



**Craig Whittaker MP**

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**The Royal British Legion's and Poppyscotland's 2017 Manifesto**

Thank you for contacting me about the Royal British Legion's 2017 manifesto.

There is huge admiration throughout our society, which I fully share, for the invaluable contribution made by Armed Forces personnel and their families and for the many sacrifices made through their service in keeping Britain safe.

I know that the Government supports the RBL's aspiration to include a veteran's marker in the 2021 census. In light of this, the Office of National Statistics and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have established a working group to review this matter.

I am aware that the MOD continues to keep a watching brief on gulf veterans' illnesses but, in line with the Medical Research Council review carried out in 2003, which confirmed that no discrete diagnosis was present, there are no plans to institute further research either on causation or clinical management.

I am encouraged that an independent review of the Covenant pledges made by business and the third sector is being undertaken in 2018 which will identify and document positive examples of how a range of organisations are delivering on their Covenant commitments. These examples of best practice will then be shared, along with appropriate guidelines, to support organisations in drafting and implementing Covenant pledges.

With regard to veterans' healthcare including the treatment of Non-Freezing Cold Injuries, the MOD continues to work with the Department of Health, NHS England, and the Devolved Administrations to ensure that the specific healthcare needs of injured personnel continue to be met when they leave the Services.

I know that the MOD works closely with Local Authorities to make provision for separated or divorced spouses or civil partners as they transit out of the Armed Forces community, and Ministers will consider whether additional measures are necessary. I am aware that a number of Local Authorities have amended their housing policy to waive the requirement for a local connection to recently divorced and separated spouses, on their first move out of Service family accommodation.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP