

Cross Party Group on Armed Forces and Cadets

Meeting Minutes

Date: 6th February 2019

Location: Pierhead Building Seminar Rooms

In attendance:

Name	Title
Darren Millar AM	Assembly Member for Clwyd West
Ian Doyle	Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees
David Munson	Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees
Brigadier Alan Richmond	160th Infantry Brigade and Headquarters Wales
Brigadier Jock Fraser	Naval Regional Commander
Hannah Blythyn AM	Welsh Government (Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government)
Janet Jones	Welsh Government
Air Cadre Adrian Williams	Royal Air Force
Captain Brian Thorne	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association
Alun Davies AM	Assembly Member for Blaenau Gwent
Julianne Newsham	Regular Forces Employment Association
Paul Weaver	The Defence Medical Welfare Service
Caroline Jones AM	Assembly Member for South Wales West
Alun Williams	Office of Caroline Jones AM
Conor Holohan	Office of Mark Reckless AM
Gareth Bennet	Assembly Member for South Wales Central
Neil Hamilton	Assembly Member for Mid and West Wales
Zak Weaver	Office of Gareth Bennet AM
Peter Evans	Welsh Government
Geraint Jones	Change Step
Shelly Elgin	Help for Heroes
Antony Metcalfe	Royal British Legion
Heather Ferguson	Project 360 Age Cymru
Annabel Ingram	Army Families Federation
Jeff Maddeson	Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough

	Council
Michael Bailey	Veterans Welfare Serviec
John William	Royal British Legion
Georgina Webb	Welsh Conservative Group Office
Lisa Rawlings	Armed Forces Covenant Liason Officer for Gwent
Mark Polin	Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Leanne Plechowicz	SToMP (Support Transition of Military Personnel)
Corin Morgan-Armstrong	Head of Family Interventions at HMP Parc

Apologies:

Name	Title
Colonel Nick Beard	Reserve Forces & Cadets Association
Llyr Gruffydd AM	Assembly Member for North Wales
Cllr Elizabeth Roberts	Conwy County Borough Council
Professor David Rose	University of East London
Helen Mary Jones AM	Assembly Member for Mid and West Wales
Neil Kitchiner	Veterans NHS Wales
David Price	Welsh Veterans Partnership
David Singletary	SSAFA
Mark Isherwood AM	Assembly Member for North Wales
Russell George AM	Assembly Member for Montgomeryshire
David Rowlands AM	Assembly Member for South Wales East
Air Commadore Dai Williams	Royal Air Force

Summary of Meeting: Cross Party Group for Armed Forces and Cadets – 6/02/2018 – Pierhead Building

1. Introductions

2. AGM Business – Election of Chair and Secretary

- Caroline Jones AM nominated Darren Millar AM to continue in his capacity as the chair of the Cross Party Group on Armed Forces and Cadets. The nomination was seconded by Alun Davies AM. In the absence of further nominations, Darren Millar AM was duly elected as Chair for the forthcoming year.

- Curtis Shea was nominated and duly elected as Secretary of the group.

3. Updates from last meeting –

- An event was held in the Senedd sponsored by Darren Millar AM in conjunction with Help for Heroes welcoming back Welsh athletes from the Inictus Games.
- The former First Minister (Carwyn Jones AM) had responded to the group's letter regarding an extension to the Cymru'n Cofio programme confirming that there is no plan to extend the program beyond 2020. Darren Millar AM noted the negative response and said he would write to the new First Minister to determine whether there might be a different response.
- The former Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services (Alun Davies AM) had responded to a question tabled by Darren Millar AM, acknowledging the Royal British Legion's report on 'Loneliness and social isolation in the armed forces community'.
- Education Minister (Kirsty Williams AM) had responded to the group's letter regarding the use of digital resources from the Cymru'n Cofio programme in schools. The Education Minister confirmed that schools are being made aware of digital resources in relation to the First World War and noted that secondary schools in Wales have been able to apply for a £1,000 grant to develop creative and innovative projects to commemorate the First World War.
- Darren Millar AM made the group aware of an upcoming visit to Israel in conjunction with the Evan Roberts Institute. The visit will see a delegation of Assembly Members travel to Jerusalem to lay a plaque to commemorate the 53rd Welsh Division and Welsh military heritage in the Holy Land. The project had been supported by the Royal Welsh and the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association.

4. A discussion on Veterans and the Criminal Justice System.

- Darren Millar AM introduced Leanne Plechowicz – a Support and Transition Officer from SToMP, Mark Polin - Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and Corin Morgan-Armstrong – Family Interventions Officer from HMP Parc.
- Leanne Plechowicz introduced herself to the group and spoke about the work being carried out by SToMP in Wales, creating a consistent approach for veterans in the criminal justice system.
- Mark Polin introduced himself to the group and spoke about the work currently being undertaken at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to improve access to mental health services for veterans.
- Mark Polin made the group aware of The Liberty Report on military justice. It was agreed this should be circulated to the group.
- Mark Polin spoke of his experience with veterans in the criminal justice system during his time as Chief Constable of North Wales Police. The scale of offending among veterans is unknown to police forces due to the armed forces dealing with criminal activity from serving personnel internally.
- Corin Morgan-Armstrong introduced himself to the group and spoke about his role at HMP Parc, working inside the prison with prisoners, their families and communities. In 2015 the Endeavour unit was set up in HMP Parc, giving veterans the opportunity to be housed alongside other veterans and be given specialist help.
- Darren Millar AM asked Mark Polin whether he has assumed the role of the Armed Forces Champion at BCUHB since being appointed chair. Mark Polin that this role has been passed to an independent member of BCUHB.
- Leanne Plechowicz said that SToMP had front line champions in every probation service, prison and police force. This helps ensure that front line staff are aware of veteran specific issues.

