

CAERPHILLY ARMED FORCES FORUM

Meeting

At 10am on Thursday, 12th February, 2015

in the Ebbw Room

Caerphilly County Borough Council Offices

Ty Penallta

1. Attendance, Apologies & Introductions:

Attendance: Howard Rees (CCBC Armed Forces Lead Officer & Chair), Cllr Alan Higgs (CCBC Armed Forces Champion), John Elliott (CCBC – Policy), Keith Sutcliffe (SSAFA Gwent Area), Steve Keenan (GAVO), Ken Terry & Alison Parkinson (Royal British Legion), Sgt. Rob Davies & Sgt. Andy O’Keefe (Gwent Police), Peter Wilson (Royal British Legion), Hayley Lancaster (CCBC Corporate Communications), Mike Jones (DWP), Melvin Byles (Federation of Small Businesses), Mike Bailey (Veterans Welfare Service), Jo Dover (Defence Medical Welfare Service), Donna Lloyd-Williams (First Choice Housing Association)

Apologies: Peter Evans (Royal British Legion), Brian Mawby (ABUHB Armed Forces Champion), Insp., K. Childs (Gwent Police), Abbie Morgan (Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice Bureau), Stephen Hughes (Reserve Forces’ & Cadets’ Association for Wales), Maria Chapman (Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Gwent), Chris Kirk (SSAFA), Captain Huw Williams (203 (Welsh) Fd., Hospital), Andrew Bush (National Probation Service)

Introductions: HR welcomed everyone and introductions were provided, for this, the seventh meeting of the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum (CAFF). He also mentioned that if members of the Forum were dealing with individual cases of veterans, reservists or serving personnel, who have issues/problems, which could be addressed by particular agencies on the Forum, then anonymised information should be used, with a view to obtaining advice and support.

2. Notes and matters arising from the meeting of 20th November 2014:

Notes were approved as a true record.

3. Presentation from Jo Dover – Defence Medical Welfare Service:

JD described the origins of the service which goes back to Red Cross Volunteers in WW1, through to WW2 when St John and the Red Cross formed the Service Hospitals Welfare Department in 1943. St John and the Red Cross then became a Voluntary Aid Society, and were embedded in all

military hospitals, and in 2001 became the Defence Medical Welfare Service. It has served alongside the British armed forces in many theatres of war.

The DMWS seeks to provide a high-quality hospital welfare service to the military community, those serving, reservists, veterans and their dependents in locations in the UK and overseas, in order to sustain the delivery of military capability.

Staff trained to National Welfare Qualifications, training to Level 3 Diploma for Welfare Officers, to cover core competencies in:- Leadership, Counselling, Bereavement, Employment Law, Conflict resolution, Behaviour management, Mental Health First Aid, etc.

DMWS 24/7 Duty Contact Telephone Numbers:

South Wales & South West: 07730 219 579

North Wales & North West: 07715 436 671

Website: www.dmws.org.uk

Contact details for Jo Dover, Service Delivery Manager, DMWS:-

E-mail: jdover@dmws.org.uk Tel: 07721 127 783

The Chair thanked JD for her very informative presentation. (*Chairs Note: PowerPoint presentation circulated on 18th February, 2015*)

4. Presentation from Donna Lloyd-Williams – First Choice Housing Association:

DL-W introduced the First Choice Housing Association (FCHA), which was established in 1988. FCHA provides quality accommodation solutions for people with disabilities, veterans and additional complex needs across Wales and Shropshire. It is the only Welsh RSL with an all Wales coverage.

FCHA aims to be the provider of choice for local authorities to deliver well-designed homes in which people with a range of specialist needs, disabilities and veterans can lead fulfilling lives, enabling a positive transition to independent living.

At present FCHA have 189 properties / 580 bed-spaces, in 18 local authority areas. FCHA is working in partnership with Alabare and are committed to providing supported housing for veterans. Working together in partnership it aims to deliver 72 bed-spaces utilising the first round of LIBOR funding, and together FCHA/Alabare hope to achieve many homes throughout Wales, with the first having opened in 2014.

