Scottish Veterans Commissioner

Support for the Bereaved Community

Review paper

Please be aware that this report contains references to suicide

November 2025

INTRODUCTION

As part of her extended tenure, the Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SVC) has undertaken a short review of support for the armed forces bereaved community in Scotland. This review picks up some of the areas outlined in *Community and Relationships: Anything but Uniform*[1] in respect of the bereaved community and those who support them.

This review has focused on the support available to members of the bereaved community in Scotland, including from the statutory and third sectors. On that basis – and while fully appreciating the crucial role of the services themselves and of the MoD in the 'transition' phase and beyond – this review did not look in detail at the immediate support offered on the death of the service person.

To inform this report the Office of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner has carried out a programme of external engagement with a range of stakeholders, alongside investigation and analysis of relevant research and data. Due consideration has also been given to statutory policy and guidance at both national and local levels. This has included looking at any data available on the armed forces bereaved community (UK and Scotland), reviewing grant/funding programmes in support of this community and looking at sources of direct support available to the bereaved community. This has included considering the extent to which that support is visible and accessible to those who may need it.

The military bereaved community in the UK refers to individuals and families who have lost a loved one who has served in the Armed Forces (including Reservists).

This includes spouses, partners, children, parents, siblings, and close relatives and friends of deceased service personnel. Some may be bereaved at an early age while others, including of course veterans themselves, may be bereaved much later in life. Whether the death occurs while the person is still serving, or after they have left service and become a veteran, all of those affected are part of the military bereaved community.

Through the research and investigation that supported the previous thematic reports[2] published by the Scottish Veterans Commissioner it has been vital to focus on the challenges and barriers faced by the veteran community in Scotland, as well as promoting and celebrating the positive contribution they make to civilian society.

1 Community and Relationships: Anything but Uniform | Scottish Veterans Commissioner
2 Publications | Scottish Veterans Commissioner

As a result of that work, it has become clear that it is equally important to ensure that the community surrounding our veterans is not forgotten. The spouses, partners, parents, and children, alongside extended family and friends, provide the roots and stability needed to support our armed forces and they deserve our lifelong respect and help. In times of bereavement, the extended armed forces and veteran community should be supported through all the challenges that the death of a loved one brings.

As global security challenges evolve and the potential for future conflicts remains ever-present, Scotland must be prepared to support those who may face military bereavement in years to come. The lessons learned from supporting families affected by operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other deployments must inform our preparedness for future casualties that may arise from emerging threats or unforeseen conflicts.

In preparing for the future, we must ensure that military families - who provide such essential support to our serving personnel - are in turn looked after properly when loss of life occurs. When Service ends in death, families deserve comprehensive, coordinated, long-term support that honours both their loss and their ongoing needs as they rebuild their lives outside the military system that once defined them.

This short report looks at the existing services that are available and the lived experience of anyone who, sadly, has to access those services. It aims to encourage a wider conversation about what works well and what could be improved to provide the bereaved community with reassurance and support for as long as they need it.

It is essential that effective support for the military bereaved is not seen as just a moral imperative. It is a critical component of the covenant between society and those who serve it so well.

SUSIE HAMILTON

Scottish Veterans Commissioner

CONTEXT, DATA & RESEARCH

The Armed Forces Covenant[3] is a promise that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, ***including the bereaved***, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

Its two principles are that, recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces:

- Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured ***and the bereaved***.

A commitment to support the bereaved community was included within the 2018 10-Year '*A Strategy for our Veterans*' and the Scottish Government's Refreshed Action Plan of August 2022.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) provides comprehensive support and benefits to families following the death in service of a member of the Armed Forces. This is managed through the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), including notification processes and ongoing support from Visiting Officers (VOs).

The latter provide ongoing liaison and support through:

- Funeral arrangements
- Headstone provision
- Service Inquiry and Coroner's Inquest (or FAI in Scotland)
- Transition to Veterans Welfare Service

Families receive the Purple Book[4], a resource guide with practical advice and contact information for relevant charities. Support is also offered when a veteran dies, with information on how to access this set out on the UK Government website[5]. Delivery of this support is the responsibility of the UK Government, as is access to the correct financial benefits and compensations.

