

Cross-Party Group Minutes

Meeting Minutes

Cross Party Group Title:	Armed Forces and Cadets
Date of Meeting:	18 th October 2023
Location:	Hybrid Meeting – Ty Hywel 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
James Evans MS	Member for Brecon and Radnorshire
Jack Sargeant MS	Member for Alyn and Deeside
Sam Rowlands MS	Member for North Wales
Peter Fox MS	Member for Monmouth
Rhianon Passmore MS	Member for Islwyn
Colonel James Phillips (Virtual)	Veterans' Commissioner for Wales
Brigadier Nick Thomas CBE (Virtual)	160 th (Welsh) Brigade
Ella Fortune (Virtual)	Royal Air Force
Robert Govier (Virtual)	Royal Navy
Craig Stockdale (Virtual)	160 th (Welsh) Brigade
Adrian Leslie (Virtual)	Royal British Legion
Col Dominic Morgan (Virtual)	Reserve Forces' and Cadets Associations' (RFCA)
Peter Kellam	Welsh Government
Peter Evans (Virtual)	Welsh Government
Millie Taylor (Virtual)	SSCE Cymru
Tina Foster	Veterans and Families Service, TGP Cymru
Graham Jones	Woody's Lodge

Christopher Mills (Virtual)	Homes for Veterans Cymru
Simon Frith (Virtual)	Alabare
Neil Lawman	Adferiad
Roger Lees	Adferiad
Michael Harvey	Adferiad
Lianne Martynski (Virtual)	Adferiad
Cllr Ian Buckley (Virtual)	Veterans' Champion (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cllr David Evans (Virtual)	Armed Forces Champion, Flintshire County Council
Cllr Glyn Haynes (Virtual)	Armed Forces Champion, Isle of Anglesey County Council
Cllr Teresa Heron	Armed Forces Community Covenant Champion (Caerphilly)
Cllr Mark Spencer (Virtual)	Armed Forces Champion, Newport County Council
Andy Jones (Virtual)	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (Powys)
Jamie Ireland (Virtual)	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (South Wales East)
Lisa Rawlings	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (Gwent)
Stephen Townley (Virtual)	Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer (North Wales)
Zoe Roberts (Virtual)	Armed Forces Covenant & Veteran Healthcare Collaborative Lead, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Tara Moorcroft (Virtual)	Secretary and Office of Darren Millar MS
Archie Draycott	Office of Darren Millar MS
Lee Gonzalez	Office of Joel James MS
Felix Millbank	Office of James Evans MS
Jena Quilter	Welsh Conservative Group Staff
Eleanor Lancaster	Office of Julie Morgan MS

Apologies:

Name:	Title:
Llyr Gruffydd MS	Member for North Wales
Joel James MS	Member for South Wales Central
Laura Anne Jones MS	Member for South Wales East
Janet Finch Saunders MS	Member for Aberconwy

Brigadier Jock Fraser	Royal Navy
Air Cdre Dai Williams	Royal Air Force
Cllr Paul Hinge	Armed Forces Champion, Ceredigion County Council
Cllr Wendy Lewis	Armed Forces Champion, Swansea City & County Council
Cllr Elizabeth Roberts	Armed Forces Champion, Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr Eddie Williams	Armed Forces Champion, Vale of Glamorgan Council
Alun Thomas	CEO, Adferiad

Summary of Meeting:

1. Introductions and Apologies
2. Annual General Meeting
 - Darren Millar MS was unanimously re-elected as Chair.
 - Alun Davies MS was unanimously re-elected as Deputy Chair.
 - Tara Moorcroft was unanimously elected as Secretary.
3. Updates from previous meeting.
 - The Chair welcomed new attendees to the Group.
 - The Chair wrote to the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism following the previous meeting following calls from the Group for a National Museum of Military Heritage in Wales. The Chair and Vice-Chair will meet with the Deputy Minister to discuss the calls further.
 - The Chair gave an overview of the response received from the Minister for Education in relation to the work the Welsh Government is taking forward to ensure military history is recognised in the new curriculum. A response was received and shared with members of the Group in July.
 - The Chair tabled a question to the Welsh Government in relation to Armed Forces Covenant Leads in local Health Boards in Wales. A response was received and shared with members of the Group in July.
 - **It was agreed that the Chair would write to each Health Board in Wales to ask them to appoint an Armed Forces Covenant Lead, if they have not already done so.**
 - The Chair gave an overview of the correspondence with Welsh Government regarding the Veterans NHS Wales service.