FCHA links with the 'Hire a Hero' (HaH) organisation. Three FCHA staff are HaH mentors, and they provide housing advice to other mentors and service leavers.

FCHA find it difficult to obtain statistics on leavers from the armed forces, and also where they are expected to locate, on a Welsh LA basis. Some details

on veterans' information can be obtained from 160 Brigade leaver statistics (though leavers are only part of the whole picture), from RBL and SSAFA referrals, and Remploy sign-ups.

Contact details for: Donna Lloyd-Williams, Director of Corporate Services, FCHA:

Tel No: (029) 20703758 E-mail: donnalloyd-williams@fcha.org.uk

The Chair thanked DL-W for her presentation. (*Chairs Note: PowerPoint presentation circulated on 18th February, 2015*).

He also explained that CCBC's Draft Common Housing Allocations Policy is now out for consultation, comments must be returned by 22nd February. The Chair was impressed with the policy as it contained numerous references regarding armed forces personnel and service leavers, 'veterans'. The document was circulated to Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum members in January 2015.

5. Update from the Gwent Armed Forces Forum – 11th February, 2015:

The Chair gave an update on the recently held Gwent Armed Forces Forum meeting. The meeting on the 11/02/15 was held at HMP Prescoed which is a farm, an open prison and is a satellite facility for HMP Usk.

This Gwent wide meeting was facilitated by Usk Prison Admissions Officer, followed by an arranged tour of the prison facility at Usk. When the visit was originally arranged, in November 2014, the inmates had constructed various impressive '3D sculptures' of WW1 military items of equipment, in commemoration of the outbreak of WW1. These included a model of a WW1 tank, artillery and machine gun pieces, battlefield scenes, and a mural. These items were on display within the prison in the months leading up to Christmas 2014 but needed to be dismantled, and so the visiting group were unable to view the original artwork, but did look at the photographs taken of these items. Even from the photographs the exhibits looked very impressive.

The meeting covered updates from the various Local Authorities represented around the table and other regular members, including the Prison Service, ABUHB, SSAFA, RBL, various military representatives, Veterans NHS Wales, etc.

Capt. Dibble announced that there was some small funding available under an initiative named 'Operation Reflect'. Based on the commemoration of the outbreak of WW1, this funding is designed to encourage small community projects to come forward and apply for funding, on the basis that Armed Forces Cadets can get involved and complete the project. An example given was the clearing of a beauty spot of unsightly dumped tyres, and a project to reinstate the headstones in a churchyard, for fallen veterans.

Vanessa Bailey, Community Therapist, Veterans' NHS Wales said that currently the Veterans requiring therapy for mental health issues have an

assessment waiting time of 2 – 4 weeks and therapy waiting time of 6 – 8 weeks. Howard Rees mentioned that he could pass this information onto the Neighbourhood Care Networks which exist in Caerphilly, largely to ensure that GP's are informed of the referral pathways.

SSAFA in conjunction with Gwent Police have developed a protocol to be used initially in Custody Units, where those people in custody will be asked if they are veterans, or serving members of the Armed Forces. As part of wider awareness training on this subject, Gwent Police have produced a DVD on this, to be shown eventually to all police officers and public facing staff. Information will also be available via social network sites – Twitter and Facebook. SSAFA have also produced a reference card, containing the main SSAFA Helpline telephone number, which will be freely available to be given out by the Police, for any veteran to use for help and support. It is also felt that with the Veterans awareness training for Community Police Officers, and the contact cards will benefit veterans in the community.

6. Feedback from the Welsh Government Armed Forces Champions Networking Event – 27th November 2014:

From discussions at workshops in this event, there appears to be "a disconnect" between the Welsh Government Ministers Experts Group – the Strategic Level, and the Regional and Local level forums. The Experts Group meets twice a year and discusses items which have little or no local impact. The need for better communication from the Local and Regional levels to feedback up to the Expert Group level was identified. It also became apparent that certain areas of Wales do work differently, and while this is not necessarily a bad thing, there should be better consistency across local authority areas. During this discussion at the (CAFF) Mike Bailey of the Veterans Welfare Service said that he attends the Expert Group meetings, along with Lt. Col. Stephen Hughes of the RFCA. MB said that although he takes on board what people are saying about the Expert Group, perhaps there could be better information and more constructive communications, at all levels, in the future. All agreed.

