

# Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill

## Oral evidence: Armed Forces Bill, Session 4, HC 1281

Wednesday 17 March 2021

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Members present: James Sunderland (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Tonia Antoniazzi; Dan Carden; Miss Sarah Dines; Leo Docherty; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Darren Henry; Mrs Sharon Hodgson; Mr Richard Holden; Mr Kevan Jones; Jack Lopresti; Johnny Mercer; Stephen Morgan.

Questions 168-215

### Witnesses

[I](#): Nicola Williams, Former Service Complaints Ombudsman.

[II](#): Tony Wright Wright, CEO at Forward Assist, Emma Norton, Founder at Centre for Military Justice, and Dame Vera Baird QC, Victims' Commissioner.

[III](#): Caroline Paige, Joint Chief Executive at Fighting with Pride, Craig Jones MBE, Joint Chief Executive at Fighting with Pride, David McMullen, Citizenship4Soldiers, and Lieutenant Colonel (retd) Diane Allen OBE

Written evidence from witnesses:

[AFB0005 – Forward Assist](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Caroline Paige, Craig Jones MBE, David McMullen and Lieutenant Colonel (retd) Diane Allen.

**Chair:** Welcome to panel three of this fascinating session to gather evidence in support of the Armed Forces Bill. My name is James Sunderland and I am pleased to welcome four guests to this next panel. We have Lieutenant Colonel Diane Allen OBE, Caroline Paige, joint chief executive officer of Fighting With Pride, Craig Jones MBE, joint chief executive also of Fighting With Pride, and David McMullen from Citizenship4Soldiers. You are very welcome. Time is tight once again, so can I please ask all Members and all witnesses to keep questions and answers short?

Q200 **Mrs Hodgson:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us. My question is initially to Lieutenant Colonel Diane Allen: you recently told the Defence Sub-Committee, in its inquiry into women in the Armed Forces, "The current complaints system is truly damaging to people's mental health." Do you think the provisions to reduce time and grounds for appeal are the right approach to tackle delays?

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** Thank you for the question. I am now a retired Lieutenant Colonel, as I left last year. As background, I wrote a book as a call to arms, and from that I have become something of a de facto spokesperson to give a voice for women, which is the women in defence inquiry that your colleague Sarah Atherton is chairing at the moment.

My answer is no, I do not think that the two weeks helps in any way whatsoever. The complaints system is already a failing system. There are plenty of reviews that have shown that, and plenty of solutions out there. Decreasing the time further, from six weeks to two weeks, when there is already an imbalance of power—effectively, the complainant will be receiving documentation from the MoD legal system and be expected to translate that as a lay person without legal representation within six weeks at the moment, but that is being delayed and made even shorter, to two weeks—seems profoundly unfair, and would not in any way help the system we have at the moment. I think that is my main concern at the moment: the proposal doesn't in any way reflect the current problem with the system.

Q201 **Mrs Hodgson:** You also said that the service justice system is "equally toxic". How far do you think the Bill goes in addressing those concerns? Is anything missing from it that would address your concerns?

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** I think so. I am not an expert in the service justice system. I have had my own experience of a vexatious complaint against me, and had to experience the justice system myself, but mostly I am speaking on behalf of the women who have spoken to me about the justice system. My understanding of the justice system is that it is not appropriate at the moment. I very much support what Emma said in her findings, that it would be much better served by putting it into the criminal



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system. I cannot see the benefit of having a separate military police system to take on serious criminal activity.

Q202 **Mrs Hodgson:** Why do you think the Government has taken the approach it has on concurrent jurisdiction?

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** I am sorry, I don't really understand the question.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Whether it is in the civilian courts or the military courts.

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** Judge Lyons probably explained it far better than I can, but my understanding is there are some cases where it would be appropriate to place it in the military system, but in nearly all cases it should move to the civilian justice system.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Excellent. Thank you so much, Diane, for that. Back to you, Chair.

**Chair:** Can I move now to Dan Carden, please?

Q203 **Dan Carden:** Thank you, Chair. I welcome our witnesses. I would like to direct my questions to Craig and Caroline. I wonder if you could give us an overview of the experiences of LGBT members of the Armed Forces during the years of the ban, what happened to those who were outed or discovered, and how your organisations have supported them?

**Craig Jones:** Thanks very much for the question, Dan. Fighting with Pride was created 12 months ago in recognition of the fact that we have a part of the Armed Forces veterans community who were dealt with with staggering cruelty. Although the memory of that in Parliament, in the general public and even in the Armed Forces may have faded, it is not something that has faded for those most affected.

The special investigations branch of the Royal Military Police had a worldwide remit to find, charge and bring to justice LGBT+ members of the Armed Forces for the offence of being homosexual. Every unit of the Royal Military Police was trained on where to look and what to look for. There were confidential Defence Council instructions held in safes in every unit about how individuals would be treated; and the details were not good.

When people were found or suspected, they were arrested, often late at night, by the Royal Military Police. They were taken away for questioning, and that questioning often went on for days. Many of the people who were questioned had no legal support, or no "accused's friends", as we sometimes call that in the Armed Forces. They were searched, and the process went on for a very long time. After they had been charged, many were taken to military hospitals for medical inspections, which were a disgraceful breach of trust between members of the Armed Forces and the officers whom they were in the care of.

At court martial, sentences were handed down that were most commonly six months in military prison, but some individuals were sent to civilian prisons, and in the process of the court martial, their medals and good



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conduct badges were literally ripped from their uniforms. These were not sentences for crimes of hate: these were sentences for consensual acts of love, that had no equivalent in civilian law.

At the end of their sentences, these veterans were walked to the main gate, dismissed in disgrace or "service no longer required", afforded no protections of the Armed Forces Covenant, and not only cast from the military family but also outed to their own families, so many found themselves immediately homeless, with no employment, impoverished, and with the trauma that you would imagine from that set of circumstances.

Just to close that question, in the modern history of the Armed Forces, there has been no equivalent to the staggering cruelty that was inflicted on our LGBT+ veterans. It is an existing national disgrace that has had no remedy.

**Chair:** Thank you. I will just point out for the record that the ban on homosexuality was lifted on 12 January 2000.

**Dan Carden:** Caroline, would you like to add anything to that?

**Caroline Paige:** I would just like to talk about how those veterans have fared over the past few years and the way that the support has not been there for them. We have already heard from Craig what happened to those veterans, but since the ban was lifted in January 2000, there has been no support for those people who were identified as LGBT+ or dismissed in disgrace. They were turned away or not welcome at the service charities and organisations that were apparently there for veterans, because they were not considered as veterans, or they stayed away because of the shame of the manner in which they were dismissed.

After the ban was lifted, actually, nothing changed. Nothing was done, and the reputations of those charities and support organisations was one of not being very welcoming at all, so our veterans stayed away from that. What is happening now is that Fighting with Pride, over the past 15 months, has been connecting with those charities and with the NHS's mental health trusts within Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, raising awareness using our lived experience. The feelings that we are getting from those organisations are ones of shock and disbelief, as well as shame that that happened on their watch. They know it happened, and they agree. Even the veterans serving those organisations were not aware of the treatment that the LGBT+ veterans faced. They knew that their colleagues were working with them one day, and the next they were gone, but they did not understand what had actually happened to them in that process.

There is a desire to do more within those organisations. They want to learn, they want to help, they want to—*[Inaudible.]* They are asking us how we can help them—*[Inaudible.]* The doors are open, but the damage is done, and there has been nothing done for such a long time that we now need to build trust: we need to reach out to all those veterans who



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are isolated from the military community and from their own communities, and we need to rebuild that trust. There is an enormous amount of work to be done. These are people who served our country, and we dismissed them in the most horrendous way, but we have done nothing to support them at all.

