



Óglaigh Náisiúnta na hÉireann

Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel

Brú na bhFiann, North King Street, Dublin 7. Tel: 01-485 0666 Fax: 01-485 0601

Email: info@oneconnect.ie Website: www.one-veterans.org

Support, Comradeship, Advocacy, Remembrance

ONE Submission Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

Introduction

1. Óglaigh Náisiúnta na hÉireann (Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel - ONE) is a registered charity for veterans of the Defence Forces. ONE was established on 10 March 1951 and its primary objective is to support the needs of Irish veterans by the provision of accommodation to homeless veterans in its Veterans' Homes and the provision of other advice and support to veterans through its nationwide network of Branches and Veteran Support Centres.

2. ONE's services are available to all veterans of the Defence Forces and we also facilitate homeless veterans from other countries living in Ireland from time to time. ONE currently provides accommodation (board and lodging) for fifty-four veterans in its four residential homes in Athlone, Cobh, Dublin and Letterkenny. ONE has developed a nationwide network of Veteran Support Centres and a Counselling Service for advice and support.

3. This submission will outline: ONE's Background; ONE's Support Services; ONE's Strategic Plan; ONE's Position on Veterans' Policy – a key Strategic Goal; and will draw a number of conclusions.

Background

4. Outlining the circumstances that led to the foundation of ONE helps our understanding of the organisation today. The end of the Second World War heralded:

- a. A transformation of the international system.
- b. The emergence of two ideological hostile superpowers.
- c. A wave of decolonisation and attempts at democratisation.
- d. And the creation of the United Nations.

5. Ireland was not exempt from post war renewal. It had the arduous task of dismantling the Emergency Forces and putting a workable peace time establishment in its place. Downsizing any military force has intrinsic difficulties and this was the second time that it happened in Ireland in a little over twenty years. The first demobilisation after the Civil War led to the 1924 Mutiny and while history did not repeat itself, many difficulties emerged after the Emergency. The dramatic downsizing left many veterans unemployed and in dire circumstances. While some had outstanding success, others were not so fortunate and veterans continued to face difficulties in the late 1940s and early 50s.



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6. A new organisation was needed, and ONE was formally established on the 10 March 1951 in the Mansion House. Its goals were straightforward and rooted in the enduring four pillars of ONE – **Support, Comradeship, Advocacy, and Remembrance**. The founders believed that the maintenance of old bonds would be of practical value to their less fortunate members. In many ways they were idealistic paladins who were seeking better treatment for veterans, and that ideal of 70 years ago continues today.

Veteran Support Services

7. Following the deaths of homeless veterans on our streets in the late 1980s / early 1990s, ONE adjusted direction and its primary objective. The branch structure remains a central plank in the provision of support and further information is outlined below on Homes for Homeless Veterans, Veteran Support Centres, and Veteran Counselling Service.

8. **Homes for Homeless Veterans.** The provision of accommodation and sustenance are achieved through our homes:

- a. Brú Chóstúim Athlone – 7 Bedrooms.
- b. Brú na Farraige Cobh - Opened 03/10/ 2021 – Cost €525,000 – 5 Bedrooms.
- c. Brú na bhFiann Smithfield Dublin – 35 Bedrooms.
- d. Brú Doire Feá Letterkenny - 7 Bedrooms.

9. Brú Uí Choileáin in Cork City is being planned leading to 60 bedrooms nationwide. Our residents contribute on a means basis towards their keep which includes all of the facilities that one would expect in a normal home. Most of our residents had extensive service in the Defence Forces; serving with distinction both at home and in various overseas missions with the United Nations. However, for one reason or another they now find themselves homeless and in need.



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9. Veteran Support Centres. ONE has developed a nationwide network of Veteran Support Centres to provide veterans with information, advice, someone to listen and somewhere to meet with former comrades. It is hoped that by providing early intervention, we can alleviate social stresses and significantly reduce homelessness among veterans. Veteran Support Centres staffed by volunteer members are now located in: Athlone; Athy; Casement Aerodrome; Cavan; Cathal Brugha Barracks (Dublin); Collins Barracks and Cobh (Cork); Curragh Camp; Donegal; Dundalk; Galway; Kilkenny; Limerick; McKee Bks (Dublin); and Wexford.

10. Veteran Counselling Service. ONE offers a counselling service and is there to listen and to provide veterans with direct access to a designated Veteran Support Team and ONE's Confidential Counselling Service. ONE has male and female counsellors on our team who are available to meet over the phone or in person. Veteran Support Officers (Counsellors) are located in

- a. Head Office in partnership with the Leopardstown Park Hospital Trust.
- b. Brú na bhFiann in partnership with HSE Dublin North Community Healthcare Area.
- c. Cork –Initial talks with HSE Cork Kerry Community Healthcare Area have taken place.

Strategic Plan

11. The ONE Strategic Plan – Building for the Future attached at **Annex A** - is reviewed annually by the Board of Directors. In the August 2021 review, the impact of COVID-19 continued to be a major factor. Each and every member of ONE faced personal challenges during the pandemic. Our organisation, in which our members are the vital component, was and will continue to be challenged. We can reasonably expect

- a. An increased requirement for accommodation in our veterans homes in the post COVID period.
- b. An increased requirement for advice, guidance and support for veterans.
- c. Challenges in re-opening our Branch and Veteran Support Centre network.
- d. Implications for the staff and residents in our Homes and Head Office as we transition from the significant necessary restrictions during the pandemic.
- e. Challenges with state funding in the post pandemic period.
- f. Similar to all charities, the inability to fundraise during the pandemic.



