

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

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 13 JULY 2016

Members

Carl Sargeant AM	Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children
Lt Colonel Jonah MacGill	160 Brigade Wales
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	RAF
Sara Baade	Army Family Federation
Colin Jones	RAF Family Federation
Jane Williams	Naval Families Federation
Dawn North	HIVE
Peter Evans	Royal British Legion
Seb Hargeaves	Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association (SSAFA)
Lt Col Stephen Hughes	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Col Nick Beard	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Stephen John	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
William Lyn	Ministry of Defence Covenant Team
Mike Bailey	Veterans Welfare Service
Rachel Morgan	WLGA
Lt Cdr Jonathan Buckley	Royal Navy
Huw Thomas	Department for Work and Pensions
Martin Swain	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Jan Jones	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Jason Pollard	Welsh Government – Mental Health
Paige Rouse	Welsh Government – Community Safety

Apologies

Dr Sarah Watkins	Welsh Government – Health and Social Services
Debbie Whittingham	COBSEO
Bill Mahon	RAF Families Federation
Chris Downward	SSAFA
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Annabel Ingram	Army Families Federation
Peter Higson	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Cllr Brendan Toomey	WLGA

ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Cabinet Secretary welcomed members to his first Expert Group meeting and also welcomed new members to their first meeting. The

Cabinet Secretary noted that apologies had been received from Dr Sarah Watkins, Debbie Whittingham, Bill Mahon, Chris Downward, Cerys Gage, Annabel Ingram, Peter Higson and Cllr Brendan Toomey.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 3 DECEMBER 2015

- 2.1 The Cabinet Secretary invited members to agree the minutes for accuracy, noting that the minutes had been agreed to reflect comments received. The minutes were agreed as a true record.

ITEM 3 – PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- 3.1 The Cabinet Secretary noted that all previous actions had been completed and no further updates were reported.

ITEM 4 – DISCUSSION ON KEY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT GROUP

- 4.1 Lt Colonel Jonah MacGill updated the Group on the Armed Forces Employability Pathway. It was noted that the one week long course had seen 70% of its candidates either gaining employment or joining the Forces. Candidates were put forward by DWP and the Forces continue to have a good relationship with them. In total eight courses had been run including a pilot. There are plans for a further three courses this year with invitations to be sent to Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries. The course has produced many success stories which have changed people's lives.
- 4.2 Lt Colonel Jonah MacGill said he hoped 160 Infantry Brigade and Welsh Government would continue to work together to support and fund the course.
- 4.3 The Cabinet Secretary was pleased with the outcome of this course and asked if he could be provided with detailed statistics for the next meeting of the Expert Group.

Action:

- **Lt Colonel Jonah MacGill to provide the Cabinet Secretary with detailed statistics on the Armed Forces Employability Pathway for the next meeting of the Expert Group.**
- 4.4 Air Commodore Adrian Williams updated the Group on the fast jet pilot training at RAF Valley, Anglesey, confirming that, from the Strategic Defence and Security Review, there would be an increase in the numbers of RAF squadrons, which would generate increased investment and training at RAF Valley.

- 4.5 It was noted that the RAF are awaiting clarification on the future of the Number 4 School of Technical Training. Ministry of Defence (MOD) are currently working with Welsh Government and hope to see a decision at the end of the year.
- 4.6 Air Commodore Adrian Williams also announced that 2018 will be the centenary anniversary of the RAF and that ideas for celebratory events would be welcomed from Welsh Government.

Action:

- **Welsh Government to gather thoughts and ideas on potential celebrations for the RAF's 100 year anniversary in 2018.**
- 4.7 Peter Evans discussed with the Group the challenge of improving data to support Community Covenants. The Royal British Legion is currently fronting their Count Them In campaign. The Cabinet Secretary explained that Welsh Government are very supportive of this work but would like to ensure the security of the data to avoid veterans being put at risk.
- 4.8. It was highlighted that there is existing census legislation with regards to the sensitive nature of the data, and there had been no problems in the last 100 years. This issue had been discussed with the UK Government.
- 4.9 The Group were informed by Peter Evans that there is a lack of data on veterans and their families within Local Authorities (LA's). The Cabinet Secretary stated the reason for having Covenant Champions in each LA was to support delivery of the Covenant and carry out activities, not just hold the title. He went on to say that there will be a Covenant Conference in the Autumn and that it is important that the Armed Forces are celebrated all year and not just on the dedicated days such as Armed Forces Day.
- 4.10 It was brought to the Groups attention that MoD holds Champion Events and Champions were attached to each Military unit. This was to ensure that the community knew that the Armed Forces are always there and not just one day a year. The Tri-Services are keen to integrate into the communities in which they are located, and demonstrate they are no different to other members of the community.
- 4.11 It was agreed that members of the Expert group need to look at communication methods to ensure a year round message on the Armed Forces is portrayed.

