



BRIEFING PAPER

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The Armed Forces Covenant and status in law

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Summary

The next five yearly Armed Forces Bill is due in 2021. The Government has said it will use the Bill to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law.¹

The Armed Forces Covenant is a statement of the moral obligation which exists between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. It was published in May 2011 and its core principles were enshrined in law, for the first time, in the *Armed Forces Act 2011*. The Government is required by the Act to produce an [annual report](#) on the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant does not create legally enforceable rights for service or former service personnel.

The Government has given little information about its proposals, except to say that it is their intention to make it a legal duty for specified bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant. The Covenant's core areas are healthcare, housing and education.

This paper explains what the Covenant is, its current status in law and the Government's proposals. The paper then looks at the debate on the Covenant during the Armed Forces Bill 2011.

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¹ [HC Deb 11 November 2020 c794](#)

1. The Armed Forces Covenant

The Government published the first tri-service [Armed Forces Covenant](#) on 16 May 2011.² It took the form of two documents:

- [The Armed Forces Covenant](#) – which sets out, in one short statement, the principles of the Covenant, and provides guidance on what the Government believes it means in today's society.
- [The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow](#) – which sets out the practical measures that the Government is taking to support the Covenant. That paper brings together both the commitments that have already been made, with measures to be implemented in the future.

The Covenant articulates the view that the nation has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces Community in return for the sacrifices they make. In return, those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. It also states special consideration is appropriate in some cases, particularly for those who have been injured or bereaved.

Those principles were enshrined in law in the [Armed Forces Act 2011](#) (section 2, which inserted section 343A in the *Armed Forces Act 2006*). The Act places a statutory requirement on the Secretary of State for Defence to provide an annual Armed Forces Covenant report to Parliament each year. In preparing that report, the Defence Secretary must have particular regard to:

- (a) the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces;
- (b) the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces; and
- (c) the principle that special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.³

Coverage of the Covenant

The accompanying guidance states that the whole of the armed forces community is covered by the Covenant and the obligations and principles which flow from it. The armed forces community includes Regular personnel, Reservists, Veterans, the immediate families of those categories of individual, and the immediate family of those Service personnel and veterans who have died.

The Covenant is clear that inclusion in the community does not confer any legal rights. Nor does it mean identical entitlement to support: “the level of support made available will vary. It will take into account the need for assistance, and may also reflect what an individual has contributed through Service”.⁴

Armed Forces Covenant annual reports

The *Armed Forces Act 2011* places a statutory requirement on the Secretary of State for Defence to provide an annual Armed Forces Covenant report to Parliament each year. The

² [Armed Forces Covenant](#), Ministry of Defence, 10 January 2013

³ *Armed Forces Act 2011* clause 2 (inserts new paragraph 343A into the *Armed Forces Act 2006*).

⁴ [The Armed Forces Covenant](#), p.4

Act sets out what the report should cover. Namely, that it should be about the effects or membership, or former membership, of the armed forces on service people:

- (a) in the fields of healthcare, education and housing
- (b) in the operation of inquests
- (c) and in other fields as the Defence Secretary may determine.⁵

The annual reports have evolved over the years in terms of both subject areas and layout. Common to each edition is a list of commitments for the year ahead and reflections on measures previously introduced. Each report includes a commentary from the external members of the Covenant Reference Group: the three Service Families Federations, the Royal British Legion and Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities.

The [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020](#) was published on 7 December 2020. Reports tend to be published at the end of the year before Christmas recess.

The Defence Committee has in recent years published a report on the annual report, most recently in September 2019: [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2018](#) (PDF).

Implementing the Covenant's proposals

Implementing measures introduced under the Covenant's umbrella may be the responsibility of central government, the devolved governments or local authorities.

