



Armed Forces Covenant

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The Military Covenant has existed as an unwritten social and moral commitment between the State and the Armed Forces that has developed through long standing convention and customs. Historically it has been largely associated with the Army, although its principles are applied across all three Services. Although it currently has no legal basis, it implies that in return for the sacrifices that Service personnel make, the State has an obligation to recognise that contribution and retains a long term duty of care toward Service personnel and their families.

Criticisms over the last few years that the Military Covenant was being steadily undermined, has prompted a series of welfare-related measures intended to improve the terms and conditions of Service personnel, their families and the treatment of veterans. Upon taking office in May 2010, the Government outlined a commitment to “work to rebuild the Military Covenant”, which would include the writing of a new Tri-Service Covenant. In June 2010 the Prime Minister also pledged to enshrine the principles of the Military Covenant in law.

On 16 May 2011 the Government published the first *Armed Forces Covenant* and a document outlining the measures it intended to put in place over the next few years in order to support that Covenant. The Government also announced its intention to amend the *Armed Forces Bill*, which is currently in the House of Commons, in order to enshrine the principles of the Covenant in law.

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Contents

1 Background 2

2 Developments in the Last Few Years 5

2.1 Service Personnel Command Paper 5

2.2 Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces 6

2.3 Military Covenant Task Force Report – December 2010 7

2.4 *Armed Forces Bill* – December 2010 8

3 The Armed Forces Covenant 10

3.1 Specific Commitments 14

4 Further Library Reading Material 22

1 Background

The Military Covenant is an unwritten social and moral commitment between the State and Service personnel in the Armed Forces that has developed through long standing convention and customs. Indeed, one of the first references to the existence of an obligation on the State to provide for its injured soldier’s, dates back to the reign of Elizabeth I when an *Act for the Necessary Relief of Soldiers and Mariners* was passed in 1593.¹

Historically it has been largely associated with the Army, although its principles are applied across all three Services. Although it currently has no legal basis, it implies that in return for the sacrifices that Service personnel make, the State has an obligation to recognise that contribution and retains a long term duty of care toward Service personnel and their families.

Army Doctrine Publication Volume 5 set out what the British Army considers to be the fundamental principles of the Military Covenant. It states:

The purpose and measure of the British Army is military effectiveness: success in war and on other operations. Ultimately this means that every soldier is a weapon bearer, so all must be prepared personally to make the decision to engage an enemy or to place themselves in harm’s way. All British soldiers share the legal right and duty to fight and if necessary, kill, according to their orders, and an unlimited liability to give their lives in doing so. This is the unique nature of soldiering.

These grave responsibilities mean that military effectiveness cannot be based on functional output alone; unless an Army is focused on higher external ethics, it risks moral bankruptcy. This is vitally important because a morally bankrupt force, even if effective, risks alienation from the community it serves. Furthermore, military success is not a simple question of victory and defeat. Soldiers operate throughout a complex spectrum which embraces conflict prevention operations, conflict itself, and post-conflict activities, all of them with joint, multi-national and inter agency dimensions, and under the scrutiny of government, society and the media at home and abroad. The country expects soldiers to be available at any time, to go anywhere and to carry out a wide variety of potential missions in support of government policy, often as the last resort. Such capability requires good equipment, organisation, training and leadership,

¹ 35 Elizabeth c.4, 1593 and 39 Elizabeth c.21, 1597

and above all, soldiers with high degrees of personal and collective commitment, self-sacrifice, forbearance and mutual trust. Together these cement the morale and teamwork so essential for operational success. This demands hard and realistic training, the unquestioning acceptance of authority and sound discipline. In addition, soldiers have to understand and accept the political and legal responsibilities of their actions. And in all of this, conflict is still the province of chaos, danger, exhaustion, fear, loneliness and privation. Success in such a complex environment requires a moral and ethical basis which is shared and understood by all. However the societies from which the British Army recruits have increasingly diverse ethical and moral codes. Hence the Army has a fundamental duty to its soldiers, and those they serve, to articulate its common ethos and moral basis. British soldiers must know that what they are called upon to do is right as well as militarily achievable, and has the support of the nation, society and the government.

Soldiers will be called upon to make personal sacrifices - including the ultimate sacrifice - in the service of the Nation. In putting the needs of the Nation and the Army before their own, they forego some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service. In the same way the unique nature of military land operations means that the Army differs from all other institutions, and must be sustained and provided for accordingly by the Nation. This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the Nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility which has sustained the Army throughout its history. It has perhaps its greatest manifestation in the annual commemoration of Armistice Day, when the Nation keeps covenant with those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in action.²

Over the last eight years various aspects of the terms and conditions of service of Armed Forces personnel, and the treatment of veterans, have been highlighted and criticised. This was considered largely inevitable given that there has been large scale restructuring of the Armed Forces in the last few years; while at the same time the UK has played a significant, and very public, operational role in Iraq and Afghanistan. The provision of healthcare for injured Service personnel and veterans; the poor standard of Service accommodation; the inadequacy of equipment; overstretch and the breaching of harmony guidelines; the rates of pay, allowances and compensation for Service personnel and the welfare support provided to their families and to veterans, have been the most consistently criticised.

The high profile nature of this debate led to allegations by a number of charities, campaign groups, opposition political parties, ex-military chiefs and the media, that the Military Covenant was being steadily undermined. In response to these longstanding concerns In September 2007 the Royal British Legion launched its "Honour the Covenant" campaign, which was also the focus of that year's poppy appeal. The fundamental principle behind the campaign was the RBL's belief that the Military Covenant was being breached with respect to three key issues:

- The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme
- Healthcare and welfare support for serving personnel, their dependents and veterans
- Support for bereaved families at inquests

² *Soldiering – The Military Covenant*, Army Doctrine Publication, Volume 5, February 2000

Announcing the campaign, the RBL stated:

While we acknowledge that significant efforts have been made in recent years, we believe that certain aspects of the Military Covenant are not being delivered and that the Nation must now bring about change to ensure that our Service people and their families get the support they deserve. It is time to Honour the Covenant.³

An unconnected e-petition was also launched on the Downing Street website which called for the Military Covenant to be enshrined in law.⁴

Taking the discussion of the Military Covenant one step further, during a speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in September 2007, the then Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt also expressed concern over what he considered to be a “growing gulf” between the Armed Forces and the general public. He stated:

I have become increasingly concerned about the growing gulf between the Army and the Nation. I am not talking about the support that we get from Her Majesty’s Government and to a large extent I am not talking about public finances. Rather, I am talking about how the Nation as a whole views the Army.

