

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

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2018

### Members

Alun Davies AM	Cabinet Secretary for Public Services and Local Government
Lt Col Kevan Thornber	160 Infantry Brigade and HQ in Wales
Brigadier Frasier	Royal Navy
Annabel Ingram	Army Family Federation
Jen Brooksbank	RAF Family Federation
Jane Williams	Naval Families Federation
Lisa Gostling	HIVE
Peter Evans	Royal British Legion
Ant Metcalfe	Royal British Legion
Col Nick Beard	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Mike Bailey	Veterans Welfare Service
Rachel Morgan	WLGA
Kevin Morgan	Department for Work and Pensions
Leeanne Plechowicz	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Ian Caws	COBSEO
Ross Hall	University of South Wales
Jenna Clare	Ministry of Defence
Neil Kitchiner	Veterans NHS Wales
Reg Kilpatrick	Welsh Government - Director Local Government
Jan Jones	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety
Julia Letton	Welsh Government – Health and Social Services

### Apologies

Air Commodore Adrian Williams	RAF
Seb Hargeaves	Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association (SSAFA)
Lt Col Stephen Hughes	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Naomi Alleyne	WLGA
Huw Thomas	Department for Work and Pensions
Peter Higson	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Ian Barrow	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in Wales
Jason Pollard	Welsh Government – Health and Social Services
Dawn North	HIVE
James Greenrod	Ministry of Defence Covenant team
Cllr Rob Jones	WLGA spokesperson

## **ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

- 1.1 The Cabinet Secretary welcomed members to his first meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group and paid recognition to the work driven forward by his predecessor, the former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children.
- 1.2 The Cabinet Secretary noted that he had previously worked alongside Serving personnel and was therefore aware of the trauma they experienced in the Forces. Interested in hearing the views of the Group he requested members speak openly at each meeting.

## **ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 5 JULY 2017**

- 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 Julia Letton provided an update on the provision of dentistry in RAF Valley. Julia advised that discussions were underway between Betsi Cadwaladr and Dean Clarke, RAF Valley Community Liaison Officer. To ascertain the numbers that require dental provision, an online survey of family needs had been carried out. 11 families responded out of the 109 families registered. Two of the families confirmed they didn't have a dentist. Discussions will continue in order to ascertain the level of need required.
- 3.3 The Cabinet Secretary said that he wished to pursue the issue of dentistry further.
- 3.3 The members noted and agreed the revised Terms of Reference. Jan Jones asked whether members would have any objection to inviting a police representative to be on the Group. Annabel Ingram advised that a member of the police attended the regional forums and that this approach worked well. It was agreed that a police representative would be invited.

### **Actions:**

- **The provision of dentistry in RAF Valley to be explored further.**
- **Officials to invite a police representative to be a member of future Expert Group meetings.**

## **ITEM 4 – ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE**

- 4.1 The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that he was aware of issues facing the Armed Forces community within his constituency of Blaenau Gwent.

Commenting on the achievements of the Expert Group he noted that it worked well as a catalyst for delivery of specific services. He hoped to build on achievements to date. The Cabinet Secretary emphasised the need to identify issues and a collaborative approach of resolving them.

- 4.2 Jan introduced the paper, highlighting that it was an opportunity to review the achievements that had been delivered in collaboration with all members of the Group. Whilst the paper included achievements across a number of areas Jan suggested that it would be opportune to focus on continuing collaborative working in the future. Jan confirmed structures were in place to raise issues and share best practice, and that members needed to make greater use of the regional forums and the WLGA Armed Forces Network. It was advised that the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board will shape the future direction of the Covenant Reference Group and that key areas of interest include metrics and the delivery and performance of the Covenant across the UK.
- 4.3 Ant Metcalfe advised that the next Veterans Gateway meeting would be held in the Spring and agreed to provide an update on latest statistics following the meeting.
- 4.4 Mike Bailey asked to share the achievements wider, noting that he'd experienced the public perception that Wales weren't doing enough to support the Armed Forces community. Both Lt Col Thornber and Jenna Clare noted the good work that was being done in Wales, a comment that was reinforced by Leeanne Plechowicz who said that the achievements in Wales were often spoken about in the Criminal Justice field in England.
- 4.5 Peter Evans noted the Housing Referral Pathway, suggesting that it would be useful to evaluate the success of the Pathway and the issue of removing the local connection requirement for divorced and separated spouses and civil partners as part of the Housing Wales Act.
- 4.6 Reg Kilpatrick commended the achievements made, noting that the majority had been delivered without a budget and in collaboration with partners. Reg expressed an interest in raising awareness of the achievements and asked that a smaller sub group be established to explore how this could be done.

