

Cutting the Red Tape - Veterans Receive Compensation

People often ask me why I got into politics and my answer 'to make a positive difference', I sense to some may seem a little hollow. But this week was one of those weeks when I felt I had achieved my aim.

As Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans, one of my major tasks has been the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant which recognises that the nation has a moral obligation to service personnel and their families. One specific challenge within this, has been the fight for adequate provision of compensation to military personnel that have contracted Mesothelioma whilst serving.

Mesothelioma is a form of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos at work and is particularly prevalent amongst former Naval Personnel. The Mesothelioma Act 2014, which provides for lump-sum payments to civilians who contracted the disease, was not applicable to veterans who were instead receiving the War Disablement Pension that did not allow for such lump sum payments, so vital if you have a limited life expectancy.

Having argued the case, back in December I announced a change in policy that veterans diagnosed with the disease would be given the choice between receiving a traditional War Pension or a lump sum of Â£140,000. Whilst this was good news, because of generic rules over retrospection, it meant a small band of veterans such as Fred Minall from Northampton who had been diagnosed before the announcement date would miss out. To me this seem terribly unfair, so finally this week, it was with great pleasure that I confirmed that the option would be extended to all. In Fred's own words;

"This news is marvellous and I could not have wished for better. I have so many people to thank for their help, I hardly know where to begin. My first and lasting reaction is that of relief..."

Long after all the party politics and bickering are forgotten, it will be Fred's words that I remember from my time as a MP.