

CAERPHILLY ARMED FORCES FORUM

Meeting

At 10am on Thursday, 28th May, 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), PC. Adam Lang (Gwent Police), Peter Wilson (Royal British Legion), Hayley Lancaster (CCBC Corporate Communications), Mike Jones & Ceri Pritchard (JCP - DWP), Simon Jones (Federation of Small Businesses), Mike Bailey (Veterans Welfare Service), Donna Lloyd-Williams (First Choice Housing Association), Capt. Huw Williams (203 (Welsh) Field Hosp.), Rachel Gray (Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent CAB), Jennifer Lilley (Hire A Hero), Brian Mawby (ABUHB Armed Forces Champion), Lucy Jones (Wales Probation Service)

Apologies: Peter Evans (Royal British Legion), Sgt. Andy O'Keefe (Gwent Police), Stephen Hughes (Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association for Wales), Chris Kirk (SSAFA), Jo Dover (Defence Medical Welfare Service)

Introductions: HR welcomed everyone and introductions were provided, for this, the eighth 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 12th February 2015:

Notes were approved as a true record.

3. Presentation from Jennifer Lilley – 'Hire A Hero' Organisation:

JL (Head of Transition & Social Media) described the organisation and its function. It is a registered charity which helps Forces Veterans in transitioning from service life to civilian life.

The organisation provides support for service leavers and, importantly, businesses. Service Leavers are provided with employment support to provide job opportunities through the Hire a Hero employer network, which can supply

work placement opportunities. This may also extend to the provision of training programmes, and volunteering projects. With these opportunities in mind it develops a meaningful plan, which also demonstrates businesses commitment to the Corporate Covenant.

Hire a Hero provides trained transition support and guidance, and also housing advice through First Choice Housing Association.

The Hire a Hero organisation has tri-service coverage, and will deal with any service leavers, whether it be:

- Early Service Leavers
- End of Tour Service Leavers
- Retired Personnel
- Medical Discharge Leavers

Transition support is provided in a variety of forms which includes, Career Coaching, Employment, Training needs, Mentoring, Housing, and Welfare issues.

Hire a Hero in Wales has had contact with 84 service leavers, with 10 people via the Career Transition Programme (CTP). There are 44 service leavers who are currently involved with Transition Support; 20 have gone into employment and 16 are currently active. There are 10 service leaver referrals for housing support to First Choice Housing Association.

Referrals have come from a number of sources such as: Veterans NHS Wales, local authorities, N-Ergy, RBL and SSAFA.

Hire a Hero continues to assist:- 'Doing whatever it takes for as long as it takes in the transition from service life to meaningful civilian employment'.

JL's PowerPoint presentation will be e-mailed to all CAFF members. After some discussion JL was invited to next week's Gwent (ABUHB) Armed Forces Forum meeting in the Civic Centre, Pontypool. JL accepted this invitation.

The Chair thanked Jennifer for her very informative presentation, and reminded the Forum that there is a Transition Fayre in Cardiff City Stadium on the 26th June, 2015.

4. Briefing on the Veterans Welfare Service from Mike Bailey – (Welfare Manager, Veterans UK (Formerly the SPVA):

MB advised that the organisation started life as part of the Benefits Agency in the DHSS. The organisation was passed onto the MOD and became the Veterans Agency and later on, the Service Personnel & Veterans Agency, and in very recent times it is now known as Veterans UK.

Veterans UK assist in the provision of information on pensions and on benefits for dependants. They work with individuals and assist in the completion of PIP forms, and act as a signposting agency, and when necessary, they can refer individuals to RBL, SSAFA or the CAB. They also provide advice on the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and the importance of claiming for benefits. The claims are required in order to ensure NI contributions are kept up to date.

Veterans UK is also moving towards assisting individuals in transition work in Wales based around 160 Brigade in Brecon. The general welfare of clients and their families is part of Veterans UK work, and they do attend the Brigade Welfare meetings to provide advice. Also part of their work is to provide direct support for bereaved families, with the assistance of Family Support Officers. It is not generally known but some serving armed forces personnel unfortunately pass away due to accidents, underlying health issues, disease contracted in foreign countries etc., i.e. not just deaths due to combat operations. Veterans UK are there to also provide help for these cases.