#### **Actions:**

- **Ant to share the latest statistics following the next meeting of the Veterans Gateway.**
- **A sub group to be set up to explore how we communicate our achievements.**

#### **ITEM 5 – COLLABORATIVE WORK BEING UNDERTAKEN CONCERNING ACEs AND ESLs.**

- 5.1 The Cabinet Secretary expressed an interest in the research project between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Early Service Leavers (ESLs),

highlighting that whilst a number of the military leave the service prematurely, the reasons aren't always well understood.

5.2 Ross Hall introduced the agenda item explaining that the project stemmed from the Armed Forces Covenant conference held autumn 2017 and discussions with Welsh Government. Ross advised that he had already met with various partners with a view to capturing other projects ongoing in this area. The expected outcomes of the research would include:

- An in-depth understanding of factors influencing absenteeism and intentions to leave the Armed Forces prematurely in the UK;
- An initial mechanism for screening for those at risk of leaving prematurely and;
- A basis for developing new screening tools and interventions to alleviate absenteeism and intentions to leave the Armed Forces prematurely.

Further discussions would be held with the Forces in Mind Trust prior to submission of a formal funding bid in due course. Ross stated that whilst there is a preconception that more should be done upon transition he believed that additional support should be in place prior to transition.

5.3 Lt Col Thornber advised that the experience of ACEs weren't made known upon enlistment, in contrast to civilian life where social care support provided often identified ACEs.

5.4 The Cabinet Secretary thanked Ross for the update and asked to be kept informed of progress.

## **ITEM 6 – UPDATE ON RESEARCH FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE ENDEAVOUR UNIT MODEL AND THE EXPERIENCE OF VETERANS RELEASED FROM THE UNIT.**

6.1 Leeanne Plechowicz provided an update on research undertaken into the resettlement experience of ex-Service personnel released from the Endeavour Unit. Leeanne explained that the dedicated unit model in Parc had sparked controversy, with it being suggested that the unit may make transition more difficult for those who are already struggling with transition.

6.2 As part of the study Leeanne had spoken with 21 ex-Service personnel who had been released. The purpose was to ascertain their motivations and experience within the unit in addition to their experience of resettlement following release. The research questions asked were:

- Why do ex-Service personnel choose to reside and engage with the Endeavour Unit?
- How do ex-Service personnel experience resettlement from the Endeavour Unit?
- Does the dedicated unit model provide a 'hook for change' that encourages resettlement preparation pre-release and positive resettlement post-release?

- 6.3 Findings from the research concluded that transition had been difficult as a result of employment challenges and changes to routines. The peer mentoring provided had proved popular as it gave the ex-Serving personnel motivation to engage. The provision of such a service prior to release would be useful. The importance of the physical environment made a considerable impact, with many commenting on a preference for a clean, well looked after space. Ex-Serving personnel welcomed the military banter and the personal Service experience of the staff within the unit. Those with alcohol and substance misuse dependency welcomed the intervention support provided in addressing such issues. The importance of trust and delivering on promises made was highlighted given the strong military bond developed during the Services.
- 6.4 Leeanne ended by highlighting that the research had identified that:
- Dedicated units for those who valued specialist provision helped ex-Serving personnel prepare for and engage with the resettlement process;
  - Dedicated units need to take into consideration the appropriate staffing and physical environment whilst also nurturing a military culture.
- 6.5 Neil Kitchiner asked whether any of the 21 ex-Serving personnel interviewed had received a mental health referral. Leeanne confirmed that whilst Change Step were engaged in the process she would need to explore this further.
- 6.6 Mike expressed an interest in reviewing the 21 ex-Serving personnel in the future. Whilst this may prove challenging as the ex-Serving are no longer on license, data will continue to be gathered routinely.
- 6.7 Leeanne confirmed that feedback from the Endeavour Unit had been positive and since replicated in HMP Berwyn. In the future it would be interesting to compare and contrast between ex-Serving personnel who had engaged and those who hadn't. Peter Evans noted that it would also be useful to compare against those who hadn't been in the Forces.
- 6.8 The Cabinet Secretary thanked Leeanne for the presentation and noted an interest in making changes that will have a positive impact on lives in the future.

## **ITEM 7 – WLGA UPDATE**

- 7.1 Rachel Morgan introduced the WLGA update and advised that the Armed Forces Network had been established as part of the National Wales project. The first meeting was held in November 2017 providing an opportunity for updates and information sharing. Held twice yearly the next meeting would take place in April.
- 7.2 To ensure consistency of delivery online training packages for Local Authorities were under development. To be launched shortly Rachel confirmed that the training packages had been designed so that Local Authorities could tailor the training to suit. Marketing materials were also

under development and would include a national brand, to again encourage consistency of delivery.

- 7.3 Rachel advised that Armed Forces Liaison Officers had been appointed across the majority of Local Authorities. The North Wales Liaison Officers were currently developing a North Wales Covenant website which would link into the Veterans Gateway and filter down through Local Authority and Voluntary Council websites. The South Wales Liaison Officers have carried out a staff survey to test awareness of the Covenant and were currently reviewing content across all Local Authority websites. Liaison Officers appointed in South West Wales also recognised the importance of having a comprehensive and clear online presence and were focussing on staff training and surveys. The remaining Local Authorities currently without Liaison Officers were exploring options to secure Covenant funds to follow a similar approach. A review of the roles would be undertaken in the near future.
- 7.4 The Cabinet Secretary expressed concern for the delivery of frontline services, and was keen to ensure the appointment of the Armed Forces Liaison Officers made a difference, with the needs of the Armed Forces community being met.
- 7.5 Neil commended the work of the Liaison Officers, noting that having a similar approach across health forums would be useful.

## **ITEM 8 – UPDATE FROM THE MOD AND TRI-SERVICES**

- 8.1 Jenna Clare introduced the update on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Covenant team. Jenna explained that the MoD were reviewing the UK Veteran policy delivery to ascertain whether it is fit for purpose given that in the future the number of Veterans will likely lessen. The importance of involving all Devolved Administrations in future discussions was noted.
- 8.2 Jenna spoke about work underway regarding the Tri-Service Transition policy, emphasising the need to reflect accommodation, education, mental health provision in addition to employment. Another area of focus included the perception of Veterans. Jenna explained that since the publication of Lord Ashcroft's transition report independent research is underway, to identify if any differences have been made.
- 8.3 Three options are being worked up regarding future delivery of a Veterans ID Card – an ID marker, a replacement ID card and ex-Service personnel keeping their uniformed services ID card. Further communication would be made once a decision has been confirmed.
- 8.4 Jenna explained that work is ongoing to measure performance across the UK, to ensure consistent delivery of services. Whilst the current provision of services differs, Jenna said that unless the Service community is disadvantaged the Services provided are meeting the needs of the Armed Forces community.

- 8.5 Work is underway to consolidate the Covenant in the Community with guidance in hand for Serving personal and families moving between nations. MoD are also focussing on tackling known areas of disadvantage, for example, posting notices for service families with school-aged children, challenges facing Foreign and Commonwealth personnel and their families and mitigating the negative impact of overseas postings.
- 8.6 Jenna said that in 2021 the Covenant will have been in existence for 10 years and consideration will need to be given to refreshing it. Thanking Jenna for the comprehensive update the Cabinet Secretary asked that officials be kept in the loop of future proposals as any legislative amendments would require early notice.
- 8.7 Brigadier Frasier confirmed that whilst the Naval footprint in Wales was small, the numbers were largely made up of Cadets and Veterans. With 2018 being the 'Year of the Sea,' the Brigadier confirmed the aim was to increase understanding of the Services through scheduled events, including National Armed Forces Day, Freedom of the City being given to Swansea and Armistice 100.
- 8.8 Lt Colonel Thornber welcomed the report from the Cross Party Group and advised that the priorities for 160 Brigade included defence engagement and operations. Lt Colonel confirmed that MCA support had been provided during the UEFA cup and following the incident at Parsons Green, and that discussions for future support and implications were ongoing.
- 8.9 There was agreement from the Cabinet Secretary and members that Brecon is an important part of the community. The Cabinet Secretary noted his concern regarding the Defence Estates Review and the location of the Armed Forces bases in Wales. Jenna suggested that the Cabinet Secretary may wish to raise his concerns with the Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson.

## **ITEM 9 – UPDATE FROM THE FAMILY FEDERATIONS**

- 9.1 Annabel Ingram introduced the case studies outlining the challenges facing Service families. One example highlighted the impact on family life, as a result of children being placed in different schools. Annabel asked the WLGA to look into this, explaining that whilst some schools are flexible not all families are sufficiently robust to appeal against decisions made by Local Authorities. Jenna confirmed that the MoD were exploring increasing the length of time before posting orders were received thus providing the family with more time to consider education options.
- 9.2 Annabel commended the work done to raise awareness of support available to the Armed Forces community and noted that issues would hopefully lessen in the future. Other areas of concern for Service families included the Future Accommodation Model, foreign and commonwealth issues and transition; the latter of which was exacerbated by the lack of resettlement centre in Wales.

- 9.3 Noting the issues raised the Cabinet Secretary advised Annabel that the Family Federations may wish to put their concerns in writing. Officials would also meet with the Family Federations to discuss further.

**AGENDA ITEM 10 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 10.1 The Cabinet Secretary thanked the members for their input, noting that it had been a useful meeting. The next meeting will be held on the 26 September, 11.00 – 12.30pm.