

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

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 3 DECEMBER 2015**

#### **Members**

Leighton Andrews AM	Minister for Public Services
Col Lance Patterson	160 Infantry Brigade and HQ in Wales
Air Commodore Adrian Williams	Royal Air Force
Peter Evans	Royal British Legion (RBL)
Lt Col Stephen Hughes	Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA)
James Franklin	Ministry Of Defence Covenant Team
Annabel Ingram	Army Family Federation
Dawn North	HIVE
Huw Thomas	Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Jane Williams	Naval Families Federation
Dr Sarah Watkins	Welsh Government – Health and Social Services
Reg Kilpatrick	Welsh Government – Local Government
Martin Swain	Welsh Government – Community Safety Division
Cerys Gage	Welsh Government – Community Safety Division

#### **Invited Attendees**

Leeanne Plechowicz	National Probation Service Wales
Stuart Davies	Cwm Taf University Health Board
Peter Greenhill	National Probation Service

#### **Apologies**

Jan Jones	Welsh Government, Community Safety Division
Bill Mahon	Royal Air Force Family Federation
Phil Jones	Royal British Legion (RBL)
Chris Downward	Soldiers Sailors Airmen Families Association (SSAFA)
Mike Bailey	Veterans Welfare Service (SPVA)
Peter Higson	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Cllr Brendan Toomey	Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Lt Col Jim McLaren	Royal Navy

### **ITEM 1 - WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

1.1 The Minister welcomed members to his third Expert Group meeting and also welcomed new members to their first meeting. The Minister noted that apologies had been received from Jan Jones, Bill Mahon, Phil Jones, Chris Downward, Mike Bailey, Peter Higson, Cllr Brendan Toomey and Lt Col Jim McLaren

### **ITEM 2 - MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 3 JUNE 2015**

2.1 The Minister invited members to agree the minutes for accuracy, noting that the minutes had been agreed to reflect comments received. The minutes were agreed as a true record.

### **ITEM 3 – PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

- 3.1 Dr Sarah Watkins provided an update on current dental support, prescription services and cross-border differences. Sarah explained that whilst issues remain regarding the provision of dental support in Pembrokeshire, 43,000 patients are currently registered with Hywel Dda, 33,000 with Betsi Cadwaladr and 13,000 with Powys. Dental contracts are now in place on an annual basis with patients able to approach alternative dental providers after one year.
- 3.2 Whilst not an issue for Armed Forces personnel, who have their own dental arrangements, Sarah went on to say that the cost of NHS dental services are higher in England than in Wales. Wales also benefits from prescriptions that are free of charge, with prescription services available from any pharmacy in Wales. Armed Forces personnel are also entitled to an exemption card providing them with access to free prescriptions.
- 3.3 Colonel Lance Patterson said that dental services weren't an issue for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The Rifles. However, Air Commodore Adrian Williams expressed concern regarding dental provision in RAF Valley and agreed to follow this up with Sarah.

### **ITEM 4 – REPORT ON MEMBERS VISIT TO THE SCOTTISH VETERANS COMMISSIONER**

- 4.1 The Minister welcomed the draft report and advised the members that whilst Wales can learn from the appointment of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner the Welsh Government will not be following the Scottish route as yet.
- 4.2 Peter Evans commented that it is too early for any tangible conclusion to be made although a consultation with the sector would be welcome. He informed the group that since his appointment the Commissioner had published two reports, one on transition and a more recent report concerning housing in Scotland.
- 4.3 James Franklin agreed that is too soon to make a decision on the benefits of a Commissioner and informed the group that the Veterans Commissioner, Eric Fraser, would be attending the next Covenant Reference Group in February.

### **ITEM 5 – CHALLENGES FACING NAVAL FAMILIES**

- 5.1 Jane Williams introduced the paper on challenges faced by naval service personnel and their families. Jane explained that there are approximately 30,000 naval personnel and this will increase by 400 as further personnel are appointed to man additional equipment in the future. It was noted that 1,232 naval personnel are based in Wales, however these numbers may change as personnel come and go.
- 5.2 Jane explained that Naval families face family separation with personnel deployed for an average of 660 days in a three year cycle, or two years out of every three years. Jane praised the work of the Covenant and emphasised that more should be done to

recognise that Naval families are part of the community and entitled to support. Families that are aware of the support available, such as childcare, and how to access it, follow a lot steadier course.