- **It was agreed that the Chair would write to the Minister to request an annual campaign to promote Veterans NHS Wales.**
- The Chair is engaging with Adferiad regarding the Change Step programme.
- The Chair advised Members of the Senedd have undertaken a number of visits since the last meeting including to Veterans Gateway Call Centre with the Royal British Legion in June; MOD St Athan as part of the Senedd Armed Forces Scheme in July; Army Expo in London in August and the Exercise Cambrian Patrol in Sennybridge in October.
- The Chair praised Exercise Cambrian Patrol and the importance of hosting this in Wales.
- The Chair shared that Jack Sargeant MS recently opened the Veterans Hub in Connaught Quay which the Chair also recently visited.
- The Chair advised that discussions are still ongoing regarding overseas military commemoration with Lt Col Nicholas Lock. Brigadier Jock Fraser is still investigating funding for Museum of Military Medicine. The Chair will share any updates with the Group.

4. Briefing from Colonel (Retd) James Phillips, Veterans' Commissioner for Wales.

- Col Phillips gave an introduction into his work as Veteran's Commissioner for Wales, and how he is in position to represent and advocate for Veterans in Wales.
- The Commissioner advises he reports to both the UK Government and Welsh Government, and gave an overview of ongoing work with the UK Government.
- The Commissioner gave an overview of the results from the 2021 Census in relation to veterans in Wales. The Commissioner advised that the percentage of veterans was highest in Wales (4.5%) compared to the rest of the UK.
- A recent statistic from the Ministry of Defence's Career Transition Partnership indicated that 87% of veterans were in employment within six months of leaving service, and that 66% of employers are interested in recruiting more veterans in their organisations.
- The Commissioner outlines how he aims to follow five steps when supporting veterans. These are to understand veteran needs; seeking to build trust with veterans and stakeholders who impact veterans' lives; identifying gaps in provision and areas for collaboration; transforming and driving change for change and to ensure communication is clear.
- The Commissioner advised that on the whole, Veterans are supported well in Wales however there is a concern over health and wellbeing and this could be a reflection on pressures on the NHS in Wales.
- In addition to this, there are significant delays for trauma and orthopaedic treatments which is another area of concern for the Commissioner.
- The Commissioner expressed concern over the data available on the Veteran Community but highlighted the improvements following the 2021 Census and a

recent survey by the Veterans' Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA).

- The Commissioner gave an overview of his priorities for 2023, which included a review of Veterans UK performance and a review of awareness and prioritisation for veterans within NHS Wales.
- The Commissioner mentioned the rollout of Veteran Identification cards which should improve access to support from local authorities and charities.
- The Commissioner highlighted the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.
- The Commissioner gave an overview of work to recognise marginalised veterans and access to long-term, sustainable homes for veterans.
- The Commissioner praised the work of Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs), School liaison Officers (SLOs) and Armed Forces Champions in Wales. He also praised UK charities and smaller charities in Wales, such as Woody's Lodge, and the Veterans Hwb Network.
- James Evans MS asked for further information on the Commissioner's engagement with the Wales Local Government Association (WLGA) with regards to housing and care element for veterans. The Commissioner advises he does meet with WLGA regularly.
- The Chair asked what activity we can undertake in Wales to help make it easier for veterans to access veterans cards. The Commissioner advised we are waiting for the UK enrolment and national media campaigns and we should then encourage veterans to participate. The Commissioner advised the use of the cards will not only be of benefit to veterans, but will also assist with collecting data.
- Rhianon Passmore MS asked what the biggest concern was for the Commissioner in Wales. The Commissioner advised there is a particular concern over access to health services and housing for veterans.
- The Chair asked for further clarification over the allocation of funding from the UK Capital Housing Fund to Wales. The Commissioner advised the bidding process is open. Peter Kellam gave an overview on this process from the Welsh Government's perspective.
- Simon Frith advised there can be misconceptions from housing associations and local authorities regarding local connections which can be an issue when it comes to housing, but this can often be resolved following conversations. Simon advised that the enhanced funding has been very beneficial for Wales and they are hopeful of the opportunities it will give.
- Rhianon Passmore MS asked how Welsh Government is assisting with raising awareness of access to the UK Capital Housing Fund. Peter Kellam advised there are many charities who are engaging with the bidding process and he wished them well. It was agreed that Welsh Government could engage with housing associations more.
- Lisa Rawlinson gave an overview on housing issues within her region.

