

A small scale research project focussing on the observations of children, young people, parents and carers from Armed Forces families on their school experiences within the Highland Practice Model

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## **Section 1 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1.1** This study was conducted between August 2015 and July 2017. It adopted an action research methodology in order to satisfy two linked purposes. The first purpose was identified as the exploration of the interface between the Highland Practice Model and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people from Armed Forces families. The second purpose was identified as the generation of a range of possible future actions which would improve the school experiences of this group of pupils.

**1.2** Three research questions emerged from consultation exercises around the two purposes and a range of quantitative and qualitative techniques, operating within a broad solution oriented style, were designed to address the three research questions.

**1.3** On the basis of the outcomes from all three research questions, a set of 16 improvement actions were drawn up for further consideration.

## **Section 2 – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY**

**2.1** This study was commissioned by the Highland Council's Care and Learning Service and was funded through the Ministry of Defence Education Support Fund. Pre-commissioning discussion shaped an action research format, whereby outcomes would be determined through the researcher exploring perceptions of the effectiveness of key elements in the Highland Practice Model, identifying challenges for pupils and parents/carers from Armed Forces backgrounds and working alongside them to identify a set of possible solutions for further consideration of the Additional Support Needs Service within Highland Council and the Armed Forces.

**2.2** The project was active from August 2015 to July 2017. As a consequence of a number of staff changes and staff illnesses, the decision was taken in August 2016

to extend the originally planned period of study in order to incorporate two data sets (in November 2015 and November 2016), so that some limited trend-data analyses might be included.

**2.3** The researcher reported directly to the Head of Additional Support Services from Highland Council. The Military Action Group, comprising members from Highland Council, Armed Forces, Poppy Scotland and The Royal Caledonian Education Trust provided advice, consultation and direction as appropriate throughout the duration of the project.

**2.4** During the research activity, 6 progress update reports were provided for the Military Action Group in order to advise on ongoing research activities and 4 Occasional Papers were written for a wider range of professional stakeholders in order to trail emerging findings and to stimulate conversation on a number of focused questions relating to the research purpose.

**2.5** From the outset two particular constraints on the details that could be included in this Final Report were observed. Firstly from the Council's side, there was a requirement that no information was published that could identify individual pupils. The approach taken is generally not to report data sets where group numbers are 5 or less. Secondly, in order to both enhance the anonymity of respondents and from a consideration of security, this project has used the minimum geographical location identifier of Associated School Group (ASG), in order that no individual schools can be identified. Highland Council has 29 named ASGs in total, each of which comprises 1 secondary school and a number of associated primary schools (which can range from 2 to 16 primary schools).

**2.6** Following extensive consultation with all partners during the early stages of the project, the following statement of purpose was agreed:

**“The primary purpose of the research will be to explore the impact of key elements of the Highland Practice Model on the educational, social, and emotional outcomes for children from Armed Forces families attending Highland schools. The secondary purpose will be to gain a fuller**

**understanding of what constitutes effective supports for the potentially different educational experiences of children across the different service categories of Regular, Reserve and Veteran”**

**2.7** The term 'Service Category' has been used to distinguish between Regular Forces, Reserve Forces and Veterans. The term 'Service Sector' has been used to distinguish between British Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy and Marines. The Armed Forces convention of referring to Primary Welfare Support (for current members of the Armed Forces), provided through a senior officer, Secondary Welfare Support, (for the families of current members of the Armed Forces), provided through the appropriate Service Sector Welfare Service and Third Sector Welfare Support, provided through a wide range of agencies and statutory services which are not Armed Forces based, such as Poppy Scotland and Highland Council, was adopted.

**2.8** Within this context, the research questions and methodologies adopted were as follows:

**2.8.1 Research Question 1: Are there specific components within the Highland Practice Model which result in increased awareness and take up of Third Sector Welfare Support provided through Highland Council's Care and Learning Service across variables such as geographical location within Highland and Service Category?**

**2.8.2** Research Question 1 was initially addressed through the analysis of basic project-relevant data held by Highland Council. This was followed up by a series of structured interviews with key individuals within the Care and Learning Service. An online survey of awareness and perceived usefulness of those key Highland Practice Model elements among Armed Forces families was conducted as a proxy measure of the extent to which the Highland Practice Model was opening up awareness and access to welfare services beyond support offered by Primary and Secondary Welfare Support.

**2.8.3 Research Question 2: Are there significant correlations between the nature of any Additional Support Needs of children/young people from Armed Forces families and the variables of geographical location and Service Category?**

2.8.4 Research Question 2 was addressed through further engagement with the Highland Council information database to explore whether a distinctive pattern of Additional Support Needs in Highland is discernible, with enhanced analyses involving geographical location and service category.

**2.8.5 Research Question 3: Can the experiences and insights of Armed Forces parents/carers and children/young people be explored as a means of identifying as yet undiscovered ways for The Armed Forces and Highland Council to better support this subset of pupils in the school setting?**

2.8.6 Research Question 3 was addressed through a series of guided discussions, structured through solution oriented processes, with parents/carers and children/young people from Armed Forces families, in partnership with Army Welfare Service personnel. Content analyses from Survey Monkey responses were additionally carried out.

2.9 Sections 4, 5 and 6 examine Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, with the questions structured under the headings:

- Methodology
- Outcomes
- Commentary

2.10 Section 7 comprises the presentation of a range of recommended actions for further consideration by the partners commissioning this research.

2.11 This Final Report has been written primarily for a professional audience, but the style adopted is intended to make it accessible to parents, carers and young people from Armed Forces families in order to promote ongoing dialogue between all parties.

## Section 3 - LITERATURE REVIEW

**3.1** Approximately 3 kilogrammes of research papers and publications from Government and other agencies was accumulated during the course of the project. This section will review several sources which have had the most influence on the direction in which the research has evolved.

### **3.2 “Supporting Learners: Children and Young People from Service Families. Transforming lives through Learning” Education Scotland CfE briefing 5 (2014).**

This publication, as a professional learning resource, seeks to improve the capacity of practitioners in Scottish schools and centres to respond to the needs of children and young people from Service families. Individual sections under the headings of existing good practice, emerging good practice, and extending good practice, provided helpful signposts throughout the research period.