Q204 **Dan Carden:** Thank you. Can I ask one more question, going back to you, Craig? I think you are spot on: the way these veterans have been treated is a national disgrace. The Government have announced the restoration of medals to LGBT veterans, but what more needs to be done to put right the hurt and loss faced by this community?

**Craig Jones:** We really welcome the initiative to return medals to veterans; they should never have been taken, and it is a first footstep. I also wanted to say that at Fighting with Pride we recognise the remarkable advances that the Armed Forces of today have made in support of LGBT+ serving personnel. Our Armed Forces are very different to those that Caroline and I, and our colleagues, experienced. But, by gum, there is a lot of work to do.

We have individuals who have sexual offences on their civilian records that have no place in modern times. They should be supported through the process to achieve royal pardons. We have a veteran on our books who had the civilian police arrive at his door in 2017 to take swabs for the national criminal intelligence database, because he was a registered sex offender. That's fundamentally wrong, and those types of circumstances need to be guarded against.

We need to make sure that people who live their lives, with housing issues and with impoverishment and health issues, are properly supported. There needs to be compensation for people who, as I have said, were treated with staggering cruelty. There needs to be a remedy for the fact that people are approaching pension ages, and they have had broken careers, they have had periods of unemployment and they have no pensions—no military pensions—or their pensions were denigrated, because of a perceived offence, and they have not been restored.

We need an apology on behalf of the nation. This level of hurt is at such a level that there should be a prime ministerial apology and an apology from the Chief of the Defence Staff to any individual who steps forward and declares that they have been affected by this. And we need to start the journey of reparations, and that journey of reparations needs data, because if we ask the Ministry of Defence today who was affected by the policy, and who was dismissed, they would not be able to answer the question, because people were dismissed in so many different ways and under so many different acts of military law that it may be impossible to tell. But work needs to be done so that the Government can begin its journey quickly towards resolution and reparation.

**Dan Carden:** Thank you, Craig and Caroline. That is harrowing evidence, and I just want to say that I and others on this Committee will want to use this Bill to make a real change. Thank you, Chair.



**Q205 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** It is good to see Caroline and Craig giving evidence in front of the Committee; I am delighted that they are both here.

I think that lack of time doesn't allow discussion of the complete horrific experience of the LGBT community in the Armed Forces, even after the lifting of the ban—there seem to be those who think that, just because there is no longer a ban on being LGBT in the Armed Forces, then everything's tickety-boo.

We have seen, first of all in an earlier panel, the experience of women specifically in the Armed Forces. Last week, we saw serving judges in the military structure excuse behaviour for drunkenness, just because "it's the way we do things."

Craig, taking the point that you made about, for example, practical applications whereby we can move things forward, do you and Caroline want to say anything about the pension issue in a bit more detail, in terms of repairing the trust for those who were forced out of the Armed Forces and whose career was destroyed by these draconian principles, and about financial reparations—some people might not want to talk about this—such as restoring a pension maybe being an opportunity to make some reparations to those former members of the Armed Forces?

**Craig Jones:** There are two points to pensions. The first one is that people did not reach career pension points; they did not have the military careers that they hoped for when they joined the Armed Forces as young people. We know of many cases where there was an unreasonable haste to exit people from the Armed Forces before they reached career pension points. So, some elements of the ban were enforced zealously.

What we must also recognise is that after people left the Armed Forces, they were not able to have the careers that they might reasonably have hoped for, because they had criminal convictions, which prevented them from getting DBS-es—clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service—or because they have experienced trauma through their lives. I have spoken to lots of people who have moved town many, many times, who have been unable to focus at work, or who have brought lots of tribunals, because of reliving their trauma. So, yes, there is a huge amount of work to do with pensions.

I think that will be extremely complex because of the challenges of burden of proof. We have suggested to the Government that it may be necessary to look at how we can establish a trust fund with a different style of evidencing, because you can't compare the experiences or the burden of proof for LGBT+ people with other minority groups in the Armed Forces—for example, those who were dismissed through pregnancy—because the burden of proof is, in those cases, much more uncomplicated. Work on things like pensions and financial compensation needs to be accelerated, and it needs to happen quickly. These folks are getting older; they are impoverished and in a sorry state.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Caroline, do you have anything to add?