MB then answered questions, some being very technical in relation to pension entitlement, and compensation claim criteria. The Chair thanked Mike for his informative presentation on the work of Veterans UK.

5. CAFF & Caerphilly Big Cheese event: 25th & 26th July 2015:

The Chair described the success of the event last year and building on that success the CAFF marquee will be double the size in order that more military units and service charities can be accommodated this year. The marquee has been funded by MOD recruiting (Capita). The marquee will be somewhat of a 'Military Village', with static vehicle exhibits and demonstrations. It is expected to be a popular venue for the public to visit.

6. Feedback from the Welsh Government Armed Forces Champions Networking Event – 14th May 2015:

The Chair attended this event held in Wrexham and provided an update, advising that it was well attended, with presentations from a number of organisations. The Chair will send out copies of the presentations to the Forum members. Major Craig Middle introduced the Armed Forces National Framework document. This document will also be circulated to Forum members for consideration and any query/comment to be forwarded to the Chair asap..

Brian Mawby (ABUHB – AF Champion) said that he was glad to see progress of Community Covenants in Gwent and across Wales. He reminded the Forum that local government reorganisation in the future will reduce the number of Local Authorities in Wales and potentially the good work of the forums could be diminished. All local authority forums and the Gwent (ABUHB) Armed Forces Forum will need in the future to plan and co-ordinate meetings, to ensure that meeting dates do not clash.

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

Cllr Alan Higgs said that he had attended the opening of a United Welsh Housing Development in Bedwas. This housing complex, apart from housing members of the public, has set aside one home for the use of a single Veteran, and a home for a married couple who are Forces Veterans.

Cllr Higgs will be attending the Royal Gun Salute at Cardiff Bay on the 2nd June. He will also be attending the AGM of the RFCA of Wales on Wednesday 10th June. Cllr Higgs has also been heavily involved in the planning of the re-dedication of the Cenotaph in Aberbargoed, and that ceremony will be held on the 20th June. He has managed to get the local superstore – Morrisons to sponsor the provision of a buffet. He will be circulating a poster for this event and is grateful for the support he has had from the Cadet Force, the Armed Forces and the major service charities.

Cllr Higgs is also active in assisting and supporting quite a number Veterans who have housing, medical, council tax & benefits issues. He has become the single point of contact for Veteran support. As a mark of appreciation for Cllr Higgs, the Chair thanked him for his continuing good work and support.

8. Update from Members of the Forum:

- 8 a) **203 (Welsh) Field Hospital:** Capt. Huw Williams explained that the 203 is still heavily involved with recruitment. The MOD has a target of recruiting 30,000 reservists into various military units by 2019. The 203 will be attending the Royal 21 Gun Salute on the 2nd June, which is to commemorate the Queen's birthday. This ceremony is to be held at the Pierhead Building in Cardiff Bay. The 203 will also have a small detachment on parade at the Caerphilly Armed Forces Day parade at Newbridge on the 20th June. The 203 continues to train for operational deployments. For example there are 3 medical staff from the 203 in Sierra Leone dealing with the Ebola crisis, with two more members due to join them including the regiment's CO.

The Chair reminded the Forum that if any organisation wishes to enter a teams for the BIG CHEESE race on 24th July, please get their entries in as soon as possible.

- 8 b) **The Royal British Legion (RBL):** The RBL are currently running a campaign called 'Insult to Injury', identifying the fact that veterans injured during Service are having to give up most of their compensation to pay for the costs of their social care. The 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, when assessing benefits.

The RBL has published a manifesto calling for at least twelve strategic issues to be addressed. At this point in time six have been addressed. The Centenary Fields initiative is progressing which sets aside land in LA areas,

for the public to enjoy, in commemoration of the First World War. RBL will be in attendance and supporting the events being held on 7th June at Aberbargoed, and on 20th June at Newbridge, for Armed Forces Day.