- 5.3 The Minister asked where in Wales the 12,000 families were based and Jane agreed to forward statistics of Naval family locations.
- 5.4 James Franklin said that families need to understand the support available to them and advised that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) would be publishing its Family Strategy in January and agreed to share a draft with the members. James said that the Strategy would need to tie in with the Welsh Government's Package of Support.
- 5.5 Lance explained that families of serving personnel are encouraged to live near their family and that more work is needed to identify service children and the funds that are available. Lance also advised that during a husband's deployment in Iraq for example the stress experienced by children isn't always picked up on.
- 5.6 Peter Greenhill acknowledged that further work is needed to identify veterans in the criminal justice system and that the questions asked to employers aren't always appropriate.
- 5.7 The Minister stated that there is an opportunity for Local Authorities and Community Covenant Champions to identify issues facing service personnel in their area.
- 5.8 Annabel Ingram advised members that she had been invited to a meeting to consider family issues and the funding available.
- 5.9 Sarah said that a Welcome to Wales pack was in place and agreed to share this with the Family Federations.
- 5.10 The Minister requested Martin Swain meet with the Family Federations to further explore the issues faced by families.

#### **Actions:**

- **Jane Williams to forward the naval location statistics for the Minister's attention.**
- **Sarah Watkins to share the Welcome to Wales pack with the family federations.**
- **A meeting between Martin Swain and the family federations to be arranged.**

#### **ITEM 6 – FAST TRACK REFERRAL PATHWAY FOR SERVING PERSONNEL**

- 6.1 Stuart Davies presented the Fast Track Referral Pathway which prioritises access to secondary care for Armed Forces service personnel who are actively serving but currently medically non-deployable. As part of the Pathway the needs and the care of service personnel are diagnosed with certain serving personnel fast tracked to specialist provision as required by the Defence Medical Welfare Service.

- 6.2 Stuart explained that a MoD 'gatekeeper' has been appointed whose role was to decide if there was a need to fast track each individual for treatment. A thorough process is in place to ensure requests are dealt with appropriately. For example the service specification ensures services are fast tracked as required and surgical follow up is always undertaken as part of continuity of care.
- 6.2 Stuart advised that 103 referrals had been processed since the start of the service, the majority of which were ENT and orthopaedic related. Whilst this is manageable at present, should there be an increase in requests this may affect capacity of treatment.
- 6.3 The Minister commended the Pathway as an excellent example of public service collaboration.
- 6.4 Lance emphasised that the Pathway is unique to Wales and important to keep service personnel, such as The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The Rifles, deployed.

## **ITEM 7 – UPDATE ON VETERANS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

- 7.1 Peter Greenhill provided an update on the Veteran's Pathfinder and its aim to implement a whole system approach in supporting veterans from their arrest to their exit from the criminal justice system.
- 7.2 An Expression of Interest had been submitted to the Covenant Fund seeking funding for a Veteran Pathfinder Co-ordinator, administrative support and two Veteran Prison Liaison Officers.
- 7.3 Veteran leads have now been established in each prison in Wales, in all four Police Force areas and also in each Local Delivery Unit in Wales. The leads attended an event in Maindy Barracks in September which provided an opportunity to share information on the Pathfinder. Peter advised the members that Parc Prison had opened its Endeavour Unit, the UK's first prison wing for ex-Service personnel whose Prison Officers and Managers were ex-military.
- 7.4 Peter explained that Chief Inspector Lisa Gore, Veterans Lead for South Wales Police had amended the Public Protection Notification (PNN) so that it identifies veterans within the home and captures individuals at their earliest point of entry in the criminal justice system.
- 7.5 The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) had met with the police to discuss improving data collection and information sharing. Peter confirmed that there is considerable interest in sharing resources to avoid duplication and ensure services are more sustainable. NOMS had also met with Chief Constable Jeff Farrah to discuss the involvement of Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups as a means of tracing when early intervention would help solve problems at an earlier point. However, it was agreed that the Pathfinder would benefit from ESGV at a later stage in its development.

- 7.6 Leeanne Plechowicz confirmed that following three separate bids for Covenant funding to help veterans in the criminal justice system the National Probation Service and NOMS had linked in with various stakeholders, such as Barnardos, to avoid duplication.
- 7.7 Lance emphasised the importance of consolidated bids between the Third Sector and those organisations submitting bigger bids as they would likely be more effective.
- 7.8 Stuart said that violent acts are often committed by those with mental health issues and asked whether there was any evidence of Armed Forces personnel entering medium secure units.
- 7.9 Lance noted that work was underway to identify Armed Forces personnel in the criminal justice system. Any information held by other organisations regarding this would be worth sharing to get the bigger picture.
- 7.10 Reg Kilpatrick emphasised the opportunity of the Endeavour Unit to build on this area of work, advising members that the prison Governor is an ex-Marine.
- 7.11 Sarah advised that in terms of post traumatic stress disorder it is often more appropriate to stabilise its sufferers prior to starting treatment.
- 7.12 Jane spoke about the military correction centre in Colchester, an establishment that provides corrective training for those servicemen and women sentenced to periods of detention, stating that there may be an opportunity to link in. Lance agreed to speak with Corin Morgan Armstrong from Parc Prison on this matter.