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12. The Plan has eight Strategic Goals as outlined below

STRATEGIC GOALS



Veterans' Policy

13. Veterans' Policy is a key Strategic Goal. ONE defines Veterans' Policy as a declaration of the Government's political activities, plans and intentions relating to veterans of the Defence Forces. It may be contained in a Programme for Government, White Paper or another appropriate medium. An embryonic Veterans' Policy was included in the White Paper on Defence 2015. There was also a commitment therein to further develop the supports available to veterans. ARCO, IUNVA and ONE made a detailed joint submission to the Minister for Defence in December 2018 which included

- a. Interface between veterans and the Department and the Defence Forces.
- b. Transition from Military to Civilian Life.
- c. Accreditation of Unique Military Skills.
- d. Pensions and Ancillary Support.
- e. Medical Treatment.
- f. Social Housing and
- g. Recognition of Military Service.

14. On examining the issues included above, it is immediately apparent that a Veterans' Policy requires a whole of government approach as many of the issues affecting veterans, such as health care and housing, do not fall within the remit of the Department of Defence. This is explicitly acknowledged in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the



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Department of Defence and ONE which states that the funding ONE receives from them "is only used in connection with the administrative overheads arising from its charitable work and is not used for the provision of services that are properly provided to citizens, and members of O.N.E., from other arms of the State."

15. While ONE will continue to advocate on the issues in Paragraph 13, this submission will outline three proposed areas for inclusion by Government in a Veterans' Policy namely: the creation of an Office of Veterans' Affairs; the requirement for research to underpin the Veterans' Policy; and the provision of policy imprimatur in the Veterans' Policy for the essential work ONE continues to undertake on behalf of veterans.

16. **Office of Veterans Affairs.** An Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA) is a common feature that governments put in place as the strategic delivery agency tasked with co-ordinating the achievement of the objectives of Veterans' Policy. The establishment of an OVA in Ireland was originally proposed to the Minister for Defence by ONE in December 2017. It was also included in the joint submission by ARCO, IUNVA and ONE in December 2018. It is recommended that the OVA would operate in a similar manner to the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) in the Department of Defence. The OEP is a joint Civil / Military Office which co-ordinates emergency planning at a national level. The OEP works with all relevant government departments and other key public authorities in order to ensure the best possible use of resources and compatibility across different emergency planning requirements. Establishing the OVA in a similar manner to the OEP would help ensure that the delivery of the Governments' Veterans' Policy was not solely within the purview of the Department of Defence but also included other relevant departments, authorities and agencies. The envisaged role of the OVA includes

- a. Facilitating and coordinating the delivery of a range of services to veterans.
- b. Providing opportunities for veterans to have their service acknowledged.
- c. Managing the Government's relationship with veterans and their representative organisations.
- d. Advising Government on veterans' issues.
- e. Co-ordinating with other departments and agencies on aspects of policy relating to veterans.

17. **Research.** Veterans' Policy should seek to address the needs of veterans in the twenty-first century. These needs are complex and varied and because we use the collective term veterans, there is a danger that these essential requirements are wrapped up into a nice neat parcel. Generalisation is dangerous because it takes complicated issues and turns them into easy superficial figures of speech. The needs of our veterans developed from difficult situations, and the circumstances in which some veterans now find themselves are both real and challenging. The evolution of Veterans' Policy should be underpinned by undertaking



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research on the impact of service and the needs of veterans. While ONE deals with issues on a daily basis, there is a clear lack of empirical evidence on the challenges affecting veterans due to their service in the Defence Forces. These include but are not limited to

- a. Family break up among veterans.
- b. The prevalence of homelessness in the veteran community and other housing issues.
- c. Extent and impact of PTSD.
- d. Substance misuse.
- e. The impact of institutionalisation and other issues impacting on the transition to civilian life.
- f. The differing impact of service on male veterans, female veterans, veterans of differing sexual orientation and veterans of differing ethnicity.
- g. Suicide.

18. Policy Imprimatur for ONE Veteran Support Services. The Programme for Government, which was agreed on 15 June 2020, provides policy imprimatur for ONE's nationwide network of Veteran Support Centres. This is warmly welcomed. ONE believes that a comprehensive Veterans' Policy is necessary to provide similar imprimatur for the other major areas of work ONE undertakes in support of veterans such as

- a. ONE's Homes for Homeless Veterans.
- b. ONE's Veteran Counselling Service.
- c. Pathway for end of life care.
- d. Basic multi-annual funding.

Conclusion

19. ONE receives assistance from many quarters in support of veterans of the Defence Forces. This has enabled the organisation to: open and sustain its current four homes; develop fifteen veterans support centres and thirty - seven branches nationwide; plan the delivery of additional homes; and put in place a range of supports for veterans. The sustainability of the aforementioned must be ensured and ONE believes that the facts we have created on the ground should be enshrined in a Government Veterans' Policy thereby ensuring continued support for veterans in need. This support would be strengthened by undertaking detailed research into areas affecting veterans and fortified by having a cross governmental agency tasked with co-ordinating the delivery of Veterans' Policy.

A recent awareness campaign can be found on sleepingflags.ie

Further information on ONE can be found on our website on <http://www.one-veterans.org/>



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