

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

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2022

In attendance

Hannah Blythyn MS	Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (DMSP)
Lt Col Kevan Thornber	160th (Welsh) Brigade
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	Royal Air Force
Brigadier Jock Fraser	Royal Navy / Royal Marines
Vicky Brindley	Naval Families Federation
Fiona Jenkins	Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
John Shivas	Ministry of Defence
Ant Metcalfe	Royal British Legion
Roy Brown	COBSEO
Colonel Dominic Morgan	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
Rachel Morgan	WLGA
Steve Boswell	SSAFA
Sarah Mallaghan	DWP
Karen Faulkner	Welsh Government – Education
Issy Mortimer	Welsh Government - Education
Simon Prothero	Welsh Government – Housing
Hayley Edwards	Armed Forces Liaison Officer – West Wales
Jamie Ireland	Armed Forces Liaison Officer – Cwm Taf
Jon Price	Veterans UK
Laura Dunn	Ministry of Justice
Gwen O Connor	Veterans NHS Wales
Vanessa Plumley	RAF Families Federation
Richard Goodman	COBSEO
Shannon Allen	Northumbria University
Peter Kellam	Welsh Government – Armed Forces team
Peter Evans	Welsh Government – Armed forces team
Karin Phillips	Welsh Government – Deputy Director Community Safety
Kate Bacon	DMSP – Private office

ITEM 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Deputy Minister welcomed all members to the Armed Forces Expert Group, in person and via Teams. Apologies were given for IT problems at the start of the meeting.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

The Deputy Minister noted that previous issues relating to the Armed Forces Act, Wales Veterans Commissioner and Tri Service update were included on the agenda and would be covered later in meeting.

2.2 Peter E gave an update on the Veterans Scoping Exercise / Veterans Strategy in Wales. Key activity was focused on delivering the sService leaver/veterans employment event on 17 November in the Celtic Manor. Progress was noted on the delivery of resettlement courses in Wales with CTP holding career transition workshops in June 2022 at HMS Cambria with another course scheduled for mid-November. Work continues with Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) and partners.

ITEM 3 – VETERANS' COMMISSIONER FOR WALES JAMES PHILLIPS

3.1 The Deputy Minister formally welcomed the Commissioner to his role and noted he had already met with her as Minister and officials in the Armed Forces team. Meetings are currently being arranged with other Welsh Government Ministers.

Action 1 – Commissioner's update slide to be circulated with draft Minutes.

3.2 James summarised his initial assessment of the position for veterans in Wales since commencing his role. Overall picture is a positive one with areas of best practice including Armed Forces champions, the work of the Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs), DWP and Local Health Boards. James was grateful for the positive relationship being developed with Welsh Government.

3.3 At UK level, James outlined the updated Ministerial position in UK Government with James Heapey MP as Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans and Sarah Atherton MP as Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families. James meets regularly with the Commissioners across the UK.

3.4 James updated attendees on current priority areas:

Veterans UK – issues including capacity, resourcing, experiences of veterans, appeals have been raised and James is keen to pursue. Jon Price offered to discuss any issues directly with James.

NHS – Increasing awareness of the Covenant and the experiences of Armed Forces; dental registrations for service families, veterans; pursuing a GP accreditation scheme in Wales; promoting self identification amongst the veteran community as they encounter health services. Fiona Jenkins confirmed that the Welsh Government LHB champions forum had been examining a voluntary GP accreditation scheme and discussions ongoing with Royal College of GPs and Public Health Wales.

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust AFCFT – significant activity in Wales funded by the AFCFT. The dependency of many charities in Wales on grant funding was identified as an issue, particularly when other giving might be impacted by cost of living. The Commissioner saw it as important for the Trust to build sustainability and longer-term support into planning so that charities/services can continue.

LGBTQ+ review – promoting the Etherton Review and encouraging as many veterans as possible to engage is a priority. The Deputy Minister referenced a recent visit to Llanberis with Fighting with Pride and the launch of the support hub for LGBTQ+ veterans in Cardiff (funded by Welsh Government).

Winter hardship / cost of living – James stated that supporting veterans and families amongst the broader range of support available will be vital as the nation faces challenges such as fuel costs.

3.5 The forthcoming Veterans Survey, developed by OVA, Office for National Statistics and devolved nations, was highlighted and would be promoted. James confirmed he would provide a report of initial priorities to Ministers.

Action 2 – officials to clarify whether results of the Veterans survey would be available at Wales level.

3.6 Darren Millar stated that the AFLOs are critical to much of the good work being developed in Wales and asked about ongoing funding support. The Deputy Minister stated that she hoped to be able to announce further detail soon regarding the AFLOs.

ITEM 4 – ONE IS TOO MANY – SUICIDE PREVENTION

4.1 The update paper was noted by the Deputy Minister. Shannon Allen from Northumbria university provided an update on the *One is Too Many* project. The project utilises a person-focused approach looking at narrative stories from veterans and families investigating the journey to suicide. Co-production workshops have been held in Newcastle, Llandudno and online. A final in-person workshop is planned for 14 December in Scotland.

4.2 Darren Millar asked if different approaches across the UK were taken into account. Shannon confirmed that all UK nations have been represented and that different models had been considered including Veterans NHS Wales. Peter Evans confirmed that officials from Welsh Government had attended the Newcastle event; a Wales-specific event had been arranged in Llandudno in June 2022; a virtual co-production workshop had been held with stakeholders in Wales in August 2022 and representatives from Adferiad and Welsh Government had attended the virtual workshop on 29 September. The project will include statistics relating to suicide rates.