Progress on commitments made can be tracked in annual reports. By way of illustration, below is small selection of commitments with progress made, as set out in the 2020 annual report:

- The Welsh Government will implement a national action plan across Wales, aimed at expanding the provision of psychological therapies. Completed
- The MOD will consider options for providing increased notice to Service families to allow more time for the school admissions process. On target
- The Home Office will work to resolve issues experienced by non-UK families applying for visas and passports. More work needed to achieve target
- In early 2020, the Scottish Government will work with the MOD, local authorities and the third sector to develop and implement a pathway to prevent homelessness for people who have served in the Armed Forces (no comment made on progress)
- The MOD will continue working with the Families Federations to gather further evidence on the inclusion of divorced spouses in the categories of the Armed Forces community and report on the subject in this year's report. More work needed to achieve target.⁶

The Devolved Governments

Many areas relating to the Covenant are the responsibility of the devolved governments. In recent years the Scottish and Welsh Governments have published their own annual reports on the support they provide to the armed forces community in the context of the Covenant:

- [Armed forces Covenant: annual report 2019](#), Welsh Government, 30 September 2020
- [Support for the Veterans and armed forces community 2020](#), Scottish Government, 15 November 2020

⁵ Armed Forces Act 2011 343A(2)

⁶ [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020](#), 7 December 2020, annex A

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The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020 said this of Northern Ireland:

Northern Ireland continues to build on its successful arrangements to ensure the application of the Armed Forces Covenant.

[...]

A Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner has now been appointed, fulfilling a UK Government commitment in the New Decade New Approach agreement. Extra UK Government funding has also secured an additional two posts for the Veterans' Support Office.⁷

In September 2020 Robin Walker, the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, said:

We have been making good progress on implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland, in line with my party's manifesto pledges and UK Government commitments in the New Decade, New Approach Agreement.⁸

Local authorities

All 407 local authorities in mainland Great Britain and four Northern Ireland councils have pledged to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant.⁹

Commons Library paper [Support for UK Veterans](#) details the support available to armed forces veterans in Great Britain and Northern Ireland in areas such as healthcare, housing and benefits.

The covenant and businesses

Thousands of organisations have signed the covenant, including businesses and charities. A list is available on Gov.uk: [businesses who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant](#).

The Covenant Fund and Covenant Trust

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund was launched by the MOD in August 2015. It replaced previous funding schemes, including the Covent Community Grant scheme and the LIBOR fund. It provides £10 million per year, funded by the MOD, "to support mutually beneficial projects and programmes being delivered by organisations across the UK in partnership with the Armed Forces Community."¹⁰ Funding has been committed for the next 14 years and the MOD has said it intends for it to be funded in perpetuity.¹¹

For the first 3 years, the Covenant Fund was based within the Ministry of Defence. On 1 April 2018 the Armed Forces Covenant Fund became an independent charitable trust: The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. It is registered with the Charity Commission and produces annual reports on its funding. The Fund has four broad funding themes:

- removing barriers to family life
- extra support after service for those that need help
- measures to integrate military and civilian communities and allow the armed forces community to participate as citizens
- and non-core healthcare services for veterans.¹²

⁷ [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020, Ministry of Defence, 7 December 2020, p31](#)

⁸ [PQ95012](#), 24 September 2020

⁹ "[Who has signed the Covenant?](#)", Armed Forces Covenant, accessed 30 November 2020. A list of local authorities who have signed the Covenant, by region, can be found on Gov.uk: [Armed Forces Covenants for communities](#)

¹⁰ "[Defence Secretary announces Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board](#)", Ministry of Defence, 3 October 2017

¹¹ Defence Committee, [Armed Forces Annual Report 2017](#), written evidence AFC0001, 17 April 2018, q164

¹² "[Guidance: The Covenant Fund is coming!](#)", Ministry of Defence, 23 July 2015

Within these broad themes, the Fund's priorities change every year.

Information about the Trust, the Fund and how to apply for grants is available on the [Armed Forces Covenant Fund](#) website.

