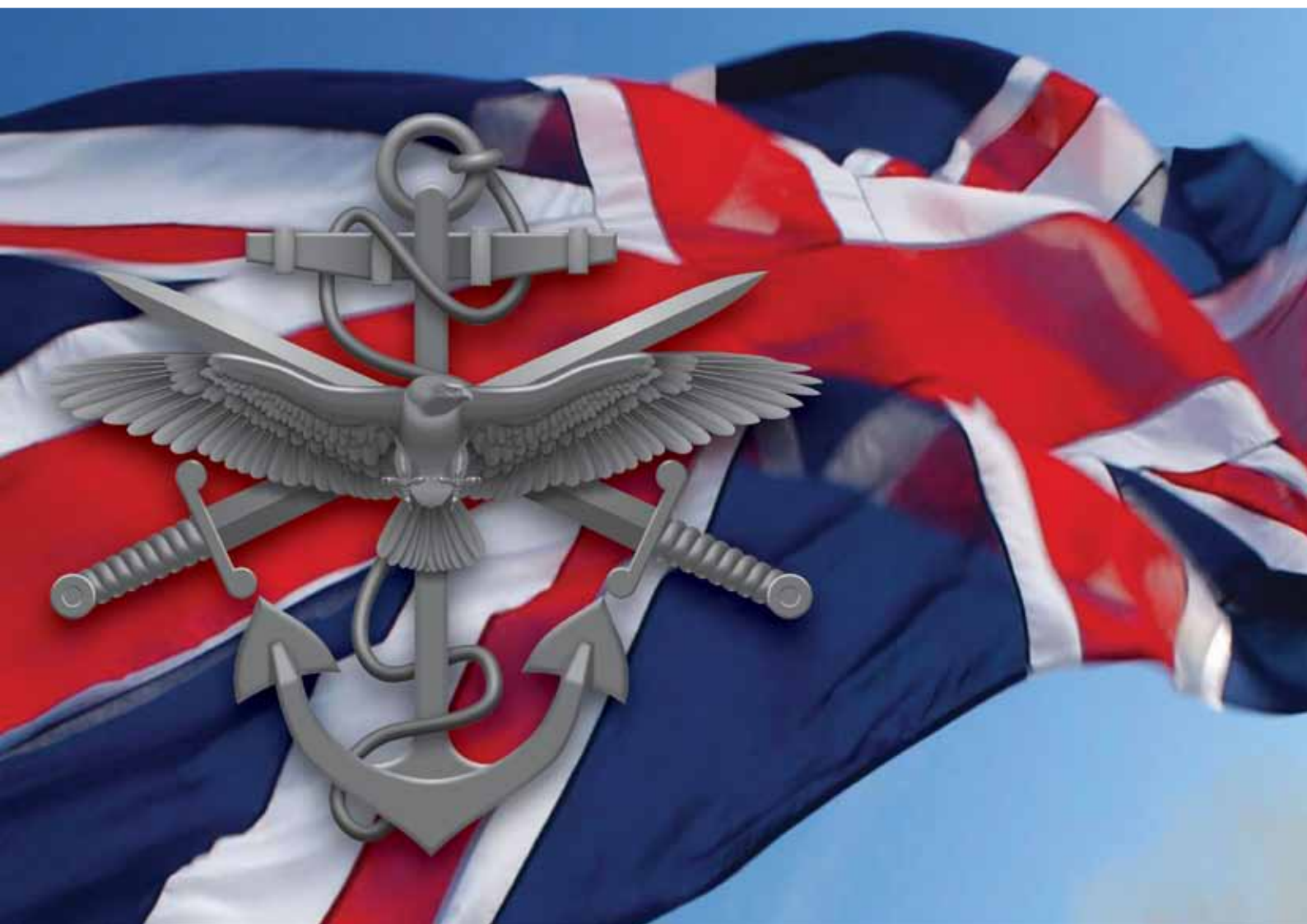




MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON THE MILITARY COVENANT



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Note on numbering and terminology

This response follows the structure of the Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant published on 8 December 2010. As such it mirrors the numbering for each chapter, section and recommendation, with the exception that where bullet points were used by the Task Force we have assigned a letter for ease of reference. In addition, where the response relates to an issue raised by the Task Force in the introduction to a particular chapter or section, this is labelled as an 'issue' and numbered with a zero, in order not to affect the numbering of the recommendations. Thus each text box sets out an issue or recommendation made by the Task Force and the text which follows is the Government response.

FOREWORD

**by The Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP
Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans**

The Government is committed to rebuilding the Covenant. That is why the Prime Minister commissioned Professor Hew Strachan of Oxford University to lead an independent Task Force into novel ways to achieve this.

This response sets out how the Government plans to take forward his ideas. But the Task Force is not the only way we are seeking to redress the balance for our Armed Forces community. We set out in our Programme for Government a number of specific commitments we made when we formed the Coalition Government. We have already delivered on a number of these. Changes have been made to Rest and Recuperation rules and the Operational Allowance has been doubled. We have announced the introduction of a Pupil Premium in England for Service children and have already launched a new scheme to provide scholarships for bereaved children to study at university. We are providing additional support for ex-Service personnel to study at university and a new 'Troops to Teachers' scheme will be launched later this year in England to encourage ex-Service personnel to join the teaching profession.

We have published a new tri-Service Armed Forces Covenant, setting out the key relationships between the Armed Forces, Government and the Nation. The commitments we are making for the future – drawn from the Programme for Government, Dr Murrison's 'Fighting Fit' report, the work of Prof Strachan's Task Force report and other initiatives – have been set out in the publication 'The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow', which summarises the measures that the UK Government is implementing in the coming year and beyond, across all the different areas which relate to the Armed Forces Covenant.

However rebuilding the Covenant is not a single event. It requires a process to ensure that progress is made, year on year. That is why we have brought forward legislation within the Armed Forces Bill, requiring the Defence Secretary to present an Armed Forces Covenant report to Parliament every year. The report will describe how we are supporting our Armed Forces, their families and veterans in key areas such as healthcare, housing and education. It will also be the opportunity to provide an update against work set in train by the Task Force's report.

The Task Force has made a big contribution to shaping Government policy in relation to the Covenant, and I am personally very grateful to Prof. Strachan and his team for the work they have done to support this important agenda.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrew Robathan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

INTRODUCTION

In July 2010, the Prime Minister established an Armed Forces Covenant Task Force. 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.

The independent Task Force was led by Professor Hew Strachan, Professor of the History of War at Oxford University and member of the External Reference Group (ERG). This group was originally set up to monitor progress against the Service Personnel Command Paper published in July 2008, but has been asked by the present Government to expand its remit to oversee the work on rebuilding the Covenant. Prof. Strachan was assisted in his work by the No 10 strategy unit and MOD officials. The Task Force consulted widely across Government including the Devolved Administrations, members of the Armed Forces from the UK and other nations, the Service Families Federations and the private, academic, charity and community sectors, as well as reviewing many relevant publications. The Task Force presented its initial report to the ERG in September 2010 and subsequently submitted it to the Prime Minister. The report was published on 08 December 2010. This paper is the Government response to that report.

We are pleased that the report highlights so many areas in which the MOD and other parts of Government have already made good progress. For example there have been significant improvements in the training package for the Armed Forces, which offers a comprehensive range of accredited training, as well as a focus on life skills such as financial training early in Service life. Personnel who are wounded, injured or sick are being given enhanced support to return to duty or transition into civilian life with the appropriate skills through the various Defence Recovery Capabilities which are now operational.

However we welcome new ideas and we will continually strive to make improvements for the Armed Forces community. There are a number of key recommendations of the Task Force that we are now taking forward, and hope will play a significant part in rebuilding the Covenant. The Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme which we are launching will encourage and help people to offer their support to the local Armed Forces community, whether they are public service providers, private companies or members of a charity or community group. This is very much in keeping with our concept of the Big Society. We plan to launch a veterans' card which can be used to access commercial discounts or privileges both locally and nationally, including through the Community Covenant scheme. A formal dialogue with the financial sector on problems faced by Service personnel when they try to take out a mortgage or gain access to other forms of credit has begun under the umbrella of the Home Finance Forum. We are now working with lenders with the aim of agreeing guidance that will help financial service providers take account of the special circumstances of Service families in order to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in that respect. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has welcomed the opportunity to thank

personally those who give outstanding support to the Armed Forces community through a CDS Commendation scheme. We hope that through this initiative and others there will be many occasions to celebrate the strengthening relationship between the Nation and the military.

There are however some recommendations that we will not be progressing at this point. The Government has examined the idea of appointing a Veterans' Commissioner and believes that the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans is already well supported in the formulation and delivery of Government policy on veterans' issues. This includes advice from Armed Forces Advocates in the major Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations of Scotland and Wales. Independent scrutiny is provided by the ERG, which in addition to Whitehall officials includes Prof. Strachan and representation from Service and ex-Service charities and the Families Federations. On the issue of formal identity cards for veterans and Service families, we believe a Government-funded identity card scheme would not offer value for money.

Our full response to each of the recommendations is contained in the following chapters. As the Task Force recognised in its report, the short time it had to undertake consultation meant that many of the proposals were at an early stage of development and needed further exploration to determine practicality and cost. Consequently, in some areas work is still progressing on the most appropriate way forward. While the majority of the recommendations are directed towards the UK Government, some are aimed at the voluntary sector, since rebuilding the Covenant is about all sectors of society playing their role. We look forward to continuing to work across Government, including with the Devolved Administrations, and with the voluntary and community sectors to take forward these important measures in support of the Armed Forces community.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Military Covenant

1.4 A new approach to Service welfare: the Armed Forces Community Covenant

Recommendation 1.4: Armed Forces Community Covenant.

(extract) The Task Force's proposed approach for combining these requirements – building on existing progress while empowering local areas and improving awareness and understanding of the military – is the Armed Forces Community Covenant. The Community Covenant has its roots in a successful US scheme in which states and towns (incorporating local government and local service providers, the voluntary sector and private companies) voluntarily pledge support for the military community in their area. Support could come in a number of forms, depending on the level of central government participation deemed necessary. Given the scope for local variations in the adoption and delivery, central government's role in promoting the "key ingredients" of a Community Covenant could be particularly valuable. The Departments of both Health and Education have already acknowledged that the Community Covenant will present them with further opportunities for engagement with the Armed Forces at the local level.

We announced in December 2010 that the Government accepts this key recommendation. The MOD is developing an Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme which will be launched shortly; the first areas to launch the scheme will be Oxfordshire, North Yorkshire, Hampshire and Portsmouth. Through this scheme we aim to encourage public service providers, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors to offer support to their local Armed Forces community. The nature of the support offered will be dependent on the needs of the local community but could take the form of, for example, additional support in accessing local services (such as social housing), free access to leisure facilities or discounts in shops and restaurants. We see the Community Covenant as a key enabler to integrating Service life into the local community and improving engagement between the local Service population and other members of the community. The Community Covenant is intended to be a two-way arrangement and we will actively encourage the local Armed Forces population to offer support to their local community. This might include participation in open days, school visits, or helping with community projects and will be determined by the needs of the local area.

It is likely that individual Community Covenants may look quite different from one area to another as the nature of the support given should, as much as possible, be driven by the needs of the community. It is our intention to facilitate sharing of information at a local level, raising awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces community in order to help direct support where it is needed most. The MOD will provide guidance to

Local Authorities (with the support of the Devolved Administrations) outlining what a Community Covenant could look like in practice, and sharing examples of best practice from the initial launch areas. Ongoing support and sharing of best practice will also be provided through a dedicated website.

In addition the MOD will introduce, later this year, a Community Covenant Grant scheme allocating up to £30m over four years. The aim of the Grant will be to support projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding 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 delivered rapid results in support of the Armed Forces community.

We believe that the scheme will be relevant to all parts of the UK, including areas which do not have a large operating Service presence, as it is likely that many areas will have a significant number of veterans within the community. This scheme is fully endorsed by the Scottish Government, which is committed to working with local charities to link up with local services and to explore ways in which local communities might develop initiatives designed to demonstrate support for the Armed Forces community. In Wales, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government wrote to Local Service Boards, asking for their assistance in identifying issues that may impact on the Armed Forces community in their area.

2. Service personnel and their Families

2.1 Housing

Issue 2.1.0: Service Families Accommodation.

Service Families Accommodation (SFA) is provided (approximately 50,000 homes), at a net cost of around £285m per annum. The poor condition of some of this accommodation has been widely documented, but the cost of upgrading these homes is substantial.

The MOD is committed to continuing with a programme of improvements to Service Family Accommodation (SFA), subject to financial constraints, with the strategic focus of bringing the 1,500 properties in the UK which are at the lowest two standards up to the top two standards (or disposing of them). To facilitate this, properties at the lowest standard of condition are no longer routinely allocated to Service families, and under current plans this provision is to be extended to properties at the next standard up from January 2012.

2.1.1 Improve opportunities for home purchase among Service personnel

Recommendation 2.1.1.a: Enhancing accommodation allowances.

In 1990 Service personnel were encouraged to purchase homes by the provision of Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP), set at a maximum of £8,500 or 16 % of the average house price at that time. Since then it has remained capped at £8,500. In the current climate, it is recognised that even maintaining LSAP, let alone increasing it, may not be affordable. However bringing LSAP in line with current house prices would enable more Service personnel to buy homes. This would involve significant upfront expenditure by the government, but as the payment is an advance on salary rather than a grant, this expenditure would ultimately be recouped (although with some loss due to inflation). In practical terms, an increase in LSAP should be viewed as a long-term option. Additionally, any increase would incur a tax liability for Service personnel which the MOD may also be required to fund.

The MOD recognises that this is a high priority for Service personnel and the issue of incentivising the use of private accommodation will be considered by the Future Accommodation Project team. This project, which is part of the wider New Employment Model (NEM) programme described in section 2.3, aims to develop costed options for a different approach to the provision of accommodation, which will better meet future needs for affordable and good quality living accommodation during and in transition from service. The project is due to complete by Summer 2012.

Recommendation 2.1.1.b: Expanding shared equity schemes.

In January 2010 MOD launched a pilot shared equity scheme in England, which has had an excellent response. Its total of £5m in year one has been fully taken up, much of it by those in non-commissioned ranks. Funding of £20m has been allocated across the life of the pilot. There is a strong case for expanding this scheme more widely, and the Task Force recommends exploring options for involving private funding in this.

The Armed Forces Home Ownership Scheme (AFHOS) is an open market shared equity scheme specifically designed for Armed Forces personnel. The £20M pilot project running over 4 years (2010/11 to 2013/14) provides an equity investment of 15 to 50% on a property purchased from the open market, up to a maximum of £75,000. It is targeted at more junior, lower-income members of the Armed Forces by restricting eligibility to those with between 4 and 6 years of service. In its first year the scheme has delivered in excess of 80 home owners. The MOD will be providing funding for the scheme over the next three years and expects that it will continue to be an attractive option for Service personnel. The potential for expansion of such schemes, including across the UK, will be considered as part of the Future Accommodation Project review (described above).

Recommendation 2.1.1.c: Better use of the MOD estate.

The MOD could, in partnership with developers/local authorities, identify surplus MOD estate in order to offer mixed economy housing which would include priority for Service personnel.

Defence Estates (DE) has previously worked closely with Annington Homes Ltd (who own the vast majority of SFA in England and Wales) to make appropriate use of surplus accommodation. When accommodation is not required permanently, it is returned to Annington Homes. If this leads to the sale of the property, limited discounts are generally offered to Service personnel on a site-by-site basis. In Northern Ireland, as part of the Good Friday Agreement, arrangements are in place with a number of organisations to 'gift' some surplus accommodation to the social housing market.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is working with central government departments, including the MOD, to identify locally important sites so that communities have access to a pipeline of sites to meet their local aspirations. Armed Forces personnel already have priority status across all regions in Great Britain within the Government's and the Devolved Administrations' low cost home ownership programmes, including for 12 months after leaving service. This is considered further in our response to recommendation 2.1.1.e.

In April the MOD launched the new Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO). The new infrastructure arrangements and organisation are designed to enable more efficient and coherent management of the estate. Options for better use of the MOD estate will be examined by the Next Generation Estates Contract (NGEC) programme. NGEC aims to develop the optimum mix of future commercial arrangements for the Defence estate, once the current contractual arrangements with Industry to provide management, maintenance and development of the SFA in the UK expire. The NGEC programme will replace these arrangements with a single end-to-end process for the provision of Service housing that delivers the best possible service for Service families and achieves best value for money for the UK taxpayer. It is due to be implemented in April 2013.

Recommendation 2.1.1.d: Working with banks to offer favourable mortgage rates to Service personnel.

A significant percentage of Service personnel can experience difficulty in obtaining mortgages because they have a poor or inadequate credit history. The possibility has been raised in the past of encouraging a bank or banks to offer favourable mortgage rates to Service personnel, or – at the very least – to initiate a mortgage scheme which recognises the specific needs of those serving. The Task Force suggests holding a PM/Chancellor-chaired summit with major banks to explore this option further.

In response to this recommendation, in January the MOD presented to a forum chaired by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury: the Home Finance Forum (HFF), which brings together mortgage lenders, professional associations, the Bank of England, the Financial Services Authority and consumer groups, and is attended by the Housing Minister. In addition to raising concerns over the disadvantage faced by Service personnel in obtaining mortgages due to their circumstances, the MOD invited lenders and professional associations to work with the Department on guidance to govern their dealings with members of the Armed Forces. In establishing this guidance, lenders would put on record their intention to take account of the special circumstances of Service families and this would also raise awareness among Service personnel that their specific circumstances should be taken into consideration. We believe that increased awareness both within the financial sector and with Service personnel is key to ensuring that the circumstances of Service personnel and their families are reflected in the mortgage application process which lenders use to assess applicants. The results of these discussions will be announced later this year.