There are no official statistics (at UK or Scottish level) about the bereaved veteran community. Some third sector organisations have undertaken surveys and other

3 Armed Forces Covenant
4 Purple Book bereavement guide | GOV.UK
5 Guidance: What to do when a veteran dies | GOV.UK

data collection/comparison activity to try and understand the size and shape of that community. However, we do know from Scotland's 2022 Census that 176,100 people (3.9% of adults aged 16 and over) had previously served in the UK Armed Forces, marking the first time this data was collected in the country's census. The veteran population in Scotland is older and predominantly male (88%), a demographic shaped by World War II and National Service. In time, the loss of these veterans will impact on their families, and it is important that support is easily accessible to those who may need it.

The Ministry of Defence[6] record deaths in service each year . These deaths mean their families will become members of the bereaved military community. In 2024 there were 59 deaths recorded. Included in these figures, but also set out in a separate annual report, are the annual deaths by suicide[7] in the armed forces . For each loss there will be devastating impact, both short and long term, for family, friends and colleagues.

There are some sources of research available, mainly focusing on the processes and procedures within the Ministry of Defence. Others undertake a qualitative approach to understand the needs and support that was or is provided to the bereaved community. The most recent and comprehensive of these reports, *Research into the Needs of the Bereaved Armed Forces Community*[8] – produced by alma economics on behalf of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) – reviews the research and evidence base on this subject.

This report was used to inform the development of the AFCFT 'Empowering Bereaved Military Families programme' in 2025, aiming to:

- Build a collaborative network of support organisations
- Improve access to mental health and holistic support
- Ensure inclusive, long-term care for all bereaved family members

The Empowering Bereaved Military Families programme is designed to create transformational change in how bereaved military families are supported.

It was announced in October 2025[9] that nearly £2 million had been awarded to Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS)[10] to deliver targeted support – including counselling, emotional and practical care – to military families who have lost loved ones during or connected to service.

The programme will be a collaborative partnership, with key partners including Cruse Bereavement Support, Scotty's Little Soldiers and The Poppy Factory. It is intended that the project will deliver long-term, transformational change by addressing the unique challenges bereaved military families face over time.

6 Collection: UK armed forces deaths in service statistics: index | GOV.UK
7 Accredited official statistics: UK armed forces suicides: 2024 | GOV.UK
8 Research into the needs of the bereaved Armed Forces community | AFCFT
9 Empowering Bereaved Armed Forces Families: Transforming Mental health Support Through Partnership | AFCFT
10 Armed Forces Support | DMWS

SUPPORT LANDSCAPE

Perhaps due to the influence of a military culture where there has historically been a reluctance to seek help, the military bereaved community may not come forward to access support. It is therefore important that they are encouraged to do so if and when the time is right and – when they do – that the support available meets their needs. We know that those needs may change over time and will be specific to every individual and family. Grieving is not a linear process and the range of emotional, practical and financial challenges can manifest in different ways.

There is a range of support organisations[11] that members of the bereaved veteran community (in common with the civilian community) can access across Scotland for emotional and practical help. These include Cruse Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland, and Social Security Scotland. For many, this will provide them with what they need. Some of these organisations will draw on armed forces experience from within their staff or volunteer cohorts, for example when using assessment processes to match client needs to counsellor skills levels and expertise.

There are also examples of bereavement organisations who have recognised the specific needs of the military community. Widowed and Young[12] is an example of this. It is a support organisation for widows and widowers who lost their spouse/partner when aged under 50 and they operate across the UK (including Scotland). While not military specific, there is a peer support sub-group for members with a military connection.

For others, the support provided by armed forces charities can be the preferred route and they, in particular the benevolent trusts and funds, play a vital role here. The bereaved community is included within their beneficiary group and have access to financial support (including funeral costs, access to pensions, benefits advice), and emotional support (such as grief counselling and peer support networks).

The SSAFA branch network provides bereavement support through casework, referrals and collaboration with other organisations and authorities. They advise that most commonly they help with funding to cover funeral costs and on occasion to help with funeral arrangements. This (sometimes substantial) financial assistance, alongside onward referrals to other support services and providers, can make a significant difference in how well the bereaved family is able to recover from the death of a loved one.

SSAFA caseworkers[13], some of whom have lived experience of bereavement, may also follow up informally where there have been concerns about the beneficiary being alone and/or not coping well.

11 Bereavement support | mygov.scot
12 Widowed and Young
13 Loss of a Loved One | SSAFA

This could be by telephone or visits to stay connected with the family. SSAFA also provide specific bereavement support via their "Support for Bereaved Families" support groups.

