

## Written evidence submitted by Diane Allen, Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired)

### House of Commons Defence Select Committee – Women in the Armed Forces

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#### My Background and Overview

After announcing on Sky News in May 2020<sup>1</sup> that it was time for the armed forces to have its own #MeToo moment, I was still surprised by how many individuals contacted me to share their stories. **163** directly and many more via chat-room comments and charity groups. I subsequently told my story – of a woman's experience of serving in the armed forces (from the 1980s, full-time and then part-time until 2020) in my book, '*Forewarned*<sup>2</sup>', but I also agreed to write up the stories and represent this cohort, many who preferred or needed to remain anonymous. I was delighted when Sarah Atherton MP announced an inquiry into the lived experiences of women in the armed forces.

The need for an inquiry has been increasing since the mid-1990s when cultural progress in the military stalled<sup>3</sup>. Though roles did open to women, attitudes did not and seemed to regress in some areas. Diversity in the armed forces slightly improved; but inclusion did not. Many who contacted me described a worsening culture, exacerbated by sclerotic, obstructive systems – most notably the lack of effective HR, a failed and brutal complaints process and the negative attitude of senior leaders. The reluctance of armed forces leadership to modernise (despite growing evidence of the level of inappropriate and allegedly unlawful behaviours) and the growing awareness of inequalities for women, for example, the Weinstein #MeToo movement of 2017, led to several parliamentary inquiries (listed in the final annex) and the Wigston review of 2019, which provided a good list of recommendations to address the problems. There was acceptance by the MOD of the cultural failures relating to women and other military minorities and women and many men working in the armed forces breathed a sigh of relief. This was a report that could not be ignored.

And yet it was.

The MOD followed their now standard approach of acknowledging shortcomings with words, promising change, and then doing nothing (or very minor cosmetic changes). The most recent, egregious act is the 'independent' assessment of the response to the Wigston review by Danuta Grey<sup>4</sup>. This report, appallingly un-referenced and gaining its assessment of progress only from a handful of internal MOD sources – has been used as an excuse by MOD leadership, to ignore the need for significant systemic and cultural change yet again.

This report is submitted as evidence for the inquiry. It summarises the stories of all the women who contacted me. It is not my intention to repeat all the recommendations of the useful Wigston report (there were some blind spots in his report as it focused only on internal solutions and serving personnel), but it did cover around 90% of the requirements needed for change to happen, including reviewing other global military solutions. It also started with this key-stone recommendation, which I commend:

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<sup>1</sup> Sky News announcement. ['British Army needs its #MeToo moment', says former senior female officer | UK News | Sky News](#)

<sup>2</sup> Published in July 2020. [Forewarned: Tales of a Woman at War ... with the Military System eBook: Allen, Diane: Amazon.co.uk: Kindle Store](#)

<sup>3</sup> Difficult to analyse why definitively – change in societal attitudes (porn/degradation of women), but also a shrinking military no longer retaining its star performers and reliant on a lower quality leadership, while lacking a clear role and public support – appear to be the main causes.

<sup>4</sup> The shameful Danuta Grey report of Dec 2020 is a toxic reminder of the MOD's desire to inspect its own performance, with little evidence, engagement or facts included beyond a small internal echo chamber, trumpeting very minor successes, while ignoring all the key-stone recommendations.

***'Ultimately, it (reform of the armed forces response to inappropriate behaviours) is about the determination of leaders to change the culture; everything else hangs off that'.***

He is right. In the decades I have served, there is no evidence from our military forces or from any other allied force, that change will occur without leadership determination. Australia, Canada (and the US to some extent) have now started to demonstrate that leadership determination. But most have needed to be nudged by their governments to do so.

*The UK MOD should be ashamed that its service men (and especially women and other military minorities) lack representation or rights afforded to other public sector workers. But it isn't - military leaders seem content to replace service personnel if they become vulnerable or file a grievance, rather than invest in managing their needs. Retention has become a lost art; people are no longer the forces primary asset; process is.*

*After decades of inactivity, the assumption must now be that **parliament will need to mandate the necessary changes** - to bring the MOD in line with other public bodies: it will need the formation of an independent defence authority, linked to a credible HR system; and consequences for military leadership if they fail to live up to their stated values & standards – addressing these areas would make a huge difference to serving men and women.*

I doubt my report will add many new findings, but I believe it can add a human face and volume to the common themes already laid out by Wigston, the Service Complaints Ombudsman herself<sup>5</sup>, various media stories, HCDSC reports, and armed forces continuous attitude surveys. And I believe it also highlights several breaches of the Equality Act, where MOD is not exempt:

- Failure to modernise systems, to offer equality of opportunity
- Chain of Command interference into reporting complaints
- Harassment of victims and potential witnesses

There is evidence **of misconduct in public office** – Chief of Defence People has been informed by his own ombudsman of 'wilful intent to find loopholes to sidestep dealing with injustice,' yet has done nothing. And senior legal leadership in the armed forces actively deny that the service complaints system is a legal process yet uses teams of lawyers to defend the MOD leadership, while leaving its people un-represented. Perhaps the most damaging of the breaches is the betrayal my senior military leaders, who inform their chains of command not to bring them bad news and insist that their career prospects are dependent on reducing the number of complaints that are processed. Even when evidence is shared that this standard is achieved by coercing individuals to withdraw complaints or career fouling witnesses, senior leaders turn a blind eye to this practice.

