

CAERPHILLY ARMED FORCES FORUM

Meeting

At 10.30 am on Thursday, 3rd March, 2016

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), Ch/Insp. Nick McLain (Gwent Police), Mike Jones (JCP – DWP), Julia Ferguson & Paul Harding (Change Step), Capt. Phil Carter (203 (Welsh) Field Hospital), Phil Williams (DMWS), Peter Wilson, Ken Terry, Elaine Thomas (Royal British Legion), Steve Perham (614 Sqn., R. Aux. A F), Alison Griffiths & Richard Wong (St. Loyes Foundation), Mike Bailey (Veterans Welfare Service – Veterans UK), Jennifer Lilley (Hire A Hero), Steve Keenan (GAVO), Michelle Allford (Community Rehabilitation Company), Mike Jones (DWP), Ceri Pritchard (JCP), Julian Wilde-Davies (Coleg Y Cymoedd –Inspire2Work), Sarah Ellen Downes & Paul Harding (Change Step), Lisa Rawlings (Remploy), Nicky Darton & Suzanne Ledsham (Poppy Factory), Ceri Pritchard (Job Centre Plus)

Apologies: Hayley Lancaster (CCBC Corporate Communications), Peter Evans (Royal British Legion), Stephen Hughes (Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association for Wales), Brian Mawby (ABUHB Armed Forces Champion), Annabel Ingram (Army Families Federation), Donna Lloyd-Williams (First Choice Housing Association), Roy Fitzgerald (104 Rgt., R A), Sinead Lewis (Wales Probation Service)

Introductions: HR welcomed everyone and introductions were provided, for this, the twelfth 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, or families who have issues/problems, which could be addressed by particular agencies represented 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 3rd December 2015:

There were no matters arising, and the notes were approved as a true record.

3. **Presentation from Lisa Rawlings (Employment Advisor at Remploy)**

Remploy seeks to transform society and the lives of disabled people by creating equality in employment, helping disabled people gain fair and equal access to sustainable employment and career opportunities, and enabling them to achieve their ambitions and maximise their potential.

The **Work Choice** programme offers employment support to people with disabilities, health conditions or barriers to work, so that they can find and stay in employment. They work with customers; guide them through their journey to employment with all the advice, support, development and recruitment help they need, to find the job that's right for them.

Once they have started work, we will continue to support them for as long as needed, so that they can progress in their career and ultimately work without our support.

Regarding forces veterans, there are few on Remploy's books at the moment, those low numbers could be probably due to pride, and reluctance of Veterans to ask for advice or help in employment opportunities. It is the intention to improve this situation by encouraging forces veterans to seek employment with the aid of Remploy, where hidden skills, interests, strengths and abilities of individuals, could be developed, for their benefit, for future employment.

Remploy Digital Services (iRemploy), after Referral provides Engagement, Development, Recruitment via the Branch, Office and Field Services, to In-Work Support.

Employer partners:

Amazon (via agencies) ASDA ARGOS City Facilities Management G4S Marks & Spencer (Some) McDonalds Morrison's (new store)	Poundland Royal Mail Sainsbury's (You Can) Securitas Serco Tesco TC Facilities Management Total Security Solutions
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Full details of this presentation will be circulated to the Forum members. The Chair thanked Lisa for her informative presentation, and for answering some questions from the Forum.

4. **Overview of 'Inspire2Work' project (Julian Wilde-Davies, Coleg Y Cymoedd)**

JWD gave verbal presentation on this project, as final details e.g. funding is awaited before it can start. The project will cover the four campuses operated

by the college, three in RCT and one in Ystrad Mynach. It will be a European Funded project to meet the needs of the 'NEET' agenda (Not in Education, Employment or Training) for youngsters aged 16 – 24.

It is intended that these criteria may be extended to those aged 24+ from the summer onwards. The project looks at early service leavers in the above age group and the needs of families and spouses. The project will provide one to one help to the service leavers over the course of a twelve week period. It will seek to provide career paths to employment routes, in Caerphilly CB and RCT.

The Chair explained that final details for the project start date, was awaiting approval from the Welsh Government for the grant money, which he had noticed from a recent press article. This was why JWD could not provide exact details on the project until confirmation on the funding was agreed.

Similarities were pointed out between this project and that of the Remploy presentation, in that the development of a 'One Stop Shop' could provide information on, and benefit, all agencies, and would be a suitable platform to identify and supply a wealth of information. It was agreed by the Forum that this could be established in several ways, the cheapest being an 'online one stop shop', but there were several problems with this. Questions were asked about who would establish / host such a web site, maintain it, and fund it. Also, would this information source be easily available to all veterans who may need it, and indeed if established, would those most in need of it, actually know of its existence?