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**Caroline Paige:** I think Craig said everything about pensions. He summed it up quite nicely.

Q206 **Stephen Morgan:** My questions are directed at David. It is good to see you again, David. How does the covenant currently support Commonwealth veterans and their families? Do you feel this Bill will improve that?

**David McMullen:** The reality is that the covenant would support Commonwealth veterans only if they gained citizenship, in which case they would be treated like any other veteran in the UK. There lies the main problem, because very often it is difficult and complicated for them to get citizenship.

As we know, 7% of the Armed Forces come from a Commonwealth background and, because of the issues we see with the complex visa applications and the costs, often these are the people who slip through the net. The first thing that they will be asked if they go for a job is, "Do you have the right to work in the UK?" If they go for medical treatment, they are often put off because of the cost to the NHS, because they are not classed as citizens, as we have seen with recent cases that have hit the press, where a veteran with a brain tumour is looking at costs of almost £30,000 to have treatment, despite fighting in Iraq in two war zones.

So, I think the covenant could go a lot further in protecting these veterans and that it has, by and large, missed out a wide collective of veterans in the way that it has been written. I would like to see immigration added into the Bill, because I think that is an important point that has been missed.

Q207 **Stephen Morgan:** Can you give some specific examples of how the Commonwealth visa fee has impacted on veterans?

**David McMullen:** Sadly, I could speak to you all day about this. I appreciate that we are pushed for time, but I will give a couple of cases to highlight the point. We have a Commonwealth veteran who served in Germany, was brought back to the UK and 12 months later was made redundant or told that his services were no longer required. He went to the local council to get help with housing, because he was kicked out of Army accommodation, and he was told that they couldn't help, because he had no long-term connection with the area. He was forced to live in his car in a Tesco's car park with his wife and two children, effectively living on handouts from Tesco staff, who took pity on him. That is a disgraceful story, and it is a blot on us as a country that any veteran should be in that position.

We also have people who, unfortunately, because of the visa fees, have had to return to their country of origin, where, very often, mental health services aren't at the level that they are in the UK. If we take Fiji as an example, there is one hospital that specialises in mental health, which can be nearly a four-hour drive away from people if they are at the opposite end of the island. We have an example of a veteran who is effectively living in what can only be described as a chicken shed—a corrugated



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building—half of which has been damaged by the recent storms. They are desperately in need of mental health treatment but can't get it, because it is so far away and transport links are so poor. That person should be in the UK and should be getting fixed and repaired by the country that damaged him by sending him on operations.

**Q208 Stephen Morgan:** Thank you for those really powerful examples. With that in mind, do you think that the high visa fees announced are a breach of the Covenant?

**David McMullen:** Absolutely, and I have been on record as saying that the visa fees are completely wrong. It is not in the essence of the Armed Forces Covenant, which specifically says that it will understand that those "who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve". That definitely has not happened.

To expect a family of four to spend nearly £10,000 to remain in the UK is unreasonable. The limits on earnings for bringing people in are disgraceful. A recruit earns less than £16,000; a private earns just over £20,000. To apply for a spouse to join you in the country, you have to earn at least £18,600, so that immediately rules out a recruit from having that family network. You then have to have £3,800 for your first child and an extra £2,400 for an additional child. When we look at that, you would need to be a lance corporal to have your family and support network here in the UK with you, so that massively prices out Commonwealth soldiers, who traditionally don't progress through the ranks as quickly as British-born nationals.

**Q209 Stephen Morgan:** Based on your previous answers, David, you are suggesting that immigration should be a key part of the Bill. What other actions do you think the Government should take?