The RBL Bargoed Library Drop-in Centre seems to be popular with Veterans and family members. These sessions are open on the third Thursday of each month, 10am to 2pm. If required, other organisations from the Forum, can attend these sessions to ensure that Veterans and their families are more aware of other services available to them.

- 8 c) **SSAFA:** KS reported that there is still an RAF exhibition in Risca Library, which contains a number of interesting artefacts and information on display. This exhibition also commemorates the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the D Day Landings in June 1944.

Locally SSAFA continues to deal directly with veterans applying for bankruptcies, and works with case referrals from CAB and GAVO. On the 27th June Newport CC will be re-signing their Community Covenant, and on the 23rd June there will be a "Beating the Retreat" Ceremony at Raglan Barracks.

Gwent Police are continuing their staff training on the contact referral cards produced by SSAFA for use by the Police, to identify the assistance available to veterans, reservists and serving members of the armed forces who may find themselves in Police Custody.

£200,000 was raised for SSAFA last year, a significant portion of which came from the Caerphilly county borough area. PTSD cases for the Caerphilly CBC area continue to be greater than other areas within Gwent, largely because CCBC has the highest population.

KS has been invited on to the SSAFA Voluntary Advisory Committee in London.

104 Regiment Royal Artillery hosted a breakfast meeting for employers recently, at which SSAFA raised £2,300.

- 8 d) **ABUHB:** BM gave an update on the financial funding for Veterans NHS Wales. The Welsh Government has granted Veterans NHS Wales, £100,000, but it is the subject of further negotiation as Veterans NHS Wales say that the WG should provide for true operating costs, with a sum of £600,000 for all of Wales, to deliver this service. There are also issues around the transfer of control of staff, within Local Health Board areas, to Cardiff. This poses issues around staff recruitment.

BM updated that GP's are encouraged to ask patients if they are returners from the armed services, so that an element of prioritisation can be given, however this is not currently the case for Forces Veterans. It has been ascertained that Dental Practices do not ask their patients if they are serving in the Armed Forces or Veterans, at all. These situations are going to be explained to and taken up with the Gwent (ABUHB) Armed Forces Forum next

week. The situation is not helped by the fact that the official pan-Wales forms are lengthy and bureaucratic.

- 8 e) **Gwent Police:** PC Adam Lang gave the Forum an update on changes within Gwent Police. The Gwent Police is divided into two operational areas ie: East and West. The Western area, under Superintendent Marc Budden, will cover Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Caerphilly County Borough Councils, with the Eastern area covering Newport and Monmouthshire council areas. It is anticipated that this reorganisation will provide an enhanced policing service. Blackwood Police Station's staff club facilities are now the new location for the Gwent HUB, which provides services to victims.

- 8 f) **Reserve Forces & Cadets Association for Wales:** Apologies noted.

- 8 g) **Probation Service:** As previously described the Probation Service, like other large organisations have undergone major reorganisation. The National Probation Service will now deal with high risk offenders, and the Community Rehabilitation Company will deal with the medium to low risk offenders.

A review of the Gwent area is being undertaken to establish forces veterans within the Probation system and also to identify Armed Forces Champions within the Probation staff in all areas.

- 8 h) **GAVO:** SK reported that GAVO's 'One Beat' event is to continue this year but in a slightly different format. The expectation is that by having four events at separate locations around the county borough, that this would encourage greater community access and participation. The first of these events will be at Blackwood Methodist Church, on the 11th July. Further venues and dates will be circulated to this Forum and members are invited, if they wish to have stands at these 'One Beat' sessions.

- 8 i) **Caerphilly Business Forum & Federation of Small Businesses:** The Chair welcomed Simon Jones from the Caerphilly Business Forum, who was standing-in for Melvin Byles. SJ said that he personally had a great interest in helping Forces Veterans into employment. There is a need for more engagement by the Business Forum with Forces Veterans at the right point in time when employment is sought. It may be an idea if the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum could attend the Caerphilly Business Forum's meeting to explain common employment issues encountered by Veterans. The Caerphilly Business Forum will seek to attend Transitions Events in the future.