The importance of assessing the impact of support services was highlighted.

ITEM 5 – ARMED FORCES ACT / DUE REGARD DUTY

5.1 John Shivas provided an update on progress which could also be accessed via the website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-covenant-supporting-information>

5.2 The draft Statutory Guidance and associated documentation had been laid as a Statutory Instrument in August and is available for organisations to increase their

own awareness:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2022/9780348237801/resources>

5.3 The House of Lords is due to debate the content on 18 October under the affirmative procedure process. The date for passage through the House of Commons remains to be confirmed. It was thought likely that the route would be through an Affirmative Procedure. After that it would go to Ministers for signing and 14 days later the Guidance would come into Law. Focus of MOD now is to support bodies in scope with increasing understanding. A health webinar had been delivered with plans for education and housing events being developed. The Deputy Minister thanked John for his update and invited Hayley Edwards and Jamie Ireland to provide a local perspective from the AFLOs across Wales.

5.4 Hayley updated the group on activity the AFLOs had been undertaking including information briefings to local authority officers and senior leadership teams, training for frontline staff and partners. There remain gaps in awareness and it was felt the more services 'ask the question' in order to identify the Armed Forces, the greater chance of engagement and understanding of the issues. An awareness raising campaign would be welcomed. The AFLOs and Welsh Government have worked with Phil Deakin (Warwickshire) to adapt online Covenant training for a Wales audience including translation.

5.5 The AFLOs were concerned about the definition of 'relevant family members' in the guidance as it was a very broad group which could pose difficulties in implementation. More discussion was invited with MOD on this issue. It was reported that understanding amongst Service personnel remained low anecdotally.

Action 3 – John Shivas and AFLOs to discuss concerns.

5.6 It was felt by the AFLOs that data was improving eg. Service children due to work of SSCE Cymru but often different internal systems in public bodies were not linked so could lead to gaps. It was suggested that a more consistent requirement from Welsh Government, for public bodies to report on Armed Forces data, would improve the situation at a local and national level.

The financial implications of the duty was not yet known but it was felt there could be budgetary implications / resource implications in terms of staff time.

5.7 Challenges to delivery include a lack of standardised approach across local authorities. AFLOs are aware that even within their own area, delivery methods vary and therefore sharing of best practice is vital. Areas not in scope such as employment / social care could lead to issues as 'need' is rarely confined to one issue. Challenges of rurality / population was also noted.

5.8 John Shivas commented that ongoing review/assessment was vital and surveys would be developed to assess the baseline and chart progress as the duty goes forward.

5.9 Jamie Ireland provided an overview of AFLO work to support local authorities to prepare for the duty and to support the Armed Forces community. This includes assessing local policies and procedures, some areas running compulsory training for new staff and working with data protection officers to ensure data collected is treated in line with GDPR rules.

Cwm Taf would be running a media campaign in November 2022 to encourage GP identification.

5.10 Darren Millar commended the work and schemes such as the Employer Recognition Scheme and encouraged more public bodies to sign up to increase their engagement with the Covenant.

Action 4 – AFLO slides to be shared with attendees.

ITEM 6 – TRI SERVICES UPDATE

6.1 The Deputy Minister thanked the Tri Services for their updates as circulated in the paper. The Deputy Minister confirmed Welsh Government are working with the Tri Service leads to arrange a meeting with Ministers to update on their activity.

6.2 The Tri Service leads referenced the recent UK ceremonial activity relating to Operation LONDON BRIDGE and Operation SPRING TIDE and the contribution of Service personnel from Wales. These activities demonstrated multi-agency cooperation involving the military, Welsh and local government and key partners. Attendees placed on record their thanks to the Tri Services for their excellent contribution and professionalism during the period.

6.3 Specific updates:

- Exercise Cambrian Patrol commences next week and the Deputy Minister would be supporting with a visit.
- The Battle of Britain Exhibition has toured over 30 locations in Wales and will finish in the Senedd in November.
- 2 RAF fellowships have commenced in Cardiff university and a serving RAF Officer, FO Carys Williams, is part of the Wales Women's Rugby World cup squad.

6.4 Darren Millar thanked the Tri Services on behalf of the Senedd Cross Party Group which was supported by all attendees and highlighted the recent visit of the group to Talybont Royal Navy outdoor leadership training centre.

AOB / DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A future meeting date will be circulated.

The Terms of Reference of the Expert Group would be circulated ahead of the next meeting to be discussed, to ensure the Group remains fit for purpose going forward.

Post meeting update RFCA:

The RFCA for Wales Annual Briefing took place on 20th October 2022 (HMS CAMBRIA); Professor Simon Denny, author of the Northampton University report into the wider benefit to society of military Cadet Forces, was the keynote speaker at this event. AFEG members and Welsh Government representatives were invited.

Gold ERS Awards for Wales – took place on 1st December 2022 (Hensol Castle); These Awards will recognise the 12 Welsh organisations from both the private and public sector who this year have met the Gold ‘standard’ for specific employment policies for Veterans, Reservists, Cadet Force Volunteers and Service families. Invites for this event will be sent out in due course.

Actions log

Action	Detail	Owner
Action 1	Commissioner’s update slide to be circulated with draft Minutes.	Armed Forces team
Action 2	Officials to clarify whether results of the veterans survey would be available at a local level.	Armed Forces team
Action 3	John Shivas and AFLOs to discuss issues / concerns regarding delivery of due regard.	John Shivas, Hayley Edwards, Jamie Ireland
Action 4	AFLO slides to be shared with attendees	Armed Forces team