

# EXPERT GROUP ON THE NEEDS OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY IN WALES

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2019

### Members

Hannah Blythyn AM	Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government
Darren Millar AM	Welsh Conservative member
Col Nick Lock	160 Infantry Brigade and HQ in Wales
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	RAF
Brigadier 'Jock' Frasier	Royal Navy
Annabel Ingram	Army Families Federation
Lisa Thipthorp	RAF Families Federation
Jane Williams	Naval Families Federation
Ant Metcalfe	Royal British Legion
Lt Col Stephen Hughes	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Mike Bailey	Veterans Welfare Service
Naomi Alleyne	WLGA
Lorraine Davies	Department for Work and Pensions
Roy Brown	COBSEO
John Shivas	Ministry of Defence
Julie Lowe	SSAFA
Lisa Gostling	HIVE
Shelly Elgin	Help for Heroes
Leeanne Plechowicz	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Fiona Jenkins	Cardiff and the Vale Local Health Board
Shehan Hettiaratchy	Veterans Trauma Network, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
Richard Swarbrick	NHS England
David O'Reilly	Cardiff and Vale UHB
Gary Haggaty	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Jan Jones	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Peter Evans	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Tania Nicholson	Welsh Government – Education

### Apologies

Neil Kitchiner	Veterans NHS Wales
Ian Barrow	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Dawn North	HIVE

## ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Deputy Minister welcomed members to her first meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group and emphasised her desire to continue with the good work that had been achieved to date.

## **ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 26 SEPTEMBER 2018**

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

## **ITEM 3 – PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

- 3.1 The Minister noted that many of the previous actions had been completed, or were in progress with further updates to be provided during the meeting.
- 3.2 It was noted that the issue concerning the provision of dentistry in RAF Valley had been resolved. The Minister expressed her thanks to all parties involved. Air Commodore Adrian Williams also expressed his thanks, noting the collaborative approach taken to ensure a successful outcome.

## **ITEM 4 – UPDATE FROM THE TRI SERVICES**

- 4.1 Brigadier Frasier informed members that 6% of the Royal Navy were now based in Wales with investment underway to increase the Reserve footprint.
- 4.2 Following the return of HMS Monmouth from deployment its crew had taken part in the Freedom of Monmouth parade. HMS Dragon had also returned to Portsmouth following a six month deployment. The Brigadier advised that despite being decommissioned in 2017 HMS Severn would be retained in service for future operations.
- 4.3 Colonel Lock spoke about the six month deployment of Regular infantry battalions, 1 Royal Irish and 1 Rifles, to Afghanistan to provide security to the NATO training and mentoring mission Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT. He also advised that two Reserve battalions would be posted to Africa to support operational training.
- 4.4 Endeavours to strengthen and enhance the STEM agenda in Wales continued with work being undertaken to further develop youth activity programmes into NVQ qualifications. Colonel Lock advised that the continuation of Hightown Barracks as a military establishment had been well received.
- 4.5 Colonel Lock noted that it was a busy time of year for the Army. Planning for the Festival of Music on the 4<sup>th</sup> May was at an advanced stage. An invitation to attend was extended to all members of the Expert Group. The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of s'Hertogenbosch would take place in the autumn and would highlight the enduring relationship between both countries that continues today. The First Minister would be in attendance.

