

Minutes for the AGM meeting of the Cross Party Group for the Armed Forces and Cadets

Tuesday 13th February 2018 1200 – 13:20

Conference Room B

Attending:

- Darren Millar: *Chair, Welsh Conservative AM for Clwyd West*
- Kathryn Sharpe: *Secretariat, AMSS*
- Geraint Jones: *Change Step*
- Squadron Leader Brian Ramsey: *RAF Specialist Engagement Team*
- Warrant Officer Stephen Perham: *RAF Specialist Engagement Team*
- Annabel Ingram: *Army Families Federation*
- Lisa Rawlings: *Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer, Gwent*
- Mohammad Asghar: *Welsh Conservative AM for South Wales East*
- Brigadier Jock Fraser: *Naval Regional Commander*
- ML Dave Singletary: *SSAFA*
- Angela Burns: *Welsh Conservative AM for Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire*
- Air Commodore Adrian Williams: *Air Officer Wales*
- Colonel Lance Patterson: *Deputy Commander HQ Wales*
- Colonel Nick Beard: *CE RFCA for Wales*
- Dr. Neil Kitchener: *UNHSW*
- Alun Williams: *AMSS*
- Andrew RT Davies: *Welsh Conservative AM for South Wales Central and Leader of the Welsh Conservatives*
- Mike Bailey: *Veterans Welfare Service MOD*
- Ty Harrison: *The Royal British Legion*
- Peter Evans: *The Royal British Legion*
- Mark Isherwood: *Welsh Conservative AM for North Wales*
- Gareth Bennett: *UKIP AM for South Wales Central*
- Heather Ferguson: *Age Cymru*

- Alun Davies: *Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services*

Apologies received from:

- Lisa Leece: *St. John and Red Cross Defence Medical Welfare Service*
- Janet Finch Saunders: *Welsh Conservative AM for Aberconwy*
- Jeff Maddison: *Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council*
- Andrew Whitcombe: *Councillor, Caerphilly Council*
- Richard Mottershead: *UAE Higher Colleges of Technology*
- Llyr Gruffydd: *Plaid Cymru AM for North Wales*
- Shelley Elgin: *Help for Heroes*
- David Rose: *Universities in Support of Wounded, Injured and Sick Service Personnel*
- Stephen Hughes: *RFCA*
- John Skipper
- Karen Rees: *Barnardo's Cymru*
- Menna Thomas: *Barnardo's Cymru*
- Ian Williams: *AMSS Support Staff*
- David Rowlands: *UKIP AM for South Wales East*

1. Chairs' welcome, introduction and apologies and AGM Business

Election of Chair. Angela Burns nominated Darren Millar, seconded by Mohammed Asghar. No other nominations were received and Darren Millar was re-elected with unanimous support.

Election of Secretary. Darren Millar nominated Kathryn Sharpe, seconded by Angela Burns. Kathryn Sharpe was elected with unanimous support.

1. Address by Alun Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government

Alun Davies gave an address, following publication of the Group's Inquiry into the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales in November 2017.

The address focused on responding to recommendations in the Report.

This included a discussion on the appointment of an Armed Forces Commissioner, of which Alun Davies was sceptical, office resources and engagement of colleagues. He also voiced concern over current justice policy and the need for strategic direction from the Welsh Government.

Air Commodore Dai Williams expressed gratitude for the work of Expert Group and spoke on having a proportionate number of troops in Wales.

Andrew RT Davies also raised the issue of troop numbers.

Oscar Asghar inquired about the establishment of a Welsh Defence Counsel.

Action:

The Cabinet Secretary agreed to provide a written response to the recommendations on the Cross Party Group's Report on its Inquiry into the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary agreed to extend an invitation to the Chair to attend future meetings of the Expert Group.

