

CAERPHILLY ARMED FORCES FORUM (CAFF)

10th September 2020
Microsoft Teams



PRESENT

Cllr Andrew Whitcombe	CCBC Armed Forces Champion
Kathryn Peters (Chair)	CCBC (Armed Forces Lead)
Lisa Rawlings	Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer
Peter Wilson	RBL - District
Emma Ashmead	Newport Youth Co-Ordinator - Former HMF Education Officer
Paul Owen	Partnership Manager - DWP
Sadie Balwin	Army Families Federation
Andy Jones	SToMP
John Williams	RBL – Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager
Andrew Williams	160 Bde
Rachel McManus	Help for Heroes Comms Manager
Julianne Williams	RFEA
Jinty Morgan	Hire a Hero
Alan Denmen	SSAFA
Daniel Madge	ABUHB – AFC Lead
Gino Parisi	ABUHB – Person Centred Care and Partnerships Manager
Damon Rees	ABUHB – Veteran Peer Mentor
Tom Hall	Blesma
Stephen Boswell	SSAFA - Wales
Michelle Williams	Veterans Welfare Service

APOLOGIES

Anthony Metcalfe	RBL
Shelley Elgin	Help for Heroes
Michelle Williams	Veterans UK
Kirsty Gronow	The Poppy Factory
Nigel Lewis	Gwent Police
Sue Ball	ABUHB
Jason Suller	Blesma
Ken Terry	RBL

KP welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for brief introductions.

1.0 ATTENDANCE, INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

2.0 NOTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING OF 12/03/20

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

UPDATE OF ACTIONS

- LR distributed contact details of Veteran Project Endex

- LR distributed details Ex-Forces Information and Advice Fair (cancelled due to Covid Restrictions)
- LR distributed details of VE75 celebrations (amended due to Covid)
- LR distributed Project 320 grant information

3.0 UPDATE FROM WLGA / Welsh Government

KP advised the forum of the following from WLGA:

- A series of case studies of best practice have been collated and will be available shortly
- There is a potential that the training package will be updated

KP advised the forum of the following from WG:

- Annual report 2019

The Welsh Government's Armed Forces Covenant annual report will be laid in the Senedd at the end of September. It contains key progress and achievements this year in delivery for the Armed forces community. Last year's report is available here:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/armed-forces-covenant-annual-report-2018.pdf>

- Veterans' scoping exercise

The findings of the veterans scoping exercise continue to be taken forward. To date, action groups have been established in Employment, Information and awareness/finance and Transition. Initial activity was summarised in the June update (attached) and another update will be provided during the autumn.

- UK Covenant Annual report

Welsh Government continue to work with UK and devolved nations on the UK Armed Forces Covenant annual report. The report will capture the year running from Oct 2019 until Sep 2020.

- UK Armed Forces Covenant legislation

The Welsh Government is working with the UK and devolved nations on the proposed new legislation and consulting with policy colleagues across health, education, housing and legal to inform the legislation and associated guidance. Officials maintain regular contact with the AFLOs and WLGA on this issue and have been working to ensure local government have the opportunity to feed into the process.

- VJ day

Welsh Government were pleased to collaborate on a virtual VJ day service in August involving the Tri services, faith groups and The Royal British Legion. The First Minister held calls with VJ day veterans and a wreath laying ceremony was held at the national War memorial, following covid 19 guidelines.

- Armed Forces Expert Group

The next meeting of the Armed Forces Expert Group will take place on 16 September. Papers will be disseminated for the AFLO's information following the meeting.

4.0 ARMED FORCES COVENANT INTO LAW - AFLO

An update was delivered by LR on the progress of bringing the Armed Forces Covenant into Law:

- The Government has announced that it intends to introduce legislation to further strengthen the statutory basis of the Covenant. We are currently working with our legal and bill teams to put this together. While the detail is still being worked on and the scope of the legislation may yet change slightly, the current proposal is for the legislation to be a duty on public service providers to take due

regard of the Armed Forces community when writing policy and decisions made in implementing that policy in specific aspects of Healthcare, Education, and Housing. "Public sector providers" in this context refers to local authorities but will also include those who have a role in setting and implementing policy such as Clinical Commissioning Groups and Education Boards for example.

