

CAERPHILLY ARMED FORCES FORUM

Meeting

At 10.00 am on Thursday 18th September 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), Captain Mark Gold (203 (Welsh) Fd., Hospital), Abbie Morgan (Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice Bureau), Steve Keenan (GAVO), Ken Terry & Gareth Pennell (Royal British Legion), Max Bergmanski (Veterans' NHS Wales), Stephen Hughes (Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association for Wales), Ceri Pritchard & Mike Jones (DWP), Maria Chapman (Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Gwent)

Apologies: Peter Evans (Royal British Legion), Brian Mawby (ABUHB Armed Forces Champion), Insp., K. Childs (Gwent Police)

Introductions: HR welcomed everyone and introductions were provided, for this, the fifth 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 1st May 2014:

The Chair mentioned that as far as the reference on page 5 to the Pupil Premium Funding Scheme is concerned (Established in Scotland & England, but not in Wales), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has obtained funding to appoint an 'All Wales Project Officer for Service Children in Education', to assess the current requirements and needs of children of service personnel in Wales. The officer's name is Laura Bryon. If the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum wishes Laura to attend to give a presentation at a future meeting, she is more than willing to do so.

The Chair updated that the 2015 **Ministry of Defence (MoD): Education Support Fund** has been circulated by Welsh Government and by CCBC to all schools in the county borough, inviting bids from schools for funding to assist

the education of service personnel relocating to Welsh schools. The bidding round for academic year 2014 – 15 ended on the 30th September 2014.

Notes were approved as a true record.

3. Presentation from ABUHB – Veterans’ NHS Wales:

Max Bergmanski – Veterans’ Therapist from ‘Veterans’ NHS Wales’ was introduced and welcomed. MB delivered a presentation, describing the work of Veterans NHS Wales as follows:

Historically veterans do not access medical facilities if they are suffering from stress due their service in the armed forces. Veterans can also exhibit stress related issues when it comes to the transition back into the civilian world, and stress can be perceived as a stigma.

The charity ‘Combat Stress’ was the main service provider for veterans with mental health difficulties prior to All Wales Veterans’ Health Wellbeing Service.

Operational deployment to combat = higher risk of exposure to trauma than the average civilian population.

With cut backs to the regular forces, and the increased use of more reservists, it has been found that these personnel cope less well.

Veterans NHS Wales provides an equitable service across Wales, which caters for veterans’ needs.

The risk of death (occupational attributable mortality) for the Army overall is currently around one in 1000 per year, or about 150 times greater than for the general working population. Risk of serious injury (for example loss of limbs, eyes or other body parts) is substantially increased. Because of this, the government promises to help and support people in the Armed Forces when they need it most. This is set out in the ‘Military Covenant’.

The general principle set out by Government is simply for there to be ‘no disadvantage’ to veterans and their families due to their military service, compared with society in general.

There are significant higher levels of referrals from the Caerphilly county borough area, compared to the other county boroughs within the Gwent area. Although this could be explained by the fact that Caerphilly has the largest population of the “Gwent” county boroughs and it has been a major area for recruitment over many years.

MB operates a bi-weekly clinic to treat all referrals, from across Gwent, at Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr, Ystrad Mynach. At the moment the waiting time for referrals is very short. Veterans are able to self refer their cases, where there are mental health issues of concern, direct to the Veterans NHS Wales service at the County Hospital at Griffithstown, Pontypool.

Referrals can also be made by GP's, Health Service professionals, and/or Forces Charities. Typically, those patients seen from the CCBC area come from Caerphilly town, and the Upper Rhymney Valley area. They are generally between 18 and 30 years of age, and have served primarily in infantry regiments. On arrival those referred to the clinic are assessed, to include checking their military background and records, so that appropriate forms of treatment can be arranged. Due to these procedures the clinic can not operate as a 'Drop-In Centre'.

AH said that he had spoken to a veteran at the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum stand, at the Big Cheese event. The person said that he was suffering from PTSD and AH gave him details so that he could be referred to the ABUHB Community Veterans Therapists.

