

Veterans and Armed Forces Strategy

2016 – 2021



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Introduction

At Riverside we are proud to be one of the leading registered providers of social housing in the UK, providing support and affordable housing to people of all ages and circumstances throughout England and South West Scotland.

Riverside has provided specialist services to Veterans of the Armed Forces since 2000 and, in this time, we have supported, advised and housed over 13,000 Veterans. We also recognise that within our general housing stock, support services and retirement services there will be a significant number of military Veterans, as they make up more than 7% of the UK population. In 2014/15 3.4% of new tenants told us that they were Veterans, and alongside this we also house a proportion of currently service military personnel in our social housing. Underpinning all of this we also have a significant number of Veterans and Reserves among our own staff teams.

The aim of this Veterans strategy is to provide a clear picture of and vision for the services we provide to Veterans, as well as those we aim to develop, setting our approach for the next five years. It will help to promote Riverside's role within the Veterans sector, as well as highlighting to the Ministry of Defence, Veterans and the wider community the value of our services. It will also outline our plans for developing Veterans' services in the future.

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Our Corporate Plan is clear in its objectives, and the Veterans strategy will be no different. The following commitments from the plan will be included within it:

- **Connected Customers:** improving our customers' experiences by modernising our services and delivering consistency.
- **Resilient Lives:** providing a comprehensive range of services to support those customers who need extra help to thrive in their homes.
- **Better Places:** improving neighbourhoods by investing in our existing homes, building and acquiring new ones, and selling stock to focus our geographical footprint.

The plan has also set out how we will achieve these objectives by following two key routes:

- **Great Team:** ensuring our colleagues and board members are well led, fully engaged, supported and rewarded to deliver our strategy and involving our customers in scrutinising and influencing what we do.
- **Effective Business:** securing the resources to deliver our objectives, managing them effectively in order to generate the capacity to make choices and do more.

This strategy should be read alongside Riverside's Supported Housing Strategy, which includes best practice from the sector and a framework with resources for support delivery.

Background

Recent years have seen the beginning of a significant movement in the population of Armed Forces personnel. As troops withdraw from Afghanistan (December 2014) and Germany under the banner Army 2020, the demand for Service and Veterans' housing within the UK will rise proportionally.

Each year between 18–20,000 people leave the Armed Forces; the majority have a successful transition into civilian life. According to NHS figures, just below 10% leave with some kind of health issues, either psychological or physical.

Via our SPACES service Riverside is a member of the Confederation of Services Charities (COBSEO) and are particularly involved in the Housing Cluster. COBSEO provides a single point of contact for interaction with government, including local government and the Devolved Administrations; the Royal Household; the private sector; and, of course, other members of the Armed Forces Community. Membership of this body provides Riverside with a credible reputation for delivering services to Veterans, as well as a voice amongst the sector.

In 2013 Riverside joined up with Stoll (a specialist Veterans social housing provider) to commission the University of York to conduct a four year research programme into the housing and support needs of Veterans. Funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), the first phase has been completed. The published report confirms fears of a lack of knowledge and data on the long-term housing needs of Veterans. Information held at Local Authority level is inadequate and, whilst providers of accommodation services (and some Local Authorities) report strong demand in some locations, provision is ad-hoc and fragmented. In addition the research has identified weaknesses in the planning and processes of transition (of service leavers to civilian life), with limited advice available and no real preventive work to identify service leavers who are likely to struggle as they re-enter civilian life – a missed opportunity.

It is also difficult to know if figures of Veterans within housing and support services, or those sleeping rough, are correct. This is made more difficult as many people will not 'admit' to being a Veteran as they can feel ashamed of becoming homeless. However, the research also identified great respect amongst the Veterans and social/welfare/health sector for services such as Riverside's, which deliver dedicated and tailored housing with support to Veterans, often with very complex needs and multiple traumas.

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The Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) was published in May 2011 along with a document called 'Today and Tomorrow'. This lists the nearly 100 real, tangible commitments the government has made to the Armed Forces Community.

The AFC itself is not a legal document but its key principles have been enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011.

The Covenant's two principles are that:

- the Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and
- special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

The Covenant exists to redress the disadvantages that the Armed Forces Community may face in comparison to other citizens, and to recognise sacrifices made.

The AFC is also supported by the Corporate Covenant, which is a public pledge from businesses and other organisations who wish to demonstrate their support for the Armed Forces Community. Riverside signed the Corporate Covenant in June 2014, and was the first (and to date the only) Civilian Registered Provider of Social Housing to do so.