- Focus groups were tasked to gather the information needed to develop the legislation and accompanying guidance. Specifically, the focus will be on 3 key areas:
 1. Impact Assessments – we need to know how this new legislation will impact on areas such as the economy and the burden on local authorities.
 2. Guidance and Training Documents – as local authorities will be at the front line delivering this policy, it is important that they find the guidance helpful and that it addresses everything they would expect it to.
 3. Communications –to ensure that local authorities have the tools they need to communicate the legislation to their internal and external audiences.
- Due to limited information the presentation is not for a wider audience at present but can be discussed directly with AFLO

For more information please contact AFLO rawlil@caerphilly.gov.uk

5.0 UPDATE – ARMED FORCES LIAISON OFFICER

LR advised the forum of the following:

- Welsh Government refunded the AFLO posts until Mar 2023
- Thanked Emma Ashmead whose post as HMF Education Officer has come to an end. 4 Regional School Liaison Officers started work on 7th September 2020. Gwent & Powys RSLO is Caitlin Woodland.
- All Armed Forces Covenant Training will be conducted via Microsoft teams or via the e-learning package until Covid 19 restrictions are lifted
- Scoping undertaken on the Forces Connect app to see if it is feasible to find money to have this in Welsh and therefore extend the ability for LA's to add content
- VE and VJ Day celebrations unfortunately curtailed due to restrictions. It is hoped we will be able to honour Remembrance Day as in the past but alternative arrangements as per prior events will be in place.
- Gwent AFC Newsletter deadline for Winter 2020 edition is September 30th. Members are reminded that this is free to advertise or include news stories from their organisations.
- Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund Grant 'Force for change' deadline noon Sept 11th for round one.
- Endex in conjunction with Newport Veterans Hub will be arranging a five a side football tournament and families day next May if restrictions allow.
- Plans in progress to hold a Wales Employment event in 2021

Action: LR to distribute details of digital Armed Forces Covenant training dates

6.0 FEEDBACK FROM GWENT (ABUHB) ARMED FORCES FORUM

LR informed the meeting that:

- the meeting due to be held on 26th April was postponed due to Covid. A new date is yet to be set but can be expected under the circumstances.
- The Grange hospital will be opened early and is scheduled for November 2020

Action: LR to Distribute Gwent ABUHB meeting date if rescheduled

7.0 CAFF Activity Programme

LR advised the group of events/meetings that have been attended by the Armed Forces Champion and/or RAFCLO

10/12/19	Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum
17/12/19	Help for Heroes Christmas event
20/01/20	WLGA Network Meeting
24/01/20	Holocaust Memorial Day Service
04/02/20	Veterans Legal Link update
13/02/20	The Army Engagement Team event
20/02/20	Mental Health and Substance Misuse Project
25/02/20	TGP Cymru Education Training
03/03/20	Full Council - Invictus Games representative
09/03/20	RFCA Business Club event
11/03/20	Cross Party Group Armed Forces and Cadets
12/03/20	RFCA Lord Lieutenant Awards – Gwent
17/03/20	SSCE Stakeholder Day
07/07/20	WLGA Armed Forces Network

8.0 UPDATE FROM CAFF MEMBERS

8.1 Armed Forces Champion

- Attended a small-scale celebration for VE Day in Abercarn
- Asked the forum about any celebrations/events planned for Battle of Britain. RBL indicated there are some planned by the RAF and will pass on the details
- Activity has been restricted due to lockdown and is concerned that some may struggle with online celebrations for remembrance day.

