

Research Briefing

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By Louisa Brooke-Holland

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Armed Forces Bill 2021-22: Progress of the Bill

The Armed Forces Bill 2019-21 was introduced on 26 January 2021 and had [Second Reading](#) on 8 February 2021. The Bill was carried over from the 2019-21 session. It is now Bill 002 2021-22.

Unlike the majority of Government Bills, the Armed Forces Bill has traditionally been committed to a specially convened ad hoc [Select Committee](#) after Second Reading, which sits only for the duration of the Bill. The Committee's members were appointed on 24 February. The Committee was required to report the Bill back to the House by 29 April and [published their report](#) on 22 April 2021. It was the first Committee in the House of Commons to consider a Bill via virtual means.¹

The Bill completed [Committee of the Whole House](#) on 23 June 2021. The date for the Bill's remaining stages is to be decided. The text of the Bill as amended by Committee, and proposed amendments can be found on the Bill's webpage: [Armed Forces Bill](#).

The former Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Johnny Mercer, sat on the Select Committee. He left Government on 21 April 2021. Leo Docherty, who also sat on the Select Committee, was appointed Minister for Defence People and Veterans on the same day.

Commons Library paper [The Armed Forces Bill 2019-21](#) sets out the background to the Bill. The Bill webpage contains the [explanatory notes](#).

¹ "[Special Report of Session 2019-21: The Armed Forces Bill](#)", Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, 22 April 2021, HC 1281 2019-21

1 Purpose of the Bill

The primary purpose of the Bill is to renew the Armed Forces Act 2006 (itself renewed by the Armed Forces Acts of 2011 and 2016). The Armed Forces Act 2006 provides the legal basis for the existence of the Armed Forces as disciplined bodies. Without renewal, the 2006 Act will expire at the end of 2021.

The Bill also:

- Makes provision to continue the 2006 Act for a further period of five years, ending no later than 2026;
- Amends the service justice system;
- Creates a new independent body to oversee complaints about the Service Police;
- Requires specified public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in the areas of housing, education and healthcare;
- Allows for flexible working for Reserve personnel;
- Makes changes to sentencing and rehabilitation;
- Extends posthumous pardons for those convicted of abolished service offences;
- Allows for a British overseas territory (i.e. Gibraltar) to bring the Royal Gibraltar Regiment into the UK's service justice system;
- Aligns the time limits for war pension appeals in Scotland and Northern Ireland with those in England and Wales.

2 Second Reading

The Bill received cross-party support during [Second Reading](#).

However, the Shadow Defence Secretary, John Healey, described the Bill as a “missed opportunity” and SNP defence spokesperson Carol Monaghan said it lacked teeth and scope.

The main concerns raised during Second Reading concerned the scope and enforcement of the Covenant and the rejection of Lyons' recommendation

regarding serious cases in the service justice system.² Members also raised issues they felt should be, but aren't, in the Bill.

On the Covenant many Members argued the scope was too narrow in being limited to the areas of healthcare, education and housing. Members questioned how the Covenant would be enforced and what recourse would be available. Members also asked what, if any, resources would be available to public bodies.

Several members endorsed the idea of requiring every council to have an Armed Forces Champion, some of whom cited successful practices by their own councils. Others also questioned why the Bill did not apply to central government and the devolved administrations.

On the clauses relating to the service justice system, it was the rejection of Lyons' recommendation that allegations of murder, manslaughter and rape when committed in the UK should not be tried at Court Martial except with the consent of the Attorney General that drew the most comment. Members welcomed the creation of a Service Police Complaints Commissioner.

Members also raised issues they felt should have been included in the Bill and suggested these might be addressed in committee. Several Members asked why measures relating to legacy investigations of personnel in Northern Ireland were not included in the Bill. The Minister said in response that "legislation will be coming in due course from the Northern Ireland Office."

John Healey suggested the Bill should consider:

- Mandating Ministers to report to Parliament each year on the fighting strength of armed forces
- Discuss making the recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body binding on Ministers
- Scrap British citizenship fees for families of personnel from the Commonwealth.

Carol Monaghan also raised the SNP's view that there should be an Armed Forces representative body, akin to the Police Federation.

A Carry-Over motion was approved at the end of Second Reading on 8 February 2021. On the same an Order of the House allowed for all the remaining stages to be completed on one day.³

² HH Shaun Lyons led a Government commissioned review into the service justice system. The Bill enacts several of his recommendations but not one of his main recommendations, on jurisdiction of the most serious offences of murder, manslaughter and rape when committed in the UK.

³ Armed Forces Bill: Programme, [HC Deb 8 February 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

3 Summary of Select Committee stage

Unlike the majority of Government Bills, the Armed Forces Bill has traditionally been committed to a specially convened ad hoc [Select Committee](#) after Second Reading, which sits only for the duration of the Bill.

3.1 Process of the Select Committee

The Committee's members were appointed on [24 February 2021](#) and launched their inquiry on 3 March. The committee held [six oral evidence sessions](#) featuring seventeen panels and forty-five witnesses over a three-week period from 4 to 24 March 2021. Witnesses included representatives from armed forces charities and service families' federations, Local Government Associations, current and former Judge Advocates General, the former Service Complaints Commissioner, officials from the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Ministry of Defence, and the Minister for Defence People and Veterans. A [full list of witnesses](#) is available in the Select Committee's report and [oral and written evidence](#) can be found on the Committee's website.

Two sittings to consider the Bill line-by-line took place on [25 March](#) and [31 March](#).

The Committee also launched a public survey on the Armed Forces Bill and related matters, which ran from 22 March to 5 April and received over 3,000 submissions. The [key findings](#) of the survey are summarised in the Select Committee's report and can be found in the annex of this paper.

The Committee was required to report the Bill back to the House by 29 April. The Committee [published their report](#) on 22 April 2021.

The Committee consisted of: Stuart Anderson, Tonia Antoniazzi, Dan Carden, Miss Sarah Dines, Leo Docherty, Martin Docherty-Hughes, Darren Henry, Mrs Sharon Hodgson, Richard Holden, Rt Hon Kevan Jones, Jack Lopresti, Johnny Mercer, Carol Monaghan, Stephen Morgan, Mr James Sunderland (chair) and Mrs Heather Wheeler.

3.2 Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

The Committee's conclusions and recommendations can be found in their report on the Bill ([HC 1281 2019-21](#)). They are briefly summarised here.

The role of the Select Committee and process

The Committee recommended select committee scrutiny continue to be the convention for the Armed Forces Bill. They also suggested future committees should be given at least three months to report.

The Committee criticised the Ministry of Defence for difficulties in securing documents and visit approvals. The Committee highlighted how its request for the Statutory Guidance relating to the duties imposed under clause 8 of the Bill be shared with the Committee at the earliest opportunity was not answered by the MOD until the 24 March, after the Minister had given evidence at the final oral evidence session.

The Armed Forces Covenant

The Committee welcomed the Bill's proposals to further incorporate the Covenant into law. The Committee recommended:

- The annual Continuous Attitudes Survey include questions on whether the Covenant has had a positive or negative impact on respondents in the areas of housing, healthcare and education in the last 12 months;
- The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report should review the effectiveness of the legislation and comment on future scope;
- The MOD should submit a memorandum to the Defence Committee two years after the legislation is enacted to enable the Defence Committee to conduct post-legislative scrutiny into how the Act has worked in practice.

The Service Justice System

The Committee welcomed efforts to reform the Service Justice System following the Lyons review. However, it recognised concerns remain surrounding concurrent jurisdiction and the decision not to implement this recommendation of the Lyons Review. The Committee recommended the MOD quickly introduce the Defence Serious Crime Capability, and ensure clear protocols are in place to allow effective cooperation with civilian police forces.

The Service Complaints System

The Committee welcomed efforts to speed up the complaints process. However, it was concerned that the response to its survey indicated that only 15 per cent of respondents believe the decision to reduce the time limit in which an appeal can be made from six weeks to two weeks gave them enough time to receive "fair treatment." The Committee said the MOD should prioritise implementing all recommendations of the Wigston review within 6 months. The Wigston report was a Government commissioned review of

inappropriate behaviour in the armed forces published in 2019. Air Chief Marshal Wigston found a “pressing need” to reform the complaints system.⁴

Healthcare for Veterans

The Committee made several recommendations regarding the provision of healthcare to veterans, including how it meets targets for the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service, Complex Treatment Services and Improving Access to Psychological Therapy; to ensure the principle of “priority treatment” is better understood by both veterans and service providers; to work to minimise variation in the level of services across the UK; improve data collection on the numbers of serving personnel and veterans requiring treatment for addiction and other mental health illnesses.

Duty of due regard

The Committee also noted that by excluding central government as a responsible public body, Service accommodation is not covered by the duty of due regard. The Committee suggested the Government consider adding this as an area where the duty applies in the future.

Miscellaneous

The Committee made several other recommendations, including:

- A metric be added to the Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant to report on the experience of those with protected characteristics.
- For the Minister for Defence People and Veterans to report back to the House within three months on progress made to fulfil the commitment to “find a mechanism of restorative justice” for veterans dismissed due to their perceived sexuality during the years of the ban on homosexuality.
- For the MOD to carefully consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Defence Committee’s Sub-Committee on Women in the Armed Forces once it has reported.

3.3

Line-by-Line scrutiny in Select Committee

The Bill was not amended by the Select Committee.

The committee undertook two days of line-by-line scrutiny, on [25 March](#) and [31 March](#) 2021.

⁴ [Commons Library Research Briefing CBP-9153, The Service complaints system, 03 March 2021.](#)

Several amendments and new clauses moved by Labour and the SNP were defeated on division.

Labour moved then withdrew two amendments to the Bill. The first would require the most serious crimes (murder, manslaughter and rape) be [tried in civilian court](#) when offences are committed in the UK. The second was a series of amendments to widen the scope of the Bill to address “all matters of potential disadvantage” including employment and pensions and for central Government and the devolved Governments to have the [same due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant](#) that that Bill places on local authorities and other public bill bodies. Both of these issues were discussed at length during committee stage.

Sharon Hodgson’s amendment to [remove the reduction](#) in the amount of time service personnel have to make a service complaint appeal was defeated on division.

Carol Monaghan and Martin Docherty-Hughes moved new clauses to [increase the recruiting age to 18](#) and to create a new [Armed Forces representative body](#) akin to the Police Federation. Both were defeated on division.

Kevan Jones moved two new clauses that were defeated on division. One was to create a requirement for a [report on the effects of Operation Banner](#) (the name for military operations in Northern Ireland during the Troubles) on Veterans. The second was to include in the Armed Forces Covenant report a comparison of the [terms and conditions of service](#) with the public sector.

Members also moved clauses calling for: better data collection on Veterans; regular reports of the [strength of infantry battalions](#); a review of the number of people who were [dismissed or forced to resign](#) from the Armed Forces due to their sexuality; an annual report on [armed forces accommodation](#); definition of [priority care](#); and to include data on people accessing treatment for [alcohol, drug and gambling disorders in](#) the Armed Forces Covenant annual report.

Stephen Morgan’s new clause to ensure [Commonwealth veterans applying for UK citizenship](#) following their service would only pay the administrative cost of an application for Indefinite Leave to Remain was withdrawn after debate, but Mr Morgan said he would return to this issue at Report Stage. The Minister said in response that the Government will provide a pathway to residency and are looking to start a public consultation shortly. The [public consultation](#) opened on 25 May “to seek views on a draft policy proposal relating to settlement fees applicable to non-UK Service Personnel leaving the UK Armed Forces and wishing to remain in the UK.” The consultation closes on 7 July 2021. Library paper [Nationality and immigration requirements for the UK’s armed forces](#) (CBP8625) discusses this topic further.

A document containing the text of amendments considered at each sitting is available on the Bill’s webpage: [All proceedings up to 31 March at Select Committee Stage](#).

Government response

Leo Docherty responded to the Select Committee's report on the Armed Forces Bill in a [written statement](#) on 22 June 2021.⁵ The Minister addressed the recommendations in turn, but stopped short of endorsing any suggested amendments to the Bill. The Chair of the Committee welcomed the written statement.⁶

3.4 Issues that might arise as the Bill progresses

Two issues that arose during proceedings of the [Overseas Operations \(Service Personnel and Veterans\) Act](#) may arise during the remaining stages of the Armed Forces Bill. The Overseas Operations Act received royal assent just before prorogation, on 29 April 2021.

Duty of Care

During the proceedings of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021, Lord Dannatt tabled an amendment on the duty of care which was rejected by the Government. The Minister suggested the Armed Forces Bill would be a more appropriate mechanism for any discussion of the duty of care owed to personnel. Members and/or Lords may, therefore, seek to amend the Armed Forces Bill accordingly.

Briefly, Lord Dannatt tabled an amendment that would require the Secretary of State to establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations.⁷ This would have to be laid before Parliament after six months, as well as an annual update on its operation to be included in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report. The Amendment defines “duty of care” as the legal and moral obligation of the Ministry of Defence to ensure the wellbeing of service personnel. Lord Dannatt explained that the clause would “bring into law the good ideas and intentions of well-meaning Ministers and officials with whom we are currently united in common cause but who are strangely reluctant to enshrine the fruits of their endeavours in a Bill... to protect our people for all time from vexatious investigations and prosecutions.”⁸

⁵ [HCWS109, 22 June 2021](#).

⁶ “[Committee on Armed Forces Bill welcomes written statement on Special Report](#)”, Parliament, 23 June 2021

⁷ Amendment 14, [HL Deb 13 April 2021 c1242](#)

⁸ HL Deb 13 April 2021, c1244

Responding, Baroness Goldie explained that the Government supported the intention behind the amendment. However, she suggested that the Armed Forces Bill would be a more appropriate mechanism for any discussion of the duty of care owed to personnel. The amendment was passed on division by 303 votes to 223.⁹ Further discussion of this can be found in Commons Library Paper [Overseas Operations \(Service Personnel and Veterans\) Bill 2019-21: Lords amendments](#).

During ping pong, Leo Docherty, the Minister for Service Personnel and Veterans, said the Government “continue to believe that it would not be practicable or desirable to define a legally binding standard of care in relation to the matters referred to in the amendment.” He added the Government is “deeply concerned about the potential unintended negative effects of Lords amendment 5B if it is included in the Bill.”¹⁰

John Healey voiced Labour’s support for the amendment. Acknowledging the amendment would not pass, Mr Healey said “we will certainly return to it in the Armed Forces Bill.”¹¹ The amendment was negated on division by 357 votes to 267 votes.¹²

Review of investigations

During the proceedings of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021, Members also expressed disquiet about the lack of change to the investigative process. This relates to the judge-led review announced in October 2020 to examine the investigation of alleged offences which occur on overseas operations. Kevan Jones, who described the Overseas Operations Act as a “bad bill” because it did not address investigations, called on the Minister to “ensure that investigations are put in the Armed Forces Bill.”¹³

3.5

Committee of the Whole House

The Armed Forces Bill completed [Committee of the Whole House](#) on 23 June 2021. Several opposition amendments were defeated on division, while several Government amendments were accepted without division. The Bill, as amended, was reported.¹⁴

⁹ HL Deb 13 April 2021, c1260-1262

¹⁰ HC Deb 27 April 2021, c287

¹¹ HC Deb 27 April 2021, c291

¹² [HC Deb 27 April 2021, c302-206](#)

¹³ HC Deb 27 April 2021, c297

¹⁴ [HC Deb 23 June 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

Members raised a broad range of issues, many of which had been discussed either at select committee stage or, as mentioned above, during the passage of the Overseas Operations Bill.

Government amendments

The Government tabled several technical amendments to the Bill, as summarised by the Minister:

Amendments 8 to 15 relate to the armed forces covenant, amendments 16 to 23 and 31 to 38 amend the service complaints provisions, and amendments 24 to 30 relate to the provision on driving disqualification.¹⁵

Opposition amendments rejected on division

Stephen Morgan's amendments to clause 8 (amendments 1, 2, 3 and 4), which would place the same legal responsibility to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant on central government and the devolved administrations as the Bill currently requires of local authorities and other public bodies, was negated on division by 355 votes to 271.

Carol Monaghan's amendment to clause 8 (amendment 41) to require service accommodation be required to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard was rejected on division by 354 votes to 273.

Stephen Morgan's new clause 7, regarding indefinite leave to remain payments by Commonwealth personnel, was rejected on division by 355 votes to 272.

Issues raised

Amendments tabled but not moved covered a number of issues discussed during the debate.

Dismissal because of sexual orientation

Several MPs discussed the historic hurt suffered by those dismissed from military service purely for their sexual orientation (new clause 4). Leo Docherty said that while the government is resisting the new clause, it intends to "address that injustice", adding that it will be part of the veterans strategy which he will announce later this year (the Minister has previously said the MOD will publish an updated veterans action plan this year).¹⁶

Cost of indefinite leave to remain applications

The cost of settlement fees for Commonwealth personnel who wish to remain in the UK after they leave service was also raised by several Members (new

¹⁵ [HC Deb 23 June 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

¹⁶ [HC Deb 27 May 2021 \[Office for Veterans' Affairs\]](#).

clauses 1 and 7). Both clauses had cross-party support. The government launched a public consultation on 25 May seeking views on a proposal relating to settlement fees for non-UK Service Personnel. The consultation runs until 7 July. Library paper [Nationality and immigration requirements for the UK armed forces](#) (CBP8625) discusses this topic further.

Investigations of allegations during overseas investigations

Kevan Jones spoke for new clause 9 regarding the investigations of allegations related to overseas operations. He argued the key point is to stop “frivolous and vexatious investigations” and called for timely investigation of allegations. He criticised the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act, arguing it was not necessary and the issues in it could have been covered in the Armed Forces Bill. In response, the Minister said [Justice Henriques is currently reviewing the investigative process](#) and will report “by the end of the summer.” Kevan Jones questioned the timing of the review and queried whether further legislation might be required to bring into law any recommendations that might be made.

Shift on need for legislative consent motion

When the Bill was first introduced, in the explanatory notes the MOD indicated its intention to seek a legislative consent motion (LCM) from the Welsh and Scottish Governments in relation to clause 8.¹⁷ A [legislative consent memorandum](#) was laid in the Senedd Cymru and discussed by the [Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee](#). However, during select committee oral evidence, Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, Scottish Government, indicated the UK Government had changed its position and now agreed with the Scottish Government’s view that an LCM was not required.¹⁸ The explanatory notes for the Bill, as reintroduced for the 2021-22 session, reflect this shift:

in the view of the Government, none of the matters to which the Bill relates are within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru or the Northern Ireland Assembly.¹⁹

Responding to queries from Welsh MPs, Leo Docherty confirmed a legislative consent motion is not required for clause 8.

¹⁷ The [explanatory notes](#) for the Bill when first introduced said “Clause 8 (Armed Forces Covenant) applies in policy areas of housing, education and healthcare which are within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. A legislative consent motion is therefore being sought from each of those legislatures.” [Bill 244 FN 2019-21](#), 25 January 2021

¹⁸ [Oral evidence: Armed Forces Bill](#), Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, HC 1281, 18 March 2021, qq282

¹⁹ [Armed Forces Bill 002 2021-21 Explanatory Notes](#), 12 May 2021, para 27

Duty of care

The question of duty of care, which was debated during the [passage of the Overseas Operations \(Service Personnel and Veterans\) Act](#) in the Lords, was introduced by Stephen Morgan. New clause 2 would require the Secretary of State to establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations. In response, the Minister said he felt the clause unnecessary and “could result in unintended consequences.” He also spoke of the difficulty in drafting such a duty of care as it could result in additional litigation.

Armed Forces Federation

New clause 8, which would create a representative body for the Armed Forces, akin to the Police Federation, was not moved. In speaking to the new clause, Stephen Morgan, said it would be the equivalent to a trade union but would provide independent representation for the armed forces.

Most serious offences to be tried in civilian courts

Labour and the SNP tabled an amendment (amendment 7) which would require the most serious offences are tried in the civilian courts when committed in the UK. Stephen Morgan argued trying the most serious offences in civilian courts would “help to improve conviction rates.” Carol Monaghan made a similar point, arguing sexual assaults would be better dealt within in civilian courts which have more experience of these sorts of cases. The Minister said he is confident the service justice system is “capable of dealing with all offences” and urged the committee to reject the amendment.

Party views

In concluding his remarks, Stephen Morgan argued “Labour’s amendments would truly deliver improvements for our forces personnel, veterans and their families.”²⁰

Carol Monaghan, speaking for the SNP, said the Bill “lacks the punch required to make a real difference”, adding that the Bill’s commitment to the Covenant “falls far short of what it ought to be.”²¹ She also argued that “most of the pressing and difficult issues for veterans are out of scope” of the Bill.²²

Jamie Stone, speaking for the Liberal Democrats, focused on personnel and his concerns that reducing the army in size may put off potential recruits who are looking to build a career. Ben Lake supported several amendments and

²⁰ [HC Deb 23 June 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

²¹ [HC Deb 23 June 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

²² [HC Deb 23 June 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

new clauses which he said would “make a meaningful impact” on the lives of current and former service personnel.²³

3.6 Remaining stages

At the time of writing Report Stage has not yet been scheduled. The text of the Bill, as amended in Committee, is available on the Bill page: [Armed Forces Bill](#).

Several MPs have tabled amendments to the Bill for Report stage, a list of which can be found on the [Bill page](#).

²³ [HC Deb 23 June 2021 \[Armed Forces Bill\]](#).

Annex: Survey by the Select Committee

The Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill conducted a survey on the Armed Forces Bill between 22 March 2021 and 5 April 2021. The survey was public, and anyone could respond to it, with 3,337 submissions received. [Full results of the survey](#) are contained in the annex of the Committee's report. The overview of key findings of the survey are reproduced below.

Overview of key findings

Nearly four times as many respondents reported that the introduction of a “duty to have due regard” would help current and former service personnel and their families receive the support set out in the Armed Forces Covenant, compared to those who said that it would not. For respondents who did not think that it would help, the key issue was that a duty to have due regard was perceived as ‘lip service’ and too vague and open to interpretation to result in meaningful change.

Nearly three times as many respondents reported that the Bill would help them to address practical problems they might face during or after their service, compared to those who said that it would not. For respondents who did not think that it would help, one key issue centred on perceptions that the Bill would not result in more effective support because organisations had either not heard of the Covenant or enforcement of it was inadequate. Another key issue was a perception that the remit of the Bill was not sufficient to address some of the key practical problems faced by personnel after service. This includes support in accessing employment and access to physical and mental health care. Respondents noted that it would not address inequalities in access to benefits and the immigration status of foreign and Commonwealth service personnel and veterans. Respondents also noted that it would not provide support for veterans who leave the UK or address practical problems faced by longer-term veterans, including access to welfare benefits when in receipt of an Armed Forces pension.

More respondents reported that they thought the Armed Forces Covenant is applied evenly across service personnel than that it was not, although the majority of respondents reported that they were not sure. Respondents who did not think that it was applied evenly reported a ‘postcode lottery’ across the UK, especially in relation to access to NHS and Local Authority services. Another key theme was that respondents thought that it was not applied evenly to foreign and Commonwealth veterans. In addition, respondents noted that it was not applied evenly to lower-ranking and junior personnel, and to serving personnel and veterans in Northern Ireland.

Three times as many respondents reported that the specified bodies listed in the Bill in respect of housing, education and healthcare are correct/appropriate, compared to those who reported that they were not, although the vast majority of respondents reported that they were not sure.

The key suggestion put forward by respondents was that the list should be expanded to include more-or all-UK and devolved central government departments, agencies and public bodies as well as local government. Respondents also called for increased education about the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure that public bodies and other stakeholders were aware of what it requires. Some respondents also called for listed bodies to be incentivised or compelled to fulfil their obligations. Many respondents called for 'champions' or dedicated roles within Local Authorities or central government departments and agencies to ensure accountability and to ensure that the needs of serving personnel and veterans are taken into account. Some respondents suggested that there should be increased engagement with, or employment of, veterans by public bodies to increase understanding of the issues that they face. Many respondents noted a need for the list to include specialist bodies and groups supporting veterans, as well as GPs, private landlords and housing associations and other organisations providing services used by veterans and their families, including mental health support. A few respondents noted that it should be expanded to include relevant bodies on immigration if the Bill was amended to include foreign and Commonwealth veterans.

More respondents reported that they thought the provisions in the Bill impact differently on Serving personnel, veterans, and their families than did not, although the vast majority of respondents reported that they were not sure. Many responses were highly positive about the overall potential impact of the Bill, reporting that they thought it would provide help and support for serving personnel, veterans and their families. Many respondents noted that they thought the Bill would provide less support for Veterans. Some respondents reported that they thought it would provide less benefit for Reservists and some highlighted that it would not provide support to foreign and Commonwealth serving personnel and veterans.

Nearly double as many respondents reported that the Bill will improve the way in which serious crimes are handled in the Armed Forces, compared to those that reported that it would not. However, the vast majority of respondents reported that they were not sure. For respondents who did not think that it would improve the system, this was because they thought that serious crime should be handled by civil police, not military police, because the civilian system was perceived as more efficient and appropriate for dealing with cases of this nature.

1047 respondents answered the question inviting them to comment on anything else they would like the Committee to consider when scrutinising the Bill. Comments centred on the need for:

- better support for personnel leaving the Armed Forces to reintegrate into civilian life, especially in relation to physical and mental health, housing and employment,
- the need to increase knowledge about the Covenant amongst service providers,

- the need for some form of mechanism to assess progress in whether changes made by the Bill lead to positive change, and
- equality in access to benefits and immigration status for foreign and Commonwealth veterans and their families.

Some respondents called for more support for veterans who settle outside the UK, better support and more legal protection for Armed Forces personnel and veterans, and for reassessment of pension provisions for veterans who left the service before 1975.²⁴

²⁴ [“Special Report of Session 2019–21: The Armed Forces Bill”](#), Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, 22 April 2021, HC 1281 2019-21

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