



DEBATE PACK

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General debate on the Armed Forces Covenant Report 2016

Backbench Business Debate
Chamber

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Summary

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*. It applies to all three services.

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. Specifically, the Covenant outlines two core principles:

- No disadvantage: no current or former member of the armed forces, or their families, should be at a disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- Special consideration: special consideration is appropriate in some cases, particularly for those who have been injured or bereaved.

The *Armed Forces Act 2011* does not create legally enforceable rights for Service personnel but it does require the Secretary of State for Defence to report to Parliament each year on the progress made with respect to the Covenant.

On 15 December 2016 the Government published its latest annual report on the Armed Forces Covenant. It highlights all of those areas where progress has been achieved over the last year and outlines some key priorities for the future, including the delivery of contracted veteran's mental health services in England from 2017 and publishing the outcome of research into the support provided to the families of Reservists.

2. Press Articles

The following is a small selection of recent press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for the views expressed in, nor the accuracy of, external content.

[Peer: End 'betrayal' of veterans probed over Troubles killings](#)

Belfast Telegraph
10 January 2017

[Armed forces can rent out their homes without facing higher costs](#)

Aol News (from PA)
26 December 2016

[Armed Forces families 'living in squalor' with leaking roofs and broken toilets](#)

Daily Telegraph
Christopher Hope
16 December 2016

[Muslim owned businesses and organisations sign pledge of support for armed forces community](#)

ITV News
13 December 2016

[UK firms not doing enough on jobs for military veterans](#)

BBC Newsbeat
18 November 2016

[Armed forces and veterans need fairness and respect, Tories say](#)

BBC News Online
9 November 2016

['NI army veterans not treated fairly' - UUP MLA](#)

ITV News
12 August 2016

[Armed Forces covenant is weak and does no justice to those who serve this country](#)

Daily Telegraph
Air Vice-Marshal David Murray
21 June 2015

3. Press Releases

Good progress on delivering Armed Forces Covenant commitments

Ministry of Defence
15 December 2016

The fifth annual Armed Forces Covenant report has been presented to parliament today, showing good progress in providing support for the Armed Forces community.

The Covenant is a promise from the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. Today's annual report details the actions taken to deliver covenant commitments in 2016, with over 1300 businesses now signed up to the Covenant.

Amongst the Armed Forces Covenant 2016 achievements:

- A new e-learning programme is helping GPs understand the needs of the Armed Forces community
- NHS England has launched a Veterans Trauma Network
- £22m of Service Pupil Premium payments made to support the pastoral needs of over 73,000 Service pupils in state schools
- 9,000 Forces Personnel have now benefitted from Forces Help to Buy – which has been extended to 2018 • 86% of UK motor insurers are supporting overseas postings by committing to waive cancellation fees
- 4 of the UK's biggest mobile phone providers have committed to suspend contracts for overseas postings
- A new covenant website is helping the Armed Forces community find out what they can expect from local services and businesses
- Over 150 Covenant Champions in the services are raising awareness of the covenant within their units

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said:

Our Armed Forces continue to be engaged in numerous operations worldwide, and the world remains a dangerous and increasingly unpredictable place. We have a duty across society, to recognise this dedication and sacrifice, by ensuring that the policies we make, and the services that we provide, treat our Service personnel, Veterans, and their families fairly, and ensure they suffer no disadvantage by comparison to the rest of society.

Our vision is to ensure that there is a network of practical support, embedded right across central and local Government, businesses, charities, and society as a whole, to meet the unique needs of the Armed Forces community. I have again arranged for a summary version of this report, which will capture its key aspects, to be sent to every serving member of the Armed Forces.

We will continue to strive for fair treatment, and we pledge to ensure that through the Armed Forces Covenant, we continue to do our utmost for our people.

Read the full report [here](#) and see the key facts [here](#).

A new look for the Armed Forces Covenant

Ministry of Defence

14 January 2016

Today, the Armed Forces Covenant unveils its new branding.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation, ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. The Covenant is a national responsibility and the Government is committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for the Armed Forces community by working with a range of delivery partners including businesses, local authorities, charities and the public.

Businesses and local authorities who wish to support the Armed Forces community can sign the Covenant, and publicly declare their commitments.

The new branding simplifies and clarifies the Armed Forces Covenant, uniting all the delivery partners in their common goal to achieve the best outcomes for the Armed Forces community.

Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans, Mark Lancaster, said:

The new Armed Forces Covenant brand gives us a clear visual identity, encapsulating what it stands for. It gives all the supporters a simple way to show what their commitments of support stand for, and I hope they will be as keen to get people talking about this as I am.

