

CAERPHILLY ARMED FORCES FORUM

Meeting

At 10.00 am on Thursday 1st May 2014

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), Hayley Lancaster (CCBC Corporate Communications), Keith Sutcliffe (SSAFA Gwent Area), Kirsty Moore (Wales Probation Trust), Captain Mark Gold (203 (Welsh) Fd., Hospital), Insp. Kevin Childs (Gwent Police), Tony Sheehan (Caerphilly Business Forum), Simon Ellington & Abbie Morgan (Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice Bureau), Steve Keenan (GAVO)

Apologies: Peter Evans (Royal British Legion), Brian Mawby (ABUHB Armed Forces Champion)

Introductions: HR welcomed everyone and introductions were provided, for this, the fourth meeting of the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum. 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 16th January 2014:

Notes approved as a true record, with no matters arising.

3. Presentation from 'Change Step':

Rob Smith from the charity "Change Step" was introduced and welcomed. RS described the work of "Change Step" as follows:

Change Step is CAIS led, and is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre based in North Wales. He read a recent press release:- *'Thousands of armed forces veterans across Wales with mental health and substance misuse problems and the family members who often struggle to look after them, will*

have a helping hand thanks to a more than £1.4 million government grant to an all-Wales service led by Llandudno based drug and alcohol charity CAIS'.

RS informed that the idea is to combine the Peer Mentoring system with veterans who will mentor fellow veterans. The first exercise is to discover where veterans reside on a regional basis, identifying those who wish to seek treatment for drug, alcohol or mental health issues. A variety of schemes to assist them already exist to help when it comes to financial problems and homelessness, where assistance can be provided by the RBL, SSAFA, Drug Aid and Kaleidoscope.

Other issues encountered by veterans include assistance in obtaining long term employment via Remploy or Hire a Hero.

RS area of operation is South East Wales (Gwent): Caerphilly, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Newport and Monmouthshire, and will be looking to advise those in this area what "Change Step" can provide. The organisation also wants to recruit volunteers to assist the project, i.e. veterans. SK suggested that RS might find GAVO useful for this, who agreed that the third sector may provide useful information and contacts.

KS said that SSAFA and Hire a Hero also have mentors who seek to assist service leavers.

SE said that the CAB gives some financial advice to veterans, who have financial capability problems.

HR said that there were many agencies working in very similar fields to achieve the same ends.

HR advised that the Safer Caerphilly Substance Misuse Lead Officer for the Caerphilly county borough (Maria Evans) has considerable knowledge and expertise and can advise on the sophisticated structure of service providers available to tackle both drug and alcohol abuse. RS mentioned that he intends to contact and meet ME.

SK commented that from personal experience, veterans can be overwhelmed with appointments, forms and bureaucracy, making re-entry into civilian life very daunting for a military veteran. He felt that e-mail addresses were more effective than telephone numbers. SK asked if "Change Step" had registered with GAVO as the Voluntary Sector umbrella organisation for this area. RS replied that they had not done so as yet but will consider.

"Change Step" has a central contact number 0300 777 2259 web site at www.changestepwales.co.uk e-mail ask@change-step.co.uk

The Chair (HR) thanked RS for his very useful presentation and wished his project every success.

4. Feedback on the Medal Presentation Ceremony – 1st March, 2014:

Capt. MG said that the ceremony and parade went ahead without a hitch, and that all the arrangements for catering and transport worked out well. He expressed his thanks, on behalf of the Commanding Officer – Colonel Tina Donnelley, and the members of the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital, for a very warm welcome from the people of Caerphilly county borough and in particular the local community, the people of Risca. HR said that he would wholeheartedly agree with what Capt. MG had said, and praised the support which the event had from the business sector in Risca. HR thanked CCBC Corporate Communications, and all of the other council staff, for the hard work they had put into this successful event. SK said that both he and GAVO had received very positive feedback from this event.

5. Update from Gwent Armed Forces Forum:

The Terms of Reference have now been agreed, in line with other Health Boards.

Veterans are able to self refer their cases, where there are mental health issues of concern, to the County Hospital at Griffithstown, in Pontypool. The wait for treatment is considerably less than if visiting a GP Surgery. Caerphilly county borough still has the highest referral rate, in particular for PTSD cases. (NB: Caerphilly County Borough Council area has a population of 180,000 and is the largest in the Gwent region). It is envisaged that at sometime in the future all veterans visiting their GP's, will be noted on an IT based 'flagging system', ensuring that the GP will view this fact. The ABUHB's Primary Care Cluster Plans are seen as delivering armed forces / veterans, messages to local clusters.

