

The UK based charity Combat Stress estimates that around 1 in 25 former Armed Forces regulars and 1 in 20 Armed Forces Reservists who were deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan will report systems of PTSD following their service.

Furthermore, the charity also estimates that around 1 in 5 Armed Forces veterans are likely to eventually suffer from a common mental illness – such as depression, anxiety or substance abuse. These are likely to have either been caused or aggravated by their experiences in the Armed Forces.¹²

While Combat Stress acknowledges that the rate of occurrence of such conditions, including PTSD, is similar to those experienced in the general population – the complexity of such disorders tends to be greater in Armed Forces veterans. Also, there is a more regular occurrence of a condition like PTSD being experienced alongside other medical problems such as chronic pain, physical disability and substance misuse.

Analysis of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme by The Independent newspaper suggested that the number of serving and ex-serving Armed Forces personnel being awarded compensation for conditions such as PTSD has been rapidly increasing – particularly following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The analysis showed that the annual number of mental disorder pay-outs had increased by 379 per cent – from 121 in 2009/10 to 580 in 2015/16. This was the highest number of awards in the 11 years the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme has been running.

While the claims are not broken down by the type of condition awards have been issued for, it has been suggested that the timing of the increase mirrors the expected delays before Armed Forces veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan start to experience symptoms and seek help¹³.

AVAILABLE TREATMENTS FOR PTSD

At first, when an individual reports to their General Practitioner (GP) with mild symptoms of PTSD, or they have had symptoms for less than four weeks – their GP may recommend something known as ‘watchful waiting’.

‘Watchful waiting’ is where an individual monitors their own symptoms to see if they improve or get progressively worse. Usually this requires a follow-up appointment with a GP after a month – where further treatment opportunities will be considered.

11. PTSD: A Growing Epidemic, NIH MedlinePlus, December 2009: <https://medlineplus.gov/magazine/issues/winter09/articles/winter09pg10-14.html>

12. Myth Busters, Combat Stress, January 2017: <http://www.combatstress.org.uk/veterans/myth-busters/>

13. Payouts to UK veterans with mental health disorders reach record levels, The Independent, August 2016: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ptsd-iraq-afghanistan-british-army-mental-health-depression-wars-combat-stress-veterans-uk-armed-a7199461.html>

There are many different treatments available for PTSD. Medical experts are continually evaluating treatments – although the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) currently maintains a list of treatments which it believes to be an effective approach.

One such treatment is trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

CBT is a treatment based on talking – where attempts are made to change the ways things are viewed, for example seeking to shift negative ways of thinking into positive ones.

CBT helps those undertaking it to recognise how they react to unwanted experiences and the triggers which cause them, in order to find a more comfortable way of reacting and behaving.

Another treatment option recommended by NICE is Eye Movement and Desensitisation Reprocessing (EMDR).

EMDR, which was developed in the late 1980s, requires an individual to make rhythmic eye movements while recalling a traumatic experience. The rhythmic eye movements are designed to stimulate the information-processing systems in the brain. This treatment is designed to help the processing of traumatic events and speed up an individual's readjustment and recovery.

While medication is not routinely offered as an initial approach to treating PTSD, it can sometimes be provided as part of treatment if an individual is also considered to be clinically depressed; having difficulty sleeping or when an individual does not consider themselves in a position to undertake talking treatments like CBT or EMDR.

Other forms of treatment offered can include things like group therapy – where individuals suffering from conditions such as PTSD come together to discuss the experiences related to their trauma and the emotions they are feeling. These sessions are designed to help individuals understand their own experiences more thoroughly and learn ways to manage their symptoms.

Psychodynamic therapy, which is based on the considerations that past experiences have an impact on experiences and feelings in the present, is also used as a treatment for PTSD. This therapy focuses on the emotions an individual has experienced in response to a traumatic event and aims to help them learn ways to manage intense emotions¹⁴.

However, alongside these traditional treatments, there is growing recognition of the therapeutic benefits attached to individuals suffering from PTSD working with an assistance animal, particularly assistance dogs.

