

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

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

Members

Hannah Blythyn AM	Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government
Deputy Commander Nick Lock	160th (Welsh) Brigade
Flt Commander Albie Fox	RAF
Flt Lieutenant Ella Fortune	RAF
Commander Steve Henaghen	Royal Navy
Darren Millar AM	Welsh Conservatives
Cat Calder	Army Families Federation
Colette Musgrave	Army Families Federation
Jane Williams	Naval Families Federation
Lisa Thipthorp	RAF Families Federation
Ant Metcalfe	Royal British Legion
Col Nick Beard	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Mike Bailey	Veterans Welfare Service
Rachel Morgan	WLGA
Neil Kitchiner	Veterans NHS Wales
Louise Forman	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Nicola Davies	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Roy Brown	COBSEO
Steve Boswell	SSAFA
Shelley Elgin	Help for Heroes
John Shivas	Ministry of Defence
Ray Lock	FIMT
Caroline Cooke	FIMT
Fiona Jenkins	Cardiff and the Vale Local Health Board
Jan Jones	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Peter Evans	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Simon Protheroe	Welsh Government – Housing
Huw Charles	Welsh Government – Housing
Carl Spiller	Welsh Government – Housing
Omer Williams	Welsh Government – Housing
Megan Colley	Welsh Government - Education
Liz Davies	Welsh Government - Health

Apologies

Howard Reed	DWP
Naomi Alleyne	WLGA
Cllr Matthew Dorrance	WLGA
Brigadier Fraser	Royal Navy

Gary Haggaty	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Reg Kilpatrick	Welsh Government – Local Government
Emma Williams	Welsh Government – Housing
Jonathan Price	Veterans Welfare Service
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	RAF (sent his apologies due to technical issues)

ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Deputy Minister welcomed members to the first virtual meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group. Highlighting the continued challenges experienced as a result of Covid-19 the Deputy Minister thanked all members for their contributions towards fighting the pandemic. She noted a good deal of progress had been made since the last meeting in September 2019.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 18 SEPTEMBER 2019

- 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 Rachel Morgan updated members on the proposals for the future delivery of National Armed Forces day. Seven Local Authorities with an interest in hosting the event had submitted an expression of interest. Despite delays as a result of the pandemic Rachel confirmed that the WLGA were in the final stages of consultation and a 5-year rolling programme would shortly be in place.
- 3.3 Given the interest received consideration of reserve Authorities or having a 6-year rolling programme may need to be taken into account.
- 3.4 Ant Metcalfe asked for clarification on the provision of Welsh Government funding towards the event. Jan Jones confirmed that Welsh Government funding would continue with £20k available for the host Local Authority towards an annual event held in Wales.

ITEM 4 – UPDATE FROM THE TRI SERVICES

- 4.1 Deputy Commander Nick Lock introduced the update on behalf of the Army. The last 7 months had been taken up with the Joint Military Command providing support for the Welsh Government and the NHS in response to Covid-19. Client capability support had been identified with 1,000 troops in support across Wales, including Serving personnel from the Royal Welch Fusiliers and Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers. In supporting Wales

Ambulance Service Trust (WAST) 60 personnel were deployed as ambulance drivers; attending 6,000 call outs relating to both Covid-19 and emergency incidents. Serving personnel had also been involved in the building of field hospitals across Wales - notably the Dragon's Heart hospital in Cardiff City centre - delivery of PPE from Cardiff Airport and mobile testing. Whilst many tasks were now in the hands of contractors Deputy Commander Lock emphasised that it had been a privilege to provide support.