Whilst we would welcome favourable mortgage rates for Service personnel, the Government's policy regarding financial services is that decisions concerning the pricing and availability of specific products remain commercial decisions for individual banks and building societies. We understand from lenders at the HFF that there are some initiatives by the banks to offer mortgages tailored to the needs of Service personnel and raising awareness should improve take-up of such products.

Recommendation 2.1.1.e: Boost take-up/raise awareness of the Government’s low cost home ownership programme.

Lower-paid Service personnel and recent Service leavers are one of the key worker groups who receive priority assistance through the Government’s low cost home ownership programme “HomeBuy” (previously known as Key Worker Living Scheme). However, despite extensive advertising across the MOD, there has been very little take-up of the previous Key Worker Living Scheme. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some Service personnel view the scheme as “social housing” and therefore do not see it as applicable to them (although paradoxically, on leaving the service they often rely on Local Authorities for their accommodation needs). The scheme’s other drawback is its apparent lack of portability – it can be moved but doing so is difficult and complex. Extending the current education campaign is vital to ensure that eligible personnel take advantage of the scheme (for example by including case studies of Service personnel who have benefited, contrasted with the difficulty of obtaining Local Authority accommodation). Including advice on it as part of resettlement is too late, even though eligibility extends to 12 months after leaving service. In Scotland and Wales, guidance has been issued to local authorities and Registered Social Landlords that they should treat Service personnel as a priority group for “HomeBuy” (provided they meet the other eligibility criteria for the scheme). They have also been advised that they should disregard any lump sums paid as a result of illness or injury.

Armed Forces personnel have priority within the UK Government’s and the Welsh Assembly Government’s low cost home ownership programme, “HomeBuy”, including for 12 months after leaving service. The Scottish Government is helping Service personnel, veterans and their widow(er)s or partners buy a home by continuing to ensure that they are given priority access to the Scottish Government’s Low-cost Initiative for First Time Buyers (LIFT) shared equity schemes. Indeed, it is worth noting that Service personnel and veterans are one of only a very small number of groups currently able to apply for the LIFT Open Market Shared Equity scheme.

Recent initiatives such as a home buyers’ leaflet and the single Services’ financial awareness education training packages which are offered throughout Service, have improved awareness of available affordable housing schemes. Over 850 Service personnel and Service leavers purchased a property in England or Scotland using their priority status in the 2010-2011 financial year. In addition the agents who run the HomeBuy scheme are tasked with increasing awareness within their priority groups, undertaking activities such as visits to military establishments. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) who administer the LIFT Shared Equity schemes on behalf of the Scottish Government also make efforts to promote the schemes to Service personnel and veterans in their area, by providing – for the Open Market scheme – details of the scheme to bases and offering to provide short presentations to personnel. RSLs have also provided local Service and veterans’ groups with information to include in their newsletters.

In England, proposed changes to the affordable housing schemes, following a review by DCLG in the context of the spending review, will retain the priority afforded to Armed Forces personnel (below social tenants but alongside the highest locally determined priority group) across England. They will also encourage HomeBuy agents to focus more on this priority group when advertising the scheme and to improve data collection on Service personnel accessing the programme. In Wales, Service personnel will also continue

to retain their priority status. The Welsh Assembly Government has no way at present of measuring the take-up of HomeBuy amongst Service personnel but will investigate methods whereby this could be done (through its Statistics Directorate).

We appreciate that the process of portability may appear complex and difficult for Service personnel. DCLG is reviewing the delivery of the HomeBuy programme and will work to review guidance given to the HomeBuy agents, which will improve communications on portability.

The MOD will continue to work with relevant stakeholders including Housing Information Centres, Local Service Commanders, HIVE Information Centres, Family Federations and the Joint Service Housing Advice Office to raise awareness of the programme, placing a particular emphasis on informing and educating Service personnel earlier on in their career. In addition, the potential for such schemes will be considered as part of the ongoing Future Accommodation Project review mentioned previously.

Recommendation 2.1.1.f: Work with credit rating companies to improve access to credit.

Mobility causes problems with access to credit, including mortgages, as neither British Forces Post Offices (BFPOs) nor other military addresses are accepted by companies as evidence of continuity of residence. This issue has been considered in the past by the MOD and Treasury, but lack of documented cases has thus far prevented it being pursued further. However, anecdotal evidence suggests this remains a barrier to accessing credit for many Service personnel and their families. The Task Force recommends obtaining hard evidence of credit applications being refused and continuing to work with credit companies to resolve this issue. Experian, in conjunction with the Task Force, has been exploring the possibility of allocating postcodes to each BFPO address at little or no IT development cost to the 600+ organisations using credit checking systems. Service numbers would be used in the house name field. The benefit of this suggestion is that it should make it easier to “pin” Service personnel and store and access their data. Experian advises that this proposal will not necessarily mean that it will be easier to get credit since that will still depend on the applicant’s credit profile. However, it does mean that each applicant will be more likely to have a credit history.

The MOD is engaged with the Royal Mail and the credit reference agency Experian to resolve the issues surrounding recognition of British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses. This work aims to generate UK-style postcodes which correspond to BFPO addresses. Discussions are under way to ensure that the use of larger BFPO geographic regions (compared with normal UK postcodes) would not have unintended consequences for credit rating. These postcodes could then be used by the shared credit databases which credit reference agencies maintain and which retailers use to support internet shopping. Access to credit will always, rightly, be dependent on an individual’s credit profile. Alignment of BFPO numbers and postcodes will not, therefore, directly improve credit profiles; but this should go some way to reducing the impact that mobility and multiple addresses can have. The system should be fully functional before the end of the year.

The MOD, the Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills are also working with the financial sector (including the three credit reference agencies, the Building Societies Association, the Finance and Leasing Association and the Council of

Mortgage Lenders) to improve awareness of the specific issues facing Service personnel and their families, with the aim of encouraging solutions that mitigate the effects of Service life. As stated in the response to recommendation 2.1.1.d, a formal dialogue has been established through the Home Finance Forum, which is chaired by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Recommendation 2.1.1.g: Ensuring 50% council tax discounts are applied evenly for those posted overseas.

Currently Local Authorities treat eligibility for 50% council tax discounts inconsistently. While this is a matter for individual Local Authorities, the Task Force notes that this inconsistency causes problems for some families posted overseas.

The Task Force correctly notes that administration of council tax, including decisions regarding discounts and exemptions, is a matter for local government and the Government has no plans to change this arrangement. Second homes are liable for council tax, although councils must offer a second homes' discount of between 10% and 50%. The level of discount depends on the policy of the Local Authority. For Service personnel who own or rent a private property as a second home, the discount may be claimed from the Local Authority levying the council tax. The property will only be treated as a second home if the family's main residence is in Great Britain. If it is, for example, a job-related dwelling in Germany, a discount will not normally be available on the second home. Councils generally take the view that, because the individual is not subject to council tax there, the property in England, Scotland or Wales cannot be a second home for council tax purposes.

However, the Government is prepared to encourage Local Authorities to be more aware of the payments Service personnel and families pay in lieu of council tax when overseas when considering an application for a second home discount. Any individual who disagrees with a Local Authority decision regarding discount or exemptions may make an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal for England and equivalents in Wales and Scotland. The appeals system is free. Separately, MOD funds a council tax relief scheme, which provides a one-off payment to Service personnel who pay council tax (or a payment in lieu of council tax) and are on operational deployments overseas such as Afghanistan. The MOD will double this relief payment for all Service personnel on eligible operations overseas. This means eligible personnel will receive council tax relief of 50% of the average council tax paid in England for the period of their deployment.

2.1.2 Improving SFA in the short term

Recommendation 2.1.2.a: A single independent housing provider for Service Families Accommodation.

Currently SFA is owned, administered and maintained by three separate organisations, an arrangement which often causes confusion over whom to contact. One possible solution might be to hand over all management and maintenance for SFA to an independent housing provider, who would have a direct interest in the maintenance of the property which the provider would own. However, this may attract an Annington Homes dilapidation cost.

As announced in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), the MOD is already committed to undertaking a detailed review of its approach to accommodation. A number of options will be considered in the Future Accommodation Project, which is exploring how the MOD can deliver affordable and good quality living accommodation for Service personnel and their families in the future. In the interim, consideration is being given as to how best to let the NGEC National Housing Prime Contract (plans for which were announced in February) and to obtain the best possible service from the existing contractual arrangements, including optimising the division of responsibility between the DIO and Industry. Meanwhile, the MOD expects a high standard of maintenance and will work with its contractors to improve further the level of service provided to Service families. The MOD's relationship with Annington Homes Ltd will also be examined ahead of the renegotiation of the MOD discount in 2021.

Recommendation 2.1.2.b: Improved customer care for those living in service accommodation.

Those who live in SFA often find themselves dealing with a process-driven and distant organisation (Defence Estates Operations Housing is based at a single location in Brampton), and lacking any individual support or advice when problems arise. The seven regional Housing Information Centres (the bodies responsible for the management of the housing stock in each region) are predominantly call centres, and their wide dispersal across the country makes face-to-face communication difficult. They appoint housing officers to supervise each patch but the contact details of these officers are not given to prospective tenants (they have to await a call back). To provide a more personal face-to-face service some local chains of command have appointed their own housing officers. These models could be adopted on other SFA locations to improve customer care. As an alternative, the Canadian approach, in which a commercial organisation is contracted to manage an end-to-end process for moving, could be considered. It offers a 'one-stop shop' for all accommodation needs, queries and complaints, at a cost to the government.

The MOD is actively looking to improve customer care for personnel living in SFA, including by providing a network of local Drop In Centres which will enable families to resolve their issues locally at a one stop shop. This concept will be considered within the NGEC (see 2.1.1.c above) which is due to be implemented in April 2013. Service levels have already improved in some areas, thanks in particular to the introduction in 2010 of a Take Back inspection 48 hours before the customer moves in, and the provision of bespoke training

in Telephone Skills and Customer Care for front-line staff employed within the regional Housing Information Centres.

Recommendation 2.1.2.c: Treating the Service family as a unit.

Defence Estates' (DE) application of the MOD's accommodation policies is rightly based on maximising operational effectiveness. However, this policy sometimes marginalises the needs of family welfare. This leads to dissatisfaction not only among families but also among Service personnel, with repercussions on the very operational effectiveness the policy seeks to serve. There is scope to consider how Defence Estates' application of the existing accommodation policy could better meet the needs of the family as a unit.

Following a report from the National Audit Office on SFA in 2009, which recommended a more flexible approach to using the existing living accommodation policies to meet families' needs, the MOD has committed to making improvements. Improved and ongoing training (as mentioned above) has ensured that officers at the Housing Information Centres are better equipped to handle complex situations requiring a flexible approach to applying accommodation policies (such as when circumstances justify allocating a family SFA of a different type to their entitlement).

Recommendation 2.1.2.d: Greater flexibility in move out/in dates.

Currently families are allowed 28 days to relocate. This sometimes causes problems with schooling due to conflict with term dates. There is scope to incorporate greater flexibility into the sometimes rigidly applied policy, with each case being considered on its own merits.

The Government is committed to supporting Service children's education as highlighted by its measures to include Service children within the Pupil Premium scheme. In addition to this, we will look at how to increase the flexibility in the provision of military accommodation to assist families being moved at important stages of their children's education. The MOD Tri-Service Accommodation Policy already allows personnel to apply for the retention of their property in certain circumstances (such as welfare, medical or educational reasons or when serving unaccompanied), for specific periods of time. However, where this has not been agreed, extension of the 28-day relocation period for a family leaving a particular area would in many cases lead to a lack of availability of SFA for another family moving into that area. This would entail the costly rental of property on the open market for the incoming family. The MOD aims to strike the right balance between the needs of individual families and the level of service provided to all other occupants of SFA, but is looking at further flexibility in this area.

Families' ability to relocate at a suitable time for them can be affected by the amount of notice given for changes of assignment, as well as the time taken by the Service person to inform the DIO of the change of assignment. The MOD is working to improve communication between occupants and the DIO in order to ensure that notifications of assignment are received promptly by housing officers, which will facilitate the planning process for housing allocation. Each Service has separate targets for issuing assignment notices. In line with the Naval Personnel Strategy and the Naval Strategic Plan, the Royal Navy assigns people in accordance with endorsed current and future Service

Requirements, the individual's skills and career development needs and, whenever possible, personal preferences. Depending on their rate or rank and the nature of the assignment, a minimum of 3 months' notice is given. This is only breached in exceptional circumstances, such as short notice augmentation. In general, RAF personnel receive a minimum of 90 days' notice of an appointment. Officers and non-commissioned aircrew are provided with as much notice as possible in accordance with Service need. On completion of operational deployments, personnel should return to their original parent unit for a minimum period of 30 days, unless the individual elects to move to their new assignment location immediately after deployment. This allows the family to complete the move once the individual has returned from deployment, as well as ensuring that post operational deployment checks are carried out satisfactorily. The Army policy is to give at least 4 months' notice of assignment, but this is not always achievable. Some personnel assigned at less than 4 months' notice are moved in response to urgent operational or other requirements whereas others may move of their own volition to take up a promotion or for compassionate reasons.

2.2 Support for families

Recommendation 2.2.1: Service Families Card.

There is no single MOD-recognised Service family's card (each military facility provides its own version). A universally accepted card would provide a means of identifying their status, enabling them access to public services and to claim service discounts offered by businesses. This could be provided by charging a one-off fee or through charitable funding – see Veterans Privilege Card (section 4.2.1) for further options. The production costs of providing individual base cards would be reduced, thus decreasing the overall cost to the MOD. In principle such a card could also be extended to bereaved families.

Base Entry Passes and Amenities Passes are available to Service families and are issued by individual military facilities with the primary aim of enabling access to the base, where it is appropriate. For reasons of Health and Safety, Duty of Care and security responsibilities, which are firmly placed on individual Commands or Heads of Establishment, it is necessary that Entry Pass approval and issue is managed by individual sites. A universal card meeting this requirement would probably necessitate a secure chip and pin or machine-readable card. In addition to the card itself, this would require the provision of card readers at every military facility, with the associated resource implications. This is not an option given the financial constraints we currently face.

With regard to access to public services, this is facilitated where necessary (e.g. NHS waiting lists) without the need for a Service Families Card. Similarly, discounts offered by businesses can be claimed according to the terms of the specific scheme. For example members of the Armed Forces, Service widow(er)s and others are eligible for free membership of the Defence Discount Scheme, which is currently administered via a website and gives access to more than 1,100 companies offering discounts. The MOD plans to launch a veterans' card which can be used to access commercial discounts (see recommendation 3.2.1). We will consider how this could be expanded to include Service families.

Recommendation 2.2.2: Access to military bases for Service families.

At the moment a Service family may only be able to access the base on which their spouse or partner serves, which is not necessarily the one closest to their home. Wider access, enabled by a Service Families Card, would allow them to access essential services such as HIVEs at their local base. Increased access would have to be agreed with the local Commanding Officers as they will be responsible for base security but ideally an MOD-wide policy should be established regarding access.

Service families are already able to gain access to a military base other than where their spouse or partner serves, providing the local Head of Establishment or Commanding Officer is satisfied that there is a legitimate reason for the visit. This policy is made clear in the Defence Manual of Security. This system meets the needs of the families of Service personnel and the security constraints of individual military bases. As discussed above, a universal base card is not currently being considered. However the MOD will keep the relevant policy guidance under review.

Recommendation 2.2.3: Dedicated welfare support for families within unit.

Unit welfare support is currently provided within the command chain, in some cases by providers who are not always professionally qualified to support and guide Service families. The key recommendation here is that the level of welfare support afforded to all of the three services should be provided by professionally qualified welfare officers, while ensuring they are tailored to the particular needs of each service.

It is common practice for Local Authority social work departments to be staffed by a mixture of fully qualified social workers and others with a lesser qualification, who play a supporting role. It is the same within the MOD. Specialist welfare support in the Services is provided by a mixture of qualified social workers and supporting staff, both civilian and military. The proportion of qualified staff is notably higher in the Navy's welfare services as a result of the much higher levels of separation that have always been endemic in naval life.

Naval Service and Army supporting staff undertake the 7-month Initial Training Course at the Joint Service School of Specialist Welfare. The course is accredited by the Open University (OU) and graduates receive the OU's "Certificate in Social and Occupational Welfare". This results in a worker who is a "professionally qualified welfare officer". In the RAF, specialist welfare support is contracted out to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association - Forces Help, who deliver a professional Social Work Service. This complements on-base uniformed staffs who undertake a variety of welfare roles. Military personnel are required to attend professional training at Southwick Park, as well as the RAF Community Support course, to prepare them for appointments as Subject Matter Experts in personnel and welfare roles. Each Army unit has a Unit Welfare Officer (UWO), formerly known as the Families Officer, who attends a course at Bristol University designed to equip them for the UWO role. The UWO is not a professional social worker but is the first line support and can refer people to more specialist services where needed. This system ensures an appropriate level of support, tailored to the specific requirements of each Service.

Recommendation 2.2.4: Improved childcare provision.

The provision of childcare is the responsibility of Local Authorities; however, there are crèches on some but not all MOD establishments. These are accessible to all personnel based on the particular site. Given the transient nature of the service population some families report difficulty in finding childcare and there appears to be a demand for more crèches which cater for the needs of single parents or those families working outside 'standard' working hours. The RAF has made excellent use of charitable funds to provide more on-base support. The RAF Benevolent Fund has been working with "4Children", a national charity, to deliver activities and after-school drop-in clubs for children. Charitable funding could be sought to expand this model across the MOD estate, in order to move towards an MOD-wide childcare provision.

