

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

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2019

Members

Hannah Blythyn AM	Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government
Brigadier Alan Richmond	160th (Welsh) Brigade
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	RAF
Brigadier 'Jock' Frasier	Royal Navy
Curtis Shea	Darren Millar's office
Annabel Ingram	Army Families Federation
Jane Williams	Naval Families Federation
Ant Metcalfe	Royal British Legion
Col Nick Beard	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Mike Bailey	Veterans Welfare Service
Rachel Morgan	WLGA
Councillor Matthew Dorrance	WLGA
Neil Kitchiner	Veterans NHS Wales
Leeanne Plechowicz	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Ian Caws	COBSEO
Steve Boswell	SSAFA
Lisa Gostling	HIVE
Shelly Elgin	Help for Heroes
Fiona Jenkins	Cardiff and the Vale Local Health Board
Kate McCullough	Defence Transition Service
Andy Mansfield	Defence Transition Service
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Peter Evans	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Jess Lacey	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Phil Rhine	Welsh Government – Housing
Nicola Giles	Welsh Government - Education

Apologies

Dawn North	HIVE
Darren Millar AM	Welsh Conservative member
Huw Thomas	DWP
John Shivas	Ministry of Defence
Gary Haggaty	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Jan Jones	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Reg Kilpatrick	Welsh Government – Local Government
Jo Maddaford	Welsh Government – Health
Liz Davies	Welsh Government - Health

Observers

Kenny Warren	Scottish Government
--------------	---------------------

ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Deputy Minister welcomed members to her second meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group and emphasised her desire to continue with the good work that had been achieved to date.
- 1.2 It was noted that Councillor Matthew Dorrance was attending his first meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group. The Deputy Minister indicated a number of apologies had been received and these would be circulated with the minutes.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 28 MARCH 2019

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated to all members. Leeanne Plechowicz requested an amendment to the minutes to reflect her attendance at the meeting.

Action:

- **Minutes dated 28 March 2019 to be amended to reflect Leeanne Plechowicz's attendance.**

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 Further to her meeting with the WLGA to discuss the future delivery of Armed Forces day the Minister advised that in the future there would be one event per annum. A 5-year rolling programme identifying the host Local Authority would be developed in collaboration with the WLGA. £20k funding would continue to be available from the Welsh Government.
- 3.3 Fiona Jenkins updated members on the progress concerning the Veterans Trauma Network. A variety of meetings had been held which had confirmed support from the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee in communicating the new service. The Veterans Trauma Network would be hosted by Cardiff and the Vale Local Health Board and launched on the 3 October at the Welsh Government Covenant conference.

Action:

- **A 5-year rolling programme of future Armed Forces days to be developed in collaboration with the WLGA by March 2020.**

ITEM 4 – UPDATE FROM THE TRI SERVICES

- 4.1 Brigadier Frasier informed members that HMS Dragon had returned to sea and was currently escorting HMS Queen Elizabeth during her deployment to the USA and her training with the F35 Lightning jets. The Brigadier advised that HMS Montrose was currently undertaking strategic business on deployment in the Middle East.
- 4.2 It was noted that the first steel had been cut in Glasgow for the new HMS Cardiff, the second ship in the Royal Navy's next generation of Type 26 anti-submarine frigates.
- 4.3 The Brigadier reaffirmed the commitment by the Royal Navy to raise awareness of its role in Wales; on the 4 October an invitation had been extended to members of the Cross Party Group on Armed Forces and Cadets to go aboard HMS Express, the only Royal Navy vessel based in Wales. In addition the 3 October would see the Wales launch of Forces Families Jobs initiative at the Welsh Government Covenant conference. It was noted that the First Minister would visit Fitzalan High School to hear about the work of its Combined Cadet Force and that the new HMS Cambria was now operational and would be officially opened May 2020.
- 4.4 Brigadier Richmond informed the group that whilst we remain within a demographic trough, recruiting is improving and the decline in overall manning of the army is slowing. On the 1 August the brigade became known as 160 (Welsh) Brigade and its battalions transferred to other brigades whilst disappointing, this offered the opportunity for the brigade to focus more on its and the army's relationship with Wales.
- 4.5 It was noted that the Queens Dragoons Guards (The Welsh Cavalry) were warned off for deployment to Mali as part of a United Nations peacekeeping mission in 2020.
- 4.6 Speaking about the Defence Estates Review the Brigadier advised that whilst Brecon barracks were scheduled to close in 2027 options for future locations were being explored with the Ministry of Defence. Cawdor Barracks, Haverfordwest would close in 2024 with the unit moving to England whilst Beachley Barracks would close in 2027. Hightown Barracks would now remain open. The situation in St Athan continued to be in impasse with ongoing discussions concerning the East Camp, where there are competing ambitions for the site from MoD and Welsh Government. The Brigadier emphasised that the Defence Infrastructure Organisation was keen to secure East Camp as the site for an Army Major Unit.
- 4.7 The Brigadier commended the Reserves Day event in the Senedd and advised the group that 160 Brigade were supportive of the recent decision for a single Armed Forces day per annum. A number of successful engagement events had been held including an army presence at the Royal Welsh Show and a visit by Lt General Nugee, Chief of Defence People, to the HMP Parc Endeavour Unit. Future engagement would include a royal gun salute on the 14 November in both Caernarfon and Cardiff Castles to mark the birthday of

