

# [Press release: Veterans' charities reminded to prioritise safeguarding](#)

The charity regulator is [writing to recently registered veterans' charities](#), reminding them to ensure they are safeguarding people in their care.

This follows a proactive [review of a sample of military charities](#) that were registered since 2007 and are involved in service delivery to veterans and / or in public fundraising.

The review found the charities were providing a wide range of services and activities that had a positive impact on the lives of veterans. It also found areas of good practice, including around trustees working together to make decisions in the best interests of their charity.

However, the Commission also found a concerning lack of safeguarding policies and practices in some of the charities reviewed. In a number of other cases, it found that the charities needed to strengthen their safeguarding policies.

The Commission says that this resulted in part from not recognising the veterans they help as being potentially vulnerable on account of their personal circumstances. The potential vulnerabilities of former service men and women with physical injuries were more likely to be considered than those with other conditions, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The issues included not considering whether those who were in direct contact with veterans should undergo appropriate background checks (DBS checks).

The review also found weaknesses in most of the charities' oversight of fundraising, with some having no basic agreement in place with professional fundraisers, and some having no systems to ensure the charity receives all of the funds raised by professional fundraisers.

The Commission was prompted to conduct a proactive review after identifying from its case work, social media, and media reporting that some more recently registered military charities may be at greater risk of compliance and reputational issues. The regulator wanted to establish whether there were any themes or patterns of concern in this type of charity.

As a result of the Commission's findings, it is now working collaboratively through [Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities](#), and writing to veterans' charities registered since 2007, to remind them to:

- be alert to the specific needs and potential vulnerabilities of some of their beneficiaries
- put robust safeguarding policies in place and ensure they are followed in practice

- ensure they have proper arrangements in place with any professional fundraisers or commercial firms providing fundraising services

**Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:**

The charities we examined had been set up with good intentions by people with genuine compassion for veterans. And we saw some really innovative work being done in those charities.

But it takes more than good intentions and a good idea to run a charity properly. The trustees' role is to govern a charity well. And one of their most basic duties is to take safeguarding seriously. Some veterans may be potentially vulnerable for a variety of reasons because of what they've seen and been through, and charities set up to help them must make caring for them, and protecting them, an absolute priority. The public would be rightly concerned if veterans were exposed to harm through a charity supposed to help them.

Charities working with veterans rely on public generosity, and our advice to the public is simple: give with your head as well as your heart. Ask some basic questions before you give: how much of my pound will reach the beneficiaries? Are you giving direct to the charity or is a fundraising company taking a cut? There is no right or wrong charity to support – but we can all take basic steps to ensure our donations are making a difference.

And if you see something you're not comfortable with, for example aggressive or disrespectful fundraising, report it to the Fundraising Regulator, which is the self-regulatory body for fundraising.

And my message to those thinking of setting up new military charity is to think carefully before doing so; there are other ways of supporting the armed forces community, including supporting with money or time an existing, established veterans charity. Setting up a new charity may not be the most effective way to help.

**General Sir John McColl, KCB, CBE, DSO, Executive Chairman of**

## **Cobseo, The Confederation of Service Charities said:**

We strongly support the Charity Commission's scrutiny of safeguarding and fundraising practices, not just for the Military Charities on its register, but across the entire charitable sector.

Service charities play a crucial, and highly effective, role in supporting the Armed Forces Community. Cobseo, The Confederation of Service Charities, strives for the highest of standards among its membership and will continue to work closely with the Charity Commission in pursuit of this goal.

### **Wider case work involving veterans charities**

Since 2016, the Commission has opened 17 compliance cases into military charities resulting from complaints or concerns raised in the media; of these 13 have concluded. The Commission has also announced 5 statutory inquiries into charities working with veterans ([The Veterans Charity](#), [Support the Heroes](#), [Afghan Heroes](#), [1st Knight Military Charity](#), [Our Local Heroes](#)).

The Commission says that these cases indicate that some recently registered veterans' charities can be vulnerable to problems resulting from inappropriate dominance of one or two individuals; often excessive power rests with a charity's founder, who is not properly challenged by other trustees. This can lead to poor decision making and to concerns such as conflicts of interest and unauthorised private benefit.

The findings of the review, and of its reactive case work involving veterans' charities, have also prompted the Commission to strengthen its approach to assessing applications for new veterans' charities, and undertake a wider tranche of further proactive case work among military charities registered since 2007.

### **Ends**

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### **Notes to editors**

1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
2. Our review examined 21 charities, chosen from military charities registered since 2007 that provide services to veterans and /or are involved in public fundraising.
3. While the number of new military charities registering increased following Britain's involvement in conflicts in Afghanistan, overall the number of military charities coming off the register has outstripped new registrations by 2 to 1 and the number of registered charities has

shrunk by around 10% over the last decade.

4. [The Fundraising Regulator](#) holds the Code of Fundraising Practice for the UK; it sets and maintains standards for charitable fundraising, aims to ensure that fundraising is respectful, open, honest and accountable to the public and regulates fundraising in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.