The people who make up that Army are all volunteers and they fully understand that they join to fight and if necessary to put themselves in harms way to get the job done – we do not ask for sympathy when we are doing what we are paid to do. Now, a great deal has been made of the Military Covenant in recent weeks, mostly in terms of equipment and pay, but the real covenant is with the population at large – the Nation. The covenant says that we do what we do in your name; soldiers do not ask why; but they do ask for respect and honour for doing what they have been sent to do with courage and professionalism [...]

As our operational commitments have become more intense, so has the need for support from the Nation. We must move from being a society that uses the military as a political football.⁵

Michael Codner writing in the *RUSI Journal* in April 2007 also discussed this need for a better understanding of the military among the general public:

A fundamental element of the rebuilding of a national consensus over the military instrument is that the nation as a whole, and not just particular governments, accepts its responsibility for the wellbeing of its military and their dependents. And there needs to be a better understanding in the electorate of its military and the demands that are made on it. Education in this respect is not a matter simply for government or the Services. Representative politicians have a particularly important role to play in their communities as well as in Parliaments and councils.⁶

³ Royal British Legion, *Campaign Overview*, September 2007

⁴ That petition is available at: [Hhttp://petitions.pm.gov.uk/MilitaryCovenant/H](http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/MilitaryCovenant/H)

⁵ A copy of this speech given to the International Institute for Strategic Studies on 21 September 2007 is available at:

[Hhttp://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/ChiefStaff/20070921AddressToTheInternationalInstituteForStrategicStudies.htm](http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/ChiefStaff/20070921AddressToTheInternationalInstituteForStrategicStudies.htm)

⁶ “British defence policy – rebuilding national consensus”, *RUSI Journal*, April 2007

2 Developments in the Last Few Years

The Royal British Legion's 'Honour the Covenant' campaign received widespread support and succeeded in spearheading a number of changes in welfare policy relating to Service personnel, their dependants, and veterans.

2.1 Service Personnel Command Paper

Most notably, the previous Labour government published a command paper in July 2008 entitled *The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans*⁷ which set out a number of cross-departmental measures intended to improve welfare provision and support. Announcing what was essentially regarded as a Military Covenant White Paper by many commentators, the then Armed Forces Minister, Bob Ainsworth, stated:

We in Government have a responsibility to recognise the commitment and sacrifice our Armed Forces make for our country, and in return we must look after them and their families. To do this we need the entire Government, working together in a comprehensive and co-ordinated way. We also need to look at how we can make the best of the support offered by other organisations and charities – who make an important and much appreciated contribution.⁸

The terms of reference were wide ranging and intended to address all aspects of the terms and conditions of Service personnel, including those areas which had been widely criticised over the last few years. The main recommendations in the paper therefore focused on housing, healthcare, compensation, education and welfare support for families.

The intention of the Command Paper was also for the strategy and initiatives set out in it, to have long term value. In its conclusion the paper stated:

Many of the initiatives redress the unnecessary frictions and inadvertent disadvantages that our service people, their families and veterans experience. These frictions and disadvantages have accumulated over decades during which policy has been made and legislation enacted without fully taking into account the impact on the Armed Forces constituency. This must not be allowed to happen again. Nor must this strategy be allowed to fade. What we have set in place here must stick and remain foremost in the minds of Government, the devolved administrations, local authorities and, indeed, the Armed Forces themselves.⁹

While the MOD has taken the lead on providing strategic direction to the development of welfare related policies, responsibility for many of these issues, particularly in relation to veterans, does not, however, lie directly with the MOD but with other government departments such as the Department of Health, the devolved administrations and local authorities. Indeed, the Scottish Executive published a paper, in parallel with the Service personnel Command paper, entitled *Scotland's veterans and forces' communities: meeting our commitment*, which set out the specific commitments that the devolved administration would meet.

⁷ Cm 7424, July 2008

⁸ Ministry of Defence press release, 8 November 2007:

[Hhttp://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/NewGovernmentStrategyWillImproveSupportToServicePersonnelAndTheirFamilies.htm](http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/NewGovernmentStrategyWillImproveSupportToServicePersonnelAndTheirFamilies.htm)

⁹ Ministry of Defence, *The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans*, Cm 7424, Session 2007-08

In order to deliver on the principles and commitments of the Service Personnel Command Paper and maintain a degree of co-ordination and cohesion, Armed Forces Advocates were established within Government departments, while the MOD's External Reference Group, which brings together representatives from across Government and the devolved administrations, leading charities and the Service Families Federations, was tasked with monitoring implementation of the paper's recommendations and reporting annually to the Prime Minister.¹⁰ With respect to the support of the devolved administrations, in its report for 2010 the ERG stated:

The role of the ERG extends to all parts of the United Kingdom, and we note that the Scottish and Welsh Assembly Governments – unchanged as a result of the General Election – have also continued to support the SPCP initiative. In addition to the SPCP commitments the Welsh Assembly Government is working to deliver, they have set up a Ministerial-level Welsh Expert Group to support the needs of the Armed Forces Community in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government is establishing an all-Wales Mental Health and Wellbeing Service for Veterans, and funding research into veterans' health needs in Wales. Health Boards have appointed Armed Forces and Veterans Champions, and set Annual Operating Framework targets in 2010-11 for Local Health Boards to consider veterans' needs specifically when planning services.