8.2 Royal British Legion

- The legion will still continue to strive for activities for Remembrance Day in whatever guise they can. The Fields of Remembrance in Cardiff Castle is still planned with local restrictions that are in place at the time. The festival of Remembrance will still go ahead albeit potentially without an audience (this will be available virtually).
- Working on a Manifesto in line with the next set of elections
- Working on a 10-year Nationwide Covenant review – to look back at the impact the Covenant has had on our Community.

8.3 Army Families Federation

- Informed the forum that Annabel Ingram (Regional Manager) has left the organisation and Sadie will be covering Wales and the borders
- 1 year anniversary of Forces Families Jobs website - a webinar has been hosted to celebrate. It is tri-service and veterans up to a year

8.4 SSAFA Gwent

- They have had to move out of their offices in Raglan Barracks at short notice due to Covid. They are now working remotely from home. However, on return the office will be moved to a different location but still within the barracks.
- Steady flow of referrals over the past few months. Some cases have been sign posted at branch level and some co-ordinated with other partners such as GDAS, RAFA, RBL and local citizen advice bureau.
- GAVO has helped with volunteer recruitment which has worked exceptionally well and now have 38 new volunteers. Training and casework have started.
- The Chairman John Blackburn has had to step down due to ill health and a new chairman will be announced shortly.
- There is a concern around fundraising and although at present funds are manageable it is a concern long term.

8.5 HMF Education Support Officer

- EA informed the forum that her tenure in post has come to an end thanked the Forum for the support they have given over the past 18 months. KP thanked EA on behalf of the forum

8.6 ABUHB – Armed Forces Covenant Lead

- Due to increased workload due to Covid it has been quiet in terms of AFC however, they have tried to continue to mark events such as VE and VJ day.
- The Armed Forces Network has been unable to meet as many core members are not currently equipped with suitable IT capacity at work.
- Will co-ordinate with the AFLO for any updates/actions required for AFC.

8.7 ABUHB – Veterans NHS Wales Peer Mentor

- It has been quite challenging not being able to have face to face consultations with the veterans. However, along with the therapists the majority of treatments have been conducted over Microsoft teams in order to continue therapy.
- Since some restrictions have lifted, he has managed to visit more of the 'at risk' clients.

8.8 Hire a Hero

- JM informed the forum that Axel Rees has now left the organisation and any future referrals are to be sent to her
- Steady state of referrals.
- Awarded Gold on the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme
- Requested a telephone conference with the AFLO

Action: LR to discuss updates with JM

8.9 SToMP

- Staffing levels have changed as some posts are only part funded and having to spend more time in their primary roles
- Usual meetings are currently suspended within the prisons but still provide referrals to partners when necessary
- Developed a 1 hour briefing to staff in HMPPS
- Direct contact with all Offender Managers
- The team are looking for any services that are gender specific – particularly for females
- Currently supporting the community payback scheme – Veteran offenders to work with Veteran Charities/Organisations if possible
- Recently reached out for supplies of merchandise (pens etc) for offenders due to lack of events – AJ thanked forum members for their contribution.

8.10 RFEA

- Organisation very busy at present especially as many people have lost their jobs due to Covid, The service has been extended to families and spouses.
- There has been employment of 2 extra staff
- Womens military adviser has been recruited and at capacity within the first month
- There has been a virtual employment event organised today which has 24 companies and 160 service leavers logged on
- Experiencing more referrals due to redundancy and furlough expiring

8.11 DWP

- The Armed Forces Champions have now been recruited however there is a pause in their start date due to Covid
- Celebrated VE/VJ in local offices
- DWP currently open as normal – with Covid restrictions in place

8.12 RBL - District

- Good news on the refunding of the AFLO's post
- VE and VJ celebrated but scaled down due to covid. VE Day was small but VJ was a little larger as restrictions were slightly lifted
- There are 2 plans for Remembrance week depending on restrictions. To mirror VE/VJ with small assemblies outside and virtual church services. They do not envisage any parades taking place.
- The poppy appeal will be scaled down and it may be that there will be static sites manned by a younger, less vulnerable volunteers. Boxes and Collection tins will hopefully be allowed in shops.

