

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to talk through our highlights from 2025, and what's coming up in 2026.

This year, we launched *Our Strategy to 2035*, which sets out our vision, mission, values, and the outcomes we aim to deliver for the Armed Forces community over the next decade. The strategy responds to ongoing changes both in the external landscape and within our own community.

Changes include a marked decrease in the Second World War generation, uncertainty around how the UK Armed Forces might be deployed over the next decade, and the increasing number of working-age veterans and their families coming to us for support. These shifts require us to adapt so that we can remain relevant and fit for purpose.

We engaged widely across a variety of groups as we developed our strategy including with members through surveys, with County Chairs at their conferences, and with Membership Council and Trustees as well as bringing in an external challenge panel who were able to challenge some of our thinking as the strategy evolved. As you can see on *Our Strategy to 2035* one pager, available here today, our vision is to bring together society to recognise, remember, and support the Armed Forces community. This is supported by our mission, strategic outcomes, enablers and values.

The strategy is built on three core pillars, or 'outcomes': *Connect, Remember and Support*, which each have long-term goals and shorter one-to-three-year goals to help us plan and deliver work against them.

The long term goals are set out on the one page. Together, they focus on strengthening the connections we make across communities and wider society, evolving Remembrance to continue to bring society together in recognising the contribution of the Armed Forces community, and modernising our services to meet people's needs today and into the future.

But none of that work will be achievable without the people and things to make it happen, what we refer to as our 'enablers', and these are categorised into three areas - people, assets, and capabilities. Our people are all of us in this room, our members, our volunteers, and our employees, all of whom will make a valuable contribution to achieving the strategic outcomes. Our assets include our properties, data and technology, finances, and of course our trusted and well-known brand.

And our capabilities are our funds, skills and processes, and our resources, all of which are needed to make sure we operate effectively and efficiently in delivering the outcomes we all want for our Armed Forces community.

It's also important we have a shared understanding in how we want to go about this work and behave towards one another, and that's where our values come in. We built on existing work that had already taken place across the Legion to develop our values and we also engaged widely on their development. We wanted to ensure we had values that were recognisable and relevant for all our people. We have four values that we ask

all our people to be guided by, and these are; stand together, be respectful, take pride, and embrace change. Combined, these values focus us on comradeship and connections, ensure we act with empathy, fairness, and integrity, help us focus our passion in the right way, and ask us to look ahead and be adaptable to change.

Since May, we have introduced the strategy across the organisation and beyond, building understanding among members, colleagues, volunteers and external partners about what it means and how it will shape our work in the years ahead.

In another activity this year, we strengthened the leadership of the Membership by launching the Aspire Leadership Programme, which I'm pleased to say has been extremely well received, with a strong uptake.

At Annual Conference, we introduced the Sir Clive Johnstone Award, created in memory of our former National President who sadly passed away in 2024. The award celebrates individuals who demonstrate unity and bring people together, and the first recipient was Lieutenant Commander Steve Cass of the Royal Navy, from the Cosham Branch.

And, to support Our Strategy to 2035, we have been assessing our branch property assets to explore how we can best use our spaces. We are also improving online access, making it easier for members to connect with what they need.

In the last year, the RBL provided direct support to nearly 20,000 households across the Armed Forces community.

Our members continued to make a real difference. Branch Community Support volunteers carried out more than a thousand home visits, over 160 hospital visits, and almost three and a half thousand check-in calls.

Our Benefits, Debt and Money Advice team achieved its strongest results to date, securing more than £11 million for households.

We also expanded our War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme service to include 'first-stage' applicants. This meant people were able to access compensation more quickly, and the number of households we supported doubled to more than 1,400.

Through this work, we've helped beneficiaries to claim nearly £14 million. Our campaigning made important progress too. We helped secure the extension of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, which will be expanded to cover a wide range of public services. This will form part of the Armed Forces Bill in 2026. More than 50 councils have now changed policy following our 'Credit Their Service' campaign, calling for military compensation to no longer be counted in means-tested benefit assessments. Our Care Homes continue to lead the sector, with customer satisfaction at 97%, and across all our services, satisfaction remains strong, with 85% of households saying they would recommend RBL to a loved one.