In Scotland, as well as the SPCP commitments that Scotland specifically signed up to, there have been further initiatives including the creation of Armed Forces and Veterans Champions in Health Boards and Local Authorities, the establishment of the Scottish Veterans Fund, and working with Scottish Parliament Cross Party Groups on mental health and veterans issues. As we stated last year, we want to see the benefits of the SPCP initiatives extended to Northern Ireland as rapidly as possible, especially now that the uncertainties regarding devolution have been reduced.¹¹

2.2 Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces

In May 2008 Quentin Davies MP also published a report into [National Recognition of our Armed Forces](#), in conclusion to an inquiry that had been instigated by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, in late 2007.

Intended to complement the work of the Service Personnel Command Paper, the report was to evaluate the relationship between the Armed Forces and society and identify ways in which the perceived "gulf" between the two could be bridged, without significant cost to the taxpayer. In announcing the inquiry's recommendations, the report stated that:

Where adjustments in intangibles – consciousness, priorities and habits of mind and practice – are desirable... there is never any mechanistic or immediate solution. The best that can be done is to set in train, across a broad front, a range of initiatives, none of which individually may be, or perhaps should be, very dramatic, but which taken together will move matters forward in the right direction over time.¹²

Those recommendations included, among other things, the wider use of uniforms, legal protection for the uniform, a more systematic approach to homecoming parades, the creation of a British Armed Forces and Veterans Day, the reinstatement of the Royal Tournament, annual public outreach schemes and civic education in secondary schools.

¹⁰ The latest annual report was published on 12 November 2010 and is available at: [HExternal Reference Group Annual Report 2010H](#)

¹¹ External Reference Group, *Annual Report 2010*

¹² *Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces*, May 2008, p.5

In response to that report, the Government stated:

The Government accepts the majority of the recommendations made by the Inquiry, though in a few cases this is with qualification or modification. In particular, the Government is conscious of the need to avoid placing additional burdens on our hard pressed Armed Forces, especially given the present level of commitment to operations, which must remain our top priority. Nevertheless, the Government welcomes the Inquiry's objective to create more opportunities for contact between the Armed Forces and the society they serve and for the public to be able to express its support. Where the Government has not fully accepted recommendations, it is confident that it can give meaning to the intent behind the recommendation in most cases. Our detailed response to each of the recommendations is set out below. Where appropriate, it will be for the Devolved Administrations to take forward recommendations in co-operation with the MOD and the Armed Forces in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.¹³

A full copy of the Government's response is available [online](#).

2.3 Military Covenant Task Force Report – December 2010

At the same time the Service Personnel Command Paper was published, both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats commissioned reports into the state of the Military Covenant,¹⁴ with many of the recommendations subsequently forming key pledges in each parties respective manifesto ahead of the 2010 general election.¹⁵ The new Coalition Government's *Programme for Government*, published in May 2010, subsequently outlined a commitment to "work to rebuild the Military Covenant", which would build on the measures set out in the 2008 command paper and include the writing of a new Tri-Service Covenant.¹⁶

A new independent Task Force on the Military Covenant, chaired by Professor Hew Strachan, was established in summer 2010 to support taking that work forward. The terms of reference of the Task Force were to seek innovative, low-cost solutions to some of the known issues faced by serving and former Service personnel and their families in order to assist the Government, and society as a whole, to fulfil its obligation to rebuild the Covenant. In June 2010 the Prime Minister also pledged that the Military Covenant would be enshrined in law for the first time.¹⁷

The [Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant](#) was published on 8 December 2010. Among the key recommendations in that report were the creation of an Armed Forces Community Covenant, which would encourage communities across the UK to volunteer support for their local Armed Forces; the introduction of Veterans' Privilege cards, Service Families' cards and Reservists' ID Cards, which would allow these groups to access services and discounts offered under the community covenant; encouraging home ownership among Service personnel; establishing a Veterans' Commissioner or Champion within Government

¹³ Ministry of Defence, *The Government's response to the report of inquiry into national recognition of our armed forces*, October 2008

¹⁴ See Liberal Democrats, *HNo Choice but ChangeH*, September 2008 and Conservative Party, *HRestoring the CovenantH*, September 2008

¹⁵ *HConservative Armed Forces Manifesto 2010H* and *HLiberal Democrat Manifesto: Your WorldH*

¹⁶ Since taking office the Coalition government has already introduced several welfare measures including the doubling of the Operational Service Allowance; changes to the policy governing rest and recuperation for Service personnel deployed on operations; measures for university scholarships for children of Service personnel killed on active operations since 1990 and plans to encourage Service personnel leaving the Armed Forces to re-train as teachers. A report on mental health services for personnel and veterans, entitled *H Fighting FitH*, was also published in October 2010, the recommendations of which are currently under review.

¹⁷ MOD Press Release, *H "Military covenant to be enshrined in law" H*, 25 June 2010

and providing better co-ordination of the work of veterans' charities; and strengthening the links between the Armed Forces and society, including the establishment of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Commendation Scheme, which would allow the CDS to thank those individuals or bodies who give exceptional support to the Armed Forces.

In responding to the publication of the Task Force report, the Government announced that it would begin work immediately on two of its recommendations: the creation of an Armed Forces Community Covenant, which is in keeping with the concept of the Big Society, and the establishment of the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) Commendation Scheme.

A full response to the report's recommendations was subsequently published in May 2011, in tandem with the *Armed Forces Covenant* (see below). In addition to the two measures outlined above, the Government also expressed its support for launching a veteran's card, which could be used to access commercial discounts or privileges both locally and nationally; while formal dialogue with the financial sector on access to mortgages by Service personnel is ongoing. The Government rejected, however, the proposal for a Veterans Commissioner to be established, arguing that the post of Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans is already well supported in the formulation and delivery of veteran's policy. The Government also rejected the idea of a formal ID card for veterans and Service families, suggesting that a Government-funded ID card scheme would not offer value for money.

The recommendations of the Task Force, supported by the Government, have now formed part of the specific commitments identified as part of the *Armed Forces Covenant*, which was published on 16 May (see below).