A presentation was made by Tom Dalby from the Defence Discount Service. It is intended to launch a publicity campaign, in association with the Welsh Government, to publicise the Defence Discount Service Card, which for fee of £4.99 for a five year membership, will be available to Serving Personnel, Veterans, Cadet Forces (16+), Bereaved Family Members, War/ Service Widow(er)s, Spouses / Partners of serving personnel, Reservists, MOD Civil Servants and NATO Personnel in the UK. The card enables savings from a number of regional and national organisations when purchasing goods and services on the High Street or online. The scheme does extend to new car purchases as well.

Overall the Networking Event was a very positive experience and an excellent opportunity to network with members of the Armed Forces and other representatives from AFF, charities and Councils around Wales.

7. Update from Cllr. Alan Higgs (Caerphilly Armed Forces Champion):

In Cllr AH absence the Chair updated on the various activities undertaken by the Champion including:-

- Quite a lot of work connected to the WW1 centenary.
- Compilation with Council Officers assistance, of information on battle honours and campaigns directly relating to Welsh Regiments and 203(Welsh) Field Hospital as WW1 progressed.
- 2015 marks 100 years from the start of the Gallipoli Campaign.
- AH has assisted a number of veterans who have had difficulties with their Council Tax payments, and Housing Benefit payments. Some of these cases have been referred to him by the RBL, SSAFA and our own Council Tax Department. So far seventeen cases have either been completed or are at various stages in the process of being completed.
- AH said that because the number of cases he has dealt with is increasing, a monitoring sheet has been developed to record the de-personalised quantitative data, and monitor the progress of each case.

8. Update from Members of the Forum:

8 a) **203 (Welsh) Field Hospital:** Apologies noted. Capt. Huw Williams is in North Wales on a recruitment drive.

8 b) **The Royal British Legion (RBL):** KT and AP updated on initiatives within CCBC. The RBL has an outreach session operating from CCBC offices, Penallta House every other Thursday, on an appointment basis. The RBL and CCBC have recently negotiated a 'Drop in Service', using Bargoed Library which veterans can use, to just arrive and have a cup of tea or coffee and a chat. These sessions will be available from 10.00 am to 2.00 pm., starting on 26th March, then 23rd April and 21st May, 2015. More sessions will be booked for the future. The RBL are currently running a campaign called 'Insult to Injury', identifying that veterans injured during Service are having to give up most of their compensation to pay for the costs of their social care. RBL are of the view that military compensation is awarded as recompense for the pain, suffering and loss of amenity experienced by injured Service personnel and veterans; the RBL feel that it should **not** be treated as normal income. RBL stated that this campaign is aimed at National and Welsh Government encouraging them to change guidance, which would allow local authorities to waive compensation payments. To find out more and if you wish to support the campaign, to make the Welsh Government and National Government aware of this, please follow the link below.

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/campaigns/insult-to-injury>

8 c) **SSAFA:** KS advised that they are dealing with a number of claims within the CCBC area. These include assistance in the legal process for bankruptcies, referred by the CAB, and the cost for veteran's funerals. As mentioned in Point 5 above SSAFA (Gwent Branch) have worked with Gwent Police to produce a contact information card which can be given to veterans in Custody Units, for them to telephone the SSAFA helpline for any assistance which can be offered. SSAFA have recruited a number of volunteers from Caerphilly

County Borough with the assistance of GAVO, who have provided the referral information.

- 8 d) **ABUHB:** KS reported that he recently attended the Stakeholders Reference Group. That group had discussed the Specialist & Critical Care Centre to be constructed at Llanfrechfa. Work will start on the construction in February 2016 and the building should be open in 2019, at a cost of £241 million. When this building is completed the present Royal Gwent Hospital will be downgraded possibly to a minor A&E unit. All emergency admissions will then go to the S&CCC in Llanfrechfa. The overall aim of NHS Wales is to reduce hospitals taking full emergency admissions, to four or five across South Wales.

