



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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Armed Forces and Veterans Bill 2010 - Update

1 Introduction

This Briefing Note updates the [Bill Paper Armed Forces and Veterans Bill 2010 \(194/10\)](#) of 8 December 2010.

2 Armed Forces Bill 2010

The Armed Forces Bill 2010 was introduced into the House of Commons on 8 December 2010 as a public bill¹. Clause 2 of the Bill amends the Armed Forces Act 2006² to require the Secretary of State to annually prepare an armed forces covenant report and lay it before Parliament³.

The Bill defines the covenant in the following terms⁴:

(2) An armed forces covenant report is a report about the effects of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces on service people, or particular descriptions of such people –

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/122/11122.i-ii.html>.

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/52/contents>.

³ Clause 2, inserted Section 359A (1).

⁴ Clause 2, inserted Section 359A (2).

- (a) in the fields of healthcare, education and housing; and
- (b) in such other fields as the Secretary of State may determine.

If passed, this would give legislative force to the requirement to report on an armed forces covenant, but, in its current form, there is no implied duty for implementation of the contents of such a covenant.

3 Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant

On 8 December 2010 the UK Government published the Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant⁵. The Task Force⁶ was appointed to⁷:

identify, assess and recommend innovative ways in which the Government, and society as a whole, can fulfil its obligations to rebuild the Military Covenant.

The recommendations of the Task Force were as follows⁸:

- Armed Forces Community Covenant A Community Covenant would be a voluntary scheme, modelled on a similar scheme in the USA⁹, where Local Authorities, private companies, charities or individuals could pledge support to the 'Armed Forces family' with guidance, co-ordination and funding from central government.
- Recognition of the Armed Forces Family A means of identification, such as a Veterans' Privilege Card, a Service Families' Card or Army Reservists' ID Card, could be provided so that veterans, families of service personnel and reservists can identify themselves to service providers and to claim any discounts or otherwise confirm their status.
- Explore options for increasing home ownership among Service families Policy options include encouraging more home ownership among service personnel, , enhancing accommodation allowances, expanding a pilot shared equity scheme begun in January 2010, boosting 'HomeBuy', the Government's low-cost home ownership scheme and encouraging banks to offer more favourable mortgage rates to service personnel.
- Veterans' policy and coordination of veterans' charities A Veterans' Commissioner or Champion could be established, supported by a cross-departmental advisory committee, as well as measures to better coordinate veterans' charities, such as a Services and Veterans' Charities Advisory Board,

⁵ Report of the Task Forces on the Armed Forces Covenant (2010): <http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3C6A501D-5A85-47C9-9D89-B99C5E428061/0/militarycovenanttaskforcerpt.pdf>.

⁶ See <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/Personnel/Welfare/ArmedForcesCovenant/>.

⁷ Report of the Task Forces on the Armed Forces Covenant (2010), p.35.

⁸ Report of the Task Forces on the Armed Forces Covenant (2010), pp.3-5.

⁹ Examples of Community Covenants in the USA are given on page 9 of the Task Force Report.

a framework for coordinating the activities of veterans' charities (as provided by Veterans Scotland), a 'shopping list' of greatest need to assist charities in directing their activities and the local coordination of charities through a Community Covenant.

- Education throughout Service career This could include support for service personnel in career planning, more personal responsibility built into service life to improve self-reliance, ongoing formal education during military training and 'life skills' training throughout service.
- Strengthening links between civilians and the military This could include a Covenant or Chief of defence Staff Commendation for those outside the service who do outstanding work for the military, greater community engagement by the military to encourage civic participation, increase the visibility of the Armed Forces, for example, building on Armed Forces Day¹⁰, homecoming parades and open days, and encouraging wider cultural engagement.

The report highlights the three main themes of local partnerships to forge links with the community, education to support service personnel and to inform the wider community about service life and communication to inform service personnel of the rights and to promote wider understanding of the service community¹¹. Generally, practical, relatively low cost approaches are explored, but a legislative route to impose a duty to have due regard for the needs of the armed forces community is not put forward¹².

¹⁰ <http://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/>.

¹¹ *Report of the Task Forces on the Armed Forces Covenant* (2010), pp.6-7.

¹² In contrast, the USA legislates significantly for the care and support of former service personnel, following the so-called 'GI Bill', more accurately the Servicemen's Readjustment Act 1944 (See: (<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>), and the establishment of a Department of Veterans' Affairs (<http://www.va.gov>). For example, 100 Acts related to veterans have been passed by the 111th Congress 2009-2010.