

Cross-Party Group Minutes

Meeting Minutes

Cross Party Group Title:	Armed Forces and Cadets
Date of Meeting:	8 th June 2023
Location:	Hybrid Meeting – HMS Cambria, Cardiff Bay and Virtual via Microsoft Teams

In attendance:

Name:	Title:
Darren Millar MS	Chair & Member for Clwyd West
Alun Davies MS	Vice Chair & Member for Blaenau Gwent
Mark Isherwood MS	Member for North Wales
James Evans MS	Member for Brecon and Radnorshire
Laura Anne Jones MS	Member for South Wales East
Peter Fox MS (Virtually)	Member for Monmouth
Brigadier Jock Fraser	Royal Navy
Air Cdre Dai Williams (Virtually)	Royal Air Force
Lt Col Nicholas Lock OBE	160th (Welsh) Brigade
Col Sion Walker	160th (Welsh) Brigade
Jeremy Fowler	Head of Army Heritage Branch, Ministry of Defence (MOD)
Rob Wilson	Welsh Government
Peter Evans (Virtually)	Welsh Government
Adrian Leslie	Royal British Legion
Col Dominic Morgan (Virtually)	Reserve Forces' and Cadets Associations' (RFCA)
Millie Taylor	SSCE Cymru
Joanna Wolfe	SSCE Cymru
Emilee Kinsey	SSCE Cymru

Cllr Teresa Heron	Armed Forces Community Covenant Champion (Caerphilly)
Lisa Rawlings	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (Gwent)
Tina Foster (Virtually)	TGP Cymru
Will Peltor (Virtually)	160 th (Welsh) Brigade
Beth Taylor	Welsh Conservative Group Staff
Tom Livesey	Welsh Conservative Group Staff
Tara Moorcroft (Virtually)	Office of Darren Millar
Charlotte Raymond	Office of Darren Millar

Apologies:

Name:	Title:
Sam Rowlands MS	Member for North Wales
Samuel Kurtz MS	Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire
Llyr Gruffydd MS	Member for North Wales
Jack Sargeant MS	Member for Alyn & Deeside
Mike Hedges MS	Member for Swansea East
Joel James MS	Member for South Wales Central
Rhianon Passmore MS	Member for Islwyn
Colonel James Phillips	Veterans' Commissioner for Wales
Graham Jones	Woody's Lodge
Abigail Warburton	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (South Wales East)
Andy Jones	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (Powys)
Zoe Roberts	Armed Forces Covenant & Veteran Healthcare Collaborative Lead, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Cllr Andrew Barry	Armed Forces Champion, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Cllr David Evans	Armed Forces Champion, Flintshire County Council
Cllr Glyn Haynes	Armed Forces Champion, Isle of Anglesey County Council
Cllr Paul Hinge	Armed Forces Champion, Ceredigion County Council

Cllr Philip Hughes	Armed Forces Champion, Carmarthenshire County Council
Cllr Julie Matthews	Armed Forces Champion, Denbighshire County Council
Cllr Elizabeth Roberts	Armed Forces Champion, Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr Delyth Williams	Armed Forces Champion, Gwynedd Council
Cllr Eddie Williams	Armed Forces Champion, Vale of Glamorgan Council

Summary of Meeting:

1. Introductions and Apologies

2. Updates

- The Chair welcomed new attendees to the Group.
- The Chair gave an overview of the response from Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), which was received and shared with members, following the last meeting.
- The Chair gave an overview of the Welsh Government response after Written Parliamentary Questions were tabled following the last meeting.
- The Chair paid tribute to Ysgol Pen y Bryn, Colwyn Bay who received their Silver Award via the Armed Forces Friendly Schools programme.
- The Chair updated the group to advise he had asked the Welsh Government via an Oral Question in the Senedd, what work they are doing to promote the programme more widely to get other schools engaged. The Welsh Government responded positively.
- Millie Taylor thanked the Chair for raising in the Senedd and congratulated Ysgol Pen y Bryn.
- Millie Taylor advised that Estyn inspectors should report on service children in education and action by schools to meet their needs but wasn't sure to what extent this was being done.
- **Millie Taylor advised she would follow this up with Estyn and will report back to the CPG.**
- Millie Taylor also discussed the need for greater awareness in the MOD of the scheme so that other UK nations could be encouraged to adopt it.

3. Discussion on Military Heritage in Wales with Colonel Sion Walker and Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Lock, both of 160th (Wales) Brigade.

- Col Sion Walker spoke about the Royal Welsh Museum in Brecon and the need to promote what they do.
- Col Sion Walker mentioned that there are many military pieces that are not currently displayed in Wales due to the lack of a National Military Museum.
- Col Sion Walker praised the travelling exhibition for the Battle of Britain by the Royal Air Force.
- Col Sion Walker introduced Jeremy Fowler, Head of Army Heritage at the MOD. He gave an overview of the army museums across the UK, the impact loss of funding has had on them, and the many exhibitions which could be developed for items currently in storage.
- Jeremy Fowler advised that they are working on a potential central repository for transient collections so that they're not just distorted or disappeared.
- Lt Col Nicholas Lock gave an overview of the Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum in Caernarfon and Wrexham and the challenges they are facing with regards to funding.
- Brig Jock Fraser spoke about his role in relation to heritage in the Royal Navy and confirmed his support for ongoing talks regarding the tri-service museum that has been discussed.
- The Chair praised the RAF Battle of Britain exhibition, spoke about the national museums currently in Wales, and the importance of having a tri-service national military museum in Wales, particularly given the huge contribution service men and women in Wales have given to the Armed Forces.
- Rob Wilson, Welsh Government advised that whilst the team are supportive of military heritage, the matter lies with the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism and CADW. Rob advised he would be happy to be involved with further discussions regarding military heritage.
- Laura Anne Jones MS asked what the outreach is with schools regarding the museums. Rob Wilson encouraged LAJ to follow this up with the Minister for Education. Col Sion Walker gave an update on how they engage with schools.
- Air Cdre Dai Williams advised that the Battle of Britain exhibition will be on permanent display at RAF Valley. Air Cdre Dai Williams advised he has had conversations with Museum Wales and shared the challenges he has faced.
- Andy Jones has asked what effect there would be on private military museums. The Chair suggested they should be involved in wider discussions.
- The Vice-Chair praised the Battle of Britain exhibition, spoke of his experiences with visiting museums and the difficulty of accessing them outside of regions.
- The Vice-Chair explained the need for a vision for the military heritage museum and what would like to be achieved and expressed that Welsh Government could provide funding for work to put the vision into context.

