

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2017



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Registered charity numbers 219279 & SC014096
www.britishlegion.org.uk
www.poppyscotland.org.uk

ABOUT THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION AND POPPYSCOTLAND

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten. We were created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War, and still remain one of the UK's largest membership organisations. The Legion is the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, providing financial, social and emotional support, information, advice, advocacy and comradeship to Service personnel, veterans and their dependants. In 2015/16, we responded to over a million requests for help - more than ever before.

Poppyscotland is a proud member of The Royal British Legion family of charities. We are probably best known for running the iconic Scottish Poppy Appeal, but in fact, we work all year round to help the Armed Forces community receive the care and support they urgently need. Poppyscotland provides tailored support and funding to thousands of ex-Servicemen and women as well as other vital services in advice, employment, mobility, respite, housing and mental health support.

For information on this document please email publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk
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FOREWORD



The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten. Working together with our sister charity, Poppyscotland, we seek to ensure that no one in the Armed Forces community is disadvantaged by virtue of where they live.

Inspired by those we support, our aim is to offer the breadth, depth and quality of service they deserve. But we cannot do this on our own. Every year through the Poppy Appeal and Remembrance, the public show their generous support, which enables us to deliver our services for the Armed Forces community. For this we are truly grateful.

The Legion was proud to have played its part in the development of the Armed Forces Covenant, which has two key principles:

- *“Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services”*
- *“Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.”*

We have welcomed the opportunity to work with governments and politicians of all sides to help turn these commitments into practical measures to improve the lives of the Armed Forces community.

That community, of serving personnel, veterans and their families, is estimated to comprise around six million people across the United Kingdom. Today, the vast majority of veterans go on to lead fulfilling lives and make a positive contribution to our local communities. However, Legion research has shown that for a minority, challenges and disadvantages remain including on health, employment and housing.

There is, therefore, more to do, and in this manifesto we outline further steps that we think will help maintain progress.

The next Parliament will see the culmination of the First World War Centenary in November 2018, the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 2020 and we will mark the Legion's own centenary in 2021. As the national custodian of Remembrance, we will continue to play a leading role in ensuring that the contributions made by our Armed Forces, past and present, are never forgotten. However, ensuring that the principles of the Covenant are adhered to and implemented is the strongest way of honouring the service of our Armed Forces community.

We hope all candidates will consider our recommendations and we look forward to working in partnership over the coming years to further improve the lives of our serving personnel, veterans and their families.

Charles Byrne
Director General, The Royal British Legion



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

THE LEGION BELIEVES THAT THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

Ensure questions concerning military service and membership of the Armed Forces community feature in the next national census in 2021

Invest in research on 'what works' in treating veterans with Gulf War illnesses, and set up formal communication channels to convey the results of US research developments to these individuals

Provide an enhanced package of practical support to corporate signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant

Enable veterans to receive treatment for Non-Freezing Cold Injury through Defence Medical Services

Ensure divorced or separated spouses and partners of Service personnel are able to access housing support on the same terms as other Armed Forces families

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Ensure questions concerning military service and membership of the Armed Forces community feature in the next national census in 2021

The Legion estimates that the Armed Forces community makes up around one in ten of the general population. However, it is surprising to many to learn that no one definitively knows the size, location or demographics of the Armed Forces community in the UK. It is only a slight exaggeration to observe that from the census we presently know more about the UK's 'Jedi Knight' population than we do about those who have served our country.

The last national census, in 2011, contained just two questions related to the Armed Forces. It asked respondents whether a member of the Armed Forces usually lived at the address and whether respondents usually lived at an Armed Forces base for over 30 days a year. Whilst this helped build up a picture of where serving personnel are located, it did not collect information on veterans and their dependents, or Reservists.

National, devolved and local government, and many other organisations, have made commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant to address disadvantage and provide special consideration where appropriate for members of the Armed Forces community. Yet without accurate, uniform and localised data about that community, they are not able to plan their services in the most effective and efficient way possible, and monitor progress.

