

LOUISE SANDHER-JONES MP
Minister for Veterans and People

Our ref: POA2026/09300

2 June 2026

Dear Ms Kipling,

Thank you for your email of 6 May 2026, regarding the Armed Forces Covenant.

I would like to begin by thanking you and Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council for all the support you have shown the Armed Forces, as demonstrated by your commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant since 2013, and your accreditation with the Gold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Award. The Government is greatly appreciative of councils, such as yours, who support our Armed Forces Community in various ways, and I personally thank you for this support.

As you may be aware, on 15 January 2026, the new Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty Extension was introduced to Parliament as part of the Armed Forces Bill. This is currently making its way through its parliamentary stages, with royal assent expected before the end of the year.

To support organisations in meeting their obligations under the new Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty, the Ministry of Defence are developing a range of comprehensive resources, including training materials, online learning modules, downloadable tools, and updated statutory guidance.

As part of these efforts, we have strengthened communication and collaboration with Other Government Departments (OGDs), Devolved Governments, Local Authorities, and the third sector to ensure we deliver these effectively. Feedback sessions to refine the materials and approach are currently ongoing to ensure effective support and guidance is provided to help organisations meet their legal obligations under the Covenant Legal Duty. Officials are already reviewing feedback to refine the products and, as the training and guidance products continue to evolve, updated versions will continue to be shared to ensure they remain practical, relevant, and informed by stakeholder experience. The aim is to enhance understanding and raise awareness of the unique sacrifices and challenges faced by the Armed Forces community, equipping service providers to deliver better support.

We are actively working with OGDs to see the various ways in which they may be able to meet their covenant commitments, helping to demonstrate how they will be able to show 'due regard' to the Covenant in practice. We know this is essential to delivering the intended benefits of the legislation, providing meaningful support to the Armed Forces

Ms Shelley Kipling
Chief Executive
Oldham Council

community, and reaffirming the Government's commitment to serving personnel, veterans, the bereaved, and their families.

It is of course important to note, the Legal Duty is intentionally designed to be flexible, allowing service providers to honour the Covenant in ways that best address local needs. Mandating UK-wide minimum standards for service delivery to the Armed Forces community may not be appropriate or proportionate, as it could inadvertently disadvantage members of the local general population with greater needs.

You will be interested to know, that as part of ensuring the impact of the Covenant is properly measured, officials are currently working on refining the Covenant Annual Report, leveraging this established mechanism to assess the impact of the Covenant and measure its success. This report is a key tool for ensuring transparency and accountability, as it is subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The Secretary of State for Defence is legally required to report annually to Parliament on progress in delivering the Covenant across the UK.

As part of this work, officials are exploring ways to improve data collection and develop more robust methods for measuring the impact and success of the Legal Duty. These efforts aim to provide a clearer understanding of how the Covenant is being delivered, ultimately driving improvements in support for the Armed Forces community. Defence will continue to identify opportunities to enhance data collection processes, ensuring that the information gathered is comprehensive, accurate, and reflective of the needs of the Armed Forces community.

I hope this information is helpful. We remain grateful to the work done by all our partners in the third sector and united in our efforts to help support the wider Armed Forces community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Sandher-Jones', with a stylized, flowing script.

LOUISE SANDHER-JONES MP