



# News Release

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2002

## Legion celebrates campaign success as Gravesham Council pledges change to war pension policy

The Royal British Legion today welcomed Gravesham Borough Council's pledge to complete its plans to totally **disregard local war veterans' pensions when calculating benefits**. This follows a two-month campaign by the Legion calling for Gravesham to **join the majority** of Local Authorities in England and Wales by entirely disregarding both war disablement and war widows' pensions when working out Housing Benefit and Council Tax relief.

The high-profile campaign received strong support from Gravesham residents and so the Council has responded with a commitment by the Cabinet to completely disregard war veterans' and widows' pensions in its **next budget**.

"The Legion has campaigned hard for Gravesham veterans and widows to be treated in the same way as the majority of war pensioners across the country," says Tom House, Head of Pensions for the Legion. "These veterans receive a war pension because they are disabled due to their time in the Armed Forces. For many, this **changes their lives dramatically**; they are unable to work or enjoy a decent quality of life. In the same way, war widows are supported financially because their husbands, who **died serving their country**. The Legion believes people should not be penalised for receiving these pensions. We therefore welcome what is definitely a **just decision** by Gravesham Council – and one which reflects the feelings of many local people who have been demanding respect for their veterans."

**Rosemary Leadley**, Leader of Gravesham Council said "I am very pleased to announce that we will make good our commitment and deliver on our promise. Gravesham Council has a good working relationship with The Royal British Legion; this development will help to strengthen that relationship. We look forward to working with the Legion to implement the necessary changes.

I recognise our duty to provide for the well-being of the community, within the resources available to us. In particular, I acknowledge and respect the particular needs of former members of the Armed Forces, their families and all those who dedicate their services for the common good."

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Although Government policy requires Local Authorities to disregard just a minimum of **£10** of veterans' and widows' pensions when means testing for Council Tax and Housing Benefit relief, most Councils disregard them entirely. "After years of successful campaigning on this issue, Legion figures now show that Gravesham is currently **one of only 23 out of the 410 Councils** in England and Wales not to give a 100% disregard, choosing instead to disregard an extra £30," says Mr House. "We will therefore be very pleased to cross Gravesham off our campaign list when the new budget is announced later in the year."

In the long-term, the Legion wants the current system, which allows Local Authorities to change their policy from one year to the next, to be replaced with a **new Central Government policy**, ensuring an total disregards policy for war veterans' and widows' nation-wide. In the meantime, the Legion will continue to campaign at a local level.

"It is time for The Government to fully recognise the huge debt owed to its war veterans and widows," adds Mr House. "Our campaign will not be dropped until all war veterans and widows are treated fairly and equally."

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### Notes to Editors:

**The Royal British Legion** is Britain's leading ex-Service charity protecting the welfare, interests and memory of ex-Service people and their families and dependants since 1921. Some 13 million people - of all ages - are eligible to approach the Legion for support, ranging from resettlement and war pensions advice to benevolence grants.