



Research into veterans living in South Gloucestershire

SUMMER 2024

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Foreword

South Gloucestershire Council is a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant, and we work hard to ensure conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces Community across our work.

We are proud to fund the South Gloucestershire Veterans Support Service and to work closely with our colleagues across the South West so that together we support the Covenant in a coherent manner.

We take our responsibilities under the Armed Forces Covenant Duty seriously and produce an annual report to communicate our work and progress, and to encourage residents to 'have a say' and influence our work so that we continually develop.

As a result of feedback from residents and our work with partners, we know that key areas we need to focus our attention to are health & wellbeing (including social care), housing, education, and employment.

Our Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan seeks to ensure our work delivers in these areas and beyond and, as a large employer ourselves, we are working to progress through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme as part of demonstrating our commitment.

We hope that this briefing note will provide valuable information to organisations, groups and residents across South Gloucestershire and influence enhanced recognition and work so that the needs of those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

What the Census has told us about the veteran community in South Gloucestershire

The 2021 Census in England and Wales was the first to ask people if they had previously served in the UK armed forces. Residents aged 16 years and over were asked whether they had previously served in the regular or reserve UK armed forces, or both.

The ONS¹ defines a veteran as somebody who has previously served in the UK armed forces for at least one day. This includes those who have served in the regular and reserve Armed Forces, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.

The South West was the region within England with the highest proportion of veterans (5.6% of the total aged 16 years and over, or 265,000 people).

Important note on the data: The Census provides information relating to people who had previously served and does not provide information concerning currently serving personnel. The Armed Forces Covenant Duty is wider than this as it covers the Armed Forces Community - **Regular Personnel, Reservists, Veterans, families of these and the bereaved.**

In South Gloucestershire, the number of veterans stood at 9,498, which represents 4% of the total population aged 16 years and over. 73.4% of veterans (6,970) had previously served in the **regular forces**, 22.4% (2,124) in the **reserve forces**, and 4.3% (404) in **both**.

There were 7,068 households with at least one veteran (6% of the total).

The number of veterans as a proportion of the total population in South Gloucestershire was greater than that of Bath and North East Somerset (3.6%), Bristol (2.4%) and England & Wales (3.8%), but lower than in North Somerset (5.3%).

1 UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Population aged 16 years & over who had previously served in the UK armed forces 2021, WoE local authorities

	Previously served in regular UK armed forces		Previously served in reserve UK armed forces		Previously served in both regular and reserve UK armed forces		Has previously served in any UK armed forces (total)	
South Gloucestershire	6,970	2.9%	2,124	0.9%	404	0.2%	9,498	4.0%
North Somerset	7,426	4.2%	1,593	0.9%	424	0.2%	9,443	5.3%
Bath & NE Somerset	4,341	2.7%	1,274	0.8%	243	0.2%	5,858	3.6%
Bristol	6,450	1.7%	2,623	0.7%	418	0.1%	9,491	2.4%
England & Wales	1,413,296	2.9%	360,770	0.7%	79,046	0.2%	1,853,112	3.8%

More locally, the wards in South Gloucestershire with the most veterans in relation to their total population are Chipping Sodbury & Cotswold Edge (5.1% of the total population aged 16+ are veterans), Yate Central (5.1%), and Boyd Valley (4.9%). For the veteran population figure for each ward, see appendix 1.

Overall, the Census provides useful insight into our veteran community on areas of demography, health, housing, employment, and education, which aids service delivery for the Armed Forces Community.

We also combine the Census with service-level data and Armed Forces Community feedback to understand issues such as over and under representation and assess how we can better help and support them and others in the future.

Throughout this briefing note, the veteran population encompasses usual residents aged 16 years and over who have served in the UK armed forces. The non-veteran population refers to usual residents in South Gloucestershire aged 16 years and over who have not previously served or are still currently serving in the UK armed forces.

The veteran population differs in structure to the non-veteran population as they are older and differ in relation to sex. These factors interact with other personal characteristics, i.e. legal partnership status, health, tenure, religion and so forth. Caution should therefore be taken when interpreting some results as certain differences may not be attributable to the status of having served in the UK armed forces.