JWD went on to say that it is important to provide training to veterans for jobs which actually exist in their local areas, rather than train for 'traditional' jobs which may not be readily available locally. The overall target for both local authority areas will be 50 people per year over a three year programme.

The project would look towards sustainable future funding, possibly from the Covenant Fund.

The Chair thanked JWD for his presentation and hoped the WG funding decision would be announced soon.

5. Update from Welsh Government Armed Forces Team:

The information was previously circulated to this Forum. The Chair announced that now one is able to view circulated agendas and minutes from the WG Expert Group, which up until recently had met and carried out their meetings almost 'secretly'. However this situation has greatly improved and items discussed, affecting Wales regionally and nationally are now able to be viewed.

The Chair took the opportunity to encourage those eligible to purchase a Defence Privilege Discount Card, which allows holders to obtain discount on goods and services at a number of high street stores, businesses, and on line. The Welsh Government recently launched the Free Swim for all Veterans, Serving Personnel, and Reservists at leisure centres across Wales, which was launched nationally, last month at Risca Leisure Centre with Welsh Ministers in attendance. The Discount Card mentioned above would provide proof, at leisure centres around Wales, that the holder is a forces veteran.

6. Feedback from Gwent Armed Forces Forum, 18th February 2015:

KS reported on this meeting. Major Craig Middle, described the procedure and requirements of the Covenant Fund and the involvement of the RDA Board (160 Infantry Brigade).

Tanya Strange from the ABUHB, gave a presentation on a project - 'Prescription for Loneliness'. This is an initiative which seeks to reduce the isolation and stress which often occurs when ex-forces personnel find themselves in a community. It is looking towards engaging a multi agency approach to establishing places where veterans can go to talk about medical issues, with which they may be troubled. This engagement is hoped to reduce the stress and possible loneliness of veterans within the ABUHB area. The project hopes to gather veterans and agencies together for a meeting on the 29th April to discuss the way ahead for the initiative.

Monmouthshire County Council is housing thirteen Afghan Interpreters, some who are single and others who have families.

7. Update on South Wales Armed Forces Day 2016:

KT reported that there are still some funding issues to be addressed for this event. On the Armed Forces Day, 25th June, a Royal Navy vessel will be alongside in Cardiff Docks, and will be open to the public on Sunday 26th June. The marching parade in Caerphilly on the 25th will consist of a band from the Royal Marines, the Gwent Army Cadet Band, and the band from the Royal Regiment of Wales.

Also in the parade will be a contingent from the Royal Marine Reserves – HMS Cambria, Navy Cadets, Army Cadets, 614 Sqdn., Air Force Cadets. There will be Standard Bearers from various Military Associations, and it is hoped to have approx 120 veterans marching in the parade. The RBL Motorcycle Riders Branch will also be in the parade followed by the Monmouthshire Military Historic Vehicles group.

The parade will start at 11.00 am from St. Martin's School and march downhill through Caerphilly town, before an 'eyes right' at the dais positioned near the cenotaph. The veterans will break away from the parade at this point to form up at the rear of the castle for the 'Drum Head Service'. The rest of the parade will continue along the road, turning left into Nantgarw Road and then left into Crescent Road at the rear of the castle.

The Drumhead Service will take place on the horn works green, at the rear of the castle, with the attendance of the Lord Lieutenant, a senior military figure, and possibly the First Minister. There will be a Family Fun Day on Crescent Road throughout the afternoon, with cadet displays, modern army vehicles on display, and various stage shows. At 16.30 hrs. in the arena, there will be a Sunset Service sounding the Last Post and Reveille. This event is expected to be extremely popular will attract people from a wide area.

8. Armed Forces Covenant Fund:

At this time the exact themes, criteria and timescales for the fund 2016- 2017 are not known but details will be put onto the MoD.gov Covenant webpage by the end of March.

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

On the 9th March, Cllrs. A Higgs and K. James were given a tour of the General Dynamics facility in Oakdale, where electronic hardware is designed and produced for the new army vehicle, the Ajax Armoured Reconnaissance Fighting Vehicle which will replace the Scimitar Armoured Vehicle.

Cllr. Higgs also attended the Pan Welsh launch of the Welsh Government 'Free Swim for Veterans,' at Risca Leisure Centre, with the leader of Caerphilly county borough and the Leader of Merthyr county borough (As previously described)

Cllr. Higgs met with Andrew Tuggey, the High Sherriff of Gwent, to discuss the Welsh launch of the charity 'X-Forces'. This organisation is new and has already launched in England and Scotland. A major funder for X-Forces, is the ABF (Army Benevolent Fund). The Launch here at Penallta House will be on the 11th March at 10.30 am. The purpose of the organisation is to assist veterans in setting up and developing their own businesses, by means of loans.