2.4 *Armed Forces Bill* – December 2010

The report of the Military Covenant Task Force was also published the same day that the *Armed Forces Bill* was presented to Parliament. That Bill contained provisions for the Secretary of State to present an annual report to Parliament on the implementation of the Military Covenant.¹⁸ It did not, however, go as far as some commentators had considered it might. It did not explicitly state what welfare provisions must be provided for under the Military Covenant, such as priority healthcare; or any minimum standards of care.

The extent to which the Bill, as introduced, fulfilled the Prime Minister's pledge to enshrine the Covenant in law has since been the subject of intense debate both during the Select Committee stage of the Bill and during a number of Opposition Day debates that have taken place since the Bill's introduction. The Royal British Legion suggested that the Bill, as it stood, "looks like the beginnings of a Government u-turn".¹⁹ Giving evidence on 10 February 2011 the Director General of the RBL, Chris Simpkins, argued:

It was...a surprise on publication of the Bill that an enshrined form of the Covenant – or at least, as I would put it, principles that such a Covenant should satisfy – is absent from the provisions of clause 2 [...]

This group is the only group of people in the country who contract with the state to lay down their lives on behalf of the state. We believe that the other side of the contract, and what the state contracts towards those individuals, represented by

¹⁸ See also MOD Press Release, H"[Government commits to progress on rebuilding Military Covenant](#)", H 8 December 2010

¹⁹ [Hhttp://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/news/campaigning/legion-to-defend-military-covenant-in-armed-forces-bill-hearings](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/news/campaigning/legion-to-defend-military-covenant-in-armed-forces-bill-hearings)H

Parliamentarians, should equally be given some better status in law. There is no better opportunity than that currently presented by the Bill.²⁰

That debate is examined in Library briefing [SN/IA/5899](#).

The Committee of the Whole House and remaining Commons stages of the *Armed Forces Bill* were delayed by the Government at the beginning of May 2011 amid speculation that the Government was reconsidering the provisions in the Bill relating to the Military Covenant, following a sustained campaign by the Royal British Legion for the Bill to be amended.

Indeed, on 15 May 2011 the Prime Minister announced that the principles of the Military Covenant would now be written into the Bill. The Secretary of State for Defence provided further details to the House on 16 May when the Government also published the first tri-Service *Armed Forces Covenant*, and a document outlining both the measures that are being undertaken to implement the Covenant, and future commitments in this area. In his statement to the House, the Secretary of State commented:

In deciding how best to recognise the covenant in law, the Government have had to maintain a careful balance. On the one hand, we do not want to see the chain of command undermined or the military permanently involved in human rights cases in the European courts. On the other, we must ensure that the legitimate aspirations of the wider service community, the armed forces charities and the British public for our armed forces are met.

We believe that a sensible way forward – one that will give the right kind of legal basis to the armed forces covenant for the first time in our history – is to enshrine the principles in law, provide a regular review of the policies that will make them a reality, ensure that Parliament has a chance to scrutinise that review through the annual report, and ensure that the report itself is widely informed, consultative and transparent. I believe that it is right for the Government to be held to account on delivering the principles underpinning the covenant by this House, and not by the European Courts. That is what our approach will ensure [...]

The Government will set out on the face of the Armed Forces Bill the key principles that we believe underpin both the covenant and any report on its implementation. Ensuring that members of the armed forces community do not suffer disadvantage as a result of their service, and that where appropriate they receive special treatment, are at the heart of the armed forces covenant [...] the Government will bring forward amendments before Third Reading to require the Secretary of State to address those principles in preparing his report to Parliament, and to recognise the unique nature of service life.²¹

Responding to that announcement, the Director General of the Royal British Legion, Chris Simpkins, stated:

For the first time, Armed Forces personnel and their families will see the principles of fair treatment there on the statute book. Fairness for our brave Armed Forces can now be put to Parliamentary scrutiny – an historic breakthrough that will benefit those in Service and their families for generations to come.²²

²⁰ Armed Forces Bill Select Committee, *Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence*, HC 779-iv, Session 2010-11, Q293

²¹ HC Deb 16 May 2011, c26

²² Royal British Legion press release, 15 May 2011

The Government’s amendments to the Armed Forces Bill are examined in Library briefing [SN05991](#).

3 The Armed Forces Covenant

On 16 May the Government published two documents:

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

The Armed Forces Covenant is stated thus:

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

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

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

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.²³

²³ *The Armed Forces Covenant*, p.1

The guidance accompanying that statement provides a definition of the Armed Forces Community, to which the Covenant applies:

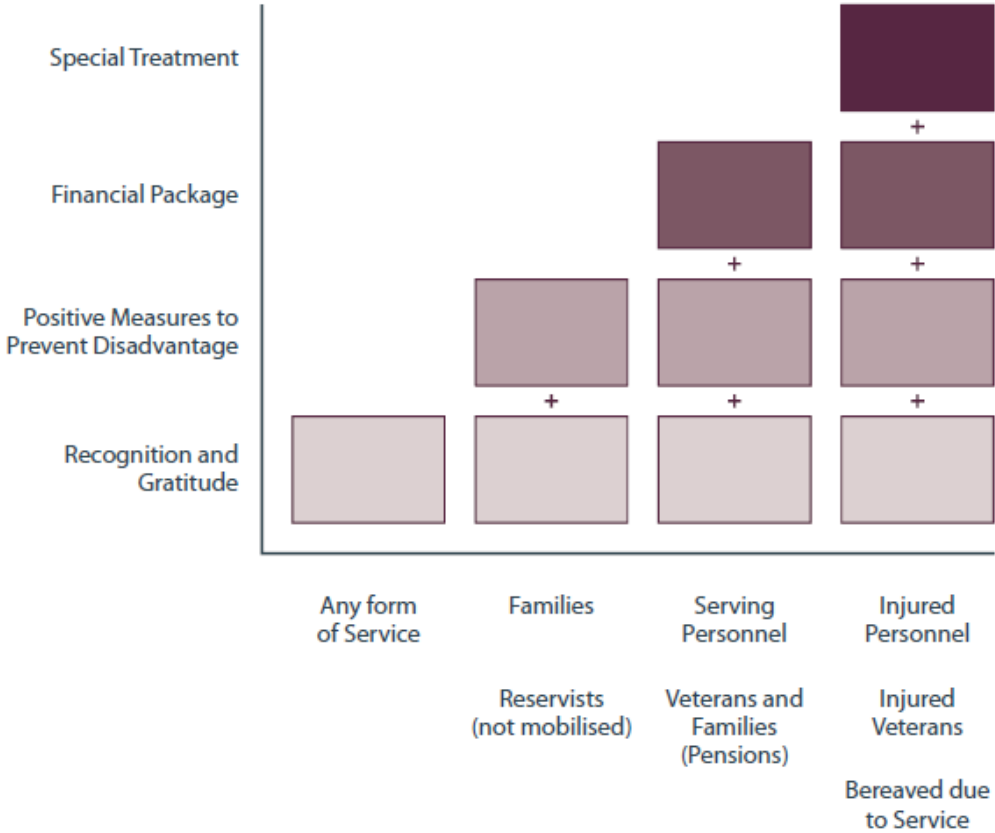
The Armed Forces Community is defined, for the purposes of the Armed Forces Covenant, as including all those towards whom the Nation has a moral obligation due to Service in HM Armed Forces. Inclusion in the community is neither dependent on nor limited by strict criteria, nationality or legal definitions, and it does not confer any legal rights.

