

THE LORD COAKER  
MINISTER FOR THE HOUSE OF LORDS

4.8.2.3

22 April 2025

Dear Lord Stirrup,

**Armed Forces Commissioner Bill: Operation of the Armed Forces Commissioner in mixed military and industry sites**

I thank you for your contributions and support for the Armed Forces Commissioner Bill. In a follow up meeting to Grand Committee on Wednesday 2 April, we discussed several issues including mixed civilian industry and military workplaces. Specifically, you wanted to understand if military personnel were embedded in a civilian contractor environment, how the Commissioner would operate in these areas and whether they would have access to these sites or would need to make separate arrangements. I agreed to write to you on this matter.

Any member of the Armed Forces, regardless of where they are based or what their role is, will have full access to the Commissioner and will be able to raise any general service welfare matter to them. Even if the Commissioner cannot access the location the service person is based, they will still be able to conduct an investigation and subsequently produce a report, which would be laid before Parliament.

The Bill also enables the Commissioner, for the purposes of an investigation, to enter “service premises”, which are defined as:

*any premises which are permanently or temporarily occupied or controlled for the purposes of a regular or reserve force but are not service living accommodation.”*  
S340IB(8).

For each site, it will therefore be a fact-specific question as to whether it meets the definition set out in the Bill depending on what purposes the site is being used for.

The Defence Estate has many notable joint run sites with industry including HMNB Devonport and MOD Boscombe Down. We anticipate that these sites would likely meet the definition, as in large part they are occupied for the purposes of the UK Armed Forces. If the Commissioner

wanted to access one of these sites, with prior warning or otherwise, they would be able to do so.

The Lord Stirrup KG GCB AFC  
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However, in the case of a site where military personnel may work but that is owned and operated by industry, i.e. the Thales factories making the lightweight multirole missiles (LMMs), at this stage, we consider it less likely that they would fit into the 'service premises' definition. In this instance, the Commissioner would have to contact the company directly and ask to visit. We expect the Commissioner to manage any difficulties with this via its relationship with the Secretary of State who may be able to discuss with the company on their behalf or arrange a meeting - noting that the SofS is anyway subject to an obligation to provide reasonable assistance as the Commissioner may request in relation to their investigation.

If the resulting investigation culminated in the Commissioner making recommendations regarding these environments, these could be set out into a report to be laid before Parliament. Similarly, and at the sole discretion of the Commissioner, these findings may just be shared with the Secretary of State and the relevant people in the company involved.

Defence Industry has been identified as a key stakeholder group in the comms and engagement plan. Relevant bodies will be informed of the introduction of the Commissioner and their powers in due course, for example through the Defence Industrial Joint Council.

I very much look forward to your esteemed examination of the bill at Report Stage on 30 April 2025.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vernon Coaker". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

**THE LORD COAKER**