There are examples of invaluable specific support for children and young people, including Forces Children Scotland and Scotty's Little Soldiers, and some military charities – such as BLESMA – have specific groups to facilitate peer support for adults.

It is very clear that there is a willingness to provide support across the third sector, and for organisations to do so collaboratively. They are swift to respond when contacted, whether that is delivering financial, pastoral or peer support. Peer support is identified by many stakeholders, researchers and the bereaved community themselves, as one of the most important ways of supporting those who have lost a loved one.

There are also some statutory processes that are effective in reducing the stress and bureaucracy associated with a death, for example the 'Tell us Once' service[14] that allows someone to report a death to most government organisations in one go. This includes notification to Veterans UK, which is necessary for members of the military bereaved community. This service goes some way to reducing the distress caused by having to repeat the detail and circumstances of a death to multiple organisations.

The Defence Bereaved Families Group meets twice a year. It is made up of Associations, charities, affiliated organisations, and MOD representatives. The group aims to improve and address the unique challenges faced by military bereaved families, by providing lived experience feedback that both challenges and influences current policy.

Less positively, in Scottish Local Authorities, even if support for the veteran community is covered in public-facing information (and that is not the case for all) the bereaved community tends not to be referenced. This should be addressed to ensure the covenant is being upheld.

Having reviewed a range of websites and online resources, there can be a lack of accessible and clear information for the bereaved military community. In conversation with expert stakeholders such as Beyond the Wire[15] it is apparent that access to advice and support has historically been piecemeal at best. The launch of their interactive bereavement hub later in the year will provide a comprehensive and much needed resource to help address this issue.

It is also important to recognise and appreciate the huge contribution of the staff and volunteers who provide support to the bereaved community. It is essential to ensure that they are equipped with the skills, tools and knowledge to do so effectively but also to consider the emotional toll it may take on them and to provide appropriate resources for their own wellbeing.

14 What to do after someone dies: Tell us once | GOV.UK
15 Beyond the Wire

There are too many support organisations and services for it to be practical to list them all. However, to provide an overview of the range of available assistance, a selection has been included in **Appendix 1**. This is intended as an indication of current provision rather than an exhaustive list.

THE UNIQUE IMPACT OF BEREAVEMENT ON MILITARY FAMILIES

Bereavement in military families carries unique dimensions that distinguish it from civilian grief experiences. The loss of a service member - whether through combat, training accidents, illness, suicide, or other causes - profoundly disrupts families both emotionally and practically, often compounded by the abrupt severance from the military community and support systems. If the death occurs while the family is living in service accommodation, they may not have close family support available nearby.

Different Types of Military Death

Killed in Action (In- Service):

Combat and Service-related deaths bring a particular complexity to grief. Families may struggle with the circumstances of the death - wondering if their loved one suffered, questioning military decisions, or grappling with the "what ifs" of deployment. There is often a public dimension to the loss, with media attention, military ceremonies, and community recognition that can feel both honouring and intrusive. Some families find meaning in the service and sacrifice narrative, whilst others feel anger or betrayal towards the institution.

Illness or Accident (In-Service and Post-Service):

Deaths from illness or accident can carry different burdens. These losses may lack the public recognition given to combat deaths, potentially leaving families feeling their grief is somehow "less significant". Medical illnesses may involve prolonged caregiving periods where spouses become primary carers, fundamentally altering family dynamics. Accidents - whether in vehicles, training incidents, or off-duty events - can bring sudden, shocking loss without the framework of "service and sacrifice" that helps some families find meaning.

Suicide (In-Service and Post-Service):

Death by suicide presents perhaps the most complex and stigmatised form of military bereavement. Suicide rates among UK Armed Forces veterans have been a growing concern, with research[16] indicating possible elevated risk particularly among younger veterans who left service prematurely or struggled with transition. For the bereaved, suicide can bring:

- **Stigma and Shame:** despite increasing mental health awareness, suicide remains heavily stigmatised. Families may encounter attitudes suggesting the death was somehow preventable or a personal failing, rather than recognising the complex interplay of trauma, mental illness, inadequate support, and circumstance.
- **Guilt and Self-Blame:** surviving family and friends can experience "if only" thoughts - if only they had noticed warning signs, intervened differently, or provided more support. Spouses may question whether they failed their partner; children may wonder if they were "not enough" reason to live; parents may feel they somehow failed in raising their child.
- **Anger at the Military System:** some families feel the Ministry of Defence and wider military healthcare system failed their loved one. They may point to inadequate mental health provision, delays in accessing care, stigma around seeking help within military culture, or failures in transition support. This anger can be both justified and complicate grief, as families feel trapped between honouring their loved one's service and holding the institution accountable.
- **Complicated Questions Without Answers:** unlike other deaths, suicide leaves families searching for reasons that may never be fully understood. The deceased's mental state, operational trauma, adjustment difficulties, or other factors may remain painfully ambiguous.
- **Trauma for Those Who Found the Body:** family members who discover the suicide face their own traumatic response, with intrusive memories and images that complicate their grief journey.