As part of planning for 2021, the statistical agencies and the Government will bring forward proposals for the content of the next census which Parliament will then be invited to approve. This represents a clear opportunity to improve knowledge of the Armed Forces community and how they can best be supported in the years to come.

Recommendation

The Legion calls on the next Government and Parliament to ensure that the next national census, in 2021, includes questions that will provide information on the Armed Forces community, including veterans and Reservists.



"I joined the Army in 1994 as a Para. I completed two tours to Northern Ireland, took part in exercises in America, Canada and Botswana, and served in Afghanistan where, in April 2008, I lost my lower right arm. I was eventually medically discharged and now work for The Royal British Legion as the Community Fundraiser for Essex."

Whilst receiving treatment in Selly Oak Hospital and for the first few months that I was back at home, the Legion's welfare department visited me to ask if there was anything they could do to help make life a little easier for me around the house. A few small adaptations were made, which improved my day to day life and helped me regain my independence.

I was fortunate in that I was able to receive the support I needed at a difficult time, but I'm aware that this is not the case for all veterans because they're hidden from official statistics, making it harder for service providers to identify and reach them. At present, most official records only capture veterans who are of pensionable age or who, like me, were injured and are now in receipt of military compensation. But younger veterans experience difficulties too and not everyone with an injury receives compensation, leaving them vulnerable to falling through the cracks."

Darren Fuller

Darren was painted at the Houses of Parliament in London as part of our #CountThemIn campaign, showing how the Armed Forces community is effectively invisible in the national Census.

Invest in research on 'what works' in treating veterans with Gulf War illnesses, and set up formal communication channels to convey the results of US research developments to these individuals

Research in the US, UK, Australia and Canada has found that veterans of the First Gulf War in 1990-91 report common health symptoms at two to three times the rate of other veterans, and at a greater intensity. Symptoms can include acute and chronic fatigue, hypertension, muscle pain, cognitive problems, reduced coordination, rashes, diarrhoea, and skin conditions associated with immune dysfunction. In addition, ill Gulf War veterans are twice as likely to report Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and a poorer quality of life.

According to 2015 figures from the Ministry of Defence (MOD), some 1,300 veterans are in receipt of compensation for conditions and illnesses connected to their deployment to the First Gulf War, or their preparation to deploy to that theatre of conflict. These figures further reveal that a small but significant number of veterans who deployed to the First Gulf War have claimed for complex and medically unexplained conditions. Yet research by the

King's Centre for Military Health Research estimates that as many as 33,000 UK Gulf War veterans could potentially be living with illnesses linked to their service in that war, with over 13,000 experiencing severe symptoms.

Veterans with Gulf War illnesses are generally treated for their individual symptoms rather than the 'condition' itself. To date, there has been little meaningful research published in the UK concerning effective treatment or 'best practice' for ameliorating symptoms in ill Gulf War veterans. A first phase of an MOD-commissioned study at Cardiff University commenced in 2009 to examine potential interventions to rehabilitate ill Gulf War veterans. However, the results were never published and the MOD chose not to fund the second phase of research. This lack of understanding about how best to treat ill Gulf War veterans has left many living with debilitating conditions 26 years after the end of combat operations, with a recent Legion survey revealing that 54% of ill Gulf War respondents currently receive no medical support for their condition.

Recommendation

The Legion calls on the next Government to invest in research that focuses on how best to treat ill Gulf War veterans and improve their recovery outcomes, and to establish formal communication channels to convey the results of similar US research developments to Gulf War veterans in the UK.



"About six to nine months after serving in the First Gulf War I became unwell and what happened next is only what I have been told as I cannot remember myself. I collapsed at home and was rushed to hospital with a suspected brain haemorrhage. After several days in hospital and the loss of feeling in my legs, it was found that my myelin sheath, which coats your spinal column to protect the central nervous system in your spine, was destroyed.