**David McMullen:** I served in Afghanistan with Commonwealth soldiers. They fought alongside me in exactly the same way as British nationals and I don't see why they should be treated any differently, so I think immigration needs to be brought in. The limits on bringing in spouses and children need to be scrapped for veterans. It is very important that we have that network. The answer seems to be that the suggestion is that credit unions will fill the gap, which is not something that we have covered as yet, but when you look at small loans from them, we are talking 13% at times to cover the cost. Primarily, that is just a plaster over the issue and they should not be charged these fees. What I would like to see is the fees either scrapped or dramatically reduced. We campaigned to ask for an automatic indefinite leave to remain after four years and citizenship after five years.

The fees have massively increased since they were introduced in 2003, from what was then £150, up to £2,389. There used to be another way of establishing a visa, which was over a longer period, where you could spend £1,500 every two and a half years, but the issue with that is that the introduction of the health surcharge has made it unrealistic. The only



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route people are forced down now is indefinite leave to remain and they very often can't afford to do that. Some people are having to get second jobs if they want to bring family members over or are just simply priced out of being able to stay in the UK.

**Chair:** Mr McMullen, your evidence is very persuasive. I just want to draw to your attention and that of the wider panel to the fact that this issue is subject to consultation as we speak, in both the Home Office and the MoD. I am sure we will be hearing more about it in due course.

Q210 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Thank you to all the witnesses. This is a fascinating session. My question is to everybody. Should protected characteristics be included in the statutory guidance on applying due regard?

**Caroline Paige:** Yes, I think they should. There is no mention of protected characteristics—it is not mentioned in the covenant at all. If you look at the covenant, there is no mention of diversity inclusion at all. Fighting with Pride was delighted to work with SSAFA earlier this year and late last year, and with Cobseo—the Confederation of Service Charities—to make an observation in the annual report to the covenant that diversity and inclusion was not included and there was no mention whatsoever of protected characteristics.

That is all very well and great—the covenant is a promise to all in the military family, that they deserve our respect and support and fair treatment, and demonstrates the value of their contribution—but people can sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and have that logo on their website, saying that they support the Armed Forces Covenant, but actually they may have values that differ from the modern military, in terms of how they regard veterans who have protected characteristics. So I think they should be.

Q211 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** That leads me nicely into my next question. What metrics could be used to measure how bodies take these characteristics into account when they are applying the covenant?

**Caroline Paige:** There needs to be some kind of accountability, for sure. When organisations request or ask to be signatories to the covenant, there should be some kind of look at how an organisation values veterans—or all people—with protected characteristics. That should be part of the process of allowing an organisation to sign up to say it is a member of the Armed Forces Covenant.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** I can see you nodding, David. Do you have anything to add from your perspective?

**David McMullen:** I completely share my fellow panel member's views. Fighting discrimination should be a foundation of anything we do in any organisation, but especially in the Armed Forces. Across the board with all the protected characteristics, we should be doing our utmost to stamp out any sort of discrimination. We have heard from other panel members today about the issues with sexual assaults and things like that, and that really has no place in the Armed Forces.



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**Tonia Antoniazzi:** Diane?

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** I will keep my answers short—I have moved rooms, but they have decided to drill on the road right outside, so I apologise.

I think women feel the same, too. They often feel invisible, particularly in the veterans sector. Therefore, I believe that the protected characteristics need to be enshrined in the system.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** I don't want to leave you out, Craig.

**Craig Jones:** I can only agree. The values that we expect for our veterans and the organisations that support them need to be the values of our modern-day Armed Forces, and we can do that only if we include protected characteristics.

**Chair:** We come now to our final prescribed question. After that, we have an open floor for all of you to ask anything you wish. Let's go to Martin Docherty-Hughes.

Q212 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** The prescribed question is more or less about whether anything is missing from the Bill, but I would like to ask about one more specific element. We talked about the values-led approach and the lived experience. If you were a member of any other Department of Government, you would have a representative body that would be seeking agreement through organisation and co-operation with the heads of Government. Can I ask you all whether you think it is now about time that we follow the vast majority of our NATO allies and have a formal, independent Armed Forces representative body in which the ranks can have a vocal and clear way of engaging with the MoD structure? Diane, can I come first to you?