HR asked how aware are GP's of this service? MB said that all GP's should ask any patients who exhibit severe stress or possible Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, whether they have served in the armed forces. HR mentioned the opportunity to reinforce information on the Veterans NHS Wales service to GP's via the recently established ABUHB Neighbourhood Care Networks.

HR also mentioned that recently he had spoken to a Mental Health Social Worker (employed by the MOD), who was assisting an individual who was living in the county borough and was in "transition" from the Army. Seemingly the Social Worker was based in Donnington, and covered an area of England and Wales. He was unaware of the good work being undertaken by Veterans NHS Wales, and particularly the work within the ABUHB area.

MB's PowerPoint presentation will be circulated to the Forum, for information.

4. Update from Gwent Armed Forces Forum - 16th July 2014:

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

HR said that he had been in discussion with 160 Brigade regarding the figures on service leavers returning to the Caerphilly county borough area and will endeavour to have Major John Symonds give a presentation at a future meeting of the Gwent Armed Forces Forum or CAFF.

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

The above event was attended by HR, JE, and Cllr AH. There were various presentations to identify issues/experiences of the Armed Forces community in Wales, and the initiatives/actions being taken to support the Armed Forces community.

The event was an excellent opportunity to network with members of the armed forces and other representatives from councils around Wales. A great deal of very useful information was obtained by all from the workshops.

There will be a WLGA Community Covenant Officers' Network meeting in Llandrindod Wells on the 9th October, 2014 for Council Lead Officers.

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

HR updated that the CAFF had a marquee at the above event, staffed by several organisations attended over the Big Cheese weekend including: - Royal British Legion, SSAFA, CCBC and the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital. The event was very successful especially for the forces charities sales and collections. The 203 had an army ambulance on site which was a major crowd puller, and had the bonus of signing-up seven people who were interested in joining (as reservists) on the medical side of the 203. The marquee attracted people attending the Big Cheese from the Midlands and south west of England. Several members of the public pledged support, and signed-up, with their contact details, for the Caerphilly Armed Forces Network. The network is used to publicise Covenant information and publicise armed forces events in Caerphilly county borough, and we have at present over 130 people in the network.

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

Cllr. AH said that the event at Maesycwmmmer where a memorial plaque was unveiled went very well. He thanked the bugler, RBL Standard Bearers, SSAFA, Cadets and representatives from the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital, who attended and supported the event, which was featured as a news item on the local ITV Wales news. The local councillor Cllr Robin Woodyatt was also in attendance and grateful for the support from CAFF partners.

Cllr. AH attended the National Service of Commemoration of the First World War, which took place on 4th August, 2014 at Llandaff Cathedral.

He also attended the opening ceremony of the 'Duty to Bear' WW1 Exhibition at the Winding House Museum in Phillipstown, New Tredegar, an exhibition which is open until the summer of 2015.

AH also attended the NATO Reception in Newport, prior to the NATO Summit.

He has also dealt with several housing issues brought to his attention by veterans.

8. Update from Members of the Forum:

- 8 a) **203 (Welsh) Field Hospital** (Capt. MG) updated that their new CO – Colonel Neil Smith was now in post. MG thanked all members of the forum for their continued support for the 203 and that they valued the warm relationship which has been developed.

