

The armed forces covenant

The government has rightly signed a special covenant with armed forces personnel to look after their interests. They have no right to strike, and can be put in harms way by their government employer, so they deserve special attention and consideration. There is widespread cross party support for this approach.

I have been talking to MP colleagues this week about what more the government could do to improve the reality of the Covenant. There are various issues affecting service personnel lives where improvements can and should be made.

The first is housing. There is a home purchase scheme, but it does not work for many Ministry of Defence employees. There are cases of individuals ending up homeless on departing the armed forces. They have not saved for a deposit or amassed some equity during their time in the forces. Quite often local Councils give them little priority for rented accommodation as they have been mobile during their service careers, not establishing entitlement in any particular location.

Part of the answer to this is to go over to a home base approach for all service personnel, so there is a place they return to regularly between tours of duty. More imaginative and helpful schemes to encourage home purchase, or to provide surrogates for home purchase would ensure on leaving the forces the individual either owned a home or had money for deposit on a home of their own. My proposals include acquiring the room or flat on the base that the MOD owns for the duration of their service or use, and agreeing to sell it back at an indexed price to the MOD on departure. This in normal market conditions would give the individual a deposit sum from the price gains.

The second is employment for the spouse or partner of the uniformed employee. Where there is no home base and frequent moves to undertake new assignments, the spouse or partner can have their careers disrupted or destroyed by the changes. The home base idea would help with this problem, allowing more stability for the family.

The third is the impact on the education of the children. Frequent changes of school can be disruptive to someone's learning, as they have to adapt to different approaches and curricula. It also breaks friendships and creates more unsettled feelings. Again settling on a home base approach could be of considerable benefit.

I have put ideas into the current review on these issues, and would be happy to add other points if constituents want to join in these conversations.