Cllr. Higgs has also attended a two day course, funded by St Loyes Foundation, on Mental Health First Aid Training, and has the certificate to prove that he passed the course !!

He is also heavily involved in the week prior to the Armed Forces Day. As part of the build up to the event on the 25th June, on the 20th June there will be a flag raising ceremony in Rhymney at 10.30 am. This ceremony will have a parade of veterans, representatives from the Royal Welsh and 203 (Welsh) Field Hosp. etc. Also on the same day, 20th June, as promotion for the 25th June, there will be flag raising at Caerphilly Castle at 13.30 hrs.

10. Update from Members of the Forum:

- 10 a) 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital:** The 203 has had to change their corporate identity. Their current emblem contains a 'Red Cross' which does not comply with modern rules, in that 1) the red cross image is used by the International Red Cross Organisation as their official identity, and 2) the red cross image is also an International Sign of Protection.

The 203 will be having a new Adjutant – Capt. Tom Doe. Amongst other duties he will be working on Community Engagement. He replaces Capt. Mark Gold.

- 10 b) 614 Squadron Royal Auxilliary Air Force:** Nothing to report.

10 c) The Royal British Legion (RBL):

KT reported that the RBL successfully launched their Welsh Assembly Election Manifesto, at the Senedd, in Cardiff Bay. Copies were handed out to Forum members, at this meeting.

Also just announced was the following press release: 29th February 2016.

LEGION CAMPAIGN SECURES ARMED FORCES COVENANT WIN FOR VETERANS WITH ASBESTOS-RELATED CANCER

Government extends eligibility to provide lump sum compensation pay-outs to those suffering mesothelioma

All veterans living with the asbestos-related cancer, mesothelioma, as a result of their Service are set to receive lump sum compensation pay-outs as a result of a campaign spearheaded by The Royal British Legion.

KT said that this compensation was principally related to those veterans who had served in the Royal Navy.

The RBL campaign 'Insult to Injury' continues, it is regarding the rules where the first £10.00 of War Pension **is not** discounted by Local Authorities, in relation to council tax discounts. The Chair pointed out that in Wales this was an issue for the Welsh Government to resolve.

The RBL continues to provide outreach sessions to Veterans and their families at Penallta House, by appointment.

- 10 d) SSAFA:** KS reported that they are continuing to undertake prison visiting at HMP Usk and Prescoed. Recently KS attended a meeting in London where he heard about a new organisation 'Care After Combat' (CAC), which specialises in mentoring veterans in the Criminal Justice System, in England and Wales. CAC is a new Forces charity formed by Jim Davidson OBE, Simon Weston OBE & 'Goose' Cryer MC. CAC has obtained funding from the UK Government to start the Phoenix Project which mentors low risk prisoners and

from 2016 will mentor category B, C, & D prisoners. The 'Phoenix' project aims to reduce the number of re-offending veterans released from prison.

SSAFA now has a place on the GAVO Partnership Board on Mental Health.

10 e) ABUHB: KS reported on these updates. The Caerphilly CB area still has the highest number of PTSD cases / severe stress related illnesses referred to the ABUHB for treatment, but it does have the largest population, of authorities in Gwent. Currently there is no waiting list for treatment for individual referrals.

10 f) Reserve Forces & Cadets Association for Wales: MJ reported that there has been an appointment of Cadet Flight Sgt Arran Rigby from Caerphilly as the Gwent Lord Lieutenant's Cadet of the Year 2016. Many congratulations to Arran.

A Cadet version of the famous Cambrian Patrol, will be held later in the year.

The Chair mentioned at this point that an 'Adventure Wales' week is to be held at the end of March beginning of April, and CADW are seeking some help to join in with this initiative, to install an assault course / climbing wall in the grounds of Caerphilly Castle, for the weekend 2nd and 3rd April. MJ to give some details on a contact at the Army facility in Crickhowell, to JE. E-mail contact made with Major Derek Munro.

10 g) Royal Air Force Association: No report available.

10 h) Gwent Police: Ch/Insp. N. M. said that he would wish to be involved with the arrangements for the South Wales Armed Forces Day event scheduled for 25th June, to ensure that the policing element is satisfactorily covered.

10 i) Probation Service/Wales Community Rehabilitation Company: MA reported that designated Armed Forces Veterans staff are having better interaction with their clients. They are through a One Stop Shop process, working more in the community, in conjunction with other agencies. The WCRC is attempting to set up Community Hubs for service users. They work with medium to low tariff offenders.

