

Labour's Pledges to the Armed Forces



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FOREWORD BY THE LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, RT HON. JEREMY CORBYN MP

Every year, on Armed Forces Day, our country comes together to pay tribute to the dedicated personnel who serve in our Armed Forces. At events in communities across the UK, the public say thank you to these brave men and women who work tirelessly to keep us safe.

Our thanks and appreciation for our Armed Forces lasts the whole year round. We have an important duty to ensure that our personnel, our veterans, and their families, have the very best support.

It is a travesty that so much of the burden of this Government's austerity has fallen on many in our Forces and their families.

Whether it is the Conservatives' decision to cut the pay of our servicemen and women in real-terms for seven years, their ideological obsession with outsourcing services to private companies, or leaving those living in service accommodation with leaking roofs, broken boilers and appliances that don't work.



Labour has a plan to rebuild Britain to make sure that our service personnel are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. The pledges contained in this document will guarantee a better deal for all those who serve in our Armed Forces.

Jeremy Corbyn MP,
Labour Party Leader

FOREWORD BY THE SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, NIA GRIFFITH MP, AND SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE ARMED FORCES, WAYNE DAVID MP

As a country, we are rightly proud of our dedicated and highly-skilled servicemen and women, ready at a moment's notice to do whatever is necessary to defend our country.

Their selfless service and dedication are in evidence across the world - whether in building hospitals to fight the Ebola epidemic, combating poaching in Southern Africa, or freeing civilians from the tyranny of Daesh.

But under the Conservatives, our Armed Forces have had a raw deal. The government has delivered short-sighted defence cuts and failed privatisations that have let down personnel and taxpayers alike.

The next Labour government will guarantee a better deal for servicemen and women.

We will lift the public sector pay cap and give personnel a fair pay rise. We will ensure that all service members have access to decent accommodation, without the threat of being forced into the private rented



sector. We will give personnel a voice and consult on introducing an Armed Forces' representative body. We will scrap the dodgy outsourcing deals that do not deliver. And we will ensure that all service children can get a good school place.

Those who serve our country deserve our full and unwavering support. The next Labour government will put the needs of the Armed Forces community at the very heart of what we do.

Nia Griffith MP,
Shadow Secretary of State for Defence

Wayne David MP,
Shadow Minister for the Armed Forces

LABOUR'S PLEDGES TO THE ARMED FORCES

The next Labour government will deliver —

- 1 Fair pay for the Armed Forces
- 2 Decent housing for personnel and their families
- 3 A voice for servicemen and women
- 4 An end to failing privatisation
- 5 Support for Forces children

1. FAIR PAY FOR OUR ARMED FORCES

The next Labour government will ensure: a fair pay rise each year for our Armed Forces personnel.

THE TORIES' RECORD:

The Conservatives have dealt a real-terms pay cut to our servicemen and women for seven years running. Because of their refusal to deliver fair pay rises, the starting salary of an Army private is now £1150 lower in real terms than it was in 2010¹. This is despite the fact that the government has increased food and accommodation charges and cut social security payments for Forces families.

Adding insult to injury, the Conservatives have also delayed the announcement about pay, leaving personnel and their families waiting months to find out how much they will have in their pay packets.

This is having a knock-on effect on the morale of our personnel, which has fallen dramatically since 2010. Two-thirds of personnel are not satisfied with their pay.²

The number of personnel choosing to leave the Forces is at historically high levels and pay remains one of the top reasons why personnel decide to leave³.

This helps to explain why we have seen Forces numbers plummet under this government. Since 2010, the number of fully trained soldiers has fallen from 102,000 to just 75,000 – the smallest it has been in modern times. The RAF and Royal Navy and Royal Marines have also seen a sharp fall in numbers.

LABOUR'S PLEDGE:

The next Labour government will make sure that our personnel receive a fair pay rise every year.

We can do this because we have budgeted to scrap the government's public sector pay cap that is currently keeping wages down.

We will ask those at the very top to pay their fair share, so that those who serve our country can get the pay rise that their service deserves.

1. House of Commons Library analysis

2. Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey 2019

3. Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey 2019

2. DECENT HOUSING FOR OUR ARMED FORCES AND THEIR FAMILIES

The next Labour government will ensure: decent, properly maintained housing that meets the specific needs of personnel and their families.

THE TORIES' RECORD:

The recent collapse of Carillion, which jointly maintained the MoD's housing estate with Amey, demonstrates the significant risks associated with poorly managed privatisation.

There have been repeated complaints about the poor maintenance of MoD accommodation, which is letting down service personnel and their families.

Despite the failure associated with outsourcing maintenance to a private company, the current Tory government seems unable or unwilling to insist on better delivery of the service.

In 2015, the government committed to deliver a new accommodation offer for our Armed Forces – now known as the Future Accommodation Model - which is to be piloted from September 2019.

This risks pushing our Armed Forces personnel and their families into the private rented sector, while ignoring the concerns and wishes of our Forces families.

A recent Armed Forces Federation (AFF) survey demonstrated that if the availability of the accommodation currently on offer was reduced and a rental allowance offered instead, **only 22% of respondents would definitely remain in the Army**⁴.

Living on site together with other military families provides a crucial support network for our Forces and their families, which would be lost through dispersal into the private rented sector. The insecurity, variable quality and limited availability of the private rented sector are also of significant concern to Forces families. Furthermore it is not clear how the additional costs of

4. <https://aff.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AFFbigsurveyfullbriefinal.pdf>



private sector rents would be met: it is unacceptable to expect Armed Forces personnel to contribute more to what would be significantly higher private sector rents – that would be a real-terms pay cut. The alternative would be higher accommodation allowances, so the UK taxpayer would be putting more money into the pockets of private landlords, as we have seen before with housing benefit.