**3.2.1** One quotation from this publication (page 3), signals well the research orientation adopted:

“Even in inclusive schools however, it is about who you are: the background and identity you bring to school. Children and young people from Service Families can encounter barriers to learning *even within the environment of good schools.*’ (Researcher’s italics)

**3.2.2** Page 4 has a further seminal entry:

“Efficient transfer of information regarding previous assessments and *advice on recommended next steps* is essential.” (Researcher’s italics)

**3.2.3** Pages 12 to 13 set out a number of reflective questions under the headings of Transitions, Interrupted Education, Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Additional Support Needs, which the researcher has used to structure the research framework, especially in relation to Research Question 3.

**3.3 “How schools secure the progress of children from the armed forces families. Good Practice guidance” DfE (2010).** This publication contains many

points towards successful practice. It includes helpful context setting under the headings of Mobility, Social and Emotional, Attendance and Parental Involvement factors. Although the focus is on England, this report echoes both formal and informal representations advanced by Highland participants, highlighting the evidence that many children from armed forces families do very well at school and this report includes further statistical evidence that overall they perform better than average at certain curricular stages in literacy and numeracy assessments.

**3.4 “Moving School. Supporting Children as they move schools - A guide for parents 1” and the accompanying “Children’s Activity Book” MOD (2013).** This is helpful in terms of directing parents from Armed Forces families on the issues worth considering when their children are in the process of moving school. Again, it has a specific focus on the education system in England, although the key messages are pertinent to all children and young people.

**3.5 “Service children in State Schools Handbook” GOV.UK (2013).** This document helpfully distinguishes between mobility and deployment with regard to school implications and appropriate strategies for various stakeholders. It has a useful section on school liaison with military communities, including some exemplars of good practice.

**3.6 “Children and Young People of Armed Forces Families in Scotland. Help us to support your children in school” ADES.** This leaflet is written by the National Transitions Officer for Children and Young people of Armed Forces families in Scottish Schools. Its layout and content was referred to positively by a number of parents in discussions.

**3.7 “Highland Practice Model Guidance (GIRFEC)”**  
<http://www.forhighlandchildren.org/5-practiceguidance/> (2015). This comprehensive document provides the professional audience with a comprehensive delineation of the Highland Practice Model.



## **Section 4 - RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

**Are there specific components within the Highland Practice Model which result in increased awareness and take up of Third Sector Welfare Services provided through Highland Council's Care and Learning Service across variables such as geographical location within Highland and service category?**

Research Question 1 was addressed through a structure of:

4.1 - basic data collection

4.2 - in-depth structured interviews with key Highland Council stakeholders

4.3 - an online survey

### **4.1 Basic Data Collection**

#### **4.1.1 Methodology with reference to basic data collection**

Basic project-relevant data was obtained through submitting the following questions to the Highland Council in November 2015 and in November 2016:

1. Total number of AF pupils within Highland Council schools
2. Numbers of AF pupils in each Associated School Group
3. Numbers of AF pupils at all Nursery, Primary and Secondary stages
4. Number of AF pupils in each Service sector enrolled in Highland Council schools
5. Number of AF pupils by ASG and Service sector

#### **4.1.2 Outcomes with reference to the basic data collection**

Paragraph 2.5 identified reporting restrictions due to compliance with data protection and security considerations. Within these limitations, the following data provides the basic demographic factors in relation to pupils from Armed Forces families enrolled in Highland Council schools in November 2015 and November 2016.

##### **November 2015:**

430 children had been identified at enrolment in Highland Council Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools as being from Armed Forces families.

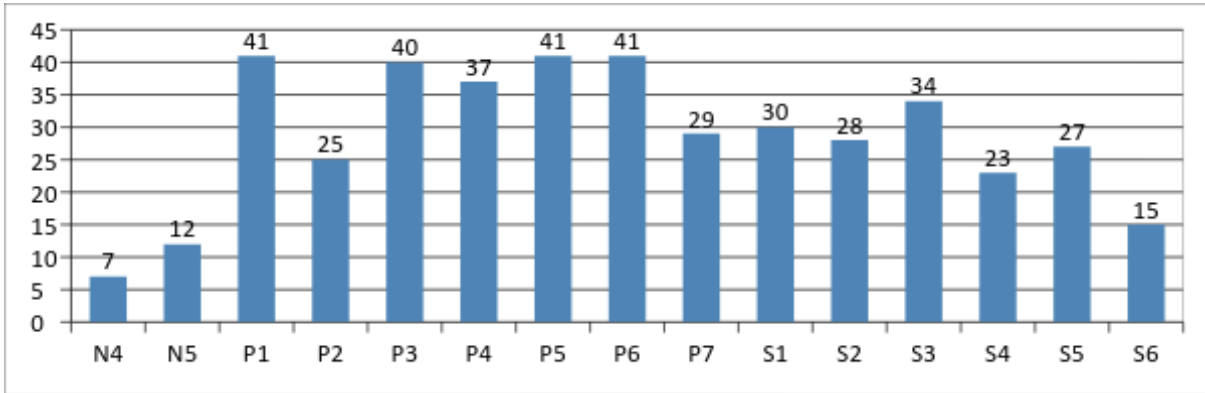


Fig 1

Fig 1 shows the spread of these pupils across a range of stages from Nursery 4 to Secondary 6, with a concentration in nursery and primary school. Some pupils from AF families attend residential/boarding schools as a choice of the family, to provide consistent schooling even when the family transfer base as a result of the redeployment of the service parent. This *could* account for the lower number of pupils represented in secondary school.

There were 18 ASGs in Highland where the number of pupils from Armed Forces families was 6 or more (Fig 2).

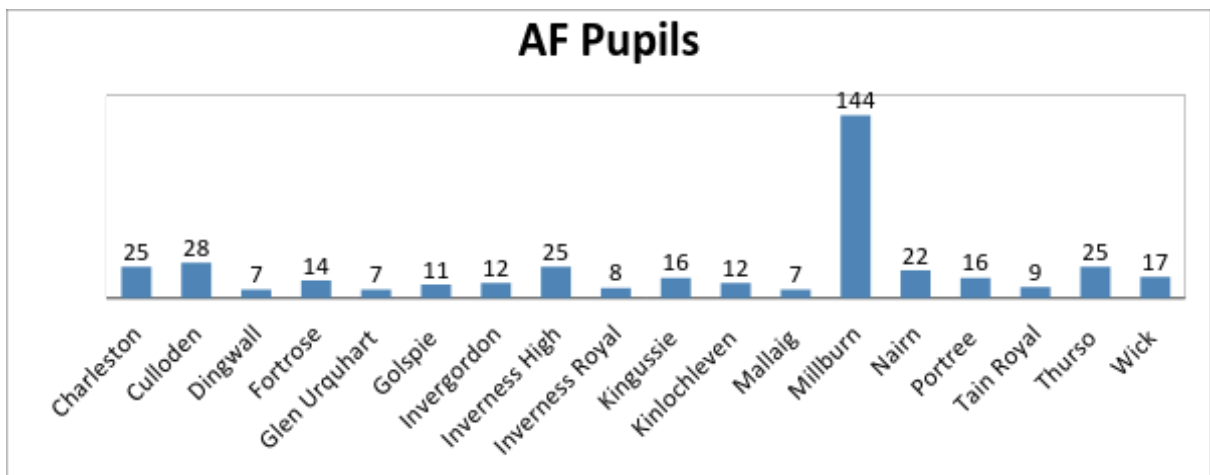


Fig 2

Service sector breakdown for children from Armed Forces families attending Highland Council schools was as shown in Fig 3 below.