The ONS uses adjusted estimates for the **non-veteran population** which show what difference would exist between veterans and non-veterans if the two populations had the same age, sex and regional distribution.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR VETERAN POPULATION

- **Veterans are more likely to be older and male in comparison to non-veterans**, with 55% (5,187 people) being aged 65 years and over.
- **97%** (9,188) of veterans identify as White British, with only 2% (189) from an ethnic minority background.
- **64.5%** (6,126) of veterans state a religion or belief, with 63% (6,001) reporting being Christian.
- **57.5%** (5,461) of veterans are economically inactive, although 88.5% (4,833) of economically inactive veterans are aged 65 years and over.
- **83.1%** (3,583) of working aged veterans (16-64) are in employment.
- **54.0%** (1,934) of working aged veterans are in managerial, professional, or technical occupations. 24.2% (867) are in skilled trades or process, plant and machine operative occupations.
- **81.1%** (7,703) of veterans have at least one qualification, and 28.8% (2,733) hold a level 4 qualification of above.

ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- **30.6%** (2,903) of veterans are disabled under the Equality Act and 34.2% (3,250) self-reported as being in 'not good health'.
- **82.1%** (5,805) of veterans own a house outright or with a mortgage, although 56% (5,180) of all households with one or more veteran is deprived in at least one dimension (the Census measures deprivation in four dimensions: education, health and disability, and household overcrowding).
- **28.4%** (2,629) of veteran households are single family households where all residents are aged 66 years or older.

2023/24 was the third year of the South Gloucestershire Veterans Support Service. 83 veterans were supported by the Service, representing an increase of 54% on year one.

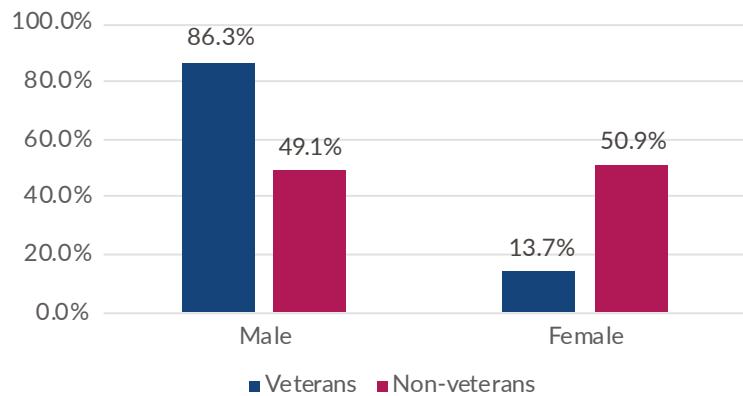
- **Health and housing** are the two most common areas veterans are seeking support for.

- We are seeing high numbers of disabled veterans seeking support, with mental health conditions being the most prevalent impairment type.

DEMOGRAPHY

Sex of veterans and non-veterans

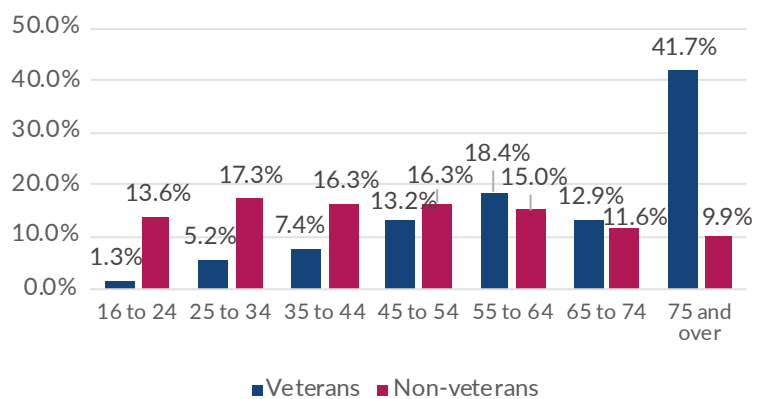
Similar to trends across the country, the structure of the veteran population in South Gloucestershire differed substantially to the non-veteran population in terms of age and sex; veterans are far more likely to be older and male.



The actual ratio of males: females is 86:14 among veterans and 49:51 among non-veterans.

