

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	EDU/25/24

**Committee:** Education

**Date:** 21 November 2024

**Report Title:** Supporting the Education of Children from Armed Forces Families

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - People

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides information about the work of the Military Liaison Group (MLG) (Education) in supporting the education of Children from Armed Forces Families. The MLG is a partnership that guides, advises, informs and supports those working with children from an Armed Forces family, to ensure that within an educational context they do not suffer any disadvantage due to being from a military family.
- 1.2 The unique nature of military life means that families and educators may need additional guidance, support and advice to ensure needs are met in relation to the impact on continuity of education, additional support needs and the mental health and wellbeing of the children and young people. This is most usually the case during times of separation, deployment, or associated with the frequent moves due to the nature of high mobility within the Armed Forces.
- 1.3 Training and resources have been created by the MLG under the leadership of the Education lead for Armed Forces Families. A website has also been created to provide access to these resources along with information and guidance to support families, practitioners and children and young people in relation to military families - [Armed Forces Families Highland](#).

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - I. Note the information about the service that MLG (Education) provides.
  - II. Note the potential impact of challenges and barriers that may be faced by children and young people from Armed Forces families.
  - III. Note the support, resourcing and training that MLG (Education) provides which can be signposted to families, educators, and communities.

### **3. Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource**

The MLG (Education) lead role sits within Highland Psychological Services, funded by Highland Council. Wider support is provided to the group from a range of other services and agencies as part of their service delivery and at no cost to Highland Council.

#### **3.2 Legal**

Highland Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012 and [The Armed Forces Covenant Duty](#) became law in November 2022 through the enactment of the Armed Forces Act (2021). This brings with it legal obligations and responsibilities, including the following areas to consider for children and young people within the context of Education:

- An interrupted education
- A disrupted social experience
- The effect of military life on mental wellbeing
- A longer journey time to school or a more difficult journey as a result of mid-year moves and relocation
- Being unable to take holidays with parents during normal school holiday periods
- Delays relating to support for Service Children with additional needs

#### **3.3 Risk**

Highland Council would be at risk of not meeting its legal requirements under the 2021 Act if the education elements of the Armed Forces Covenant were not given due regard.

#### **3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)**

There are no specific Health and Safety risks.

#### **3.5 Gaelic**

The education of all children from Armed Forces Families are supported by the Military Liaison Group (Education), including those educated within Gaelic Medium schools and units.

### **4. Impacts**

#### **4.1**

In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

#### **4.2**

Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

#### **4.3**

This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required. When MLG was established, the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment identified a positive impact for the children from Armed Forces families and the wider

population of children in Highland, as the resources created would be able to be used with other cohorts of children also.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1 The MLG (Education) partnership has been operating for some years, being created out of a previous group that was established when Highland Council first signed the Armed Forces Covenant. The partnership aims to mitigate disadvantage for children and young people from Armed Forces families in education within Highland.
- 5.2 The MLG (Education) is a tri-service (Army, RAF, Navy and Marine) multi-agency and multi-disciplinary partnership that supports the equity and equality of children and young people (CYP) from Armed Forces families (Regular, Reserve & Veteran). It works within an educational context to ensure the best possible outcome; ensuring CYP suffer no disadvantage being from Armed Forces families and that they can thrive and be empowered to be and do the best they can.
- 5.3 The partnership works operationally and strategically with representation from each of the Armed Forces Services; Armed Forces specialist provider services; third sector organisations that specialise in education, health and wellbeing of children and young people from Armed Forces families; Health and Social Care representatives; cross sector education representatives; and most importantly the views and participation of our children and young people and their families. Councillor Leslie-Anne Niven, Armed Forces Champion, is an active core partner to MLG and Chairs the Highland Council Armed Forces and Veterans Community Group. [Click here](#) for full MLG (Education) partnership information.
- 5.4 The MLG lead is a member of Highland Council Armed Forces and Veterans Community Covenant Group and holds responsibility for the “Education and Families” part of this Action Plan. Education updates/progress reports are submitted to the bi-annual meetings. The work reported on is based on the MLG Improvement Plan which is informed by CYP and is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and within the framework of GIRFEC and so provides a universal, strengths based multi-agency approach.
- 5.5 The MLG lead sits within the Psychological Services team which provides opportunities for joint working, collaboration and gives a depth of holistic support around the children and young people from Armed Forces families.