The whole of this Community is covered by the Covenant and the obligations and principles which flow from it. The obligations are owed to the Armed Forces Community as individuals, as well as collectively. Being part of this community, of some 10 million people, entitles an individual to recognition and sometimes to support. However the level of support made available will vary. It will take into account the need for assistance, and may also reflect what an individual has contributed through Service. Inclusion in the community does not, therefore, mean identical entitlement to support.²⁴

Specifically, the Armed Forces Community includes Regular personnel, Reservists, veterans, the immediate families of those categories of individual, and the immediate family of those Service personnel and veterans who have died.

In terms of the level of support available:

Figure 3: Levels of Support Available



²⁴ ibid, p.4

That guidance also notes the support that is provided to the Armed Forces by civilian groups that fall outside of the scope of the *Armed Forces Covenant*, namely: the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the Merchant Navy, other defence civilians and contractors, cadets and the adult volunteers who support them, and the extended families of serving personnel. The document notes that, although they fall outside the scope of the Covenant:

When members of these groups are deployed alongside members of the Armed Forces, they are entitled to increased levels of care and support, including in the event of injury or death, and often on a comparable basis to their Armed Forces colleagues.²⁵

The scope of the Covenant is wide ranging, and as the Government has noted “it is not possible to specify in detail how it should be applied in every case and at every time”. However, the general expectations and aspirations implicit in the Covenant are noted as follows:

- **Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS)** – Service personnel should be sustained and rewarded by TACOS which recognise the freedoms and choices that Service personnel have voluntarily given up. They should be fair, and where possible provide flexibility to match family circumstances, while meeting the needs of the MOD. They will be kept under regular review.
- **Healthcare** – The Armed Forces Community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen. Personnel injured on operations should be treated in conditions which recognise the specific needs of Service personnel. The families of Service personnel should retain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the Service individual being posted. Veterans should receive priority treatment within the NHS where it relates to a condition resulting from their Service, subject to clinical need; while those injured in Service, whether physically or mentally, should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation’s moral obligation to them, while respecting that individual’s wishes.
- **Education** – Children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education as any other UK citizen. There should be special arrangements to support access to schools if a place is required part way through an academic year as a consequence of a posting. Assistance will also be available to support Service children’s continuity of education. Service personnel should also receive appropriate training and education for personal and professional development in order to support them throughout their Service career and to prepare them for life after leaving the Services.
- **Housing** – Where serving personnel are entitled to publicly provided accommodation, it should be good quality, affordable and suitably located. Service personnel should have priority status in applying for Government-sponsored affordable housing schemes and Service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge. Those injured in Service should have preferential access to appropriate housing schemes, as well as assistance with necessary adaptations whilst serving. Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to social housing and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and should not be disadvantaged by the requirement for mobility while in Service.

²⁵ *The Armed Forces Covenant*, p.5

- **Benefits and Tax** – Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to benefits as any UK citizen, except where tailored alternative schemes are in place. The taxation may also be adapted to reflect the particular circumstances of Service personnel, for example in relation to Council Tax arrangements.
- **Responsibility of Care** – The Government, and the chain of command, has a responsibility to maintain an organisation which treats individuals with fairness, dignity and respect, and an environment which is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. Special account must be taken for those individuals under the age of 18. Operational matters, including training and equipment, fall outside the scope of the Covenant however.
- **Deployment** – The impact of operational deployment on both personal and family life should be recognised, and may include financial support, welfare support and, where possible, facilities to enable good communications with home.
- **Family Life** – Service families give up certain freedoms and choices in order to support the Services. To sustain family life, family members should have the same access to childcare, training and employment opportunities as any other citizen. Support should be available to minimise the impact of mobility caused by service.
- **Commercial Products and Services** – It is for the commercial sector to determine its approach to the Armed Forces Community. However, the Government should work with the commercial sector to develop a situation where those individuals have as good access to commercial products and services, including financial services, as any other citizen.
- **Transition** – Support should be provided to all Service personnel to assist in their transition from Service to civilian life. Provision should include training, education, appropriate healthcare referral and job-seeking preparation and assistance. It should also include information and guidance on housing and financial management and the support that is available from both Government departments and the voluntary sector.
- **Support after Service** – The Covenant involves an obligation for life. In accessing services, veterans should expect the same level of support as any other citizen in society. Pension schemes should be fair and appropriate to the particular circumstances of Service personnel. All veterans should be able to access advice and in some cases additional support from the MOD and other Government departments, and the charitable sector, although access may be affected if they do not reside in the UK. Those injured in Service or have a health condition relating to Service should receive additional support, which may include a financial element depending on circumstances. Bereaved families should receive assistance commensurate with the loss that they have suffered, including at the inquest process.
- **Recognition** – The Armed Forces Community is entitled to appropriate recognition for the unique Service which it has given. This recognition will include commemorations and celebration; while the award of campaign medals and individual gallantry awards will continue to be used in recognition of individual sacrifice and meritorious service. The Veterans Badge will be available to all veterans in recognition of their service.