Practical Disruptions

The loss of Service Family Accommodation (SFA) creates perhaps the most jarring practical impact. Surviving families are typically required to vacate their Service Family Accommodation, and regulations now provide a two-year notice period, offering significantly more time for adjustment and planning. However, this can still mean:

- Facing the eventual loss of their home during a period of profound grief
- Leaving the neighbourhood and community that knows and supports their story
- Children potentially needing to change schools at a sensitive stage in their grief
- Navigating housing markets and making major financial decisions while emotionally vulnerable

16 Armed Forces and Veteran Suicide | Samaritans policy brief

Whilst death benefits exist, families suddenly shift from military income to managing solely on benefits and survivor income. The surviving spouse must learn to navigate numerous schemes such as:

- Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) claims
- War Pension Scheme (for deaths attributable to service)
- Surviving Adult Dependant's Pension
- Bereavement Support Payment
- Life Insurance claims
- Service Pension (if applicable)

Many surviving spouses report feeling overwhelmed by paperwork during acute grief. This can often include the requirement to retell the circumstances of the death, sometimes to numerous different authorities, and this can cause repeated trauma for bereaved families. This could be minimised by applying responsible and compliant data sharing principles. Notably, families bereaved by suicide may face additional challenges if there are questions about service attribution, which can affect compensation eligibility.

Overseas families may lose access to Defence Medical Services. Families moving location will need to change healthcare provider, potentially in another part of the UK, requiring them to:

- Register with new GPs
- Establish relationships with new healthcare providers
- Navigate mental health services precisely when they are most needed
- Ensure continuity of care for children during a critical period

The loss of Military Community represents the most underestimated impact. Military families often live in close communities where neighbours understand the lifestyle, share common experiences, and provide mutual support. Leaving military accommodation means:

- Losing the only community that truly understands military loss
- Isolation from others who "speak the language" of military life
- Reduced access to military support services and resources
- For children, separation from friends who understand having a military parent
- Loss of connection to unit families who may be the only ones who knew the deceased in their service role
- The shared identity and purpose that structured their lives
- Established supportive relationships

At their most vulnerable, families must navigate extensive bureaucracy - updating MOD records, processing claims, coordinating military funerals, registering the death, sorting through legal and financial documents, liaising with police/ Procurators Fiscal (the Fiscal must enquire into any death where the circumstances point to suicide). Many report this feeling surreal and overwhelming, causing further anxiety arising from the fear of missing something important.

Families may endure a coroner's inquest or a Fatal Accident Inquiry, which can occur months or years after the death. This process delays closure and can retraumatise families and may involve detailed examination of the deceased's mental state and circumstances. It can bring unwanted media attention and force families to relive painful details publicly. The process may describe previously unknown details about the life or death of the deceased and may raise questions about MoD responsibility that are never fully resolved.

Military families may be stationed far from extended family networks. Death often prompts a desire to return "home", requiring a major move during grief - selling property, uprooting children, finding new employment, and rebuilding social networks from scratch. For some families, however, "home" is ambiguous after years of military postings.

Loss of a Military Parent

Military children face compounded losses:

- Death of their parent
- Loss of their home and neighbourhood
- Potential school changes
- Feeling that they have to support the surviving parent and 'grow up too soon'
- Worry about the remaining parent also dying
- Feel responsible for siblings' well-being
- Separation from military community and friends who understand
- Loss of identity as a "military kid"
- Possible relocation away from their surviving parent's support system
- Loss of the structure and predictability that military life provided

Research indicates military children who lose a parent show increased anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues, often exacerbated by these accumulated disruptions. Children bereaved by parental suicide face additional risks of mental health difficulties and may struggle with stigma among peers.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out the fundamental rights all children should have. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty worldwide, covering rights to health, education, play, fair treatment, protection from exploitation and the right to be heard. The UNCRC was incorporated into Scots law through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act, which received Royal Assent in January 2024. Scotland is the first devolved government to directly incorporate the UNCRC into law within the limits of devolved competence.