Action:

- **Members of the Group to work with Communications in their organisations to ensure Armed Forces messages are delivered**

throughout the year to remind the Welsh public of their ongoing work each day.

4.12 Jane Williams updated the Group on the work Warwickshire Council are currently piloting. It is a front facing customer service document which includes a concise guide on the Armed Forces from a strategic level right down to that of the general public. It is hoped to launch the initiative in the near future. The document is designed to give a clear picture of the life of veterans and share information and good practice. The document will be available to be disseminated to other Local Authorities at no additional cost.

4.13 The Cabinet Secretary welcomed the idea and confirmed he will look into it.

Action:

- **Jane Williams to let Jan Jones know when Warwickshire Council launch their customer service document. Jan can bring it to the Cabinet Secretary's attention for his consideration.**

4.14 Peter Evans explained that the Royal British Legion delivered Covenant training packages to 19 out of the 22 LA's in Wales and would be happy to go out and deliver them again in future.

4.15 The Cabinet Secretary suggested he would write to Cllr Brendan Toomey (WLGA) to gain clarification and consistency across Wales on Covenant training undertaken by all Local Authorities. It was also suggested that the Cabinet Secretary asked if all Local Authorities included a question about being an ex-member of the Armed Forces on initial point of accessing services by the general public.

Action:

- **The Cabinet Secretary to write to Cllr Brendan Toomey (WLGA) to ask him to write to Local Authorities regarding training undertaken by front facing staff and to ascertain if a question about being an ex-member of the Armed Forces is asked on initial point of accessing services.**

4.16 It was confirmed that Stephen John had been selected as the Cadet Expansion Officer for Wales; he is already working with colleagues at the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA) to prepare an approach for the new academic school year. It was agreed that a more direct approach with Head Teachers is the way forward. The Cabinet Secretary asked for a progress update to be provided at the next meeting.

4.17 Jane Williams from the Naval Families Federation said Service families blend into, and give to the community in which they live, and the

Welcome to Wales's document is a welcomed addition to support available for families. Jane confirmed that ongoing conversations are taking place around childcare and what the increased support will be.

- 4.18 The Cabinet Secretary explained that when Armed Forces sat in one of his previous portfolios he met with spouses in military settings and had seen how distressed they were especially around employability and language barriers. He confirmed that these issues need addressing and that he is currently creating new childcare packages which could prove to be useful to Armed Forces families and will be launched end of the year.
- 4.19 The Cabinet Secretary is considering tours to visit families in the next 12 months.

ITEM 5 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 Lt Colonel Jonah MacGill raised the question how the information flows from this group down to the regional and local groups and vice versa. Jan Jones confirmed that the minutes from the Expert Group are posted on the Armed Forces in Wales's website and attendees should feed the information down and Martin Swain also confirmed that information should be shared through Public Service Boards.
- 5.2 Lt Colonel Jonah MacGill emphasised the main problem was the communication flow upwards from Regional Partnerships up to this Group. Jan Jones recognised the regional value and will start to widen the communication

Action:

- **Members to look and give some thought to the communication flow from the Regional Partnerships up to the Armed Forces Expert Group.**

- 5.3 Martin Swain updated the Group that the team are continuing to work on the Package of Support and Welcome to Wales's documents. Jan Jones hopes that both documents will be launched in the autumn.
- 5.4 William Lynn confirmed that the Ministry of Defence Covenant Team Annual Report will be published prior to the Christmas break and will include case studies. William welcomed the opportunity for members of the Group to provide some case studies to be included in the report. Jan Jones requested that they be sent to herself or Cerys Gage first who can pass them on to William.

Action:

- **Members of the Group who wish to provide examples of case studies to the MoD's Annual Report to send them to Jan Jones and Cerys Gage who will pass them on to William Lynn.**

ITEM 6 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 6.1 The date of the next meeting will be confirmed in the coming weeks but will be held in the New Year.
- 6.2 The Group were also reminded that they should have received an invitation to the Community Covenant Conference on the 15 September, the venue still to be confirmed but is likely to be Cardiff City Stadium.