ASSISTANCE DOGS

Assistance dogs (sometimes known as service dogs) are dogs which have been specifically trained to aid or assist an individual suffering with a particular disability.

14. What treatments are available?, Mind, January 2017: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/treatments/#.WHia5huLS70>

A commonly recognised type of assistance dog is a Guide Dog – which is a dog that has been specifically trained to aid the mobility of a blind or visually impaired person.

However, assistance dogs can, and are, used for a wide variety of conditions and disabilities – for example there are autism assistance dogs which are trained to provide safety and facilitate a more independent and socially inclusive life for someone suffering from autism.

There are also assistance dogs trained to act as seizure alert dogs, which are trained to provide a 100 per cent reliable warning up to 50 minutes prior to an oncoming epileptic seizure – which gives their owner the time to find a place of safety and privacy as they have their seizure.¹⁵

Assistance Dogs UK, a coalition of assistance dog organisations, estimates that across the UK well over 7,000 individuals rely upon an accredited assistance dog to help with practical tasks, in addition to the emotional benefits and greater independence that such dogs can provide.¹⁶

ASSISTANCE DOGS FOR ARMED FORCES VETERANS

As is commonly recognised and accepted, an Armed Forces veteran suffering from a condition like PTSD often becomes extremely isolated – and their life can be dominated by conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Introducing a specially trained assistance dog into the life of an Armed Forces veteran who is suffering from PTSD has been shown to have hugely beneficial outcomes.

An assistance dog's daily routine for an Armed Forces veteran suffering from PTSD would typically consist of helping get the individual out of bed, fetching any medication they may require, accompanying them on any trips outside and 'grounding them'. Examples of an assistance dog grounding an Armed Forces veteran can include the dog waking the person if they are experiencing a nightmare, making them get out of bed and the dog then placing its' paws on the individual's shoulders, thereby reducing their anxiety and stress levels. This is known as emotional regulation.

The practical benefits of an assistance dog for an Armed Forces veteran suffering from PTSD is that the mere ownership of the dog requires the individual to get and up and do something, for example it places responsibility on the Armed Forces veteran to walk the dog and feed it.

Additionally there is the added emotional benefit of an assistance dog – whereby the dog provides unconditional love, showing no judgement and offering an uncomplicated relationship – which empowers an Armed Forces veteran suffering from PTSD to reconnect with their emotions¹⁷.

Internationally the benefits of assistance dogs for those Armed Forces veterans who suffer from PTSD is gradually becoming more recognised.

15. About Us, SupportDogs, January 2017: <https://supportdogs.org.uk/about-us/>

16. About Assistance Dogs UK, Assistance Dogs UK, January 2017: <http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/about/>

17. Conversation with Craig MacLellan, January 2017

In the United States, Cole Lyle, who served overseas in the Marine Corps for six years has been raising awareness of the benefits of assistance dogs for Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD¹⁸.

After serving in Afghanistan, Cole returned to his home in Texas in 2011 – and a Post-Deployment Health Assessment indicated he required treatment for PTSD. He saw a psychiatrist who prescribed antidepressants and medication to help him sleep – which he used alongside counselling services.

Cole found his condition worsened, rather than get better. By 2014, Cole felt that the medication he was taking was exacerbating the issues he faced and his therapy sessions were not helping – he even considered taking his own life. Having decided to stop taking his medication, a conversation with a friend highlighted to him the potential benefits of a trained assistance dog.

However, acquiring such a dog required a significant financial contribution from himself because the United States Department of Veteran Affairs did not provide them to Armed Forces veterans as part of their service provision.

Using ten thousand dollars of his own money, Cole acquired a German Shepherd called Kaya. Subsequently Kaya was trained to wake Cole up from nightmares and recognise stress patterns in his voice.

Within weeks of having an assistance dog, Cole's nightmares had drastically reduced and Kaya began to help stop his stress from developing into more severe bouts of depression and anxiety.

Now a graduate from Texas A&M University, Cole has begun advocating and lobbying for legislation known as the PAWS Act – which stands for Puppies Assisting Wounded Service members Act.

