

From: The Minister

Andy Allen MLA,
Parliament Buildings,
Stormont,
Belfast.
BT4 3XX

Via email: andy.allen@mla.niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Andy,

AQW 39893/22-27 to ask the Minister for Communities to detail any initiatives taken forward by his Department to support veterans, in each of the last five years.

Due to the volume of detail required to provide an answer to your question, I have arranged for this to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely,



**Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities**

Annex A

AQW 39893/22 27 -To ask the Minister for Communities to detail any initiatives taken forward by his Department to support veterans, in each of the last five years.

Over the last five years, my Department has maintained a consistent programme of initiatives to support and ensure that veterans in Northern Ireland can access the services and entitlements available to them.

The work during this period has focused on:

- Sustained engagement with key stakeholders, including the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), to maintain awareness of UK-wide developments and ensure alignment with national policy.
- Promoting clear communication of the Armed Forces Covenant guidance to delivery partners and supporting its consistent application across relevant services.
- Ensuring that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is aware of and continues to meet its statutory responsibilities to veterans, including updates to Covenant guidance and new toolkits designed to support implementation.
- Developing a dedicated Armed Forces liaison pathway. This will offer a single point of entry into the Department where individuals can receive a free and confidential needs assessment to determine potential eligibility for benefits, support, and services.
- Appointing a dedicated senior official within my Department to engage directly with the Veterans' Commissioner and representative groups.

The NIHE has also recently appointed a Single Point of Contact within the Senior Management Team. This will enhance trust and confidence between Veterans and the NIHE and aid engagement with issues raised which can then be addressed effectively.

A breakdown of the Department’s engagement and initiatives for each of the last five years is provided below:

Year	Event	Purpose
2020/21	Engagement with the Office for Veterans’ Affairs and the Ministry of Defence.	Participated in meetings in an observational capacity to maintain awareness of emerging issues affecting veterans.
2021/22		
2022/23		
2023/24	Engagement with the Office for Veterans’ Affairs and the Ministry of Defence and attendance at a consultation event organised by Office for Veterans Affairs.	Observational capacity to track and understand national initiatives
	Veterans Information Roadshow	To help veterans and their families identify and claim all financial support they are entitled to.

	Mid & East Antrim Veterans Champion Roadshow	To help veterans and their families identify and claim all financial support they are entitled to.
	SSAFA The Armed Forces Charity	Engagement to assist veterans to access appropriate financial and welfare support.
	Omagh British Legion	Engagement to support veterans and their families in accessing benefits and entitlements.
2024/25	SSAFA NI Briefing & Training Day	To help veterans and their families identify and claim all financial support they are entitled to.
	Engagement with the Office for Veterans Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, including a meeting with Office for Veterans Affairs	Provided an overview on initiatives such as Operation Fortitude which provides a referral service for homeless veterans across the UK and an introductory meeting with the Office

		for Veterans Affairs Policy Team.
2025/26	Meeting with the Minister for the Armed Forces	Engagement to discuss Department's support for Veterans.
	Meeting with the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner	Introductory meeting to discuss Department's support for Veterans.
	Veterans Workshop attendance alongside the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner and Veteran Champions from local councils	Workshop aimed to build on the broad range of services the Department currently provides for veterans, to identify gaps in available support, and to consider actions to address these going forward.
	Met with SSAFA NI Armed Forces charity	Information session with case workers