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# THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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## Summary





# Ministerial foreword to the Annual Report

Since 5 July 2024, our country has had new leadership. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has new leadership, and we have a strong mandate for change. Defence is at the heart of both the future security of this country and its future success, and it is an honour and a privilege for me to serve in the role of Defence Secretary.

The current global landscape continues to highlight and demonstrate the important work that our Armed Forces carry out. The time has come for change. We are led by a guiding principle of ‘One Defence’ to make Britain secure at home and strong abroad.

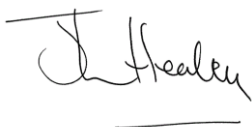
Since 2011, the Armed Forces Covenant has been a promise by the nation that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families along with the bereaved, should be treated fairly. This is a promise we do not take lightly. That is why this government has made a manifesto commitment to placing the Covenant fully into law and I am pleased to report that work is already underway to develop and deliver on this.

I am honoured to introduce the 13th Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report, the first under a Labour government. This report includes contributions from across the MOD, alongside wider government departments, the devolved administrations and third sector organisations, and is the primary tool by which we, the government, are held to account in delivery of the Covenant and its founding principles. The latest reporting period (October 2023 to September 2024).

It is a testament to the hard work of the Armed Forces and the wider teams that support them that the number of signatories for the Armed Forces Covenant continues to grow. July 2024 saw a significant milestone with the 12,000th signing of the Covenant, a number which has since grown to over 12,400, and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme now having awarded over 1,000 gold awards, demonstrating the importance on attracting members of the Armed Forces community.

Personnel and veterans – and the families that support them – serve our country with dedication and professionalism. Too often they face serious problems and have been let down. This Government is committed to renewing the nation’s contract with those who serve and have served. We are already delivering for defence. We have given service personnel the largest pay rise in over 20 years, introduced to Parliament the Armed Forces Commissioner Bill to improve service life, and announced action to support veterans into social housing, with exemptions from local connection tests in England. But there is much more to do.

This report is a demonstration of all the work that goes into supporting the Armed Forces both Regular and Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families. It also serves as a spotlight on where more needs to be done, to ensure they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services, something that this government is committed to upholding.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Healey', with a horizontal line underneath.

The Rt Hon John Healey MP –  
Secretary of State for Defence



The Prime Minister Keir Starmer (centre) and the Secretary of State for Defence John Healey (left) meet with Lord Robertson (right) head of the Government's Strategic Defence Review.

# Health and healthcare

Looking after the health needs of the Armed Forces community, especially where military service has caused or exacerbated those needs, is one of the first priorities of the government. The MOD provides some healthcare services to Service personnel, while the NHS across the UK provides services to family members, veterans and the bereaved, depending on their location. The MOD, the Department of Health and Social Care, the relevant bodies of the NHS, and the devolved administrations all continue to work closely together to ensure needs are met and services are improved.

Highlights from this work to improve healthcare services over the reporting period includes:

- 98% of NHS trusts and foundation trusts in England are now part of the Veteran Healthcare Covenant Alliance.
- HeadFIT version two was launched in July 2024 with a redesigned website. It highlights the unique Defence environment and promotes mental fitness alongside physical fitness as essential in maintaining performance and operational effectiveness.
- In September 2024, the chief executive of the NHS re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of NHS England.
- By the end of September 2024, over 98% of primary care networks in England had at least one Royal College of General Practitioners-accredited veteran friendly practice.

- Op COURAGE saw over 6,800 referrals during the first year of operation as the new integrated mental health and wellbeing service.
- Following a successful pilot, the General Practice Armed Forces and Veterans Recognition Scheme was launched in November 2023, which aims to raise awareness of some of the health challenges that the Armed Forces community face.
- Construction has now started on the flagship NHS and MOD health complex, the Catterick Integrated Care Campus, in Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire and is due to complete by spring 2026.



First aiders with a simulated casualty during HMS Prince of Wales Crash on Deck Exercise integrating 809 Naval Air Squadron.

# Education

Due to the mobility of some Service families, Service children can face specific, and additional, challenges in comparison with their peers throughout their time in education.

Work to improve the education and wellbeing of Service children includes:

- This year, it was announced that the Royal Navy, Army and the Royal Air Force were among the top five apprenticeship employers in the UK, ranking 1, 2 and 4 respectively.
- **The Early Years Programme** awarded £1.2 million to 31 projects focused on improving early childhood education and care for Service children aged 0 to 5 years.
- **The Service Pupil Support Programme** awarded over £1.8 million to 48 projects aimed at improving educational outcomes for Service children.
- The Scottish Government has renewed its short-term funding for 2024 to 2025 to continue the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland's National Education and Transitions Officer role.