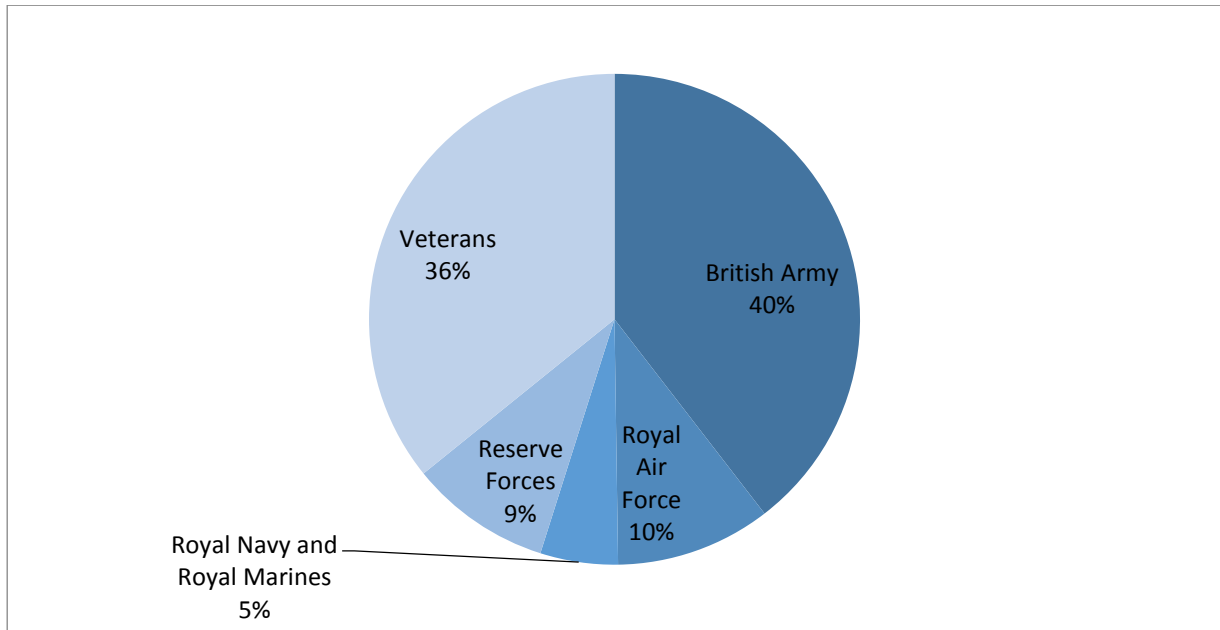


Fig 3

ASG geographical concentrations of British Army pupils were located in Millburn ASG, Inverness High ASG and Thurso ASG. ASG geographical concentrations of RAF pupils were located in Kingussie ASG and Nairn ASG as identified in Table 1 below.

ASG	Army	RAF	Veterans
Charleston			12
Culloden			20
Golspie			6
Inverness High	12		7
Kingussie		6	6
Kinlochleven			6
Mallaig			6
Millburn	118		19
Nairn		7	10
Portree			7
Thurso	7		12
Wick			9
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>120</b>

Table 1

November 2016:

596 children from Armed Forces families were identified at enrolment in Highland Council Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools.

As in the previous year, the pupils were recorded as being represented at each stage up to S6 (see fig 4). The numbers for each age group were more consistent, although the drop in numbers from S5 and S6 could indicate pupils leaving school at their first leaving date at age16, rather than remaining in education. This would require further analysis.

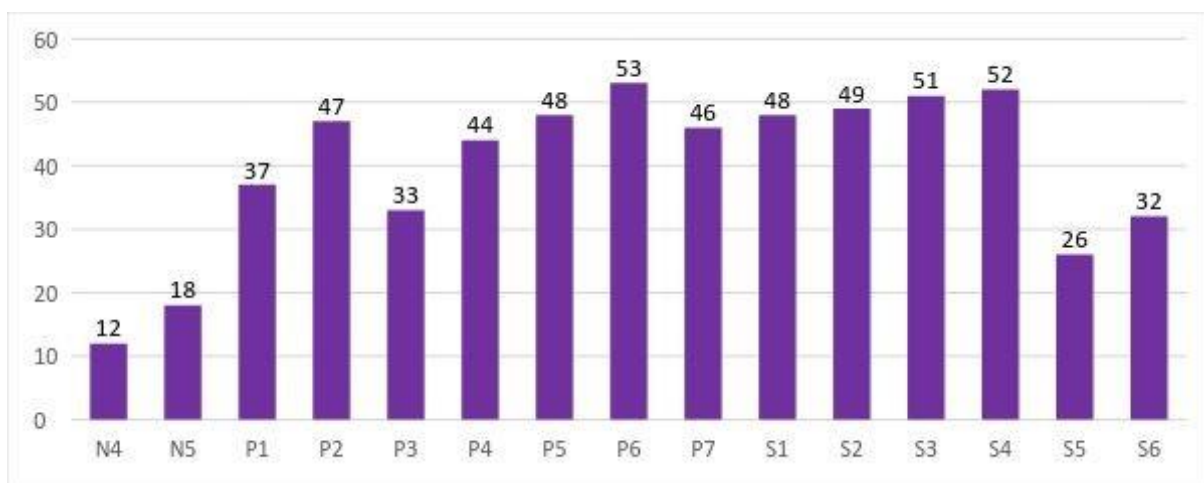


Fig 4

There were 23 ASGs in Highland where the number of pupils from Armed Forces families was 6 or more, as represented in fig 5 below.