Age of veterans and non-veterans

In terms of age, the veteran population is highly skewed towards older groups (in particular, those aged 65 years and over), whilst there is a far smaller proportion of middle-aged and young veterans. Almost 55% of all veterans are aged 65 years or older, which is 33 percentage points greater than the figure for non-veterans. In contrast, only 6.5% of veterans are aged between 16 and 34 in comparison to 30.9% of non-veterans.



The following charts show adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, which the ONS² uses to show what difference would exist between veterans and non-veterans if the two populations had the same age, sex and regional distribution.

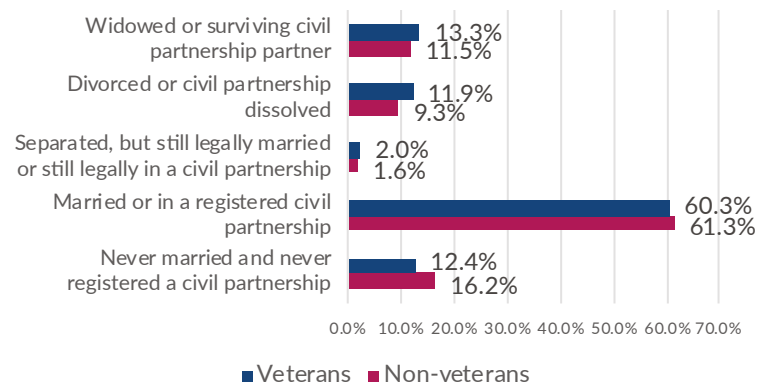
Veterans were more likely to report being married compared with the non-veteran population (60.3% compared with 47.3%). They were also more likely to report being widowed or surviving a civil partnership partner than non-veterans (13.3% compared with 5.5%).

As partnership status is often related to age, the ONS have provided adjusted estimates for the legal partnership status of the non-veteran population to show what difference would exist between veterans and non-veterans if the two populations had the same age, sex and regional distribution.

When we adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population to show what, if any, difference would exist between veterans and non-veterans if the two populations had the same age and sex distribution, some small differences still remain, though are not as stark.

Marital status of veterans and non-veterans (adjusted)

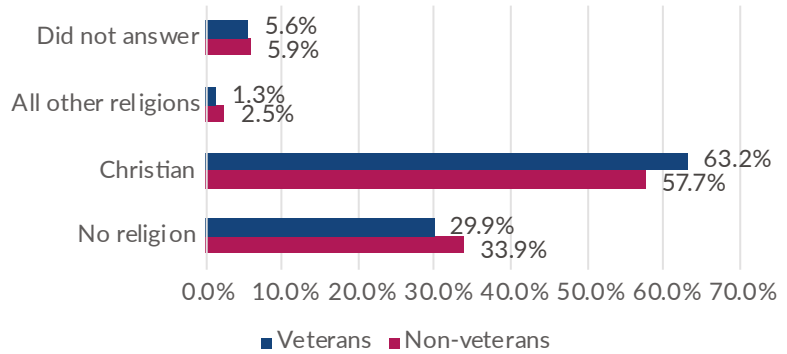
Veterans were less likely to be never married and never registered in a civil partnership than non-veterans (12.4% compared with 16.2%). Veterans were still more likely to be widowed or surviving civil partnership partner than non-veterans (13.3% compared with 11.5%).



However, veterans were no longer more likely to be married or in a registered civil partnership than non-veterans, suggesting differences in the non-adjusted proportions can be accounted for by the age and sex of the veteran population.

Religion of veterans and non-veterans (adjusted)

A greater proportion of veterans described themselves as Christian than non-veterans (63.2% compared with 46.1%). A smaller proportion of veterans reported a religious belief other than Christian (1.3% compared with 3.7% for non-veterans). Veterans were also far less likely to state that they do not have a religion (29.9% compared with 44.4% of non-veterans).

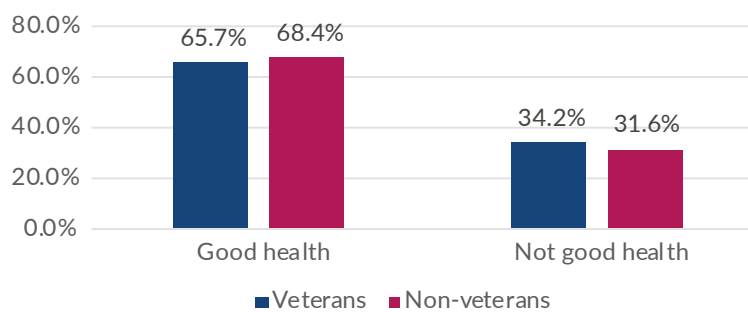


After adjustments, differences remain, though are smaller. Veterans were more likely to report being Christian than non-veterans (63.2% compared with 57.7%). They were less likely to report following any other religious belief (1.3% of veterans compared with 2.5% of non-veterans). In addition, veterans were less likely to report following no religion (29.9% compared with 33.9% of non-veterans).