Vanessa Bailey, the Community Therapist, Veterans' NHS Wales said, at the Gwent Armed Forces Forum, that Veterans who may have mental health issues currently are waiting two to four weeks for an assessment of their condition. If those people had gone to their own G.P.'s, the waiting time could be 18 months to 2 years. G.P.'s need more education on this issue, so that they are aware that there is a much shorter route, by referral to the ABUHB Specialists, for these cases.

The £100,000 received for this service last year had certainly improved that service, however in order to continue at this level more funding will be required this year. This has not yet been secured.

- 8 e) **Gwent Police:** RD gave an update on the current position within Gwent Police who has undergone a second major reorganisation. The Gwent Police area will now exist as East and West. The West area, under Superintendent Marc Budden, will cover Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Caerphilly County Boroughs, with the East area covering Newport and Monmouthshire council areas. It is anticipated that this reorganisation will provide an enhanced policing service. Sgt RD announced that he will soon be retiring and introduced his successor, Sgt. Andrew O'Keefe who accompanied him to this meeting.
- 8 f) **Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner:** Apologies noted.
- 8 g) **Reserve Forces & Cadets Association for Wales:** The Chair stated that disappointingly he had only recently become aware of an awards ceremony called the Wales Employer Recognition Scheme, which.

'Public and private organisations have been recognised for their commitment and support to Defence at an inaugural Wales Employer Recognition Scheme - Silver Awards Ceremony. The event took place at Cardiff City Stadium and more than 30 organisations attended, including Airbus UK, Greggs, Cardiff City Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, Tata Steel, NHS Bro Morgannwg and many more from all four corners of Wales.'

The Employer Recognition Scheme was a commitment made in the July, 2013, White Paper entitled "Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued". An earlier Green Paper consultation process took into account the

views of a wide range of companies and industry bodies who championed the value in publicly recognising employers supportive to Defence across a range of areas.

AP from the RBL said that with the increase in Combined Cadet Forces in comprehensive schools in CCBC, the RBL provides training sessions for Standard Bearers. If anyone is interested please contact Ken Terry of the RBL.

- 8 h) **Probation Service:** The Chair described how the Probation Service, like other large organisations have undergone major reorganisation. The National Probation Service will now deal high risk offenders, and the Community Rehabilitation Company will deal with the medium to low risk offenders.
- 8 i) **GAVO:** SK said that GAVO had relocated its headquarters to Newport, and that several officers have been placed in satellite offices in the CCBC area, and that volunteer recruitment was ongoing.
- 8 j) **Caerphilly Business Forum:** The Chair welcomed Melvin Byles from the Caerphilly Business Forum, and explained that they had met at a Hire a Hero event in November 2014, where MB expressed his desire to join the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum. MB himself is the Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses for South East and Mid Wales, which represents the interests from sole traders, to firms employing 250 people. With the potential of reaching over 3,500 small businesses, it was felt that MB would be an ideal contact to promote the recruitment of veterans leaving the armed forces with a variety of skills, which would be useful in civilian life. Also it was felt that MB could assist with two major initiatives relating to the Armed Forces. These are the Heroes Welcome Scheme and the Defence Discount Service Card.

The Heroes Welcome Scheme encourages businesses to extend, as a minimum, a warm welcome to Veterans, Reservists and Serving Members of the Armed Forces and their Families who are purchasing goods or services. It is up to the business taking part in the scheme as to whether they may offer a discount of any kind or perhaps a special deal. Businesses tacking part in this scheme are able to display a window sticker to show this fact. The stickers are bi-lingual, and Caerphilly County Borough Council is the first Local Authority to offer this in Wales. For a sample of the sticker please see the attached page.

The Defence Discount Service Card is scheduled for a major launch via the Welsh Government soon. (See Point 6 above)

The Welsh Government, as part of the future publicity for the Defence Discount Service Card, has asked for any personal examples of the use of the discount card. SSAFA supplied us with the name and contact details of a Veteran who uses the discount card very often, and who has agreed to take part in the publicity campaign.