- The Chair thanked the Commissioner for briefing the group and it was agreed that copies of the Commissioner's presentation would be shared after the meeting.

5. Briefing from Tina Foster - Operational Services Manager, TGP Cymru:

- Tina Foster gave an overview of her role within TGP Cymru which is a children's charity in Wales, and how TGP Cymru support veterans and their families.
- Tina advised that TGP Cymru undertook research to see whether the support they provide to families had a positive impact on the mental health of veterans. This was successful and TGP Cymru received funding from the Armed Forces Covenant to support their work.
- Initially, TGP Cymru supported families in and around Cardiff but they are now able to support families across Wales. TGP Cymru accepts referrals from professionals such as veterans' therapists but also self-referrals from families directly.
- It is hoped that TGP Cymru will be able to access additional funding to enable them to support service families as well as veterans.
- Feedback on the service has been very positive. TGP Cymru work one-to-one with all family members, not just the veterans, to help them understand changes that may occur and the impact this may have on relationships. TGP Cymru also provide guidance to professionals to help them to assist families and work alongside organisations such as Adferiad and SSCE Cymru.
- Andy Jones asked where the majority of referrals come from and asked who in the family can be supported. Tina advised that recently there has been a number of referrals from Bulldogs Gym in Neath Port Talbot, as well as from Alabare, Woody's Lodge and self-referrals. Tina also reiterated that TGP Cymru will support any member of the family, not just the veteran, and gave an overview of the contact process.
- Andy also asked when the funding is due to come to an end. Tina confirmed this will be in March 2024.
- The Secretary will share details for TGP Cymru with the group.

6. Discussion on Change Step Programme:

- Roger Lees gave an overview of the Change Step programme which is currently only funded in North Wales. Roger highlighted conversations that have been had with Veterans NHS Wales, Welsh Government and other organisations to continue the programme in other regions in Wales.
- Roger highlighted the need for more peer mentors within Veterans NHS Wales and has been approached by therapists who would like the Change Step model within their region.

- Roger praised the work of Tina Foster and the TGP Cymru team who provide an immediate service for families.
- The Chair praised the Change Step programme which provides low level support for veterans with poor mental health and wellbeing, which acts as a pathway for those who then may need higher support from Veterans NHS Wales.
- At present, Adferiad do not have the capacity to meet the demand for services for veterans but they are available in all parts of Wales.
- Roger gave an overview of the projects that Adferiad are currently running in Wales including a project with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board; a funded study alongside Swansea University regarding gambling addiction and will be looking to provide Christmas presents to service children in Ukraine.
- Lianne Martinski highlighted the funding issues Adferiad and other organisations are experiencing. The Change Step funding is due to end in January 2024.
- **It was agreed that the Chair would engage with Welsh Government Ministers regarding the Change Step service.**

7. AOB

- The Chair thanked attendees and looked forward to working together with the group going forward.
- Dates of future meetings will be shared with the group in due course.