Though this report focuses on the serving community, it also points out how this affects the veterans' sector as well – the current protocol of appointing retired senior military officers to senior veteran charity or setting up politically narrow veterans' offices such as the Office for Veterans' Affairs are hindering change. These organisations must become more diverse and representative of the communities they serve, independent of party politics and MOD influence.

## **Report Layout**

The report is a summary of the 163 stories, plus my own experiences. For ease, the report is broken down into:

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<sup>5</sup> Who has written herself for the last 5 years that the system is 'ineffective,

- Findings, answering the questions
- Recommendations
- Supporting Material – annexes:
  - a. Common themes
  - b. Quotations from the Forewarned research
  - c. References and timelines

The more detailed database I hold of individual case stories is available to parliament only. Most stories are anonymised unless express consent has been given to include names.

*30 January 2021*

## KEY FINDINGS AND COMMON THEMES

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There are five common themes identified in nearly all the stories. Combined, these issues create the hostile environment for any who find themselves vulnerable or who seek to challenge poor behaviours. The system has corrupted to the point where it now bullies good service people to keep quiet – and rewards slow and obstructive management of those who do dare to speak up. It is sclerotic, archaic and designed only to manage the careers of a small number of white males. Wigston described it as a negative ‘pack mentality’ among privileged white males, out of touch with a modern workforce. This toxic environment empowers two destructive groupings: the small, but deeply damaging cohort who abuse their power; and a large ‘frozen middle’ of service personnel turning a blind eye to bad behaviour rather than risk career damage by dealing with it. They slavishly follow process for fear of taking an independent decision that might be deemed incorrect. This consequence – of threat to careers to any who speak up was a common theme in nearly all the case reports. It stops service personnel from raising a good idea, reporting equipment issues, but also from standing up for a colleague who is being bullied, harassed or sexually assaulted. A system that prevents an individual from reporting an incident without risk of getting punished or shunned creates deep injustice.

### **Question1: Do female service personnel face unique and/ or additional challenges in the armed forces?**

Service personnel generally are facing lack of representation and moral leadership. The issues more commonly affect women, but they affect all service personnel. Without addressing the following 5 main issues, the armed forces will continue to stagnate – and women will continue to disproportionately suffer.

#### Affecting all those Serving

1. **An absence of a professional HR system that is independent of the chain of command.** The current system requires military personnel, responsible to their chain of command to manage often complex people issues- military personnel are rarely well trained in HR and their careers are affected if they allow ‘people issues’ to reach the ears of their senior leadership.
2. **A failed complaints system, with no independent representation** – though purporting to be an HR process, the SC process is heavily legally controlled - yet only offers legal advice to MOD leadership (not to service personnel as individuals). Women are over-represented in this system because, as a minority, they face greater challenges, but the failure of the system is common to all. The unwillingness of leadership to address grievances without interference is at the heart of toxic outcomes. It encourages vexatious threats to enact this lengthy and ineffective process and causes good service personnel to leave early.
3. **An un-necessarily large military justice system** – most service justice roles could be delegated to civilian bodies. There is no need to continue to fund the volume of military police and military lawyers. Military Police lack the skills & the impartiality to offer justice; military lawyers have the skills, but not the impartiality.
4. **Secretive and biased promotion and career management system**, including male-centric job descriptions and annual appraisals designed to favour infantry men, particularly those with public school backgrounds. Many women and some men leave once they realise they will not be offered the career prospects of more mediocre, but ‘connected’ men.

5. A **culture of expected silence** – the coercion by many in leadership roles breaches equalities legislation. Nearly all the women who came forward reported being bullied and coerced into changing their stories or withdrawing a complaint. This included threats of career fouts, refusal to allow discharge if sexual harassment was reported and emotional blackmail to persuade women that they were ‘letting the side down’ if they complained. Tolerance of ‘old school’ (sexist) behaviours was rife with leaders failing to call out misogyny and walking on by rather than address issues. There were repeated stories of the chain of command interfering in investigations and harassing both victims and witnesses.

#### **Specific to Women**

- Equipment issues – both personal clothing and military systems were reported as being designed for the average male, with limited ability to request female-designed equipment.
- Training issues - training programmes were designed with men in mind – leaving women to adapt- causing greater risk of injury and reduced performance
- Medical issues - medical rehabilitation programmes and access to services, designed for men.