The Bill, which was introduced by Florida Republican Representative Ron DeSantis (and which already has the support of well over 135 members of the United States House of Representatives and 11 members of the United States Senate), seeks to establish a pilot where veterans who have tried other forms of treatment for conditions like PTSD, would be given a trained assistance dog.¹⁹

In the UK, the charity Veterans with Dogs was founded in 2012, by former Royal Marine Craig MacLellan. The charity is soon due to become part of the Assistance Dogs UK coalition, following being mentored by the charity Dogs for Good which investigates ways in which people can overcome specific challenges, such as autism, using assistance dogs.

Craig joined the Royal Marines at the age of 16, eventually serving several tours in Northern Ireland. In 1989, Craig's barracks in Deal, Kent were attacked by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) – whereby a bomb was detonated outside of the Royal Marines School of Music building. The building collapsed, killing 11 Royal Marines from the Royal Marines Band Service and wounding another 21.

Five years after the attack, Craig left the Armed Forces and began to suffer from severe

18. Cole Lyle Testimony: Service Dogs will save lives; C-SPAN3, April 2015: <https://youtu.be/ly818tcs-kw>

19. Conversation with Cole Lyle, January 2017

panic attacks, depression, hypervigilance and agoraphobia – bought on by the horrific events he had witnessed while serving in the Royal Marines. He became suicidal and found it very difficult to leave his house.

While attending a residential course organised by the charity Combat Stress, and accompanied by his Labrador, Craig noticed that she would sit with those people who were feeling the most anxious or stressed.

This led Craig to found the charity Veterans with Dogs – which trains assistance dogs at the Seal-Hayne Centre, run by the Dame Hannah Rogers Trust in Newton Abbott, Devon, to help veterans with mental health conditions including PTSD.

Since its creation, Veterans with Dogs has been inundated with demands for assistance dogs and operates a waiting list. As the charity is reliant upon donations it has to work within economies of scale and cannot help everyone in need.

The average cost of an assistance dog to help an Armed Forces veteran suffering from PTSD is £20,000 – which includes the cost of training the dog for two years and training for the Armed Forces veteran, which follows a CBT model. This is broken down as £11,000 for the training of the assistance dog, and £9,000 for the CBT-related element.

The training provided is bespoke for each veteran, and dependent on their mental health requirements. The training operates on a reward system, based on the bond between the Armed Forces veteran and their dog.

There is no requirement for the assistance dogs to be any particular breed – however Labradors, retrievers and spaniels have proved to be very well suited to the role required – given their capability to work, be calm in public and be friendly.

Currently no other charity in the UK provides fully trained assistance dogs for Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD. While some smaller organisations offer companionship programmes, nothing is offered on the scale of the work carried out by Veterans with Dogs²⁰.

20. Conversation with Craig MacLellan, January 2017

CASE STUDY – RICHARD MEARNS

Richard Mearns served as a Combat Medical Technician in the British Army until 2005/06, completing one tour of Iraq in 2003.

Richard initially left the army to pursue a career in policing, but has since worked in various other roles.

Richard was not officially diagnosed with PTSD until 2009 – when he self-referred to the charity Combat Stress. Combat Stress provided Richard with initial support and methods to deal with the issues but he considered these to not be far-reaching enough.

During this period, Richard found none of his job roles sufficiently challenging – however at the same time he was suffering from flashbacks during the night. Richard was able to recognise that his reactions were false and pushed himself to obtain a new job role as a regulator in central London. Not only was the job a challenge but one of the symptoms of PTSD suffered by Richard was severe anxiety when commuting into London from home.

At this time, Richard was receiving invaluable support from Craig MacLellan, the founder of Veterans with Dogs. Accordingly, Richard applied for an assistance dog and enquired as to whether his current employer would permit him to bring the dog to work. This request resulted in Richard being referred to their Occupational Health Department and suffering discrimination when it was suggested that Richard should get a job closer to home if travelling was a problem. Consequently Richard left that employment whilst still suffering flashbacks at night and not wanting to leave the house.