2. The Government's proposals

In the Queen's Speech 2019 the Government said the Armed Forces Covenant will be "[further incorporated into law](#)". On 11 November 2020 Johnny Mercer, the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, confirmed plans to bring forward an Armed Forces Bill in 2021 "to legislate and further enshrine into law the armed forces covenant".¹³

There is very little information in the public domain about the Government's proposals. In January 2020, Johnny Mercer said the Bill would create a legal duty to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant:

Whilst the Ministry of Defence gave statutory foundation to the Armed Forces Covenant in the 2011 Armed Forces Act, with a requirement on the Defence Secretary to report annually to Parliament, this Government has recognized more must be done to ensure the Armed Forces community suffer no disadvantage. We have therefore committed to the creation of a legal duty to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant and are further enshrining it in law to support this.¹⁴

The Government expanded on their intentions in response to a petition calling for the Covenant to be enshrined in law ([e-petition 332503](#)):

The Armed Forces Covenant has been working across the UK at the local level for nearly 10 years with every local authority in Great Britain having made pledges of support. As a result, we have seen a significant improvement in the understanding of how Service life can impact on the Armed Forces community, and how best to improve their day-to-day experience, and ensure they are not disadvantaged in accessing public or commercial services.

However, the Government was concerned that the current legislation is not enough in itself to ensure the future of the Covenant and the support it offers our Armed Forces Community. It has therefore confirmed that strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant remains a key priority for this Government, and is engaging with key stakeholders across the country to develop policy and guidance to support this work going forward.¹⁵

In a letter to chief executives and council leaders of a number of local authorities, the MOD's Director of Armed Forces People Policy confirmed the intention is to make it a legal duty for specified bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant:

The legislation will have most effect by making it a legal duty for specified public bodies, including local authorities, to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant, and by including this commitment in the Armed Forces Bill to ensure it carries enough weight and stature as part of the Armed Forces Act. The duty will focus on healthcare, housing, and education – the Covenant policy areas encompassed in the Armed Forces Act 2006 – and the areas most likely to affect serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families.¹⁶

¹³ [HC Deb 11 November 2020 c794](#). An Armed Forces Act is required every five years. The last Armed Forces Act was passed in 2016, meaning a new Act must be passed by the end of 2021.

¹⁴ [PQ51](#), 7 January 2020

¹⁵ E-petition 332503 [Enshrine the Military Covenant in Law](#), Government response, 9 November 2020

¹⁶ Letter from Director of Armed Forces People Policy to the Chief Executives and Council Leaders, 30 September 2020, deposited in the Library of the House, [PQ110073](#), 5 November 2020

Robin Walker, the Northern Ireland Minister, has suggested the proposals will apply to all nations including Northern Ireland:

Our Armed Forces Covenant legislation will mandate local authorities to pay due regard to the experience of veterans so that they suffer no disadvantage in society. This will apply UK-wide, and the Ministry of Defence is working closely with the territorial offices and devolved administrations to ensure it is implemented effectively across the four nations.¹⁷

What is due regard?

The Government has not explained what it means by “due regard” in relation to the Covenant.

However, it might be helpful to briefly explore uses of the phrase in other legislation.

The Public Sector Equality Duty contained in section 149 of the *Equality Act 2010* requires public authorities to have due regard to several equality considerations when exercising their functions. For example, under section 149 all public authorities must, in the exercise of their functions, “have due regard to the need to” eliminate conduct that is prohibited by the Act. Such conduct includes discrimination, harassment and victimisation related to the protected characteristics. The Act does not identify what is meant by the requirement to “have due regard”. However, case law does provide some assistance in better understanding how public authorities might fulfil their duties under the Act. One case established six principles, known as the “Brown Principles”:

- decision-makers must be made aware of their duty to have due regard to the identified needs;
- the duty must be fulfilled both before and during consideration of a particular policy, and involves a “conscious approach and state of mind”;
- it is not a question of ticking boxes, the duty must be approached in substance, with rigour and with an open mind, and a failure to refer expressly to the duty whilst exercising a public function will not be determinative of whether due regard has been had;
- the duty is non-delegable;
- the duty is continuing;
- it is good practice for an authority to keep a record showing that it has considered the identified needs.

