

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

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2018

Members

Alun Davies AM	Cabinet Secretary for Public Services and Local Government
Darren Millar AM	Welsh Conservative member
Col Lance Patterson	160 Infantry Brigade and HQ in Wales
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	RAF
Annabel Ingram	Army Family Federation
Dani Robertson	RAF Family 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
Naomi Alleyne	WLGA
Huw Thomas	Department for Work and Pensions
Caroline Wood	COBSEO
David Mogilner	Ministry of Defence
Amber Chalonner	Veterans NHS Wales
Julie Lowe	Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association (SSAFA)
Fiona Jenkins	Cardiff and the Vale Local Health Board
Millie Taylor	SSCE Cymru
Geraint Jones	Change Step
Jane Greaves	Northumbria University
Dr Michael Rodriguez	Northumbria University
Reg Kilpatrick	Welsh Government - Director Local Government
Jan Jones	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Peter Evans	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Jess Lacey	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Julia Letton	Welsh Government – Health and Social Services
Tania Nicholson	Welsh Government – Education
Emma Williams	Welsh Government - Housing

Apologies

Neil Kitchiner	Veterans NHS Wales
Jenna Clare	Ministry of Defence

ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Cabinet Secretary welcomed members to his second meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group. A particular welcome was given to new members

of the Armed Forces team, Peter Evans and Jess Lacey, and to Darren Millar AM who had been invited to observe.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 7 FEBRUARY 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 Cabinet Secretary noted that many of the previous actions had been completed, or were in progress.
- 3.2 The Cabinet Secretary noted that the action concerning dentistry remained outstanding and requested that this be resolved. Fiona Jenkins agreed to take this forward. Air Commodore Adrian Williams noted that he'd interact if needed.
- 3.3 Darren Millar AM asked that a greater focus be given to the issue of veteran gambling. Jan Jones agreed to raise this with colleagues in the Welsh Government that lead the Cross Government Gambling group and speak with Swansea University who had recently conducted a report on veteran gambling.

Actions:

- **The provision of dentistry in RAF Valley to be taken forward by Fiona Jenkins.**
- **Jan to speak with the Cross Government Gambling group leads to highlight the Expert Group's interest in the issue of veteran gambling and also speak with Swansea University who had recently conducted a report on veteran gambling.**

ITEM 4 – PROGRESS TO DATE

- 4.1 Jan Jones confirmed that Welsh Government officials were working with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to develop the new UK wide Veterans Strategy. A write around to Ministers will take place mid October seeking observations on the current draft.
- 4.2 Jan went on to advise that the MoD Covenant Annual Report will be published during November, followed by a Welsh Government Annual Report at the end of January beginning of February 2019.
- 4.3 A scoping exercise was underway to identify the gaps in delivery of services for veterans and their families in Wales. Peter Evans said that as part of the process he will be visiting partner organisations to gather information on current provision of service. A draft survey had been circulated to all members for comments by 1 October.

- 4.4 Jan provided an update on the Employment Pathway and Toolkit, confirming that both documents were scheduled for launch by the Cabinet Secretary during Remembrance.
- 4.5 Darren Millar AM said that the issue of employment had been raised during the meeting of his Armed Forces and Cadets Cross Party Group. He advised that he had met with the Regional Employer Engagement Group to discuss Reservist engagement. Reserves day will take place on 27 June 2019 and Darren Millar AM suggested the Welsh Government may wish to consider holding an event in the Senedd on the 26 June to promote Reservist employment.
- 4.6 Reg Kilpatrick noted the volume of work that had been undertaken since the last Expert Group meeting in February; a large proportion of which has been achieved in collaboration and is an exemplar model.

Actions:

- **Jan to speak with Welsh Government colleagues concerning delivery of an event on the 26 June in the Senedd to promote Reservist employment.**

ITEM 5 – UPDATE FROM THE MOD AND TRI-SERVICES

- 5.1 Colonel Lance Patterson began by thanking all those who had been involved in this year's National Armed Forces Day, noting that all Expert Group members had helped towards its success.
- 5.2 Colonel Patterson noted it was a busy time of year for the Army. 1st Battalion the Royal Welsh had recovered from Estonia but the Queens Dragoon Guards remained committed to reinforcing NATO's eastern flank in Poland whilst 1st Battalion the Welsh Guards remained on operations in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- 5.3 Colonel Patterson thanked the Welsh Government for the £250,000 funding that has been provided towards supporting Service children in education in Wales, and noted the recent announcement by the MoD to continue its Education Support Fund for a further two years on a limited basis. £415,000 in funding had been allocated to projects across the UK as part of the Covenant Fund. £87,000 of this had been allocated to Wales, making up 21% of the allocations, and reflects the quality of the bids submitted.
- 5.4 Going forward Colonel Patterson explained that the Armistice Remembrance service will take place at Llandaf Cathedral, an event that will be attended by the First Minister. Also coming up are the Armed Forces in Wales Awards, 22 November in St Fagans and a gun salute to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Wales, 14 November.