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and the Armed Forces in Wales Awards on the 28 November. It was noted that Exercise Cambrian Patrol would take place from the 12 - 20 October should any members of the group wish to attend. The Employer Recognition Scheme continued to grow with 19 new silver awards and 10 gold awards to Welsh employers.

- 4.8 Air Commodore Williams advised that RAF Valley had been given a new major task, namely to carry out all basic flying training for the UK Armed Forces. The task is moving from RAF Linton on Ouse in Yorkshire, which is to be closed. The transfer of the task to RAF Valley will see it also acquire a new squadron of aircraft, the Texan, and the new task will bring with it new investment and additional civilian jobs on the Station. The move of basic flying training to RAF Valley will also bring synergies with the existing fast jet training that is already carried out at RAF Valley and also cements the long term status of RAF Valley as a military flying base. In recent weeks, ITV had also run a "Fighter Pilot" mini series in which fast jet training at RAF Valley featured prominently, highlighting very well the crucial tasks the Station carries out for the operational capability of the UK's Armed Forces and also its status as a leading world centre of excellence for military flying training.
- 4.9 Throughout the Summer, the RAF had continued its busy engagement programme across Wales. This included attendance at both the Swansea and Rhyl Airshows, together with an RAF aircraft naming event in RAF Valley after Caernarfon born Group Captain Rees VC, whose bravery in the air during the First World War led to his receiving the Victoria Cross. National Assembly for Wales AM's had recently visited the RAF Resilience Centre at Crickhowell as part of the AM AF Scheme. The Air Commodore also advised members of a film that had been produced as part of the 'Talacre Then and Now' project, with funding from the National Lottery and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund, to raise awareness of the role of the RAF in the Talacre area during World War Two.
- 4.10 The appointment of the new RAF Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston was noted. Taking up the post in July 2019 the Air Commodore informed members that Air Chief Marshal was brought up in the Bangor area and had attended Ysgol Friars in the city.

ITEM 5 – UK VETERANS STRATEGY

- 5.1 Kate McCullough introduced the item on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. Kate explained that work to progress the Veterans Strategy continued and was on track. Data had been shared across Government and also with Cobseo clusters. An implementation plan and official Government response would be published at the end of 2019. The Office for Veterans Affairs continued to be under discussion. Its team would be in post before the end of September with advice on its scope and shape to be issued to the Prime Minister by the end of September 2019. It was also advised that work was underway to set out options concerning legislation of the Covenant and these would be provided to Johnny Mercer, Minister for Military Personnel and Veterans, in due course.

