

Press Release UK Veterans-One Voice

9th January 2016 – for immediate release

UK Veterans- One Voice – Focus on Annual Report of the Armed Forces Covenant to Parliament

UK Veterans-One Voice was heartened to see Parliament set aside time in the first week of business of the New Year to discuss the annual report of the Armed Services Covenant. The first debate on the Armed Services Covenant since its inception four years ago.

A copy of the Commons Briefing Report is here appended to enable UK Veterans – One Voice members and interested parties, understand what has been achieved and what immediate further steps are planned.

In line with UK Veterans –One Voice’s aim of helping members get support when they need it, the report highlights provide direct, meaningful and tangible benefits that the Group can help disseminate and promote.

UK Veterans – One Voice are pleased to see the Covenant will be extended to include members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy, and that recognition for a UK Armed Services Families Strategy has been adopted, which will report back later in 2016.

About:

UK Veterans - One Voice formed to campaign for fair treatment for all veterans. We aim to attempt to unite all the groups who are fighting for justice or seeking help for serving military personnel and veterans in need. We are not a political organisation but people who have served their Country with Professionalism, Honour and the hope that we would always be supported by the Government we represented. Though we are in support of other groups, each must take responsibility for its own actions. We WILL NOT support any criminal activities.

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Appendix - Armed Forces Covenant and the 2015 Annual Report

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On 10 December 2015 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 outlined some key priorities for the future. Among them is the extension of the Armed Forces Covenant to members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Navy. The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015 is the subject of a Westminster Hall Debate on Thursday 7 January 2016.

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, and specifically in relation to four core areas specified in the Act – healthcare, education, housing and the operation of inquests. However, the Covenant encompasses fifteen broad themes in total.

Delivery of many areas of the Covenant fall to other Government departments, local authorities and the Devolved Administrations, for example in the provision of healthcare, housing for veterans and education. A Cabinet sub-committee on the Armed Forces Covenant has been established to oversee cross-Government work on the Covenant.

The Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government have published their own documents expressing their support for the Armed Forces Covenant. Challenges in implementing the covenant in Northern Ireland continue to be recognised. Concerns remain that providing preferential access to serving and former members of the Armed Forces may run counter to section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act which promotes equality.

Community and Corporate Covenants

The Armed Forces Covenant is supported by the Community Covenant and the Corporate Covenant.

The Community Covenant encourages local communities to support the armed forces community in their area and promote public understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the armed forces community. Every local authority in England, Scotland and Wales has signed a community covenant partnership with their local armed forces, along with two local authorities in Northern Ireland. Community covenants may look quite different from one location to another, with the nature of the support offered determined by both need and the capacity of the local authority. Many local authorities also have an 'Armed Forces Champion' whose role is to ensure that the local authority achieves its commitments to the armed forces community and that any problems are resolved.

The Corporate Covenant is a voluntary pledge from businesses and other organisations who wish to demonstrate their support for the armed forces community. More than 770 organisations have signed a Corporate Covenant thus far. Each organisation is encouraged to offer support in a way most appropriate to their situation and capacity, with the pledge document including a variety of options that they may sign up to. Such options include employment support for veterans, reservists, service spouses and partners, as well as support for cadet units, [Armed Forces Day](#), and discounts for the armed forces community. There is also an opportunity for companies and charitable organisations to add their own commitments based on local circumstances.

Highlights of the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015

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The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report for 2015 was published on 10 December 2015. Key achievements over the last year include:

- Embedding the principles of the covenant within the NHS constitution in England.
- Establishing a pilot NHS Specialist Rehabilitation unit to provide veterans with improved access to orthopaedic care in England.
- The Schools Admission Code has been amended to prioritise Service children. Service families can now apply for, and be allocated a school place before they move into an area.
- Approximately £21 million in Service Pupil Premium payments have been allocated in order to support the pastoral needs of almost 70,000 Service pupils in state schools in England.
- £85.5 million has been provided through the Forces Help to Buy Scheme, which allows Service personnel to buy, or improve, their own home.
- £65 million has been invested to upgrade and improve Service Families Accommodation in the UK.
- Reserves are now eligible for the new Armed Forces Pensions Scheme 2015 in relation to non-mobilised service.
- A two-year Spouse Employment Support Trial has been launched.
- Spouses and adult children returning from overseas have been made exempt from the three-month residence requirement for claims for income-based jobseekers allowance.
- £10 million has been allocated to the Royal British Legion to launch a Veterans' Hearing Fund.
- A new annual £10 million Covenant fund has been launched in order to support covenant commitments; along with a new Aged Veterans Fund, which has £25 million available to it over the next five years. It will fund projects that support non-core health, wellbeing and social care needs for older veterans.

Going forward the Armed Forces Covenant will now be extended to cover members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) and the Merchant Navy. Under the new measures, all those in the RFA and Merchant Navy who have served on a civilian vessel while it was supporting HM Armed Forces will now be recognised and supported by the Covenant.

In 2016, the MOD will also publish its first UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy.

Commons Briefing papers CBP-7441

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