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21 August 2023

Dear Elliot,

During my statement to the House on LGBT Veterans, you raised an important point regarding Civil Marriages and Civil Partnerships on the MOD estate, and I promised to write to you with further details on the policy.

It is disappointing that whilst same sex couples' marriage was made legal in 2013, only two Armed Forces Chapels in England and Wales have since been registered for such marriages.

The mechanism for the registering of an Armed Forces Chapel for the marriage of both same sex and opposite sex couples is laid out in legislation. Following a review of Defence's internal registration process, changes have been identified to streamline the process and less daunting for the couples seeking to marry in a particular chapel and less burdensome for the single Service Chaplaincies. These changes have now been introduced and will be publicised across Defence.

In addition, further work is underway to review possible amendments to current legislation to better support the registration of Armed Forces Chapels for same sex couple marriage, while assuring the protections afforded to the Church and its officials in the matter of conscience.

While current legislation recognises the uniqueness of Defence, its people, and its estates in the matter of the registration of Armed Forces Chapels for religious marriage, this recognition does not extend to approving venues for Civil Partnerships or Civil Marriages of opposite sex couples or same sex couples in England and Wales. This distinction stems from The Marriages and Civil Partnership (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005, that requires an Approved Premises to be regularly available to the public. Unfortunately enabling members of the public to access MOD establishments for the purposes of Civil Marriage or Civil Partnerships, and without a MOD sponsor, raises unacceptable security concerns. However, Defence is aware that the MOJ is currently reviewing the recommendations from the Law Commission's review of

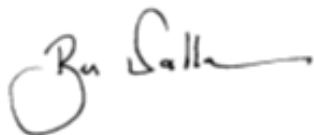
Elliot Colburn MP
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Weddings Law and we will be working closely with them to ensure the unique position of our military personnel is not over looked.

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Families also recently wrote to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice enquiring about the possibility of amending the legislation to allow premises within the MOD estate to be approved as venues for Civil Marriage and Civil Partnership without requiring unrestricted public access.

I hope this provides clarity on these important issues and reassures you that the MOD is actively trying to make this policy more inclusive.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

THE RT HON BEN WALLACE MP