

## **Strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant in Law**

Sir,

Whether through their contribution to tackling the pandemic, or the recent commemorations of D-Day and VE Day, the unparalleled contribution of those who have served in the Armed Forces continues to be shown. The Armed Forces Covenant is the government's and the nation's promise that those men and women – and their families – should not be disadvantaged, and that special consideration may be appropriate, such as for the injured or bereaved.

The Armed Forces Bill currently before the UK Parliament makes welcome provision for a new legal duty on public bodies to give due regard to the Covenant. However, based on our collective experience working with the Armed Forces community, the Bill does not go far enough. The new duty would only apply to local councils and some limited public bodies delivering housing, health and education. This neither reflects the reality of how the Covenant is delivered, nor the full range of issues affecting those in the Armed Forces community.

Even where services are provided locally, they are often based on national guidance. It is therefore a major gap for national government and the devolved administrations to be exempted from the duty that will be imposed on councils and others. This is compounded by the omission of important topics including employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice, and immigration from the Bill's scope.

Now that the Bill has returned to the Commons, we urge the UK Government and MPs to seize this rare opportunity to deliver on the promise of the Covenant. Such a move would attract widespread consensus and be a fitting recognition of the ongoing service and sacrifice of our brave men and women, and the families who support them.

Charles Byrne, Director General, the Royal British Legion  
Mark Collins, Interim Chief Executive, Poppyscotland  
General Sir John McColl KCB CBE DSO, Chairman of Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities  
Chris Hughes, Chairman, Veterans Scotland  
Lieutenant-General Sir Andrew Gregory, KBE, CB, DL, Chief Executive of SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity  
Melanie Waters, CEO, Help for Heroes  
Jeff Harrison, Interim CEO, Combat Stress  
Mike Ellicock, Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust  
Collette Musgrave, Chief Executive, Army Families Federation  
Maria Lyle, Director, RAF Families Federation  
Anna Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Naval Families Federation  
Nick Bunting OBE, Secretary General and Group CEO, Royal Air Forces Association