In England and Wales it is the responsibility of Local Authorities to ensure that there is sufficient childcare provision to meet the requirements of parents in the Local Authority's area who require childcare to enable them to take up, or remain in work. Progress is being made; for example in Wales a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit has been introduced to help Local Authorities identify the requirements in their areas in their audits.

The provision of childcare is not MOD core business. Although it does not routinely provide childcare for employees, there are childcare settings on some MOD establishments. However, we appreciate that there is a demand for increased provision, including crèches, nurseries, before and after school clubs and holiday programmes. The MOD will continue to facilitate the development of appropriate childcare options and is investigating what more can be done, in particular with regard to ensuring that Local Authorities meet their obligations to conduct a full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA). Units and Local Authorities are aware of the CSA procedures and are working together to identify and promote relevant initiatives (such as the RAF Benevolent Fund 'Airplay' model referred to by the Task Force which delivers youth, play and holiday activities in partnership with '4Children').

Recommendation 2.2.5: Make Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks portable.

CRB checks are required for each paid or voluntary engagement with children and young people, e.g. one required for being a scout leader, another for a rugby coach, another for working/assisting in a school. The checks are carried out by the local police. If they were transferable from one policing area to another and from one activity to another many Service personnel and their families would be able to participate more fully in communities into which they are posted. This would reduce isolation and improve engagement between the service community and their civilian neighbours.

In October 2010 the Government outlined the terms of reference of two significant reviews: a thorough review of the Vetting and Barring Scheme (to re-examine whether the scheme is the most appropriate mechanism to protect children and vulnerable people and, if so, how many roles should be covered by it) and a Criminal Records Review (to examine whether the criminal records regime strikes the right balance between respecting civil liberties and protecting the public). The findings of the Vetting and Barring Scheme review and those of the first phase of the Criminal Records Review have been incorporated in the Protection of Freedoms Bill which was introduced on 11 February.

In terms of the issues raised by the Task Force, the Government announced on introducing the Bill that there is to be a large reduction in the number of positions requiring checks (only those working closely and regularly with children and vulnerable adults will need them), and there is to be easier portability of criminal records checks between jobs to cut down on needless bureaucracy (this was in response particularly to views received through the "Your Freedom" website). Portability of checks is currently possible, but employing organisations are advised to fully assess the risks of accepting a check conducted by a different employer or organisation which may have been carried out some time ago and where the work done in those posts is not directly comparable (as this will have affected decisions on the relevance of any past criminal record). Under proposals in the Bill, employers will have the opportunity to get updates on an individual who holds a CRB certificate without the need to conduct a further full check if they deem that appropriate.

Subject to parliamentary approval, the Protection of Freedoms Bill is expected to become law in England and Wales in early 2012.

The Scottish Government broadly welcomed the publication of the Criminal Records Review and will review and consider the detail for any implications for Scotland. The portable disclosure will provide an update facility for employers similar to the way disclosures work in the Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme: the PVG Scheme record is portable and the Scheme Record Update will be available on line.

Recommendation 2.2.6: Increased availability of communications while on deployment.

The MOD has made significant inroads in improving communication between families and Service personnel on operational tours. However, postal services to Forward Operating Bases are regularly disrupted because of lack of helicopter capacity, other forms of communication are often closed down if there has been an incident, computer terminals are few, and the amount of time allowed free of charge is limited. While increasing the number of terminals might have resource implications, the Task Force suggests exploring the possibility of sponsorship of communications by private sector or charitable providers. A Joint Personnel Administration (JPA)-compliant method of communication with families has been explored by the MOD but further development has been put on hold. Consideration should be given to revisiting this idea.

The MOD recognises the importance of receiving mail (British Forces Post Office provides Forces Free Air Letters and families can send packages of up to 2 kg free of charge to all operational locations) and makes every effort to deliver to all forward locations as soon as possible. There are of course occasions when the tactical situation and availability of helicopter lift may delay delivery but this is reduced to a minimum. It is also necessary to suspend temporarily all communication from theatre following a serious casualty or death to ensure that next of kin can be informed by the necessary welfare organisations; this fact is understood by all deployed personnel and is a vital part of the casualty notification process.

The deployed welfare package is continually reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of both Service personnel and their dependants. All Service personnel receive 30 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week to both landline and mobile phones and can purchase as many additional privately funded minutes above that entitlement as they

wish. The cost of making privately funded calls has recently been reduced from 10.5p to 5.5p per minute for landlines; costs will be higher to mobile phones. Access to welfare telephones has recently been reviewed and ratios halved from 1:30 to 1:15; the policy has also been amended to ensure that isolated detachments of 15 personnel or less have access to at least one welfare telephone. The internet is becoming an important means of communication for Service personnel. The MOD currently provides fixed internet access (full broadband) on Main Operating Bases at a ratio of 1:50 and in addition provides email only mobile internet access (WiFi) for use with personal laptops. In Forward Operating Bases, mobile internet is provided that allows both internet access and email from personal laptops. Internet use is not limited by time, however in a number of smaller more austere locations it can not be provided due to insufficient infrastructure. Where this is the case, the MOD has introduced a text link facility instead.

All welfare communications are provided against an agreed and publicly funded entitlement, which meets the welfare requirement within operational constraints. Over recent years Paradigm Services Ltd (the welfare phone contractor) have provided an additional 45 minutes of free calls to those deployed on operations over the Christmas period. They have also developed a Charity Card system which enables charities to sponsor communications. Over the last year, the charity "Calls for Heroes" and the RAF Association have both purchased over a thousand of these cards; individual units have also bought cards through their welfare funds. This has worked well and will be a good model to facilitate future charitable or private company support. Whilst it is a matter for private companies or charitable organisations if they wish to sponsor communications, we are very grateful for the support received to date.

The MOD has previously investigated the possibility of allowing welfare staff access to primary contact addresses on the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system for Service personnel who are deployed, to enable the welfare staff to post relevant information (such as invitations to participate in welfare activities) directly to next of kin and emergency contacts. However, a workable technical solution has not yet been achieved. It is worth noting that each of the Services has a community website, which provides an official internet platform for units to communicate with families and enables families to support each other through virtual forums, chat rooms or SMS messaging facilities.

2.3 Reducing Service mobility

Issue 2.3.0: New Employment Model.

The principal obstacle to 'equality of opportunity' for Service personnel and their families – particularly in the Army – is the mobility currently required by service careers. The New Employment Model (NEM) for Service personnel is being considered by the MOD as part of the SDSR and is outside the remit of the Task Force. However, it is worth noting that reduced mobility would be a significant step towards resolving some of the problems faced by Service personnel and their families.

As stated in the SDSR, the MOD is working on a New Employment Model (NEM) for the future. One of the key drivers for changing the employment model is to provide terms and conditions of service (including career structure, pay, allowances and accommodation options) that better balance the expectations of Service personnel and the demands placed on them and their families, and are fit for the future. One aim will be to improve

domestic stability, which we recognise is important for spouses' employment and children's education. The NEM will recognise that, where mobility is required for Service reasons, appropriate support and compensation should be available. The programme is due to report by Summer 2012. The intent is that policy changes will be implemented from April 2014.

Recommendation 2.3.1: Same region postings.

Examining the possibility of subsequent postings being in the same region rather than in a different one.

Throughout the career management process, the Services balance the requests of the individual with the needs of the Service, striving to provide geographic stability wherever possible. The projects detailed in the response to recommendation 2.3.2 below will seek to increase the opportunity for successive postings within the same region in the future.

Recommendation 2.3.2: Increase the use of "super-garrisons".

Examining whether there is scope to increase the use of "super-garrisons", such as Tidworth and Catterick.

We recognise that there are significant benefits for Service personnel of grouping as many units, and by implication Service Commands, as possible in a single area or vicinity. The Defence Communities concept is exploring how to align defence infrastructure with defence capabilities whilst developing economies and benefits of scale. By realising the benefits of both size and partnering with communities and industry, the MOD aims to enable greater lifestyle choice and increase stability for Service personnel and their families. Defence Communities will be the delivery focus for the new Defence Infrastructure Organisation to support the military. For the longer term, we will develop options for the NEM in consultation with key stakeholders.

Recommendation 2.3.3: Basing units in recruitment areas.

Basing units in the areas from which they recruit where possible. This would ensure that families are close to their own friends and relatives, providing extra support when personnel go abroad on operational tours.

The Armed Forces currently recruit nationally in order to meet their requirements and there are no plans to change this policy. Families are given support by their unit and will be further assisted by the greater stability in Service life and links with the local community which we aim to achieve through projects such as Defence Communities, the Armed Forces Community Covenant and the future NEM. For Reserves, they recruit both nationally and regionally depending upon the specialist skills requirements of the unit.

Recommendation 2.3.4: Relocating Service families at the end of the school year.

In order to minimise disruption to schooling, the MOD could explore whether movements involving the relocation of Service families can be confined to the end of the school year (or at least the end of a term). This is already the norm in many other Armed Forces of the developed world, including those of the United States and Australia. Consideration could also be given to creating stability for a stage of education, particularly at GCSE and A-level or equivalent.

The MOD Tri-Service Accommodation Policy allows for the retention of SFA for four months (the length of a term) or, in some exceptional circumstances three years, to help reduce the educational turbulence faced by Service children required to move schools. This is separate from the issue of the 28 days allowed for relocation once the SFA move has been agreed. However whilst moves can be scheduled, to some degree, to coincide with school terms, notice of assignment (as discussed in the response to recommendation 2.1.2.d.) can also impact on Service parents' ability to apply for school places in September. The Government looks to the programmes highlighted in our response to recommendation 2.3.2 to provide greater domestic stability in the future.

2.4 Support for the wounded and bereaved

Issue 2.4.0.a: Army Recovery Capability.

The Army is addressing the issues surrounding convalescence and either return to service or discharge, through the Army Recovery Capability, in which the Army pays for the staff, Help for Heroes the infrastructure, and the Royal British Legion (RBL) the ongoing support. Coordinated by a Personnel Recovery Branch, it is in the process of developing a network of twelve regionally based Personnel Recovery Units, supported by purpose-built Personnel Recovery Centres, of which the first was opened in Edinburgh in 2009. The initiative still has a number of hurdles to cross before it achieves full operating capability in 2012.

The Army Recovery Capability (ARC) has been considered an effective operational capability since 1 November 2010 but will continue to be rolled out incrementally over the next 18 months and will reach Full Operating Capability in April 2012. The ARC ensures that wounded, injured and sick personnel from all three Services have access to the key services and resources needed to help them return to duty or make a smooth transition into an appropriately skilled civilian life. It has also been designed to track individuals transitioning from the Army and, through its partnerships with charities and agencies that have historically provided support to serving and ex-Service personnel, will ensure continuity of support post discharge.

Eleven Personnel Recovery Units have been established throughout the UK and Germany, and, in addition to the Personnel Recovery Centre (PRC) currently operating in Edinburgh, the construction of a PRC in Colchester is under way with completion planned for early 2012. Two Personnel Recovery and Assessment Centres will be established in Tidworth and Catterick by 2012. In the meantime, interim capabilities will be available by Summer 2011 to directly support wounded, injured and sick personnel. A bespoke Personnel Recovery Facility will also be available in Germany by Autumn 2011.

The ARC facilities work closely with the RN's Hasler Company, based at HM Naval Base Devonport, and the RAF Personnel Holding Flight, which provide equivalent rehabilitation and welfare services for RN and RAF personnel with long-term injuries and illnesses to provide mutual support and create a Defence Recovery Capability.

All three organisations link closely with the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham and the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Headley Court, and all other elements of the Defence medical and welfare services, as well as external providers, to create a truly joined-up approach to the recovery of injured Service personnel.

Issue 2.4.0.b: Armed Forces Pension Scheme 1975.

The Task Force also notes the disadvantage experienced by some categories of Service widows under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 1975. These include the widows of servicemen who had not 'elected' to join the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2005 but who by definition could not so elect as they were dead; those who marry retired ex-servicemen who had already retired before 1973, who are not granted any pension; and the widows of those who retired before 1973, who receive only 30 percent of their husband's pension, as opposed to 50 percent rising to 62.5 percent. While the cost implications of addressing this issue put it outside the remit of the Task Force, we note that resolving these apparent anomalies would be an important step in ensuring that bereaved families receive the support they need.

It is a general principle of public service pension policy, and one that has been upheld by successive Governments, that improvements to pension schemes should not be made retrospective. The Service widows' issues are not just limited to the Armed Forces but are common to other public service schemes which have similar provisions. Resolving legacy issues such as widows' pensions, across the wider public sector, would be extremely costly with estimates for retrospective treatment running into hundreds of millions of pounds. In some specific circumstances we have been able to make changes. For example, pension and compensation rules have been changed to recognise acting rank in the payments to dependants of Service personnel who died for reasons related to service. Previously, under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 1975, death benefits were calculated on the substantive rank held at the date of death, with the acting rank being taken into account for pension purposes only if it had been held for at least a year. From 3 January 2011 death benefits will be paid on the basis of the acting rank if the individual's death occurred due to service, regardless of how long the individual has been in acting rank. Dependants of those who have died as a result of service since the AFCS came into force in April 2005 but before 3 January 2011, and whose pension benefits did not provide recognition of acting rank, will receive a single lump sum payment through the AFCS. Changes to the AFCS were incorporated into legislation laid in February. These changes only affect the Armed Forces and are limited to a relatively small group of individuals.

Recommendation 2.4.1: More support for wounded veterans to retrain.

Those severely wounded with disabling injuries are well supported in the service and by their mates, but need extra support if they leave the service. As an example of good practice the Rifles has appointed a Casualty Officer, funded by the Army Benevolent Fund, to help the wounded transition into other employment, including finding places on relevant post-graduate courses. Other regiments who do not already do so should consider using their own regimental funds for resettlement, or seeking other charitable funding. The Royal Navy has an extant resettlement process (as described above), which is managed by the Employment Co-ordinator and charities and works with the Defence Career Partnering (DCP) Recovery placement scheme to identify suitable temporary employment opportunities.

The MOD works to ensure the smoothest transition to an appropriately skilled and supported civilian life for wounded, injured or long term sick Service personnel, irrespective of cause. All Service personnel who become medically discharged for whatever reason and for however long they have served are entitled to the full resettlement programme. This includes support from a career consultant two years before and two years after discharge, access to vocational training, coaching in CV writing and job interviewing, access to a dedicated Service leavers' job website and briefings on housing and financial awareness. Service leavers can opt to undertake the programme over an extended duration or transfer it to spouses and civil partners if that is the most beneficial arrangement given their circumstances.

The MOD is keen to ensure that wounded personnel enjoy unhindered access to the best civilian employment options whilst optimising the services of existing resettlement and employment provision through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), Defence Career Partnering (DCP) and others from the commercial, public and voluntary or community sectors. The MOD has recently appointed an Employment Outcomes Manager, based at the offices of the ARC, who is responsible (working with CTP, DCP and others) for coordinating offers of employment, work-based training and work placements for wounded, injured or sick personnel and matching them to individuals' needs. The CTP plays a key role in this scheme: as the MOD's contracted resettlement provider for the Armed Forces, it vets and manages employment and training opportunities for Service leavers through its employment vacancies database and website (called RightJob). To complement this, the DCP operates a Recovery Placements programme with industry which is designed to provide Service personnel recovering from injury or illness with temporary work placements to help prepare them for return to duty or to ease their transition to civilian life. In addition the MOD's Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) will work with partner organisations from the charitable sector at the ARC Personnel Recovery Units as they are rolled out, and also with initiatives that are aimed at helping retrain veterans less seriously injured than those covered by the ARC. The VWS is in contact with the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court with a view to engaging more effectively there.

The MOD welcomes and supports the contribution of local initiatives such as the appointment of Casualty Officers and the use of regimental funds to supplement existing resettlement and recovery provision. The Department will continue to look for opportunities to promote such initiatives as examples of best practice for other regions to consider and adopt as they see fit.

Recommendation 2.4.2: A coherent national approach to trauma research.

Improvements in the survival of casualties depend on rapid introduction of new technologies. A coherent national approach to trauma research – encompassing key partners including the Department of Health (DoH), Medical Research Council and universities – would help develop such technologies. In line with the MOD's wish to ensure ongoing improvements in trauma care, the DoH should continue to lead the co-ordination of investment through the National Institute for Health Research and across the Research Councils in acute trauma, repair, reconstruction and long-term rehabilitation in a military or civilian context. This will help ensure that future research needs are coherently mapped and mutually reinforcing. A closer alignment between the development of NHS Major Trauma Centres and the placement of DMS personnel is also encouraged.

The MOD and the Department of Health, working with the Medical Research Council (MRC) and universities, have forged strong links on research issues. In January the new National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Centre for Surgical Reconstruction and Microbiology at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation and the University of Birmingham was launched as a new initiative, unique in the UK, and with the support of the MRC. This Centre will bring together trauma surgeons and scientists working in the area to translate innovation in medical research and advanced clinical practice in battlefield medicine into benefits for all patients at an early stage of injury.