I had to try to get on with my job without being able to walk properly, and I had an issue with vision in my left eye. As I was constantly falling ill, I was advised to take redundancy in 1996, rather than be medically discharged. At a medical board in London, they gave me the diagnosis of post-viral syndrome (better known today as chronic fatigue syndrome). I was given £1,500 compensation and a letter for free prescriptions as a War Pensioner.

I now take a cocktail of medications to keep me alive – without this I do not know where I would be. I continue to live with neuropathy pains in my legs and arms, excessive tiredness, forgetfulness and occasional loss of cognitive activity, as well as global pain and heart arrhythmia. No-one knows quite how best to treat my condition, so the Government needs to invest in research on 'what works' in treating ill Gulf War veterans like me."

Ian Ewers-Larose

Provide an enhanced package of practical support to corporate signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant

Working age veterans in the UK are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their civilian contemporaries, according to research undertaken by the Legion. Furthermore, working age dependents and spouses of veterans are also less likely to be in full time work than their civilian counterparts (28% vs 39%).

Veterans bring with them a wide range of highly employable skills and qualities. It has been widely noted that veterans:

- Have experience working in and leading teams;
- Are flexible and able to work in a stressful, fast-paced, dynamic environment;
- Are dependable, demonstrate a strong work ethic, and have the tenacity to consistently complete the work;
- Display integrity and loyalty; and
- Are experienced with culturally diverse and global working environments.

Spouses and dependents similarly bring a diverse range of skills with them to the civilian employment market, many having careers that

predate military life which have been interrupted due to the commitments of Service life.

The UK employment market benefits from the skills and qualities that the ex-Service community can bring. They are highly trained and experienced in a range of trades and skills that could be utilised to help meet skill shortages in business, whilst reducing rates of unemployment in that community.

Across the UK over 1,500 organisations have now pledged their support to the Armed Forces Covenant, showing the breadth of support amongst businesses for the UK's Armed Forces community. However, research in 2016 found that only 29% of businesses thought that the Covenant was a success and 40% of businesses believed that the Covenant initiative should be doing more. More practical support to those who sign it and the sharing of best practice will help corporate pledges on the Covenant to fulfil the aim of ensuring that businesses support the Armed Forces community in the UK.

Recommendation

The Legion calls on the next Government to provide an enhanced and practical package of guidance for corporate signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant, and to set up mechanisms to ensure that best practice is spread amongst local corporate signatories, harnessing and promoting the positive impact the Service community can play in the civilian commercial sector.

"To my mind, more needs to be done to ensure that the skills we have as veterans are properly recognised in civvy-street. I've been for jobs where I know I have the skills to do well, based on what I was doing in Afghanistan and other areas, but because I didn't necessarily have the right bit of paper, I wasn't even considered."

Employers need more help understanding the roles we've done in the military, whether it's leading people, managing logistics or being part of effective teams. I couldn't get a team leader job in the civilian world yet that's exactly what I'd been doing, and in really testing environments.

I'm not saying we should be guaranteed a job – just that our experience should be recognised and valued by employers so that more businesses can play their part in ensuring a smooth transition for veterans like me."

Joel Price



Enable veterans to receive treatment for Non-Freezing Cold Injury through Defence Medical Services

Non-Freezing Cold Injury (NFCI) is a condition that results from damage caused to tissues exposed for prolonged periods to cold temperatures at or above the freezing point of water. NFCI is sometimes referred to as ‘trench foot’, although the condition can affect other parts of the body such as the hands and face. It is a rare injury in the UK that primarily affects members of the Armed Forces. NFCI can be experienced by any individual – however, certain ethnic groups in the UK Armed Forces are at a higher risk of the condition.

NFCI is an exceedingly difficult condition to treat once established. Those severely affected by NFCI may experience numbness, swelling, chronic pain, acute pain on exposure to cold temperatures, excessive sweating, tissue and nail loss.

