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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5 ZONE D MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

57

SECRETARY OF STATE

Telephone
Fax:
E-mail: c

MSU 4/5/2C

10 September 2006

Jean Charles

Thank you for your letter of 31 August about the question of additional funding for the Oxfordshire coroner, as discussed during my meeting with Harriet Harman on 24 May.

Can I first thank you on behalf of the Armed Forces for the action that you are taking to help the Oxfordshire Coroner reduce the backlog of inquests into the deaths of Service personnel deployed overseas on operations. It is clearly right and has my full support. At the meeting, Harriet explained that, although the initial estimate was that the additional resource necessary to clear this backlog had been £125,000 per year for 2 years, the latest estimate was £250,000 over a 6 month period. I now see from your letter that the latest figure is £350,000. I believe that there is a strong case for funding this from the Reserve, but I believe that the Treasury would expect such a case to come from the Department responsible for coroners. I do not think it would be proper for my department to fund the Oxfordshire coroner directly. However, as I said to Harriet at our meeting, in principal I am willing to provide a contribution towards the financial cost of additional resources for the coroner, subject to the points made at our meeting, and that offer still holds good.

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The Rt Hon Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC
Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and Lord Chancellor

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You said that your officials would look at the suggestion of a call on the Reserve. My officials would be very ready to assist in formulating such a case and I suggest that we ask them jointly to pursue this course as a matter of urgency.


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