In addition to the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine in Birmingham, the MOD has arrangements with five major NHS Trust hospitals to provide experience and training for military medical personnel. These NHS hospitals have all agreed to host Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) to facilitate the continuing training, development and maintenance of clinical skills of Defence Medical Services (DMS) personnel in their hospitals. The MOD continues to work with the Health Departments in each of the Devolved Administrations to seek similar opportunities across the UK. Future arrangements for placing DMS personnel – where appropriate to do so – in Major Trauma units will be considered as part of the contractual arrangements for future MDHU hosting. The MOD has deferred contractual re-negotiations in order to understand the new Trauma arrangements in the NHS and, working with the MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board, to then consider how best to align with those arrangements. It is worth noting here that not all DMS personnel are solely involved with trauma treatment, therefore other types of placement also need to be considered.

Recommendation 2.4.3: Better communication of Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

Those serving are not always fully aware of the scope of the scheme (for example, it is widely thought that the scheme only covers wounds received in action, when in fact it covers the full range of possible injuries in service). A notable exception is Hasler Company, where injured personnel have their own dedicated Service Personnel and Veterans' Agency (SPVA) representative as their single point of contact (to assist with their claim and award). Better communication, as proposed by the Boyce report, would also help correct some of the public misconceptions about the scheme – for example, press reports often fail to distinguish between lump sum payments and the guaranteed income payments which can accompany them.

Improving communication of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) has been a priority since Lord Boyce's review of the Scheme was published in February 2010. The review led to the MOD setting up an AFCS Communications Working Group which undertook a communications campaign across the three Services during 2010 to raise awareness of the Scheme and the improvements recommended by Lord Boyce. The first tranche of those improvements, which included extending the timescales for making claims and raising appeals and increasing the maximum levels of the Bereavement Grant, were implemented in August 2010. In addition the Army undertook an end-to-end review of the AFCS Claims Pathway with key stakeholders and the findings form part of a substantial communications and training package which is planned to coincide with the implementation of the remainder of the Boyce recommendations that became operational on 9 May 2011. In particular, a revised AFCS briefing package will be incorporated into all core military training syllabi in 2011, as well as within pre-operational deployment training. Furthermore, AFCS communication material now provides clearer information on the full value of awards, including Guaranteed Income Payments (GIPs), where appropriate. All relevant communication products have been reviewed with the aim of providing more user-friendly information on submitting claims and general aspects of the claims procedure. As a result claim acknowledgment letters now include more information on how the claim will be processed and assessed, while award notification letters include an explanation of how awards have been calculated along with reconsideration and appeal rights.

The Service Personnel and Veterans' Agency (SPVA) will continue to offer seriously injured individuals expert advice and support. Its VWS is already working with the ARC while a commitment has also been made for VWS staff to redeploy to work with partner organisations from the charitable sector at the Personnel Recovery Units, as mentioned in the response to recommendation 2.4.1. Dedicated SPVA representation as currently provided at Hasler Company is also being considered in other locations, including Headley Court.

Recommendation 2.4.4: Local access to NHS primary care services.

The statutory provider for primary healthcare for serving personnel is Defence Medical Services (DMS). However, in some cases, due to geography or particular clinical needs, wounded personnel will require care or support from the local NHS or Local Authorities. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have no legal duty to provide such care, although to date they have generally been prepared, after discussion, to do so. The NHS White Paper has proposed significant changes in NHS commissioning which could prevent such ad hoc arrangements. It is proposed that consideration is given to ensuring that the existing informal arrangement is formalised.

The issue of commissioning primary care services for serving personnel is being addressed as part of ongoing MOD commissioning discussions with the Department of Health (DH), including by the "Commissioning sub-group", which reports to the MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board. This recommendation will form part of work undertaken in response to changes in the NHS structure for England. In Scotland arrangements will remain the same since they fall within the remit of Health Boards. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) have launched a review with Service Organisations in Wales that will include gathering information on access to NHS primary care services for Armed Forces personnel, their families and veterans in Wales. The outcome of this review will be used to inform health policy in Wales and also to consider if specific 'quality requirements' for Armed Forces personnel, their families and veterans accessing healthcare in Wales are needed.

Recommendation 2.4.5: Coroners' inquest training.

The Task Force understands that under the previous government, legislation was being prepared by the Ministry of Justice to improve training for coroners in handling the inquest process. The Task Force notes that such training would greatly benefit Service families and improve press reporting, which in the past has sometimes been confused, and hopes this preparation will continue.

An MOD familiarisation event was held on 26/27 May 2010 to provide coroners with awareness of equipment and procedures used in theatre. This was attended by approximately 30 coroners and the MOD plans to repeat the event annually. A one-day training event on handling Service personnel deaths, which included military themed presentations, was also held on 11 March 2010 and attended by approximately 60 coroners. Induction and continuation training for coroners, their deputies and assistant deputies is continuing and the Ministry of Justice Coroners Training Group is planning training for the future.

Provisions have also been made in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 for Fatal Accident Inquiries to be held into deaths of military Service personnel abroad. The Act has amended the terms of the Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths Inquiries (Scotland) Act 1976 to allow a Fatal Accident Inquiry to be carried out in Scotland into deaths of Service personnel abroad. The interests of bereaved relatives are at the heart of this legislative change and those military fatalities where there are familial links to Scotland will be the subject of discussion between the offices of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Lord Advocate.

Recommendation 2.4.6: Local Authority and some Service charities' treatment of compensation payments.

Lump sum payments made to wounded Service personnel and other compensation payments are handled differently by Local Authorities and some Service charities when assessing need and eligibility for social care: some include it in means testing, others do not. Lord Boyce's Armed Forces Compensation Scheme review states that the compensation payments "are not intended to pay for care provided by the public sector in the UK". The report also contains a range of ways to calculate benefits. This is a matter for individual Local Authorities, but disregarding compensation payments for means testing would be an excellent way of demonstrating their commitment to the Community Covenant. Similarly the Task Force also encourages Service charities to exclude lump sum payments from their eligibility calculations.

In 2005 a full review of the treatment of compensation payments for income-related benefits was carried out. The aim was to introduce rules which would be fair and consistent to all claimants who suffer bereavement or personal injury. As a result, more flexible and generous rules were introduced for people who receive compensation for personal injury. For these benefits, all capital payments made for personal injury are disregarded for the first 52 weeks. Thereafter if the capital is placed in a personal injury trust it continues to be disregarded. As for the regular Guaranteed Income Payment paid from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, there is currently a fixed disregard of £10 per week for income-related benefits. This special treatment is in recognition of the fact that the claimant's disabilities arose as a consequence of serving in the Armed Forces.

Where Local Authorities administer benefits such as Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, the same rules apply, but in addition they have the discretion to go beyond the £10 disregard, including disregarding it in entirety. Indeed evidence to date suggests that most choose to exercise this discretion. The financial assessments for social care made by Local Authorities also follow these rules, and can again be disregarded. We believe that it is in keeping with our localism agenda to allow Local Authorities to show their commitment to the Armed Forces community by retaining this flexibility, and as the Task Force have highlighted, it could form part of their commitment under the Community Covenant. It is for charities to determine their own criteria for who they support, and indeed some choose to offer support to those where none is available from other sources.

The Government is committed to keeping the arrangements for the treatment of compensation payments under review to make them as fair and appropriate as possible for those injured during Service. An independent Commission on the Funding of Care and Support is currently considering how to achieve an affordable and sustainable funding system for care and support for all adults in England both in the home, and other settings. The Commission is due to report in July this year. A White Paper on the future of social care will be published by the end of the year. Government will need to consider the relative roles of different public funding streams in this review. We will look again at AFCS payments within this context to consider how to ensure the Guaranteed Income Payments made under this scheme are not required to be used to pay for social care provided by the public sector, as recommended by Lord Boyce in his review of the AFCS.

As the Universal Credit is developed in the next few years, we will ensure that it is designed to take account of the needs of injured Service personnel and veterans. The MOD will also work to ensure that the details of these exemptions, including the implications of putting

lump sum payments into personal injury trusts, are well communicated to the recipients of the scheme. Individual financial guidance is available at Headley Court to help those in receipt of compensation payments.

2.5 Reservists

Issue 2.5.0: Support to Reservist families.

While deployed, Reservists are treated no differently from their regular military counterparts. However, the needs of Reservists and their families are in some ways unique. While they are deployed, their families are subject to many of the same pressures, but lack the “on-base” support available to Regular Service families.

We are aware that living in the community away from a Service environment can be an issue for the families of deployed Reservists. This also affects Regulars who choose to live off base in their own homes. Activities such as briefing events and community support activities tend to be centred on the unit that the individual deploys from and most services and resources are located there. However the requirement for more directed welfare support was noted in the Strategic Review of Reserves (in 2009) and as a result the three Services have provided more tailored welfare literature improving the quality of information to families of deployed Reservists before, during and after mobilisation. DVD versions of family briefings are being produced in order to enable dispersed families to access the same level of information and signposting as those on Unit, in particular to help them deal with the emotional demands of deployment and separation. The MOD recognises that effective and creative communication is key to the delivery of effective welfare support; again this is an area that is being improved by the Services.

It is worth noting that those Reservist families for whom the distance to their unit is not an issue have access to the various agencies that can provide support if required (e.g. HIVE, publicly-funded welfare support, UWOW/ Regimental Operations Support Officer) and chain of command. In addition each Service operates a community support website and maintains online forums which enable two-way communication with personnel in theatre and promote networking and support to members of the community.

All three Services provide a support package including a deployment information pack (including useful telephone numbers, sources of support and websites) and a nominated local Service welfare point of contact to families of those deploying, coupled with more intensive support to the most vulnerable, the bereaved and injured. Use is made of as many forms of media as possible to keep families informed; there is also a responsibility on the family to keep in touch with the Welfare Teams and to keep their contact details up to date.

As an example, all personnel who transit through the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre (RTMC) receive a welfare pack, a welfare brief with comprehensive information for the soldier to pass on to their family together with contact details of the RTMC UWOW. There is a continuous rolling programme of briefs to ensure the chain of command is fully advised on the need to include individual Reservists and Territorial Army into their welfare plans. This is replicated in the other two Services on mobilisation.

Recommendation 2.5.1: Build on links between RFCAs and youth groups.

As a result of their responsibility for the Cadets, the RFCAs are involved with other youth groups through Youth United. The Adjutant General has engaged the Army with the Prince's Trust. There is further scope for collaboration, including sharing facilities; this should be fully exploited.

Society as a whole benefits from closer interaction between the military community – Serving, Reservist and Veteran – and civilian communities. We agree that there is further scope for collaboration between the MOD – including the Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations (RFCAs) – and youth groups. The MOD is currently conducting a comprehensive Review of Youth Engagement, with the aim of determining its youth engagement requirement and methods to deliver it. This is due to report in late 2011.

As part of its current engagement policy, the MOD has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Prince's Trust with approximately 120 Service personnel and civil servants taking part in Prince's Trust schemes at various levels. The Department was a founder member of Youth United at the National Level and has encouraged the RFCAs to engage at a local level. The MOD is able to share its facilities in line with current Defence policy.

In Wales, Young Dragons/Dreigiau Ifanc is a developing youth citizenship initiative aligned to Youth United (under the chairmanship of the Deputy Chief Constable of Gwent Police), which aims to increase the number of young people involved in the uniformed youth organisations and also to increase the number of volunteers who help to run them.

Recommendation 2.5.2: Recognised form of ID for Reservists.

Currently some Reservists have no formal means of identifying their status between deployments. Identity cards would allow them to claim any services or discounts offered by private companies under the Community Covenant. A chip-and-pin card could provide a more secure system. Combined with a card reader, such a card could allow remote access to the secure online Service personnel system (JPA), which can currently only be accessed during Territorial Army office opening hours via a limited number of terminals. It could also potentially allow access to military bases, subject to commanding officer approval.

Members of the Royal Naval Reserves, Royal Marine Reserves, the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and other reserve air forces are issued with an ID card on joining. However, since outflow during Territorial Army (TA) training can be high, TA units often do not issue ID cards until the end of training. Thereafter TA members as a minimum are issued with an ID card when they are mobilised or on training courses; and in many cases ID cards are issued to the individuals permanently. However the MOD recognises that it is important to have a consistent approach on this issue and direction will be given to ensure that all trained TA members have their ID card issued to them permanently subject to local security considerations.

Access to services and discounts can be obtained with these and other forms of proof of TA membership (such as temporary paper ID available on request or payslips). It may also be appropriate to expand the new veterans' card (see recommendation 3.2.1) to include Reservists, and we will consider this further.

Access to the JPA system via the internet by members of the Armed Forces, including Reservists, is currently limited to those personnel that are posted or detached to a non MOD managed location. The MOD will keep under review whether this can be extended more widely in the future.

Recommendation 2.5.3: Information to reservists' GPs.

As part of the demobilisation medical following deployment, consent should be obtained from Reservists to allow their defence medical records to be transferred to their civilian GP. This communication could then act as the formal handover of medical care from the Defence Medical Services back to the NHS GP. NHS GPs would therefore be able to respond should Reservists develop physical or psychological problems on their return.

We fully support this recommendation, and a current paper process delivers the consent model and the transfer. The majority of Reservists demobilise from operational service with no medical problems. Reservists who have deployed in a P3 grading (fit for limited military duties), those requesting medical review or those identified as having a change in their medical state by preliminary examinations (e.g. hearing thresholds) are assessed by a Medical Officer. If the problem identified is minor and is expected to resolve spontaneously or with minimal intervention (e.g. a prescription for antibiotics), then a letter explaining the situation is currently provided for the individual to present to their GP. Individuals with more complex medical problems may be retained in a medical holding category until such time as the condition has been satisfactorily treated; on demobilisation the individual is provided with a Medical History on Release from HM Forces together with any appropriate medical documentation (e.g. scan reports) that may assist the GP with future medical care. At present it is the individual's responsibility to hand this information to his or her GP.

The Defence Medical Information Capability Programme and NHS Connecting for Health (part of the Department of Health Informatics Directorate) have reviewed the electronic transfer process which exists within the civilian population, and identified issues which need to be resolved prior to announcing how an electronic transfer process might be introduced. The intention is to transfer the responsibility of handover from the patient to the organisation, mirroring civilian responsibilities, and therefore part of the new arrangements will include an explicit consent model.

This issue will also be considered in the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) review described in the response to recommendation 2.4.4.

Recommendation 2.5.4: Better information for GPs on available help for Reservists.

In November 2006 the MOD launched the Reserves Mental Health Programme, under which any Reservist deployed after 2003 who has a mental health problem can access the programme by a referral from their GP. This is particularly important, as Reservists experience a greater increase in mental health problems than Regulars when they return from deployment. Knowledge of the existence of the programme needs to be more widespread: in 2008 84% of GPs were unaware of its existence. We suggest that information on the programme be included as part of the provision of the DMS medical record to the Reservist's NHS GP. We also note and support other efforts to raise awareness of all veterans' health needs among GPs, including the recent publication of 'Meeting the Healthcare Needs of Veterans – A guide for general practitioners' by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and the RBL, and the future development of a Veterans' Healthcare eLearning package by the RCGP on behalf of the DoH (England).

The MOD takes the mental health of all Service personnel, reservists and veterans seriously. The Reserves Mental Health Programme (RMHP) is continually reviewed and future direction will take into consideration the findings of research by King's College Mental Health Research, the Medical Assessment Programme and NHS Mental Health Pilots. In particular, initial findings from an independent clinical review of the RMHP indicate that the programme is well received in its current form and appears to offer an effective and acceptable intervention service to recently de-mobilised Reservists who are suffering from service-related mental health problems.

Reservists and the chain of command are regularly made aware of the RMHP; Reservists are informed during the mobilisation process and are advised to notify their GP if they self refer. However we agree that publicity of the programme could be improved. DH has agreed a contract with the Royal College of General Practitioners for an e-learning package for GPs (as noted by the Task Force), which will ensure appropriate information is provided to improve understanding of the health needs of reservists, veterans and families. This is planned to be in place by June 2011. In addition the MOD and DH will take this recommendation into consideration in future work to enhance communication of the RMHP to GPs.

The issue of communicating relevant information to GPs will also be considered in the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) review described in the response to recommendation 2.4.4.

Recommendation 2.5.5: Support from employers.

Reservists, unlike Regulars, can lack the intimate support of their military comrades on return from overseas deployments, making it more difficult to adjust to civilian life. Employers could help by encouraging them to discuss their experiences – for example through informal presentations to colleagues. Employers should also be made aware of the early warning signs that someone may be experiencing problems.

The MOD provides support for members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces and their employers through its 'Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers' campaign (SaBRE).

As part of this, the MOD communicates the benefits, rights and legal responsibilities associated with employing a Reservist through a dedicated website and a freephone support line.

Reservists and employers are encouraged to maintain contact during mobilisation and the Reservist is encouraged to contact his employer as part of the Safeguards of Employment Act in order to ensure a safe return to work. In addition, during demobilisation all Reservists are offered the opportunity for a medical to determine their fitness for release from permanent service and to return to civilian employment. The SaBRE website also contains information for employers about the Reservist return to work, including recognising deployment-related health issues and who to contact for help.

Reintegration in the workplace is aided by the provision of financial assistance to employers to cover the costs of retraining their Reservist employee when they return to work if it is essential for them to carry out their duties properly. On the SaBRE website, the MOD also encourages discussing the Reservist's experience, stating: "Staff will be interested in what their colleague has been doing. You might want to ask your Reservist employee to give a talk or presentation on their role, or to lead a skill-sharing exercise based on their experience." This is further promoted by initiatives such as the hugely popular Uniform to Work Day, which occurs in conjunction with Armed Forces Day and serves to highlight the dual role Reserves play as part of the Armed Forces and wider society. This year it will take place on Wednesday 22 June.

Recommendation 2.5.6: Encourage retiring Service personnel to join the Reserves.