#### **Q: What are the issues faced by women veterans once they have left the services? Are the needs of female veterans currently met by the available veteran services?**

The short answer is ‘no’ – women veterans often feel invisible and report that resources are targeted at male veterans.

- **Transition services designed for men** – evidence shows that the senior appointments in the large service charities are gifted to retired male senior officers. This is ‘jobs for the boys’. Not only are they well-remunerated positions, but by following this path – the old school male culture becomes embedded in these organisations. Many women have said that their experiences of veteran’s charities are no better than when serving.
- **Medical Discharge** – though UK has conducted little research, evidence from broader 5 Eyes militaries is that women face different medical challenges – both mentally and physically, yet are offered the same medical treatment. Stories from women suggest that the process of medical discharge is demeaning, unjust and untimely for most veterans and that women suffer disproportionate harm when moving from military support systems to wider UK medical provision.
- **The AFCS is reported as not fit for purpose**- women have reported feeling invisible and ignored by the AFCS, a problem that is consistently reported by both men & women. The organisation is described as having lost its human touch when assessing the needs of veterans.
- Veterans Organisations accounts show that they **predominantly fund programmes for male veterans**.
- The lack of a redress/complaints system for issues with AFCS is unacceptable - given women are more commonly represented in the complaints system, this lack of redress has greater effect on women.

#### **Question 2: How easy is it for female service personnel to complain? What are the issues encouraging/hindering female personnel from complaining?**

Women are over-represented in the complaints system. They are minority voices in the military and are less well provisioned by military programmes. But the failures of the complaints system are common to all. The issues hindering women particularly from

complaining are often cultural – that they do not want to appear ‘weaker’ or ‘unable to hold their own’ so will often tolerate poor behaviours rather than feel an outsider. There is sufficient evidence from the Ombudsman’s own annual reports that complaining will fail to deliver outcomes, particularly for women – so many leave rather than complain.

In annex a, I have summarised the common reasons given by those 163 women for feeling let down by the complaints system- most of the women did report their experiences; in nearly all cases, their reports were ignored, and they experienced harm by raising the issues. It has not been possible to check and correlate all the facts, so the stories are taken at face value, with common themes highlighted.

#### The statistics

- **163** individuals contacted me directly with stories to tell. Most were uniformed but also civil servants working in defence and family members affected by the experiences of women serving in the military.
- At least **33** are still serving (some have withheld information)
- A further **63** left in last 5 years.
- **3** were parents of serving women.
- **5** were civil servants, working alongside uniformed armed forces
- **130** were from the Army<sup>6</sup>; **31** x RAF and only **2** x RN – this was partly because my initial call out for stories mentioned army only. The range of ranks is more difficult to assess- but generally issues were the same for officers and other ranks with some nuances e.g., sexual favours for promotion only reported by other ranks and class issues were more prevalent in officers.
- Over **75%** of the individuals did report complaints and were fobbed off either through delays or coercion to revoke their complaint.
- Nearly all had been affected by incidents due to their gender during their careers, but most had handled it - usually without support from the chain of command. Only 1 individual contacted me to say she had never experienced adverse incidents and wanted her voice to be heard that she felt there were no issues in the military.
- Several senior female officers did contact me and attempt to influence my future media engagements, to paint a more positive military picture.

Sexual harassment and sexist attitudes are still reported as common. On paper, there is equality- on the ground not so much (particularly where leadership is weak).

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<sup>6</sup> Likely this number is skewed as my initial SkyNews interview called for Army only – an error on my part, corrected later.

**Q: Why do female service personnel choose to leave the armed forces? Are the reasons different to why men leave?**

Both genders are leaving the service early due to poor management of careers, poor handling of grievances and lack of a safe and positive work environment, including poor accommodation and lack of job satisfaction. But women are more likely to leave earlier due to lack of flexibility in career paths and when they notice they are dropping behind male colleagues despite matching their performance levels – the boarding systems do not offer equal opportunities, particularly in mid and later career pathways.

Poor equipment, relentless low-grade sexism and a culture that is less welcoming to women than wider society are all common reasons why women have said they have left.

But also, too many are leaving because they have experienced a toxic incident and have not been taken seriously in raising the issues.

**SUMMARY**

Culture doesn't change by wishing it to happen and it won't change unless senior officers and non-commissioned leaders start to lead by example. The #MilitaryMeToo movement has gained momentum as it seeks to call out predatory behaviours, lack of acknowledgement of the damage caused by military sexual trauma, unwillingness of leaders to challenge endemic sexist attitudes, unequal career prospects, poor equipment for women and poor systems. The most important reason to address these issues now is that progress has stalled and, in many reports, is rated to be regressing. The lack of an independent authority to represent the minority voices is harming military operational effectiveness – and hurting too many women and other military minorities.

