

Cross Party Group at the Scottish Parliament on ARMED FORCES VETERANS

Minutes of the meeting held at the Scottish Parliament on 30th November 2011

PRESENT

Alex Fergusson MSP (AF) - Convenor

Willie Rennie MSP (WR)

Stewart Maxwell MSP (SM)

Nanette Milne MSP (NM)

Paul Wheelhouse MSP (PW)

Sir Jamie McGrigor MSP (JM)

Annabel Ewing MSP (AE)

In Attendance

Colonel Martin Gibson OBE DL – Veterans Scotland (MG)

Lt Colonel Ian Ballantyne – CEO Scottish Veterans Residencies (IB)

Ian McGregor – CEO Poppyscotland

Richard Hellewell – CEO Scottish War Blinded

Lieutenant General Robert Baxter – President Veterans Scotland

Francis Brown – War Veteran

Robert McFarlane – Secretary to the Cross Party Group.

APOLOGIES

Richard Simpson MSP

Jackie Bailey MSP

Jackson Carlaw MSP

Denis Robertson MSP

George Ross - General Secretary RBLS

BUSINESS.

1. The minutes of the inaugural meeting of the 5th October 2010 were agreed as a true record
2. There were no matters arising.

3. Veterans Presentation

- a. Colonel Gibson gave a presentation on the current state of the Veterans community in Scotland, and on issues affecting them. Copies of the presentation can be obtained from gensec@veteransscotland.org.uk
- b. MG indicated that the veterans Community were impressed with the scope and content of the recent debate in the Scottish Parliament on Veterans affairs.

4. Areas of discussion arising from the presentation

- i. Services to veterans should be delivered at the point of need.
- ii. Office of the Scottish Charities regulator – could they do more to limit the plethora of service related charities springing up in Scotland. The consensus was that whilst it is wrong to try and stop people wanting to start a charity OSCR could do more to signpost those wishing to set up towards existing service providers who could accommodate their wishes. OSCR should be encouraged to carry out improved initial due diligence and on going governance monitoring.
- iii. Resources are a major issue within the 3rd sector particularly as we are being asked to do more to provide services alongside established LA and Government departments.
- iv. The role of the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) was discussed at length and in particular their role in provision of housing.
- v. MOD need to be kept under pressure to improve the advice and guidance given to Early Service Leavers (ESL) to help them understand what is available to them when they leave the service and to give the coping strategies to adapt to civilian life.
- vi. There needs to be a single point of access for disabled and vulnerable veterans to find employment opportunities.
- vii. There needs to be a consistent and joined up front end to service provision.
- viii. Service providers (including Police) need to be educated in service life and the way it impinges on families.

- ix. Veterans need a single point of access for help and assistance along the lines of “Crimestoppers”. The Veterans Agency (VA) provide a 12 hour 5 day a week service and there are plans to make this a 24/7 service.
- x. Veteran’s organisations can assist the SG to establish a series of metrics to allow monitoring of service provision.
- xi. GP’s need to be more proactive in identifying veterans and their needs.
- xii. The priority treatment rules need to re-published to raise awareness of the scheme among stakeholders.
- xiii. Alcohol addiction is more prevalent within the veterans community in Scotland
- xiv. Mental Health - the need to ensure service provision was adequate to meet the perceived need arising from the current conflicts.

5. Priorities for CPG

- a. From the above the XPG identified the following topics as being a priority and ones which they could advance.
 - i. COSLA issues –**ACTION** - The Secretary was asked to invite COSLA and the Scottish Housing Federation to the next meeting to discuss matters. VS would produce a paper for discussion. **ACTION** VS to produce a paper on issues where COSLA is involved i.e. Local Governments role in veteran’s affairs.
 - ii. The role of the Armed Forces in preventing alcohol problems transferring to civilian life. MSP’s were to be encouraged to speak out about the alcohol culture within the Armed forces. **ACTION** - Further briefings on the problems relating to alcohol abuse and its impact on the veteran’s community are to arranged
 - iii. Discussions with the Veterans agency about Scotland specific requirements for Veterans support. **ACTION** -The secretary was tasked to invite the CEO of the Veterans Agency to brief the CPG on matters Scottish.
 - iv. Further discussions to mirroring initiatives that are on going in other parts of the UK within Scotland. Particularly in the field of Mental Health.
 - v. There is need to ensure GP’s are fully engaged in the process. **ACTION** - RCGP are to invited to a CPG meeting to discuss.
- 6. Given the number of issues and the timescale to be informed about them the CPG agreed to insert a further meeting into the schedule in April.

7. AOCB
 - a. The secretary will write to the Scottish Government requesting a representative from the Armed Forces Strategy Team attend future meetings.
8. Dates for subsequent meetings are:
 - a. 29th February – COSLA & Alcohol addiction related organisations.
 - b. 25 April – Veterans agency and RCGP
 - c. 13th June – Keith Brown SG Minister with responsibility for Veterans.
 - d. 26th September – normal business meeting and AGM
9. The meeting closed at 2000hrs.