Encouraging those retiring from Regular service to become Reservists could usefully exploit their operational experience and broaden the range of moral support available to demobilised reservists. Such cross-over could be increased by, for example, including an opportunity to opt-in to Reserve Service at the point of termination. Reservists might particularly benefit from the support of former Regular officers with experience of frontline combat.

Regulars leave service with a varying degree of reserve liability, and the take-up for Volunteer Reserve (VR) service is currently about 18%. The MOD has made progress in improving the pathway from Regular to VR service following the Strategic Review of Reserves carried out in 2009. Work is under way to simplify the processes even further, including the employment of specialised single Service advisers to coordinate transfers, giving expert advice and guidance. This will enable employees to end Regular service on one day and commence VR service the next day. Other initiatives include the Army's incentives of reduced annual training requirement and relaxation of Call-Out liability.

The MOD intends to improve recruitment further by increasing visibility of VR opportunities through various media such as the CTP website (RightJob, which offers employment opportunities specifically for Service leavers). This work and other related strands will be taken forward to inform the Future Reserves 2020 Study into the future role and structures of the Reserve Forces, which was announced by the Prime Minister in October 2010. The study is exploring innovative terms and conditions of service to attract all forms of service, in order to man a balanced force structure comprising Regulars, Reserves, Contractors and Civilians, which is optimised to meet Defence's requirements. A key element will be to ensure that Defence continues to offer the challenge, reward,

training and support which attract people including ex-Regulars to volunteer for reserve service. It is due to report to the Prime Minister in July 2011.

Recommendation 2.5.7: Lord Lieutenants' Awards.

Lord Lieutenants' Awards for employers who have supported employees serving as Reservists (employers can already qualify for a SaBRE certificate signed by the Defence Secretary). This could raise awareness and further incentivise employers to enable their staff to deploy (currently employers are entitled to appeal against mobilisation). It could operate in a similar way to the Covenant or Chief of Defence Staff's Commendation.

Many employers have publicly pledged their support for Reservists through the MOD's SaBRE campaign, which enjoys the support of the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and other organisations.

The MOD values the vital contribution that all employers make in supporting their Reservist employees. As the Task Force notes, this support is recognised by the award of the SaBRE Certificate signed by the Defence Secretary, which is often presented by The Lord Lieutenants. On the advice of the National Employer Advisory Board, SaBRE is also developing a complementary Employer Marque. This initiative is intended to further increase awareness and incentivise employers to support Reservists, as per the Task Force's recommendation.

As an indicator of the success of the MOD's employer support engagement strategy to date, more than 24,000 Reservists have been mobilised since 2003 and there have been only 11 Appeal Tribunals for employers seeking exemption from call-out for their employee.

Recommendation 2.5.8: Encourage professional bodies to recognise relevant deployment experience.

The experience of some Reservists on deployment could enhance their civilian career opportunities but it is too often not properly recognised. Professional bodies, organisations and employers need to be encouraged to develop a process that credits staff who have been deployed. This could also apply to DMS personnel deployed in NHS Trusts.

Whilst accreditation is constantly evolving, we are keen that existing and developing qualification opportunities are available to Regular and Reservist personnel and encourage Sector Skills Councils, Awarding Organisations and other professional bodies to recognise relevant deployment as well as prior education and training experience. The MOD's medium to longer term aim (agreed by all Services) is to provide opportunities for an individual Reservist to gain relevant, recognised and transportable qualifications mapped to the Qualifications and Credit Framework. This would provide advantages to both an employer and the Services. The National Health Service recognises the value of sharing the operational experiences of MOD clinicians (including Reserves), particularly in the field of

emergency medicine, as demonstrated by the Emergency Medicine Conference hosted by the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine.

The SaBRE campaign aims to make employers aware of the skills that Reservists can offer. Drawing on recent research into the financial value of the transferable skills gained through training and experience in the Reserve Forces, SaBRE has put together a series of short guides¹ for employers which have been endorsed by the Chartered Management Institute. These guides describe what each course entails and how it benefits civilian employers in clear, non-military terms. They also provide figures for how much the training (the part which is useful in a civilian job) would cost if they had to pay for it. There are currently 17 guides on various Territorial Army Courses and 2 for Royal Naval Reserves. Guides for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force will follow. This approach is complemented by secondary legislation that provides the assurance that if an employer feels that a Reservist employee needs retraining upon returning to work following mobilisation, the costs of this can be reclaimed from the MOD.

Recommendation 2.5.9: Consider extending Pupil Premium to Reservist children (on a case by case basis).

Evidence suggests that children of Reservists sometimes experience behavioural problems as a result of their parents' deployment. If this occurs, schools should be able to address it with additional funding which would need to be applied for on a case by case basis. This would obviously have cost implications which would need to be considered.

One of the reasons for the introduction of a premium for Service children is to enable schools to provide the extra support needed to mitigate the effects of frequent changes of school, including help settling in and changes of syllabus. The children of Reservists do not suffer the same level of family dislocation and frequent disruption of education that the children of Regulars do, since Reservists are not subject to the same high level of mobility and are more likely to have support through being settled in their community. Thus the schools attended by the children of Reservists do not generally incur the same increase in costs associated with the administration and support of children of Regular Forces personnel. Payment of the Service pupil premium is linked to the number of Service children on the school roll when the Annual School Census is conducted in January each year; this does not allow for the inclusion of additional children on a case by case basis. However whilst we do not propose to extend the pupil premium to Reservist children, we are introducing a fund of £3m per annum over the next four years to support State schools catering for significant numbers of Service children or the children of Reservists. This is intended to help ensure that schools are equipped to deal with exceptional or changing circumstances as a result of troop movements and/or operational deployments.

In addition each Service provides advice to the families of deployed personnel (Regular and Reserve), including on how to prepare children. Guides, which are distributed and available on line, contain advice such as considering informing the child's school that he or she has a parent deployed away on overseas operations. As mentioned previously, DVD versions of family briefings are being produced in order to enable dispersed families to access the same level of information and signposting as those on Unit, in particular to help them deal

1 <http://www.sabre.mod.uk/Reservists/The-value-of-your-training.aspx>

with the emotional demands of deployment and separation. Other forms of support are also available as described in our response to recommendation 2.5.0.

2.6 Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel

Recommendation 2.6.1: An Armed Forces Visa for families of Foreign and Commonwealth personnel.

The Task Force commends the exemption already applied by UKBA to Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel which allows them to remain in the UK while serving without paying visa fees. While accepting the possible financial implications of changes in visa fees, we recommend that a similar provision should be made for the spouses or partners of Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel and their dependant children. The introduction of a free Armed Forces Visa would enable families to join their serving spouse or partner in the UK and to travel in and out of the UK unaccompanied by the Serviceman or woman.

The UK Border Agency has noted this proposal and recognises that there is a case for a more wide-ranging review of the fees for Armed Forces' dependants that would seek to address a number of anomalies and inconsistencies. This will form part of the annual fee review due to take place in late 2011.

2.7 Other issues

Recommendation 2.7.1: Ensure serving personnel are able to vote.

The problem of Armed Forces' voting was recognised in 1945, and has still not been fully addressed. If an underlying aim of the Military Covenant is to sustain the rights of citizenship for those who defend the nation, members of the Armed Forces (and their dependants) need to be able to exercise their right to vote. The complications of registration are currently being addressed, but difficulties are also caused by delays in post reaching personnel deployed or serving overseas. To ensure that these serving personnel (and their dependants) are able to vote consideration should be given to extending the time between the issue and return of voting papers for postal votes. The Task Force understands that this is already being explored by Government and strongly supports it.

In the Coalition's Programme for Government, we stated our commitment to ensure that Service personnel only have to register once on the Service register. Following discussions at Ministerial level between the Cabinet Office and the MOD, detailed proposals for how such a system could work are being developed alongside work being undertaken on pilots of data-matching as part of the Cabinet Office's Electoral Registration Transformation Programme. The pilots will be taking place during 2011. This will help identify whether the required levels of accuracy and completeness can be achieved on the Register.

Separately, the MOD and the Cabinet Office worked together with the Electoral Commission, BFPO and Royal Mail to make suitable provisions for ballot packs for the referendum and other elections which took place on 5 May 2011 to reach Service personnel in Afghanistan, in order to help those who chose to vote by post. For other overseas

locations, BFPO aimed to identify and fast track ballot papers when under their control. For the longer term, the Cabinet Office is also examining the possibility of extending the timetable for general elections so that postal votes would be issued further in advance of the poll. This would have a number of benefits, including for Service voters overseas.

3. Transition to civilian life

3.1 In-Service education and preparation for resettlement

Recommendation 3.1.1: Support for Service personnel in career planning.

A clear and jargon-free personnel strategy would help Service personnel better understand their career options and provide information about the management within the services of recruitment, retention, professional development, health, and transition back into civilian life. In particular, such a strategy would help Service personnel understand the difficult choices which may accompany a military career, including the balance between career advancement and family obligations.

The MOD produces a simple leaflet for Service personnel summarising and explaining the key points of the Service Personnel Strategy. However detailed information about career options and opportunities is tailored to each of the Services and therefore provided by them. Career guides and advice are available to individuals during the recruitment process and through the career management cycle (including training courses and Formal Career Reviews).

The RAF is implementing its new Through Service Career Management Concept aimed at improving the career management of all RAF personnel through three projects providing guidance to Junior Ranks, Senior Non Commissioned Officers and Officers respectively (Projects Apollo, Zeus and Sirius). The Army has published a number of user-friendly documents, such as the 'Career Management in the British Army' booklet. Its Military Secretary organisation (whose remit is to develop, manage and guide the careers of all officers and soldiers) publishes a quarterly newsletter which is distributed widely down to unit level and below, as well as maintaining a website. The Royal Navy has published a Personnel Functional Standards document (July 2010), which details the standards and assistance available to all Serving personnel across a range of areas, such as lifelong learning, resettlement and career management. Although families are not targeted directly with this information, they can access it through their partners, or via web-based material available to all.

Recommendation 3.1.2: Build more personal responsibility into service life.

There can be a tendency to treat Service Personnel paternally, especially the younger recruits. This does not prepare them for civilian life. Relatively simple measures – such as the Pay As You Dine scheme which helps recruits budget for their monthly food bill – could improve the self-reliance of personnel at little or no additional cost.

Personal responsibility is emphasised in many aspects of Service life, from adventurous training to initiatives such as Pay As You Dine or the use of the self-service Joint Personnel Administration system. The MOD supports the principle of increased self-sufficiency; this is addressed in further detail in the response to recommendation 3.1.4., 'Life skills' training throughout service.

Recommendation 3.1.3: Ongoing formal education during military training.

All the indications are that education leads to greater retention, to a better return on service, and to a more fulfilling career within the Armed Forces. Although those who enter the Armed Forces at the age of 16 are often anxious to escape school, there is a strong case for continuing to educate those recruits aged 16-18 alongside their military training. Consideration should be given to a pre-service apprenticeship or another scheme, where service life and training are incorporated with finishing education. Ensuring that Service Personnel are aware of the civilian accreditations of existing (sometimes mandatory) training, and know how to record them on their CVs, is crucial in service training. Many academic and vocational courses are already available to Service personnel, but there is scope to consider whether some of these could be made available earlier in service, with appropriate return of service conditions attached. Currently many of these are only offered to personnel who have served more than four years. They also need to be made aware of these and their benefits, and be given the opportunity to attend them. This is a responsibility of the Chain of Command.

The MOD is a major provider of training and seeks to provide opportunities for all personnel to gain nationally recognised qualifications as they progress through their careers. It is a significant contributor to the skills base of the national workforce, and many Armed Forces personnel return to civilian life with useful vocational or management-related qualifications.

The Armed Forces will continue to educate recruits below the age of 18 in accordance with the requirements of the Education and Skills Act 2008 which, from 2012/13, will place a duty on those aged below 18 who do not hold a Qualification and Credit Framework Level 3 qualification (the equivalent of achieving A levels, GCEs in applied subjects, BTEC National) to participate in appropriate full-time education or training.

Apprenticeships and Level 2 qualifications (the equivalent of achieving GCSEs grades A* to C, BTEC First Diplomas and Certificates) are already offered to all Service personnel who do not hold them and the MOD is on track to meet the Leitch Skills pledge of 95% of all personnel holding Level 2 qualifications by 2020. Much of the training provided by the MOD is formally accredited and therefore recognised by civilian employers when personnel come to the end of their Service careers. While opportunities for accreditation are usually explained during the relevant military course, the Services continue to encourage personnel to take up relevant training (in addition to mandatory training). During initial training, Service personnel are issued with a Personal Development Record or equivalent, which they can use to record their experience and qualifications throughout their career. Training on how to generate a CV occurs during the resettlement phase.

MOD policies on training are regularly reviewed. For example the Royal Navy is currently working on the Naval Service Education Requirement and the Maritime Through Career Development initiative, which aims to establish a coherent approach to delivering Command, Leadership and Management, Staff Training and Core Maritime Skills. The RAF is developing a Lifelong Learning Strategy, overseen by the RAF Higher Education Board. As part of such initiatives, the Armed Forces will consider if there is scope to increase academic and vocational courses available earlier in service with appropriate return of service conditions attached, without affecting the right of those who have been recruited below the age of 18, and who are unhappy in the Service, to discharge if they wish.

Recommendation 3.1.4: 'Life skills' training throughout service.

From our research it appears that the skills in which education is most required are those which will enable Service personnel to stand on their own feet in the civilian world. These include opening and managing a bank account, securing housing, understanding benefits, drawing up a will, and responsible social behaviour. There are potential resource implications in attempting to offer such training internally. However, some private sector providers have expressed an interest in offering training in financial management – Standard Life Trust and Barclays Trust have done so in the past – and this option warrants further exploration. These elements are also included routinely in resettlement courses, and redistributing the funding from end of service to during service would enable such courses to be funded from existing budgets – a 'cradle to grave' approach.

The MOD recognises the importance of life skills training throughout Service careers. Indeed each of the Services has training programmes designed to address the areas suggested by the Task Force. For example in support of the Army Recovery Capability, the Army runs bespoke assessment and life skills courses targeting many of these issues specifically for wounded, injured and sick soldiers.

In particular the MOD is keen to help develop financial awareness amongst the Service population, and is working to that end with The Royal British Legion, the Consumer Financial Education Body (CFEB) and Standard Life Charitable Trust. There are three strands to this work: financial training, guidance and advice. The MOD has already introduced financial training for basic trainees which includes how to operate a bank account as well as budgetary planning, and bespoke single Service financial awareness education briefings are available from the CFEB on request. The focus is now on developing a 'through life' approach which targets personnel at key stages of their life and career. For instance individual financial guidance is available at Headley Court to help those who are in receipt of compensation payments.

Raising financial awareness in the wider Armed Forces community will assist in focusing personnel on planning financially for their future, including their accommodation needs. Home ownership advice is available from sources such as the Joint Service Housing Advice Office, as well as from targeted campaigns such as those for HomeBuy and the Armed Forces Home Ownership Scheme. As the MOD works to deliver the new accommodation model discussed in section 2.1 it will continue to work to improve all aspects of communication on accommodation choices.

Understanding state benefits will be included in the life skills training which the Army is currently developing to build on the training already provided on entry and at key points in a Service career.

The RAF and Royal Navy currently provide guidance on drawing up a will as part of initial training as well as pre-deployment preparation; the Army is considering introducing this as part of initial training instead. As for responsible social behaviour, it is encouraged through the communication of core values and training in areas such as equality and diversity, sexual awareness and stress management. For the Army, it is addressed as part of the Military Annual Training Tests syllabus.

Introducing activities such as life skills earlier in service in order to aid transition will be considered wherever possible, however it will require careful balancing to ensure that what is offered remains current at the point of discharge; this is particularly true in the areas of housing, securing benefits and financial management where practises and guidance can change quickly and significantly.

Recommendation 3.1.5: Target better educated recruits.

The coincidence of buoyant recruiting and possible reductions on overall strength in 2010-11 presents an opportunity to raise the minimum entry requirements for recruitment. This would need to be accompanied by a job offer which more fully matches the aspirations of better educated Service personnel. A shift in the profile of recruits could help mitigate the problems sometimes encountered by those with lower levels of education at later stages of their careers and on transition out of service.

The Armed Forces provide challenging and constructive education, training and employment opportunities for young people, equipping them with valuable and transferable skills. Each of the Services has a different requirement and strategy for recruits on entry.

The Army has found that specific educational qualifications are not a guarantee of soldiers' quality. The Individual Development and Selection Tool used during the Army selection process recognises educational attainment equally alongside effort, commitment and suitability. However, specific educational qualifications are required for certain trades. The Army currently has no plans to raise the minimum educational requirements for recruitment.

The Naval Service at present has very few specific educational entry requirements and relies on its Recruiting Test for selection of recruits. This provides sufficient and valid prediction of performance in training, however work is under way to explore the potential benefits and impact of raising educational entry standards, including the possibility of recruiting later to make best use of the civilian education sector and reduce training costs.

The RAF's Directorate of Recruitment and Initial Training Transformation Plan, once fully implemented, will ensure better educated recruits. The strategic purpose is for self de-selection of unsuitable candidates and more efficient processing of suitable candidates. The strategic vision was initiated in March 2008 and is underpinned by the Transformation Plan. Incremental steps are being taken to ensure the achievement of the vision as resources and technology become available and it should be realised by 2015.

Recommendation 3.1.6: A healthier approach to alcohol.

Depression and the harmful use of alcohol are much more common problems in the Armed Forces than post-traumatic stress disorder or mental health symptoms. The Armed Forces' culture of 'work hard, play hard' is important in promoting comradeship but can encourage the harmful use of alcohol. Evidence suggests that alcohol education has little effect on its own, but that raising alcohol prices on bases and greater discipline (such as alcohol testing) can reduce consumption. The Armed Forces should continue to promote the use of existing, and the introduction of more, non-drinking social spaces and recreational facilities in each base.