- 4.2 Understandably the Army's programme of physical engagement activities had been postponed with virtual opportunities taking place where possible. A series of Army engagement presentations had been delivered virtually, with more scheduled to take place later that week. The Cadets were also operating differently, undertaking virtual training until it was deemed safe to return to physical activities.
- 4.3 It was confirmed that all Welsh training was now at full capacity; with Serving personnel adhering to social distancing Government guidelines.
- 4.4 A new Diversity and Inclusion officer had been appointed within 160th (Welsh) Brigade whose focus would include celebrations for Black History Month in October. A regional engagement team was also in place providing support and guidance for schools wishing to undertake STEM activities.
- 4.5 Noting the update the Deputy Minister thanked the Deputy Commander for the support provided during the pandemic.
- 4.6 Flt Lieutenant Ella Fortune provided an update on behalf of Air Commodore Williams. During the pandemic the RAF had supported the national response whilst continuing in its role of Air Defence and world-wide Air Mobility. It was confirmed that despite a pause of some training, fighter pilot training had continued but with changes put in place to ensure safety. Technical training at St Athan had resumed in May, with measures in place to ensure compliance with Government guidelines. The RAF had supported the Joint Military Command via RAF Resilience Liaison Officers undertaking varied roles including logistic and media support and medical transfer of patients when required. The RAF's reserve squadron in Wales, No 614 Squadron, mobilised 12 personnel for Covid Support Force duties in Wales and from mid-June were employed as a Mobile Testing Unit in the North of England under 11 Signals Brigade.
- 4.7 Engagement events had either been cancelled, postponed or delivered online. Online packages had been put in place for both VE Day, the Royal Welsh Show and the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. It was noted that an event to commemorate the Battle of Britain had been re-scheduled for July 2021, providing an opportunity for a full ceremonial parade and flypast. The annual visit to the RAF by Members of the Senedd had also been postponed and would be re-arranged for Spring 2021.
- 4.8 During 2019 the RAF STEM programme had reached in excess of 90,000 young Welsh children. Flt Lieutenant Fortune advised members that in 2021 it

was hoped to reach over 100,000 young people, although this would depend greatly on the capacity within schools to engage.

- 4.9 RAF recruitment continues to improve with around 5.5% of all recruits hailing from Wales, with one in eight Welsh recruits being recruited as Officers. 2021 recruitment was underway with some 30,000 applications being processed each month. Plans to further increase the numbers of BAME and female recruits were in place.
- 4.10 Whilst the RAF Air Cadets have remained closed it was advised that plans were underway to reopen, within the Government guidelines, from next month.
- 4.11 Commander Steve Henaghen updated the members on the latest position regarding the Royal Navy in Wales; advising that both Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel continued to be deployed in Wales providing support for Covid-19 as military planners and liaison staff.
- 4.12 As with the other Services virtual opportunities had replaced traditional face to face methods. The Sea Cadets were receiving virtual presentations whilst commemorations for VE and VJ Day had included application based quizzes.
- 4.13 Recruitment for Regulars and Reserves was underway with an influx in applications anticipated.
- 4.14 Commander Henaghen spoke about the Royal Navy engagement plans. A new Twitter site was now in place and in 2021 it was anticipated that up to 50 Officers would be undertaking engagement visits around Wales.
- 4.15 Darren Millar AM asked about Cambrian Patrol and it was confirmed that whilst this year's exercise had been cancelled discussions were ongoing regarding delivery of the event in 2021. In the meantime a 'Keeping the Flame Alive' activity was in place instead. 41 teams had taken part during 2019; it was hoped to improve on this in 2021.
- 4.16 It was highlighted that veterans had also provided support during Covid-19. An example of this was the role of Team Rubicon, of which Ant Metcalfe was involved with. Ant explained that as part of the team he had helped support the construction of the Dragon's Heart field hospital. Team Rubicon had also supported the decontamination of ambulances.
- 4.17 Wishing to put on record her gratitude towards all those involved in the provision of support in tackling the pandemic the Deputy Minister suggested that a public thank you would be worth considering.

ITEM 5 – UPDATE FROM THE FAMILIES FEDERATIONS

- 5.1 Jane Williams advised members that each of the Families Federations websites included an area with a focus on Covid-19 and the support in place for Service families experiencing challenges during the pandemic.

- 5.2 The Forces Families Jobs had recently celebrated its first anniversary with the number of organisations involved increasing. To date there were 1,620 jobs advertised with 2,105 candidates registered. The total number of employers listed was 610 and out of these 176 were recipients of the Gold ERS. Jane confirmed that amongst the organisations listed on the site two Welsh Local Authorities, Blaenau Gwent and Vale of Glamorgan had registered.
- 5.3 Jane spoke about the Andrew Selous report 'Living in our Shoes' that had been published in June 2020. The report included a number of recommendations and advised that the Family Federations would work with the Welsh Government in taking these forward.

