

Written evidence submitted by the Ministry of Defence

HCDC HEARING – MOD ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

I am writing with regard to the hearing held on 8 December relating to the MOD's 2019/20 Annual Report and Accounts. As you will recall, I undertook to provide further information on a number of the issues discussed and these are addressed in the Annex to this letter.

I trust the responses address the Committee's queries on these matters.

STEPHEN LOVEGROVE

11 March 2021

Follow up Questions from House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC) on the MOD Annual Report and Accounts (ARAc) 19/20 held on 8 December 2020

Q12 Sarah Atherton: Just a very quick one, please. You mentioned Danuta Gray's review of the Wigston review. Can you give me a date for when we are likely to see that document?

MOD Response:

The report was formally published on 8 December 2020 and can be accessed via the following link: [Unacceptable Behaviours Progress Review 2020](#)

Q22 Richard Drax: Air Marshal, what figures are we talking about for running the estate—was it 400,000 hectares, or something like that?

Air Marshal Knighton: Forgive me; I do not have the land mass numbers right in front of me, but they are published routinely and I am very happy to write to you with an answer to that question.

MOD Response:

The following summarises the Departments land mass footprint in the UK: 432,500 hectares (ha): land and foreshore the MOD owns or has access rights to, of which 225,800 ha is directly owned (209,000 ha) or leased (16,800 ha) by the MOD

Q51 Chair: Apologies, then—you are confirming that we are now purchasing Ajax and Boxer? That is not what we heard before.

Air Marshal Knighton: That is correct, Chair—we are purchasing Ajax and Boxer. We have been through the full business case and that is the position we set out to the Committee when we came to see you recently.

Chair: Okay—I will give you licence to come back and just confirm that. That is not what the Minister has confirmed to us quite recently but thank you for that.

MOD Response: We have reviewed the transcript from the HCDC hearing “Progress in delivering the British Army’s armoured vehicle capability” from 20-Oct and noted that the answer given was consistent with the position presented by Min-DP in the earlier hearing. The following extract from the Oct hearing relates:

“Jeremy Quin: Chair, you will appreciate that, in theory, every single capability is subject to the IR, but what Mr Bushell was saying is absolutely right. Ajax is under contract and at an advanced stage. Boxer is under contract, and we have firm delivery dates.”

Q69 Martin Docherty-Hughes: So there's a major public health risk, and you don't have an opinion on it.

Sir Stephen Lovegrove: You asked me whether or not I had a view as to whether or not the outbreak in Faslane had contributed to a wider outbreak of the disease in that local area, and I'm afraid that I do not have a view on that. That is a scientific question which I am not qualified to answer.

Q70 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Would it be possible for the Department to get a view on it, and maybe inform the Committee in writing?

Sir Stephen Lovegrove: We will. We will liaise with the appropriate health and local authorities, who will be the ones who would give us that answer. We certainly wouldn't be

doing that analysis within the Department. We would be providing information such as they wanted. We will do our best.

MOD Response:

The outbreak at HMNB Clyde has been contained. NHS Highland, Health Protection Scotland and Scottish Government officials were all engaged in discussions of the positive cases reported and the requirement for isolation of close contacts, who have now returned to work. They are confident that the outbreak was not indicative of wider community transmission.

Q76 Derek Twigg: But you are responsible for the Armed Forces—the MoD—so could you write to us and let us know how many personnel will not be able to spend their Christmas this year with their families, particularly given their contribution to the covid outbreak?

MOD Response:

This Christmas period saw 7,717 Defence personnel deployed on 39 operations and across 46 countries. 2,950 of those were deployed within the UK in support of Winter Operations.

A further c40,000 Defence personnel were held at very high readiness to deploy to respond to crises at home and overseas on any given day. Of this, c16,000 personnel will be on less than 48 hours' notice to move over Christmas, with an additional 24,000 at less than 10 days' notice. 11,050 of these remain at very high readiness for UK Winter Operations.

Q76 Derek Twigg My second question is about the Gurkhas. The Gurkhas have made a significant contribution to the Armed Forces for many years, yet I have started to get former Gurkhas and Gurkhas' families contacting me to say that they believe there is a real problem with their pensions. You will recall that in 2008, the Gurkhas were made an offer to transfer to the Armed Forces pension scheme, but there seems to be an issue about the transfer from the previous scheme into the Armed Forces scheme. What are you doing to address those concerns that the Gurkhas and their families have brought up?

MOD Response:

The aim of the Gurkha Offer To Transfer (GOTT) was to provide terms and conditions for Gurkhas that were equal to their British counterparts and this has been supported by the decisions of the Courts. The MOD is required to ensure that their pensions are correct at the point of transfer. In the cases where incorrect calculations have been highlighted, these have been rectified. No discrimination on grounds of nationality or age has been successfully challenged.

Any decision to transfer from the Gurkha Pension Scheme to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) is irrevocable. The individual is no longer a member of the Gurkha Pension Scheme and, once transferred at the appropriate rate, the member's pension is treated as an AFPS75 pension and subject to the same conditions as other members of the scheme.

The matter of not making retrospective changes to pension arrangements has been covered extensively. We do not believe there are any systemic issues related to Gurkhas moving to AFPS. MOD has followed the procedures as per the GOTT policy. The MOD's position regarding GOTT legal basis and its terms and conditions have been tested and upheld at Judicial Review including at the Court of

Appeal, and at the European Court of Human Rights. It has been found to be fair, reasonable and rationale. There are no plans to change the current pension arrangements for Gurkha veterans.

We are not aware that any issues have been raised with us directly concerning the transfer of Gurkhas to the AFPS. If there are any specific concerns, we suggest that the individuals contact us directly at the address given below:

**DBS Veterans UK
Mail Point 335
Kentigern House
65 Brown St
Glasgow
G2 8EX**