- Darren Millar AM asked the panel why a significant members of veterans enter the criminal justice system and whether this is related to issues surrounding mental health.
- Mark Polin mentioned a 2011 Howard Lee Report found that causes of offending among veterans were no different to that of the civilian population. Domestic abuse rates are higher among military personnel than the normal population and because of this it is important that the services identify early signs of offending among serving personnel.
- Leanne Plechowicz noted that you are less likely to offend and become involved in the criminal justice system if you have been in the armed forces. There are a small portion of armed forces personnel who join the armed forces to avoid falling into a life of crime and upon leaving the forces, fail to avoid becoming involved in the criminal justice system. There is no evidence to suggest there is a causal link between criminal behaviour and being a veteran.
- Corin Morgan-Armstrong noted that there is a false stereotype that veterans in prison suffer from mental health issues which does not represent the majority of veterans in prisons. HMP Parc have found that a successful transition to civilian life from military life is vital to veterans staying out of the criminal justice system in the long term. It is important for veterans to build up skills to function as a civilian.
- Caroline Jones AM asked Corin what is being done to ensure that the support veterans receive in prison is being continued or replaced once they leave prison.
- Corin answered that continuity after leaving prison is vital. HMP Parc have links with external experts in the community who work with prisoners and their families during their time in prison and continue to work with them once they have been released.
- Brigadier Alan Richmond noted that it was important to remember that a veteran could be someone who spent a single day in uniform

and that service early leavers who drop out during training or following a failed drug test are of particular concern and are more vulnerable. Often if a member of the armed forces has been caught breaking the law, their colleagues may want to get them out of their unit thus eroding any support they otherwise may have had. Brigadier Jock Fraser agreed with this assessment.

- Janet Jones from the Welsh Government confirmed that the Welsh Government are working with the MOD to create a framework for vulnerable veterans to transition from the forces to civilian life by placing caseworkers across Wales as a preventative measure to avoid veterans becoming involved in the criminal justice system at all.
- Paul Weaver from the Veterans Welfare Service told the group about the work they have been doing to introduce an ex forces action network which involves connecting veterans with mental health issues or involved with the criminal justice system with other veterans as a form of support. It has been found that veterans respond much better to support when provided by another veteran. Alan Williams who has worked at HMP Parc agreed with this.
- Julianne Newsham from RFEA mentioned the 'Future Horizons' program which ensures veterans who have been in prison are signposted to relevant services when leaving prison.
- Darren Millar AM mentioned the Royal British Legion's successful campaign to have a new question included on the census asking if someone has served in the armed forces.
- Janet Jones confirmed that the Welsh Government would be coming forward with work on ACEs in the near future.
- Alun Williams who worked on the endeavour unit said that veterans who are homeless are not on the street begging but are hiding as they are ashamed. Homeless veterans are being arrested for vagrancy. Stability is important in keeping veterans out of prison.

- Janet Jones confirmed that the Welsh Government were working on an employment engagement event during reservist's week in the Senedd. It was suggested that veterans could become involved with this. Veterans who are employed are less likely to become involved in the criminal justice system or become homeless. Janet Jones confirmed the employment path way has been published by the Welsh Government.

Guaranteed interviews for veterans

- Air Commodore Dai Williams told the group about the guaranteed interview scheme in the United States which gives veterans a guaranteed job interview when applying for a job in the public sector.
- Darren Millar AM suggested the group write to the Welsh Government to ask what consideration the Welsh Government has given to introducing a similar scheme.

Veteran Identification

- Darren Millar AM asked what work is being done around an armed forces identification card could help in flagging a person's serving history when they join the forces which could stay on their record after leaving.
- Janet Jones from the Welsh Government confirmed that the GMS medical form now included a section that allowed serving personnel to do this.
- Darren Millar AM suggested the group write to the UK Government asking what progress is being made on the Armed Forces Identification Card.

Veteran enjoyment

- Paul Weaver said that it is important that veterans are physically engaged with services to improve outcomes as signposting alone does not work.

- Geraint from Change Step said that they are working with North Wales police on the 'Prevent' scheme which deals with first time offending veterans without following the usual custodial routes. Once these veterans engage their chance of reoffending lowers. Shelly Elgin mentioned that Gwent Police have a similar programme which is successful.

Family Support

- Corin mentioned that involving the families in the process is very important in having a support system for veterans who have been in the criminal justice system.
- Leanne Plechowicz had been working with Barnardo's to support the families of veterans. Many veterans who have been in prisons feel a 'Hero to Zero' Syndrome which will have a negative mental impact.
- Annabel Ingram from the Army Families Federation asked for the Lifting the Lid on Transition report to be circulated to the group as it is relevant to this subject.

5. AOB

- Darren Millar AM thanked everyone for attending.
- Hannah Blythyn AM thanked the group for inviting her and found the meeting useful in her new ministerial capacity and looked forward to working with the group in future. Darren Millar AM thanked the Minister for attending.
- Darren Millar AM thanked Alun Davies AM for working with the group during his time as a Cabinet Secretary.

Action Points

1. Write to the UK Government for an update on Veteran ID cards.
2. The lifting the lid on transition report to be circulated.
3. Write to the First Minister to ask about the guaranteed interview scheme
4. Write to the new First Minister to request an extension of the Cymru 'n Cofio programme.