## **6. Service Delivery**

- 6.1 The MLG has been acknowledged for the significant contribution made towards Highland Council receiving the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award. Additionally, the partnership and practice has been cited by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) as a ‘good model of practice’ for other local authorities to follow. The MLG lead was part of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance Focus (Scotland) Group and some case studies from MLG’s work have been cited within the Duty as helpful examples to mitigate disadvantage.
- 6.2 Identification is core to the work of MLG. If we know who the children and young people are we can ensure we get the right targeted support to them at the right time, if and when needed.

School and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Enrolment Forms now ask if the pupil is from an Armed Forces family and, if so, which Service they are engaged with (Army, RAF, Navy or Marine). This data is recorded on SEEMiS and provides helpful detail for analysis in relation to where the majority of CYP from Armed Forces families are located.

The Head Teachers' Guidance for Enrolment has a specific section for Armed Forces families to encourage identification.

All education settings are encouraged to add a discretionary paragraph to their website and School Handbooks to reach out and welcome Armed Forces families, provided by the MLG lead. A promotional [poster](#) to reach out to Armed Forces families has been provided to Schools/ELC settings and an electronic link and [flyer](#) to the [Armed Forces Families Highland website](#) can be included in newsletters/blogs.

Reaching out to this community encourages them to reach in so we can connect, engage and ensure we are providing the best support we can for their CYP.

- 6.3 Families are encouraged to engage at the earliest opportunity to ensure schools and ELC settings are prepared and ready for the arrival of their child or young person and plans made in preparation of meeting any identified additional needs.

At times, early engagement can be challenging for families due to a posting order being changed with little notice, or depending on housing allocation and the differing catchment areas these may fall into. The MLG is in the process of exploring links with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) careers to provide an automatic link to the local authority education website when service personnel first receives their posting/assignment order for a move.

MLG is timely and effective when responding to enquires from families and educators and ensuring quick responses and easy to navigate information. MLG partners engage, listen to and work with families, their children and young people and educators, learning from their lived experiences and creating resources together to meet need.

The MLG lead has an established close relationship with 3SCOTS Unit Welfare and the Army Welfare Service which gives a direct understanding of 'on the ground' issues and supports joint collaboration to ensure families are supported. MLG has an 'education page' in the 3SCOTS arrivals pack to welcome families to Highland, encourage early engagement and signpost key transition information and links.

- 6.4 The MLG wants children and young people from Armed Forces families moving into Highland to be in the best place they can to grow up and thrive within their education while they are with us. We extend [A Warm Welcome to Highland](#).

The *Armed Forces Families Highland* website provides a wide range of resources to support a smoother transition at the [enrolment](#) stage and data from the website reflects a continued steady increase of users accessing/downloading materials.

Some of the challenges of transition are in relation to the different devolved nations; year groups, curriculum, understanding the language of GIRFEC and Additional Support Needs (ASN).

National resources produced by MLG partner organisations are signposted to provide a clearer overarching understanding of the Scottish Education system.

The MLG also provides additional bespoke resources and information for families moving into (within and out of) Highland. To give examples:

- Following on from a workshop with families to identify issues when moving to Schools in Highland the resource “[Transition in Partnership](#)” was developed by MLG. These checklists put the child or young person firmly at the centre and with a step-by-step guide for the parent/carer, detailing how this fits alongside and in partnership with the school’s enrolment and engagement process. Within this package is a resource for children and young people, “My Journey My Voice”, to support their participation, partnership and inclusion in their school move and their feelings around this. Additionally, it supports first steps of building relationships and a personal connection with the new school they are coming to in Highland.
- MLG also recognises that families may want a document of quick links with everything in the same place so they can get to what they need easily and directly. “[Quick Access to Direct Information](#)” was created to meet this need and has been widely shared, used and adapted in other local authorities.

MLG has forged strong links with UHI Inverness to help with resources and raising awareness to support young students from Armed Forces families. The UHI Website and handbook now highlights Armed Forces families and their enrolment process includes questions to encourage identification. MLG is working towards developing awareness training for frontline staff.