Children also face challenges around sharing the circumstances of their loss. They may have to repeat and relive their experience of loss many times, for example when moving schools or meeting new friends. The complexities of what to share, who they can trust and revisiting their trauma can have an enormous and long-lasting impact on their capacity to deal with their grief. Educators, GPs and others need to be aware of when to access specialist support and input.

Long-Term Considerations

Military families face unique reminders of their loss. These might include Remembrance Sunday, Armed Forces Day, unit homecomings, news of military casualties or veteran suicides, or even seeing someone in uniform. These events are in addition to occasions which are particularly challenging for bereaved children such as Mother's Day or Father's Day. Any of these events can reactivate grief unexpectedly.

Families must decide what to tell others, how to explain the death to children at different developmental stages, and how to honour their loved one whilst acknowledging the manner of death. Some families maintain connections to military community through organisations like Scotty's Little Soldiers (for bereaved military children) or other veteran family networks. Others deliberately distance themselves. Neither approach is wrong, but families may struggle with which path feels right.

Bereavement in Later Life

The veteran population in Scotland has a higher average age compared to the general population, and with advancing age comes a greater likelihood of experiencing bereavement. Age Scotland has produced a valuable guide[17] to bereavement in later life, offering practical advice and emotional support for those affected. Statistically, a significant proportion of the older bereaved population will either have served in the Armed Forces themselves or have been the partner of someone who did. While their personal experience of grief may not be directly influenced by military service that occurred many years earlier, their connection to the veteran community means they may be entitled to a broader range of practical and emotional support than their civilian counterparts.

17 Bereavement | Age Scotland

Reaching this community can be challenging, as many individuals may be unaware of the range of organisations available to support them - offering help with everything from financial assistance to reducing loneliness and social isolation. This underscores the importance of proactively identifying members of the veteran community when they engage with health, social care, or community services. By asking whether someone has served in the Armed Forces, or is the partner of a veteran, professionals can connect them to a much wider network of support and services designed to improve wellbeing and quality of life.

Impact of Bereavement on those with Disabilities

Losing a carer through bereavement can have a devastating and far-reaching impact on a disabled veteran, particularly for those living with complex injuries or sensory impairments. For many, their carer is not only a source of daily practical support but also their emotional anchor and primary link to independence. When that person dies, the veteran may face sudden isolation, a collapse in routine, and overwhelming uncertainty about the future. The carer often managed medical appointments, transport, finances, and social contact, so their loss can leave the veteran struggling to cope with both grief and the practical realities of life without that essential support.

For veterans with physical injuries such as limb loss, spinal trauma, or mobility impairment, the loss of a carer may immediately restrict their ability to carry out essential daily activities, leading to a rapid decline in health and wellbeing. Those with sensory impairments, such as sight or hearing loss, face particular risks: their carer may have acted as their interpreter, communicator, and guide in navigating a world not always accessible to their needs. The sudden absence of that trusted person can heighten disorientation, fear, and vulnerability, often leading to social withdrawal and loss of confidence.

Practical challenges also emerge immediately after bereavement. It may be that the veteran has managed without any intervention other than their carer's support. As was explained during a visit to Sight Scotland Veterans, there may be no change in a person's visual impairment, but bereavement can bring a sudden and dramatic increase in support needs. The transition to new care arrangements can be slow, bureaucratic, and emotionally exhausting, especially when the veteran is already struggling with grief. The sudden absence of advocacy - someone who helped manage appointments, benefits, and medical communication - can leave veterans feeling abandoned by the very systems meant to support them. Without timely intervention, this combination of grief, disrupted routine, and loss of independence can lead to declining physical health, increased risk of depression, and social withdrawal.

By ensuring a swift, compassionate, and coordinated response, the Armed Forces and veteran welfare community can help prevent the loss of a carer from spiralling into deeper crisis. Early intervention, continuity of care, and emotional support are critical to preserving the dignity, stability, and wellbeing of disabled veterans as they navigate one of the most challenging transitions of their lives.

REFLECTIONS

As noted in *Community and Relationships: Anything but Uniform*[18] the bereaved, despite being specifically mentioned in the Armed Forces Covenant as meriting special consideration, are often omitted from policy and practice. It should be recognised that they are also part of the armed forces and veteran community and have sacrificed much in the Service of this country.

