



City of Westminster

Children, Sports & Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Title:	Children and Families of Service Personnel
Cabinet Member Portfolio:	Children's Services
Wards Involved	All
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an update for information, following on from a September 2016 report on meeting the needs of children of Service Personnel. It provides an indication of the composition of this small group of children and work that has been done to improve their access to services where required as well as linking the families in with the wider community.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. A report "Meeting the Needs of Children of Service Personnel in Westminster" was presented to the Children and Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 16 September 2013. The report provided background on the Armed Forces Community Covenant, current understanding of the numbers of children and families living in Westminster and how they were being supported by the Armed Forces and the City Council. The report concluded that there were appeared not to be any particular barriers in relation to the children concerned having access to school places and other universal services when they moved into Westminster.
- 2.2. Since the last report, the numbers of children in this cohort have been monitored through the annual pupil census which is carried out in January each year. While the results of the 2015 census are imminent, as at January 2014 there were 33 children going to school in Westminster, attending a total of 6 different schools (including academies). The numbers of children attending each school varied between 1 and 11 children. Of particular note was that there were no children of secondary school aged from a Service family background attending local schools. Six of the children were on their schools' Special Educational Needs register

although none of the children had met the threshold to require a statement of special educational need or Education, Health and Care plan.

- 2.3. Since the previous report, council officers have developed a partnership with the London Central Garrison Welfare team which has improved the City Council's understanding of the needs of the families concerned. It was explained that a high number of Services Personnel who work in a range of roles in Westminster commute in from outer London boroughs and beyond. In these cases, their families tend to live and their children are educated in their home boroughs. It was also pointed out that significant numbers of the older children tend to be educated in residential schools, particularly when their parents' roles involve frequent moves.
- 2.4. The Welfare Officer carried out a survey of the 172 armed forces quarters within Westminster during Autumn 2014. The survey obtained responses from 115 of the 142 quarters where families were known to live. It resulted in a similar understanding of the composition of the group of children concerned, with 35 school children identified in total. The children attended 6 schools with the two schools where the highest number of children were enrolled being the same as the two identified through the schools census. The Garrison Welfare Service's survey identified one child of secondary school age. The lead officer has commented on the significant turnover of families recently and therefore wishes to repeat the survey in the near future.
- 2.5. Of particular note from the Welfare Service's survey was that 42 children aged under 5 were identified, showing that the majority of children living with the families concerned are in the early years age group. Council officers have recently come into contact with families who regularly make good use of a local Children's Centre. The parents reported that they had also taken the initiative to set up their own coffee morning. It may be that more can be done to make other parents aware of local facilities where they can take their children and develop networks with other parents in the community.
- 2.6. In December 2013, consideration was given to applying for funding from the Support Fund for State Schools with Service Children. This was not proceeded with as the criteria for successful bids included a need to demonstrate exceptional mobility experienced by the school or schools in relation children of Military Personnel. Contact was made with Ministry of Defence representatives who advised that the local population of Service families was comparably stable and that significant movements of personnel were not anticipated. Thought was given to the possibility of implementing the "My Passport" scheme that had been developed in Buckinghamshire to support the transfer of information when children change schools. However, the head teacher of the Westminster school where the most children attend advised that good and timely information sharing took place between schools with the children she had worked with and that alternative ways of managing the process were not needed at this point.
- 2.7. Following ongoing consultation with the London Central Garrison Welfare officer, in summer 2014 it was agreed that it would be helpful if more detail about City Council services could be included in its "Service Community Guide for October 2014-

September 2015". The guide which has now been published and distributed to the families concerned includes information and contact numbers for parents in relation to the City Council's childcare, admissions and special educational needs services.

2.8. Most recently, Children's Services have submitted a bid for an Armed Forces Community Covenant grant. Funding is being sought to train up to 10 parents from Service families to become childminders in Westminster. A number of parents who may take part in this have expressed an interest in taking part in the project if the bid is successful. The grant would cover the charge for attendance at local information sessions, formal registration and additional required training as well as a DBS check. It is understood that many parents from this community wish to work but find it difficult to find employment that fits in with other responsibilities and demands. Those who successfully complete this process would be able to take part in regular, paid employment in an area of London where their services are in high demand. The work is flexible in that they can provide full time care, after school care and also shorter placements for up to 15 hours a week under the Government's "two year old offer" scheme. Those trained can also potentially work as childminders in other parts of the country, should they be stationed elsewhere. The training might also provide opportunities for employment in other parts of the childcare sector, for example in nannying. It also provides insight into running a small business which may lead to other potential self-employment opportunities for those who take part. The project will increase the pool of childminder places available in the area and will also facilitate more integration of the families from an Armed Services background with those from the wider community who may choose to employ them to care for local children.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact:

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Meeting the Needs of Children of Service Personnel in Westminster. Westminster City Council, Children and Community Services Scrutiny Committee, 16 September 2013.