

Transformative new childcare support will save Defence families up to £6000 a year

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A new Defence scheme to transform support for forces families with young children will be rolled out across the UK from September 2026.

A new Defence scheme to transform support for forces families with young children will be rolled out across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from September 2026, the Defence Secretary has announced today.

This major boost for UK Armed Forces families will save forces families living in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland up to £6,000 per year for each child and will help with the cost of living as they serve to protect the nation.

It will be delivered through the Ministry of Defence's existing Early Years childcare reimbursement scheme and will ensure that eligible working UK Armed Forces families receive the same Government funded childcare support as forces families in England.

This government promised to renew the nation's contract with those who serve, and this support is another major step to deliver on that pledge. Childcare is cited as one of several factors affecting Armed Forces retention and morale and this government is on a mission to fix the recruitment crisis. The announcement was made by Defence Secretary John Healey MP on a visit to meet families at Dreghorn Barracks, Edinburgh.

The early years childcare offer currently differs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to that available to UK Armed Forces families in England and overseas. Today the government is taking action to change that by providing a reimbursement of childcare costs for eligible working UK Armed Forces families with children aged 9 months until they reach 3 years old in Scotland and Wales, and from 9 months to 4 years in Northern Ireland.

The scheme recognises the commitment and uniqueness of service life and the dedication of service families who can be assigned anywhere in the UK or overseas. This government is delivering on the commitment to support service families wherever they live and work.

Defence Secretary John Healey MP said:

Our Armed Forces families are at the heart of our nation's security. With demands on defence rising, from the conflict in the Middle East to growing Russian aggression, we are asking more of our military, and it is right that we continue to step up our support for them.

This transformative offer will ensure more military families get the childcare support they need, no matter where they are posted.

We are making good on our promise to Armed Forces families - supporting them as they support our dedicated military personnel defending the UK and our allies. Our message to the Armed Forces community is clear: this government is on your side.

This is part of the wider support that MOD has delivered to service families since July 2024, including a new housing strategy which will make homes fit for heroes, the biggest pay rise in 20 years and putting the Armed Forces Covenant into law through the Armed Forces Bill introduced this year.

Through the new scheme, MOD will reimburse the difference in early years childcare costs for eligible working families. Aimed at working families, where both parents are employed and meet the income thresholds required to access an active Tax-Free Childcare account, the scheme could save forces families thousands.

Hundreds of families in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to be eligible for the scheme, which follows feedback from forces families on the cost of childcare.

The scheme will be rolled out from September 2026, giving eligible families time to prepare and explore suitable childcare options.

MOD is committed to supporting forces families no matter where they live. Defence will continue to work closely with the devolved governments, and further details will be set out for eligible families in the coming months.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transformational-new-childcare-support-will-save-defence-families-up-to-6000-a-year>