The Armed Forces are fully supportive and appreciative of the benefits of adopting a sensible drinking culture. Alcohol education and general health promotion are implemented across all levels of command. There are comprehensive advertising campaigns across the Services and changes have been introduced in order to help promote a cultural shift. For example the use of alcohol as prizes for inter-unit activities is not normally permitted. Under certain circumstances, availability and type of alcohol is limited or banned. This is particularly so on operations.

Facilities within Service establishments are run by commercial contractors, mess committees or the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI). They have pricing policies which are generally consistent with market forces. Raising alcohol prices within Service establishments would risk moving consumption outside, making it more difficult to control. Across Service establishments, particularly with the advent of Pay As You Dine, contractors are increasingly encouraged to provide "coffee shop" type facilities to meet changing demand. These are in some cases collocated with internet and Wi-Fi facilities and provide a relaxed environment and a welcome addition to wider welfare provision. In Phase 1 and Phase 2 training establishments this provides an alternative focus for those trainees who are under 18 years of age.

In addition the Armed Forces Bill introduced to Parliament in December 2010 contains a bespoke military scheme for the testing of Service personnel for alcohol and drugs. Guidance will be set out for the chain of command on when a test for drugs or alcohol might be appropriate. The chain of command will then be able to decide when to use that power, based on the particular circumstances in front of them. These are important provisions, aimed at creating an environment of deterrence and increasing safety.

3.2 Easing the transition

Recommendation 3.2.1: Veterans' Privilege Cards.

Currently Service ID cards must be handed back on leaving the service. This can have a strong psychological impact, with Service leavers feeling they are losing an important part of their identity. Veterans' Privilege Cards could provide a sense of continuity as well as allowing access to any benefits offered under the Community Covenant. Options for providing cards are discussed in more detail in section 4.2.1 on Veterans.

All those who have served in HM Armed Forces, including Volunteer and Regular Reserves, are eligible for a Veterans' Badge. It is currently issued to all Service leavers, while those who left before the scheme was in place can obtain one free of charge on application to the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA). The Veterans' Badge is intended to unite all veterans in recognising the commonality of their service, to encourage a sense of unity and community between surviving veterans and to ignite public recognition of our veterans and their continuing contribution to society. Some 828,000 badges have been issued to date and the SPVA continues to process over 2,000 retrospective applications each month due to their popularity with the veteran community.

In terms of accessing services and discounts, the support already available to veterans from the charitable, commercial and government sectors does not generally require ownership of a veterans' privilege card. Where some form of proof is required, former Service personnel usually have a number of ways to prove their status, including production of their Discharge Papers or record of Service. However, we accept that a veterans' card would be more convenient for former Service personnel and believe that it might encourage additional benefits and discounts to be made available. The MOD will launch a veterans' card, which can be used to access commercial discounts or privileges both locally and nationally, including through the Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme.

Recommendation 3.2.2: Online access to Service pensions.

A Veterans' Privilege Card (with chip and pin functionality) could enable veterans to access their pension details on line, just as they can check and manage their bank accounts. This would provide continuity with service life (as they are used to accessing pay details online) and also make financial management more convenient.

The MOD is working with the Forces Pension Society to identify exactly what pension information they believe it would be useful for veterans to be able to access on line. The next step will be for the MOD to investigate the technical and operational feasibility of offering online access to this data to Service personnel, Reservists and Veterans. This will include determining the most appropriate way of providing secure access to pension information, which may not require the use of a card. Should the proposals be judged both worthwhile and feasible, implementation is unlikely to be possible until 2013 at the earliest, owing to other changes planned for the SPVA's pension computer systems. At present the MOD does not consider this work to be a driver for the provision of a veterans' card with chip and pin functionality.

Recommendation 3.2.3: Partnering with industry to recruit ex-Service personnel.

Examples of where this works in practice include DCP, a partnership between the MOD and private enterprise designed to create employment opportunities for wounded personnel, and British Military Fitness, which actively recruits homeless veterans. DCP currently works with national companies, but its activities could be further expanded to include local employers.

The MOD is keen to utilise the combined strengths of the private, public and voluntary and community sectors in order to improve the resettlement process and, where possible, 'connect' rather than 'signpost' Service leavers (especially those who leave early) into civilian employment opportunities. The MOD is working with Right Management Limited in a partnering arrangement known as the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to deliver employment outcomes for Service leavers and explore this idea. Organisations from industry (private, public, voluntary/community sectors) wishing to contribute to the resettlement agenda are encouraged to work in conjunction with the CTP to maximise as well as cohere their efforts.

Defence Career Partnering (DCP) is a joint MOD and private sector programme which focuses the MOD and its industrial partners' knowledge, skills and resources for the mutual benefit of the individual, industry and MOD. The MOD will continue to develop the mechanisms at its disposal to involve a wide range of employers. In line with the underlying principles of the Community Covenant, we hope that employers will increase their support to the Armed Forces community at the local level.

Recommendation 3.2.4: Passport to Work.

The idea of this proposal is to incentivise employers to take on Service leavers by contributing towards their wages and/or training for the first six months. The money thus goes towards helping Service leavers into work rather than funding unemployment benefits for the same period (similar in principle to the Future Jobs Fund but on a smaller, lower-cost scale). Particular issues which would have to be carefully thought through include:

The amount paid to employers. Setting employer subsidies at around £65 per week would equate to the cost of Jobseekers' Allowance. However, higher rates would provide a greater incentive for employers to take on a Service leaver. The aim is for the scheme to be cost-neutral in the medium term, so the balance between the funding put in and the overall savings in benefit payments would have to be carefully considered.

Effect on the job market. Subsidies for employing Service leavers must not threaten the jobs of existing workers.

Eligibility. Around 17,000 trained Service personnel leave the service each year. It would be important to target only those most likely to benefit.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) continues to be supportive of ex-Service personnel and their families in relation to employment provision. They are eligible for voluntary early entry into employment programmes such as the New Deal and Flexible New Deal, which will remain in place until the Summer. From this Summer the Work Programme will be launched. This will become DWP's main employment support

programme. In the Work Programme, providers will be free to design support based on the needs of individuals and to target the right support at the right time. DWP will offer providers higher rewards for supporting harder-to-help customers into employment in order to incentivise them to offer all customer groups appropriate employment support. Partners of current or former Service personnel will, along with former Service personnel, have early access to the Work Programme from the three month point of their claim for Jobseekers Allowance, with the agreement of their Jobcentre Plus adviser. If they are supported into sustained employment having been referred at this stage this will attract a higher payment for providers.

The support that DWP delivers through Jobcentre Plus is also evolving. Jobcentre Plus advisors and managers will have more flexibility to help customers move towards paid employment and the support available to help customers will be tailored to meet personal and local labour market needs. DWP already offers claimants a range of Get Britain Working measures, including opportunities for work clubs, work experience for 18-24 year olds, and volunteering. From Autumn the New Enterprise Allowance is being rolled out throughout the country to support the unemployed into self employment. In addition, last year the DWP established a network of Armed Forces Champions across the UK in each Jobcentre Plus district. The Champions will continue to work to ensure that the concerns and issues affecting the Armed Forces community are integrated within the wider work of Jobcentres so that the support, advice and guidance offered reflect their needs. The Champions also work with national and local employers to raise the profile of the Service community in terms of the skills, knowledge and experience they can offer.

Whilst the Government does not support the Task Force's specific proposal of a Passport to Work, we are confident that this combination of additional support for ex-Service personnel, freedom for providers to design support that works, and a more flexible service from Jobcentre Plus, will ensure that ex-Service personnel and partners of current or ex-Service personnel receive the support they need to find and sustain civilian employment.

Furthermore, for people facing redundancy, Skills Development Scotland will coordinate local response teams under the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) initiative, to provide tailored help and support. The type of support available will be tailored to meet individual needs and local circumstances but will include: Jobcentre Plus Scotland services; one-to-one counselling; comprehensive information packs; access to high-quality training; seminars on skills such as CV-writing and starting up a business; and access to IT facilities. In light of the current economic climate, the Scottish Government has been reviewing the 'PACE offer' to improve the services to individuals facing redundancy. Enhancements made to the service include 80 Skills Development Scotland staff dedicated to work alongside Jobcentre Plus staff to deliver services to individuals in different locations as appropriate, including Jobcentre Plus offices, Careers Centres and employers' premises. A national helpline (0808 100 1855), updated website², new leaflet and improved information resources have been introduced to make PACE services more accessible to individuals and employers through increased marketing and promotion.

2 <http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/redundancy>

Recommendation 3.2.5: Encourage greater involvement of Service personnel with Service charities.

The more Service charities are involved with Service personnel while they are in uniform, the more aware of their role those same people will be when they are out of uniform.

The importance of involvement with charities is recognised and supported by the military chain of command through initiatives such as the Army's Carrington Drum, which is awarded annually to the military unit (regular and Territorial Army) that raises the most money for the Army Benevolent Fund The Soldiers' Charity. Whilst it is encouraged, there are also clear Treasury guidelines to be adhered to when supporting charities on duty. Moreover the three Services support the personal choice of individuals to become involved in charitable activity off-duty. The MOD is currently investigating how to facilitate contact between Service leavers and Service charities further as described in the recommendation below.

Recommendation 3.2.6: Opt-out rather than opt-in for contact with Service charities.

During resettlement, Service charities should be encouraged to engage with Service leavers. At the moment those leaving the services are given the option to opt in should they wish contact from the Service charities; we recommend that the option be changed to opt out, an initiative which the MOD is currently considering.

The Government welcomes the work of the Service charities who seek to identify Service personnel who may require support when they leave the Armed Forces. The MOD is happy to share data to assist in that aim, where appropriate, but it must be in a way that complies with legislative obligations on data protection, and in a manner that protects those Service leavers who would not wish the Department to share their details. The MOD supports this recommendation and is currently working with COBSEO – the Confederation of Service Charities, as the representative of Service charities, to identify the best way to develop this idea. It is important that a limited number of charities act as the trusted custodians of this information. At the time of writing, it is intended to meet with COBSEO and key ex-Service organisations in order to establish exactly what information is required, identify the organisations which should act as the custodians of data and how they might store, share and use this information. Once the Service charities have decided how they wish to proceed, the MOD will examine how this could be implemented.

4. Veterans

4.0 General Veterans' issues

Issue 4.0.1: Definition of a veteran.

The United Kingdom identifies as a veteran anybody with one day's service (a much wider definition than that used by most other countries). The current categorisation means that in 2005 there were about 4.8 million veterans in the United Kingdom and, by including their dependants, it placed around 10 million people (about 18% of the UK population) in the wider veterans' community. Many of these people do not even know they are considered to be veterans or, if they do, do not want to be so identified. Consideration must be given to revisiting the current definition of a "veteran" so that it commands greater acceptability. For example it might apply only to those who have completed their basic training.

The MOD has reviewed the definition of a veteran, both as a result of the Task Force's report and during the development of the new tri-Service Armed Forces Covenant, and has no plans to change the existing definition at present. The MOD values consistency with the major Service charities in this respect; for example the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association - Forces Help (SSAFA-FH) uses a single day as its standard and The Royal British Legion (TRBL) uses a seven day standard. However, we are clear that being a veteran does not automatically confer a particular entitlement. The level of support offered by the Government will take into account the need for assistance, and may also reflect what an individual has contributed through service.

Recommendation 4.0.2: Northern Ireland Aftercare Service.

In Northern Ireland, there are particular issues relating to veterans that need to be addressed. In 2007, the MOD established the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and Royal Irish Regiment Aftercare Service to provide medical, vocational, welfare and benevolence support to the UDR and Royal Irish (Home Service) veterans. It is subject to review at the four-year point (2011). Funding was originally ring fenced until 2016, but there appears to be an assumption that the funding stream will cease at the five-year point. HQ Northern Ireland is currently challenging this assumption. Due to the demand-led nature of some services, the costs of provision have been lower than budgeted, enabling savings to be handed back (approximately £500K per year). One possibility currently under consideration is to extend this scheme to cover all veterans based in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland under the Army Recovery Capability, which estimates suggest could be achieved at little or no additional cost. The Task Force fully supports this proposal.

Veterans in Northern Ireland face a particular challenge when accessing medical, vocational, welfare and benevolence support. This is because the security situation prevents some of them from associating themselves with service in the Armed Forces. This issue is not as significant for those veterans who happen to have moved to Northern Ireland, but did not serve in the Ulster Defence Regiment or Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service). However the MOD believes that there is a continuing need for this separate and

specific service for some Northern Ireland veterans, which currently is an excellent example of a one stop shop for veterans. The full requirement is currently being investigated so that a more accurate estimate of the cost and demand beyond 2012 can be judged against other defence priorities. It should be noted that in other parts of the UK very similar services (albeit without the security constraints) are provided by a collaborative effort between public, private and charitable services. This option will also be considered as part of the future funding model for this service.

4.1 Administration of Veterans

Recommendation 4.1.1: Veterans' Commissioner or Champion.

Consideration should be given to the concept of a Veterans' Commissioner or Champion, to represent the interests of veterans and also to frame veteran-specific policy. Such a person could be appointed by the PM (possibly operating through a department external to the MOD such as the Cabinet Office). Another option for the exercise of such duties might be to enhance the duties of the Chief Executive of the SPVA. Further discussion across the public/private and charitable sectors should be undertaken to develop the potential role, responsibilities and authority of such an appointment.

In general, this Government believes that Ministers are accountable for policy and that there should be fewer independent bodies and appointments within Government. We do not believe that the concept proposed would provide the most effective way to represent the interests of veterans and to frame veteran-specific policy. The Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans has specific responsibility for the formulation and delivery of Government policy on veterans' issues. Furthermore, there are Armed Forces Advocates in senior positions in each major Government Department and in the Devolved Administrations, in order to ensure that the interests of both serving personnel and veterans are adequately taken into account in Government policies. The External Reference Group (ERG), which is comprised of MOD officials, Armed Forces Advocates and independent members from ex-Service organisations and other experts, chaired by the Cabinet Office, provides oversight of the Government's performance in rebuilding the Armed Forces Covenant.

In addition, the major Service-related charities contribute to and promote public debate about the Government's policies with respect to the Armed Forces community. They perform this function well, both individually and collectively within COBSEO – the Confederation of Service Charities, which meets with senior MOD staff formally three times each year and informally more frequently. Both the Chairman of COBSEO, and the Chief Executives of the major Service charities meet regularly with the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, in order to represent any concerns over veterans' issues. Similarly, in Scotland, representatives of veterans Scotland meet regularly with Scottish Government Ministers and officials to address issues of concern to veterans in respect of devolved matters.

The MOD remains open to discussions about how to engage further on veterans' issues. However the Chief Executive of the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) is not considered an appropriate post to act specifically as an advocate or champion for veterans. The Chief Executive is responsible for delivering a service to both serving personnel

and veterans; the addition of a champion's role would introduce the potential for an unwelcome conflict of interests.

Recommendation 4.1.2: Delivery of Veterans' Welfare.

A Veterans Commissioner or Champion could be supported by an advisory committee made up of personnel representatives of the services, other government departments, devolved governments and the relevant Service charities. Delivery of veterans' welfare is the responsibility of many separate organisations, public and charitable. It is best achieved at the local level but it will still require some measure of co-ordination. Again, a department external to the MOD (such as the Cabinet Office) could be the most appropriate home for a small dedicated team.

There are a number of advisory groups that help to shape the delivery of veterans' welfare. As stated above, the Cabinet Office chairs the ERG, which provides co-ordination of effort across government, as well as allowing ex-Service organisations and other experts to influence the development of Government policy.

There are 13 Veterans Advisory and Pension Committees (VA&PCs) throughout the United Kingdom, with separate committees in the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland. Members are appointed by the Secretary of State and form a statutory body independent of the SPVA and the MOD. The Committees provide advice, assistance and support to the Service and ex-Service community and local public service providers. They also raise awareness with public bodies and the local community about the needs of veterans.

The Veterans' Welfare Service (VWS), which is part of SPVA, works closely with the VA&PCs, Service charities, other Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations in co-ordinating the delivery of welfare support to veterans in need at the local level. The VWS is currently engaged in an exercise to improve the co-ordination of service delivery further.

COBSEO, the key umbrella organisation for all Service-related charities, also routinely engages with the MOD and other Government Departments at both official and ministerial levels to offer advice and provide a coherent voice on behalf of British veterans.

4.2 Recognition for Veterans

Recommendation 4.2.1: Veterans' Privilege Card for all veterans.

There are a number of options available for providing such a card:

- a. **Charging users.** If there were obvious benefits from such a card (as is the case in the US) veterans would be willing to pay for the initial card and for its replacement if lost. This could cover the costs of the card (£10 for a chip and pin card) and some of the administrative costs.
- b. **Update Service ID card.** With chip and pin technology, the veteran could retain the same ID card as that held while in service. A more low-tech solution would be simply to punch a hole in the Service ID card.
- c. **Charitable funding.** One military charity has expressed an interest in funding a veterans' card scheme, and this option could be pursued further if desired.

As stated in our response to the Task Force's recommendation for a Veterans' Privilege card at 3.2.1, the MOD will launch a veterans' card which can be used to access commercial discounts or privileges both locally and nationally, including through the Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme. The Department has had discussions with a number of organisations who already operate card schemes or have expressed an interest in supporting, running or funding such a card to explore how to take this forward. We would also look for some assurances that whoever promoted a veterans' card, entitling the bearer to discounts, could sustain the scheme in the longer term. We welcome all initiatives by businesses and charities who choose to offer commercial discounts or privileges to support the Armed Forces community, both locally and nationally.