In July 2016, an assistance dog, Ziggy, was placed with Richard. Within a week he was waking Richard up when he was suffering from a flashback, thereby reducing the frequency of them from three per week to only one or two per month. In addition, Ziggy enabled Richard to do the things that most of us take for granted, for example going shopping or making a trip to the town centre.

As a consequence, Richard felt able to seek another job in central London, despite the arduous commute and the population density posing a huge challenge to him. Notwithstanding, Richard applied for the role of investigator at the Serious Fraud office in central London, advising that he had an assistance dog in training. Despite Richard's reservations about Ziggy being accepted as part of the package, Richard's application was successful.

SUPPORTING ARMED FORCES VETERANS IN LONDON

The GLA became a signatory of the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2012, alongside the London Fire Brigade (LFB), the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and Transport for London (TfL).

The Armed Forces Community Covenant is intended to complement, at a local level, the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines the moral obligation between the UK, the Government and the Armed Forces.

The aim of the Armed Forces Community Covenant is to:

- encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas;
- nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community;
- recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces community;
- encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life; and
- to encourage the Armed Forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.

Specifically, the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant seeks civic support in:

- adult support to cadet forces;
- enabling recruitment;
- allowing work and training;
- housing;
- school transition for service children;
- medical and welfare pathways;
- veterans;
- local security; and
- post-operational home-coming parades and support to reservists.²¹

While the GLA has successfully undertaken some of the responsibilities it committed to under the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant, it has not achieved or provided as much support as it could.

In a written answer to Assembly Member Bacon from September 2016, the Mayor of London confirmed that the GLA and its associated organisations had conducted some activity under the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant, for example:

- providing some Armed Forces veterans with free travel across the TfL network;
- creating 28 paid work placements in TfL and its suppliers to help Armed Forces veterans back into employment;
- providing special leave for those who wish to join the reserve Armed Forces in LFB and the MPS; and
- providing funding to Veterans Aid to combat homelessness among Armed Forces veterans.

The GLA also held several events in 2014 to commemorate the centenary of World War One and the work of London's Armed Forces veterans and military charities. These were alongside the annual ceremonies the GLA holds for Remembrance Day and Armed Forces Day.²²

21. Armed Forces Community Covenant, Greater London Authority, February 2012: <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s8447/>

22. Armed Forces Covenant, London Assembly, September 2016: http://questions.london.gov.uk/QuestionSearch/searchclient/questions/question_289500

However, although the work undertaken is welcome – it would appear the GLA and the Mayor of London could be doing far more to support Armed Forces veterans, given the activities it has undertaken as part of its commitment to the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant only cover a limited number of the required areas of civic support.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should review the work the Greater London Authority currently carries out as part of its commitment to the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant in order to expand the support provided to the Armed Forces community in London.

Particular areas of expected civic support for the Armed Forces community where the GLA has perhaps been weakest is the commitment to support for veterans, and medical and welfare pathways.

This gap provides an opportunity for the GLA and the Mayor of London to consider ways in which it could support Armed Forces veterans in London, specifically those suffering from mental health conditions like PTSD.

SUPPORTING LONDON'S ARMED FORCES VETERANS WITH PTSD

With the Ministry of Defence estimating there to be 134,000 Armed Forces veterans in London and charities suggesting that approximately four per cent of Armed Forces veterans are suffering from PTSD – it is possible to estimate that around 5,360 Armed Forces veterans in London have in the past (or are currently) suffering from PTSD-related symptoms.

Therefore, with such a large cohort of individuals potentially suffering from PTSD following their service in the Armed Forces – London has an opportunity to expand the support which is currently provided to them.

With the Prime Minister, Theresa May, announcing that she intends to transform the support provided to those suffering from mental health problems²³; London has an opportunity to lead the way.

Building on the work already being carried out by the charity Veterans with Dogs, the GLA could look to introduce a scheme which would improve access to assistance dogs for London's Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD.

While the difficult economic climate means that it would not be possible to automatically provide for a scheme where every Armed Forces veteran in London with PTSD could be provided with an assistance dog free of charge, there is an opportunity to help those most in need to access such a service.