The Transition Mapping study was published by FiMT in August 2013.

This mapped and costed the outcomes of poor transition in its manifestations of homelessness, alcohol and drug misuse, offending, family breakdown, debt, psychological disorders and unemployment. It projected that costs associated with poor transition would be £122 million in 2013, £111 million in 2014 and £98 million in 2015. These were said to be 'conservative estimates'.

However, through Riverside's early intervention services, which aid transition, we know they can deliver substantial benefits through their ability to stop problems escalating.

The Veterans' Transition Review, which Riverside contributed to, was conducted by Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, and published on 11 February 2014. His report examined the transition of Armed Forces personnel from their military careers to civilian life at the end of their service.

The report highlighted that the experience of transition varies and that there still are many gaps in provision and information available.

These reports are used to inform public policy, and in particular Lord Ashcroft's review is extremely influential. His role as 'Prime Minister's Special Representative on Veterans' Transition' means he makes direct recommendations to cabinet, to which ministers must then respond.



Where we are now

Riverside has a range of services and offers to members of the Armed Forces – including those in current active service, Reservists and Veterans.

The current services include:

1. **SPACES** (The Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services), funded by the MoD, is designed to help single ex-regulars find appropriate accommodation when they leave the services. Through this telephone advice service, Riverside reduces the instances of ex-service personnel becoming homeless or sleeping rough after discharge. Veterans who have been out of services for some time also use SPACES and are assessed and referred to appropriate housing solutions. Since its inception in 2000, SPACES has helped house over 13,500 people into independent accommodation, social housing and specialist housing including Riverside's own Veterans' services outlined below.

2. **MCTC Housing Service** is an advice service within the Military Corrective Training Centre. Working closely with the welfare support team, Riverside advises and refers to appropriate housing, preventing homelessness at the point of discharge. MCTC operates on the same MoD contract as SPACES.

3. **Mike Jackson House (MJH)** supported housing service located in Aldershot, offers 24-hour support to single men and women in 25 self-contained flats. Training and recreational space is also provided. The scheme was built on land gifted by the MoD with capital grants from DCLG (Department of Communities & Local Government), Rushmoor Borough Council and service charities.

4. **The Beacon** supported housing service in Catterick offers 24-hour support to single men and women in 31 self-contained flats. Therapy rooms, training facilities, recreational space and a working bakery are all available on site. The Beacon was built on land gifted by the MoD, with capital funding provided by DCLG, the Homes and Communities Agency, Riverside and The Royal British Legion.

5. **Family Homes** have been developed by Riverside in partnership with MoD, in the Midlands under a PFI-funded initiative. 145 three and four-bed homes close to RAF Cosford deliver quality rented accommodation to serving personnel and their families.

6. **Manchester Partnership** is a new project where Riverside is bringing its specialist support into play as part of a city-wide partnership in Manchester. Working with Walking with the Wounded our team promotes support around wellbeing to Veterans across the city.

Where we want to be

Riverside aims to deliver a range of flexible services that will meet the needs of different groups of Veterans, having demonstrable actions and outputs from our commitment to the Corporate Covenant.

As a large organisation with a national footprint, Riverside has the opportunity to touch the lives of a large number of Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community (eg spouses/partners and families of serving personnel or veterans) in different ways:

- As a landlord, we house Veterans within our general needs housing, retirement living services and supported housing schemes. We are committed to having appropriate responses to the needs of Veterans, relevant to the type of service or accommodation they are in.
- We deliver advice and support services specifically for Veterans, as well as to Veterans within our more generic homelessness or other accommodation based and floating support services. We will ensure that staff are equipped to meet the needs of veterans, appropriate to the service they receive.
- As an employer of around 2,500 people we can estimate that around 175 are Veterans. In addition to this, we know we have a number of staff who are Reservists (formerly known as the Territorial Army). As a responsible employer with 'Investors in People' and 'Best Companies' status, we will ensure our HR policies and procedures allow flexibility for all staff to undertake their duties.
- As a purchaser of goods and services we procure from a variety of organisations. Using our procurement processes, we will encourage our suppliers to consider their support to the Armed Forces Community.

The Future Shape of Riverside's offer to Veterans and the Armed Forces Community

We will continue to offer a range of options to respond to the needs of our Veterans, to include supported housing, floating support, shared ownership via our general needs, training for employment and a range of ongoing accommodation-based support packages.

We will continue to expand our Veterans services, investing in accommodation and pulling in more specialist support. Alongside this we will continue to develop support for Veterans with Riverside's social housing and generic support services.

