

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE RAF FAMILY



**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**



Compass Partnership





I am delighted to have been asked to write an introduction to this report commissioned by the RAF Benevolent Fund, the RAF's leading welfare charity. It provides an excellent insight into today's needs of those who have served this country in keeping our skies safe, as well as their families, and will enable them to receive support in their hour of need. The report outlines the size, profile and current needs among the generation who fought for our freedoms in the Battle of Britain, 75 years ago this year, as well as all those who followed them in RAF service. Key amongst the findings is the highlighting of self-care, mobility and relationships/ social isolation as the three top issues that are being faced by our older veterans. I know that the RAF Benevolent Fund, as well as other charities, is now working hard to increase the support available in these areas.

The RAF Benevolent Fund was founded almost 100 years ago with a remit to provide direct welfare assistance to those of the extended RAF Family in need or distress. Today, it offers an impressive portfolio of help and support right across the Spectrum of Care to members of the RAF past, present and future, from support for young people growing up on RAF stations, to welfare breaks for RAF families in need of a holiday, training for those transitioning back into civilian life, as well as providing a whole range of support to enable veterans and those with disabilities to remain living comfortably and independently in their own home for longer. It is an organisation that puts the beneficiary at the heart of all that it does.

I am greatly impressed with the broad range of support and initiatives which the RAF Benevolent Fund has developed to support their beneficiaries, and I am pleased to see that this research will enable it – and everyone else who supports the RAF Family – to develop and focus that support even more effectively. I commend it to you.

Mark Lancaster TD MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and
Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans



OUR WORK GOES ON!

This report presents findings from research commissioned by the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund into the size, profile and welfare needs of the RAF Family in 2015, as well as forecasting its future size and shape. It shows us that, despite helping so many, there are still a large number of people who fought in World War Two, completed National Service or who have served since who may not know of the support we can offer, despite our best efforts and many of them suffering from social isolation and underpinning/related issues.

The findings have enabled us to review how we can maximise the impact of our work and develop our support to help all members of the RAF Family, which includes those who are serving and their families, those who have served and their partners/spouses or their widows and widowers. It is also a call to arms for the public, as we remember the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, to look out for and refer to us those who might be in need of our support.

As the RAF's leading welfare charity, the RAF Benevolent Fund has been committed to supporting the RAF Family through thick and thin for nearly 100 years. These research findings (building on the Royal British Legion's Household Survey) will help us – and the many other charities who assist the RAF Family - to better direct our support to those most in need of our help today and well into the future.

These are challenging times for serving RAF families, as they try to deal with the pressures that Service life brings, with extended periods away from home, living in remote locations and the challenge of transitioning to civilian life after their time in the Service. Working closely with the RAF, we provide support including individual grants, relationship counselling and financial assistance alongside our Airplay Programme that provides childcare facilities, play parks and structured youth activities.

The research shows that the RAF veteran community is significantly older than the general UK and ex-Armed Forces adult population, and that their three key welfare needs are centred on self-care, mobility and relationships/isolation. Financial hardship still exists, particularly among those of working age, but the emerging needs among the younger generations of RAF veterans and their families are related to independence, psychological wellbeing and living with dignity/social support.

Despite the RAF Benevolent Fund having provided a number of support services over the years to those who come forward, we are continuing to develop our range of assistance even further and have launched a number of new initiatives to ensure we focus that support on those who need it the most.

- We have launched a new Advice and Advocacy Service with specialist staff to guide the RAF Family through the complex state benefits system and to help ensure they are receiving the services they are entitled to from the Government, NHS and their local authority. This can include identifying entitlement to state benefits, as well as advocating on people's behalf to access domiciliary care and help to securing housing. Already within six months we have identified an extra £415,000 of annual

income that people were entitled to but not receiving; this will make an enormous difference to their quality of life.

- We are committed to ensuring that all those with care and mobility needs live as comfortably and independently as possible. We offer specialist Occupational Therapy assessments and loan Electrically Powered Vehicles to those who struggle to get out, due to limited mobility (currently we have a fleet of nearly 1600 EPVs). We are expanding our range of support to those with home care needs to ensure that they are fully supported, through the installation of stairlifts, the provision of wetrooms, additional home help or other more personal care.
- The research indicated that significant difficulties are being experienced in relation to social isolation. This is a problem of our time and can often be caused by very practical issues such as a loss of mobility. We hope that our approach to enhanced mobility support will provide an increased means to get out and about and meet other people. We will also continue to signpost people to Princess Marina House, our respite break centre, which meets such a vital need. And we have launched a new initiative, our Individual Support Service, to provide tailored support to the most vulnerable and isolated individuals, helping in this way to build self confidence and overcome loneliness and isolation, working with national and local bodies to achieve this.
- We recognise that there can be challenges in finding sustainable employment, particularly for those who leave the RAF with disabilities or injuries. We offer a programme of grants to fund training in order to secure sustainable employment, often working in conjunction with the RAF Personnel Recovery Unit. We also work closely with the key employment support bodies and charities to help people into sustainable employment.