However, the MOD does not consider that the provision of a secure, 'identity' card is required to prove veteran status. A secure chip and pin card, guaranteeing identity, is not considered necessary (in terms of functionality) or cost effective. Indeed the MOD would incur substantial costs for guaranteeing the identity and veteran status of every card holder (in addition to the documents already provided to Service leavers). The SPVA would need to establish a system similar to checking passport or driving licence applications. Currently the SPVA only provides a verification service for those in greatest need who may no longer have Service documentation, such as those who are homeless and require emergency housing.

The MOD has also considered whether Service ID cards could be retained as a veterans' privilege card after personnel leave the Armed Forces, however for security and financial reasons this is not deemed feasible. Service ID cards would need to be updated (wiped of any electronic information and clearly marked to show that they are no longer valid as an access pass), before being returned to individuals. This is a costly operation in itself and would still require new cards to be issued for existing veterans. Similarly, over-stamping, clipping or defacing the cards is not a solution, as this would present a security risk and render the cards liable to break. Given the potential to work with non-government organisations to deliver a veteran's privilege card, other solutions are not being pursued at this time.

Recommendation 4.2.2: Broaden identification with the term “veteran”.

The word veteran needs to be rebranded to ensure that the current body of “veterans” identify with it. The public face of veterans is the Royal British Legion, but in 2005 only 7% of the current veteran population reported that they were members, and in the minds of many the RBL is associated disproportionately with the two world wars.

The MOD believes that the linkage of the term “veteran” with the world wars is weakening, with significant focus now on veterans who have served in the Falklands, the Gulf and Afghanistan. There are also a number of organisations representing the needs of veterans, with TRBL albeit an important organisation only one of them. Additionally, membership of a particular organisation does not confer veteran status. As discussed in section 4.0.1 a veteran is defined as anyone who has completed one day’s service. Over the last few years there have been many initiatives aimed at familiarising the public, the Service, and ex-Service communities with the term “veteran”. These include the HM Armed Forces Veterans’ Badge, Veterans Day (which has now developed further into Armed Forces Day), publicity campaigns such as the “Can You Recognise a Veteran?” DVD, the Veterans World magazine published by SPVA and the Veterans-UK website. We are aware that some members of the community prefer the terms former or ex-Service personnel, however the term “veteran” is now common parlance, appearing regularly in the national press and in national advertising.

4.3 Coordination of veterans’ charities

Issue 4.3.0: Proliferation of Service charities.

There are a large number of different Service charities: numbers ranging from 161 to over 700 to just short of 2000 have been cited. Collectively these charities have considerable resources, and many offer excellent support to veterans. However, the sheer diversity of the sector means that veterans in need can be confused as to whom to turn. There is concern that the full resources available to veterans are not being tapped: too many charities mean that too much is going on overheads; some are sitting on significant reserves; others were set up for purposes which are no longer relevant; and their activities tend to be determined by their own priorities rather than the needs of veterans.

The Government is supportive of those individuals who wish to set up a charity to support the Armed Forces community. However, it recognises some of the potential issues highlighted by the Task Force. In particular there are potentially a large number of small-scale Service charities which are in practice no longer active, but may be contributing to the general perception of a proliferation of charities. The Cabinet Office is working in conjunction with the Charities Commission to identify if any steps can or should be taken to help address this issue. However, the Government is conscious that charities are independent bodies which are entitled to make their own decisions.

Recommendation 4.3.1: The Big Lottery Fund (BLF)

The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) has allocated £35m to its 'Forces in Mind' programme to support veterans of more recent conflicts (including Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia, among others). Preliminary discussions suggest the Fund, via an independent UK-wide Trust, intends to allocate some of this money to coordinate veterans' charities. Proposals on outcomes will be dependent on the content of the bids. The trust will be established by July 2011.

In November last year, a partnership of Service charities and mental health organisations, led by COBSEO, was announced as the preferred bidder to form the Forces in Mind Trust³. This independent Trust will be responsible for a £35 million lottery-funded grant supporting current and former UK military personnel and their families over the next 20 years. The Trust will provide UK-wide long-term support and advocacy for former Service personnel to make a successful transition to civilian life, including those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The focus will be on addressing a range of problems that some ex-Service personnel and their families can experience back in civilian life, such as poor mental health, family breakdown and alcohol-related problems. Other work will include commissioning research to improve knowledge of the issues affecting veterans and their families, which will help shape new services and inform national policy.

The Government welcomes the selection of COBSEO as the preferred bidder and we look forward to supporting them in taking this work forward. They have now begun work to set up the Trust using a development grant of up to £200,000. The remainder of the £35 million Lottery award is due to be transferred to the partnership by the end of Summer 2011, when the Trust will become operational. Details of how the funds will be allocated will be clearer at that time.

Recommendation 4.3.2.a: Services and Veterans' Charities Advisory Board.

A Central Advisory Committee already exists within the MOD in order to provide advice on pensions and compensation. An enhanced body, to include key ex-Service organisations and single Service representatives, could set priorities and steer the overall MOD and ex-Service organisations' agenda. It could possibly exercise these additional responsibilities under a Veterans Commissioner or Champion.

The MOD has various structures for liaising with ex-Service organisations in addition to the Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation (CAC) noted by the Task Force and the ERG described in section 4.1.2.

The CAC provides advice to the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans; key ex-Service organisations such as COBSEO, TRBL, the War Widows Association, the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association and Combat Stress are represented, as are the single Services. The Minister chairs two meetings of the committee a year and other meetings may be called, if required.

³ The main partner organisations in the COBSEO led partnership are: Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) – Forces Help; Seafarers UK; ABF Soldiers' Charity; Veterans Scotland; Mental Health Foundation; Centre for Mental Health; and the Shaw Trust.

The Executive Steering Group is a standing body comprising of senior MOD staff and several of the Chief Executives of the COBSEO Executive board. It meets three times each year and has three main functions; it provides a forum in which veterans' issues can be raised at senior level with the MOD (and passed on to other Government Departments where necessary); it allows common strategic priorities to be agreed; and it directs activity in support of both the Government's Strategy for Veterans and pressing issues identified by the Service charities.

The Service charities and organisations also engage on a larger scale across the In-Service and Ex-Service agendas through an annual MOD Welfare Conference. The MOD believes that its stakeholders are content with the current level of engagement and do not favour the Charities Advisory Board suggested. The MOD is open to dialogue should stakeholders feel that arrangements need strengthening or changing; in the meantime work will continue through the current arrangements.

Recommendation 4.3.2.b: Options for strengthening COBSEO.

It may seem logical to address the problems of co-ordination by enhancing COBSEO; however, this is too simplistic an approach. COBSEO is currently limited in its operation by both its constitution and its funding (which is derived from its members). Therefore, its potential to be a major player is restricted by the willingness of the charitable organisations it serves. It has had several successes but without greater support from its members it cannot give effective consideration to an enhancement of its role.

Further consideration of this recommendation is a matter for COBSEO, however the Government is committed to continuing to work closely with them, and other Service charities.

Recommendation 4.3.2.c: A framework for coordinating the activities of veterans' charities.

COBSEO is seeking to develop further co-operation among charities, through the establishment of seven cluster groups (similar to the model already used by Veterans Scotland). Each cluster group could bring together parties/agencies with specific interests, for example Retirement and Care Homes, with a nominated ex-Service charity as a lead. Such collaboration could develop more effective and efficient services provided the individual charities are supportive. Another example is the cooperation between RBL, Combat Stress and DoH as part of the Strategic Partnering Programme.

The Government welcomes the new cluster arrangement overseen by COBSEO. There are currently eight clusters, in the following areas: Education, Resettlement and Job Finding; Residential and Care Homes; Research; Criminal Justice Support Group; Integrated Support Network; Welfare Delivery; Housing and Information, Connectivity and Communication. This has helped focus the effort of Service charities. The Government looks forward to supporting this new arrangement as it matures. We are also considering whether the Strategic Partner Programme model could be used to facilitate collaboration with the charity sector on a broader range of welfare topics. As the Task Force noted, the Department of Health (DH) has already developed a successful strategic partnership

approach to working with the charitable sector: in partnership with TRBL and Combat Stress they are working closely to develop a charitable sector infrastructure to better serve the entire Armed Forces community, including families.

Recommendation 4.3.2.d: A “shopping list” of areas of greatest need.

A “shopping list” of areas of greatest need could be compiled to help guide charities on how their funding could best be directed, either by the bodies suggested above or by the Veterans Commissioner or Champion. Other government departments could consider a similar approach to that adopted by the DoH, in which areas of need are identified based on data collected at local level.

The MOD is ready to work with charities who would like to identify key projects for which charitable help could be offered. To facilitate this, work has been initiated to design a process for capturing ideas and creating a prioritised list of greatest need for which charitable help could be sought or matched. The MOD is working across all three Services and with the Voluntary and Community sector (through COBSEO) in setting up this process. However, it should be noted that most of the Service charities already have a clear view of how and where they wish to spend their money. As independent charities, they are free to work to their own agenda. The MOD recognises and respects the independence of these organisations.

Recommendation 4.3.2e: A framework for charities to link up with local services.

The Community Covenant could provide a framework for charities to link up with local services to determine the needs of veterans in their area. It should be noted that Local Authorities would have an incentive to coordinate charities as it gives them a chance to tap into huge resources.

We agree that the Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme will provide an opportunity to build on the Welfare Pathway pilots, indeed the current six Welfare Pathway pilot authorities are keen to expand on the work they have already done by taking forward the Community Covenant initiative. Work will continue between the Armed Forces, Local Authorities and voluntary and community sector to improve communication and co-ordination of effort in addressing the needs of the Armed Forces community. This will be achieved through effective use of mechanisms such as the Community Covenant web pages and establishing Civil/Military integration boards which can include representation of all the actors in the community. This sharing of information will be key in assisting charities, and other organisations who wish to support the Armed Forces, to tailor and target their services at the local level according to need.

Recommendation 4.3.3: A “one stop local shop” for veterans.

UK-wide support for veterans is currently provided by the SPVA's Veterans Welfare Service through its SPVA Veterans' Helpline which can put them in contact with their local welfare managers (71 individuals). This support at the national level could be enhanced by greater involvement from charities locally – such as the Combat Stress Outreach Capability, which plans to deploy 14 teams throughout the country – so as to establish centres similar to Veterans First Point across the UK. Veterans First Point is a single drop-in service for veterans in central Edinburgh, providing a trained psychologist and adopting an integrated approach to veterans' problems (finance, housing, isolation, unemployment). COBSEO is exploring the creation of “offices of veterans' affairs” at a local level on lines similar to Veterans First Point. A “one stop shop” for veterans would require local community involvement and awareness. The support of Local Authorities will be key to the successful utilisation of such a network. Local Authorities would need to alert other agencies likely to encounter veterans and their needs (the housing agencies and the health services most obviously) of its existence.

In the context of localism, the Government would not want to impose any particular model on Local Government, or any other provider, as our whole ethos is that Local Government should consult with their communities when thinking about service provision and taking action. The new Community Rights proposals in the Localism Bill currently before Parliament illustrate this. However, whilst we are of the view that there is not a requirement for a “one stop shop” in every town in the UK, there may be benefit in a number of such facilities in key locations. The MOD has met with a number of stakeholders, including COBSEO, TRBL, SSAFA-FH, the SPVA Veterans Welfare Service (VWS), Local Authorities and representatives of existing “One Stop Shop” projects, including Edinburgh's Veterans First Point, to discuss the requirement, concept and possible locations. Discussions are at an early stage and further work on a number of issues is required before a clear policy can be decided. MOD staff will continue this work in conjunction with other government departments, devolved administrations, Service charities and other stakeholders.

It should be noted that the Scottish Government has agreed to continue funding the Veterans First Point service until March 2013 (subject to spending review decisions). In Wales, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government envisaged discussions about the “One Stop Shop” approach at the Expert Group on the Needs of the Armed Forces community in Wales.

Recommendation 4.3.4: A single veterans' charity online portal.

Currently a veteran seeking help is faced with information organised around the identities of numerous and often competing charities, rather than the needs of the individual veteran. A single online portal – either at a local or national level – would allow a veteran in need to be quickly directed to the relevant charity. Currently the Veterans' UK website (administered by SPVA) provides details of around 100 ex-Service organisations; however, there is a need for a more interactive, user-friendly service centred on the needs of the veteran. Such a portal, like "Start Here", could potentially be coordinated by one of the major Service charities on a national level, or by the SPVA as part of its Veterans' Welfare Service. Alternatively, information about local charities could be provided alongside information about public services and discounts through the Community Covenant (as is the case in the US).

The MOD's online portal for veterans, which as the Task Force notes contains links to the websites of many ex-Service charities as well as details of the VWS, was upgraded in 2010 to provide access to the new Armed Forces Community Start Here facility. Developed in partnership with TRBL and other major charities, this enhanced version of Start Here provides users with interactive information on charities and other organisations that exist to support the Armed Force community. The MOD is also planning further improvements to the Veterans-UK portal⁴. The MOD will work with the new Veterans Communications Advisory Group, which includes representatives from both the MOD and leading ex-Service organisations, to achieve this. For example, there are plans to include more detail on the services provided by Service and ex-Service organisations and to make the Armed Forces Community Start Here facility more prominent within the site.

Recommendation 4.3.5: Remove barriers to cooperation between charities and the military.

Currently the MOD guidelines state that Service charities must be charged for any use of service facilities, on the grounds that the MOD 'cannot subsidise any non-public organisation on purely charitable grounds'. These guidelines are based on Treasury rules governing the charging for use of publicly funded assets, and it would be for the Treasury to allow any exemptions. However, we note that this presents a barrier to greater cooperation between the military and charitable organisations and would encourage consideration of this option in line with the theme of the Big Society.

Correct management of public funds for any government department means that taxpayers' money should only be used for that which Parliament has voted it for. This means that the MOD's resources should only be used to support defence aims. In many cases supporting Service charities by providing military assets (people or equipment) qualifies as supporting defence aims. It is accepted that cooperation between charities and the military can for example provide valuable training opportunities or raise the public profile of the Armed Forces. In these instances a business case can be created to justify the use of MOD resources, with only marginal costs being charged to the charity. HM Treasury clarified these regulations last year in order to simplify the process. However, it would be improper to use MOD resources to support charitable activities that did not benefit defence in any way. This is what the extract from MOD financial regulations quoted by

⁴ <http://www.veterans-uk.info>

the Task Force is intended to convey. Notwithstanding this issue, there are many instances where charities have decided that it is in their interest to pay to use MOD assets.

4.4 Mental health

Recommendation 4.4: Veterans' mental health.

This is the subject of a separate report by Andrew Murrison MP. Recommendations, which we endorse, include:

- a. Building a **greater focus on mental health** into service and discharge medical examinations.
- b. Establishing a **Veterans' Information Service** to allow follow-up of discharged regulars and reserves after 12 months, including transfer of relevant details to the veteran's GP (opt-out rather than opt-in).
- c. An **increase in the numbers of mental health professionals** (to one per two Mental Health Trusts), who will undertake outreach work to identify cases and refer to veterans organisations and other professionals.
- d. An online **mental wellbeing website**, based on the model pioneered by social enterprise Big White Wall (www.bigwhitewall.com), to engage those reluctant to access traditional clinical services.

Dr Murrison reviewed mental health services for serving personnel and veterans in his report 'Fighting Fit', which was published in October 2010. The Government accepted its findings in full and work has been initiated across Government to implement the recommendations. Enhancements to health care for serving members of the Armed Forces will be applicable wherever Armed Forces personnel are based. However whilst good practice in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was noted, Dr Murrison's recommendations for veterans are England-specific in relation to devolved matters.

In March the Department of Health launched a one-year pilot of a 24-hour veteran support helpline: the Combat Stress Support Helpline. Working together, the charities Combat Stress and Rethink will provide a freephone helpline that allows veterans to access help and advice at any time of day. The helpline will be manned by a combination of full time specialist service leads and volunteers. Support will also be available through texting, email and websites to provide veterans with emotional and psychological support through whichever route they prefer.

Work to introduce a standardised mental health assessment into routine Service Medical Examinations is under way. The MOD has just launched a pilot in selected units across the Navy, Army and the RAF. This pilot will inform the further rollout of the mental health assessment, which the MOD currently aims to integrate into discharge protocols – including that for seriously injured personnel - by late Summer 2011.

The Veterans' Information Service, which will be operated by the Department of Health for veterans in England, will provide veterans with key information regarding a range of available support services, gather evidence to support future commissioning, and provide the opportunity for veterans to request targeted contact including mental health and substance abuse services. A limited trial will be conducted during early 2012, with further rollout scheduled thereafter.

From December 2010 the Department of Health in England has been discussing with the Armed Forces Networks how best to commission the uplift of 30 (whole time equivalent) veterans mental health professionals to deliver improved NHS mental health services to veterans in England. The increased capability will be delivered during 2011. These new mental health professionals will work under the direction of the Armed Forces Networks and will forge links with health and other statutory agencies and with both the specialist and non-specialist voluntary sector. They will also undertake outreach work to identify cases and refer individuals to veterans' organisations and other professionals.

An online mental health wellbeing website will be delivered by the Department of Health working in partnership with the MOD. DH has contracted with 'Big White Wall' to provide this online early intervention portal. The service will be targeted at three cohorts: veterans (potentially all leavers after a particular date); serving personnel; and families based in areas where the MOD has large bases. This will be trialled during 2011 with a view to wider roll-out in 2012.

