



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5 ZONE B MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone: 020 7218 9000 (Switchboard)

THE RT HON EARL HOWE PC
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

MSU4/8/2/3/ap

29th February 2016

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your contribution to what was a very well-informed and constructive second reading debate on 11 February on the Armed Forces Bill. I know how seriously you take the issue of support to our Armed Forces community, and I am grateful for the opportunity to set out the Government's position on your questions regarding the Armed Forces Covenant, and in particular the issues of home ownership and resettlement.

Let me start by saying that the Government is committed to ensuring that our Service personnel and their families receive the services and support they deserve. All around the world we ask a great deal of our people and they meet those challenges with courage and professionalism.

The first UK Armed Forces Families Strategy sets out a comprehensive programme of activity to ensure our military families receive the support and help they need. The strategy has been drafted in consultation with the three service families federations to ensure it truly reflects the needs of our Service community.

Whilst this Government remains committed to providing our Service men and women, and their families, with Service accommodation that is both attractive and affordable, it is also our commitment to provide our Armed Forces community with opportunities to own their own homes. We have allocated £85.5 million to help more than 5,600 personnel to buy or improve their home through the Forces Help to Buy scheme, and I am pleased that the Defence Secretary wants to double that number to 10,000 by this October.

We are collaborating closely with colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the charitable sector to meet our shared objectives. Minister For Defence Personnel and Veterans addressed local authorities at the Community Covenant conference in November, and we will continue to work with the chair of the LGA, Lord Porter, to ensure that local authorities understand their covenant commitments and are committed to improving the support they offer their local Armed Forces community.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

We have also contributed to two housing schemes, working in partnership with Other Government Departments and the charitable sector; Mike Jackson House in Aldershot opened in 2008 and provides a 25 unit supported housing facility of one bedroom flats for Service leavers (for up to 18 months) until they find suitable accommodation. It also helps with the development of independent living skills and finding suitable employment. The Beacon, a supported housing project in Catterick, opened in early September 2011, providing a 31 bed facility for homeless veterans, and training and employment support.

On the issue of resettlement, we recognise the importance of having a robust and effective resettlement system to maximise the skills and experiences gained by personnel whilst in Service, and their potential for utilisation upon transition to civilian life.

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) is the MOD's official provider of resettlement services to those leaving the Armed Forces and provides one-to-one guidance, training and employment opportunities to the circa 15,000 Service leavers that leave the Armed Forces each year. The vast majority of our Service personnel go on to success on their return to civilian life, and around 84% of those who use the CTP are in full-time employment within six months of leaving the Armed Forces.

I believe that the Covenant is working. The steps that we have taken offer tangible, practical support to help manage the unique impacts of Service life. However, we need to make it clearer and easier for members of the Armed Forces community to access that support. This year we will publish a dedicated Covenant website to help members of the Armed Forces community to find and benefit from the support that exists.

We are also working with Forces in Mind Trust to review how Covenant commitments are delivered locally, and to identify examples of good practice. Although we have collectively achieved a great deal, much more remains to be done to ensure the covenant fulfils the nation's promise to support the brave men and women who serve our country with honour and distinction. It is a long-term aim and the Government is committed to its long-term delivery.

A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

I hope this information is helpful.

*Yours ever,
Kriszta*

THE RT HON EARL HOWE PC