Further analysis of this, and discussion of other case law in respect to the *Equality Act 2010* can be found in Commons Library paper [The Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Impact Assessments](#), SNO6591, 8 July 2020.

The Government has also used the term in the *Environment Bill 2019-21*. Under the draft Bill 2018, draft clause 4 had placed a duty on Ministers of the Crown to “have regard” to the policy statement. This was the subject of debate at the time of the draft Bill, with concern that this duty was not strong enough and too narrow in scope. This provision was changed in the Environment Bill ([clause 18](#)) to a duty of Minister of the Crown to “have due regard” to the policy statement on environmental principles currently in effect when making policy. The Government’s response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee set out why this change was made:

¹⁷ [PQ95012](#), 24 September 2020

We have strengthened the current duty in the Bill from ‘have regard’ to ‘have due regard’ with the aim of ensuring that the policy statement is used effectively across departments.

Strengthening the duty in this way means that Ministers of the Crown will be required to give fuller consideration to the principles as the policy statement will be given greater weight.¹⁸

Further discussion of this can be found in Commons Library [Analysis of the Environment Bill 2019-20](#), CBP8824, 6 March 2020

Commentary

Given the lack of information in the public domain about the Government’s proposals, there has been very little commentary or reaction.

The MOD said it is not holding a formal consultation process because it wants to have the Bill ready for introduction by the end of 2020 and because of the impact of Covid-19 on preparation of the work.¹⁹ However, it has been holding regional focus groups with representatives from a selection of local authorities. The Director of Armed Forces People Policy said these groups are providing information and feedback “which will be used to shape the legislation and accompanying guidance package”.²⁰

Charles Byrne, the Director General of the Royal British Legion, and General Sir John McColl, chairman of Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities, briefly discussed the Government’s proposals when giving oral evidence to the committee on the *Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill 2020*. Both indicated they had been consulted by the MOD. Charles Byrne told the Committee the Legion had championed bringing the Covenant into law and is supportive of the general principle of strengthening the Covenant.²¹

General Sir John McColl discussed some of the issues Cobseo has raised during consultations with the MOD:

The first concern is that initially there was no mention of special consideration, in other words, for those who had given the most—those who had suffered bereavement or very serious injury. I understand that may now be in it. There was also a concern that it was limited, in that it dealt with three specific areas rather than the totality of the covenant. We continue to have concerns in that area, and we also have concerns that it seems to focus the effort on local government rather than central Government. Those are our major concerns. I am not sure whether I have answered your question, but those are the concerns that we have. We will be watching the consultation and participating in it.²²

Cobseo expanded on their concerns in their observations to the Covenant’s annual report 2020, published on 7 December:

The Government’s aim to consolidate the commitments set out in the Covenant is laudable; however, we are concerned that the proposed way forward, and unintended consequences, could combine to undermine their good intentions. In particular, Cobseo Members would want to ensure that the scope of the proposed legislation reflected the three principles at the heart of the Armed Forces Covenant

¹⁸ Efra Committee, Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19, First Special Report of Session 2019–20, HC 95, 17 Oct 2019, p4

¹⁹ Letter from Director of Armed Forces People Policy to the Chief Executives and Council Leaders, 30 September 2020, deposited in the Library of the House, [PO110073](#), 5 November 2020. Also available as [DEP2020-0686](#), 5 November 2020

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ [Overseas Operations \(Service Personnel and Veterans\) Bill \(Third sitting\)](#), 8 October 2020, c88

²² [Overseas Operations \(Service Personnel and Veterans\) Bill \(Third sitting\)](#), 8 October 2020, c88

and was sufficient to ensure that the many areas of potential disadvantage will be addressed. There is also a broader concern that if a legal standard is set that is below existing voluntary commitments, this could create the perception of a two-tier Covenant and, in practice, lead to services being reduced to what is mandated by law. A Joint MOD/Cobseo Working Group was established to address concerns, and will continue to be a means of tracking and influencing developments as the consultation process proceeds.²³

The three Service Families Federations also touched on the proposals in their observations to the annual report. The Federations suggested the proposals “will have a great impact” both upon Service families and those who will be charged with delivering the changes that are implemented.²⁴

The Labour party has indicated its support to further enshrine the armed forces covenant into law. John Healey, the shadow Defence Secretary, discussed the need to support the armed forces and veterans in a debate on Remembrance on 11 November 2020. He said:

On veterans, the Office for Veterans’ Affairs was a welcome step last year, but we can do more to make the UK the best place to be a veteran by enshrining the armed forces covenant in law. I say constructively and respectfully to the Minister that if the Government are willing to take those steps, they will have our full support to do so.²⁵

3. Background to the Armed Forces Bill 2011

The section explores how the Covenant’s principles came to be enshrined in the *Armed Forces Act 2011*. It discusses how the provisions of the Bill changed from originally requiring only an annual report, when first presented, to having the principles written into the Bill following Select Committee stage. It also highlights an opposition amendment, defeated on division, that is pertinent to the current Government’s proposals.

Box 1: About the Armed Forces Act

An Armed Forces Act is required every five years. The *Armed Forces Act 2016* was extended by the [Armed Forces Act \(Continuation\) Order 2020](#) until the end of 11 May 2021. Any further Orders cannot extend the Act beyond the end of 2021 ([Armed Forces Act 2006, section 382](#)).

The purpose of the Armed Forces Act is to provide the legal basis for the armed forces and the system of military law which exists in the UK. It sets out nearly all the provisions for the system of service law – of command, discipline and justice – that applies to all service personnel wherever they are operating. In the past the Act has also been used to introduce any new measures relating to the armed forces that fall outside the Act’s traditional remit of service discipline. The *Armed Forces Act 2006* was extensive and amounted to a complete overhaul of the legislation relating to military law and Service discipline. Subsequent Acts have amended the 2006 Act.

Prior to 2011, the Military Covenant had existed as an unwritten social and moral commitment between the State and the Armed Forces that had developed through long standing convention and customs. Historically it had been largely associated with the Army, although its principles are applied across all three Services. The Covenant implied that in return for the sacrifices that Service personnel make, the State has an obligation to

²³ Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020, Ministry of Defence, 7 December 2020, p19

²⁴ [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020, Ministry of Defence, 7 December 2020, p16](#)

²⁵ [HC Deb 11 November 2020 c935](#)

recognise that contribution and retains a long-term duty of care toward Service personnel and their families.

Concerns that the Covenant was being undermined and that a social gulf between the armed forces and the general public was developing prompted investigations into how to strengthen the Covenant. In 2007 the Royal British Legion established an “Honour the Covenant” campaign. In 2008 the then Labour Government published a Command Paper entitled: [The nation's commitment: cross-government support for our armed forces, their families and veterans](#). The Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats commissioned reports which fed into their election manifestos.

The Coalition Government’s Programme for Government, published in May 2010, subsequently outlined a commitment to “work to rebuild the Military Covenant”, which would build on the measures set out in the 2008 command paper and include the writing of a new Tri-Service Covenant. In June 2010 the Prime Minister indicated that the Military Covenant would be enshrined in law for the first time.²⁶

The Armed Forces Act 2011

The Armed Forces Bill was presented to Parliament on 8 December 2010.

The extent to which the Bill, as introduced, fulfilled the Prime Minister’s June 2010 pledge to enshrine the Military Covenant in law received particular attention during the Armed Forces Select Committee proceedings.²⁷

As presented, the Bill made provision for the Secretary of State to present an Armed Forces Covenant Report to Parliament every year on the effect of membership of the Armed Forces on Service personnel, their dependants and veterans in the UK (Clause 2).²⁸

One of the main topics of Second Reading (10 January 2011) and the Select Committee oral evidence sessions, held in February, was the Covenant and whether the Bill went far enough in delivering on the Government’s commitment to rebuild it. Several amendments relating to clause 2 of the Bill were moved in Committee, but after extensive debate were defeated on division.²⁹

However, on 15 May the Prime Minister announced that aspects of the Covenant would be written into the Bill. The Covenant was published the following day and the Government’s amendments to clause 2 were tabled during the Committee of the Whole House on 8 June 2011. All of the Government’s amendments were subsequently adopted.

A number of other amendments were either withdrawn, fell after debate or were defeated on division.

Of particular relevance to the current Government’s proposal is an amendment proposed during Committee of the Whole House by then Shadow Defence Ministers Gemma Doyle and Kevan Jones (new clause 17). In introducing her amendments, Gemma Doyle supported the Government’s amendments to clause 2 but went on to suggest “they enshrine in law the principles of reporting to Parliament, but they are still a step away from fully enshrining the covenant in law”. [New clause 17](#) would make it an obligation on all public bodies and Ministers, when making policy, to have regard to the same issues

²⁶ [“Military Covenant to be enshrined in law”](#), Ministry of Defence, 25 June 2010

²⁷ Unlike the majority of Government Bills, the Armed Forces Bill has traditionally been committed to a specially convened Select Committee after Second Reading, which sits only for the duration of the Bill. Three oral evidence sessions were held in February 2011.

²⁸ Analysis of the Bill as introduced can be found in [“Armed Forces Bill \(Bill 122 of 2010-11\)”](#), House of Commons Library Research Briefing, RP10-85, 17 December 2010

²⁹ A detailed account of the debates during Select Committee and the divisions can be found in [“Armed Forces Bill: Consideration in Select Committee”](#), SN05899, 9 June 2011

that the Secretary of State must also consider in preparing the Armed Forces Covenant report:

New clause 17 – Duties of public bodies and Ministers

(1) In preparing policy, public bodies and Ministers must have regard to those matters to which the Secretary of State is to have regard in preparing an armed forces covenant report, under subsection (2A) of section 359A of AFA 2006.

(2) In preparing policy, public bodies and Ministers must consider whether the making of special provision for service people or particular descriptions of service people would be justified.³⁰

In response Defence Minister Andrew Robathan argued it was the Government's view that placing a general duty on all public bodies and Ministers in the preparation of all policy would be unhelpful and unfocused. New clause 17 was defeated on division by a vote of 213 (Ayes) to 291 (Noes).³¹

In the Lords, several amendments to the Bill were agreed during Third Reading, including moving the placing of clause 2 to an entirely new part of the *Armed Forces Act 2006* (Part 16A, section 343A).³²

The Bill received Royal Assent on 3 November 2011.

All Bill documents and debates relating to the passage of the Bill can be found on the Bill's webpage: [Armed Forces Act 2011](#). The Commons Library covered the progress of the Bill extensively:

- [Armed Forces Bill \(Bill 122 of 2010-11\)](#), RP10-85, 17 December 2010
- [Armed Forces Bill: Consideration in Committee Stage](#), SN05899, 9 June 2011
- [Amendments to the Armed Forces Bill](#), SN05991, 13 June 2011.
- [Armed Forces Bill: Committee Stage report](#), SN06004, 15 June 2011
- [Armed Forces Bill: Lords amendments](#), SN06083, 3 November 2011

³⁰ [Armed Forces Bill: Committee of the Whole House notice of amendments given up to and including Friday 10 June 2011](#).

³¹ A detailed account of these amendments and new clause 17 can be found in Commons Library paper "[Armed Forces Bill: Committee Stage report](#)", SN06004, 15 June 2011 and "[Amendments to the Armed Forces Bill](#)", SN05991, 13 June 2011. The full debate is available via Hansard: [HC Deb 14 June 2011 c674-749](#)

³² This and other amendments are summarised in Commons Library paper [Armed Forces Bill: Lords amendments](#), SN06083, 3 November 2011

Annex: Text of the Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is as follows:

**An Enduring Covenant Between
The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government
– and –
All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of
the Crown
And their Families**

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.³³

³³ [The Armed Forces Covenant](#), p.1

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