Action: Welsh Government officials to work with the Family Federations on the recommendations from 'Living in our Shoes'.

- 5.4 The 'Strengthening Families' initiative had been launched on the 1st September 2020 and offered a range of support to all Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel via an alliance of charities and professional bodies. Charities involved included Relate and Homestart and despite geographical challenges the Families Federations were determined to reach as many dispersed families as possible.
- 5.5 Jane informed members that a UK wide initiative was in place offering free books to the families of the current Serving naval community. Funded by the Libor fund initially and thereon with funding from the Royal Navy and Marines Charity the Naval Families Federation was working with Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru in the provision of books to Service families. Jane asked members to get in touch if they knew of other organisations who would benefit.
- 5.6 The Naval Families Federation was working with artist Tim Mann in the delivery of a creative project 'Time on my Watch'. To be launched in October 2020 the project will involve artistic means of telling the story of Armed Forces families and its impact. Jane highlighted her wish to work with stakeholders in Wales.
- 5.7 Cat Calder updated members on issues that had arisen regarding the policy to provide a 50% reduction in council tax on second homes when Serving personnel are living in Ministry of Defence accommodation. Three cases had been received and whilst two of these had been resolved, one remains outstanding. The UK Department for Communities and Local Government had recently written to all Local Authorities in England as a reminder of policies in place.
- 5.8 Colette Musgrave endorsed the frustrations of Serving families and agreed to engage with officials going forwards to help resolve this issue. Thanking the Welsh Government for its Loneliness and Social Isolation grant funding Colette advised that the Army Families Federation (AFF) had been successful in the receipt of funding. Findings from the AFF project had been provided to the Welsh Government.

5.9 The Deputy Minister informed members that the Welsh Government had recently undertaken a campaign to raise awareness of the support available concerning council tax. The Deputy Minister asked the WLGA to engage with all Local Authorities to highlight the council tax policy in relation to the Armed Forces.

ACTION: The WLGA to engage with Local Authorities highlighting council tax policy in relation to the Armed Forces.

ITEM 6 – FORCES IN MIND TRUST (FIMT) IMPACT REPORT 2019

6.1 Ray Locke provided members with an update on the current priorities of FIMT. Speaking about the 2019 Impact Report, Ray advised that the report provided a snapshot of support that had been provided by FIMT. It was noted that FIMT's strategy was to work in collaboration with organisations across the UK to ensure the Armed Forces community lead fulfilled lives. The Veterans and Families Research Hub was recommended should members wish to access evidence-based information about the Armed Forces community.

6.2 Whilst FIMT was a UK funder its work was also relevant to Wales. Specific projects had been undertaken in Wales; these included:

- the two-year 3MDR randomised control trial for veterans with treatment resistant PTSD and
- funding awarded to Tros Gynnal Plant to enable them to pilot a three-year trial of a community based mental health support service for ex-Service personnel and their families from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

6.3 Ray highlighted the 'Lifting Our Sights' research. Led by Future Agenda it will provide valuable insights into transition and future trends which may impact the Armed Forces community in 2030 and beyond.

6.4 A further piece of work was the 'Housing Policy Statement'. Published in August it set out FIMT's policy position on the housing needs of ex-Service personnel and their families. Ray emphasised the importance of ensuring information was provided to the ex-Service personnel appropriately to try and alleviate housing issues.

6.5 FIMT had funded one of the key researchers in the Andrew Selous report. Identifying important issues to be considered it was confirmed that the Secretary of State for Defence would be delivering a formal response to the report.

6.6 Caroline Cooke spoke about the 'Our Community, Our Covenant' report and advised that work to update the report would commence shortly.

6.7 Darren Millar AM commended the work undertaken by FIMT and confirmed the interest of his Cross Party Group on Armed Forces and Cadets in the report released by Swansea University regarding gambling. The report suggested UK veterans may be at an increased risk of developing gambling problems than

non-veterans. Peter confirmed that in collaboration with Professor Simon Dymond information on GamCare had now been included on the Veterans Gateway.

