

## **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2032](#): ‘Improve the support available to injured soldiers and veterans in Scotland’, lodged by James Brebner**

### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

[PE2032](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the support provided by public bodies to injured soldiers and veterans in Scotland by:

- ensuring there are clear patient pathways for their injuries to be treated by appropriate consultants;
- establishing a veterans trauma network, similar to that which operates in England and Wales;
- ensuring all correspondence, raising concerns or making complaints about their treatment, from veterans to the Scottish Government, is acknowledged and responded to; and
- reviewing and seeking to update the way in which the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman handles complaints from veterans about health service.

Serving members of the Armed Forces ordinarily receive medical care through the [Defence Medical Services](#). The NHS provides care for veterans and non-mobilised reservists. In 2022, the Scottish Veterans’ Commissioner [published a report](#) exploring health and wellbeing support for former Armed Forces personnel who have transitioned back into civilian life. The report highlighted that although most veterans are well-supported when accessing healthcare, some experience difficulties when receiving health and social care. These challenges included barriers to accessing information about healthcare; difficulties in accessing the right care at the right time; lack of awareness of the needs of veterans among some healthcare professionals; and the need to protect specialist NHS services that support veterans.

### **Patient pathways for injured soldiers and veterans, and establishing a veterans’ trauma network**

The [Armed Forces Covenant](#), which has been signed by NHS Scotland and all of Scotland’s NHS Boards, states that veterans [should receive priority treatment](#) for health problems occurring as a direct result of their service, unless there is an emergency case, or a case requiring higher clinical priority.

Each NHS Board has an [Armed Forces and Veterans Champion](#), who is responsible for ensuring that these priority treatment guidelines are supported and applied.

In its [response to the petition](#) dated 17 July 2023, the Scottish Government stated that it is:

“working with colleagues across the NHS and the veteran's community to help develop a Scottish Veterans Treatment Pathway (SVTP). The Scottish Government has been working with the Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) in England, to understand the principles of, and the approach taken by, the VTN and how this could be applied to a similar service in Scotland. The intention of the SVTP is to support any veteran presenting with a service-related physical injury, which remains a cause for concern despite treatment, either previous or current. The proposed pathway aims to supplement and support existing service provision, and provide a dedicated pathway to explore treatment options and enhanced coordination of care where required.”

The minutes from [the May 2023 meeting](#) of the Scottish Government's Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans Health Joint Group's Strategic Oversight Group confirmed that the vision, process, and governance structure of the SVTP have been agreed by the relevant working group.

### **Correspondence, concerns, and complaints**

In its response to the petition, the Scottish Government stated that all correspondence received is logged centrally, and the Government aims to reply to such correspondence within 20 days of receipt. However, the response also noted that Scottish Ministers may signpost individual cases to relevant local support or complaints processes.

### **Scottish Public Services Ombudsman complaints**

The Scottish Government advised in its response to the petition that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is independent from healthcare providers and Ministers. As such, it is for the SPSO, rather than the Government, to comment on its processes for the handling of complaints from veterans, and any potential scope for review of these processes.

The SPSO [has produced guidance](#) detailing its process for investigating complaints related to NHS Scotland. This guidance does not currently make specific reference to the handling of complaints made by veterans.

### **Scottish Government actions**

On 5 August 2022, the Scottish Government published its [refreshed Action Plan](#) to inform Scotland's delivery of the UK-wide [Strategy for Our Veterans](#). The Action Plan made a series of commitments related to health and wellbeing, including further investment in specialist support services;

improving access to health services; and developing collaborative working relationships with key NHS, Local Authority, and other key partners.

In response to written question [S6W-13901](#) on 27 January 2023, the then-Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans, Keith Brown MSP, acknowledged that veterans may have particular health needs as a result of their military service. He confirmed that the Scottish Government works with key NHS partners to ensure that veterans are identified as a distinct group with specific needs within the healthcare system. He added that the Scottish Government has developed a training package for health and social care staff working in general practices, to help them understand the specific health needs with which veterans can present.

## Scottish Parliament actions

There has been no Scottish Parliament action concerning this topic to date.

**Sarah Swift**  
**Researcher**  
31 August 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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