## **ITEM 8 – UPDATE FROM THE ARMED FORCES IN WALES**

- 8.1 Colonel Lance Patterson provided an update on behalf of the Armed Forces and advised that whilst the Armed Forces in Wales are continuing to develop relationships with the public sector it is currently in the UNDERSTAND phase with many of its requirements not yet clear.
- 8.2 Lance advised that the Covenant Fund is currently in its second series of bids. The closing date for bids under £20,000 is the 17 December and the board will convene on the 26 January 2016 to consider the bids.
- 8.3 Training and the development of skills are provided through the Armed Forces Employability Pathway (AFEP). Lance explained that 160 Brigade and Headquarters in Wales are working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to expand opportunities being offered. Work is underway to investigate sources of funding for the AFEP.
- 8.4 The Minister noted the AFEP with interest and asked for further information to be provided on the current situation regarding funding and engagement.
- 8.5 Lance informed members that the Cadet Expansion Programme now applies to Wales. A meeting would be held on the 8 December between the MoD and Welsh Government to consider the next steps in combining 24 Cadet Forces across Wales. It was noted

that Julian Brazier, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Reserves, had written to the Minister for Education and Skills concerning combining the Cadet Forces in Wales. The Minister was sighted on the letter and emphasised his support for the programme.

- 8.6 Lance provided an update on the Keep Safe Cymru scheme and advised the members that 160 Brigade were working with South Wales Police to extend the scheme to service personnel.
- 8.7 General Sir Nick Carter KCB, CBE, DSO, ADC Gen would be visiting Wales on the 10 February 2016 and will address Cardiff Business Club. Lance said this would be an opportunity to arrange a meeting with the First Minister and also the Secretary of State.
- 8.8 Lance advised that Janet Blake is conducting a strategic analysis of Army Engagement. Discussions would be held with Welsh Government in the New Year as part of the administration of the UNDERSTAND phase and to identify what devolved services want from the Armed Forces.
- 8.9 Adrian informed the meeting that over time there should be increased employment opportunities at RAF Valley to support the focus on fast jet flying training.

**Action:**

- **Further information to be provided on the current situation regarding funding and engagement of the AFEP.**

**ITEM 9 – UPDATE FROM THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

- 9.1 James Franklin provided an update from the MoD advising that the focus for 2016 would be family healthcare and education. Whilst 407 Local Authorities have signed up to the Community Covenant across mainland Britain James advised that the Community Covenant is shortly to be reviewed and questioned whether the British Forces Post Office were using the Covenant correctly. James confirmed that the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015 would be published on the 10 December.
- 9.2 On the 14 January 2016 Oliver Letwin will Chair the Covenant Reference Group where initial discussions would be held on challenges and future priorities. James advised that from the 14 January the new Covenant branding will be launched and as the Gov.UK website isn't always user friendly there would be a new Covenant microsite.

**ITEM 10 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS – PACKAGE OF SUPPORT**

- 10.1 The Minister spoke about the Package of Support review and re-affirmed his decision not to publish a reviewed document until after the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review that took place on the 25 November. Further discussions would be held with stakeholders to discuss a revised Package of Support for 2016.

## **ITEM 11 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS - ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONS EVENT**

- 11.1 Cerys Gage provided a verbal update on the event. The Champions Event had taken place in Brecon on the 18 November with around 90 delegates attending. The afternoon workshops provided an opportunity to discuss the Covenant Fund and consider regional bids. Whilst there had been a variety of feedback the key issues raised were the importance of collaboration to provide bids for projects that were both sustainable and robust, the need for more information on the process and the risk of duplication as a result of not being fully aware of what's going on locally.
- 11.2 Cerys advised that suggestions included making better use of Local Authority websites to raise local awareness and the establishment of a central forum of information.

### **Action:**

- **Secretariat to share a feedback report from the workshops with James Franklin.**

## **ITEM 12 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS – DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 12.1 The Minister confirmed that the next meeting would be held on the 7 July 2016