**Q: Are the Government and the MOD doing enough to address these challenges? What more could be done? How effective are their strategies/initiatives?**

The MOD seem unwilling to address the challenges – commissioning internal reports, when media and parliamentary scrutiny gets intense; even acknowledging ‘laddish culture’ and failed systems’- but then there is little follow up or change. The MOD strategies are effective in protecting the MOD hierarchy but in all other ways they are failed systems – allowing toxic pockets to thrive and highly trained service personnel to leave early, rather than continue to compromise their values. This then continues into the veterans’ sector.

**Q: What can Government, the MOD and Industry do to address these?**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Wigston recommendations, if enacted, would resolve about 80% of the issues surrounding inappropriate behaviours. The main blind-spot (as it was an internal report) was that although it recommended a defence authority, it needs to go one step further to unlock cultural change in defence. Chief of Defence People (CDP) and Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) have repeatedly failed to enact change – therefore a future defence authority must be fully independent of the chain of command.

Master Recommendation.

**Create an independent defence authority (IDA); an OFSTED for defence- so that both those who serve and who have served in the armed forces are represented. The IDA would also track defence culture and behaviours.**

*There is no evidence globally that expecting defence to monitor, assess and investigate itself will ever work.*

- Governance. The fully independent Defence Authority would report to the HCDSC. Like all other public bodies, it would be empowered to inspect any unit or location. This ‘OFSTED’ for defence would provide the independent oversight.
- It would house the central service complaints teams. Initial research shows it would be no more expensive than the current system. By re-allocating current resources of the SCOAF and investigation processes, it would be created as cost neutral.
- Empower this new complaint system to handle veteran complaints as well.
- It would provide an independent monitoring & alert system, especially for vulnerable locations such as training and overseas establishments – this would include digital monitoring of performance of units.
- It would include a body of trustees- representative of each single service and each ‘interest’ group e.g women, BAME, commonwealth etc
- Replace the ad hoc ‘HR’ untrained military - with a network of professionalised HR support – representing all serving personnel. These HR teams would also be delivered as cost-neutral, by replacing a proportion of military legal personnel – as the complaints process is declared as a HR function, there is no requirement to employ so many legal experts.
- By removing the HR role from Military leaders, this enables them to focus on their military roles (for which they are trained); which would be seen as retention positive by many.
- The military administrative punishment system would also gain HR ‘assurance’ – reducing the ability for it to be used coercively to influence troops to withdraw complaints.
- An HR strand should be available for transitioning & veterans – to interface with AFCS and hold its performance to account.
- The Defence Authority would provide oversight and updating of the careers, promotions & Honour's systems.

- Conduct an annual and independent reviews of V&S training – with actual consequences for breaches.
- Training. Build on the current ‘active bystander’ and minority mentoring systems – extend into training establishments and ensure advocates at all levels
- Values & Standards – enforce 360-degree assessment of leadership – rate leaders based on the views of those serving under them as well as of their bosses.
- Remove the ‘old-school’ exemption’ whereby some ‘old & bold’ are enabled to continue to act inappropriately with impunity.
- Retain a database within military HR- toxic individuals should no longer have their records ‘forgotten’ each time they are posted – an HR system should track behaviours and for repeat toxic behaviours, demotion or removal from service.
- Enable a network of defence research expertise, to work with the IDA to produce useful and independent data. (this recommendation is covered well in the Wigston report, but should be extended to ensure full independence of survey question sets)
- Activate an independent ‘speak up service’- reporting to the IDA. It can be cost effective by scaling up through use of teams of veteran volunteers – trained to understand serving and veteran issues, but not to report issues back to the chain of command.
- Ensure a strict time limit on ‘local management of a complaint’. For the toxic element, there need to be early consequences – small corrections early, as well as demotions and career-ending outcomes if issues persist.
- Enable a ‘fast evaluation team’ of trained investigators to swiftly investigate – evidence from former police officers who have been involved in the complaints system suggests that 90% of grievances could be resolved in weeks, if managed professionally and independently.
- Ensure there are negative consequences for vexatious complaints.
- Reduce the role of military police and service justice systems – hand most roles to the civilian Criminal Justice System, leaving only small military branches. - ensure oversight of this much smaller military criminal justice element within the civil sector and their ombudsman.
- Endorse Military Sexual trauma as a condition - recognise its impact.
- Mentor women who are first into post or in isolated postings.
- Ensure military leaders understand the civil service code better – most of the civil service women who stepped forward mentioned poor treatment by an element of military senior leaders – not endemic but a persistent problem.
- Create a panel to now resolve all legacy complaint cases - cheaper than employing teams of lawyers to continue fighting over minor issues for up to 13 years.
- Raise awareness that some women abuse their power positions as well and the stories of men being abused must not be ignored.