To navigate all the challenges associated with bereavement, it is vital that those affected can access the best support for their needs at the time they need it. It appears that the feeling of being overwhelmed is a universal reaction to loss. This can lead to disengagement from support. Checking in regularly with the bereaved family in the months, sometimes years, following the death helps to ensure that any relevant support or services can be accessed when the bereaved family is ready to do so.

While it contains essential information that needs to be imparted, the Purple Pack contains too much information that is delivered too quickly. A number of bereaved spouses said that receiving a long, complicated document when they were in the very early stages of grief meant that they could not ingest the information, some even discarded it.

Some widows of veterans have reported delays of several months in the payment of pensions. This could lead to severe financial hardship if the widow has no savings or other means.

Many members of the bereaved community welcomed remaining connected to the Serving community, but this did not happen often as a matter of course. An example of very good practice cited was RAF Lossiemouth which maintains links with the local bereaved RAF community, via invitations to events, in a way that is greatly valued.

Consideration should be given to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, now incorporated into Scottish law, to ensure that military-bereaved children are able to fully exercise their rights to healthcare, education, family life, play, and recreation.

The loss of a parent is considered a significant Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) and there can be a correlation between this and the resulting physical and mental health challenges which arise for a child or young person. Encouraging all support services, whether statutory or third sector, to become trauma-informed would significantly improve the outcomes for children impacted by bereavement.

18 Community and Relationships: Anything but Uniform | Scottish Veteran Commissioner

As with many areas of support, equitable access across Scotland is required and collaboration and integrated pathways across statutory and third sector organisations are key components in improving outcomes for this community. Public bodies must recognise and uphold the Armed Forces Covenant for the bereaved. Access to specialist counselling – waiting lists, who is offered / included etc – is an area that would benefit from further consideration in relation to the veteran community.

There are clear opportunities to raise awareness of the existence of the military bereaved community and their inclusion in the covenant, and to ensure they are more explicitly referenced and considered within the development of policies, guidance and services.

CONCLUSIONS

This review does not seek to make formal recommendations. However, the testimonies heard, supported by research and organisational insight, point to some clear conclusions.

Bereavement in the Armed Forces community is distinctively complex. The combination of deep personal loss and institutional disconnection creates unique challenges, whether death is Service-related, or due to accident, illness, or suicide. Even when death is unrelated to Service, bereaved families may face disadvantage in housing, education, and mental health.

Healthcare is an area of concern. Bereaved military families must receive equitable access to NHS services, with recognition of their specific emotional, psychological, and practical needs. Providers should implement a system to identify and flag bereaved military families in health records to ensure continuity and awareness of their status.

Education is another area requiring greater awareness. Educators will be aware of bereaved pupils but not necessarily of the particular needs of military bereaved children. Insights from organisations such as *Scotty's Little Soldiers* should be embedded in guidance for educators.

When delivering services for older adults in Scotland, health and social care providers should proactively identify both veterans and their spouses or partners. Doing so ensures they can be connected to the full spectrum of support available within the veteran community, helping to address practical, emotional, and social needs more effectively, especially following a bereavement.

There are opportunities to ensure the bereaved community – including organisations who represent them such as the RAF, Army and Navy Widows Associations in addition to the War Widows Associations – are included in events and engagements that seek to include the voices of the veteran community.

To conclude, a cultural shift is imperative to ensure that bereaved Service families are systematically recognised and explicitly incorporated into all aspects of practice, support, and policy. Although effecting this change presents challenges, its impact would be substantial and enduring, ensuring that their service is properly acknowledged, their needs are addressed comprehensively and the founding principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are observed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Scottish Veterans Commissioner is deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this review. Her thanks go to all of the organisations and individuals who took the time to meet or to provide input. The information, research, data, insights and stories shared with us were essential in informing this review paper. In particular, thanks go to those who shared the sensitive and challenging subject of their own bereavement and grief. Their insight and openness have greatly informed and enriched this report.

APPENDIX 1

The tables below capture some of the key organisations who provide support to the bereaved veteran community, to illustrate the kinds of provision available. This list is not exhaustive and does not include many of the bereavement services available to the general population across the country who can – and do – provide an invaluable support to members of the veteran community who access them.