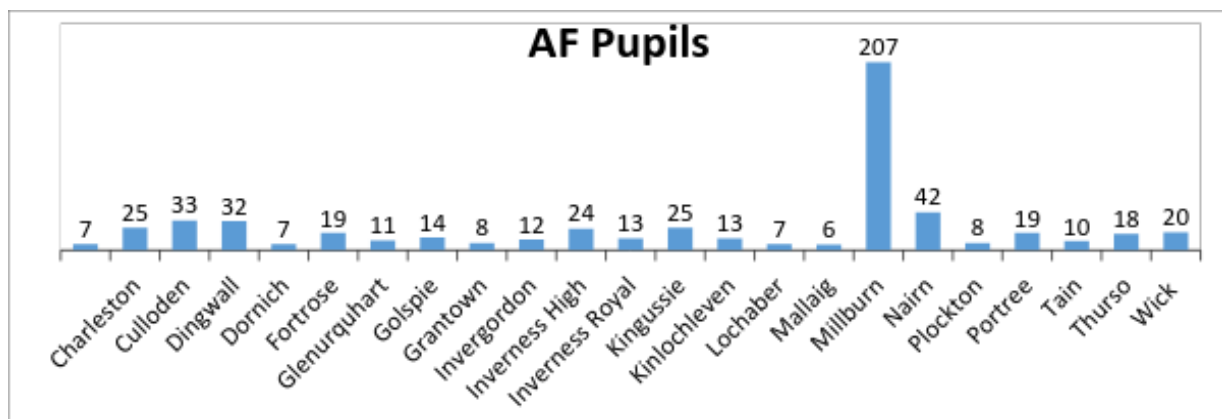


Fig 5

Service sector breakdown for Children from Armed Forces families attending

Highland Council schools was as follows in fig 6.

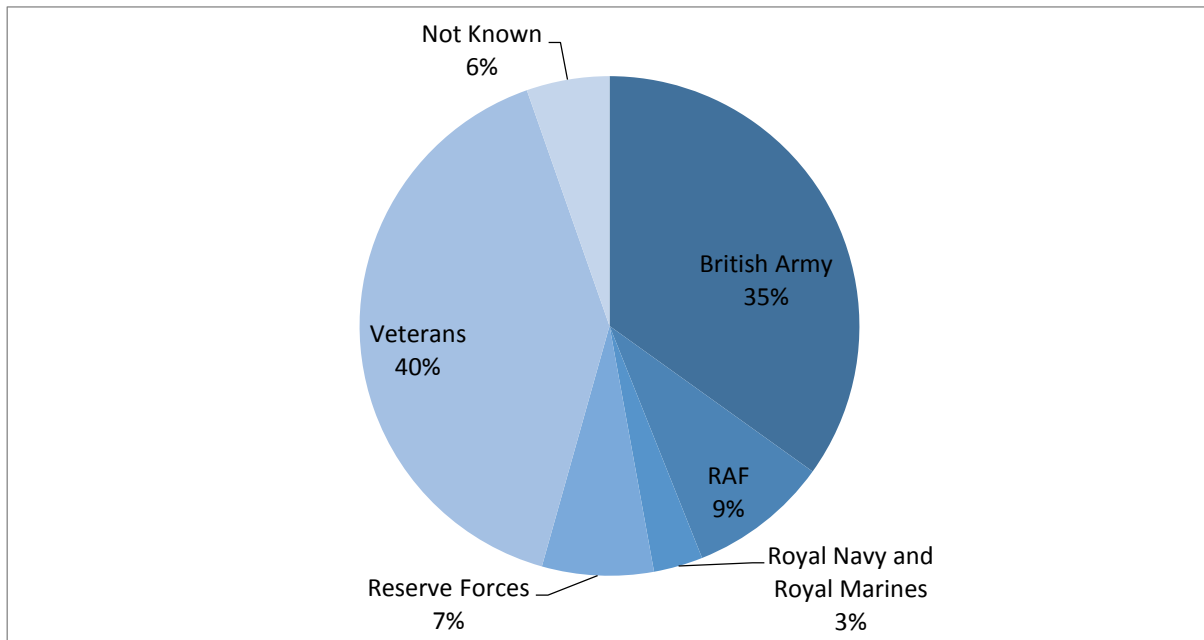


Fig 6

#### 4.1.3 Commentary with reference to basic data collection

The summarised data above is based on a voluntary self-declaration of Armed Forces membership by parents/cares at the point of enrolment, so may be an under-representation of numbers.

Discussion with Highland Council staff suggests that the significant increase in numbers between November 2015 and November 2016 relates to changes in enrolment procedures adopted by head teachers asking for the information on links with the armed forces, rather than to an actual increase in numbers. In a similar vein, in November 2016, the 5% of the identified population not identifying Armed Forces Service Sector may also be linked to head teachers not requesting or recording this data at enrolment, rather than an increased unwillingness by parents to identify their Service Sector.

The summarised outcomes above have been extracted for the purposes of this report from broader interrogation of Highland Council's information management system. What has been reported above for November 2015 and 2016 offers two snapshots for the consideration of readers of enrolment patterns in Highland Council schools in

November 2015 and November 2016. As such, they add valuable but limited information for forward planning purposes.

As an example of how trend data analysis can enrich understanding, the broader interrogation of the information database has suggested the following changes between November 2015 and 2016, although great caution must be exercised in interpreting due to the limited 12 month span, the voluntary self-disclosure by parents/carers and the small numbers involved:

- The number of Armed Forces pupils recorded as being in Highland Council schools rose from **430** in November 2015 to **596** in November 2016.
- All but 4 ASGs registered an increase in or maintained the same pupil numbers over the 12 months.
- A decrease was recorded in Thurso ASG, (possibly due to veteran families moving due to a downturn in the local employment situation), and small decreases were recorded in Ardnamurchan ASG, Invergordon ASG, and Mallaig ASG.
- Significant proportionate increases in AF pupils were noted in Millburn ASG and Dingwall ASG.
- Rank ordering of pupil numbers by Service Sector reveals that between November 2015 and November 2016 the number of British Army pupils recorded was overtaken by the number of pupils from Veteran families. (Possibly due to deployment and mobility factors).
- Royal Air Force, UK Reserve Forces and Royal Navy and Marines pupils ranked third, fourth and fifth respectively in both years.

## **4.2 In-depth structured interviews with key Highland Council stakeholders**

**4.2.1** Research Question 1 sought to ascertain whether there were specific components in the Highland Practice Model (HPM) which facilitated awareness and uptake of community-based services out-with the Armed Forces ambit. A detailed analysis of uptake among Armed Forces families with regard to Third Sector Welfare Support in the Highland Council area was beyond the scope of the present project,

but there are specific processes within the Highland Practice Model (HPM), which can be utilised as proxies of such awareness and uptake.

**4.2.2** An indication of the extent to which key Highland Council staff viewed the success or failure of such HPM components was considered to be central to answering Research Question 1.

#### **4.2.3 Methodology with reference to Structured Interviews with key Highland Council staff**

Individual structured interviews were conducted with a very limited number of highly experienced teaching staff, who also had significant strategic and operational engagements with Armed Forces pupils and families over many years.

In Phase 1 of the interviews, Likert-type scaling questioning was used to identify how, for Armed Forces pupils, potential barriers to a good educational, social and emotional adjustment to a new school were viewed by the Highland Council respondents.

The following factors were addressed in this phase:

- High number of school moves due to mobility
- Number of cross border moves due to mobility
- Deployment of parent/carer
- Deployment of close family member

In Phase 2 of the interviews, Likert-type scaling questioning was used to gauge the usefulness of the following components within the HPM for meaningfully engaging Armed Forces families in assessment and planning for their children, consistent with GIRFEC principles:

- The Child's Plan
- The Named Person
- The Lead Professional
- The Solution Oriented Meeting

In Phase 3 and with reference to Research Question 3, the opportunity was taken to invite respondents to generate specific solutions around effective school practice in relation to issues affecting children and young people from Armed Forces families.

A Key Respondent Interview Schedule was constructed to co-ordinate Phases 1, 2, and 3. This incorporated both questions employing Likert-type scaling and questions which were open ended.

#### **4.2.4 Outcomes from Structured Interviews**

In Phase 1, Likert-scale questions related to the initial concern regarding the overall progress and adjustment to school which the respondent thought teachers would feel at the initial point when a pupil from Armed Forces enrolled in school.

These questions used a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented “no concern at all” and 5 represented “extreme concern”.

- Average score when a high number of school moves was present = 3.5
- Average score when a high number of cross-border moves was present = 4.0
- Average score when a parent/carer was deployed = 5.0
- Average score when other close family member was deployed = 5.0

Respondents therefore felt that there was less concern about the number of school moves experienced by a pupil, than the concern they would have for the pupil when a parent/carer or family member was on deployment. It is reasonable to assume from this that staff had more confidence addressing the issues from several school moves (gaps in curricula knowledge, building friendships etc), than they had in providing the emotional support required at the time of deployment.

One respondent stressed the benefits of telephone or email contact with the previous school at the point of enrolment. One respondent stressed how useful, for all involved, had been a leaflet about deployment, issued by the ADES National Transition Co-ordinator.



In Phase 2, Likert-scale questions sought to rate to what extent the components in the Highland Practice Model were important to ensuring progress for pupils from Armed Forces families.

This question used a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represented “not important to progress” and 7 represented “extremely important to progress”.

- Average score for the Child’s Plan = 4.25
- Average score for the Named Person = 4.75
- Average score for the Lead Professional = 5.25
- Average score for the Solution Oriented Meeting = 6.0

These results indicate the importance of the Solution Focused Meeting process for bringing people together and planning for pupils, whether a Child’s Plan is the outcome of this process or not. The role of the Lead Professional came a very close second, presumably because of the need to coordinate services around a child, where a multi-agency approach was required.

In Phase 3, one respondent stressed the extent to which they felt that Highland Council’s embedding of emotional literacy skill training for staff as being a critical factor in its successful approaches to welcoming and supporting pupils from Armed Forces backgrounds.

The RCET video, “Forces Kids - This is my Life” was again mentioned as being very helpful for building the understanding of school staff.

One respondent highlighted the observation that due to recent changes in housing practice, some children and young people from the families of Officers might be particularly isolated in school settings.

#### **4.2.5 Commentary from Structured Interviews**

The small number of interviews carried out militates against any binding observations and conclusions in this section, but the researcher felt that this methodology was and could be a rich source for capturing a school’s lived experience and for generating ideas for improved delivery of educational services.

### **4.3 Online Survey**

**4.3.1** The primary purpose of this project was to “explore the impact of key elements of the Highland Practice Model on the educational, social and emotional outcomes of children from Armed Forces families attending Highland Council schools”. This section will briefly outline the method used to survey Armed Forces Parents and Carers on their knowledge of and opinions on key elements of the Highland Practice Model - the Child Plan, the Named Person and the Solution Focussed Meeting - in addressing the educational needs of their children.

#### **4.3.2 Methodology with reference to the online survey**

A scoping exercise was carried out to determine the best method of encouraging a high response to a survey of parents. Its conclusion was that a mobile-friendly version of a Survey Monkey questionnaire, issued through an email from an Army source, reminding parents of the purpose of the research and encouraging participation, would be the most productive approach. A draft survey was then very helpfully discussed through the good offices of the Army Welfare Service, with a number of parents and a final version of the Survey Monkey questionnaire constructed. A blank copy is attached to this report as an appendix.

#### **4.3.3 Outcomes with reference to the online survey from Regular Army respondents**

A total of 17 parents/carers from the Regular Army undertook the survey with particularly open and thoughtful responses. This number allows an interesting analysis based on trends, but is too small to permit representative, valid and reliable statistical analyses.

The following sections will share responses in relation to parental experiences of, and opinion on, the key Highland Practice Model components of:

- Named Person
- Child's Plan
- Solution Focused meeting

With reference to the Named Person :

- 80% of the sample was familiar with the term “Named Person”.
- Of those who answered, 80% knew who their child’s Named Person was.
- Of that number, 55% had had a discussion with the Named Person about their child’s needs, and
- 80% of the respondents who answered the final question had found the discussion helpful.
- Of those who answered the question, 100% had found that the Named Person was sufficiently knowledgeable about military life to assist in their child’s education.

With reference to the Child’s Plan :

- 75% of the sample were familiar with the term “Child’s Plan”.
- Of those who answered, 60% stated that their child had a Child’s Plan.
- Of that number, 66% found the Child’s plan to be helpful.

Within the open comments section of the questionnaire, parental suggestions included:

- “Very helpful. If it wasn’t for the Child’s Plan, I don’t know how my daughter would have coped”
- “More helpful if everyone who’s meant to be there (*at meetings*) appears”
- “Transition and curriculum changes are big factors which could be included specifically within a Child’s Plan”
- “I don’t think it could be any better. They are amazing. I’m more confident that my child is going to overcome her learning difficulties.”