The Scottish Government is currently considering how to take forward the devolved elements of the Murrison report. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) is working with Service Organisations in Wales on a review that will include gathering information on access to health services for veterans. The outcome of this review will be used to inform health policy in Wales and also to consider if specific 'quality requirements' for veterans accessing healthcare in Wales are needed. The Welsh Assembly Government sponsors a Mental Health and Wellbeing Service for Veterans across Wales.

5. The Armed Forces and Society

Recommendation 5.1: “Covenant or Chief of Defence Staff’s Commendation”.

Those institutions and individuals outside the service who do outstanding work for the military community should be eligible for the award of a “Covenant Commendation”, presented by the Chief of the Defence Staff. This could be awarded to an individual (such as a nurse who has supported wounded soldiers), a business (such as an employer who provides exemplary support to the military) or even a town (such as Wootton Bassett). This would demonstrate that the military acknowledges and appreciates the support shown by the wider community.

The Government accepted this recommendation immediately upon publication of the Task Force’s report on 8 December 2010. It is a welcome proposal to allow the head of the UK’s Armed Forces to publicly thank and applaud individuals or bodies who give exceptional support to the military community. We are now looking at the options for how the scheme will operate and details will be announced later in the year when it is formally launched.

Recommendation 5.2: Opportunities to show support.

Local communities might like to consider the development of ‘Friends of the Armed Forces’, an initiative of the Royal British Legion, and of the ‘Show your support campaign’, which has grown out of Armed Forces Day.

The Royal British Legion (TRBL) launched the Friends of the Armed Forces awards in February 2010 to “recognise those from all walks of life across the UK who have made an exceptional contribution to the well-being and appreciation of HM Armed Forces and their families”, including veterans. TRBL reported receiving approximately 450 nominations from across the UK. The MOD welcomed the development of this initiative; indeed the Chief of Defence Staff chaired the judges’ panel. The MOD will continue to support the awards, which are understood to be an annual event.

Armed Forces Day is developing year on year and becoming well established across the UK. Last year, in addition to a hugely successful national event hosted by Cardiff City Council, tens of thousands of people attended many more events organised by local communities. Armed Forces Day will be held on Saturday 25th June this year and will again be an opportunity for the public to say thank you and to recognise the outstanding contribution the Armed Forces community makes to this country. In addition to the UK national event, which will be hosted by the City of Edinburgh Council, the MOD is aware of a number of events being planned by Local Authorities for Armed Forces Day in 2011 and is working actively with communities and businesses who have offered their support. There is an Armed Forces Day website⁵ with information about events and how to become involved; in particular event organisers were able to apply for a small grant from the Ministry of Defence, which can be used to help pay for items integral to the infrastructure of the event (such as a marquee, PA system or stage). The Day will be further promoted nearer the time in other ways such as through the Armed Forces Day Flag flying from town halls and other

5 <http://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/Show-your-support.aspx>

public buildings, members of the Armed Forces, including reservists and cadets, wearing uniform to work or school on the preceding Wednesday, TV and radio adverts and celebrity endorsement in the media.

In addition the Community Covenant scheme will encourage local communities to demonstrate their support for the Service community, taking into account local needs and resources, throughout the calendar year.

Recommendation 5.3: Moving beyond Armed Forces Day.

Armed Forces Day works well at the national level, and there are undoubted successes at the local level too. For some communities (such as those a long way from any major military presence) there may be other opportunities for much more effective events, such as Remembrance Sunday. At the local level, Homecoming Parades have proved to be particularly popular.

We are pleased that Armed Forces Day is becoming well established and we agree that the Community Covenant scheme will encourage local communities to demonstrate their support for the Service community throughout the year. We expect participating individuals and groups to draw inspiration from their community and develop initiatives (including but not exclusive to public events) suited to local needs and resources, building on the good work that is already being done. The Remembrance period continues to remain a poignant focal point for communities across the UK to remember the Service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces.

Recommendation 5.4: Encourage military parades and open days.

Military parades, military bands, opportunities to see the equipment of the Armed Forces, and open days at military bases all have a very positive effect on civilian support for the Armed Forces. Treasury rules (see section 4.3.5) can create barriers here. However, the cost to the military can be kept low and could even make money: the Edinburgh Military Tattoo now sells out completely before its first performance and generates funds for Service charities. Possible future reductions in uniformed personnel may make public interaction more difficult to achieve; however, this could present an ideal opportunity for veterans and cadets to raise the profile of the Armed Forces.

Military parades and open days currently take place around the country and have already significantly increased as a result of post-operation homecomings and Armed Forces Day. An excellent example of the RAF's engagement with the public is the three official air days (Cosford, Leuchars and Waddington) where each year 230,000 members of the public see RAF personnel and aircraft in action. The MOD will continue to encourage such events, however opportunities for public engagement must be balanced against units' other duties.

Recommendation 5.5: Encourage Olympic involvement.

Greater military involvement in the 2012 Olympics could raise the public profile of the Armed Forces. Examples include a 'Fitness Trail' (similar to the 'Piping Trail' held throughout Scotland, culminating at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe); and the involvement of Service personnel (including seriously injured) in supporting roles in the Games.

The MOD will continue to support Armed Forces personnel seeking to represent their countries at the Games as competitors, coaches or officials. Through the Defence Career Partnering Return to Work initiative, the MOD is exploring opportunities for seconding injured Service personnel to the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), should posts be available that would help with their rehabilitation programmes. Service personnel have had the opportunity to individually volunteer through the LOCOG website using their well publicised volunteering programme. As the Games get closer, we expect there to be opportunities for local units to become involved in regional activities and events in support of the Olympics and we will strongly encourage them to do so.

Recommendation 5.6: Encourage greater civic participation among the Armed Forces community.

All members of the Armed Forces can make a contribution to wider understanding of the military: as parents, they can speak in their children's schools about their jobs; as local residents, they can engage with the local council. The more military personnel meet civilians in their daily lives the greater will be civilian understanding. Making CRB checks portable would also help enable this.

All three Services recognise the value of greater civic participation by members of the Armed Forces. Members of the Armed Forces community are keen to serve the public; many sit on committees, run parish councils, organise local events, support churches, raise money for charities or assist on school governors and admissions boards. Mobility can restrict involvement with the civilian community to some extent. By contrast the nature of Naval life, where there is a greater attachment to Naval Base areas, enables greater civic involvement by Naval personnel. Greater involvement on-duty needs to be seen in the context of other calls on personnel's time over and above core duties.

Recommendation 5.7: Military medical professionals in NHS Trusts.

Successful medical care is largely dependent upon those uniformed secondary care personnel who are embedded in NHS Hospital Trusts. The benefits that military staff can bring to the NHS are as important as the skills that the NHS imparts to those personnel. Mutual understanding and respect for these different requirements is an essential component in retaining critical military skills for casualty care. These ambassadors for the Armed Forces already play a highly visible role in the local community.

We fully agree with this recommendation on the two way benefits of military medical professionals in NHS Trusts. The MOD works closely with NHS Trusts to maximise the

benefit that comes from the transfer of skills and knowledge between military and NHS staff. This is epitomised by the recent opening of the new National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Centre for Surgical Reconstruction and Microbiology at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Birmingham, which they have jointly funded together with the Department of Health and the MOD. In Scotland, members of 205 Field Hospital play a proactive role in speaking about their experiences and promoting the benefits of reserve service at meetings, conferences and NHS/military study days. It is of paramount importance that these working relationships continue to develop, both at a strategic level and a clinical level, to continue to improve quality healthcare for our Armed Forces and the wider UK population. Indeed we are currently working on an issue concerning professional recognition of military medical training through the MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board. In Scotland, Health Boards have been issued with a circular on NHS Reserve Forces training and mobilisation policy.

Recommendation 5.8: Public presentations by returning Service personnel.

The emerging practice of those returning from operations delivering talks on their tours of deployment (Post-Operation Presentations or POPS) has been very well received. This allows those who have done a job, including those of other ranks, to talk about it first-hand rather than via the media and without coming across as a deliberate marketing exercise. POPS should be directed at those who are not already initiated in the ways of the Armed Forces, perhaps to schools and to the parents of pupils. The MOD should ensure that unnecessary regulatory barriers do not prevent these events taking place.

Public presentations by Service personnel returning from operations continue to be encouraged, where appropriate, across all three Services. Where there are good links at the local level, the presentations have a broad reach as varied audiences are targeted. The Services will continue to consider a wide range of venues in less well established areas, where there is an appetite for such presentations. There are also individuals who return to their schools to conduct briefs on their experiences. In future, local units may be able to reach new audiences through the links they will develop with local organisations as a result of participating in the Community Covenant scheme.

There are other ways of engaging with the local communities to share military experiences. For example the Army Presentation Team regularly presents to selected audiences of local opinion formers and decision-makers across the UK. This helps to raise awareness and understanding of the Army and its operational activity and to support the Army's regional community engagement initiatives, which aim to generate wider public support for the Armed Forces community.

Recommendation 5.9: Sharing military facilities with civilians.

When a military establishment and a civilian community sit alongside each other they should make arrangements for the sharing of sporting facilities and other facilities: for example the public should be able to use a military swimming pool when it is not in regular use by the troops, and schools might use football pitches at weekends. The Task Force encourages the MOD and the Treasury to revisit the rules and guidelines which currently require DE to charge for such use, with a view to providing free or low-cost access to military facilities (social and sporting) as a means of underpinning local Community Covenants.

In principle Government is supportive of sharing military facilities with the civilian community and this will become increasingly important as Community Covenants roll out across the country. Systems are already in place to allow such community activities, and where there is a tangible and demonstrable benefit to defence only the additional cost of the community using the facilities is charged, although care has to be taken to ensure that providing free or subsidised use of defence facilities does not represent unfair competition and take business away from local privately funded facilities.

This issue has been highlighted in the renewed Compact - the agreement which governs relations between the Government and civil society organisations in England - which was published in December 2010. It commits the Government to "consider a range of ways to support civil society organisations, such as enabling greater access to state owned premises and resources". The MOD will address this issue with the Treasury as work on the Compact is taken forward. It should be noted that security issues must also be taken into account when considering whether it is appropriate to allow civilians and charities access to military facilities.

Recommendation 5.10: Remove barriers to community engagement.

Policy encourages public engagement but in practice barriers sometimes discourage it. For example, the practice of charging for public appearances by personnel or units makes such engagement more difficult. Similarly, restrictions on entry to bases for local politicians (such as councillors) can restrict opportunities for wider community engagement with the military. Consideration should be given as to how such barriers could be reduced.

As with the previous recommendation, we are supportive of community engagement and there are already processes in place to facilitate this. HM Treasury rules are clear about the management and use of public funds, in that defence resources can only properly be spent, and utilised on defence business. In practice if a public appearance by personnel or a unit is in support of defence business, with a business case to justify the use of MOD resources, the charge would be minimal or zero. The MOD will re-issue guidance on this issue, and simplify the process wherever possible.

The MOD also understands the value of good relations with local representatives. Heads of Establishment are encouraged to engage with their local MPs and councillors, for whom visits to defence establishments generally do not require prior approval from Ministers. This is made clear in the guidance to personnel on the procedures for visits to defence establishments by elected representatives and peers; the guidance has been in place since 2008 and was most

recently reviewed and reissued in October 2010. The MOD recognises that, more widely, elected representatives and peers are an important and influential audience and wishes to encourage their interest in and understanding of defence. While there are some conditions which restrict activities on defence establishments for all politicians, these are generally to protect Service personnel from being used for political advantage.

Recommendation 5.11: Encourage personnel to talk and write about their experiences.

This could increase understanding of what the Services do and provide possible therapeutic benefit to personnel through sharing their experience. Existing examples include:

- a. "Operation Homecoming", sponsored by Boeing in the United States, is an excellent example of what can be achieved, enabling Servicemen and women to find a voice which they did not know they had and allowing them to engage with local people: their writings have now been published in book form.
- b. "War Story" at the Imperial War Museum, supported by Boeing. The project, "War Story", engages with personnel before and after their operational deployments.
- c. Edinburgh Public Libraries have run a scheme which enabled veterans to speak about their experiences.

The MOD aims to strike a balance between giving Service personnel a voice and ensuring that national and operational security is upheld, and that standards of political impartiality and public accountability are met at all times. The MOD works to facilitate Service voices across a range of non-news channels (blogs, books, magazines, broadcast etc.) in line with overall Defence Communications priorities. The Department will continue to encourage involvement and is working to develop training in online communications for personnel, to enable them to communicate online in a safe and professional way. The MOD has supported War Story since 2009 to help the public gain a greater understanding of what Servicemen and women are doing in Afghanistan.

Recommendation 5.12: Greater contact with regional media.

The regional media are very good allies of the Armed Forces, thriving on good news stories of Service personnel from their areas or on activities centred on local bases. The Community Covenant provides an ideal opportunity for greater engagement with local media, an aspect of the initiative which has proved highly successful in the USA.

The MOD supports this recommendation. Elevating the role of the Armed Forces within communities through engagement with regional media can be highly effective through the use of deployment stories, freedom parades, honours and home-town stories. Much of the engagement is already carried out at a local level, between the local military presence and the media. Further consideration will be given to greater interaction with regional media through ships and their affiliated towns as an effective way of promoting the Armed Forces within regional communities, particularly in support of standing Maritime Operations.

As the Task Force points out, the Community Covenant scheme will create further opportunities for positive local stories about the Armed Forces and the support of the

community. The MOD will continue to work on its own internal processes to ensure that the local military have sufficient freedom to approve and release local material as appropriate.

Recommendation 5.13: Support cultural events relating to the Armed Forces.

There is scope to engage with the public through wider cultural channels. For example, Sir David Richards' decision to support a full day of plays on Afghanistan, 'The Great Game', at the Tricycle Theatre in London helped create a greater understanding of the conflict and the role of the British Army within it; showed the British Army in an unfamiliar light, as supporter of the arts and as ready to engage with a more critical and radical audience; and generally generated good publicity.

The MOD currently successfully supports a range of cultural activities. These include General Sir David Richards' involvement with the Tricycle theatre, Armed Forces Day, War Artists, TV drama, Service museums and books. The MOD will continue to look for opportunities to involve the Armed Forces in cultural life, within the resources available.

Recommendation 5.14: Build stronger relationships with universities.

Between the late 1960s and the end of the Cold War, the MOD promoted wider understanding of strategic issues by supporting the establishments of Defence Lectureships in British universities and by sending mid-career officers to universities as Defence Fellows. Since the creation of the Defence Academy, study of defence issues has been drawn further into professional military education. Greater engagement could benefit both the military (through links with language, anthropology and comparable departments) and promote understanding of the military among an important section of society.

The Defence Academy recognises the need to build stronger relationships with universities and the academic community in general, and with a view to achieving this is pursuing new opportunities to improve and extend existing linkages as well as foster new ones in order to encourage greater engagement in the future.

Recommendation 5.15: Encourage participation in the parliamentary process.

The House of Commons Defence Committee is the Parliamentary conduit for greater public understanding of the Armed Forces and their missions: the chiefs of staff, families' federations and key Service charities should be routinely asked to give evidence.

The House of Commons Defence Committee is a Committee of MPs appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and the policy of the MOD. The Committee therefore decides which inquiries it will undertake and whom it will call to give evidence. The Chiefs of Staff, senior military and civilian officials all provide oral evidence to Committee inquiries when requested and with the permission of the Secretary of State. The MOD welcomes the Committee's scrutiny of its administration, policy and expenditure and makes every effort to assist the Committee in its work.

Annex D. Further research required

Recommendation 6.1: Further research required.

In order to achieve progress on the Military Covenant in the short and medium term, it is important to make use of existing evidence to identify gaps in provision. There are also areas where further research would be beneficial. The Task Force realises that in the current financial climate the MOD is unlikely to fund further research, but it believes that some of the UK funding councils, especially the Economic and Social Research Council and Medical Research Council, might well support targeted studies. There are also other bodies, such as the King's Centre for Military Health Research, which are well qualified to conduct the necessary research.

Possible areas for further exploration include:

- a. Outcomes of service for Reservists, and comparability with Regulars (health, employment, etc).
- b. The relationship between childcare provision and retention.
- c. Mapping the likely impact of mental illness as a result of service over time.
- d. The profile of the service community in prison: length of service, family background, age, etc.
- e. The relationship between educational attainment and long-term retention.
- f. The relationship between a particular outcome in service and family circumstances, background and need.

A robust, well planned and high quality Service personnel research programme is fundamental to developing evidence-based policies that deliver the human component of military capability and meet the aspirations of Service personnel. The MOD continues to undertake and to sponsor a significant amount of personnel-related research, including in the areas identified. For example, last year Defence Analytical Services and Advice published research on the number of veterans in prison; they are now looking to estimate the number of veterans on probation in England and Wales. The MOD has also funded work under Prof. Simon Wessely at the King's Centre for Military Health Research, which covers topics such as the impact on Reservists who have been on recent operations, and the occurrence of mental illness as a consequence of deployment to theatre.

As the Task Force recognises, there are limited resources within MOD to begin new research programmes, but topics it recommends such as childcare provision and educational attainment will be considered for inclusion in the future programme. The MOD will remain open to other potential sources of funding for research in the personnel area, and indeed to the results of research conducted by other organisations relating to the Armed Forces community. It is noteworthy in that context that the Forces in Mind Trust, referred to in section 4.3.1 above, is likely to be sponsoring research into areas such as the impact of mental illness as a result of service, the profile of the Service community in prison and the relationship between particular outcomes in service and family background. Their work will be an important contribution to the body of knowledge in this field.

