

Sodexo report explores the lived experience challenges facing our Armed Forces today

2 years ago



As a nation, we have always celebrated our Armed Forces, but, with 7,000 more people leaving the military than joining last year, our Armed Forces are facing a recruitment and retention crisis. The lived experience – the experience of service personnel on the sites where they both live and work – plays a significant part in people's decision whether they want to join, or continue to serve.

To address these challenges Sodexo convened 21 leaders from across the military community, including the future lived experience lead for the Army, Brigadier James Cook, currently serving and retired officers and non-commissioned officers, industry experts, the Civil Service, the third sector, including the confederation of service charities, Cobseo Chair Sir Nick Pope, academia and beyond, to explore the challenges of the lived experience, and how we can address them.

Three themes were identified and discussed at a roundtable hosted by Sodexo earlier this year:

- Barriers between the armed forces and society: The armed forces need to better convey their purpose, their values, and why a typical person should view a career in the military as being worthwhile. It is only through closing the gap between the military and the society it protects, that recruitment and retention will improve.
- The changing expectations of serving personnel: Satisfaction with service life in general has fallen for the second year running, dropping to 42%. Much of a service person's life is within a military base, and therefore facilities play a crucial role in providing the setting for those expectations to be met.

- Improving the lived experience through external partnerships: With the increasing complexity of life, and changing expectations of a younger generation, the Armed Forces will need to work with local communities, and other external organisations, to meet expectations.

The insights shared from the roundtable have informed a white paper, [*The Future Lived Experience and the UK's Armed Forces in the 2030s*](#), which has been published this week as the country celebrates Armed Forces Week.

The white paper outlines the insights across three chapters covering the above topics in detail. These three concepts form a framework through which we can now identify the solutions which could be applied across the Defence estate to improve the lived experience, address falling recruitment and retention, and, ultimately, secure operational capability in the 2030s and beyond.

Lieutenant General Sir Nick Pope KCB CBE, Chair of COBSEO and Military Advisor to the Haythornthwaite Review said: "I was very pleased to be part of this important conversation, convened by Sodexo, examining how we can collectively improve the lived experience of personnel on UK Armed

Forces bases to help underpin retention and recruitment. I look forward to the further debate it generates because if we don't get our people system right, we face an increasing threat to the ongoing viability of our Armed Forces, and our ability to defend our nation."

Later on in the year, Sodexo plans to bring together a wider group of stakeholders to discuss these themes and explore others and help to influence the wider questions posed by this white paper.

Mark Baker, Chief Operating Officer Defence, Sodexo UK & Ireland adds: "We see it as a core part of our business to work with partners and wider stakeholders to do all that we can to improve the lived experience for our Armed Forces, and help deliver a standard that they expect, and of which we can be proud.

"This is a conversation that is only just beginning. We will continue to bring together key players, to understand the challenges, offer options and identify solutions. But what is clear already is that, without the right lived experience, we will really struggle to maintain a capable military force that's ready to face the challenges of the future."

For more than 30 years, Sodexo has supported the Armed Forces, delivering strong, effective operational capability, through the provision of excellent food and facilities management. It supports individuals, the community, and the environment at military sites across the UK and overseas, working with military leaders to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of personnel across all military services.