- **Participation as Citizens** – The Armed Forces Community should be able to participate as citizens to the same extent as any UK citizen, subject to the necessary constraints on the activities of public servants. This includes taking a full part in the electoral process; while members of the Armed Forces Community who are not UK citizens, should be able to access routes to UK citizenship as easily as anyone else, regardless of any Service overseas.
- **Changes in Defence** – The Armed Forces will always need to evolve to meet the challenges that the UK faces. Any such changes should be managed in a way which treats individuals fairly and minimises uncertainty wherever possible.
- **Recourse** – Members of the Armed Forces Community should have a means of recourse open to them if they believe that they are not being treated in a fair and appropriate way. Established routes of recourse, such as complaints processes or Ombudsmen, should be sensitive to the particular circumstances of the Armed Forces Community. For serving personnel and those who have recently left the Service, there should be a responsive system for handling complaints relating to their Service, overseen by the Service Complaints Commissioner.

Above all, the guidance suggests that the Armed Forces Community should not be disadvantaged due to their Service in the provision and continued access to public and commercial services, and that they receive special treatment where appropriate.

The specific measures being taken in each of these areas are set out in section 3.1 below.

Like previous documents relating to the welfare of the Armed Forces, veterans and dependants, such as the Service Personnel Command Paper (see above), this guidance also acknowledges that responsibility for delivery will not necessarily lie directly with the MOD. The guidance states:

The Covenant should influence policy, service delivery and standards in the areas and ways set out... In many cases these will be a responsibility of Central Government Departments and Devolved Administrations but, in other cases, responsibility will lie with local service providers or organisations within the voluntary or commercial sectors. Particular attention will be required when public services are subject to reform or to greater local control.²⁶

3.1 Specific Commitments

The practical measures that the Government is taking to support the principles of the Covenant, both in the immediate and longer term, were set out in a separate document *The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow*.

Those commitments are largely drawn from the work that has already been done, both by the previous Government but also as part of the Coalition's *Programme for Government*, Dr Andrew Murrison's report on mental health issues entitled [Fighting Fit: A Mental Health Plan for Servicemen and Veterans](#), and the work of the Military Covenant task Force led by Professor Hew Strachan (see above).

Each section provides a useful summary of the support which is already available to Service personnel, families and veterans, and the initiatives that the Government has introduced

²⁶ *The Armed Forces Covenant*, p.6

since it entered office in May 2010. To supplement that support, the new measures that will be implemented over the next few years, include:

- **Terms and Conditions**

- Annual pay awards for all Service personnel earning under £21,000 will continue to be paid while the public sector pay freeze is in force.
- The Armed Forces will be included in the [Hutton Fair Pay Review](#) which examined pay in the public sector and was published in March 2011. The MOD will work toward implementing its recommendations, taking into account the operational context of the Armed Forces.
- Work on a New Employment Model, which will review all of the terms and conditions of Service personnel is currently underway.²⁷ It will recognise that, where mobility is required for Service reasons, appropriate support and compensation will be available.

- **Healthcare**

- Access to a mental health wellbeing website for Service personnel, families and veterans will be established. This will be delivered by the Department of Health working in partnership with the MOD. Implementation of the pilot phase will begin in May 2011 and the service will be evaluated after 12 months, with a view to a wider roll out in 2012.
- A greater focus on mental health will be built into routine service and discharge medical examinations. The MOD is currently undertaking a trial in selected units across all three Services, which will inform further rollout of this scheme. The aim is to integrate the mental health assessment into discharge protocols by late summer 2011.
- Better information will be provided to GPs on the help available to Reservists, through the Reserves Mental Health Programme. Work is currently being undertaken to determine how communications to GPs could be improved; while the development of an e-learning package for GPs will ensure that appropriate information is provided to improve the understanding of the health needs of reservists, veterans and families. This package is scheduled to be in place by June 2011.
- The MOD will continue to work with NHS bodies to maximise the benefits that come from the transfer of skills and knowledge between military and NHS staff. Professional recognition of Service medical training through the MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board is currently being developed.
- Alcohol education and general health promotion will continue to be widely undertaken across all three Services.
- The MOD is working to create a new community of excellence in clinical care, research and training in the West Midlands. The Midlands Medical

²⁷ This was first announced in the Strategic Defence and Security Review in October 2010.

Accommodation project will exploit and sustain progress in military medicine. Work is expected to begin in autumn 2011, with the relocation placed for the end of 2013. Once completed, the site will be home to 1400 Defence Medical Staff.

- Veterans suffering from serious genital injuries will be guaranteed three cycles of IVF.
- The MOD will continue to work with the Department of Health to ensure that Service families are duly considered during the process of NHS reform, and safeguard provisions that are currently in place to ensure Service families do no encounter disadvantage in accessing NHS services.
- The NHS provision of prosthetic to veterans in England is currently being reviewed and a report is expected to be published in June 2011. The Government has stated that it will look favourably on the recommendations in that report.
- Policy for the management of the MOD's Departments of Community Mental Health is currently being revised in order to allow Service personnel who have mental health issues whilst serving (or identified prior to discharge), to continue to access military mental health centres for up to 6 months after discharge. Arrangements to ensure that follow-on treatment is provided are planned to be in place by late summer 2011.
- A Veterans' Information Service will be launched and operated by the Department of Health for veterans in England. That service will provide veterans with key information on the range of available support services, gather evidence to support future commissioning and allow veterans the opportunity to request targeted contact, such as mental health or substance abuse services. A trial will be conducted in early 2012.
- The findings of the Mental Health Pilots Evaluation Report will be used by the Department of Health in England to inform planning of NHS veterans mental health services from 2011 onwards.