6.5 MLG provides a wealth of support, guidance, information and learning for [families](#), [educators and practitioners](#), [children and young people](#). These can also benefit community organisations and wider education and learning teams. This information is available on the [Armed Forces Families Highland](#) website, which has been commended on being easy to navigate, uncluttered and provides key information to meet needs. Examples of some key sections are detailed below:

- [Enrolment](#): supporting positive and smoother transitions
- [Communication during Deployment/Separation](#): guidance, notification, resources
- [Understanding the Scottish Education System](#): supporting transitions
- [Learning and Knowledge Hub](#): online flexible learning resources/training
- [Children’s Rights and Participation](#): resources, rights and participation information
- [Additional Support for Children and Young People](#): support, information, signposting
- [Information for Children and Young People](#): Rights, participation, mental health and wellbeing, moving/leaving School

Resources, information and guidance are developed and tailored specifically to our Highland community. In addition, generic resources are provided by the wider MLG partner organisations. Materials link to current relevant reports and research. Many of the resources have been shared at national level as ‘good practice’ for other authorities and communities to use or adapt to suit their local needs.

6.6 The MLG engages with children and young people to ensure their voices are heard and their lived experiences are understood, and shares these to inform educators and communities:

- Frequently this information is included within training resources to ensure they are included, and their voices heard and listened to.
- Children and young people have also co-produced resources to welcome other children and young people into Highland - producing both a primary and secondary level 'Welcome', based on what they feel, from their perspective, is important to know when moving into a school in Highland.
- An Early Years' Welcome is also in the planning stages of being developed.
- These resources sit within the education page of the 3SCOTS Arrivals Pack for families to ensure we promote a connection and sense of belonging for our children and young people moving into Highland.
- Children and young people are currently working on co-producing a poster about The Armed Forces Covenant, in consultation with 3SCOTS families; a snapshot in accessible language all about the areas in scope within the Duty, what they mean, why they should be supported and how. This 'plain English' resource should prove helpful to families, communities and educators. The resource is currently in draft form with further consultation planned with children and young people. It is proposed that an online version of this information be co-produced as an audio/transcript book to provide further accessibility.
- This resource, created by children and young people will inform a development project producing a helpful toolkit for educators to support putting the Armed Forces Covenant into action. The toolkit will be shaped around the framework of GIRFEC and link with the UNCRC and How Good is Our School.

6.7 Updates, information and news of the work going on to support children and young people from Armed Forces families is regularly shared. Regular generic communication is via:

- MLG (Education) Quarterly Newsletters (Global reach)
- Armed Forces Families Highland website 'Latest News' blogs (Global reach)
- Highland Council Schools Hub SharePoint site
- Highland Council Community Bulletins
- Highland Council Community Planning Partnerships
- Highland Council Whole Family Wellbeing Programme Team Newsletter
- MLG partnership network, sharing of good practice/resources (National reach)
- Highland Psychological Services

There are times when sensitive and confidential information is shared by MOD Armed Forces representatives in relation to deployment activity. Information is shared with the MLG lead for MOD approved distribution and at times restricted to a need-to-know basis depending on the nature of the deployment.

Information is always shared with Head Teachers and ELC Managers and Highland Psychological Services who provide support around the whole family. Resources to support educators are included with the information (Emotional Cycles of Deployment, Notification of Parental Absence, MOD advice for Head Teachers for term time absence, Supporting Communication during Deployment) and updates provided as and when received.

The current whole 3SCOTS Battalion deployment is within the UK on a training support exercise which commenced in June before the end of the school year and will last until a homecoming hopefully before Christmas.



6.8 The [Learning and Knowledge Hub](#) section of the *Armed Forces Families Highland* website was developed to provide a flexible online platform of learning. It contains a suite of learning and training resources to create awareness and understanding of being a child or young person from an Armed Forces Family. Some resources can also be delivered face to face if required.

Online and face to face training materials are developed in collaboration with the Highland Psychological Services team to ensure they take account of current approaches/research and issues that may arise that impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Some examples include:

- [My Rights to Wellbeing](#) has been co-authored by Bernadette Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist and Lou Kinnear, Armed Forces Families Highland. The programme aims to develop resilience and emotional literacy and to empower children; gaining a deeper understanding of their own wellbeing through self-reflection. It helps develop understanding and making links between the tools of GIRFEC (SHANARRI and My World Triangle) and UNCRC, to increase their understanding and engagement with their rights. The programme is universally targeted at P6 however it is easily adapted and delivered to any age group, or number of children, to suit local needs.
- The [Emotional Cycles of Deployment/Separation](#) is available to be delivered face to face if required. This cycle is complex and can have varying impacts on children and young people as it moves through the 7 phases from 'Anticipating Departure' to the return, 'Re-establishing Stability'.
- [Awareness and Understanding of Children from Armed Forces Families Early Years](#) is available to provide: an insight into moving to Scotland; the enrolment process in Highland; supporting change and promoting a sense of belonging; and building positive attuned relationships.