## **Annex a. The Common Themes from the Forewarned Research**

I have grouped these stories into themes:

### Just Plain Wrong

- Reports of rape, poorly investigated, coercion to retract complaints and senior military personnel taking advantage of recruits or juniors.
- Repetitive sexual advances by seniors.
- On tour poor behaviours – being taped in the showers, stealing items of clothing, ‘excessive banter’, actual physical attacks.
- On military camps – being drugged and raped – too many stories, with nearly all saying that they were not taken seriously.
- Relentless sexism- often judged negatively before the individual was known personally.
- Assaulted by senior officers (or instructors)
- Witnessing best friends being set upon by groups of military men – but not daring to report it.
- No access to rehabilitation on return from maternity leave
- Men found in women’s rooms uninvited.
- Initiation ceremonies designed to embarrass women.
- Medicals that involved un-necessary nudity.
- Instructors selecting recruits on ‘looks’ and demanding sexual favours so that they will get through the course.
- Instructors catching students at minor misdemeanours and then expecting sexual favours to turn a blind eye.
- Students failing modules after rejecting sexual advances.
- Confidential information e.g. medical going straight into chain of command and then ‘leaked’ across camps.
- Sex for promotion stories.
- Legal support being only offered to MOD leadership (with a comment it isn’t a legal process)
- ‘Trophies’ for “bagging the women” on camp
- Filming and sharing images
- Being punished for reporting incidents - loss of career, taken off course, moved to lower posting, while transgressor remains.
- Cross examination by attackers; coercion to change stories;
- Having to prove oneself on every tour – while the men didn’t.
- Groped- particularly at functions – then unable to leave camp or get away from perpetrator.
- Annual appraisals changed after an individual becomes a witness or reports an issue.
- SC investigations that lost all my evidence and delayed deliberately.
- Men getting the medals while the women did equal work.
- A hostile complaints system – meaning that majority leave rather than report it.
- Being punished for speaking up – either to complain or to act as witness.
- Senior officers turning a blind eye to bad behaviours.
- Being coerced to change reason for leaving military eg sexism and bullying – that if I didn’t agree to change my reasons for leaving, I would be delayed discharge.

### Anti-belonging

- Issues of bullying for ‘first into post’ - not changed since the 80s.

- Over 95% reported some unwelcome attention, especially at social events, but sometimes during working day.
- Receiving comments that sexism should be tolerated because the individual is 'old school' so women expected to put up with it e.g. an individual who says he doesn't believe any woman should be in military – tolerated by leadership.
- Equipment that is designed only for men.
- Lack of rehabilitation designed for women- particularly post-childbirth, but generally.
- Banter, that is actually bigotry.
- Cognitive dissonance – particularly with younger cohort as military gender standards are lower than 'outside world'
- Being scared to say No for fear of being classed as frigid.
- Patchy representation of 'minority groups' e.g. LGBT+, women, BAME.
- Answering the phone as 'sir'- dress codes for men only, pension letters all addressed to Mr or Sir.

### Brushed under Carpet

- Officers refusing to take forward a woman's complaint because 'you don't want to harm his career, do you.'
- Seniors (officers and other ranks) using their rank to expect young women to have sexual relations.
- Being able to leave a post before a complaint is complete – meaning no action is then taken.
- Weak Leadership including hoping that ignoring toxic behaviours will shift the problem elsewhere. Concealment and coercion to ensure 'not to embarrass unit' – often very aggressive
- Weak and untrained welfare support – well-meaning but often weak padres, welfare officers, E&D officers etc
- Service Complaints system taking 3-10 years and amateurs in charge – tasked only to support the chain of command- the length of time to investigate then damages both accusers and accused – many leave due to the poor treatment during investigations – they never recover due to lack of support.
- Ability to wipe the slate clean if posted (typically every three years) - so all the complaints system has to do is take longer than 3 years. There is no system for monitoring toxic behaviours and individuals.

### Glass Ceiling

- Job descriptions state requirements which only men can achieve (where there is no specific exemption)
- Making it difficult for 'first women into post- we will make you want to leave'
- Being told there was no point in being recommended for promotion as individual would 'probably leave and have babies.'
- Being expected to cover all the work, but watching the men in the group who didn't still getting higher grades – why?
- Having to work twice as hard and longer hours once I had kids to prove to my boss I could still cut it- yet he still thought of me as unreliable – I had no more time off than the men in the office.
- I was expected to prove that I had been discriminated against not just that every woman on the board had been.

- How come every member of the career panel was a man – yet when they selected all men for appointments, they said there was no evidence to support bias. Where did they look?
- Why can't I get feedback on why I wasn't selected for a role? It looks suspiciously like they picked the man even though he was less qualified
- Bosses changing career profiles after a service person's pregnancy.