- 4.6 The future of both the Prince of Wales Band and the Royal Welsh Band had been secured through the Future of Army Music Study. Both bands would be based at St Athan.
- 4.7 Colonel Lock highlighted the continuing expansion of the Cadet movement in Wales with three new schools developing its Combined Cadet Force. Discussions were underway with a fourth school.
- 4.8 Air Commodore Williams explained that the RAF remained extremely busy on operations around the world, with 12 operations currently underway in 22 different countries. RAF resources remain committed to combat Daesh and an A400 aircraft, with relief supplies, had been deployed earlier in the week to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Mozambique. Following the Tornado's retirement from RAF service in Mar 2019, farewell flypasts had taken place over Wales to mark nearly 40 years of service by the aircraft and to recognise the very strong connections it had with Wales, which included at St Athan, Sealand and RAF Valley.
- 4.9 An update was provided on RAF recruitment. RAF recruits from Wales traditionally made up about 4% of the total RAF recruiting numbers, with this percentage being in proportion to the size of Wales compared to the rest of the UK. Overall RAF-wide recruiting progress in financial year 2018/19 (to end February) had been excellent, with 99% of all Officers recruited (572 out of 573) and 95% of other ranks already recruited (a shortfall at present of 105 out of 2130). Air Commodore Williams also explained the excellent RAF achievement in terms of female recruits, with the RAF consistently over achieving against MOD Armed Forces targets (RAF has currently achieved 24% female recruits against a 15% MOD target). It was also noted that the RAF had recently appointed its first female three star officer, Air Marshal Sue Gray, making her the most senior female military officer in the British Armed Forces. All this was encouraging, but work continued to drive up female representation further. RAF Valley would also be busy in the coming years delivering increased pilot numbers to reflect the outcome of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and the base had received increased investment in recent years to make it a world class facility with a long term future.
- 4.10 A number of RAF engagement events were scheduled across Wales in 2019. These included a commemorative event in Swansea celebrating the centenary of RAF Officers Alcock and Brown being the first people to ever fly non-stop over the Atlantic in 1919, with Brown having had a strong affinity with Swansea throughout his adult life. An event would also take place in Caernarfon to commemorate Group Captain Rees VC, who came from Caernarfon and whose bravery in the air during the First World War led to his receiving the Victoria Cross. This would include the very rare honour of an RAF aircraft being named after Rees VC and the aircraft also carrying out a flypast over Caernarfon.
- 4.11 The Air Commodore also offered his congratulations to the Holywell Air Cadet Squadron, who had recently been awarded the Lees Trophy, making them the best Air Cadet Squadron in the United Kingdom. Thanking the Tri-Services for

their updates the Deputy Minister declared an interest in the news relating to the Holywell Air Cadets who were situated within her constituency.

- 4.12 Fiona Jenkins spoke about the lack of medical centre support on MOD St Athan, a matter that had been raised at a recent meeting of the Armed Forces Health Champions. The Air Commodore said that the recent extension of leases by the Welsh Government at St Athan had overcome this issue.

## **ITEM 5 – UPDATE FROM THE FAMILY FEDERATIONS**

- 5.1 Jane Williams explained that ‘weekending’ was a common occurrence in 60% of naval families, with Serving personnel and their families often living and working in different regions. Jane advised that the ‘Absent Parenting Guidance’ had been developed to offer deployment support to military families, schools and healthcare providers. Jane spoke about research that had been undertaken by Kings College, London which highlighted the negative effect ‘weekending’ can have on the family. Older children in particular have been seen to struggle with this, experiencing difficulty in adjusting to change. It was noted that the results from the research would help inform future MoD planning. Jane advised that the guidance would help both families and lone parents and that the Naval Families Federation was keen to make the resource available to all key partners.
- 5.2 Annabel Ingram spoke about the report entitled ‘Lifting the Lid on Transition’. Produced with support from Forces in Mind Trust the report included case studies from Wales and captured the views of families in relation to transition.
- 5.3 Annabel also introduced the new employment and training platform which will be known as Forces Families Jobs. The Tri-Service platform will promote businesses and organisations who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and will launch in September.
- 5.4 Lisa Thipthorp highlighted the collaboration of the three Families Federations to identify the support available for dispersed families. Lisa explained that whilst minimal issues had been reported from families based at RAF Valley and RAF St Athan concerns had been raised with the Fast Track Referral Pathway. Lisa reinforced the importance of managing expectations and communicating entitlements. The Deputy Minister asked for further information on the issue of patient waiting times.
- 5.5 Darren Millar AM spoke about the RFCA employer engagement event, 26 June noting that it would provide an opportunity to promote the Covenant and the support that the Armed Forces community can access. Darren Millar AM advised that it would be beneficial for Annabel to attend especially given her role in supporting families of Serving personnel.
- 5.6 Lorraine Davies welcomed the ‘Absent Parenting Guidance’ document and agreed to include it as part of DWP’s electronic directory for spousal support.

