

## Cross Party Group at the Scottish Parliament on ARMED FORCES VETERANS

### Minutes of the meeting held at the Scottish Parliament on 17 April 2013

#### Present

MSP	Other Attendees
Alex Fergusson – Convenor (AF)	Dawn Harris – Manor Hall Centre for Trauma
Hugh Henry (HH)	Ian Ballantyne – Scottish Veterans Residences
Stewart Maxwell MSP	Claire Birch – Housing Options Scotland
Willie Rennie (WR)	Maj Gene Maxwell – 51 Scottish Brigade
	Liz Anne Handibode – West Scotland VAPC
	Neil Robinson (NR) – RBL Pensions Advisor
	Ally Gemmill – ASAP Stirling
	Ian McGregor (IM) - Poppyscotland
	Peter Minshall - SVGCA
	Ross Swinton – Thistle Foundation
	Pat McKinnon Thistle Foundation
	Walter Logan – Scottish Prison Service (VIC)
	Steve Conway - Erskine
	Margaret Millar – The Mark Wright Project
	Maurice Corry – Argyll & Bute Council
	James Trolland
	Jim Millar – MSP Staff
	Pauline Thomson – Forth Valley Helping Heroes
	Joyce McVarrie – Forth Valley Helping Heroes
	Speakers
Jim Wilson – Secretary to CPG	Helen Barclay – Report Author
Apologies had been received from: Jackie Bailey MSP; Bruce Crawford MSP; Richard Lyle MSP; Annabel Ewing MSP; Col Martin Gibson, Veterans Scotland; Mr Gary Gray, Poppy Scotland; Stephanie Morrison RGU; Cllr Fergus Wood, Stirling Council; Cllr John Patrick, Falkirk Council; Mr Graham Dunlop; Mr David McGrath;	

#### Business.

1. The Convenor opened the meeting at 1800hrs by welcoming those attending. He introduced:
  - a. Jim Wilson – General Secretary Veterans Scotland and who has recently taken over from Bob McFarlane as secretary for this Cross Party Group.
  - b. Ian Ballantyne – Chief Executive Scottish Veterans Residence and Head of the Veterans Scotland Housing Pillar.
  - c. Helen Barclay – HPB Consultancy, author of the Report ‘Veterans Scotland Housing Pillar, Housing Review’.
2. The minutes of the CPG meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2013 were approved as a true record. There were no matters arising from the minutes.
3. The Convenor confirmed that the focus of this meeting was Veteran’s Housing and he invited Ian Ballantyne to introduce the subject.

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4. Ian Ballantyne explained that the CPG was to hear the findings of the Veterans Scotland Housing Pillar report from its author, Ms Helen Barclay, however he wished to set the report in context. In particular he drew the attention of those attending to the following:
  - a. Since the inception of Veterans Scotland and its subsequent activation, considerable strides have been made in many of the activities related to veteran's issues.
  - b. Housing has seen the most changes and the veteran's case has seen significant improvement through changes to legislation, the issue of guidelines to local authorities and the general raising of awareness in regard to veterans across the whole housing spectrum.
  - c. The shortage of appropriate housing is not simply a veteran's problem but one which affects society as a whole. In the case of veterans, however, the dynamic can be far more acute and may include the loss of a job, a house and employment for the veterans partner as well as impacting on the continuity of education for the veteran's children.
  - d. Veterans Scotland, whilst taking cognisance of the need for housing for all veterans, has narrowed its field to concentrate more on those vulnerable veterans who would naturally fall within the charitable arena.
  - e. During 2012, Veterans Scotland wanted to correlate what had been achieved to date, to identify what is still outstanding and to address the best way forward to help the veteran in regard to Housing. Funding for such research was sought from the Scottish Government's Veterans Fund and Mrs Helen Barclay was appointed to conduct research into:

'How can Veterans Scotland improve housing options for veterans in need and what agencies or systems can be utilised in a wider Scottish perspective?'

At this point Ian Ballantyne handed over to Mrs Helen Barclay to introduce her report.

5. Mrs Barclay provided an overview of her report with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation, a copy is attached to the minutes. The key findings of the report are:
  - a. Improved communication regarding veterans issues with existing housing providers; this could be achieved through the employment of a further staff member with Veterans Scotland.
  - b. Focus on a single website containing the relevant information; this should be able to provide credible information to both veterans and agencies and organisations supporting those veterans alike.
  - c. It is desirable to develop a more detailed understanding of demand.
  - d. Veterans Scotland should consider a new approach to the Scottish Government for joint funding to assist current building programmes.
  - e. Information relating to veterans issues should strive to keep pace with emerging technologies such as android applications, iPhones etc.
6. During the ensuing discussion a range of issues were considered;

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- a. The current Housing Application Form, the HL1, asks for information regarding status as a veteran, this is seen as a valuable amendment to previous versions however the relevance of this information needs to be further communicated at a working 'front end' level.
  - b. It was noted that copies of the recently produced 'Scottish Housing Guide' had been issued to all military units that were recognised as predominantly Scottish (including those based overseas). As part of the transition process families were being targeted more, rather than individual soldiers.
  - c. A representative from Veterans in Custody, Walter Logan, indicated that access to housing forms may be difficult if the veteran is in prison, as internet access was restricted.
  - d. It was noted that, whilst a veteran may initially present with a single issue such as looking for assistance with housing, this may subsequently raise other issues that have been latent and for which assistance is required. The importance of face to face contact, as opposed to through a website or telephone call, was recognised; this reinforced the need for developing awareness and understanding among those service providers who may come into contact with veterans.
7. The convener drew the meeting to a conclusion by recognising that there had been a positive and stimulating discussion and that the matter should be pushed forward within the Scottish Parliament. He proposed to discuss the option of having a members debate with the co-convenors of the Cross Party Group in due course.
  8. The next Cross Party Group on Armed Forces Veterans is to take place on 12 June 2013 and will consider Employment and Transition.