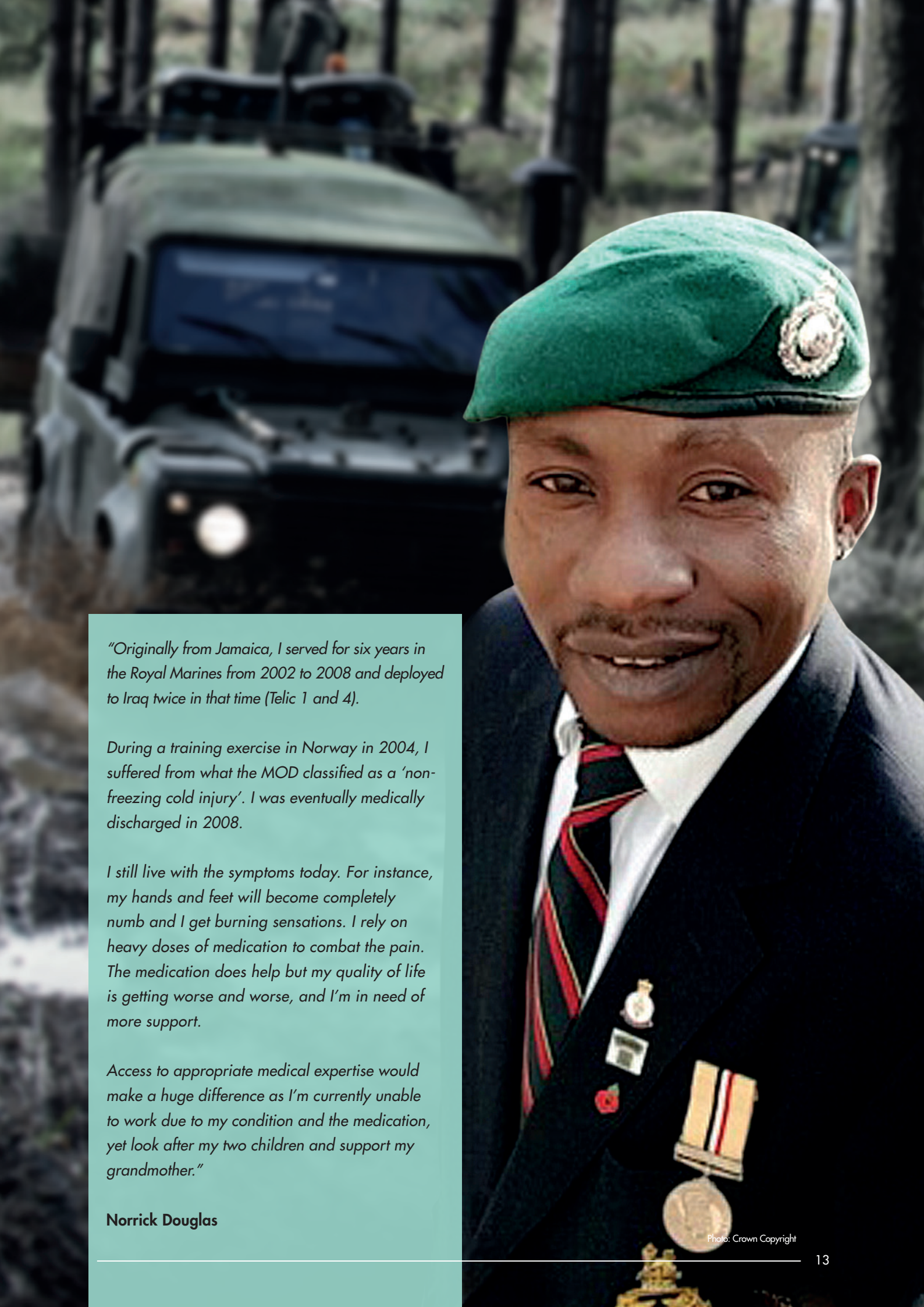
Widely reported in the First World War as ‘trench foot’, NFCI has been observed in subsequent conflicts including the Second World War and in particular the Falklands, when

significant proportions of soldiers are thought to have suffered an NFCI. More recent experience in Iraq, Afghanistan and from training exercises demonstrates continued incidence. In recent years there has been improved guidance to commanders regarding cold weather exposure, including prevention and medical management. However, between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2015, 425 personnel were medically discharged for NFCI.