ITEM 6 – DEFENCE TRANSITION SERVICES

- 6.1 Kate presented the update on the Defence Transition Services (DTS) and introduced Andy Mansfield, the DTS regional manager covering South Wales. Kate explained that the underlying policy of the DTS was JSP100, which whilst in the final stages of development, would be launched by the end of January 2020. Situated within Veterans UK the role of the DTS would be to prepare those leaving the services, whilst also recognising the needs of families. Its structure would include regional managers and caseworkers. The importance of local and national co-ordination was highlighted especially given the breadth of regions Serving personnel would choose to settle in. It was noted that discussions were already underway to expand the team if needed, to provide a permanent resource in Wales, and that business cases requesting additional resource had already been prepared. Kate explained that there would be a new referral process with the referral coming into Veterans UK and delegated via DTS as appropriate. Whilst HARDFACTS would remain it would be used as a diagnostic tool for referral involving a more flexible interpretation as had been previously used. It was noted that DTS would continue to run regional consultation events, engaging primarily with providers from the third and statutory sectors.
- 6.2 Welcoming the initiative Jane Williams asked for reassurance that feedback received would be picked up. Noting the complexities of transition Kate confirmed that DTS would work in collaboration with all its partners to ensure this happened. Fiona Jenkins emphasised the importance of making information available in an accessible way to ensure case workers had the means of identifying individuals in need of the service. Brigadier Frasier noted that one of the issues concerned not having a re-settlement centre in Wales. Cerys Gage confirmed that this would be raised at a meeting with the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) later that day. Leeanne Plechowicz expressed an interest in linking in with the DTS from a Criminal Justice perspective.

Action:

- **Welsh Government officials to raise the lack of re-settlement centre in Wales with the CTP.**

AGENDA ITEM 7 – SCOPING EXERCISE DELIVERY PLAN

- 7.1 Peter Evans spoke about the significant engagement that had taken place as part of the Scoping exercise during September 2018 - March 2019 and during a series of follow up meetings from July – August 2019. It was noted that the delivery plan included potential recommendations and asks, many of which would require support from Expert Group members, regional forums and the Armed Forces Liaison officers to complete. Members were also asked to give consideration to any issues not included in the delivery plan that should be included.

- 7.2 Peter highlighted that in order to finalise the delivery plan work was needed to clarify a lead for each action. Clarity of timescales for the actions was also required although it was noted that many of these would be dependent on the UK Veterans Strategy.
- 7.3 Mike Bailey suggested that Veterans UK could be included as the lead for various actions. Officials would meet with Mike Bailey to discuss further. Fiona Jenkins welcomed the report and stated that Veterans NHS Wales (VNHSW) was already experiencing challenges due to an increase in demand for the service. Fiona suggested that the recommendation for VNHSW to engage with prisoners prior to release be amended, reflecting the need for an increase in VNHSW capacity. Armed Forces officials would raise this with Welsh Government colleagues in health.
- 7.4 Ant praised the work of the AFLOs and emphasised the importance that their role should be continued; a view that was echoed by the Air Commodore. It was noted that despite regional variations all Local Authority Champions had a model role description in their remit in support for the Armed Forces community and that they should be included more than they are at present. It was agreed that the delivery plan would be presented to the Local Authority Champions and considered at the next meeting of the WLGA Armed Forces Network in November.

Actions:

- **Officials to meet with Veterans UK to further discuss the delivery plan.**
- **Officials to amend the delivery plan reflecting the need for an increase in the capacity of VNHSW.**
- **The capacity of VNHSW to be discussed between Armed Forces officials and health policy officials.**
- **The updated delivery plan to be presented for discussion at the next meeting of the WLGA Armed Forces Network in November.**

AGENDA ITEM 8 – VE DAY PREPARATIONS

- 8.1 Ant Metcalfe introduced the item on preparations in place to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Whilst information had yet to be received from the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport Ant confirmed that Friday 8th May would include a parade for remembrance and reflection, Saturday 9th May would be for celebratory events such as street parties with Sunday 10th May for thanksgiving and a service in Llandaf Cathedral. A working group had been established to determine the delivery of events across Wales. Its members included the Welsh Government, Royal British Legion, Tri-Services, Cardiff City Council and the WLGA. The next meeting would take place on the 25 September.

- 8.2 Ant also advised that to commemorate VJ Day there would be a RBL service on the 15 August at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.
- 8.3 Brigadier Richmond emphasised the importance of putting plans into place as a matter of priority to ensure the appropriate allocation of resources.

AGENDA ITEM 9 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 9.1 The Minister thanked members for their input and confirmed the next date for the meeting as the 23 March, Ty Hywel.
- 9.2 It was noted that at the recent Cross Party Group for the Armed Forces and Cadets presentations had been provided on the research undertaken by Project 360 and the Forces Families Jobs initiative.
- 9.3 The Minister advised that discussions were ongoing with HR concerning the introduction of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for veterans in the Welsh Government.
- 9.4 Phil Rhine said that further work was needed to identify the numbers of homeless veterans and recommended the approach adopted by England with its Housing First scheme. Phil also informed members that work was underway to develop a Housing Code of Guidance and that in taking forward the work he would consult with key partners and DTS colleagues.