- 8 b) **The Royal British Legion** (GP) updated that the RBL had now moved into their new offices, a shop unit at 18 - 19 High Street, Cardiff, CF10 1PT. GP described the accommodation, which has a provision for a drop-in centre on the ground floor, with administrative staff housed in the upstairs offices. It will be open to the public from 15th October, 2014. The First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM and Simon Weston officially opened the premises some weeks before this date. The RBL is looking for volunteers to assist in operating the drop-in centre, and those people do not need to have had a military background. GP thanked Caerphilly County Borough Council for inviting them to attend the Big Cheese event and hoped that it would be repeated next year.
- 8 c) **SSAFA** (KS) updated that there was an increasing number of requests to assist in paying for funerals of veterans and also requests to cover bankruptcy costs. KS attended a WW1 commemoration event in Caerphilly Castle, organised by CADW. He also attended a WW1 commemoration service at St. Woolas Cathedral, in Newport. The case load being dealt with by SSAFA has risen. However, SSAFA caseworkers are now able to follow-up cases at Usk and Prescoed prisons, as they can now authorised to visit these premises.
- 8 d) **Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB)** update was covered by MBs presentation.
- 8 e) **Gwent Police** (Inspector KC) apologies were noted.
- 8 f) **Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Gwent** (MC) advised that the commissioner is very supportive of the work being undertaken by the Forum, and that he could assist by signposting projects and initiatives, in the future.
- 8 g) **Reserve Forces & Cadets Association for Wales** (Col. SH) advised CAFF members as to his role and updated that in this area he is assisting the ATC in Caerphilly, who are looking for alternative accommodation as their present building is in a state of disrepair. He is looking at the possibility of using the old Caerphilly Library site as a combined facility for all of the Cadet Corps in that area, with the possibility of community use as well. The Armed Forces Community Covenant Funding was mentioned as a source which may fund the provision of new IT equipment and the setting up of a website. The Cadets are also looking at an excursion to the recently unveiled memorial in Belgium, which commemorates all Welsh personnel who served, and the many who were killed, on that front in WW1.

HR said that in the past it had been very difficult to obtain a central contact for all of the Cadet Corps in the Caerphilly county borough area. SH said that he would now be that contact.

HR also said that with regard to that element of the 'Corporate Covenant', which encourages employers to enable military personnel, to recruit reservists from their employees, he had spoken to Maj. Craig Middle of 160 Brigade, in Brecon, and was submitting a report to the CCBC Corporate Management Team for their consideration.

- 8 h) **Probation Service** apologies were noted. HR advised on the re-organisation and changes both nationally and locally to the Probation Service. Consequently due to staff changes, senior management were arranging appropriate representation at future meetings.
- 8 i) **Voluntary Sector** (SK from GAVO) explained that his organisation was undergoing a very rigorous reorganisation and he would update the Forum on the results of that reorganisation at the next meeting. SK said that if there were any Forces Charities in this meeting who were not registered with GAVO, the umbrella organisation for voluntary sector organisations and charities in Caerphilly county borough it would be useful for them to do so.
- 8 j) **Caerphilly Business Forum** apologies were noted.
- 8 k) **Caerphilly Citizens Advice Bureau** (AB) updated that CAB were examining sources of funding to effectively replace the Forces Financial Advice contract which they had lost when RBL reorganised, especially as there is a demonstrable need for this type of service. CAB can still give some financial advice to Veterans and also Energy Advice, to reduce Energy bills. CAB has produced a 'Service Directory' which will be circulated to this Forum.
- 8 l) **Job Centre Plus** (CP) advised that her organisation had also recently undergone a major reorganisation. She described a recent change which could affect many seeking employment, including Veterans. It is called "Job Seekers Allowance Homelessness Easement".

An amendment has been made to the regulations to help support homeless claimants on Jobseekers Allowance in finding sustainable living accommodation which will help to remove a barrier into employment.

The Regulations allow Jobcentre Plus to treat certain homeless claimants as meeting the job-seeking conditions for periods of longer than one week with no limit on the number of occasions on which it can be applied.

A claimant will not be required to attend the Work Programme for the duration of any easement.

CP advised that Job Centres in Bargoed, Caerphilly & Newport will now only accept customers by appointment and not on a 'drop-in' basis. There is now more digital access available to services at the Job Centres for customers and there will be adequate customer support for the operation of those devices. Where customer telephones were located in those centres these have been removed in favour of more face to face interviews, which may well cater for interviews on the day of visiting. The new system is designed to provide customers with decision information within 24 hrs or less.

An Army Champion is nominated for each of the Job Centres. Veterans can be identified by markers on the Job Centre systems.

Flexible Support Fund (FSF), a total of £50,000 has been made available for this area.