- 5.5 Col Patterson commented that there seemed little advancement over the issue of St Athan in terms of a future infantry hub and a final land settlement.
- 5.6 Air Commodore Adrian Williams advised that in excess of 60 events across all Local Authorities had been held in Wales to commemorate RAF 100. Delivery of the events had revealed many people within Wales with a personal connection to the RAF. This would be followed up in the future. The Air Commodore said that RAF Valley remained a critical part of the defence infrastructure with squadron numbers 1 and 25 now based in RAF Valley. The Cabinet Secretary offered his congratulations to the RAF following the success of its centenary celebrations.
- 5.7 The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the First Minister had written to the Secretary of State for Defence to ascertain the future landscape for Wales as part of the Defence Modernisation Programme. The Cabinet Secretary advised that he will also be meeting with the Minister for Defence and Procurement, Stuart Andrews MP, during November and the issue of basing in Wales will be raised.
- 5.8 Colonel Patterson spoke about Armed Forces Days and the uncertainty concerning future delivery. Jan suggested reducing the number of Armed Forces Days across Wales to one rather than two, and alternating the events between North and South Wales. The Cabinet Secretary asked for a report to be produced, outlining an agreed future vision and resource implications. The report will be circulated to the Group for consideration.
- 5.9 Ant Metcalfe commented on the Covenant Fund success, applauding the roles of the Armed Forces Liaison Officers in driving this forward.
- 5.10 Colonel Nick Beard advised that the building of the new bespoke HMS Cambria has now commenced in Cardiff Bay. It is expected to be completed by 2019.

Actions:

- **a report to be produced, outlining an agreed future vision of Armed Forces Days and resource implications.**

ITEM 6 – UPDATE ON THE MAP OF NEED

- 6.1 Jane Greaves introduced the Map of Need and explained that it was part of a large piece of research to identify gaps in service provision and an analysis of need for veterans and their families. Three research streams are in place – financial hardship, mental health and service families. Jane explained that work is underway to embed the directory as part of the Veterans Gateway.
- 6.2 Dr Michael Rodriguez said that the data had been collected from a variety of sources, including the RAF Benevolent Fund and Veterans NHS Wales. It was noted that within Wales the younger veterans navigated towards Veterans NHS Wales whilst the older veterans sought support from Combat

Stress. Dr Rodriguez noted one of the emerging findings was the tendency of mental health issues within deprived areas.

- 6.3 Darren Millar AM questioned what was being done about veterans with mental health who remained unidentified. Jane explained that a piece of work was ongoing in the West of England concerning primary care whereby patients were asked on registration if they had served in the Armed Forces. Fiona Jenkins noted that in Wales the primary care registration forms have already been updated so that new patients are asked if they had served in the Armed Forces. However, further work is required to resolve the issue of older patients who had registered prior to the updated forms and whose Service remains unknown. Fiona also said the issue of different codes used during discharge from military Service causes confusion and asked the MoD to look into this.
- 6.4 Ant asked whether the data could be linked so as to compare different variables. Jane confirmed that a data sharing agreement is in place. Julie Lowe noted the point that older veterans are seeking support from the benevolent funds and questioned is this specific to Wales. Fiona commented that Veterans NHS Wales is an evidence based service that works closely with Combat Stress and findings indicate that older veterans navigate towards the third sector as a source of support as it is something they are more familiar with. The Cabinet Secretary emphasised the importance of exploring delivery of services and matching needs.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – UPDATE ON THE PEER MENTORING PILOT

- 7.1 Geraint Jones explained that great progress had been made since the launch Change Step in 2013 and advised that Change Step work with those who struggle to engage and have a lack of trust with mainstream services. In 2017, with the support of pilot funding from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Change step embedded two veteran mentors working alongside Veterans NHS Wales therapists, thus providing continuous support for those who experienced difficulties in engagement. Two evaluations have since been carried out whose findings commended its innovative approach especially as the family members also receive support. Findings also identified the need for greater clarity around data collection
- 7.2 Geraint spoke about the two year study that had been compiled by Social Value Cymru entitled 'The social value of the Change Step and Veterans NHS pilot study'. Findings identified that as a result of the extra family support provided there was an increased social impact with the changes seen as sustainable.
- 7.3 Geraint highlighted the collaborative approach of Change Step which also works with the Royal British Legion, offering crisis peer mentoring, the benevolent funds, assessing the needs of hard to reach veterans and supporting aged veterans. Going forward it is hoped that the relationship with Veterans NHS Wales will be formalised.

