



THE ARMED SERVICES January 2011

1. The Armed Service

1.1 Young people under 18 may be in the armed forces as recruits or trainees, or may be dependants of a service family. The life of a service family differs in many respects from that of a family in civilian life, particularly for those stationed overseas, or on bases and garrisons in the UK. The services support the movement of the family in response to service commitments. The frequency and location of such moves make it essential that the service authorities are aware of any concerns regarding safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child from a military family. The armed forces are fully committed to co-operating with statutory and other agencies in supporting families in this situation, and have procedures to help safeguard and promote the welfare of children. In areas of high concentration of service families, the armed forces seek particularly to work alongside local authority children's social care, including through representation on LSCBs and at child protection conferences and reviews.

1.2 Looking after under-18s in the armed forces comes under the MoD's comprehensive welfare arrangements, which apply to all members of the armed forces. Commanding Officers are well aware of the particular welfare needs of younger recruits and trainees and, as stated above, are fully committed to co-operating with statutory and other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of under-18s. Local authority children's social care already has a responsibility to monitor the wellbeing of care leavers, and those joining the armed forces should have unrestricted access to local authority social care workers.

1.3 Local authorities have the statutory responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children of service families in the UK. All three services provide professional welfare support, including 'special to type' social work services to augment those provided by local authorities. In the Royal Navy (RN) this is provided by the Naval Personal and Family Service (NPFSS) and the Royal Marines Welfare Service; within the army this is provided by the Army Welfare Service (AWS); and in the Royal Air Force by the Soldiers Sailors Airmen and Families Association-Forces Help (SSAFA-FH). Further details of these services and contact numbers are given in Appendix 4.

1.4 When service families or civilians working with the armed forces are based overseas, the responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their children is vested with the MoD, who fund the British Forces Social Work Service (Overseas). This service is contracted to SSAFA-FH, who provide a fully qualified Social Work and Community Health service in major overseas locations (for example, in Germany and Cyprus). Instructions for the protection of children overseas, which reflect the principles of the Children Act 2004 and the philosophy of inter-agency cooperation, are issued by the MoD as a Joint Service Publication (JSP) 834 *Safeguarding Children*. Larger overseas commands issue local child protection procedures, hold a Command list of children who are the subject of a child protection plan and have a Command Safeguarding Children Board, which operates in a similar way to those set up under this guidance, in upholding standards and making sure that best practice is reflected in procedures and observed in practice.

2. Movement of children between the United Kingdom and Overseas

2.1 Local authorities should ensure that SSAFA-FH, the British Forces Social Work Service (Overseas), or the NPFS for RN families is made aware of any service child who is the subject of a child protection plan and whose family is about to move overseas. In the interests of the child, SSAFA-FH, the British Forces Social Work Service (Overseas) or NPFS can confirm that appropriate resources exist in the proposed location to meet identified needs. Full documentation should be provided and forwarded to the relevant overseas command. All referrals should be made to the Director of Social Work, HQ SSAFA FH or Area Officer, NPFS (East) as appropriate, at the addresses given in Appendix 4. Comprehensive reciprocal arrangements exist for the referral of child protection cases to appropriate UK authorities, relating to the temporary or permanent relocation of such children to the UK from overseas.

3. United States Forces stationed in the United Kingdom

3.1 Each local authority with a United States (US) base in its area should establish liaison arrangements with the base commander and relevant staff. The requirements of English child welfare legislation should be explained clearly to the US authorities, so that local authorities can fulfil their statutory duties.

4. Enquiries about children of ex-service families

4.1 Where a local authority believes that a child who is the subject of current child protection processes is from an ex-service family, NPFS, AWS or SSAFA-FH can be contacted to establish whether there is existing information that might help with enquiries. Such enquiries should be addressed to NPFS, AWS or the Director of Social Work, SSAFA-FH, at the address given in Appendix 4.