The age profile of veterans, in the Caerphilly county borough area, shows that they are younger than the national average.

Forum members agreed that in order to provide more information on ABUHB work with veterans in Caerphilly county borough suffering PTSD and other mental health conditions, Max Bergmanski/Vanessa Bailey should be invited to the next meeting of this Forum on 18th September, 2014.

6. Welsh Government Armed Forces Champions Network – 8th May 2014:

The above event is a Wales wide networking event. HR, JE, and Cllr AH will be attending. At the event various presentations will be made to identify issues/experiences of the Armed Forces community in Wales, and the initiatives/actions being taken to support the Armed Forces community.

7. CAFF & Caerphilly Big Cheese event – 25th & 26th July, 2014:

As previously mentioned arrangements have been made for the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum to have a marquee at the above event. Several organisations will be in attendance over the Big Cheese weekend including:- Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Job Centre Plus, Caerphilly Business Forum, Combat Stress, Caerphilly Armed Forces Network, and the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital.

JE will arrange a meeting to discuss and confirm arrangements.

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

Cllr. AH agreed that the 203 Parade and Medals Ceremony was excellent and thanked everyone concerned. Cllr. AH said that £800 was collected on the day in only two hours. Funding of £400 each, went the Mayor's Charity Ty Hafan and to the Army Benevolent Fund.

£500 was also raised at an event held in New Tredegar with the comedian Owen Money and that will also be donated to the Army Benevolent Fund.

Cllr. AH congratulated the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital on being awarded the Freedom of the City of Cardiff.

Cllr. AH updated on how he had facilitated housing advice to a veteran in need in his Ward, as a result of which the individual had successfully secured suitable accommodation. Cllr AH had subsequently received a very nice complimentary e-mail from the veteran concerned.

9. Update from Members of the Forum:

- 9 a) **203 (Welsh) Field Hospital** (Capt. MG) reported and updated on the following:

- Community Covenant Funding and the Libor Fund could be used for projects which benefit serving personnel, reservists, veterans and their families.
- Welsh Government is looking at a Pupil Premium Funding scheme for schools in Wales. This currently operates in England and Scotland. The scheme provides provision of places in local primary schools for children of serving military personnel, as service families are posted and move around the UK.
- Aid is available for veterans attending courses as long as they register. Help is also available for veterans and serving personnel on housing issues.
- Army HQ 160 Brigade collates figures (on a Wales wide basis) on service leavers and health issues. Denise Llewellyn from the ABUHB is also working on this. Mention was made that serving personnel are returning to the Cardiff and Caerphilly areas, but there was no co-ordination to establish exactly where they are settling/locating. Obviously without this information planning for supportive services by potential employers, Health Boards and Council services such as education, housing, social services are difficult.
- It would be useful to know of what WW 1 Commemoration events are taking place around the county borough (eg: in schools, etc.) in order to provide early support.
- Colonel Tina Donnelley is retiring in the next few months. Members of the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum congratulated her on her retirement and gave best wishes for the future. Colonel Neil Smith will succeed Colonel Donnelly.

9 b) **Royal British Legion (KS) update:**

- On the RBL “Pathway for Growth” change programme, resulting in changes on a national and regional basis.
- KS will attend the RBL Annual Conference on the 17th & 18th May, and will take up on issues such as Capital Grants etc.
- The Wales region/area RBL HQ is moving into offices above its shop in St Mary’s Street, Cardiff.

9 c) **SSAFA (KS) update:**

- KS and a SSAFA colleague were now qualified to undertake Usk Prison visits, to handle casework.
- SSAFA has raised £142,000 over the past year.
- Currently the number of debt cases is increasing, including some requests to cover major funeral costs. Some homelessness cases have been dealt with by SSAFA, who have found that the Barnardo’s organisation provide good to assistance on this issue.

9 d) **ABUHB update:**

- A number of references have already been made to the work of the ABUHB.

9 e) **Gwent Police (Insp. KC) update:**

- Insp KC would be the Police representative at the CAFF and also acknowledged Police involvement and success of the Risca parade.

9 f) **Wales Probation Trust (KM)** update:

- On progress of change to probation services and advised that she would be WPT link with the Forum.