Those personnel who are medically discharged may experience long term disability that affects their daily lives. Treatment for NFCI is limited as there is minimal research into effective interventions. Veterans with NFCI presently have no specified treatment pathway within the NHS. This particularly affects veterans because there are few experts within the field as a whole and in the NHS the condition is rarely seen by health professionals. Most medical expertise is held at the Institute of Naval Medicine, which manages the condition in serving personnel.

Recommendation

The Legion calls on the next Government to create a treatment pathway for veterans experiencing Non-Freezing Cold Injury delivered through Defence Medical Services, to ensure veterans are not disadvantaged in their healthcare and are able to access medical expertise equivalent to that which they would experience in Service.



“Originally from Jamaica, I served for six years in the Royal Marines from 2002 to 2008 and deployed to Iraq twice in that time (Telic 1 and 4).

During a training exercise in Norway in 2004, I suffered from what the MOD classified as a ‘non-freezing cold injury’. I was eventually medically discharged in 2008.

I still live with the symptoms today. For instance, my hands and feet will become completely numb and I get burning sensations. I rely on heavy doses of medication to combat the pain. The medication does help but my quality of life is getting worse and worse, and I’m in need of more support.

Access to appropriate medical expertise would make a huge difference as I’m currently unable to work due to my condition and the medication, yet look after my two children and support my grandmother.”

Norrick Douglas

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Ensure divorced or separated spouses and partners of Service personnel are able to access housing support on the same terms as other Armed Forces families

The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant apply to the whole Armed Forces community and this includes the families of serving and ex-Service personnel. Too often they can be overlooked in discussions on the treatment of our Armed Forces. They make great sacrifices and provide invaluable support, enabling our serving personnel to thrive in their military career. In many cases it is the spouses, partners and children of serving personnel who face some of the greatest upheavals associated with Armed Forces life. This can include being required to move house, school or job multiple times. It is vital that this significant contribution is recognised in national and local policies to ensure that they do not face disadvantage.

In the unfortunate circumstance that a Service family should break up, it is important that the sacrifices the family made in the past are still recognised and not forgotten. For example, in common with other Service families, divorced

or separated spouses and partners may have been disadvantaged in finding their own home due to the mobile nature of military life, and will not have built up a local connection to any area as they moved around, supporting their partner during their Service.

Under regulations set by Government, Armed Forces families are given support to find housing through exemption from local connection criteria and a degree of additional preference on housing waiting lists. However, when an Armed Forces couple separate or divorce, the spouse currently ceases to be recognised as 'family' under the Armed Forces Covenant, meaning that they are no longer eligible for certain allowances, including the local connection exemption criteria for social housing. In many cases divorced or separated Service spouses and partners receive no additional help in finding a home after the divorce or separation is confirmed and they have moved on from their previous house.

Recommendation

The Legion calls on the next Government to amend current regulations governing the exemption of the local connection rule to include divorced or separated spouses and partners; and to amend guidance to local authorities on the provision of additional preference to the Armed Forces community, to specifically include divorced or separated spouses and partners of serving personnel.



"I was living in Wales with my husband who had been in the Army for five years. When we separated, I had to leave the accommodation we shared, but I really wanted to live in the area. I had a strong support network of friends there and at this really difficult time, I needed them.

I was working and loved the community. I approached the council to see if there was anything they could do as I had lost my home, but they said there was no help available as I had no local connection to the area. This is despite the fact I had been living with my husband and working there!

When your husband is serving, it puts a lot of pressure on the family and you do have to make sacrifices. If things break down, I think the least you should expect is some assistance if you want to stay in the area you've built your life in. Instead, I had to move back to London, where I am now."

Victoria Dinsdale

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If you need help, call our Contact Centre helpline on 0808 802 8080 from 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week
(calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks) for all enquiries.