Armed Forces personnel and their families make many sacrifices through their service to keep Britain safe. They can face challenges accessing commercial and public services that we take for granted, so the Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to ensure that the Armed Forces community is treated fairly, and recognise their particular challenges.

Key Armed Forces Covenant achievements include:

Family Healthcare:

- The Armed Forces Covenant is now at the centre of the NHS constitution, an important step for the delivery of local health care. Now 81% of Service personnel report good access to medical care and 98% of Armed Forces families have good access to GPs.
- £2m grant awarded to create a NHS Specialist Rehabilitation Unit.

Children's education:

- Children of personnel can now get school places before moving into an area, following an amendment to the Schools Admission Code
- £21m of Service Pupil Premium payments made to support the pastoral needs of over 60,000 Service pupils in state schools.
- 24,500 children from Service families have benefitted from 154 grants for Education Support Funding to help schools mitigate and manage issues caused by Service families moving as a result of deployment.

Spousal employment:

- Spouses returning from overseas can now immediately claim Jobseeker's Allowance, as they have been made exempt from the need to be a UK resident for three months in order to claim.
- More than 400 spouses of Armed Forces personnel now to be offered £1,000 grants for training and education.

Commercial Disadvantage:

- Mobile phone providers Vodafone, EE, O2 and Three will now allow Service personnel and their families to suspend phone contracts whilst on overseas deployment, so that they are not required to pay for services that they are not using.
- A credit union has been set up to provide personnel with safe, affordable loans.
- In 2015, more than 5,200 Service personnel have been helped on to the property ladder through the on going Forces Help To Buy scheme

1000th UK employer signs up for Armed Forces Covenant

Ministry of Defence

4 July 2016

From supermarkets to football clubs, 1000 UK companies have now signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

Compass Group UK & Ireland, a catering and support services company, will become the landmark 1000th signatory to the Covenant during a ceremony on board HMS Belfast today (4 July).

The Armed Forces Covenant provides support and opportunities for Service personnel and veterans, Reservists and families.

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon attended the signing, along with senior Defence and Compass Group UK & Ireland representatives including Managing Director Dennis Hogan.

Mr Fallon said:

Companies such as Compass Group UK & Ireland are helping to ensure those who serve or have served our country, get the treatment and recognition they deserve. Their support is hugely valued.

In turn, these companies benefit from the skills, experience, professionalism and dedication that that these men and women bring to their organisation.

The Covenant aims to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for Service and ex-Service personnel, Reservists and their families when accessing goods and Services. The 1000th signing shows that the Covenant is helping to build an extensive network of support across a wide range of industry sectors.

Since 2013 the Covenant has helped to deliver these key improvements for the Armed Forces community:

- Fairer mobile phone contracts, freezing the accounts of Armed Forces personnel and their families posted overseas and removing cancellation fees
- Better deals in motor insurance, allowing personnel to keep their no claims bonuses and avoid cancellation fees when posted overseas at short notice
- Employer networks in a wide range of sectors to support Service leavers through their transition to new careers
- Better access to banking, such as savings accounts to Service families posted overseas
- Tackling commercial disadvantage previously experienced by the Armed Forces community in relation to credit rating and access to mortgages on offer. For example, if their Service overseas forces them into a situation where they will need to rent out their home, members are now free from the need to switch to a 'buy to let' mortgage.
- Better access to mentoring, work placements and employment opportunities for personnel leaving the Services
- Increased funding and sponsorship of military charities and sports events such as the Invictus Games
- Flexible paid or unpaid leave for mobilised Reservists
- Employment support for Veterans, Reservists, Service spouses and partners, as well as support for Cadets
- Discounts and special deals for individuals and their families

The Armed Forces Covenant delivery partners include businesses and trade bodies, charities and community organisations, local authorities and government departments. Signatories make their own promises to support the Armed Forces community and implement these promises through policies, Services and projects.

Mosque signing paves way for Muslim-owned businesses to support Armed Forces

Ministry of Defence
13 December 2016

A Nottingham Mosque has today signed the Armed Forces Covenant, ushering in a wave of Muslim-owned businesses which are now committed to supporting members of the military.

The Karimia Mosque and Institute put pen to paper in a significant moment today, formally recognising the important role which the Armed Forces play in the UK and abroad and supporting their work.

The commitment has already had a big impact across Nottinghamshire, with 16 local Muslim-owned businesses, from taxi firms like DG Cars to cargo companies such as MSA Transport, following the Mosque's lead by signing the pledge which the government enshrined in law as a promise from the nation that the Forces community will be treated fairly.

As well as formalising their support for the Armed Forces, those businesses will now help personnel by looking to employ veterans and facilitating the needs of Reserves with support and appropriate levels of leave to work and train.

In attendance at the signing, Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Karimia Mosque's support is incredibly significant for the proud relationship between our Armed Forces and the > Muslim community, and it has already paved the way for Muslim-owned businesses across Nottinghamshire to follow suit. That means opportunities for our people, and that these businesses will benefit from the unique skills and experience which the military community offers.

Dr Musharraf Hussain, Chief Imam and CEO Karimia Institute, said:

We believe that the defence and security of our country is an important job. Those engaged in that task must be respected, supported and appreciated. Muslims are one of the youngest communities in Britain therefore we are encouraging them to join and play their role in defending our country.

Thousands of Muslims died for Great Britain during the First and Second World Wars. I think, by signing the Covenant, we are honouring those heroes too. We are making a solemn promise to show and encourage support for the Armed Forces community. We want the Muslim community to recognise and remember the sacrifices the Armed Forces have made and continue to do so.

The signing of the Covenant will build on the strong ties already established between the Karimia Mosque and Institute and the Armed Forces, particularly 7th Infantry Brigade, based at Chetwynd Barracks, Chilwell.

Commander of 7th Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Charlie Collins was also in attendance at the event. He said:

We have built a strong friendship with Dr Hussain and members of the Karimia Institute. Recently we enjoyed hosting two separate weekend events where the Muslim community spent time with our Reservists and Army Cadet Adult Instructors to find out about life in the Army and the Army Cadet Force. I am sure that going forward, we will be able to do a lot of great work together.

The news is another example of the Armed Forces Covenant in action and coincides with this week's publication of the Covenant Annual Report, which highlights achievements from the past 12 months and outlines targets for the coming year.

Some of the successes delivered through the Armed Forces Covenant over the last year include:

- Over 9,000 personnel benefiting from the Forces Help to Buy scheme, to the sum of approximately £136 million.
- 86% of the UK's motor insurance industry committing to waive cancellation fees and preserve no claims discounts for up to three years when personnel and their families are posted abroad.
- A network of nearly 200 Armed Forces Covenant champions was introduced across Forces units to act as the focal point for their local community and to help deliver information about the Covenant directly to personnel and their families.

Defence Secretary: Helping our forces get on the housing ladder

Ministry of Defence

4 October 2016

The Government will extend its Forces Help to Buy scheme to 2018, the Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has announced today, helping thousands more to get on the housing ladder.

The move came as Mr. Fallon confirmed that the Government had met the target he set at last year to double the number of Service personnel whose applications have been approved to 10,000.

The Forces Help to Buy Scheme was launched in 2014. It allows members of the military to borrow up to half their salary interest free so they can buy their first home or move up the property ladder. It has proved most popular with non-officers: in August, 81 per cent of payments were made to other ranks.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Our Armed Forces keep us safe and we have a duty to provide them with the support they deserve. Extending this scheme will mean more troops can give their families – the unsung heroes – the stability that many of us take for granted. This is part of our plan for a country that works for everyone.

The extension is part of the Armed Forces Covenant – our commitment to ensure that we support those who keep us safe. It sits alongside the increase to council tax relief to around £600 for a 6 month deployment – 100 per cent of an average council tax bill over that period. And it complements the £1 billion that has been invested in improving accommodation as well as separate improvements announced to the provision of healthcare and mental health support for veterans.

Read more [here](#).

4. PQs

Armed Forces Covenant 15 Dec 2016 | 57063

Asked by: Anne-Marie Trevelyan | Party: Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when his Department plans to publish its annual report on the Armed Forces Covenant.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Department: Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence published the 2016 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report today. This will help demonstrate that while more remains to be done this Nation is honouring its pledge to the Armed Forces Community past and present; this includes tangible progress made and support offered by Departments of State, Local Authorities, the Devolved Administrations, Businesses, Charities and society as a whole.

Armed Forces Covenant 17 Nov 2016 | 52865

Asked by: Oliver Colvile | Party: Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, which Ministry of Defence contractors have signed the community covenant.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Department: Ministry of Defence

This information is not held in the format requested.

However, over 1,200 commercial organisations have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, pledging specific support for the Armed Forces Community.

Details of them can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-force-corporate-covenant-signed-pledges>

Some of our major contractors who have signed the Covenant are:

Airbus
Amey
Atkins
Atos
Babcock
BAE Systems
Boeing
Capita
Carillion
Compass Group
Deloitte
EY
G4S

General Dynamics
Hewlett Packard
Interserve
KBR
KPMG
Leonardo
PwC
Rolls Royce
Serco
Sodexo
Thales

**Armed Forces Covenant
17 Nov 2016 | HL3053**

Asked by: Lord Kennedy of Southwark | Party: Labour Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant by local authorities.

Answering member: Earl Howe | Department: Ministry of Defence

The Covenant's principles were enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011. This Government has demonstrated its commitment to upholding these principles, which is evident in the work reported in each of the four annual reports laid in the House. We will continue to report progress to Parliament. Next month's Annual Report will detail the considerable progress made across government and with wider public, private and third sectors, including in the key areas of education, healthcare, accommodation and access to commercial services.

Every Local Authority in mainland Great Britain and two in Northern Ireland have signed a Community Covenant. We are working with them to help them deliver the support they have promised to the Armed Forces community, with good work in many areas including housing, education, health and social care.

Together we have taken a number of steps forward in this area, such as allocating funding from a £20 million budget to improve childcare facilities for Service families at 40 locations in the UK and Cyprus. In order to help Service children through local schools' admissions processes, we have changed the Schools Admission Code in England to give them priority by allowing Service families to apply for and be allocated a place before they move into an area.

This year approximately £21 million was allocated in Service Pupil Premium payments for the pastoral needs of almost 70,000 Service pupils in state schools in England. In 2015, £6 million in grants was given to 154 applicants for Education Support Funding, to help UK state schools mitigate issues caused by exceptional mobility and deployment.

Furthermore, we have worked closely with the Department for Communities and Local Government and Devolved Administrations to ensure that Service personnel do not experience any disadvantage as a result of their military service when applying for social housing.

Armed Forces: Children
08 Nov 2016 | 51306

Asked by: Dr Andrew Murrison | Party: Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on what dates he met (a) Ministers and (b) officials of the Department for Education to discuss academic support for children of military personnel.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Department: Ministry of Defence

The Department for Education (DfE) has made a significant contribution to the Armed Forces Covenant, co-ordinated through the Cabinet Office-chaired Covenant Reference Group, which has been attended by both Ministry of Defence (MOD) and DfE Ministers. The DfE has provided £22 million through the Service Pupil Premium to support over 73,000 children from Service families in state schools in England. At official level the MOD works closely and routinely with DfE (and Devolved equivalents) to ensure that Service pupils suffer no disadvantage in comparison with their non-Service peers.

DfE conducted a thorough analysis of the educational attainment of Service pupils at state schools in England in 2010, and levels of attainment continue to be monitored through joint working between the DfE and the MOD's Directorate, Children and Young People. The Service Children in State Schools Network provides vital support and advice for state schools in England, and both the DfE and the MOD sit on the Executive Board. In addition DfE have a permanent seat on the MOD's Children and Young People Board, which is currently chaired by Lieutenant General James Bashall.

For full details of the close working relationship that the MOD and the DfE have on this issue, I refer the hon. Member to the MOD's written evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee Inquiry 'The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the children of Service personnel':

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/586/58602.htm>

Armed Forces Covenant
07 Nov 2016 | 616 c1242

Asked by: Anne-Marie Trevelyan | Party: Conservative Party

Does the Minister agree that the recent report published by the Royal United Services Institute on the corporate covenant is a really important step in highlighting where the Government need to do much more to reach out to a much wider group of companies to get them to support those who are leaving the service and those families who need support.

Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Department: Defence

Of course we recognise that the covenant is very much a partnership between Government, the third sector and the corporate world, which is why I was delighted to see that we recently passed 1,200 signatures on the corporate covenant.

**Armed Forces Covenant
07 Nov 2016 | 616 c1242**

Asked by: Fabian Hamilton | Party: Labour Party

While there are many examples of good practice across the United Kingdom, it is clear that not everyone in the forces community is experiencing the benefits of the covenant. A recent report by the Local Government Association found that nearly 40% of those who served in the armed forces felt that their service left them disadvantaged. What are the Government doing to ensure that the covenant becomes a reality for every serviceman and woman across the country?

Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Department: Defence

I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post, and I encourage him to look at the last four covenant reports, which detail the progress we have made over the last four years. However, his point is well made, and it is precisely why, earlier this year, I commissioned the Forces in Minds Trust to do a review so that we can ensure that best practice from the various local authorities across the United Kingdom is shared.

**Armed Forces Covenant
07 Nov 2016 | 616 c1242**

Asked by: Jim Shannon | Party: Democratic Unionist Party

What discussions has the Minister had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to see the armed forces covenant enforced in Northern Ireland? What steps has his Department taken in the interim to work with veterans' services in Northern Ireland until the scheme is fully implemented?

Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Department: Defence

Of course, we have unique challenges in Northern Ireland, but I am pleased to report that we estimate that 93% of covenant issues are being enforced in Northern Ireland. Clearly, we need to do better, and that is going to be my focus for the year.

**Armed Forces Covenant
07 Nov 2016 | 616 c1241-2**

Asked by: Lilian Greenwood | Party: Labour Party

What steps his Department is taking to ensure that the provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant are being implemented effectively in the UK.

Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Department: Defence

The implementation of the covenant is overseen by the covenant reference group, chaired by the Cabinet Office. Next month's annual report will detail that considerable progress has been made across Government and with the wider public, private and third sectors, including on key areas of education, healthcare, accommodation and access to commercial services.

Asked by: Lilian Greenwood | Party: Labour Party

I thank the Minister for that answer. The head of the forces charity SSAFA has warned that the armed forces covenant

“provides excellent guidance but there is no guarantee of enforcement.”

Forces families often find themselves in real difficulty when seeking housing or school places. In this week, when our thoughts are with those forces families who have made the ultimate sacrifice, what are the Government doing to make it clear to service providers that the guarantees contained in the covenant are legal duties, not just optional extras?

Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Department: Defence

The hon. Lady is right to raise that, because it was this Government who enshrined the covenant in law. We have made substantial progress in recent years, not least through the £22.5 million that has now been spent on the service pupil premium or the £20 million that has been invested in veterans' accommodation. However, I do recognise that more needs to be done, and I feel that I have a duty to ensure that local authorities across the country are doing their bit to enforce the covenant.

Engagements

02 Nov 2016 | 616 cc888-1016

Asked by: Gordon Marsden | Party: Labour Party

In July, the armed forces charity SSAFA published an in-depth survey of nearly 1,000 working-age veterans. Some 85% of them thought the UK did not give them enough support and only 16% thought the armed forces covenant was being implemented effectively. What is the Prime Minister doing personally to change that?

Answered by: The Prime Minister | Department: Prime Minister

We absolutely recognise the debt we owe to our veterans. That is why, through the armed forces covenant and throughout the work the Ministry of Defence is doing, we increasingly recognise the support that is necessary for veterans. The hon. Gentleman talks about what we can do. One thing we can do is to help people who come out of the armed forces to find their way into the world of work. That is why it is important both that we have a system that helps them to find the support that is necessary to get into the world of work and that we have an economy that is providing the jobs that people need.

Engagements

26 Oct 2016 | 616 c276

Asked by: Anne-Marie Trevelyan | Party: Conservative Party

The Prime Minister will be aware that our nation's commitment to our current and former armed forces personnel and their families by way of the armed forces covenant is a work in progress, and that although we have made important moves there is still much more to do. Will she take this opportunity to assure this House of her personal commitment to the values and promises set out in the covenant, and to pledge to lend her support to efforts to continue the good work begun, and to ensure that personnel, veterans and their families face no disadvantage arising from their service and the sacrifice they have all made for our country?

Answered by: The Prime Minister | Department: Prime Minister

My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I know she has championed the armed forces covenant and is a great proponent of our veterans and the armed forces. It is absolutely right to say that everybody in this House owes a great debt of gratitude to our veterans and to those serving today in our armed forces for what they do to keep us safe and secure. That is why it is so important that the covenant is not just a responsibility for the Government, but a national responsibility; we should all be working to ensure that those who have served us, and served us well, do not face disadvantages. That is why we have been doing things such as putting money into a forces Help to Buy scheme to help them with houses—I believe the figure is

£200 million. We must continue to do this, and I absolutely commit to ensuring that this is a Government who continue to support our veterans and the members of our armed forces.

Armed Forces

13 Oct 2016 | 47669

Asked by: Julie Elliott | Party: Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to promote the welfare of members of the armed forces.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Department: Ministry of Defence

The Armed Forces Covenant ensures that those who serve and have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. In June 2013 the Chancellor announced that the financial commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant would be made permanent through a £10 million fund per annum in perpetuity from 2015-16.

The Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant from December 2015 detailed a number of achievements of which this Government can be proud, including allocating £40 million for accommodation projects for veterans; the £200 million Forces Help to Buy Scheme; and a world class centre for excellence for the training and delivery of Defence Medical Services.

In 2016 to date under the large grants scheme we have awarded a total of almost £7.5 million to 24 projects supporting community integration, criminal justice system initiatives and the co-ordination and delivery of support. Under the small grants scheme we have awarded a total of almost £2.4 million to 150 community integration projects. Depending on the quality of the bids, we hope to be able to announce the preferred bidder for the Veterans Gateway Service in November, as well as further tranches of Covenant Grant funding.

In January 2016, the Department published the first ever Armed Forces Families Strategy, embracing seven key themes - partner employment, accommodation, children's education and childcare, community support, specialist support, health and wellbeing, and transition. This is now routine business supporting our families.

We have reviewed our casualty and compassionate processes, and this autumn we are introducing a new reserves welfare health-check. In the last year Defence has enabled payroll deductions for Service personnel to take advantage of the savings and cheap loan facilities from selected credit unions. This facility was extended to veterans in receipt of a pension in March 2016.

Veterans

05 May 2016 | 36013

Asked by: David Mackintosh | Party: Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if his Department will establish an office within his Department with a focus on assisting UK military veterans in terms of housing, health, employment, pensions and other needs.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Department: Ministry of Defence

As I stated on 24 March 2016 during a debate in the House (Official Report, columns 1865-74) the concept of such an office, while well-intentioned, would duplicate existing provision. We already have strong cross-Government support for veterans from the Department of Health, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Department for Communities and Local Government as well as other Departments. In addition, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) operates Veterans UK which focuses on the provision of pensions, compensation and welfare support for veterans.

The Armed Forces Covenant is designed to stop the Armed Forces community facing disadvantage and provides an effective mechanism to connect the various stakeholders who have an interest in supporting our community. The Covenant Reference Group brings together all relevant Departments and Devolved Administrations in a way that a single agency or Ministry could not. In addition, the Defence Secretary ensures that the MOD publishes an annual report to Parliament to communicate the delivery of our Covenant commitments.

Armed Forces Covenant: Northern Ireland
18 Jan 2016 | 22172, 22173 and 22174

Asked by: Gavin Robinson | Party: Democratic Unionist Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what proportion of the Armed Forces Covenant applies to Northern Ireland.

Asked by: Gavin Robinson | Party: Democratic Unionist Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much of the Armed Forces Covenant has been enacted in Northern Ireland.

Asked by: Gavin Robinson | Party: Democratic Unionist Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the reasons for delays in the full implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Department: Ministry of Defence

Since the launch of the Armed Forces Covenant in 2011 the Ministry of Defence has worked closely with Northern Ireland Government Departments, Service charities and other groups to build on existing measures to support the Armed Forces Community. In 2013, the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs reported that, less some specific areas, Covenant measures were being applied in Northern Ireland.

I acknowledge that the Armed Forces Covenant does not enjoy the same level of awareness or appreciation in Northern Ireland as in other parts of the UK. However, I am clear that every effort is being made to implement the Covenant against the particular nuances of the Northern Irish political and legal environment. The Ministry of Defence and other parties work tirelessly to ensure good relationships help develop improved understanding of specific needs and I have been impressed by the way in which solutions to these needs are generated in a focussed and professional manner. Such provision is fully commensurate with the aims and objectives of the Covenant, whether it is branded as such or not.

Service personnel in Northern Ireland are well-catered for under the auspices of the Covenant and are at no particular disadvantage, although more work is needed to identify the needs of those within the veterans community. This work is ongoing, well-resourced, and fully recognised as activity provided within the scope of the Armed Forces Covenant.

5. Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Debates

[Armed Forces Covenant](#)

HC Deb 9 January 2017, Vol 777 cc1819-36

[Children of Armed Services Personnel \(Schools Admission\)](#)

HL Deb 6 December 2016, Vol 619 cc146-9

5.2 Statements

Armed Forces Covenant Report 2016

Sir Michael Fallon

15 Dec 2016 | HCWS366

I am today laying before both Houses the 2016 Armed Forces Covenant annual report. The Covenant is a promise by the nation to ensure that those who serve, or have served, and their families are treated fairly. They protect the nation with honour, courage and commitment, and deserve to be treated with fairness and respect and suffer no disadvantage as a result of that service.

The report sets out what the Government has done to uphold the principles of the Covenant. The Armed Forces Act 2011 enshrined the Covenant into law, setting out the requirement for the Defence Secretary to report progress annually to Parliament.

Every local authority in mainland Great Britain is continuing to provide a network of support for the Armed Forces community. Over 1,300 employers have now also signed up.

This year, in response to feedback from our people, particular emphasis has been given to: improving access to commercial goods and services; ensuring healthcare, education, and accommodation; and improving communications about the Covenant.

89% of the UK's motor industry has agreed that Service personnel and their families will not face cancellation fees for suspending their cover when posted overseas, and they will be able to preserve their no claims discount for up to three years. NHS England launched a new Veterans' trauma network, aimed at providing a safety net for trauma-recovering Veterans and Service personnel transitioning back into civilian life. In addition to the Service Pupil Premium, the Ministry of Defence has allocated £6 million of funding from its Education Support Fund to help 471 schools, with over 25,000 children from Service families. We continue to help our people to get on and stay on the property ladder, through the Forces Help to Buy Scheme, which we have extended to 2018. 11,645 Service personnel have had their applications approved. We have also created a cohort of over 150 Covenant champions across the Armed Forces to act as local focal points within their communities.

Last year, we announced the launch of the new £10 million per annum Covenant Fund. Since then, it has funded nearly 300 large and small projects across the UK totalling nearly £12 million, to provide support to the Armed Forces Community. We have committed £2 million to provide a single point of contact to help Veterans towards appropriate support when and where they need it.

The Local Government Association, in partnership with the Forces in Mind Trust completed a review with over 400 representatives of local authorities to create a Covenant toolkit. This will help to spread Covenant delivery best practice across the United Kingdom.

A new Inter-Ministerial Group for the Armed Forces Covenant will be established in the new year.

The report has been compiled in consultation with other Government Departments, representatives from the devolved Governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the external members of the Covenant Reference Group, which includes the three Service Families Federations, the Confederation of Service Charities, the Royal British Legion, the Soldiers Sailors Airman's and Families Association, the War Widows Association and Professor Hew Strachan.

Better Combat Compensation

Sir Michael Fallon

01 Dec 2016 | HCWS299

Today I am publishing a consultation on proposals to provide better compensation for deaths or injuries sustained by servicemen or women in combat. Copies of the consultation are available in the Library of the House and on the www.gov.uk website.

The Government is proud of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme which provides compensation to Service personnel who suffer illness or injury attributable to their service or in the case of those who have died, provides it to their families, whether or not anyone was legally at fault. Separately, the Courts may award damages where the Ministry of Defence has been found to be at fault: however, that often leads to lengthy legal cases alleging battlefield negligence.

The Government has been considering options to provide relief for Service personnel and their families who may otherwise have to pursue lengthy and stressful claims in the courts. In line with our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, we plan to provide better compensation by introducing an enhanced scheme so that members and veterans of the Armed Forces and their families receive compensation for injuries or death in combat equal to that which a court would be likely to award if it found negligence.

As part of this reform, we intend to clarify in primary legislation the long-standing common law principle that the Government is not liable for damages as a result of injuries or deaths sustained in combat. This will address the "judicialisation of war" whereby judges second-guess

military decisions using criteria that are appropriate for civilian life, but not for the battlefield.

The Iraq Inquiry report by Sir John Chilcot underscored the often challenging circumstances which can contribute to deaths or injuries sustained on the battlefield. The Government is committed to learning the lessons and is reviewing ways in which we can better plan, equip and operate, so that deaths and injuries can be avoided, where possible, in future.

This package will provide relief for individuals and families who in the future will be awarded better compensation without having to pursue lengthy legal action. It will also ensure that the Armed Forces are able to take the rapid and high risk decisions essential to operational effectiveness without being inhibited by the risk of future legal claims.

Veterans Healthcare

Mark Lancaster

13 Jul 2016 | HCWS86

The Armed Forces Covenant is the Government's commitment to Service personnel, their families and veterans who have made enormous sacrifices on recent operations and to ensuring that those seriously injured receive the care and support they deserve. I would like to update the House on some of the steps we have taken to enhance this provision.

The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Headley Court has long provided world-class rehabilitation and prosthetic support to our serving personnel. I am pleased to tell the House that a number of veterans with amputation-related complications can now also receive prosthetic support at Headley Court, through the recent establishment of a veterans' Complex Prosthetic Assessment Clinic (CPAC) at the DMRC. Access to the CPAC is being offered to veterans with the most complex needs on a case by case basis, after referral by and with the support of their NHS specialist. Early feedback has been good and the Government is working closely with BLESMA, the limbless charity, and other Service charities to ensure veterans and NHS clinicians are aware of this initiative and its benefits.

A small number of those referred to the CPAC might also meet the clinical criteria for the direct skeletal fixation (DSF) pilot, for which the Government announced £2 million of LIBOR funding in November 2015. The DSF pilot, which is due to run for another two years, has already enabled some Service personnel and veterans to have potentially life-changing surgery in this country at public expense.

I can also announce a plan to improve the care received by the most seriously injured Service personnel and veterans. Currently such support is funded and delivered by a number of separate agencies, including the NHS, Ministry of Defence, Local Authorities and charitable organisations. A pilot, commencing in September will see care of this

kind co-ordinated and delivered by a new Integrated High Dependency Care System (IHDCS), producing a joined-up and improved system of care for the individual. This will provide confidence for this small number of individuals, and their families, that their clinical, health and social support needs will continue to be met when they leave the Armed Forces and for the rest of their lives.

The Government and the nation will never forget the hard work, great bravery and sacrifice of all current and former Service personnel and I will ensure the House is kept informed of this continuing and vital work.

5.3 Early Day Motions

DISTRIBUTION OF ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUNDING

EDM 419 (session 2016-17)

7 September 2016

Jeffrey Donaldson

That this House is concerned with the distribution of Armed Forces Covenant funding across all of the UK; notes that the regions of Northern Ireland and Wales are the lowest of the 10 UK regions in terms of successful small grant applications and total amount awarded in 2015-16; and further notes that no grants were awarded under two of the three large grant themes with a focus upon those regions.

ARMED FORCES AND CENSUS INFORMATION

EDM 92 (session 2016-17)

25 May 2016

Alan Meale

That this House believes that the nation owes a great debt of gratitude to ex and serving members of our armed forces, their families and local communities who bear the brunt of their role; accepts that the unique nature of military life brings with it many challenges which need to be both recognised and better understood by citizens, especially regarding the injured and bereaved who may need the provision of extra support; calls on Government departments, local and regional authorities and appropriate charities to help meet their needs as outlined by the Armed Forces Covenant; and pays tribute to the Royal British Legion and its sister charity, Poppy Scotland, who have called on the governments of the UK, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to include in all future censuses the inclusion of questions about serving personnel, reservists, veterans and their dependants in order to produce and identify the necessary information and statistics to provide a comprehensive overview of their ongoing role in society.

6. ONS contribution

In advance of a debate on the collection of statistics on veterans, the Office for National Statistics contributed the following directly to the Library:

On 23 May 2016, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a report on likely recommended topics for inclusion in the 2021 Census. While recognising the need for information on veterans, we concluded that this need could best be met by making use of administrative data already held by the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

In the period since, ONS has received a range of submissions from Parliamentarians, public sector bodies, and members of the public, in support for data on the armed forces community. Responding to this demand, ONS established a working group with the MoD, aimed at developing the UK's evidence base on its armed forces community. The group is focussed on three tasks:

- i. assessing the requirement for information on veterans;
- ii. exploring what could be achieved through use of MoD administrative data linked to the 2011 Census, plus further analysis of the ONS Annual Population Survey; and
- iii. developing and testing questions on veterans that would work in the context of the 2021 Census.

Initial work suggests that while including a question in the 2021 Census will provide a useful benchmark in 2022 (when the information becomes available); administrative data held by government may provide greater potential.

The service and pension records collected by the armed forces and held by the MoD, held electronically back to 1971, may offer a significant opportunity in the context of developing the frequency, timeliness and range of official statistics available on the armed forces community.

ONS could, anonymously, link these records to the 2011 Census and produce results on where Armed Forces veterans lived in 2011 to inform policy well in advance of the results from the 2021 Census. Furthermore, we could potentially link these records to other government administrative data to update these results annually, rather than relying on the ten-yearly census alone.

For example, linking would enable analyses at a local authority level, and perhaps lower, of the number of veterans and their families by age/sex, housing type and tenure (e.g. owned, renting, social housing), labour market participation and occupation, educational attainment, and general health and any limiting long-term illnesses.

The ONS and MoD have met key stakeholders, including the Royal British Legion and those responsible for delivering services to veterans and the armed forces community on a number of occasions. We look forward to continuing to working closely with these groups, as we share plans for improving the UK's use of existing administrative data, and for developing and testing a potential question for the 2021 Census.

7. Further reading

[Armed Forces Covenant](#) website

HM Government publications

[The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016](#)

Ministry of Defence
15 December 2016

[Armed Forces Covenant](#)

Ministry of Defence Policy Paper
3 June 2016

[The Armed Forces Covenant](#)

Ministry of Defence
2011

House of Commons Library briefings

[Support for UK Veterans](#)

Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP7693
2 September 2016

[Housing options for serving and ex-military personnel](#)

Commons Library Briefing Paper SN04244
28 July 2016

[Armed Forces Covenant and the 2015 Annual Report](#)

Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP7441
4 January 2016

[The Armed Forces Covenant](#)

Commons Library Briefing Paper SN06519
4 January 2013

House of Commons Committee inquiry

[Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016 inquiry](#) website

Defence Committee

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