- 8 j) **Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent CAB:** RG said that she had limited details on a new CAB initiative delivering 'Pensionwise Guidance' on behalf of the Government for people aged 55 + who are looking to access their pension "pot" within the next year. Rachel is the CAB Digital Money Coach Co-ordinator which assists people in managing their finances. The project assists people of all ages to gain IT skills and to maintain their financial capability. It also seeks to assist people who are transitioning through means testing for Universal Credit and also those in areas of Fuel Poverty. SWALEC are working, in association with the CAB in Wales, on a pilot project on the

reduction of fuel bills via the NEST initiative, which operates in Wales only
This Welsh Government fuel poverty scheme can be accessed Monday to Friday 9 am – 7 pm 0808 8082244 or online at www.nestwales.org.uk

- 8 k) **Job Centre Plus (DWP):** At present JCP is awaiting for the Government to give direction on the areas where Universal Credit is to be rolled out in the Caerphilly area and it has got off to a slow start. There are 80+ single customers seeking JSA (not couples or families). At present the JSA register is at its lowest for four years. As far as Forces Veterans are concerned they tend to engage with the system earlier and therefore they get support earlier.

After the bad publicity encountered by ATOS, it is hoped that the new company MAXIMUS will deal with disability assessments in a far better way.

There is an electronic information display in Blackwood Job Centre which advises on a number of services which are available from other agencies including GAVO.

- 8 l) **Veterans UK:** Please see report given under point 4 above.
- 8 m) **Caerphilly County Borough Council:** HL reported that the Caerphilly Armed Forces Day will be celebrated on the 20th June with a parade and 'Raising the Flag Ceremony' at Newbridge town centre. This follows on from last year's ceremony at Ystrad Mynach, with the idea that the ceremony will move around the County Borough. Invitations for the Newbridge ceremony have been sent out with details of the start time at 10.30 am. It is expected that contingents from the Cadet Forces, RBL & SSAFA will be attending, together with the Lord Lieutenant, a detachment from the 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital, and also the Celynnen Band, with refreshments after the ceremony at the Newbridge Memo.

The Chair advised that the Council's Common Housing Allocation Policy now complies with RBL policy suggestions. This brings to a total of five compliant policies from the suggestions from the RBL. The sixth is the Insult To Injury Campaign which is aimed at changing the policies of the Welsh Government and UK National Government, so that direction can be given to local authorities.

9. **Caerphilly Armed Forces Activity Programme:**

An updated copy of the current programme was sent out with the papers for this meeting for information and comment.

10. **The Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme:**

The existing Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme and the Labor funded scheme have now ended. The Westminster Government has stated that there will be a replacement scheme of £10 million per year in perpetuity for the whole of the UK. The name of the new scheme is the 'Covenant Fund', but we do not know the criteria it will be using.

The MOD are releasing some further information about who and what they will fund on 23 July, ahead of the formal launch on 13 August 2015. When this information is available we will e-mail the details to all members of the Forum.

11. AOB:

Donna Lloyd-Williams (First Choice Housing Association) said that they were proud to have been awarded the Bronze Employer Recognition Award for being a supportive employer of the Armed Forces. The association has pledged to continue their support to the Defence and the Armed Forces community and will be developing a number of houses across Wales which will provide accommodation for vulnerable ex-service personnel supporting and enabling their transition back to civilian life. FCHA is to attend the WG Expert Group meetings and will also attend the Transition Fayre to be held in Cardiff on 26th June, 2015.

Defence Discount Service has shown an increase in take up of 30% in Wales. CCBC has done quite a lot to promote the scheme both for businesses in town centres and in the council's Newline newspaper. They have also worked with the Federation of Small Businesses and Caerphilly Business Forum to ensure wider coverage.

Lucy Jones from the Probation Service reported that some work had been undertaken under the Community Payback Scheme which directly links to armed forces issues. As part of the above scheme unpaid work teams have cleaned up the war graves of veterans, and cut back undergrowth for people /relatives to gain access. It has been found that not only does this benefit the public to visit the graves, but also it has had an effect on offenders who often did not know of the sacrifice made by veterans.

12. Date of next meeting:

At 10.00 am on Thursday, 3rd September, 2015 in the Rhymney Room, Ty Penallta.