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** Again, I will keep my answers short, courtesy of the drilling.

Absolutely. It is my main point, and it is a complete hole in the Bill at the moment that we do not see any comment about an independent representative body. It was mentioned as a keystone part of the Wigston report, and the CDS himself said he thought that, due to the laddish culture and problems with leadership, we should go further and make it fully independent. I absolutely think we need to move forward and enshrine this in the Armed Forces Bill, and not wait another five years.

**David McMullen:** Yes. Although I am here on behalf of Citizenship 4 Soldiers, I do a lot of trade union work, so I see the benefits of advocacy and independent support for my members on a daily basis when I deal with cases. To have an independent body is beneficial in two ways. It will help people, when they need advice and support, that they will be getting independent advice that they can trust, and it will be primarily looking after their agenda. But it also allows for an independent feedback mechanism to feed back. Too often in the Army you see examples where a brigadier is flown in and a lesson has already been drafted, where you answer the questions and everyone thinks that everything is going very well. People are too scared to put their head above the parapet to raise



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concerns, injustices or wrongs, whereas some kind of body would be independent, and they could effectively raise it through there with anonymity. That would be very beneficial to the Armed Forces, to get a true perspective on what the issues are.

**Craig Jones:** Having such a representative body is something that has been tried in many countries overseas with great success. What we have heard this morning is that, for individuals who are from minorities or who have protected characteristics, there have been historical hurts. There are ongoing situations, and some degree of independence and independent support would clearly be of benefit. So yes, we would support that.

**Caroline Paige:** I agree, but I also think that any independent body should have lived experience within that body, so that each of the communities is properly represented.

Q213 **Chair:** I cannot see many hands up. Does the Committee have any more questions? I will ask one myself. Do you feel that the MoD has come a long way in tackling diversity and inclusion? Is it now a fair employer?

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** I will happily take that question while it is quiet outside. I believe that progress has stalled and that although we have diversity and inclusion on paper, we do not actually have it in reality. That is my concern. I stepped forward because I think we are perhaps going backwards in terms of inclusion. A lot of words are being said but there are not many deeds. Something like the independent defence authority would be an advocate of that. We would finally see some action and some change, and that might start moving the dial forward. At the moment, in my view, we do not have actual activity on diversity or inclusion in the Armed Forces.

**David McMullen:** I think the Army has come a long way. In the 13 years that I was a member of the Armed Forces, I saw some changes, but there is still a long way to go. The hardest thing to change in any organisation is always one of culture. While you can put in rules and regulations, they really need to be embedded. We have seen only this week, with local press coverage of issues, that hazing and things like that are still going on. That shows that the issues are still there and there are massive problems. For Commonwealth soldiers, in particular—as my chosen speciality today—there are issues with how they are treated. The removal of the fees would be a very good way of sending out a message in that area that we are very serious about changing those injustices. I am sure the other panel members' campaigns on righting those injustices would do so as well.

**Caroline Paige:** Absolutely. The forces have changed dramatically. Both Craig and I served in the Armed Forces for quite some time before the ban was lifted, and then there was a period when the Armed Forces had to adjust, make the realisation that diversity was a power, and become inclusive, and they have. In the last 10 years or so, the military has been significantly better than it was for the veterans we have been speaking about today. It is really important that we remember that the military family does include those veterans. Everybody looks at the military and



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says how good it is and, in a way, that damages those veterans because they see what they have lost and what could have been, and nobody is giving them the respect that is due.

The military is brilliant, and we are very proud of it. It is not perfect by any means—there are still matters within the military regarding the LGBT+ community that are a work in progress, and I know that the military is determined to put right all the things that are still being experienced by our service personnel—but yes, it is a much better place.