With reference to the solution-focused meeting :

- Only 25% of the sample recognised the term.
- Of that number, only 2 children had had a solution focussed meeting.
- But in both cases, 100% satisfaction was reported.

This low number is possibly explained through schools following a solution-focused structure in meetings without explicitly labelling them as such.

The results of the questionnaire were very encouraging. The Highland Practice Model outlines an assessment, planning and intervention model for children and young people and it is clear that parents/carers from Armed Forces families are familiar with these processes and find them helpful in supporting their children.

A final feature on the online questionnaire reads as follows: “For you, what would be the one change at either Scottish Government or Highland Council level, which would greatly improve schooling for children from Armed Forces families?”

Responses included:

- “Transition and curriculum changes between England and Scotland have had a detrimental effect on my child’s education and mental health. These areas would benefit from more research to aid understanding towards military children and the challenges they face, particularly at secondary level.”
- “More options of school choice. Catchment areas should not apply to military children.”
- “Get off the Curriculum for Excellence as it does not stimulate the key areas of schooling, Maths, English etc.”

Within the open comments section of the questionnaire, parents’ suggestions included:

- “a forces champion in school”
- “Named person should be a military member, ie Families Officer”
- “If named person is explained by midwife....., some people might see it as more positive”.

These points can all be discussed further by Highland Council managers and practitioners to consider any changes in practice that may be possible.

#### **4.3.4 Outcomes with reference to the online survey from Reserve Forces respondents**

Accessing members of the Reserve Forces is a particular challenge as, by definition, many work in other employment and are consequently time-pressured. However two parents/carers undertook the survey. Such a low number necessarily excludes analyses but once again, open and thoughtful responses were greatly appreciated.

With reference to the Named Person:

- One of the parent/carers was familiar with the term “Named Person”
- Neither parent/carer knew who their Named Person was.

With reference to the Child’s Plan:

- Both Parents/Carers were familiar with the term “Child’s Plan”
- One Parent/Carer had a Child’s Plan
- This parent had found the Plan useful, in particular “supporting child with tailoring teaching of specific subjects to individual strengths and weaknesses”
- The same parent felt that it was more applicable to Regulars but that when Reserves are deployed it could assist communication with all relevant teachers .

With reference to the Solution Oriented Meeting, the term was not familiar to either set of Parents/Carers

Overall, one Reserve Forces Parent/Carer felt the most useful change which could improve schooling for Armed Forces families would be to have “Head teachers and other staff attending mandatory briefings every 3 years on key issues surrounding service children and potential extra teaching requirements.” One Parent/Carer felt that “being able to track and keep a better record of the child’s progression and actually integrating with the follow-on school” would help. He/she also argued for greater understanding of Armed Forces children who have family deployed.

#### **4.3.5 Outcomes with reference to the online survey from Veteran respondents**

A total of 10 Veteran parents/carers undertook the survey.

With reference to the term Named Person:

- 50% of the sample were familiar with the term.
- However only one respondent knew who the Named Person was for their child.
- He/she had had a discussion with the Named Person, had found it helpful and felt that the Named Person was sufficiently knowledgeable about military life to assist in their child’s education.

- One respondent indicated that he/she did not agree with the system of Named Persons.

With reference to the Child's Plan:

- All respondents were familiar with this term.
- Only one respondent had a child with a Child's Plan.
- This respondent did not find it useful because "no-one follows it through or acts on it".
- One respondent stated that the Child's Plan should be used: "... don't just fill it in as a tick-box exercise!"

With reference to the Solution Oriented Meeting:

- Only one respondent was familiar with the term, he/she had attended one but had not found it helpful

Overall, one Veteran parent observed that he/she did not think that there is or would be a problem in this area. Another argued for more understanding of the Armed Forces.

These results demonstrate that some aspects of the Highland Practice Model are familiar, but that practice and the benefits of the practice are variable.

#### **4.3.6 Commentary with reference to the online survey**

Bearing in mind the cautions on interpretation cited elsewhere in this report, caution in commenting is again necessary. However, it would appear that Regular Forces have more knowledge of key components of the Highland Practice Model and appear to be more positive in their experiences in relation to them. Perhaps this can be explained on the basis that pupils from Regular Forces are more concentrated geographically than other Service Categories, allowing the cross-fertilisation of information on, and experience of, the Highland Practice Model. They also tend to use the services of a small number of schools, who have a higher number of children and therefore more experience of supporting children from Armed Forces families.

Overall, most respondents, when they had had direct experience of a Named Person, Child's Plan or Solution Oriented Meeting, felt that they had been helpful

elements and therefore, by speculative implication, there was a greater likelihood of involvement with any identified 3<sup>rd</sup> Line Service. It is important to recognise too that there were a few voices which were ambivalent, and rated the components as unhelpful.

## **Section 5 – RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

**Are there significant correlations between the nature of any Additional Support Needs of Armed Forces families and the variables of geographical location and service category?**

**5.1** This section will outline some conclusions emerging in relation to potential differences between Armed Forces pupils and the general school population. Prima facie analysis of the data available at this point suggests that whilst there are no highly significant differences between Armed Forces pupils and the Highland school population, further analysis within this project has been carried out to test over or under - representation in relation to:

- Opening of Child Plans
- Placements on Level 4 of the ASN Matrix (ie very high level needs).
- Opening of Co-ordinated Support Plans
- School exclusions.

### **5.2 Opening of Child Plans**

Data analysis identifies that the same percentage of pupils from armed forces families have plans as do children and young people across Highland (12.44 % of AF children vs 12.58% of all pupils). This figure indicates that the process of identifying and assessing need within the Highland Practice Model seems to be working well for Armed Forces children.

### **5.3 Placements on Level 4 of the ASN Matrix.**

In 2015 there were 7 children assessed to have additional support needs at level 4 (the highest level of need), out of the total number of 430. This equated to 1.6% of the total numbers identified. The percentage in the overall population was 1.8%. In

2016, after raising awareness of the need to specifically record if the children were in armed forces families, the numbers of children had risen to 596, with 15 recorded as being at ASN level 4, which equated to 2.5% of AF children. In this year 2.2% of all pupils were assessed to have level 4 needs. Based on this analysis, there are no more or less children from Armed Forces families with high levels of additional support needs than there are in the general population.

#### **5.4 Opening of Co-ordinated Support Plans**

The number of children with Coordinated Support Plans across Highland is relatively small and within the Armed Forces population, one or two pupils either way would increase or decrease the percentages significantly and so any comparison of percentages would not be valid. Having said that however, the percentage of AF children that have Coordinated Support Plans is very similar to the overall percentage across Highland (0.5 %, vs 0.4%). This would indicate that children from armed forces families requiring significant additional support are not disadvantaged in relation to multi-agency planning to meet their needs.

