

Record number of Armed Forces personnel help with Covid response

The record 5,300 personnel committed to winter and Covid operations are today supporting 56 different tasks in the UK and abroad – this includes the vaccine rollout, NHS support and community testing across the length and breadth of the UK.

This is the largest peacetime resilience operation ever undertaken by the UK Armed Forces and is drawing on every corner of expertise of the military.

Personnel are also working inside NHS hospitals, with around 50 medics now committed to hospitals in Kent and Essex to ensure there is workforce resilience to cope with increasing demand. In Essex, Combat Medic Technicians (CMTs) are supporting a 'step-down' facility for those recovering from Covid-19.

A further 1,600 military medical professionals work in the NHS every day, from intensive care nurses to specialist surgeons, providing their skills on a permanent basis to support our health service. This means that very few defence medics are not currently deployed or working in the NHS.

In Manchester, 800 personnel are deploying from nine regiments across the British Army at the request of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to support targeted asymptomatic testing of specific populations that may be at a higher risk of infection including social care staff, key workers, public facing occupations such as bus drivers, and those in high risk environments such care homes and shared accommodation for the homeless.

Over 2,155 personnel are deployed on community testing tasks, including in Lancashire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Kent. Local authorities are still able to apply for support from the Armed Forces to establish community testing programmes if required.

The Armed Forces are also helping with ongoing haulier testing to ensure the smooth movement of people and goods across our borders, with 515 operating over 30 testing sites across the country. Since 23 December over 45,000 tests have been conducted, keeping millions of tonnes of freight moving between the UK and Europe.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Our country faces an unprecedented challenge and our Armed Forces are working hand in hand with the NHS. We will continue to bolster those on the front line as they protect and care for the most vulnerable.

The sheer scope of the work undertaken by our Armed Forces, both in the UK and overseas, is a real testament to their resilience and

willingness to be there when our country needs it.

An experienced military team is also supporting the management and logistics at the Excel Nightingale hospital in London, ensuring it is ready to receive patients if required. As part of prudent planning, additional specialist medical personnel and those able to fill general duties are being held at readiness to ensure that any future requests for military assistance can be fulfilled.

Alongside specific support to NHS trusts, the UK Armed Forces have committed over 300 personnel to support the vaccine rollout in England, in addition to 90 personnel who have deployed to Wales and are already administering vaccines to the public.

The Vaccine Quick Reaction Force (VQRF) makes up the majority of the support in England, consisting of 21 teams of 6 personnel assigned to the 7 NHS England regions. The Force is able to provide surge support to the vaccine roll-out if required by local health authorities and may be stood-up to administer vaccines if and when directly asked by the NHS.

Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter said:

These are really challenging times for everyone at the moment. We all have a role to play in supporting those on the frontline in the fight against the virus. As ever, the Armed Forces are there to play our part in this collective national enterprise. We are proud to do what we can to provide our expertise wherever it is most needed.

The military is also working alongside the Department for Education to ensure that staff, vulnerable children and children of key workers can continue to attend their school or college and so far, personnel have assisted across 36 schools and colleges.

Military planners and liaison officers are embedded in local authorities, government departments and the devolved nations providing planning advice, and crucially feeding in early where military support is most effectively used so resources can be deployed quickly and efficiently.