At this point the new initiative at Parc Prison, Bridgend, was mentioned. A specific wing of the prison has been assigned for the needs of prisoners who are forces veterans, and is named the Endeavour Wing.

10 j) Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO): Nothing to update.

10 k) Caerphilly Business Forum & Federation of Small Businesses: No report available.

10 l) Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice Bureau: No report available.

10 m) Job Centre Plus: CP talked about an initiative 'Communities for Work', which is a voluntary programme to help those adults furthest away from the labour market, into employment. It builds on the WG existing programmes to tackle

poverty to help get people into work. The programme focuses on our most deprived communities, to provide 1-to-1 support, guidance and training.

The target groups, for this first phase, are people living in a Communities First cluster who are over 25:

- with low or no skills
- with work limiting health conditions
- with care or childcare responsibilities
- from jobless households
- from a Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic group.

The New State Pension starts on the 1st April at £155.65 per week, for new claimants.

DLA recipients in the future will be subject to national assessment to claim PIP's.

- 10 n) Veterans UK:** MB reported that a number of individuals contacting their organisation had concerns about pensions and the lack of up rating of their pensions while the present financial situation is at zero inflation. Also MB wished to make it clear that only those suffering from very specific asbestos related cancer, would be entitled to compensation, as described in the RBL update above.
- 10 o) Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS):** PW announced that he is leaving the DMWS and will be working for Help for Heroes on Wednesday of next week. He thanked the Forum for their help and assistance in the past. The Chair wished him well for the future.
- 10 p) Army Families Federation:** Abie Wrigley announced that the AFF now have a new Chief Executive, Sara Baade, based in London. There are several main themes to the work of the AFF, in particular housing, how the AFF works, and problems encountered by service families as they move around the UK between postings. This includes childcare and unaccompanied personnel. The AFF is seeking greater inputs to Covenants throughout Wales.
- 10 q) First Choice Housing Association:** No report available.
- 10 r) St Loyes Foundation:** AG announced that she will be leaving the Foundation soon to join Help for Heroes. Richard Wong will be taking over from her and will be attending future CAFF meetings. The Foundation is two years into a funded project, as at the 16th March. The future of the funding is unclear at the moment, this may be carried over into the third year. St. Loyes continue to get referrals from the RBL which are able to be resolved by the use of small low cost fixes. The Chair wished Alison every success for her future endeavours.

- 10 s) Caerphilly County Borough Council:** CCBC is working with CADW and the Custodian of Caerphilly Castle, to bring the ceramic poppy structure, the 'Weeping Window, to a site within the castle. This is a bidding process to a company called '14-18 NOW'. If successful the structure will probably be in place sometime in 2017, and because the structure is much sought after it, is by no means certain that we will be successful. Average duration for the display is between six weeks, to several months. There are a number of criteria which will need to be addressed for a successful bid, principally that the display must be free for the public to view, and be in a secure location.

It is unknown at the moment what will be organised for the Big Cheese. At this point HR announced that both he and JE will no longer be with the council after 31st March. This is as a result of major restructure and financial savings. Consequently two key personnel may not be available to assist in producing a similar Big Cheese event, to the one held last year. HR is to explore one approach, in that he would volunteer on an unpaid basis to continue to Chair the Caerphilly Armed Forces Forum, if that is the wish of Forum members present. By a unanimous vote, HR was re-elected to continue to Chair this Forum.

HR announced that JE was retiring on the 22nd March and he wished JE all the best for the future, and complimented him on his commitment to the CAFF.

- 10 t) Hire A Hero:** JL said that they are assisting in the Farmfoods Management Development Programme, with on the job training. Opportunities are on the website for Branch Managers. The programme closes on the 11th March.

- 10 u) The Poppy Factory:** ND reported that The Poppy Factory continues to get new referrals month on month, from injured ex-service people. The Poppy Factory's Patron, HRH Duchess of Cornwall, attended a reception in Westminster on Thursday 4th Feb to celebrate The Poppy Factory's 500 milestone - 500 disabled veterans into meaningful work since 2010.

ND covers all of Wales, a very time consuming job. To assist her to cover S. Wales, recently appointed Suzanne Ledsham is now in post, and Suzanne will attend future CAFF meetings.

- 10 v) Change Step:** The two new mentors who are now working from the base in Caerphilly for Change Step, are Paul and Sarah, who now attend this, their first meeting at the CAFF. Newport is also covered. The mentor meetings are still continuing at a room in Caerphilly Library, on Wednesdays.

- 11. AOB:** None declared.

- 12. Date of next meeting:**
At 10.30 am on Thursday, 2nd June, 2015 in the Ebbw Room, Ty Penallta.