## 7 Armed Forces Data (Education)

7.1 Currently there are around 939 children and young people from Armed Forces families recorded on SEEMiS. UK Research/census information informs us that just under 10% of communities are made up of Armed Forces families and therefore we are aware that the figure we hold in Highland, albeit increasing, remains under reported. We know that there is significant under-recording, especially of Veterans and Reservists. This may be because families do not identify themselves as being linked with the Armed Forces if it is sometime since they served, or they may perceive that this could be a disadvantage to them. We continue therefore to highlight the benefits of the Armed Forces Covenant across our communities to all schools and families.

	2015	2016	2017	2019	2021	2023	2024
<b>No of CYP</b>	430	596	824	803	913	918	939
<b>No of Schools</b>	24	107	117	94	124	121	122

The predominant service in Highland is the Army with the 3SCOTS base at Fort George in Ardersier, the families' patch in Wimberley Way, Inverness and the Reserves base at Gordonville Road, Inverness; 20% of identified children are from Regular Army families, 58% are from Veteran families and 10% from Reserve

families. RAF, Navy and Marine families, although not dominant within Highland, are still present.

Weekending families are becoming more prevalent. This is where the serving person works away during the week and return at weekend. Often these families are harder to reach as they are not living within the catchment areas of a base or families' patch.

- 7.2 We track progress in the support for children from Armed Forces Families through several data sets. Our aim is to ensure that these children are not further disadvantaged by the systems and processes around them, and that we engage with them in ways that enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Children from Armed Forces Families are able to benefit from our integrated planning systems around GIRFEC. The same percentage of pupils from armed forces families have plans as do CYP across Highland (12.44 % of Armed Forces children vs 12.58% of all pupils). So the process of identifying and assessing need within the Practice Model seems to be working well for Armed Forces children.

In a recent survey to check engagement with families, 60% of the of the Armed Forces sample responding to a questionnaire about GIRFEC were familiar with the term "Named Person". 78% had had a discussion with the Named Person about their child's needs and 80% of them had found the discussion helpful. Of particular note, 100% of respondents found that the Named Person was sufficiently knowledgeable about military life to assist in their child's education. This would indicate that Named Persons are accessing the information they need to support families where additional needs have been identified.



7.3 The number of children from Armed Forces families are also tracked in relation to ASN. There have been national studies undertaken that show educational disadvantage for children from Forces families and also challenges in behaviour that result from the disrupted educational experiences and home lives.

Our data does not support that picture and in general children from Forces families in Highland perform similarly to the general Highland population. (Some data for 2024 has yet to be gathered).

	2015	2016	2017	2019	2021	2023	2024
% of AFF pupils with ASN	33%	No data	No data	43%	42%	44%	46%
% of Highland pupils with ASN	38%	39%	40%	40%	42%	44%	47%
AFF pupils excluded	16 3.7%	14 2.3%	10 1.2%	9 1.1%	6 0.7%	15 1.6%	No data
Highland pupils excluded	482 1.6%	432 1.4%	484 1.6%	430 1.4%	309 1.0%	419 1.4%	No data
Attendance Pupils from AFF	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	88%
Attendance all Highland	92.8 %	93.0%	93.2%	93.4%	92.7%	91.5%	89.8%

7.4 In relation to the main categories of ASN, the figures are also very similar to the general school population in Highland. The percentage of Armed Forces children that have Coordinated Support Plans (ASN plans for those children requiring multi-agency involvement to meet their educational needs) is also very similar to the overall percentage across Highland (0.5% vs 0.4%).

ASN Need	ALL HIGHLAND 2023	CYP FROM AFF 2023
Autism	10%	8%
Dyslexia	10%	12%
Social/Emotional/Behavioural Needs	36%	21%
Moderate Learning Difficulties	10%	9%
Specific Learning Difficulties	17%	14%

7.5 Our data would indicate that overall, in Highland, we manage to support children from our Armed Forces families well. There is no evidence of detriment to the educational experiences of children and young people. All resources used to support families are created by or informed by children, young people and families themselves and the coordination of this work through the Military Liaison Group (Education) ensures that a multi-agency approach is taken in all the work we do to support the educational objectives of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive People

Date: 1 November 2024

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Background Papers: Live links are provided throughout this report to relevant background documents and support materials

Appendices: n/a