9 g) **GAVO (SK)** update:

- SK introduced as GAVO representative and advised of his previous military service and role in GAVO.

9 h) **Caerphilly Business Forum (TS)** update:

- Veterans considered as an asset by the Caerphilly Business Forum (CBF) for the skills and work experience they have and therefore the CBF are always willing to assist in employment of veterans or establishment of their businesses. The CBF actively support the recently launched “Passport to Employment” scheme and is willing to link with Job Centre Plus where their support can be of any benefit for veterans.

9 i) **Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice Bureau (SE)** update:

- SE updated that CAB had previously operated a ‘tailored’ debt advice service specifically for veterans. This service, commissioned by RBL and provided by CAB across England and Wales, had operated successfully.
- However approximately a year ago CAB was unsuccessful in its ‘bid’ to renew the contract, which was awarded to “Advice UK”. Subsequently, due to difficulties, RBL took the service back in-house. Unfortunately many advisors were lost in this process and went onto other employment.
- Members expressed concerns, providing examples, of a perceived poorer debt advice service now provided by RBL, via its Contact Centre on debt advice.
- SE stated that the CAB continues to provide debt advice for the general population but not a specific/‘tailored’ debt advice service for veterans.
- The use of Community Covenant Funding to fund a bespoke debt advice service was not considered appropriate.
- HR suggested that there may be some benefit of SE meeting with RBL to explore the requirement (based on demand) for specific debt advice services locally/regionally and to investigate the availability of funding to commission such a service.

9 j) **Veterans UK (previously SPVA)** update:

- On 1st April, 2014, the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) merged with Defence Business Services, thereby creating one of the largest

shared service centres in Europe, providing support for all armed forces and MOD civilian personnel, as well as providing veterans support. Re-named as “**Veterans UK**” the organisation has advised that there is no change to any of the services provided.

- For more information about Veterans UK please visit their website www.veterans-uk.info or ring the Veterans UK helpline on 0808 1914 218.

9 k) **Reserve Forces & Cadets Association for Wales & SaBRE:** Apologies received.

9 l) **Caerphilly County Borough Council update:**

- HL reminded the Forum that Armed Forces Day UK will be on the 28th June, 2014. Consequently, and in order to facilitate attendance of a number of forces charities, armed forces representatives, the Lord Lieutenant for Gwent, and other notable people, the Caerphilly Armed Forces Day will be on Saturday, 21st June, 2014.
- Publicity for the Caerphilly Armed Forces Day is as follows:
*“Joining hundreds of organisations across Britain, the Mayor of Caerphilly County Borough Council will ceremonially raise the Armed Forces Day flag in a community style event on Siloh Square, Ystrad Mynach at 10:30am on Saturday 21 June.
The event is set to be the biggest yet as 2014 marks the centenary of the First World War. Organised in partnership with the Royal British Legion Armed Forces Day is just one of the events that Caerphilly County Borough Council is set to host in celebration of the Armed Forces community and commemoration of the lost heroes. Following the formal proceedings, guests are invited to enjoy the stalls and musical entertainment which will occupy the Siloh Square in Ystrad Mynach town centre from 10am to 3pm.
For further information on Armed Forces Day, please call 01443 863218.”*
- CCBC has obtained a grant from the MOD of £1,050 to provide funding for the day. Others attending will be Cadet Forces and the RBL motorcycle club. Two WW1 commemorative benches will be installed at CCBC office sites at Pontlanfraith House and Penallta House.
- First World War exhibition is being set up in the Winding House Museum, New Tredegar and is called “*Our Duty to Bear: the First World War and Caerphilly county borough*”. It will open on Saturday 2nd August, 2014 and will be on display until summer, 2015.

10. **Caerphilly Armed Forces Activity Programme:** Previously circulated and covered in point 9(l) above.

11. **Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme:**

HR noted that there have been several enquiries from a number of organisations regarding this funding. However the only direct enquiry came from the Caerphilly Royal Welsh Veterans Association, who was advised that they would be better off applying for Heritage Lottery Funding, as this was a more suitable fund for the purposes of their bid.

12. **AOB:**

Insp. K. Childs reminded the Forum that the NATO Summit would be held at the Celtic Manor Resort, Newport on 4th & 5th September, 2014 and that there may be resultant road congestion.

13. **Date of next meetings:**

- 10am on Thursday, 18th September, 2014.
 - 10am on Thursday, 20th November, 2014.
- Both at CCBC Offices, Penallta House.

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