LABOUR'S PLEDGE:

Labour believes that it makes no sense whatsoever to push Forces families into the private sector, neither practically with all the additional stress and inconvenience for the personnel concerned, nor economically as taxpayers foot the bill for escalating rents.

A Labour government will ensure decent housing for our Armed Forces personnel, which recognises the needs and respects the wishes of our Armed Forces personnel and their families.

In government, we will put pressure on private companies with existing contracts to deliver properly maintained and promptly repaired homes for service personnel and their families.

3. A VOICE FOR SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN

The next Labour government will ensure: a representative voice for the concerns of our Armed Forces personnel about the things that affect them, like pay and pension benefits.



THE TORIES' RECORD:

Since the Tories have been in power, there has been a sharp fall in morale across all services⁵. More personnel are dissatisfied with service life, dissatisfied with pension benefits, and concerned about the fairness of the appraisal and promotion systems.

In 1995, Sir Michael Bett was commissioned by the Government to conduct an independent review of Armed Forces structures.

The review found that 66% of service personnel interviewed agreed that the Services would benefit from a representative body for Armed Forces personnel.

5. Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey 2019

Such a body would offer our Armed Forces the opportunity to voice their concerns on pay, housing, and welfare provision, amongst many other important issues that affect their lives and the lives of their families.

The idea of having Armed Forces representative bodies is neither radical nor unique. Several countries' militaries, including Germany, Ireland, Norway, the USA, Australia and Sweden, all benefit from such bodies or associations.

LABOUR'S PLEDGE:

The next Labour government will carry out a consultation on introducing a representative body for Armed Forces personnel.

As with the Police Federation, such a body would not have the right to take industrial action.

We recognise that there may be some concerns about such a proposal. That is why we are committing to a consultation first.

Such a body would be able to inform the government more comprehensively of the interests and concerns of the Armed Forces, allowing for better and more effective policymaking.

It would allow for the collective representation of concerns, which can be difficult for individuals to raise.

And while Forces families benefit from the work of excellent voluntary sector groups, such groups do not have the same level of legal recognition as a statutory body.

4. AN END TO FAILING PRIVATISATION

The next Labour government will ensure: an end to bad outsourcing deals that do not deliver for personnel or taxpayers.



THE TORIES' RECORD:

The Conservatives' ideological obsession with privatisation has seen many MoD contracts outsourced to the private sector.

All too often these private contracts simply fail on their own terms. They fail to make the promised savings and they fail to deliver a good quality of service for personnel and their families.

Whether it is the persistent complaints about the quality of housing maintenance provided by Amey – with personnel and their families stuck for days with leaking roofs, broken boilers and appliances that don't work.

Or the appalling performance of Capita's Recruiting Partnership Project which is failing in its basic job of recruiting people to the Army. This in turn puts enormous pressure on existing personnel.

Or the food provided by Sodexo, which has been the subject of repeated complaints.

The Conservatives have consistently rushed to privatise services without being clear about the reasons for doing so. Ministers have then failed to monitor these contracts when they have been outsourced, and have refused to take any action against companies that do not deliver.

LABOUR'S PLEDGE:

The next Labour government will get to grips with the practice of outsourcing MoD services to the private sector.

Upon taking office, we will carry out a root and branch review of significant service contracts that have been outsourced by the Department.

Where they are not delivering, where they are failing our personnel and their families, or failing to provide value for money to UK taxpayers, we will have no hesitation in bringing these contracts back in-house.

Labour will introduce a clear presumption in favour of public contracts being delivered by the public sector and we will call an immediate halt to the significant contracts that are currently being considered for outsourcing.

This includes the Defence Fire and Rescue Service, which delivers fire safety for our Armed Forces, their families and key defence infrastructure. Labour opposed the decision to outsource this service and the process is currently embroiled in a costly legal battle.

5. SUPPORT FOR FORCES CHILDREN

The next Labour government will ensure: better access for all Forces children to good quality local schools.



THE TORIES' RECORD:

The nature of service life means that many Forces families move house repeatedly, every few years, including sometimes to postings abroad.

One difficulty that Forces families face is finding new schools for their children, especially if they resettle outside of the admissions cycle. A recent report from the Children's Commissioner for England⁶ highlights that service children are sometimes not placed in the most appropriate school with siblings or other Forces children from the same unit, causing further and unnecessary distress.

The fragmentation of education in England, with admissions in the hands of academies or academy trusts, is exacerbating this problem, making it harder for service children to be placed in the most suitable schools.

6. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/KIN-AND-COUNTRY-Growing-up-as-an-Armed-Forces-child.pdf>

These difficulties have been made even worse by years of chronic underinvestment in our schools by this Tory government.

LABOUR'S PLEDGE:

The next Labour government will move school admissions policy out of the control of individual academies or academy trusts and put it back into the hands of local authorities.

This will enable local authorities to ensure a fairer admissions system for every child and develop admissions strategies which can cater more effectively for the specific needs of all service children, recognising the particular challenges of frequent moves, and the benefits of keeping siblings and other service children together.

Through our National Education Service, Labour will invest properly in service children's futures. In government, we will invest in our schools, creating new school places and helping to provide all service children with appropriate places in good-quality easily-accessible schools.



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5. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/803056/Armed_Forces_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_2019_Main_Report.pdf