## **ITEM 6 – VETERANS HEALTH**

- 6.1 Fiona Jenkins introduced her colleagues who had developed the Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) in England. It was noted that to date between 100-150 veterans had received treatment through the English VTN.
- 6.2 David O'Reilly explained that as part of the VTN veterans would receive appropriate and timely treatment. David explained that prior to the VTN veterans returning from conflict with severe injuries would receive treatment by an NHS team who were unfamiliar with injuries caused during conflict. This had led to inappropriate or inadequate treatment which hadn't suited the patient. David confirmed that Cardiff would be the location of the new VTN in Wales.
- 6.3 Shehan Hettiaratchy reinforced that the introduction of a new VTN in Wales would provide the veterans with local treatment that would meet their needs. However, it would be important to filter out those whose injuries hadn't been caused as a result of experience in Service. Shehan explained that whilst cross border issues exist for veterans undergoing IVF, whose treatment takes place in Birmingham, the development of the VTN in Wales would include treatment for IVF locally.
- 6.4 The establishment of the VTN had included modest resources, such as an email contact for referral and an administrative role; an approach that had received support from the UK Government. Fiona explained that to date discussions concerning a proposed VTN in Wales had been held with Cardiff and the Vale Local Health Board and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board. Discussions had also taken place with the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee (WHSSC) which is already in control of the costs.
- 6.5 Fiona asked for endorsement from the Welsh Government and members of the Expert Group to progress with the VTN in Wales. It was suggested that discussions to consider the feasibility of a VTN in Wales should take place between Fiona and the Minister for Health and Social Services.
- 6.6 Darren Millar AM expressed concern over the provision of service in North Wales given the distance from Cardiff and asked if it would be possible for North Wales to link in with England. It was confirmed that patients living in North Wales could link in to Stoke.
- 6.7 David advised that his role would only rarely include direct patient referral and assessment by him. Given the expected minimal numbers for such a service in Wales he would be agreeable to travelling around Wales. Overwhelmingly, the work of the VTN coordinator would be the assessment and management of online and paper-based material, with support to local providers, coordination of care, advice about onward referral and support to applications for WHSSC funding, where appropriate. Richard Swarbrick emphasised the importance of the VTN in providing individual wrap around

care and also involving family networks. It was noted also that conversations had taken place to widen the NHS focus to include supporting severely injured police with their return to duty.

- 6.8 Shelley Elgin spoke about the Libor fund that had been received by Help for Heroes to help support injured veterans in need of tailored support, suggesting it would fit into the work of the VTN.

#### **ACTIONS:**

- **A letter from the Deputy Minister to be sent to the Minister for Health and Social Services requesting he meet with Fiona Jenkins to discuss the feasibility of establishing a VTN in Wales.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7 – MINISTRY OF DEFENCE UPDATE**

- 7.1 John Shivas provided the members with an update on priority issues for the MoD. The Defence Transition Service (DTS), designed to provide an holistic service for those who will likely need additional support during transition, was still very much in its infancy. John confirmed that Welsh Government officials were in continued discussions with officials leading on DTS. Additional information concerning DTS would be available once further evidence is in place to determine the specific requirements of the service.
- 7.2 Members noted that whilst a good relationship was in place with the Career Transition Partnership, the provision of a similar service wasn't available in Wales. John advised that officials in the DTS would explore this issue.
- 7.3 Ant Metcalfe questioned whether access to the DTS would be through self-referral or referral via a service. It was advised that upon transition Service personnel would be able to access the DTS via either avenue. Confirmation that the support for Wales would be based in Telford and shared with the Midlands prompted Ant to highlight the importance of having dedicated support in Wales. Jan Jones advised that officials had spoken with the DTS team, proposing that Wales were given dedicated support for two days a week.
- 7.4 Mike Bailey outlined that the recruitment and training process was already underway and reassured members that the calibre of people recruited was high.
- 7.5 The consultation on the Veterans Strategy had closed on the 21 February. Responses would be shared with Welsh Government officials once analysed. A collaborative approach would be adopted across all four nations to discuss and consider delivery of future services for the Armed Forces community.
- 7.6 John confirmed that the next meeting of the Covenant Reference Group would agree proposals for future funding priorities. This would likely include a

focus on families. The challenges facing Service children who experience frequent moves as a result of deployment were noted. John explained that there had been instances whereby Local Authority SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) officers lacked resources or experience to be able to support children's needs. A Local Authority Charter for Service children with SEND was under development and once in place would clarify the expected support when transitioning into a new Local Authority. Fiona advised that this was already being considered in Wales following introduction of the Additional Learning Needs Act which would offer support for a wider cohort of Service children.

## **AGENDA ITEM 8 – WELSH GOVERNMENT UPDATE**

- 8.1 The Deputy Minister thanked all those who had contributed to the Scoping Exercise. Findings from the exercise would inform future policy delivery. The Deputy Minister requested that going forwards she would like a Task and Finish Group established to develop a delivery plan and identify collaborative means of addressing the issues raised.
- 8.2 Peter Evans introduced the key issues that had arisen from the 1,007 responses that had been received as part of the online survey and face to face engagement and confirmed that the recommendations would be fed into the Veterans Strategy. Feedback reflected mixed opinions concerning transition. 16% of the comments highlighted a positive experience on leaving the Services, however it was also a predominant issue raised by veterans and their families who had experienced a lack of support and poor experience. The responses highlighted an issue of the Covenant not being upheld, often due to lack of awareness, with veterans having to challenge entitlement. Improved work in raising awareness and training frontline staff was suggested as a means of helping to address this. Peter noted that the skills and experience veterans gain during Service cannot be overlooked.
- 8.3 Peter spoke about the Map of Need, a project lead by Northumbria University to identify the welfare needs of veterans and their families across the whole of the UK, and confirmed that officials were working with colleagues from Northumbria University to include the support hubs identified as part of the Scoping Exercise on the Map of Need.
- 8.4 Peter said that the findings from the Scoping Exercise when looked at in conjunction with the Map of Need would provide notable evidence of additional support required.
- 8.5 Ant questioned whether or not gambling had been raised as an issue. Whilst no specific mention had been made officials were working closely with Swansea University who were undertaking research concerning gambling.
- 8.6 Fiona noted the issue concerning the need for greater awareness in understanding veterans' health needs and advised that the revised GPMS form now enabled GP's to identify veterans accessing health services in their

areas. Awareness raising posters were also underway to help make veterans aware of their healthcare entitlements.

- 8.7 Peter advised members that the issue concerning prosthetics had now been resolved. Funding from Health, Education and Improvement Wales had enabled the delivery of bespoke training for prosthetists in Wales involved in the fitting of the specific socket design required by veteran amputees.

## **AGENDA ITEM 9 – SSAFA UPDATE**

- 9.1 Julie Lowe introduced the new Casework Management System (CMS), a project that was being led by SSAFA on behalf of 120 military charities. Julie explained that cases had become increasingly more complex and the current CMS had its limitations, for example not being able to capture qualitative data or fully assess outcomes when assistance is provided by more than one organisation. The new CMS system, scheduled for launch in November would be client based, assess outcomes and allow for more rapid decision making. It would also help the sector better identify and meet the needs of the Armed Forces community. Once established the system would feed into the Map of Need and allow for greater interpretation of data.

## **AGENDA ITEM 10 – ARMED FORCES DAY AND ARMED FORCES LIAISON OFFICERS**

- 10.1 Naomi Alleyne updated members on the latest position concerning the delivery of Armed Forces Day. Naomi explained that since the last Expert Group meeting discussions had taken place with the Local Authority Armed Forces Champions to gauge their preference on the options presented:
- One Wales Armed Forces Day per annum to be supported by Welsh Government funding, alternating between Local Authorities;
  - Two events per annum to be supported by Welsh Government funding of £20k towards two events (North and South including Mid).
- 10.2 Naomi confirmed that to date no clear decision had been made. Discussions were ongoing with Welsh Government officials and Local Authorities. Air Commodore Williams advised that should option one be the preferred approach then a collective decision would need to be made to determine the host Authority for each Armed Forces Day.
- 10.3 The appointment of the Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) had been welcomed by key partners, especially given their remit to consider regional issues facing the Armed Forces community and share good practice. Naomi spoke about the Gwent newsletter as an example of good practice and agreed to share this with the members for their information.



- 10.4 In November 2018 the Welsh Government announced its decision to fund the AFLO posts for two years from 2019. Naomi confirmed that discussions on a mutually agreed funding approach were ongoing with Welsh Government.
- 10.5 Air Commodore Williams reinforced the good work of the AFLOs across Wales.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 11 – RBL UPDATE**

- 11.1 Ant provided an update on the plans in place to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> D-Day anniversary. Three options were in place for those veterans wishing to take part, ranging from a 10 day trip to Normandy to visiting the National Memorial Arboretum. Ant explained that all costs would be covered and include one carer per veteran. For those who had signed up for the trip to Normandy, it was confirmed that welfare and support assessments would take place.
- 11.2 Additional commemorative events coming up would include Op Banner 50, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the UK Armed Forces' deployment on operations in Northern Ireland.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 12 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 12.1 The Deputy Minister thanked the members for their input, noting that it had been a useful meeting.
- 12.3 The next meeting will be held on the 18 September, 10 – 11.30am. Venue to be confirmed in due course.