- **Education**

- Training opportunities for under 18s will be expanded so that from 2012-13 those individuals who do not hold a Qualification and Credit Framework Level 3 qualification will be able to participate in appropriate full-time education or training.
- Improvements to the Army's education programme will be made, including the establishment of a single Personal Development Fund, individual learning accounts, qualifications drawing on and linked to military service, and full alignment with emerging Government initiatives. The infantry is adopting a Public Service Apprenticeship from August 2011; while revised career and specialist training courses should provide, from late 2011, opportunities for senior Service personnel to gain teaching qualifications.
- The Department for Education is including Service children as part of the Government's Pupil Premium Scheme for England, in recognition of the

additional support that schools need to provide to Service children affected by separation from deployed parents, frequent changes of school and so on. The rate will start at £200 a pupil in 2011-12.

- An annual £3m Support Fund for State schools with Service children will be established for the next four years until 2014-15, in order to support State schools catering for significant numbers of Service children and the children of Reservists. It will be in addition to the extra funding that schools will receive via the Service children's Pupil Premium.
- A new strategy to address the impact of mobility on the education of Service children will be established.
- The Department for Education will engage with the MOD on a consultation in 2011-12 to look at the Admissions and appeals process to ensure that Service children and their families are taken into account.
- The MOD will look at ways to increase flexibility in the provision of military accommodation in order to assist families being moved at important stages in their children's education.
- From September 2011 three new State Boarding Schools will be open which will provide an additional 210 boarding places to Service children.
- The financial support offered to Service leavers to study at university will be extended to more people, by reducing the qualifying period of service to four years, and abolishing the qualifying period entirely for those personnel who are medically discharged. That financial support will cover the total cost of tuition fees.

- **Housing**

- The MOD will examine the scope for refurbishing Service accommodation from efficiencies made within the Department.
- As part of the Future Accommodation project (which is part of the new Employment Model), costed options for a different approach to providing accommodation will be developed. The project is expected to be complete in summer 2012.
- The Next Generation Estates Contract will replace current arrangements for the management, maintenance and development of Service Families Accommodation in the UK. It is due to be implemented in April 2013.
- The MOD will continue to provide funding over the next three years to the pilot shared equity scheme for the Armed Forces. Potential expansion of this scheme, including across the UK, will be considered as part of the Future Accommodation project.
- The MOD will continue to work with relevant stakeholders, to raise awareness of the Government's low-cost home ownership schemes, placing a particular emphasis on informing and educating Service personnel early on in their

- The MOD will continue to look at improving customer care for personnel living in Service Families Accommodation, including by providing a network of local drop in centres which will enable families to resolve their issues locally.
- **Benefits and Tax**
 - Council Tax Relief for all Service personnel on eligible operations overseas will be doubled from 25% to 50%.
 - As the Government develops its plans for a universal credit to replace many of the benefits currently available, it will ensure that the needs of veterans are taken into account.
- **Family Life**
 - One of the aims of the New Employment Model will be to improve domestic stability, which assists spouses' employment and children's education, while continuing to support mobility where it is essential to defence requirements.
 - The reformed Work Programme, which will replace the Flexible New Deal by summer 2011, will take special account of the partners of current or former Service personnel. They will have early access to the Work programme to help them back into employment from the 3 month point of their claim for Jobseekers Allowance.
 - Through the *Protection of Freedoms Bill*, the Home Office will make it easier for employers to share Criminal records Bureau checks. One of the implications of this will be an improvement in the employability of Armed Forces families.
 - Amendments to the Blue Badge legislation are being made by the Department of Transport, which will remove residency requirements for disabled Service personnel and their families who are posted to UK bases overseas. This will enable them to apply for a badge for use in the UK and countries where reciprocal arrangements are in place.
 - The MOD will improve efforts to work with Local Authorities to ensure that they meet their obligations to conduct a full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, taking into account the needs of Service children in their local area.
- **Commercial Products and Services**
 - British Forces Post office addresses will be recognised as a UK postcode, thereby allowing those personnel with BFPO addresses to access financial services and online retail, as well as the completion of Government online forms. The system is expected to be functional by the end of 2011.
 - The MOD will work with financial institutions, and their professional bodies, to develop guidance for dealing with members of the Armed Forces. The results of these discussions are expected to be announced later in 2011.

- **Transition to Civilian Life**

- An enhanced resettlement programme for Early Service Leavers (personnel with less than four years service) is being developed. A 12-month trial of enhanced provision will begin later in 2011.
- The Government will launch a “Troops to Teachers” scheme to encourage more Service Leavers to re-train as teachers. The Department for Education will offer bursaries or scholarships to groups of people, including Graduate Service leavers, to train as a teacher, and will also work with higher education institutions to offer shorter, bespoke courses that will enable Service leavers to gain the qualifications they need to become teachers. Service leavers will also be encouraged to bring their particular skills, training and like experiences into the classroom, working as pupil mentors and champions, where they do not wish to train as teachers. The scheme will be introduced in phases during 2011 and 2012.
- The Future Reserves 2020 Study will examine ways of attracting Service leavers into the Volunteer Reserves. That study is due to report in July 2011.
- The Forces in Mind Trust will be responsible for a £35m lottery-funded grant to support current and former UK Service personnel and their families over the next 20 years.
- The MOD is examining ways of sharing data with the Service charities, on those personnel leaving the Armed Forces and who may require support, without compromising data protection.

- **Support after Service**

- Any changes to Service pensions, as a result of the Hutton report, will require careful consideration. The government will work to ensure that the Armed Forces Pensions Scheme continues to reflect the unique role that Service personnel fulfil, and that any new pension scheme remains a valuable component of the total remuneration package.
- The MOD will strengthen the Veterans UK online portal, to provide more detail on the services provided by Service and ex-Service charities, and will make the StartHere service, which is an independent charity, more prominent.
- Access to the Blue Badge scheme will be eased for seriously injured Service personnel and veterans in England. This will ensure automatic entitlement to a Blue Badge for those with a permanent mobility-related condition.
- The Department of Transport will introduce new guidance in England so that seriously injured Service personnel and veterans who fall within the categories of disability set out in the *Transport Act 2000*, will automatically be eligible for concessionary bus travel.
- The MOD will examine Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments within the broader context of the forthcoming White Paper on the future of social care, so as to ensure that Guaranteed Income Payments made under

the AFCS are not required to be used to pay for social care provided by the public sector.