### Abuse of Power

- Commanding officers coercing individuals to change their reasons for leaving service e.gg expecting them to remove any reference to sexual harassment
- Only MOD getting legal representation, with 100% dissatisfaction documented for any women who have used the SC system
- The SC system taking years to complete – there are no penalties for delays for investigators, but huge penalties for complainants
- Leaders leaking complaints to the whole unit – to embarrass the complainant
- Moving the complainant not the perpetrator, even once the allegations have been proved
- Witnesses coerced during complaints to keep out of it or 'risk their careers'
- All witnesses having to be named to chain of command in reports – no anonymity
- Pestering and inappropriate behaviour from those in power above- some men and women holding power reported as toxic
- Senior leaders sending out weak messages - 'keep your head down'; don't cause trouble and 'don't have any more service complaints'.
- RMP not ideal route as 'don't seem trained for role'
- Being punished for speaking up – either to complain or to act as witness\_

### Other issues – specific to Current Serving

- About 80% who contacted me said sexual harassment was 'still rife'.
- Nearly 100% who did experience problems feel that nothing is done or they are punished if speak up. Strong leadership does hold back toxic behaviour but only change to culture and systems will change it for all
- Biased 'speak out systems' – effectively an intercom to all around\_

### Other issues – specific to Veterans & Transition

- 'the sexual assault in the military caused my PTSD' yet the AFCS does not recognise sexual trauma as a disability.

### Operations and Overseas

- Sexual misconduct is exacerbated by lone working and being 'away from home'
- Leaders at all not trained for this HR grievance role – sometimes just trying to do their 'real job' and try and manage welfare, HR, career etc
- 'endemic sexism' – not every tour, but really common – "it is the wild west with some units"
- Bullied, abused, hounded out – told 'life would be made difficult'

Central to all these issues is the lack of fair representation – it is not as much the incident that causes the service person to suffer long-term, it is the harm caused by their leaders and the complaints system telling them it didn't happen or delaying and mismanaging their grievances. The current complaints system has failed. It was initiated in 2015 to replace a previous failed system and has been reported as 'ineffective, inefficient and unfair by their

own ombudsman since 2015. Currently there are 15 months delays to start the ombudsman process, with some in the system 13 years. Nearly all report lost paperwork, slow and repetitive questions – for most outside the military, it is inconceivable this system exists in a UK public body – and yet it does! The level of bias and unfair system of offering legal support to MOD leadership but not to the complainant is unjust.

**Annex b. Quotations from the Forewarned research- the women who contributed.**

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***I have selected a poignant phrase, from most of the stories – many are now willing to tell their full stories, if more information is useful. Those still serving have been particularly brave and I have therefore hidden more details in these cases.***

*“I was forced out, by men in power positions.”*

*“The bullying and harassment were so bad, I set up my own company to help those suffering bullying & harassment after I left.”*

*“I was University Officer training corps, but I had the same experiences you described (in my Sky News interview)”*

*“I was taped when on overseas operations – the investigation was a farce – I was actually cross-examined by my attacker.”*

*“Your stories really resonate- I was also in xx Unit and experienced the same.”*

*“I PVRd (left the military early) after bullying in 1995 – I was told I had no chance of promotion as I was a woman”*

*“I was one of the first female cadet instructors – bullied, abused and hounded out. I live with the scars.”*

*“I will happily speak up about appalling sexism I experienced”.*

*“I have a story to tell – serving RAF (so scared of consequences)”*

*“I was victim of MOD bullying after birth of my xx, in RAF hospital xx”*

*“When I was vulnerable, the sexist OC (her boss) just hung me out to dry.”*

*“There was an incident on tour (on operations)- I need advice- I was standing up against incorrect actions.”*

*“I was sexually harassed in Germany – I did complain – very poor outcome. I have never made my peace.”*

*“My situation is continuing – I am suffering as a result. Thank you for raising this.”*

*“I was first into xx (military capability area) I have been subjected to abuse.”*

*“22 years’ service, then medical discharge – I just missed the timelines to go to tribunal.”*

*“23 years served – I punched the air in delight when I saw your sky news article – I had a very similar experience.”*

*[male] “I was the victim of sexual allegations – it took 3 years to exonerate – I was then medically discharged as too traumatised to continue.”*

*“I was raped during trade training – accused was found not guilty on a technicality- for the rest of my career I was ‘the slag who cried rape.’*

*(Male) "It wasn't sexual for me, but I was also bullied out for raising issues (that didn't meet service values)"*

*"I was belittled, treated differently, bullied and I left- I raised a service complaint – it wasn't dealt with at all".*

*"I was punished and AGAI'd (military charge for non-criminal activity) just for speaking up – they said they would drop it if I stayed quiet."*

*"I was discharged under the LGBT legislation – I wrote a book and was moved to campaign for LGBT rights".*

*"I am still stuck in the service complaints system – just want to say #MeToo."*

*"I served until recently – I was a corporal – I left because of rampant sexism".*

*"I am writing a paper on xx (sexism) at the moment".*

*"I had a bad tour recently – I have filed a complaint -the impact on me cannot be ignored."*

*"What happened to me was just plain wrong- 22 years, so many incidents- and just brushed under the carpet".*