#### **5.5 School exclusions**

Comparative data was considered for school exclusions for the first half of school year 2016-17 as a measure of social emotional needs of the armed forces pupils in Highland. The figures for exclusion are generally expressed as a ratio per 1000 pupils. For children from Armed Forces families, the exclusion rate was 26 per 1000. For the same time period, the exclusion rate in the general population across Highland was 13 per 1000 pupils. This does demonstrate a significant over-representation of Armed Forces pupils within the cohort of children experiencing an exclusion from school, which would merit further investigation.

### **Section 6 – RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

**Can the experiences and insights of Armed Forces parents/carers and children/young people be explored as a means of identifying as yet undiscovered ways for The Armed Forces and Highland Council to better support this subset of pupils in the school setting?**



**6.1** This section relates to Research Question 3, which attempts to use the experiences and insights of children and young people from Armed Forces families to identify their school challenges and to generate solutions which might inform future policy directions.

### **6.2 Methodology with reference to Research question 3**

The methodology adopted was one which generates key issues through the thematic analyses of guided discussions as outlined in the research paper, “Gathering views of children and young people” by Alexander et al (2014). Within this approach, thematic analyses identified key issues and solutions emerging from a series of guided discussions facilitated by the researcher and Army Welfare Service personnel.

The researcher facilitated two 60 minutes sessions, firstly with a group of 12 Primary aged Armed Forces pupils, and secondly, with a group of 10 Secondary aged pupils whose parents/carers were Regulars in The British Army. Sessions were structured utilising solution oriented principles and practices.

### **6.3 Outcomes with reference to Research Question 3**

The identification by the young people of issues and potential solutions forms a powerful story. Within an action research perspective however the researcher’s interpretation of what has emerged is also pertinent to a broader understanding and such an interpretation will be offered at the end of this section. Authoring styles behind such interpretations can range from detached, through questioning and provocative up to controversial. The style adopted here will be predominantly one of questioning.

This section will look at the four main themes emerging from each age group. It will include some exemplar quotes referring to both issues and solutions under each heading.

## **PRIMARY AGE GROUP**

**1. Curricular challenges** – where the child is referring to difficulties surrounding their learning progress in specific subjects:

- “Spelling and times tables”
- “Free writing”
- “Reading”
- “How to cope with Maths”

**2. Moving away from schools** - where the child is referring to the personal challenges around loss of relationships when moving on:

- “How to leave a great teacher behind”
- “I lost contact with my best friend very quickly because everyone else in my class was moving somewhere else quickly and often”

**3. Joining new schools** – where the child is referring to the particular difficulties around joining a new group, perhaps in mid-term:

- “How to remember names of children in new class”
- “How to find way round new school”.
  - “Teacher could find nice people to sit beside you and show you round school.”
- “How to make new friends”
  - “In assembly, teacher could get someone to volunteer to play with you.
  - “Teacher could find you a new buddy every day for a while.”
- “How to cope with different things half way through school year”
  - “Extra time from teacher to help you catch up.”
- “How to cope with the boredom if you have already covered a topic in a previous school.”
  - “Teachers should spend more time getting you into the right year.”
  - “Move us up a year for a trial.”
  - “You should get to meet teachers one-to-one beforehand.”

**4. Cross border transfers** – where the child is referring to both the possible repetition of topics to be studied, as well as potential gaps in knowledge or skills due to differences in national education systems:

- “How to cope with moving from Scotland to England. “
- “If I’ve to study the Tudors one more time, I’ll scream!”

## **SECONDARY AGE GROUP**

**1. Cross border transfers** – at this stage of schooling, young people are referring to difference in national qualifications:

- “How to cope with teachers have who have never, EVER, asked me what I’ve already done”
- What happens when I arrive in a school and subject choices have already been made by everyone else and there is no space in the classes I want to be in?”

### **2. Loss of network of friends**

- “How to keep in touch with best friends from junior school”
  - “Set up a safe and secure Armed Forces version of Facebook”

**3. Adjusting to new schools** – at this stage of schooling, young people are particularly referring to the loneliness of the newcomer or ongoing isolation in school:

- “Accents are mocked”
- “Kids are cruel and make worrying comments about Armed Forces parents and what might happen to them”
- “It’s harder to go to a school with very few Army kids”
  - *“Teachers should introduce and refer to new kids not as Army kids but as kids from XXXXX”*

**4. Support in school in difficult moments** – young people are referring to specific concerns they might have around deployment of a parent, carer or favourite family member:

- “Safe space in classrooms for younger kids.”
- “Dedicated teacher you can make appointments with who knows about army.”
- “Set up a lunchtime class for Armed Forces kids.”

#### **6.4 Commentary with reference to Research Question 3**

Interpretation of these findings suggest to the researcher that the children and young people from Armed Forces backgrounds are identifying issues of school adjustment which are, at first sight, common to many pupils affected by increasing UK family mobility. However, there are distinctive elements in this subset of children and young people eg around the time of deployment and whilst schools were overwhelmingly viewed as welcoming and caring, they were perceived, in some instances, to be failing to recognise and to address these distinctive elements, some of which have emerged in the sessions described in this section.

### **Section 7 – ACTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

**7.1** From the outset, this action research project has been conceptualised as an evidence-based scoping exercise which was never intended to conclude with an academic report and formal recommendations. The intention therefore in this section of the report is to list a range of possible actions emerging from the knowledge and advice gained from all the research strands in this study.

**7.2** 16 actions are described below for further consideration by specific stakeholders in this arena including The Scottish Government, Highland Council Care and Learning Service and Armed Forces personnel.

#### Recommendations for Highland Council Care and Learning Service

- To help raise awareness of the needs of Armed Forces pupils, it would be helpful to re-circulate Education Scotland’s CFE briefing 5 - “Supporting Learners: Children and young people from Service Families” to all Highland schools and establishments.

- The Highland Council ASN Website or GLOW could contain a section on supporting pupils from Armed Forces families as a means of sharing information and allowing school staff to exchange knowledge, skills and attitudes around the schooling of children and young people from all Armed Forces categories.
- There are particular issues around cross-border movements at certain stages of the journey through school which parents/carers have highlighted as creating significant distress for their children. These include different age entry arrangements into formal primary education stages from nursery and the arrival in S3 and S4 in Highland schools when subject choices have already been made and implemented. Parents would benefit from an early opportunity to discuss such concerns with an identified member of school staff, when moving to Highland.
- The Royal Caledonian Education Trust video, “Forces Kids - This is myLife” was widely praised by a range of parents and professionals. Recirculating details of this video to Highland schools should be considered, especially where AF pupil numbers are low.
- Armed Forces Parent and Carer knowledge of the rationale and process of the Highland Practice Model was understandably limited. The comprehensive Highland Council A1 poster entitled “Highland Practice Model Guidance” could very usefully be redesigned to be an A4 Armed Forces user-friendly leaflet, making reference to Reserve Forces and Veterans as well as regular forces, and would further help to meet the specific concerns expressed by families with a youngster experiencing additional support needs.
- Re-issuing of guidance to schools on administration aspects of enrolment of pupils from Armed Forces families to ensure validity of data collection.
- Analyses of Highland Council databases on a regular basis should continue to provide trend-data intelligence for forward planning of AF pupil provision.
- Regular meetings co-ordinated by schools and Armed Forces staff should be offered to mixed groups of Armed Forces and civilian pupils to promote joint understanding.
- When a child enters a Highland Council school, a Skype or Facetime conference call involving the sending school, the receiving school, parents

and, if appropriate, children, would be recommended. This could be conducted in a manner akin to the solution focussed meetings now commonplace in Highland schools and should, inter alia, consider explicitly planned but unfulfilled next steps in the child planning programmes of the sending school.

### Recommendations for the Armed Forces

- A pre-prepared statement from Armed Forces sources to be made available for schools to give to all parents, stressing the benefits of Armed Forces identification at the point of enrolment, should be considered.
- The introduction and maintenance of Armed Forces peer mentor schemes should be emphasised in schools with significant concentrations of AF pupils. The researcher understands that Queen Victoria School in Dunblane has such a well-developed scheme.
- Job shadowing or placement opportunities should be considered for teachers within the Army Welfare Service and vice-versa to promote understanding and confidence across this vital bridge of co-operation.
- In order to address the often expressed difficulty from children and young people of “keeping in touch” with friends in a highly mobile population, it would be helpful if the armed forces could explore the establishment of a secure and closed “Facebook- style” online system to enable children and young people to keep in touch with one another throughout their school years.

### Recommendations for the Scottish Government

- The significant challenges of cross-border mobility to curricular continuity are uppermost in responses from many parents, carers and young people. Investing some time to investigate issues of inward movement from all parts of the UK would be viewed as a substantial step forward.
- Children and young people were vocal in requesting the establishment of a UK – wide Education Passport which would move from Nursery through to S6 outlining subjects and topics covered in their school journeys to avoid repetitions and omissions.

- A widely-distributed termly national newsletter of broad appeal highlighting interesting practice in schools in relation to Armed Forces pupils with wide distribution would assist in meeting the needs of this set of pupils.
- The Children’s Education Advisory Service has developed a “Children’s Activity Book on Moving School” in conjunction with a handbook for parents but no mention of this was made by any parent/carer during the project. A Scottish version aimed at several age-bands might be beneficial.

## Section 8 - APPENDIX

### Survey Monkey Questionnaire

This survey is Armed Forces funded, commissioned by Highland Council and carried out by an independent researcher.

All responses to this survey will be anonymous and we will not be able to identify individual participants.

By completing this survey you are giving permission for your anonymous responses to be used in this research project.

#### **1. Please tick all that apply for your family.**

- Regular
- Reservist
- Veteran
- British Army
- Royal Air Force
- Royal Navy and Royal Marines

#### **2. Based on your own experiences how would you rate your experience of schools in Highland Council in terms of the following:**

**(1 is very poor and 7 is very good)**

- the induction period into new schools
- the educational provision offered
- its understanding of the specific needs of military families
- your family's welcome into school
- the schools understanding of the specific needs of military families
- the schools abilities to quickly identify the appropriate stage and curriculum level for children in military families

#### **3. Please select your child's/children's ASG from the dropdown list below (if you are unsure please use the table below).**



Highland Council organise their schools into Associated School Groups (ASG). This means that a main secondary school and its associated primaries are placed into a named Associated School Group.

In an effort to getting provision right for all children, Highland Council recognises the role within school of a Named Person, who will often be your health visitor or head teacher.

**4. Is the term "Named Person" familiar to you?**

- Yes
- No

**5. Do you know who the Named Person is for your child/children?**

- Yes
- No

**6. Have you had a discussion with this person about your child's/children's needs?**

- Yes
- No

**7. Was that discussion helpful?**

- Yes
- No

**8. Did you feel that the Named Person was sufficiently knowledgeable about military life to assist you in your child's education?**

Yes No

**9. Have you any suggestions on how we might use the Named Person to help children from military families?**

When there is a particular concern about the progress or wellbeing of a specific child, Highland Council anticipates that head teachers will open a Child's Plan.

**10. Is the term "Child's Plan" familiar to you?**

- Yes
- No

**11. Do any of your children have a Child's Plan?**

- Yes
- No

Can you please state what you found most helpful or unhelpful

**12. Have you found the Child's Plan to be helpful?**

- Yes  No

**13. Have you any suggestions on how we might use the Child Plan to help children from military families?**

**14. For you, what would be the one change at either Scottish Government or Highland Council level which would greatly improve schooling for children from armed forces families in schools?**

When there are specific concerns and we are looking for ways to move things on Highland Council will frequently use Solution Focused meetings. These involve schools staff, other professionals, parents and sometimes the child.

**15. Is the term solution-focused meeting familiar to you?**

- Yes
- No

**16. Have you attended a solution focused meeting for any of your children?**

- Yes
- No

**17. Was the solution focused meeting helpful?**

- Yes
- No

**18. Have you any suggestions on how we use solution focused meetings to help children from military families?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is very much appreciated.

The final report, which will include the findings from this survey, will be available to all at the conclusion of the project.

If you have any questions regarding this survey please contact Jim Kane on [jim\\_kane@yahoo.com](mailto:jim_kane@yahoo.com)

## Section 9 – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**8.1** Action Research studies require a willingness on those involved to engage and develop trust and confidence in the researcher. At the outset of this piece of work, I was as naïve about and as unaware of Armed Forces culture and traditions as it was possible to be. However, I could not speak more highly of the welcome, the patience, the kindness, and the extraordinary helpfulness I encountered throughout from Armed Forces communities. In particular, I would like to express an elevated level of gratitude to the following individuals:

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