

EMBARGO – 0001 hrs 1 Dec 2020

CREATION OF THE FIRST UK INDEPENDENT DEFENCE AUTHORITY

PRESS RELEASE

INTRODUCTION

For years, even before Deepcut¹, injustice in your Armed Forces has been a problem that Defence leaders have failed to address. Be it rape, sexual assault, assault, discrimination, victimization, bullying, extending to possible war crimes, those who lead the UK Armed Forces have failed to address injustice in our Armed Forces. It is the case that, more often than not, injustice in our Armed Forces is concealed by those who lead our Armed Forces. This adversely impacts on the security needs of the UK as well as the reputation of your Armed Forces. We need to change the narrative.

The Armed Forces continues to investigate itself, by itself, for itself in order to protect itself. It then chooses to inspect itself. So bad has this been that Parliament had to create a Service Complaint Ombudsman (SCO) in 2015, at huge cost to the public purse, with the aim to address injustice in our Armed Forces. It has failed to do so, a fact acknowledged by the SCO herself. Those who lead our Armed Forces failed to embrace the role and denied the role the independence, resources and the power it requires, to create meaningful change. There is no trust in the SCO to effect change.

What we see today in our Armed Forces is the failure of the Chain of Command to provide justice. We see a failure in the ability of the Ombudsman to correct that injustice. We see a failure across a wide element of the MP cadre to embrace the reality and challenge to Government to mandate a solution that will give confidence again to those who serve. We recognise, support and applaud the work of Sarah Atherton in this regard²; a leading light along with other notables such as Emma Norton.³

Those entrusted to lead those who serve, have betrayed those who serve. We see an immediate need for Government working with an independent body to re-balance the relationship between ‘The State’ and the ‘Service Person.’ We are that body.

INTENT

We announce intent to assist those who lead, to better serve those they lead. Serving and retired military personnel across the UK Armed Forces announce, today, intent to create the first Independent Defence Authority for the UK on 1 Jan 2021.

The Independent Defence Authority (The IDA) aims to educate, encourage and help Defence leaders with solutions to an age-old problem that continues to plague the

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228930/0795.pdf

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/11/29/women-soldiers-set-give-testimony-parliament-rape-bullying-armed/amp/>

³ <https://centreformilitaryjustice.org.uk/>

reputation of Defence – injustice within. The IDA affords holistic integrity, by being able to talk truth to power without fear of retribution – *because we are independent of Defence and not funded by Defence.*

The IDA focused nationally, but will engage with international partners to address common issues. This puts these issues, in the UK Armed Forces, on the international stage. The IDA offers useful solutions then to what our common problems.

We are pleased to announce a joint venture with Euro Mil and the representative member States, Unions and Associations across Europe⁴.

THE PROBLEM

Air Chief Marshal Wigston stated in his Review of Jul 2019⁵ that:

- We must do more to stop instances of inappropriate behaviour occurring.
- It is about leadership at every level in the organisation, setting the culture and standards, and ensuring people meet those standards consistently.
- We have to do better when instances of inappropriate behaviour have occurred or are alleged to have occurred.
- A significant number of our people have experienced bullying, discrimination and harassment, including sexual, but have not felt able or been able to come forward to report it
- A call for evidence from people affected is to be commissioned by Defence
- It is about the determination of leaders to change the culture

Since this declaration, those who lead Defence, despite having accepted every recommendation of the Wigston Review, have failed to implement that which they agreed they would do. This fact underscores the need for greater holistic integrity.

Defence leaders have focused on Equipment whilst forgetting that their greatest asset is their People. There is a need to put our people back to the front of our thinking. The latest figures drawn from the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey in May 2020 show that half of the men and women who serve and die for our country won't complain about injustice because they don't believe anything would be done about it. The other half feel that they will suffer if they do try to address it. These figures are nothing new. Repetition of the same concerns over years suggests that the mental health of our Armed Forces as a whole could be at a significantly low point given the lack of justice and trust within the system.

Since records began post Deepcut, the Service Complaint Commissioner has been reporting that the Complaint system in our Armed Forces is unfair. The Service Complaint Ombudsman (SCO) who replaced the Commissioner, with greater powers, recorded in May 2020, for the 4th year running, that the Complaint system in our Armed Forces is still unfair. Even the new Ombudsman does not have the power to correct the problem. She records that our leaders 'simply find a loophole to sidestep'

⁴ <http://euromil.org/>

⁵

injustice⁶. This means injustice within our Armed Forces can be buried, at Board level, with our troops being unfairly treated, impacting on the Veteran community, NHS and local councils – the bill (costing billions) defaulting to the public purse.

The SCO noted to the Parliamentary Defence Select Committee that 90% of those who should raise complaints do not. She added that 75% of the complaints through her office could and should have been resolved much earlier. She clearly stated that the process has a detrimental effect on the mental health of all involved and in the 14 years her office has existed, not one target had been met. Yet the SCO has failed to improve the power imbalance. It is Parliament that is ultimately judged to have failed those who serve. We believe there is a solution. The new IDA will represent both veterans and those serving – to resolve the power imbalance, helping those who lead both Defence and those entrusted to serve in Parliament.

The Wigston Review⁷ in Aug 2019 promised a solution for our troops, but defence service chiefs have prevaricated. They have failed to enact their own recommendations. In the last few years, the problem has significantly worsened.

There is clear evidence that those who serve in the Armed Forces today have, literally, no place of mental safety, nor any psychological or peer-to-peer safe zone where they can find respite. Too many service personnel serve in fear with nowhere safe to run or share concerns. Now all who serve, have served, and their families will have a voice through the IDA.

Not all the costs to defence are human. An unfair and unjust complaint system within our Armed Forces directly impacts on UK defence operational effectiveness, through damaging morale and early departures from service due to poor treatment. Those who do make a complaint are often tied up for years, confronting service lawyers employed at tax payer expense to represent service chiefs (not the complainant). This drawn out process costs millions, and wastes millions - the overall expense to the public purse is billions – needlessly so.

THE SOLUTION

The IDA has been launched to provide solutions to the problem, both in terms of supporting the individuals affected and to help Defence do better. It gives a safe space for all to seek advice whether serving or veteran, subject to the Chain of Command or acting on behalf of the Chain of Command. It gives a solution space without fear. The Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter himself recognises the problem in the Service Complaint system, partly due to 'upwardly looking leadership' returning an outcome that leads to national morale to be 'fragile'. This reflects an erosion of values-based thinking across the Defence leadership domain – one that must be corrected urgently if we are to succeed in re-balancing the relationship with the Nation.

INDIVIDUAL STORIES

⁶ The Air Force Board (Air Vice Marshal Chrissie Elliot) in Jun 17
7

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817838/20190607_Defence_Report_Inappropriate_Behaviours_Final_ZKL.pdf

Justice4Troops (J4T) was set up in 2019 to shine the light and allow people to emerge from the shadows of stigma, frustration, fear, and retaliation that are so pervasive across the Armed Forces. The IDA is a natural build on J4T and intends to operate at both the national and international stage, giving a powerful voice to all who serve and have served.

Lt Bruce Menzies (RN) – his poor treatment will alarm you

Sgt Mark Rycoft (RAF) – his experience fails the service values test

Morgan McLellan (British ARMY) – his experience will upset you

Linda Sprouting – her experience, following the death of her husband Captain Dean Sprouting whilst on operations in Iraq in Jan 2018, will disgust you.

For further details and for interview requests, please contact our media lead:

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