We will ensure that existing and future services are viable and offer value for money. As local commissioning diminishes, a targeted fundraising campaign will be launched using Riverside's established **#LightsOnForVeterans** banner, in order to secure revenue necessary to fund support services. Consideration will be given on how best to ensure the future financial sustainability of these support services for example through increased partnership working, as we will not be able to rely solely on charitable donations.

We will increase our work with other agencies and Service Charities, to ensure we are able to provide the very best support and 'offer' to all of our customers. This will include models such as the sort in place at Mike Jackson House, where a member of staff employed and funded by Walking With the Wounded works as an integrated part of the Riverside Care and Support team.

How we will get there

Sponsor: In order to drive all of the identified activities, our Director of Business Development will Sponsor all Armed Forces activity, and 'own' our Corporate Covenant commitment. This director will promote the strategy to all divisions and sections of Riverside, and remind departments of their part to play in delivering our commitment to the Covenant. Divisions will each identify a lead member of staff to co-ordinate the delivery of the strategy.

Monitor and Research: We will begin to monitor and record the number of serving personnel, Veterans and Reservists amongst our staff teams, tenants and customers.

By understanding the numbers of people in the Armed Forces Community who are affected by our activities, we can better plan, cost and implement future developments and target additional resources where appropriate.

Riverside will better understand the need and what type of services are most effective when The University of York complete the research commissioned by Riverside and Stoll. We will develop an action plan around the research findings, and consider the most effective support models identified. Services will be developed according to identified best practice, changing needs of customers, and available funding streams.

Develop: Increase the number of Veterans specific services we provide. In 2015 we begin two new building projects thanks to a successful application to the LIBOR funds in 2014. These will create supported accommodation services for single Veterans who would otherwise be homeless.

Fundraising: Fundraising options will be integrated into our work wherever possible. For Support services there will be increased collaboration between the Fundraising Manager and the Business Growth and Strategy and Operational Teams. Alongside the Contracts and Tendering Team there will be a focus on non-usual activity such as bids to grant giving bodies and other funds rather than Local Authorities, or health and care commissioners. With such funding routes, it is usual for successful bids to be allocated for current or subsequent financial years, and as a result the timing of bids will be aligned to coincide with upcoming building completions. We have therefore developed a bidding/tendering timetable that reflects this enhanced approach to funding.

It is recognised that we are better placed to access support and funding in partnership with other agencies, and so time will be dedicated to working with agencies across the Veterans sector in order to achieve this. Through our Armed Forces Sponsor and with our Fundraising Manager we will oversee a plan to recruit major donors, leveraging influence from our Veterans Sponsor; Procurement to allow us to work with our supply chain; and frontline colleagues who can support the dissemination locally of fundraising messages. This will represent a cultural shift in promoting our need for external support to continue these valuable services. Many relevant grants are often driven by charities and local commissioners, therefore local teams and managers will be supported to seek out and maintain appropriate links and relationships. Larger, national grant giving bodies and a public fundraising campaign will be led as identified in the fundraising plan.

| Name of organisation | Small/medium/ large amounts | Statutory or non statutory | Application lead person * |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Supporting people and other regional commissioning bodies | Large | Statutory | AM/ROM if negotiation only; BG&S – if a tender process |
| Charitable Trusts & Foundations including Services charities | Medium/Large | Non Statutory | FM |
| Corporate donors | All | Non Statutory | FM |
| Individual donors | All | Non Statutory | FM |
| Community fundraising | Small | | |
| Church Housing Trust | Small/Medium | Non Statutory | AM/ROM |
| Libor Fund 2015 | Medium/Large | Statutory | BG&S/FM |
| Local Authorities/ community funds | All | Both | FM/AM |

* AM = Area Manager, ROM = Regional Operations Manager, BG&S = Business Growth & Strategy/Tendering and Contracts, FM = Fundraising Manager

PR, Marketing and Influencing: Riverside is fortunate to have a variety of internal and external people involved in the publicity and marketing of its Veterans services. Staff from Operational teams, BG&S, Marketing, and Policy are all involved in creating regular newsletters which are used to inform and influence external stakeholders including potential funders, ministers and government departments.

Through Riverside Group we have access to an external public affairs agency on influencing. This presence and awareness raising in social media, newsletters, articles in publications and other formats means that we will continue to support an holistic approach to enable all of our PR, marketing, influencing and fundraising activity to achieve the greatest impact.