- Brig Jock Fraser spoke about the importance of educating the younger and future generations and making military museums accessible.
 - Millie Taylor commented on the importance of getting schools to become armed forces friendly by engaging with the armed forces and felt the conversation links with the work that SSCE Cymru have been undertaking.
 - Cllr Teresa Heron mentioned there are grants available from Royal British Legion for teachers to encourage them to support remembrance days and asked whether a similar proposal could be put forward to Welsh Government.
 - **It was agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair should seek a meeting with the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism and that the CPG should write to request a feasibility study into the establishment of a National Military Museum for Wales.**
 - **It was agreed that Brigadier Jock Fraser would contact the Defence Medical Corp to establish the current status of the proposed Museum of Military Medicine Medical Museum previously planned for Cardiff.**
 - **It was agreed that the CPG would write to the Minister for Education to ask what action was being taken to ensure the role of the Armed Forces was being appropriately recognised in the new history curriculum.**
 - The Chair discussed whether enough is being done to commemorate Welsh military heritage overseas.
 - **It was agreed that the Chair would liaise further with Lt Col Nicholas Lock and Jeremy Fowler to explore how the commemoration overseas could be improved.**
4. Update on the work of Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) in Wales by Lisa Rawlinson, Armed Forces Liaison Officer for Gwent:
- Lisa Rawlings gave an overview of the areas covered by each AFLO in Wales.
 - Lisa advised that AFLOs are expected to develop and contribute to the work of the Armed Forces Community Covenant within their group of local authorities.
 - Lisa advised that AFLOs also engage with members of the local community.
 - Lisa advised AFLOs provide staff training, support local projects, help to support other public sectors and assist with employment support.
 - Lisa gave an overview of some events that have taken place and that will be happening this year.
 - Lisa gave more information on Veterans Hubs and the projects they undertake. She advised on average 50-70 members attend each week, and that hubs are open to the armed forces community, not just veterans.
 - Lisa spoke about the Armed Forces Directory of Support document and the Armed Forces Covenant newsletter, where people can advertise and share information.

- Lisa gave an overview of the issues AFLOs are facing, including the disparity between Health Boards in Wales, the lack of housing provision, the lack of knowledge of AFLOs and the uncertainty in funding for AFLOs. She also mentioned the gaps in veteran services depending on region.
- Lisa also mentioned the issues female veterans face including the lack of female peer mentors. She highlighted the Female Veterans Alliance which has been created to provide further support for female veterans.
- Col Sion Walker highlighted the Women in Defence scheme.
- The Chair spoke about the lack of awareness of Veterans NHS Wales and how the Change Step programme has changed.
- **The Chair informed the CPG that he has a meeting with Adferiad in the coming weeks to discuss Change Step and will report back to the Group.**
- Laura Anne Jones and Brig Jock Fraser highlighted the importance of AFLOs in Wales and thanked them for their work.
- Peter Evans, Welsh Government mentioned the Armed Forces employment events and confirmed that a North and Mid Wales event will be worked on for 2024, funded by the Welsh Government and supported by 160th (Wales) Brigade and the RFCA.
- Peter Evans, Welsh Government said there is some ongoing work regarding homelessness legislation and an expert panel has been established by Crisis Cymru. AFLOs and charities chaired by the RBL have been asked to provide comments.
- The Vice-Chair praised the work of the CPG who inspired the creation of the AFLO role, and the importance of making the posts permanent.
- Mark Isherwood mentioned services such as Adferiad and Woody's Lodge and how AFLOs support them. In addition to his, Mark raised concerns over support available to employees such as Health Boards to enable them to support their employees who are veterans.
- **It was agreed that the CPG would write to the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the lack of awareness around Veterans NHS Wales amongst healthcare professionals and the need for Armed Forces Covenant Champions in all Health Boards.**

5. AOB

- The Chair thanked attendees and looked forward to working together with the group going forward.
- The Chair informed the group that the Chief of the Defence Staff visit to the Senedd, scheduled for 14th June, has been postponed and a new date will be circulated in due course.

- The Chair informed the group that Members of the Senedd will be visiting the Veterans' Gateway Call Centre in Nantgarw, a Reservists Day event will be taking place in the Senedd on 21st June. MSs will also be attending MOD St Athan in July as part of the Senedd Armed Forces Scheme.
- Dates of future meetings were shared with the group.
- The Meeting concluded with a minute's silence to commemorate the 41st Anniversary of the Bluff Cove bombings.