The adjusted figures suggest differences in the proportion of veterans identifying as Christian compared with non-veterans, and the proportion with no religion, cannot be accounted for by the age and sex of the veteran population.

General health of veterans and non-veterans (adjusted)

A smaller proportion of veterans reported being in 'good health' than non-veterans (65.7% of veterans compared with 81.5% of non-veterans). A significantly greater proportion of veterans reported being in 'not good health' (34.2% compared with 18.5% of non-veterans).



After we adjusted figures for the non-veteran group, the differences in general health are still apparent but much smaller. 65.7% of veterans reported being in 'good health' compared with 68.4% of non-veterans. In contrast, 34.2% of veterans reported being in 'not good health', compared with 31.6 of non-veterans.

The adjusted figures suggest the differences in the proportion of veterans identifying as being in 'not good health' compared with non-veterans cannot be accounted for by the age and sex of the veteran population.

Our data on the usage of support services for veterans

Whilst the Census has focused on physical health, mental health remains an area of concern with veterans often facing issues that can be quite specific, relating to areas such as trauma, isolation, and others. We have collated user data on the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service to record the demographics of veterans who have approached us. Comparing these to the Census helps us identify any groups that are highly represented as in need of support.

Physical and mental health issues remain one of the leading causes for veterans to seek support from South Gloucestershire Council and, alongside the data from the Census, is exemplified by the following case study of an individual that approached our veteran support project.

CASE STUDY 1 IMPROVING WELLBEING WITH SIGNPOSTING AND GRANT-FUNDING.

The individual that approached for support is a former British military personnel who resides in the South Gloucestershire area and has suffered with physical and mental health issues since their transition from the armed forces.

This has resulted in the breakdown of their family situation and the accrual of significant priority debt, which has led to a precipitous domestic situation.

A caseworker was allocated to provide support for the client and has subsequently assisted them with accessing a variety of support services and signposting the client to retraining opportunities, which are provided for veterans by the local authority.

The caseworker facilitated access to significant grant funding for the client, which has helped pool public transport travel passes to facilitate a return to employment, white goods for the domestic environment, specialist medical equipment to ameliorate a chronic medical condition and essential IT equipment to aid retraining. In addition, grant funding has helped write down the client's priority debt and has allowed them to benefit from a fresh start in life.

2023/24 was the third year of the South Gloucestershire Veterans Support Service. 83 veterans were supported by the Service, representing an increase of 54% on year one.

- 103 telephone calls logged, an increase of 56% on year one.
- 36 virtual 1:1 meetings have been held, mirroring year one activities.
- 47 face-to-face meetings have been held, which is an increase of 95% on year one.
- 30 Peer support group sessions have been held, an increase of 233% on year one.
- 23 Veterans have been signposted to volunteering opportunities, an increase of 109% on year one.

The two most common areas veterans are seeking support for are health and housing, with issues such as homelessness, mental health and isolation frequently coming up. The following case study from a support user who experienced homelessness since leaving the Armed Forces.

CASE STUDY 2

PROVIDING SUPPORT TO AMELIORATE HOMELESSNESS.

The service user is a veteran who has struggled significantly since leaving the armed forces. They have recently suffered a loss of their domestic situation, as well as a loss of contact with their children. These have contributed to periods of homelessness and the loss of employment.

A caseworker was allocated to provide immediate assistance and ameliorate the situation, which involved the provision of emergency grocery funding, as well as helping the user secure a housing association apartment. They worked in tandem with other military aid charities to secure funding for essential white goods and carpeting for the veteran's new home.

Following support, the veteran is now fully rebuilding their life and is confident they will soon be able to regain contact with their estranged family and return to employment.