Through introducing an interest-free loan scheme, the GLA could provide the initial support required for an Armed Forces veteran to secure an assistance dog.

If a pilot of such a scheme were to initially be launched by the Mayor of London for 100 Armed Forces veterans, and if funding was to be provided for the assistance dog only (with

23. Prime Minister unveils plans to transform mental health support, Prime Minister's Office, January 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-unveils-plans-to-transform-mental-health-support>

other funding being required for the CBT-related elements), the cost would be in the region of £1,100,000. There could be scope to initially fund this programme using the GLA's general reserves, a portion of which has been allocated for social, economic, health and wellbeing projects. Much of this money could likely be recouped by securing corporate sponsorship for the scheme. Large corporations could be attracted to providing financial support in exchange for the positive publicity of being linked with such a worthwhile cause.

The total cost would pale in comparison to the financial implications associated with the long-term treatment required for someone who develops PTSD and suffers from the associated symptoms. An assistance dog would serve to reduce the overall cost, and help assist Armed Forces veterans in a kinder and gentler manner than just traditional medical treatments.

Should the lifetime of each loan be 10 years, it would mean that Armed Forces veterans would only be required to contribute around £91 per month. While this does mean that Armed Forces veterans will not receive their assistance dog for free, the support from the GLA would remove the requirement for a significant sum of money to be required upfront – with it instead being repaid gradually over a period of time, interest free.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should introduce an interest free loan scheme which funds assistant dogs for Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD.

Should the Mayor of London be able to secure sponsorship for such a scheme, this would also either widen the number of individuals who could take part in the pilot, or lower the required monthly repayments. Or, this funding could be used to fund the CBT-related elements of providing an assistance dog to an Armed Forces veteran.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should seek to work with corporate sponsors to secure increased funding for providing assistance dogs to Armed Forces veterans in London suffering from PTSD.

At later stages, there would be scope to widen such a scheme to include working with other organisations who have committed to the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant, and this would again increase the available funding.

CONCLUSION

Assistance dogs have been proven to drastically improve the life chances of those suffering from conditions like PTSD.

With a renewed commitment from central Government to focus on the support provided to those suffering from mental health problems, and the GLA's commitment to the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant – there is an ideal opportunity for London to lead the way in supporting Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD.

Working with a charity such as Veterans with Dogs, London has an opportunity to take a unique approach to providing long-term support for Armed Forces veterans who have served not just all Londoners but the entire UK.

Introducing a pilot scheme, where an assistance dog is provided via an interest free loan, the GLA and the Mayor of London have the ability to change the lives of Armed Forces veterans living in London.

As a signatory of the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant, the GLA has a duty to provide support for those individuals who chose to serve their country. A scheme such as this will further indicate how much their service is valued, and how the commitment they have shown and the sacrifices they have made will never be forgotten.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1 - The Mayor of London should continue to support and lobby the Office for National Statistics, to include questions related to the number of Armed Forces veterans living in the UK in the 2021 census.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - The Mayor of London should review the work the Greater London Authority currently carries out as part of its commitment to the Londonwide Armed Forces Community Covenant, in order to expand the support provided to the Armed Forces community in London.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - The Mayor of London should introduce an interest free loan scheme which funds assistant dogs for Armed Forces veterans suffering from PTSD.

RECOMMENDATION #4 - The Mayor of London should seek to work with corporate sponsors to secure increased funding for providing assistance dogs to Armed Forces veterans in London suffering from PTSD.

HELP AND SUPPORT

If you have been affected by any of the issues contained within this report you may find the following websites of use:

NHS Choices: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/pages/introduction.aspx>

MIND: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>

Assistance Dogs UK

<http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/>

Veterans with Dogs

<http://www.veteranswithdogs.org.uk/>



FEEDBACK

Connect with us online and tell us what you thought about this paper.

Twitter: [@assembly_tories](https://twitter.com/assembly_tories)

Facebook: facebook.com/glaconservatives

Email: assembly.tories@gmail.com



SHAUN BAILEY
LONDON ASSEMBLY
Greater London Authority
City Hall, The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA