



Ministry
of Defence

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Armed Forces Covenant Legislation – A government manifesto commitment

I appreciate the pressures that you are no doubt facing as our country works through the unprecedented challenges presented by the Coronavirus. I want to offer my respect and best wishes to you and your officials at this time. I also wish to express my gratitude for all the work that you do for the Armed Forces Covenant and to draw your attention to the regional focus groups that we have set up involving your officials.

It is more important than ever that we continue to support our Armed Forces who are helping the nation during this crisis by providing assistance to the NHS and other key services. Their work in aiding with the planning and building of Nightingale hospitals and mobile testing units for example is being echoed around the UK as they once again step up alongside key workers in the service of our country.

As outlined in the Queen's Speech in December, we are preparing to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law to ensure that no member of the Armed Forces Community suffer disadvantage as a result of their service.

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. The primary purpose of Armed Forces Acts is to provide for the continuation, for a further period of five years, of the legislation that enables Her Majesty's Armed Forces to be recruited and maintained as disciplined bodies. In order to meet the necessary timescales it is intended this Bill be ready for introduction by the end of this calendar year. While this puts pressure on the next few months amongst an already challenging environment, I believe it is vital this work progresses in order to honour our duty to the Armed Forces community and deliver on this Government's manifesto commitment. By working collaboratively across central and local government to make this happen, we can ensure meaningful and lasting change.

In order to have the legislation ready for introduction to Parliament in a timely manner, and due to the impact that Coronavirus has had on the preparation of this work, we will not be able to conduct a formal consultation process.

However, the input of local authorities remains crucial to the legislation, so we have therefore set up regional focus groups. These groups involve representatives from a selection of local authorities, including your own, across the country. We appreciate not all local authorities can be involved in these groups, but the groups should act as an insight into the Covenant landscape in each region.

The focus groups are already underway and the work they are doing is commendable and vital to the legislation. The representatives in the groups are beginning to liaise with the relevant members of their authority to provide information and feedback which will be used to shape the legislation and accompanying guidance package. The current focus is on gathering information to inform the impact assessments we are creating, which review the impact the legislation will have on various areas (including any potential burden on local authorities). We appreciate that the timeline for receiving this information is challenging, but we are just looking for estimates and will collate all responses to inform one set of nationwide impact assessments. I would be most grateful if you could continue to support your officials in engaging with us (and of course can supply a contact list for those working with us on this from your authority if necessary).

Once again, I am extremely grateful for the support that you and your officials have already provided, and I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the Covenant continues as an enduring part of British life, to support and recognise those who serve, have served, and their families, and which is an envy of our international community.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Helliwell, Director of Armed Forces People Policy