Action: LR to provide PW details of Volunteering Wales website

8.13 Help for Heroes

- Over the last 6 months they have taken their front facing services digital to adapt to the current situation. Still supporting Invictus athletes and sports recovery participants virtually to maintain motivation
- Continuing to deliver case management work, veterans clinical liaison nurse digitally. They still have some capacity and therefore if anyone is in contact with recipients who need welfare support, emotional support (Hidden Wounds) and medical support that the clinical liaison can offer please get in touch.
- Grateful for the support they have had from Caerphilly Council – promoting their activities and their VE day campaign
- Caerphilly resident Jon Congreave is starring in the new Help for Heroes catalogue. He was honoured earlier in the year at full council to wish him well at the Invictus Games. He has been given access by the local authority to leisure services to continue his training
- Carried out research with a survey and identified more people coming forward for support since lockdown began – a further 900 people have made contact. 33% increase in the number of people coming forward for mental health support compared to the same period last year; 30% increase in the number of new veterans supported by the veterans clinical team. Attributed to either increase in awareness of the support available or the conditions during covid exacerbating the situation.
- Earlier in the year H4H created the Field Guide to Self-Care resource. This has been made available to NHS staff – building emotional resilience and dealing with stress and anxiety. The resource has been made available online – this has also been translated in to welsh language. Asked forum members to share the field guide and signpost to it.
- Fundraising is affected considerably

8.14 SSAFA – Wales & West

- Congratulations on the refunding of the AFLO's posts in Wales
- Thank you to Alan and the Gwent SSAFA team who are doing a great job whilst trying to be 'business as normal'. Casework is continuing, referrals at the height of the pandemic were about half of what is expected year to year. However, Forcesline (SSAFA referral line) has reported that there has been a gradual increase.
- The Gurkha mentoring services are continuing
- 50 new volunteers have been recruited to the mentoring services
- Training has proved to be problematic but trying to adapt to a blended approach due to Covid restrictions. Can cause a delay on training to caseworker standard and therefore need longer assistance for some elements of the case work. Additionally, it does mean the recipient would need access to technology which is not always available.
- Seem to have stagnated in terms of the prison service and will arrange a catch up with SToMP to identify alternate ways that they could support at the moment

8.15 160 Bde

- All four Service Children Regional School Liaison Officers have now been appointed. Caitlin Woodland has been appointed for Gwent & Powys. Started 7th Sept and are completing induction at their respective LA's; additionally, they will be visiting brigade for 3 days knowledge based training.
- The Armed Forces in Wales Awards has been cancelled for this year due to covid restrictions
- The Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund small grants will not go to a regional panel this year – opting to go straight to the central team in London

8.16 The Veteran Welfare Service

- The VWS continued to work from home from the start of the lockdown, contacting and supporting clients
- Headquarters at Norcross in Blackpool closed completely but we managed clients expectations regarding the progress of their claims and were able to keep them informed as services were gradually back up and running.
- Continued completing claim forms over the phone for War Pensions, Armed Forces Compensation, Armed Forces Pensions and DWP claims and clients were able to contact via email Veterans-UK-VWS-Wales-Mid@mod.gov.uk which is monitored during normal office hours.
- Face to face visits are not currently taking place although some priority visits have been carried out for Death in Service, Terminal Illnesses and other vulnerable clients.
- The situation is very fluid with services increasing on a weekly basis, our headquarters are operating to near full capacity and are hopeful they will be able to attend surgeries in the near future.

9.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

SSAFA highlighted the success of the influx of volunteers via the Volunteering Wales website but it proved too many too quick to manage. However this is a nice problem to have and will prove a very useful resource for anyone looking for volunteers in the future

10.0 DETAILS OF NEXT MEETING: 10am, 10th December 2020, Microsoft Teams (provisionally).