*"I was a young xx – I was groped and sexually harassed – I only lasted 2 years – I didn't sign up for this."*

*"13 years in the service complaints system after sexual assault – it has made me seriously ill."*

*"I saw endemic sexism – I am leaving early because of it – I faced resentment for setting up a woman's support group".*

*(from a man) – "I have daughters now – the way we used to treat women – I am ashamed- glad to get it off my chest".*

*"We are still facing systemic sexism and sexual misconduct every day – thanks for speaking out".*

*"I was victimised after refusing to cover up a rape – eventually I was medically discharged".*

*"I am the mum of a serving officer – what happened to my daughter beggars belief – the army still has much to learn."*

*"I am writing on behalf of xx – she doesn't want to say more but thank you."*

*"Your story is completely familiar- I served at same time – we had to be better than the men."*

*"I was raped – I don't want to say any more".*

*"I have quite a few stories to tell – years of sexism – some tours on a daily basis".*

*"When in training, boyfriend shared inappropriate photos- he is now a xxxx".*

*Sexual misconduct experienced in Germany – I ended up medically discharged."*

*"I am in the Navy – it isn't just the army this happens."*

*"I left the army in 2018 after endless harassment and bullying – I was selected for promotion but resigned."*

*"When I joined, we were made to have medicals naked and doing PT, I am sure it was wrong – I had so many terrible experiences before I left."*

*"Served 24 years, I was bullied and excluded- I am planning to write a book."*

*"I was profiled for attractiveness- I joined up at 18 – I am waiting for a tribunal response".*

*'Ma'am this is rife'.*

*"I was a young RAF officer for 7 years – I have a few stories to tell."*

*"I left due to bullying and discrimination."*

*"I had similar experiences – I thought I was the only one- I am pleased to see this being raised."*

*"What he did, in front of other officers who did nothing – he was allowed to serve his final 6 months after xxx, to get his pension."*

*"I served 4 years – I was humiliated, drugged and photos were shared without my consent – very sexist – I wish I had known before I joined."*

*"We military women live in a 'no woman's world'."*

*"I am caught up in a service complaint – can't say too much yet."*

*"I am a former civil servant – I had a serious incident where I was called out in public- then coerced not to speak up."*

*"I am not okay – can you help me?" (referred onto a professional)*

*"I served 6 years – I stood up for myself in a badly handled sexual incident in training- it was coercion to have sex."*

*"I am now happy to go to the media – I was drugged and raped in xx as a recruit."*

*"I was raped when in xx (on tour) – medically discharged in 2019- I am now willing to tell my story."*

*"Left RAF in 2009 – humiliated, tried to complain, my valedictory was written by the perpetrator."*

*"I am a civil servant – I experienced endemic sexism."*

*"I am a military spouse – struggling with domestic abuse – don't know where to turn" (referred to professional)*

*(Male) "I was sexually assaulted – it isn't just women."*

*"I left in 2014- I was targeted when I joined up."*

*"I left in 2019- I was repulsed by cowardice of senior officers. This is still rife".*

*"Sexually harassed at 19 years old – Military police involved – perpetrator was promoted and posted."*

*"I was the first woman into xxxx. I have lots of stories – your books sound familiar."*

*"Early 2000s – sexual degradation – initiations on operational tours."*

*"I experienced sexual bullying and discrimination at a senior level – I was made redundant for standing up to them."*

*"I am still serving – I experienced recent sexism on a tour – it has changed my desire to serve- it really needs to change."*

*"I am a relative of someone serving – your story sounds familiar."*

*"I have various stories to tell – I served 12 years- it isn't right what's going on."*

*"I experienced endemic sexism from junior officer onwards- keen to see it change."*

*"I was one of the first females in the xxx – happy to share some things that destroyed me."*

*"I am a serving warrant officer who tried to stand up for some younger women who were being abused – I was penalised for doing so."*

*"The veterans sector is no better – ongoing sexism, serial harassment, no confidentiality."*

*"When I left I put sexual harassment and discrimination down as my reason for leaving."*

*"I left in 2020 after 20+ years – I watched deeply average men get promoted and I was never welcomed into teams- the inability to change seems deliberate."*

*"I was raped as a young airwoman – no-one helped – if I promoted, everyone said it was because you slept with someone- it is better as an officer, but there is still abuse."*

*"I experienced a serious sexual assault overseas- I am now enduring the service complaint system."*

*"Well done for raising this – 100 % behind you."*

*"I resigned in 2017 – after sexual assault – now PTSD- I can share many incidents."*

*"I reported my experiences previously to the defence select committee- an awful miscarriage of justice."*