National Partnerships and links with local partners will be nurtured. This may include external partners directly delivering support within our schemes or allowing and training us to use their materials and programmes. By taking this partnership approach we will enhance the flexibility of our services, important during the times of funding restrictions

Our specialist workers will benefit from Riverside’s wider expertise in specific areas, such as Employment and Training and Financial Inclusion. They will link into existing employment and training frameworks and best practice networks, and benefit from the peer support that can be offered by dedicated staff operating in other parts of the business.

Our membership of COBSEO will be examined and adapted (if necessary) to ensure we are gaining the most benefit from this arrangement. We will explore whether one membership as Riverside will be more beneficial, or if each specialist Veterans scheme should hold separate membership. We will be active in more of the clusters:

- Education, Employment, Resettlement
- Welfare, Health and Wellbeing Arena
- Housing (currently the only cluster we attend)
- Veterans in the Criminal Justice System

Create Champion or Lead roles:

These will be regular Scheme Managers or Support staff in retirement living and generic supported schemes, who will seek out best practice in this field and arrange appropriate activities for customers who are Veterans within their (and if appropriate neighbouring) Riverside services. This will ensure we have a level of knowledge of Veterans needs and resources available to them as a consistent offer across Riverside Care and Support division.

Staff Recruitment and Support: To honour our commitment to the Corporate Covenant, we will offer all Veterans applying for job vacancies a guaranteed interview if they meet the essential criteria of the post. We will target the advertising of posts through channels and platforms used by Veterans. In Veterans specific support schemes, we will have GROW trainee posts ringfenced for Veterans who have faced homelessness.

Riverside will support reservist employees who are compulsorily mobilised for service in the Armed Forces and Reservist Personnel have special employment protection if called up. Up to two weeks unpaid time off for Reservist annual training is allowed.

Lettings to Veterans: Where Riverside manages its own lettings and referrals in general needs divisions, we will consider giving weighting to applications from Veterans.

Building our reputation: We have steadily built our reputation since 1999 as a provider of Veterans services. To advance our credibility and give us an equal, or at least similar, footing to other forces/veterans providers, Riverside would benefit from a spokesperson/representative with a high ranking (Brigadier or above) background.

The MoD world is one of traditional military values, and great respect and trust is placed in agencies who are represented by such personalities. This is evident in key military organisations such as COBSEO, Stoll, Haig Housing, Help for Heroes, SSAFA, Royal British Legion, Combat Stress and others. To help Riverside advance its position amongst Veterans services/Forces Charities, we must therefore consider appointing a board member or senior manager who is a high ranking, ex-military personality, as soon as a vacancy allows. Whilst a military background cannot outweigh the other needs of such a role, preference could be given to such a person if all other needs of the role are fulfilled to an equal standard as other candidates.

Conclusions and recommendations

Riverside has already begun to diversify and grow its offer of services to veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community. We have shown commitment to the cause in signing the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant and now have a list of actions to ensure we can demonstrate how we put this commitment into practice.

Summary of actions:

- Identify Sponsor Director
- Monitor numbers of Veterans and Reservists within Riverside
- Organically evolve service models in response to emerging best practise and research findings.
- Increase the number of specialist Veterans Services, delivering the two new developments on time and to budget and specification.
- Dedicate a role within the BG&S Tendering and Contracts team with a remit for fundraising from non traditional routes, with Veterans bids as outlined in Table 1.
- Promote Veterans as a cross-organisational area of work, and encourage support within all parts of the business.
- Develop proactive partnerships to be developed with relevant agencies who can also support our customers.
- Review COBSEO membership and amend to most beneficial arrangement.
- Create more Champions/Leads to allow a consistency across services.
- Strengthen our support for Veterans and Reservists within our Peoples Services functions.
- Consider adding weighting to applications from Veterans in lettings processes, in Riverside Divisions.
- Seek to recruit a high ranking military veteran to the board or director level senior team.
- Identify appropriate resourcing levels to deliver proactive market profile raising, funding and influencing to meet the growth demands of our Veterans services.

Whilst Veterans services are a small part of Riverside activity, they are a very important area of work, particularly in the Care and Support division. We recognise the contribution that members of the Armed Forces Community have made, and often the very difficult circumstances in which people find themselves either as a direct result of their service history, or problems with transition back to civilian life.

Riverside wanted to make sure that Veterans do not face disadvantage, but we will also actively find ways to amend our practice, enabling improved access for Veterans to our support and wider services.

Get in touch or find out more

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Customer Service Centre

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at the weekend or even on Christmas Day
0345 111 0000

 Speak to a member of our team

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