Our service level data shows we are seeing an increasing number of service users approaching us for support with a mental health condition. In response to this, the council will engage with the Armed Forces Community and the Veteran's Support Service around this topic with the intention of identifying actions which will address needs. The following case study exemplifies the support received by a disabled individual who sought help to get involved in their local community and help other veterans.

CASE STUDY 3

FACILITATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO SUPPORT WELLBEING.

The service user is a veteran and pensioner with mobility challenges. He had volunteered on several occasions for another veteran organisation however, at some point, he was asked to step down and was not given any reason for their decision.

We engaged with the veteran on many occasions, both face-to-face and a home visit. He had the passion to get involve in veterans' activities, so we invited him to one of our drop-in centres where he decided to volunteer for AssistPlus. We also reached out to the veteran's organisation which our service user had previously engaged with to understand the situation and the reason behind their decision.

The result of the support was improved well-being for the individual. Continued engagement, including follow-ups, were facilitated and the overall support offered helped them to see there is a like-minded community of veterans who understand him.

The Armed Forces Covenant in South Gloucestershire

The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011. South Gloucestershire Council is a signatory to the Covenant and has been for many years. The Covenant sets out the relationship between the nation, the government and the Armed Forces. It recognises that the whole nation has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces and their families, and it establishes how they should expect to be treated. It considers the Armed Forces Community to include Regular Personnel, Reservists, Veterans, families of these and the bereaved.

In November 2022, The Armed Forces Covenant Duty came into force. This is a **legal obligation on public bodies** to 'have due regard' to the principles of the Covenant. It requires decisions about the development and delivery of services in the areas of **housing, healthcare, and education**, to be made with **conscious consideration** of the needs of the Armed Forces Community. The council's approach goes beyond the minimum statutory requirement in that we have also committed to ensuring we are proactive in meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community in the area of **employment**. The council's Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan for 2023/25 (shown in the latest **Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report**) commits the council as an employer to work towards the **Defence Employer Recognition Scheme** to lead by example across South Gloucestershire.

South Gloucestershire Council is an active member of **Forces Connect South West**³ which is a local authority initiative supporting the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant to the military community across the South West of England through effective partnerships. Forces Connect South West brings together public authority bodies, the MOD, military charities, support agencies and businesses to develop effective relationships and support of the Covenant in a coherent manner. Forces Connect South West plays a lead role in developing and implementing the South West Armed Forces Covenant Strategy and South Gloucestershire Council has led on the 'Health & Wellbeing' element of the South West Strategy.

The council hosts a bi-annual meeting of the **Armed Forces Covenant Working Group** for South Gloucestershire, which brings together political leadership, council officers, wider public sector partners and representatives of voluntary sector, and veterans' services organisations.

3 <https://www.forcesconnectsouthwest.org.uk/>

The meeting is an information sharing forum that supports joint working and ensures the Armed Forces Covenant has a high priority in the work of the council. For many years one of the bi-annual meetings has coincided with a flag raising ceremony organised by the Royal British Legion to mark Armed Forces Day.

Internally, South Gloucestershire Council runs its own **Armed Forces Covenant Officer Group** bringing together the areas of education, public health, housing, and employment to ensure effective delivery of the Covenant. The Group runs a [webpage](#) as part of the main South Gloucestershire Council website where a range of information is available.

In February 2021, the council commenced funding a support service for veterans known as the South Gloucestershire Veteran Support Service (VSS). Assistplus⁴ and Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) Bristol and South Gloucestershire⁵ are jointly commissioned to work in partnership to provide this service. Key to this is their involvement at a strategic level, providing feedback on experiences and information from the Armed Forces Community when accessing Council services to provide direct challenge and support to the continuous improvement of council services.

Key issues facing veterans in the UK include: mental health (including PTSD, depression and adjustment disorders), physical health, alcohol misuse, unemployment and housing needs.

Service families often face additional pressures on family life resulting from separation from loved ones due to deployment on exercises and operations. They also tend to be more mobile than families in the general population, moving every two years, with moves sometimes unplanned and at short notice. This can lead to disrupted health and social care treatment for the partners of service personnel and their children of all ages, who may also face changes in education.

The 2018 Royal British Legion report⁶ on loneliness and social isolation found:

- 1 in 4 of survey respondents indicated that they feel lonely and socially isolated 'Always' or 'Often'.
- Almost 70% agreed that loneliness and social isolation are issues in the Armed Forces community.
- Moving to a new area was the most common cause of social isolation amongst survey respondents.

4 <https://www.assistplus.org.uk/>

5 <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/bristol-south-gloucestershire>

6 https://storage.rblcdn.co.uk/sitefinity/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/social_isolation_report_full.pdf?sfvrsn=1212fbbe_0

- Exiting the Armed Forces was the most common cause of both loneliness and social isolation.

Findings from this research suggest that some elements of Forces' lifestyle can increase vulnerability to loneliness and social isolation. These include increased volume of transitions in the Forces, a culture of self-reliance and avoidance of 'weakness', long periods of separation from partner and family, impact of injury and/or sudden discharge on career and family.

Crucial to the success of our Armed Forces is the Ministry of Defence, including one of its headquarters in Filton, which has been operating there since 1993. Today, around 8,500 staff work at MoD Abbey Wood, many of whom residing in the local area, and the establishment has become one of the region's biggest employers.

Each year, staff deliver a programme of work worth over £10 billion, delivering in excess of 80% of the MOD's largest and most complex equipment projects and supporting more than 88,000 jobs across the globe. The civil servants and military colleagues who have worked at the Filton site have provided our military with everything from boots to fighter jets over the years and have continually innovated to ensure they maintain the edge on the battlefield. The HQ has won awards such as Green Building of the Year and Best Out of Town Building and was the second in the RICS Efficient Building Award⁷.

NEXT STEPS

Following this document, we hope to continue to build upon our existing knowledge of the Armed Forces Community and share what we have learnt with internal managers and officers, external partners, and residents.

In conjunction with our equalities officer, the Insight and Engagement team is working on further research reports and documents covering diverse groups in line with the Council's equalities commitments in the future to capture their characteristics and lived experiences. These are set to include work on ethnic diversity and aging well, but may extend to further areas.

USEFUL SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Armed Forces Covenant (national website)

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk>

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust

<https://covenantfund.org.uk>

Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>

SSAFA

<https://www.ssafa.org.uk>

AssistPlus

<https://www.assistplus.org.uk>

Forces Connect South West

<https://www.forcesconnectsouthwest.org.uk>

South Gloucestershire Council Armed Forces Community webpages

<https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/support-for-armed-forces>

CONTACT INFORMATION

South Gloucestershire Veteran's Support Service

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SAFFA)

Bristol & South Gloucestershire Branch

☎ 0204 566 9131

✉ southwest.region@ssafa.org.uk

🌐 www.ssafa.org.uk

Assistplus

☎ 0800 6785618

✉ info@assistplus.org.uk

🌐 www.assistplus.org.uk

Contact South Gloucestershire Council about this Briefing Note

Insights and Engagement Team

✉ research@southglos.gov.uk

Equalities Team

✉ equalities@southglos.gov.uk

Council contact details

☎ 01454 868009

☎ 07950 080111

🌐 www.southglos.gov.uk

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

This table shows the number of veterans as a proportion of the total ward populations of South Gloucestershire, sorted by highest to lowest percentage.

Ward	Percentage	Number
Chipping Sodbury & Cotswold Edge	5.1%	429
Yate Central	5.1%	385
Boyd Valley	4.9%	380
Charfield	4.8%	213
Pilning & Severn Beach	4.7%	191
Thornbury	4.7%	546
Patchway Coniston	4.6%	195
Winterbourne	4.6%	289
Frampton Cotterell	4.5%	495
Severn Vale	4.3%	344
Yate North	4.3%	432
Bradley Stoke North	4.2%	376
Dodington	4.2%	328
Frenchay & Downend	4.1%	463
Longwell Green	4.1%	338
Bitton & Oldland Common	4.0%	308
Hanham	3.9%	418
Staple Hill & Mangotsfield	3.9%	474
Stoke Gifford	3.8%	439
Emersons Green	3.7%	486
Bradley Stoke South	3.7%	286
New Cheltenham	3.5%	253
Parkwall & Warmley	3.5%	273
Woodstock	3.5%	293
Kingswood	3.3%	245
Filton	3.0%	293
Charlton & Cribbs	2.8%	199
Stoke Park & Cheswick	1.8%	121