*"Late entry officer – I just missed out taking my experiences to tribunal."*

*"Left in 2011- experienced harassment, discrimination and sexual assault."*

*"Served 12 years – I have some stories to tell."*

*"It was bad enough I decided to do a MSc in psychology."*

*"I left the RAF regulars after endemic sexism and sexual bullying."*

*"A colonel assaulted me – put his hand under my dress".*

*"I have a few stories to share."*

*"I would like to contribute – I have stories from private to senior roles."*

*"My career is over now- I feel I can't stay now but I can help others."*

*"Good luck – there is a lot good about the military but much that needs to change."*

*"26 years – the values and standards is just going through the motions- no buy in from senior leaders"*

*"I wish to remain anonymous, but #Metoo"*

*"My daughter is in the army – her friend was raped by xx men in barrack"s*

*"It isn't just men – I witnessed women who bullied and got away with it – it all just gets brushed under the carpet"*

*"I gave the reason for leaving as sexual harassment – I was told if I didn't change it, I wouldn't be allowed to leave for years – so I changed it just to escape."*

*"When I commanded, I couldn't believe what my superiors were telling me I had to do, to discredit a complainant. She never stood a chance."*

*"I was told there was no point considering me for promotion, I would only leave soon and have babies – I had never said that was my plan at all."*

*"I got tired of proving myself every time I arrived in a new post – the men weren't having to do that."*

*"My bosses thought I was faking and found a way to get my medical records without my consent – when they found out I had a xx (serious medical condition), they never apologised".*

*"My OC (line manager) undermined me in front of my soldiers."*

*"I was groped in the bar every time I went in- when I stopped going, I was called 'frigid.'"*

*"When I raised a complaint, the witnesses said they couldn't give a statement or it might affect their careers – they were very apologetic, but the military police then said there was insufficient evidence."*

*"When we were on tour, we found out some of the men were stealing our underwear and posting pictures of it around the camp- we reported it and were told just to let it go – and suddenly everyone knew we had made a complaint and we were frozen out."*

*"When on tour, I did most of the work and was praised and told I needed to do extra shifts as xx (man) wasn't as capable – but he got the medal and the promotion- why?"*

*"It is only a year ago I arrived in a new posting and one of the long-serving warrant officers just said in front of everyone in the office that he hoped I didn't mind, but he could never work for a woman – he had never even met me. And no-one did anything about it."*

*"They changed the initiation rituals when women joined – suddenly we all had to take off our shirt and let others rub our chests."*

*"My CO (boss) only used to let me instruct when there were visitors – the rest of the time he said it was better that 'real officers' did the instructing- I knew what he meant."*

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### **Annex c – the Timeline and References:**

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Women and LGBT discrimination – though governmental policy, it was seen as enforced in a very heavy-handed way by MOD – leaving many legacy cases. MOD is now working with the LGBT community groups to evaluate reparations (the same is needed for women's legacy issues)

Class actions taken out by women who left on pregnancy, in the 90s.

**1995- 2002** . Death of 4 Recruits at DeepCut Barracks, triggering family campaign for justice, where MOD eventually admitted fault.

**2006** – the subsequent Blake review criticises army training citing harassment discrimination and oppressive behaviour

**2016** – subsequent inquests confirm Deepcut deaths were all suicide, but ongoing reports of malevolent culture – for women, reports continue of rape/sexual harassment after 1990s, when women started training alongside the men. [The malevolent culture at Deepcut barracks - BBC News](#)

**2019**. HCDSC Investigations, 'Fairness without Fear' [Fairness without Fear: Work of the Service Complaints Ombudsman: Government Response to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19 - Defence Committee - House of Commons \(parliament.uk\)](#) In 2018-2019, all SCOAF requests were deferred for 15 months to try and clear the backlog.

**July 2019** – The Wigston Report, after repeated instances of inappropriate and allegedly unlawful behaviours. [Wigston Review into inappropriate behaviours - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

**2019**- Forward Assist Report on Military Sexual Trauma - Paula Edwards is submitting this report separately

**August 2020** – Service Chiefs respond to #MilitaryMeToo and BLM movement, declaring a No Mission Fail.

**July 2020** – Sarah Atherton MP questions CDS – who admits to a laddish culture and announces a review on progress.

**Dec 2020** - Danuta Grey report published quietly and late – does not go as far as Wigston and widely condemned as an insider's review, commending very totemic efforts to date.

**Additional evidence.**

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Annual reports

**2009 Haddon-Cave Inquiry** into loss of RAF Nimrod, 2006 'a failure of leadership, culture and priorities'. [THE NIMROD REVIEW An independent review into the broader issues surrounding the loss of the RAF Nimrod MR2 Aircraft XV230 in Afghanistan in 2006 HC 1025 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

**2016-2020 SCOAF reports** [Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces Annual Report 2019 published | RAF Families Federation \(raf-ff.org.uk\)](#) - consistently cite the need for full structural change. On her retirement from post, Nicola Williams is interviewed by Sarah Atherton MP and admits ongoing failings.

MOD Continuous Attitude Surveys - continue to show low female satisfaction with the ability to raise issues