- 7.4 Darren Millar AM said that the work of Change Step should be celebrated, and highlighted the ongoing challenge concerning funding and sustainability. The peer mentoring model is an efficient and effective model, however its short term funding means that the service is not embedded. The funding from Help for Heroes also comes to an end in December 2018.
- 7.5 The Cabinet Secretary noted the points raised concerning future funding of Change Step and he would get back to him on this.

AGENDA ITEM 8 – UPDATE ON THE ARMED FORCES LIAISON OFFICER POSTS

- 8.1 The Cabinet Secretary opened the item by praising the work of the Armed Forces Liaison Officer (AFLO) in his constituency and the progress that was underway.
- 8.2 Naomi Alleyne advised that as part of the national project the online training was complete and available for all Local Authorities and public services to use. A toolkit has been developed to evaluate progress. Whilst the Local Authority bids differ, reflecting regional ways of working Naomi confirmed that the priorities continue to include raising awareness, policy delivery and improving engagement. Julie asked what was happening with Powys, the only Local Authority not to have been part of a bid for AFLO funding. Naomi confirmed that whilst Powys doesn't have an AFLO it can still benefit from the national resources in place. Ant questioned the training element currently not being mandatory and said that he would raise this at the next Armed Forces Champions meeting.
- 8.3 Naomi confirmed that the Armed Forces Champions meeting will take place on the 14 November. The Cabinet Secretary will attend.
- 8.4 The Cabinet Secretary emphasised his interest in the future roles of the AFLOs, ensuring posts are rationalised and that Powys is included.

AGENDA ITEM 9 – VETERANS STRATEGY

- 9.1 David Mogilner introduced the Veterans Strategy, a proposal that had been agreed at the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board in April 2018. David explained that two documents would be published in November – a Strategy that will include a strategic vision and principles and a 12 week consultation document. It was noted that the definition of the word 'veteran' would be given consideration as part of the consultation. The Strategy will include cross cutting factors aimed at driving improvement and is structured around six key themes. The Strategy will focus on UK veterans initially with a future iteration targeted towards overseas veterans.

- 9.2 The Cabinet Secretary highlighted the need to differentiate between the delivery of services between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations, and for clarity of timescales and ambitions.

AGENDA ITEM 10 – SUPPORTING SERVICE CHILDREN IN EDUCATION CYMRU

- 10.1 Millie Taylor advised that the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru project has been underway for five years and that during this time considerable resources, such as digital stories and toolkits, are now in place. SSCE is working with the Welsh Government to provide input into the review of the school admissions code, to identify how Service children can be included in the new code. It was noted that a recent data study has identified Service children in all 22 Local Authorities in Wales. Millie spoke about the Welsh Government Supporting Service Children in Wales Fund. 41 applications were submitted across Wales with 27 of these successful in being awarded full or partial funding. The MoD has since announced the extension of its Education Support Fund on a limited basis, £3m for 2018-19 and £2m for 2019-20.

AGENDA ITEM 11 – VETERANS GATEWAY

- 11.1 Ant provided an update on the Veterans Gateway that had celebrated its first anniversary in June 2018. Since its launch Ant confirmed that smaller charities were now involved with the Gateway. Ant explained that finance, mental health and housing are the top areas of need that have arisen since its launch and that a greater number of veteran engagement is from the younger cohort. It was noted that the contact centre situated in Nantgarw includes 50% of its call handlers that are either veterans or family members of veterans.

AGENDA ITEM 12 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 12.1 The Cabinet Secretary thanked the members for their input, noting that it had been a useful meeting. He also offered his thanks on behalf of the Group to Col Lance Patterson who will shortly be leaving 160 Brigade and taking up a new role in the MoD.
- 12.2 Fiona noted that both Betsi Cadwaladr and Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board had recently been awarded Gold in the Employer Recognition Scheme awards.
- 12.3 The next meeting will be held on the 28 March, 11.00 – 12.30pm. Venue to be confirmed in due course.