- **Recognition**

- The result of the Government's review into the rules governing the award of medals will be announced later in 2011.

- **Participation as Citizens**

- The Government is committed to ensuring that Service personnel can take part in elections. For the longer term, the Cabinet office is examining how changes to the timetable for elections would better support voters based overseas, including Service personnel and their families. The MOD is also participating in a data-matching pilot, as part of the Government's Electoral Registration Transformation Programme, to identify how to take forward the commitment that Service personnel only have to register once on the Service register.
- The UK Border Agency will make the paper *Life in the UK* available for delivery via MOD education centres overseas, for those seeking naturalisation as a British citizen while in Service (or their spouses/civil partners). Locations and start dates have yet to be confirmed.
- New legislation will be brought forward to enable Foreign and Commonwealth Service personnel to be exempted from the requirement to be in the UK at the start of the residential period for naturalisation as a British citizen, if in service on that date.
- The UK Border Agency will review the fees for Armed Forces dependants.

- **Changes in Defence**

- It is expected that the confirmation of major unit moves back to the UK from Germany will be announced later in 2011. Early engagement with local authorities to ensure the inflow of Service personnel and their families is matched by an appropriate uplift in the delivery of public services, has been identified.

- **Recourse**

- The programme of familiarisation relating to Ombudsmen will continue, in order to help Ombudsmen be aware of the issues affecting members of the Armed Forces Community. It also aims to raise awareness of the Ombudsmen services among those members of the Armed Forces Community who may have a need to seek recourse and ensure that they are aware of how to access these services.

- **Wider Society**

- The Armed Forces Community Covenant Scheme will be launched. That scheme will encourage public service providers at Local Authority level, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors, to volunteer targeted

support for their local Armed Forces Community. The intention is for the scheme to be two-way arrangement, so the local Service population will also be actively encouraged to provide support to their local community.

- A Community Covenant Grant Scheme, allocating up to £30m over four years, will be introduced later in 2011. The aim of the Grant will be to support local projects which strengthen the ties between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. The scheme will consider applications from local groups for practical projects which deliver rapid results in support of the Armed Forces Community.
- A Veterans Card will be launched, which can be used to access commercial discounts or privileges both locally and nationally, including through the Armed Forces Community Covenant Scheme. The card will represent an expansion of the existing Defence Discount Directory Scheme. The MOD will also consider how this could be expanded to include Service families.
- The Chief of Defence Staff Commendation Scheme will be launched later in 2011, to allow CDS to publicly thank individuals or bodies who give exceptional support to the Service community.
- More work will be done with Service charities to identify how they can best use their resources.
- The potential for sharing Service facilities with the civilian community will be taken forward by the MOD as part of the Government's work to consider the ways in which civil society organisations could be supported, including through greater access to State owned premises.
- The MOD will support Armed Forces personnel seeking to represent their countries at the 2012 Olympic Games, either as competitors, coaches or officials. The MOD is currently exploring opportunities for seconding injured Service personnel to the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, should posts be available that would help with their rehabilitation. Local units will be strongly encouraged to become involved in regional activities and events in support of the Olympics.
- The MOD is currently conducting a comprehensive review of Youth Engagement, which is due to report in late 2011.
- A review of the Reserves is currently underway and is due to report to the Prime Minister by July 2011.

With respect to the Devolved Administrations and the Armed Forces communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the document acknowledges:

Actions being taken by the Devolved Administrations to assist the Armed Forces community, either in parallel to measures taken by the Westminster Government or independently, are not included in this document. They are matters for the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in accordance with their devolved powers. However they constitute an important pillar of work to support the Covenant. In many cases, particularly in Scotland and Wales, actions to support our people have been delivered by routes which reflect the difference legislative landscape

and they way their public services are arranged. What matters is that they too have a responsibility to live up to the Covenant and we shall take a keen interest in how they progress with this. We look forward to working with their new Governments to take this work forward following their May 2011 elections.²⁸

The Government has also made clear that rebuilding the Covenant is a process that will take many years and that the initiatives outlined in this document are very much “first steps” that will be expanded on as work progresses. An Annual review of the Covenant, published by the Secretary of State under the independent scrutiny of the ERG, will provide an opportunity to assess the progress made in implementing these measures, and identify where further work can be undertaken.

Announcing the Covenant to Parliament, the Secretary of State for Defence commented:

The obligation we owe to our servicemen and women, set against the commitment and sacrifice which they make, is enormous. In the current financial climate we are not able to do as much to honour that obligation, nor to do it as quickly, as we would like. But we can make clear the road on which we are embarked.

Our understanding of the covenant will change over time, as will the way in which Government and society meet it. The framework we have set out today provides the flexibility we need to do this so that not only the Government but all of society can fully pay the enormous debt they owe to the Armed Forces of this country, their families and our veterans.²⁹

4 Further Library Reading Material

As outlined above, the MOD has taken responsibility for the strategic direction and co-ordination of welfare related policies for Service personnel, their dependents and veterans. However, responsibility for implementation of the Government’s recommendations does not necessarily directly lie with the MOD but with other Government departments, the devolved administrations and local authorities.

Further information on various aspects of the *Armed Forces Covenant*, is available in the following Library briefing papers:

- SN05891 [Armed Forces Pension Scheme – 2010 onwards](#)
- SN04455, [Inquests of Service personnel - jurisdiction and recent developments](#)
- SN05764, [Healthcare for veterans](#)
- SN05553, [Armed Forces Compensation Scheme](#)
- SN04244, [Housing options for ex-Service personnel](#)
- SN04399, [Immigration: settlement and British citizenship for discharged Gurkhas and Commonwealth members of the Armed Forces](#)

²⁸ *Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow*, p.6

²⁹ Ministry of Defence press release, 16 May 2011