**Craig Jones:** Fighting with Pride works really closely with the LGBT+ forums in the Armed Forces—Royal Navy Compass, the RAF LGBT+ Freedom Network, and the Army's LGBT+ forum—so we are well connected to folks on the ground. We know that they feel that they are supported at every level of command—that is really important. There will always be incidences where things go wrong. What we need to know is that people feel confident about stepping forward.

We think one of the achievements of the last 20 years has been that, increasingly, people feel able to step forward, but that is not a comprehensive blanket: work still needs to go on and we need to improve. What Caroline and I, and the team at Fighting with Pride, are concerned about is that the situation for LGBT+ veterans is very different, and in the 21 years since the lifting of the ban, very little has been done for a group of people who, frankly, deserve better.

**Chair:** For the final question, we come to Sharon Hodgson.

Q214 **Mrs Hodgson:** Your final remarks were powerful to listen to. In the two sessions prior to this, we were looking primarily at the service complaints system and the service justice system. Could you briefly tell the Committee how these two systems impact on the groups that you primarily work with?

**David McMullen:** The complaint process has clear issues and Commonwealth soldiers often struggle to raise any objections, because they have hanging over them the issue that, if they are removed, they could be sent home. They always have that fear that if they put their head above the parapet and put in a complaint or raise a concern, they are in a precarious situation with their immigration status and visa requirements. We feel that they are unfairly marginalised in that system. Having worked with disciplinary and grievance processes in the civilian arena, I find the length of time it takes for service redresses to go ahead to be shocking. If that was in the civilian world, trade unions would be jumping up and down—and rightly so—so there is a lot of work to be done.

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** We have seen that for bullying, assault and sexual issues, women are disproportionately represented in the service complaints system. The problems of the system are common to all, but women are particularly disproportionately represented, and they were let down and felt offended by the fact that, as I think Nicola Williams said, only one of the Wigston review's 36 recommendations to tackle inappropriate



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behaviour has been enacted, and all others have been, effectively, shelved. That has been a particular hurt for women.

**Caroline Paige:** I think LGBT+ personnel are probably underrepresented in the service complaints process for all sorts of reasons, not least of which—this is probably quite common to most service personnel—the worry that by complaining you are seen as somebody who is not part of the unit, or your promotion prospects or postings are going to be affected, or you are going to be discriminated against for some reason. Subtly, it does not have to be something that is very obvious.

The service complaints are the tip of the iceberg. For all the complaints that we do see, there will be lots and lots that we do not—people do not get there. Therefore, the repair needs to be done before it gets to that. Before we get to the service complaints, we need to address all the things that are causing the complaints.

**Craig Jones:** Caroline makes a really important point about the likelihood of underrepresentation of the LGBT+ community, not least because in that process there might be the perception of outing yourself. There are some real challenges around that and they need to be addressed. There is insufficient monitoring of LGBT+ personnel in the Armed Forces. I completely accept that there are challenges to that, but the fact that there are challenges does not mean that we do not try our hardest.

On JPA, it is our understanding that 29% of individuals have declared a sexual orientation. People have the choice on JPA as to whether they declare it or not, but it would be a good idea to encourage people to declare, or to create an environment in which people feel able to do that, because it will help us in the future to find out what we do not know. So, we support more monitoring.

Q215 **Mrs Hodgson:** How much is the chain of command reporting a problem in all of this?

**Craig Jones:** It is difficult to answer because I am not closely enough connected to the serving Armed Forces.

**Lt Col Diane Allen:** I would like to pick that up. The chain of command is a significant issue and a reported common theme is coercive behaviour. I mentioned to Sarah Atherton that, at the chain of command level, when an individual reports it, they are encouraged not to report it. There is coercive behaviour and I firmly believe that we need to remove the service complaints system away from the chain of command.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Excellent. Thank you so much, everyone.

**Chair:** A really fascinating session. May I formally thank our four witnesses—Lieutenant Colonel Diane Allen, Caroline Paige, Craig Jones and David McMullen—for your time this morning? It is most appreciated.