We are delighted that those who have already benefitted from our support have provided us with such positive feedback, with 88% of our beneficiaries rating the overall quality of assistance as excellent or very good. We are aware of areas where we can deliver an even better level of service, and we have already been making changes and improvements to our processes to enable this.

Following on from this research, we have carried out an extensive survey of caseworkers who play a vital role in assessing beneficiaries face-to-face on behalf of the Fund and to whom we are very grateful. That report shows very similar results, with the quality of service received by beneficiaries from the Fund being rated as excellent or very good by over 80% of caseworkers.

This important research, the first of its kind in the RAF Family, shows that much vital work remains for the RAF Benevolent Fund, the RAF's leading welfare charity, working in cooperation with other charities, most particularly those within Cobseo and those caseworkers who reach out to those in need. We have a sound base for this work and we have already started to adapt to the current and future needs of the RAF Family. We will continue to be alert to the changing landscape, but will be always guided by our desire to be at the heart of the RAF Family and to provide dignity to those in need. Your continued support and interest in our work will be crucial, as will active engagement by the public at large to help us to find those in need who we do not know or who are unaware that we could support them. Together we can help to give them the respect and dignity they deserve.

Air Marshal Chris Nickols

Controller, Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report provides estimates of the size, profile and welfare needs of the RAF Family, largely drawing upon recent research by Compass Partnership for The Royal British Legion, which included 500 respondents from the RAF ex-Service community. The profile and opinions of Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF) beneficiaries have been collected through an extensive postal survey asking about their needs and the quality and impact of charitable assistance received,

which achieved a very high response rate of 57%, yielding 1,600 replies. The RAFBF have also conducted some desk research into the size of the RAF Serving community, who make up the rest of 'the RAF Family', to whom the RAFBF provides support.

Size and composition of the RAF Family

- The size of the RAF ex-Service community is estimated to be around 1,460,000 people in year 2014, which includes:
 - 735,000 RAF veterans
 - 485,000 adult dependants
 - 170,000 dependent children (aged under 16)
 - 70,000 'hidden' population living in communal establishments.
- This community makes up 2.3% of the UK population and accounts for just under a quarter of the whole ex-Service community (24%).
- Additionally the RAF Serving community is estimated to be around 100,000 people: 37,170 in-Service RAF personnel, 30,000 adult dependants and 32,000 dependent children (0-19).
- Therefore, the size of the total RAF Family is estimated to be 1.56m people which accounts for 2.4% of the UK population.
- It is unlikely that the RAF Serving community will decline significantly over the next 15 years. Conversely, the RAF ex-Service community is forecast to decline in size by nearly 40% in the next 15 years to around 895,000 people by year 2030, by which time it will represent just 1.3% of the UK population.
- Nearly four in ten of RAF veterans served as post-war National Servicemen, which (along with their associated dependants) leads to a pronounced spike in the age profile of the RAF ex-Service community in the 75-84 age band.
- Three quarters of the adult RAF ex-Service community are aged 65+, compared with just under two thirds of the whole ex-Service community and a fifth of UK adults. Related to this older profile, the adult RAF ex-Service community are more likely to live alone and less likely to have children in their household.
- The RAF ex-Service community has fewer council tenants and a higher social grade profile than the whole ex-Service community. Geographically, there are skews towards the South West and East of England.

Welfare needs of the RAF ex-Service community

- The dominant welfare needs of the adult RAF ex-Service community are problems with self-care (affecting 205,000 people), mobility (195,000) or relationships/isolation (170,000). Although, amongst those of working age, the top three themes are relationships/isolation, finance and psychological problems.
- The top specific problems of the adult RAF ex-Service community are:
 - 15% getting around outside their home (185,000 people)
 - 10% exhaustion or pain (120,000)
 - 9% getting around inside their own home (110,000)
 - 8% poor bladder control (100,000)
 - 7% cite each of: loneliness, bereavement, depression, household/garden maintenance (85,000 people).
- The RAF ex-Service community are slightly more likely than the whole UK ex-Service community to cite mobility problems, or to have a long-term health condition or disability (58% vs. 54%).
- The RAF ex-Service community are slightly less likely than the whole UK ex-Service community to cite money problems, to be unemployed (5% vs. 8%), to receive means tested benefits, or to be living on very low household incomes below £7,500pa (10% vs. 15%).
- RAF veterans come from less challenging backgrounds, experiencing fewer adverse childhood experiences than do all UK veterans.

Demographics and welfare needs of RAFBF beneficiaries

- RAFBF beneficiaries were surveyed from eight different services provided by the RAFBF: regular financial assistance, general welfare grants, debt assistance (priority debts), care equipment, housing adaptations/repairs, mobility aids, Princess Marina House respite breaks and Housing Trust support.
- RAFBF beneficiaries have a somewhat different age profile to that of the wider RAF ex-Service community, with a smaller proportion aged 75-84, and a larger proportion aged 85-94 or aged 35-44. This is encouraging since the RBL research demonstrated that welfare needs are intensified among 85-94s and 35-44s.
- Relative to the wider RAF ex-Service community, RAFBF beneficiaries have a higher proportion of dependent widows, people living alone, the economically inactive and households on low incomes; suggesting that RAFBF charitable support is targeted towards those in greatest need.
- Among RAFBF beneficiaries, financial issues predominate, along with depression and mobility problems. Their top five difficulties experienced at the time just before they received help from the RAFBF recently were:
 - 45% not having enough savings to buy or replace items they needed
 - 34% lack of money for daily living expenses
 - 20% getting around outside their own home
 - 19% feeling depressed
 - 19% getting into debt.

Quality and impact of assistance received from the RAFBF

- 88% of beneficiaries surveyed rated the overall quality of the assistance they had received from the RAFBF as either excellent (65%) or very good (23%).
- Eight in ten thought the RAFBF standard of service exceeded their expectations and seven in ten would definitely recommend them to others in need.
- On generic aspects of quality of service, beneficiaries gave highest ratings on: their case being handled sensitively and being notified of the outcome of their application. Beneficiaries gave lowest ratings on: the amount of direct contact with the RAFBF, keeping them informed of the progress of their case, telling them about other RAFBF support services and referrals on to other organisations. So these are potential areas for improvement.
- The ratings on aspects of quality of service delivery specific to each type of assistance awarded, were generally very high. Although some *relatively* weaker aspects of service delivery were identified:
 - For property repairs and adaptations: the speed and quality of workmanship and inspecting for other jobs that needed doing around the house and offering to do these, although recognising that much of this rests with local caseworking organisations.
 - For respite breaks: improving the on-site activities and entertainments and helping guests to interact socially with each other.
 - For Housing Trust tenants: carrying out repairs promptly, and the service from the local surveyor.
- Caseworkers were generally highly regarded. 85% of beneficiaries surveyed rated the overall quality of service they had received from their caseworker as either excellent (64%) or very good (21%).
- Beneficiaries gave their lowest ratings to caseworkers for: the time to wait until the caseworker visited, ease of contacting them, their explanations of eligibility for assistance and assessing their needs fully.
- Over eight in ten who gave an opinion acknowledged that the RAFBF had made a lot of difference to their quality of life, thereby confirming the impact the RAFBF achieves.
- Around half of those beneficiaries who were given a mobility aid, care equipment or stairlift, or who received a repair or adaptation to their property said they used the item supplied or repaired on a daily basis.
- In terms of addressing the primary needs of the whole beneficiary pool, the RAFBF achieved 'high' impact in:
 - alleviating financial problems - lack of savings, money for daily living or debts
 - enhancing mobility outside their home
 - supporting the recently bereaved.
- The RAFBF achieved somewhat less, but still 'substantial' impact in helping people with:
 - their personal affairs and paperwork
 - finding out about statutory services or benefits to which they were entitled
 - house and garden maintenance.
- The RAFBF achieved only 'moderate' impact in:
 - helping people to deal with depression
 - helping people to cope with exhaustion or pain.

Recommendations

- This research was not a strategic review of RAFBF services, but the evidence suggests that:
 - there may be opportunities to achieve an even better 'fit' between the needs expressed by members of the RAF ex-Service community and the support services offered by the RAFBF
 - the RAFBF could consider how to provide greater assistance to prevalent problems that are more difficult to address such as depression, exhaustion, pain, social isolation and relationship difficulties
 - more could be done to meet the needs of working age RAF veterans and their families.
- It also suggests that greater attention be given to identifying other needs beyond the 'presenting' problem, responding more quickly and keeping beneficiaries better informed of the progress of their applications.

Ongoing assessment of impact

- Although we have not looked at current arrangements for reporting impact, our experience from other charities that have greatly enhanced performance reporting suggests that there are opportunities for improving reporting the outputs and outcomes of the RAFBF's support services.
- These could be combined with the results of this research to provide better reports on the overall impact of the RAFBF.



For more information about the RAF Benevolent Fund and its work visit
www.rafbf.org

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