2. Presentation from Dr Neil Kitchiner, Director and Consultant Clinical Lead of Veterans' NHS Wales, and Geraint Jones, from Change Step, on the H4H Funded Peer Mentor Pilot

The presentation began with an update from Dr. Neil Kitchiner which included:

- An overview of referral numbers to Veterans NHS Wales
- Type of veterans using the service
- Updating the group on other work the service has undertaken, such as treating Welsh citizens caught in the Tunisia terrorist attacks
- Discussion of the new 3MDR randomised controlled trial at the Cardiff and Vale hub for treating PTSD in military veterans, which has 18 months left. The target is to treat 42 veterans and 16 have been seen to date

Geraint Jones provided an update on the Peer Mentoring Service delivered by Change Step. Two peer mentors are currently funded by the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and seven are working in other parts of Wales as a result of funding from Help for Heroes. The service offers low level intervention work and has been particularly successful in engaging people during the waiting period for therapy. There are concerns over sustainability of the project given funding.

A discussion followed the presentation on previous funding, and if there is any reliable data forecasting demand. There is no current forecast, but Combat Stress estimated that there is a 14 year delay from leaving the armed forces to presenting with symptoms.

Action:

An evaluation of the service is due by February 2018. Following publication of this evaluation, the Chair will write to the Welsh Government to inquire about embedding the peer mentoring service in local health boards across Wales and to seek £250,000 in funding for nine peer mentor posts.

3. Presentation from Heather Ferguson, Age Cymru Project Manager, on Project 360°

Heather Ferguson presented on a new project she is managing that is being delivered in alliance between Age Cymru, Woody's Lodge and Age Alliance Wales. Project 360° focuses on veterans aged 65 or over in need of support. The project covers all of Wales and is running from July 2017 to March 2020 and is being funded by the Aged Veterans Fund, which comes from LIBOR funding.

The project aims to:

- improve access to Age Alliance Wales services
- improve access to information exchanges
- improve partnership working
- improve targeting and planning
- add to existing research
- improve the quality of life for older military veterans

A discussion followed on identifying veterans, and people not being asked at the point of referral if they have ever served in the armed forces.

Peter Evans voiced frustration that the question is not being asked, despite it being part of the Royal British Legion's manifesto. The Royal British Legion delivers training to local authorities, but this is currently not statutory.

David Singeltary raised the idea of having a tick box on census forms.

Darren Millar referred to the Group's report which had called for a Veterans ID card as a way for veterans to be easily identified, and also discussed having a tick box on the Electoral Roll register.

Action:

For the Chair to explore with the Electoral Commission whether a veteran identification box could be added to voter registration documents.

For members of the Cross Party Group to spread awareness of Project 360°.

4. Update from Annabel Ingram, Regional Manager North, on the work of the Army Families Federation

Annabel Ingram updated the Group on two pieces of research that the Army Families Federation is currently undertaking:

- spousal employment and current barriers
- challenges during transition from active service to civilian life

This research will be available in summer 2018.

Annabel Ingram also flagged the need for a Service Pupil Premium.

Mark Isherwood said that he has received an increase in emails with concerns over a lack of service pupil funding in Flintshire.

Action:

For Cross Party Group members to continue to challenge the Welsh Government to establish a Service Pupil Premium.

5. AOB

Air Commodore Dai Williams provided an update on plans for celebrating the RAF Centenary.

Action:

For the Secretary to circulate dates of RAF celebrations throughout the year.

Darren Millar raised the UK Armed Forces day being hosted by Conwy Borough Council on 30th June in Llandudno, and encouraged attendance.

Action:

For the Secretary to circulate the link for veterans to register to participate in the UK Armed Forces Day Parade.

Brigadier Jock Fraser informed the group that HMS Express will be visiting Cardiff soon and it is hoped that a visit by AMs can be arranged as part of the Assembly Armed Forces Scheme. HMS Cambria will be participating at an event in their honour in Swansea on the 17th March 2018.

Peter Evans updated the group that the Royal British Legion's external grants funding will be open to applications from not-for-profit organising running, or planning, charitable activities on the 23rd February 2018.

Action:

For Peter Evans to send a link to the grants funding page and for the Secretary to circulate this amongst the Cross Party Group.