Pupils at Sandhurst Primary school in London, wearing military uniforms and equipment supplied by military personnel from the Kings Troop Royal Horse Artillery.

# Housing and accommodation

Access to decent accommodation underpins the wellbeing of the Armed Forces community and is key to the operational effectiveness of serving personnel.

Whilst the report sets out the work undertaken during the reporting period to improve the accommodation offer to Service personnel and their families, as well as looking at the experience of the Armed Forces community in the private accommodation sector, whether in the private or social rented sectors or through home ownership.

The highlights include:

- In financial year 2023 to 2024, £578 million was spent on maintaining and improving Service Family Accommodation (SFA) including an uplift of £220 million following the Defence Command Paper Refresh.
- As of Nov 2024, 44 long term relationship families have been accommodated under the overseas widened accommodation pilots launched in March 2024
- 99% of SFA now has access to Wi-Fi with speeds of 24Mbps delivering a vast improvement in previous areas of digital isolation for Service families.
- Since its inception and by the end of this reporting period, Op FORTITUDE has supported 773 veterans into housing.

# Inquests and judicial engagement

The Defence Inquests Unit (DIU) is the MOD's single point of contact for coroners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit when investigating the causes of the deaths of Service personnel, veterans and MOD civilians.

The DIU has recorded 41 inquests (15 of which concern the death of a veteran) being concluded between 1 October 2023 and 30 September 2024. Inquests are yet to be held into 55 military, veteran and MOD or contractor civilian deaths that occurred between 1 October 2023 and 30 September 2024.

During the reporting period, the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit confirmed to the DIU that they had concluded investigations into four Service personnel deaths. In all four deaths, the investigations were sufficient to understand the causes of death, therefore precluding a need to take them forward to a fatal accident inquiry (Scotland's equivalent of an inquest).

One fatal accident investigation is yet to conclude.

# Business, employment, and the community

The Armed Forces Covenant is one of Defence's key tools for supporting engagement between the Armed Forces community and wider civilian society, and for encouraging organisations to support the Armed Forces community. The Covenant itself refers to the mutual understanding between the Armed Forces community and society as a whole. It is through the Covenant lens that wider UK society is encouraged to demonstrate its support and gratitude to the Armed Forces community for the sacrifices they make on behalf of us all.

Highlights include:

- Within the 2023 to 2024 financial year, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust awarded **£31,717,321** through **311 grants** across all programmes.
- Armed Forces Covenant signings reached a significant milestone in July 2024, with the 12,000th signing of the Covenant. At the end of the reporting period the exact total figure stood at 12,401.
- The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme continues to encourage employers to support the Defence and the Armed Forces community. The total number of gold award holders has increased to 1,015 and the total number of silver award holders has increased to 1,467. Bronze has increased and sits at 5,204.

- Of those who left the Armed Forces during 2022 to 2023 and used MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) services and provided their employment outcome at their six-month follow up, 89% were employed.
- On 28 January 2024, the MOD and Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) launched the 'Apply for a HM Armed Forces Veteran Card' service. To date, over 100,000 cards have been issued to veterans.
- The first Scottish Armed Forces Evidence and Research International Conference was held at Craigmlockhart campus, Edinburgh Napier University, in August 2024.



Minister for Veterans and People, Alistair Carns, OBE, MC, MP, at Waterloo Station with Service personnel collecting donations for Royal British Legion's 2024 Poppy Appeal.

# The Covenant in law

The statutory Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty in the Armed Forces Act 2021 places a legal obligation on specific public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising certain functions, in healthcare, education and housing, that could impact the Armed Forces community.

The MOD conducted a survey to assess the impact of the Duty, detailed findings on which, can be found in the report. Overall, it found that the introduction of the Duty has led to increased understanding of the Covenant and the impacts of Service life. There is an increased action to mitigate the negative impacts of Service life, and the establishment of various elements of a supporting infrastructure. However, there is clearly still further to go in Covenant implementation.

Our election manifesto committed to “strengthen support for our Armed Forces communities by putting the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law’. We are now developing options to take this forward. As part of this, we are engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including UK Government departments, devolved administrations, and charities, to seek their views, and to help us understand the costs and benefits of the different options