In February, our Recovery Service proudly led and supported Team UK at the 2025 Invictus Games in Vancouver and Whistler. 62 competitors took part in everything from alpine skiing to wheelchair rugby, bringing home 38 medals.

We are already preparing for the 2027 Invictus Games in Birmingham. Counties, districts, and branches can play a direct part by sponsoring competitors for £26,500 each. These funds will help our Recovery Team support that individual and their family as they train for and attend the Games. County Chairs now have a full information pack available. [*Hertfordshire County has already pledged to support an Invictus Games athlete for the 2027 games*].

2025 was also a significant year for Remembrance, as we marked the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. In May, we supported 30 veterans to attend Victory in Europe celebrations in central London and we hosted our own tea party and service of Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum for 40 veterans. We marked Victory over Japan in August, by holding a commemorative event at the Arboretum, which was broadcast live on BBC One, and where we hosted 33 Second World War veterans, alongside our Patron, His Majesty The King, and Her Majesty The Queen.

Over £120,000 was awarded in VE and VJ Day 80 grants to the membership which enabled 194 branches and clubs to organise commemorative activity.

In October, the National Memorial Arboretum hosted the unveiling of a new memorial dedicated to the LGBT + people who have served and continue to serve in the Armed Forces.

In November, we hosted our annual Festival of Remembrance, paying tribute to the Second World War generation, bereaved military children, and marking 25 years since the lifting of the service ban for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans personnel. Over 10,000 people took part in the Veterans March Past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday, and the Armistice Day service at the National Memorial Arboretum was attended by Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales. Over two hundred and twenty thousand school children tuned into our Remembrance Assembly on Armistice Day, and we were proud to have the support of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, who recorded a special video message.

In continued efforts to recognise modern conflicts, on the 14th of December, we hosted a Ceremony of Remembrance at the Arboretum to remember the 30th anniversary of the end of the Bosnian War, attended by 400 veterans and families.

Also this year, we launched the Forgotten Army touring exhibition, honouring the 2.5 million soldiers of the South Asian Army who served in the First and Second World Wars. The exhibition was displayed at Liverpool John Moores University during Remembrance and will now be at the National Memorial Arboretum until March, before touring across the UK.

There have been fantastic efforts once again from our 54,000 members, volunteers, and colleagues for this year's Poppy Appeal.

We had an incredibly successful London Poppy Day raising £1.4 million, beating our £1.2 million target and raising 14% more than last year.

The total raised for the previous year's Poppy Appeal in 2024 was £51.4 million, providing vital funds for our work. As you know, it takes some time to count the cash and get it banked but thanks to more support from our branches, volunteers, and collectors, early indications for our 2025 Poppy Appeal are looking strong, and we're looking forward to announcing our 2025 total towards the end of March. Please pass on our sincere thanks to all those in your branches and local communities who supported this year's Appeal.

As we look ahead to the next year, we're focused on *Our Strategy to 2035*, and now putting the right plans in place to deliver the strategy's short-term goals over the next one to three years. And in addition, bringing our new values to life in everything we do. One of the commitments in our strategy is to strengthen and grow our membership. Increasing the number of members will boost camaraderie across our Armed Forces community and beyond, help the Membership continue to provide an invaluable contribution to RBL and maintain a strong local presence across the UK and overseas; branches need to do their bit to help.

Collaboration is underway across the charity to develop our Youth Plan. This work is rooted in listening and involving young people in decisions about how they would like to connect with RBL. Branch Community Support will continue to grow, and we want every branch to be part of this. Expanding Branch Community Support will help us reach more people in more places.

In May, we will mark the 15th anniversary of the end of Operation Telic, when British forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq, which will be commemorated with an event at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Looking ahead to the Poppy Appeal 2026 we are aiming to:

- continue to improve the volunteer experience through training, communications and streamlined processes,
- review product allocation to get the right merchandise to the right places,
- and improve our cash handling process, looking at more counting centres and other options for pick-ups from Volunteers.

Our Annual Conference 2026 will take place in Brighton from 8th-10th May. The event will be available to attend in person and join online, and now with the opportunity for those on line to speak as part of conference. This format means more members can take part, and we look forward to seeing many of you there.

Finally, I would like to say a tremendous thank you to all of you for being here today, and for your continued commitment and support to the RBL.

Thank you for listening.