- 6.8 In response to concerns raised regarding the capacity of Veterans NHS Wales, it was confirmed that an additional £85k had been provided to support veteran therapists. This additional funding would come to an end March 2021 and discussions would need to take place to consider capacity issues going forward.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – WELSH GOVERNMENT ARMED FORCES TEAM UPDATE

- 7.1 Cerys Gage introduced the update on behalf of the Armed Forces team. It was noted whilst this year's Armed Forces conference would not take place physically, options were being explored to deliver a shorter virtual conference. Any ideas on how this could be achieved would be welcome.
- 7.2 Cerys advised that over the last six months the team had been busy compiling the second Armed Forces Annual Report. This would be published and laid before the Senedd on the 30th September. The members were thanked for providing contributions towards the report.
- 7.3 It was emphasised that the report provided a clear picture of continued progress in what has become an increasingly busy agenda. Highlighting the commitments to be taken forward, many of which had been developed from feedback from the Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs), the Armed Forces Scoping Exercise and ongoing commitments, it reflected a collaborative approach. It was confirmed that whilst there is still work to do, Wales was heading in the right direction.
- 7.4 Peter Evans spoke about the Scoping Exercise and advised that following on from the update circulated in June a further update would be provided during December. All three action groups were now in place – Transition Group, Employment Group and the Information, Awareness and Finance Group. Peter explained that one of the key issues that had arisen was the consistency of training across all AFLO regions and that work was ongoing to streamline current training packages. Also in progress was the delivery of a Wales specific employment bulletin. Officials were working with the Career Transition Partnership to achieve this.
- 7.5 It was noted that work was ongoing to capture and update information on the Map of Need website to ensure an accurate portrayal of services available across Wales.
- 7.6 Peter provided an update on the work underway to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant by further embedding it into law; given its complexities officials were working closely with the Ministry of Defence, key partners such as the AFLOs and WLGA, and both legal and policy officials.
- 7.7 John Shivas thanked Armed Forces officials for their support with the Armed Forces legislation proposals, reinforcing that it would take time to look at each

policy area in detail. Jan emphasised the Welsh Government's desire to see the final draft legislation proposed and the outcome of the consultations with key partners prior to making a firm commitment.

AGENDA ITEM 8 – ARMED FORCES LIAISON OFFICERS (AFLOs) – PROGRESS AND KEY ISSUES

8.1 Rachel Morgan provided an update on the AFLOs, highlighting that the continuation of funding for the roles and been an area of considerable interest amongst all partners in the Armed Forces sector. The £275k funding for each of the next two years, from April 2021, was very welcome, and would enable them to continue to deliver important work.

8.2 In speaking of their continued progress the AFLOs' involvement in supporting VE and VJ day within their local communities was noted. Despite challenging circumstances the AFLOs had continued to engage regionally, raising awareness of the support in place for the Armed Forces community during Covid-19. A number of achievements were identified and included:

- A question relating to the Armed Forces community in a local survey to evaluate the impact of Covid-19;
- Practical support on individual cases relating to housing and educational issues;
- Delivering online welcome packages for new frontline staff raising awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant;
- Supporting Local Authorities in achieving Gold in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme;
- Supporting core services dealing with Covid-19 issues.

AGENDA ITEM 9 – NATIONAL ARMED FORCES DAY 5-YEAR PLAN

9.1 This item had been covered in item 3, matters arising.

AGENDA ITEM 10 – COVID 19, FUTURE SUPPORT

10.1 Introducing this item the Deputy Minister noted the challenging times that continued and highlighted the exemplar ways in which Service personnel and the Armed Forces community had supported the people of Wales.

10.2 In considering future plans in place Roy Brown explained that COBSEO had undertaken a survey on the effects Covid-19 had on the charity sector. This exercise would be repeated in the near future.

AGENDA ITEM 11 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 11.1 Under any other business Colonel Nick Lock spoke about the recently appointed Regional Schools Liaison Officers. Funded from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund they would be working with SCCE Cymru to raise understanding of the issues faced by Service children.
- 11.2 Ant advised that this year's Poppy Appeal would be going ahead, in addition to the Field of Remembrance. Both would adhere to social distancing guidelines. Armed Forces officials would continue to advise members and partners of the Government guidelines.
- 11.3 It was agreed that at the next meeting her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales would provide an update on STOMP.
- 11.4 The Deputy Minister thanked members for their input and confirmed the next date for the meeting as the 24 March 2021.