Key Support Organisations & What They Offer the Veteran Community

CHARITY/ ORGANISATION	WHO THEY SUPPORT	SERVICES PROVIDED
SSAFA	Bereaved families of serving or veteran Armed Forces personnel (adult family members, and those impacted by loss).	Peer support groups, bereavement events, practical help.
Scotty's Little Soldiers	Children and young people (0-25) who have lost a parent who served in the British Armed Forces (regular or reserve), regardless of cause of death.	**Three main programmes:** Smiles (outings, gifts, respite, fun events), Support (bereavement-counselling, emotional support, guidance for carers), Strides (educational and personal development grants) plus "Springboard."
Forces Children Scotland	Scotland-based charity supporting children and young people from Armed Forces/veteran families.	Mental health & wellbeing services, youth participation, transition support.
Forces Children's Trust	Children whose parent has died or been seriously injured while serving.	Bereavement counselling, group holidays, social events, educational visits and support.
RAF Families Federation	RAF Personnel and their Families	Practical advice and support; signposting to other support.

Army Families Federation	Army Personnel and their Families	Practical advice and support; signposting to other support.
Naval Families Federation	Naval and Marines Personnel and their Families	Practical advice and support; signposting to other support.
Families Activity Breaks (FAB)	Bereaved military families, especially with children up to ~19 years.	Fully funded activity camps offering respite, peer support, and family time.
Beyond the Wire	Wider military bereaved community (spouses, partners, grandparents, siblings, etc.).	Trauma-informed support, listening, advocacy, resource connection, reducing isolation.
Child Bereavement UK (Scotland Project)	Children and young people grieving a death, including those in military families.	Training, local bereavement networks, collaboration and signposting.
Cruse Scotland Bereavement Support	Anyone who has suffered a bereavement.	Support services such as helplines and webchats, one-to-one counselling, listening services, including specialist support for children and young people, those recently bereaved, and suicide bereavement. Community projects in support of local grief networks and other on-line guides and resources.
Defence Medical Welfare Service	Welfare and emotional support for older veterans and their families, including widows/ widowers.	Specifically includes Scotland.
Blesma, The Limbless Veterans Charity	Supports widows/widowers of Blesma members after their passing.	Scotland outreach office included in support network.

Widowed and Young	Support network for anyone who has lost a partner before their 51st birthday.	Peer to peer support, including a specific military group, organised events, a telephone support line offering counselling, legal and financial support, and other on-line resources.

MOD / Government Provision: Key Components

INITIATIVE/ MECHANISM	WHAT IT DOES	ELIGIBILITY & SCOPE (INCL. SCOTLAND)
Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC)	Coordinates practical requirements following death, injury or serious illness of a Service person.	UK-wide, for serving members of the UK Armed Forces.
Purple Book Bereavement Guide	MOD guidance for bereaved families: entitlements, benefits, funerals, practical steps, signposting.	UK-wide, includes support for children.
Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme	Scholarships for children of Service Personnel whose death is service-attributable. Covers tuition, maintenance, etc.	UK-wide; acknowledges SCQF Level 6 in Scotland.
HIVE/RN Family and People Support	Initial welfare support, guidance, referrals, help with education and childcare post-bereavement.	Available in Scotland via local HIVE or welfare cells.
Army Welfare Service	Counselling, wellbeing support, referrals post-bereavement.	UK-wide, including Scotland.
Royal Air Force Community Support	Counselling, wellbeing support, referrals post-bereavement.	UK-wide, including Scotland.
Royal Navy & Royal Marines Welfare	Counselling, wellbeing support, referrals post-bereavement.	UK-wide, including Scotland.

Organisations Specifically Supporting Military Widows and Widowers

ORGANISATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED	SCOTLAND-RELEVANCE /NOTES
Army Widows Association	Volunteer-run emotional and practical support, community connection.	UK-wide, includes Scotland. Independent but liaises with MOD.
Royal Navy and Royal Marines Widows Association	Volunteer-run emotional and practical support, community connection.	UK-wide, includes Scotland. Independent but liaises with MOD.
RAF Widows Association	Volunteer-run emotional and practical support, community connection.	UK-wide, includes Scotland. Independent but liaises with MOD.
War Widows Association	Advocacy and representation for widows/widowers of military personnel.	UK-wide, includes Scotland. Independent but liaises with MOD.

For more information visit scottishveteranscommissioner.org

Scottish Veterans Commissioner
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ
T 0131 244 7136
E scottishveteranscommissioner@gov.scot

For press enquiries contact scottishveteranscommissioner@smarts.agency

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