The FSF gives Jobcentre Plus districts greater freedom to tailor back to work support to individual and local need. Working within local guidelines and priorities, Jobcentre Plus Advisers have discretion to decide how to help individuals move closer to or into work. The FSF also includes a grant funding mechanism, enabling Jobcentre Plus District Managers to award funding to local “partnerships” to address barriers to work. There is no exhaustive list of needs that may be met by the FSF, but examples could include travel costs, tools or training.

8 m) **Veterans UK** (Formally the SPVA) apologies were noted.

8 n) **Caerphilly County Borough Council updated:**

- CCBC Communications (HL) said that she could arrange for greater publicity for the MOD Community Covenant Grant Scheme to encourage more take-up across the county borough.
- There are listings on the council’s website of a number of WW1 commemoration events, which are being operated throughout the coming year. A notable and very informative new exhibition called "Our Duty to Bear" - the First World War and Caerphilly county borough is now open. This exhibition allows people to discover more about the impact of the War on men, women and children of the local area, with powerful and poignant items loaned from the wider local community playing a central role. This exciting exhibition is at The Winding House Museum, Cross Street, New Tredegar, NP24 6EG Telephone 01443 822 666
<http://your.caerphilly.gov.uk/windinghouse/>
- HR said that he had recently met with Major John Symmons at 160 Brigade in Brecon, who manages the transition process in Wales. HR outlined his discussions and outlined data provided, with a caveat on its reliability. Seemingly between June 2014 and 2015, it appears that of 462 armed forces leavers reporting that they intend to settle in Wales, only 15 have indicated that they intend to settle in the Caerphilly county borough area. As this is not a huge number of people, it is considered that the present services will be able to respond to the needs of these individuals.
- Caerphilly County Borough Council has provided accommodation at Ty Penallta for the RBL to deliver a fortnightly outreach service for clients who have booked to see RBL personnel. This service runs from 9am to noon every other Thursday. These sessions can be as simple as general information on services which can be accessed from the RBL, to confidential advice on a one to one basis in a private room.
- Lesley Griffiths AM, the then WG Minister for Local Government and Government Business, asked for an update from CAFF in February 2014 on their progress with the Armed Forces Community Covenant. This was supplied to the Welsh Government and we received a very complimentary reply in June 2014, thanking Caerphilly County Borough Council and the Armed Forces Forum for all the good work we have done. HR provide a further update on CAFF projects and initiatives to WG shortly

- HR will be liaising with Peter Evans (RBL) in relation to the provision of RBL Awareness Training for frontline Council Staff.
- The Council already has a virtual network called the Caerphilly Armed Forces Network. This is made up of members of the public who have pledged support for the principles of the Armed Forces Community Covenant, and who have agreed to be e-mailed information on Council and other Partnership Agencies', projects, ceremonies or initiatives.
- It is intended that the feasibility of establishing a CCBC Employee Veterans Network will be undertaken. This network will assist in supplying those employees, with support on any identified needs or issues. GP said that a Veterans' Staff Network had been set up in the Office for National Statistics in Newport.

9. Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum Activity Programme:

The updated "Timeline and Activity" document had been circulated with the agenda and reported on during the course of the meeting.

10. Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme:

The next submission date to the Regional Panel is 16th January, 2015 with the Panel decision in February 2015. Currently there have been no requests for this funding from any organisations in Caerphilly county borough. It was suggested that since the above dates will be the last known dates for this scheme in its present format (Due to change from April 2015) that we follow HL's advice and organise some major publicity to encourage take up from that scheme.

11. AOB: HR advised that there would be a 'Great Gwent Poppy Run' at Cwmcarn Forest Drive, on the 21st September, 2014.

Further to the recent circulation to CAFF members, HR updated that an employee of CCBC, who family support the "Heroes Haven" project, has advised that the accessible and affordable holiday venue, in a purpose built lodge at Swanage, Dorset for disabled, injured and visually impaired serving and ex- serving members of the Armed Forces, their immediate family and carers, is available for hire local Armed Forces community.

<http://www.heroes-haven.org.uk/>

12. Date of next meetings (at CCBC Offices Ty Penallta):

- 10am on Thursday, 20th November, 2014, Rhymney Room.
- 10am on Thursday, 12th February, 2015, Ebbw Room.