8 k) **Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent CAB:** Apologies noted.

8 l) **Job Centre Plus (DWP):** MJ updated the Forum on Universal Credit payments to start under the new regulations, on 4th May. This will see those entitled to these payments (including Housing Benefit) get the whole amount in one payment. Initially these will be single people with no mortgage, and payments will be made 36 days in arrears. It will be the responsibility of up the claimant to pay the Council Tax, and rent to landlords.

The Chair said that CCBC is very aware of these new regulations and has been working intensely to make people aware, and assist those claimants who may not be too IT capable, as this is the medium through which claims will be operated in the future, at Job Centre Plus offices.

8 m) **Veterans UK:** MB said that they are continuing to develop Transition Welfare Protocols to assist veterans. Forces Units identify and mentor those at persons likely to be at risk. Through the Personnel Recovery Units (PRU's) those persons who have been discharged with ill-health are assessed, with a view to resettlement and adjustment into civilian life, with follow-up home visits.

8 n) **Caerphilly County Borough Council:** HL from Corporate Communications, said that she was sounding out ideas from the Forum on their views for Armed Forces Day on the 27th June 2015. This year it is hoped to feature the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital and the 3rd Royal Welsh at an event to be held a week earlier on the 20th June. It is felt that this date is more likely to attract participants who may not be available on the national event date on the 27th June. The Armed Forces Day in Caerphilly county borough is intended to move around the county borough each year. In the past it has been held at Penallta House and last year at Ystrad Mynach. It is proposed that this year's location will be Newbridge and that the Gwent & Powys Cadet Force Band may be available for this event. Cllr AH explained that by moving the event around the county borough it would engage with many more members of the public.

The Chair said that he had attended an event at Cardiff City Hall on the 27th January, which was hosted by the 'Forces in Mind Trust' (FiMT). It is a charity which is to promote the successful transition of Armed Forces personnel, and their families, into civilian life. It provides grants for research into Veterans and Armed Forces related issues. Big Lottery has awarded FiMT £35 million. The Trust will invest and spend the £35 million over the next 20 years to support the psychological well-being and successful and sustainable transition of veterans and their families into civilian life. It will provide long-term help that supports and joins up with the valuable work already being carried out by a range of organisations. The organisation's website and details can be viewed from this link: <http://www.fim-trust.org/>

One interesting fact which came from the FiMT presentations was that there are at least 2,700 military charities in existence, varying from a one person

operation, right up to the much larger RBL and SSAFA. So for veterans to choose access to an appropriate charity may not be an easy task.

9. Caerphilly Armed Forces Activity Programme:

The BIG Cheese Event held in Caerphilly town, will be over the weekend of the 25 & 26 July. It is hoped that we can combine all of the military content which occurred last year, in one area, to also include the Royal Navy and the service charities RBL & SSAFA, and possibly representatives from the Cadet Corps.

On a similar theme, the Chair of this Forum will be meeting with representatives from the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital, the 3rd Royal Welsh and the Royal Navy, to discuss the provision of workplace Reserve Recruiting stands for CCBC staff. It is envisaged that these stands may be combined or may be set up singly, for part of a day (10am – 2pm) over a period of several weeks. This is likely to start in April 2015. The recruitment stands may also be taken other CCBC locations e.g. Pontllanfraith House, Tir y Berth etc.

A full list of Forum activities undertaken and the timeline has been sent out with the papers for this meeting. The Chair asked all to consider and forward updates as appropriate.

10. The Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme:

The existing Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme and the Libor funded scheme have now ended. The Westminster Government has stated that there will be a replacement scheme for £10 million per year for the next five years. At this time we do not know the name of the new scheme or what criteria it will be using. When this information is available we will e-mail the details to all members of the Forum.

11. AOB: None.

12. Date of next meeting:

At 10.00 am on Thursday, 28th May, 2015 in the Ebbw Room, Ty Penallta.