

**Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on  
The Armed Forces and Veterans Community  
Meeting 10 Sep 2019 Minutes**

**Attending:**

MSP's: Bill Bowman, Gordon Lindhurst, Jackie Bailie, Maurice Corry (Convenor), Michelle Ballantyne and Richard Lyle; a total of 6 MSP's.

There were 47 non-MSP members attending.

**Minutes of previous meeting:**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 11 June 2019 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

**Briefings:**

The Convenor opened the meeting by welcoming all attending, indicating that it had been a busy year and asked the Secretary to provide a synopsis of the activity that had taken place over the year. Jim Wilson, Secretary to the Cross Party Group provided the following report:

Maurice Corry MSP has been Convenor of the Cross Party Group on the Armed Forces and Veterans Community, with Jackie Baillie and Willie Rennie as Deputy Convenors; other MSP members include: George Adam, Michelle Ballantyne, Bill Bowman, Jackson Carlaw, Liam Kerr, Gordon Lindhurst and Gordon MacDonald. This shows a clear commitment from almost 8% of MSP's, with other MSPs attending the Group on an occasional basis it is fair to conclude that The Scottish Parliament is taking a keen interest in matters relating to the Armed Forces and Veterans Community.

Non-MSP membership of the group spans a wide range of organisations – including statutory organisations, the third sector and Service Charities as well as representation from businesses, education establishments and from local authorities. During the course of the year, the Convenor has been actively engaging local authorities such as Shetland and the Orkney Islands which, by reason of their locations, have difficulty attending meetings at Holyrood.

The Group seems to be vibrant and is well attended – typically we see 5 or 6 MSP's attending the meetings (almost 5% of the total number of MSPs), and between 45 and 50 non-MSP member organisations.

**The Purpose of the group:**

- To help the Scottish Parliament to address the challenges facing Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community.
- To provide MSPs with a source of information and expertise on issues relating to Scottish Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community.
- To bring together those with an interest in the well-being of Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community.
- To encourage co-operation in promoting the interests of Veterans and the wider Armed Forces Community and their involvement with the Scottish Parliament.
- To assist the Scottish Parliament in meeting Veterans and the Wider Armed Forces Community needs as well as benefiting from their experience.

## Topics Considered in Year:

Over the course of the year, topics considered have included:

### 9 January 2019:

Attended by 5 MSPs and 44 non-MSPs; topics discussed:

- A Strategy for Our Veterans Consultation: Graeme Dey, Minister for Parliamentary Business and veterans talked about the way that the Consultation was to work in Scotland and how the Scottish Government were liaising closely with the UK Government. A range of focus groups were being arranged; SG will have access to the UK Govt public consultation responses and will develop the strategy within Scotland on these. Much work has already been carried out by the Scottish Veterans Commissioner so Scottish Government already has a reasonable handle on what workstreams are likely to need to be developed.
- The Education of Children of an Armed Forces Family: Carolyn Macleod and Graham Short from the Association of Directors of Education Scotland, provided an insight into some of the issues that may be faced in respect of Education for children of Service families, both during Service and on transition from the Services. These include changes in curriculum (eg English/Scottish Education systems), as well as the impact of moving between several schools - both academically and socially.
- Skills Development Scotland: Alistair Ferrier provided an overview of the services available to all and highlighted how those in Service, transitioning from Service and veterans, as well as their families, can benefit from the resources available. He spoke about the pilot project taking place in the North East of Scotland which is assisting service leavers to identify the sorts of jobs they have the acumen for prior to attending the Career Transition Partnership briefings.
- Transferrable Qualifications SCQF: Aileen Ponton discussed the work that SCQF have carried out to identify transferrable qualifications – in particular those of the non-technical arms and services, and how these may be presented and better understood. This project should be reporting by the end of September.
- Developing Champions in Colleges and Universities: Jim Castle from Glasgow Caledonian university and Claire Biggar from Edinburgh Napier University, gave details of how they are promoting the development of a network of AFV Champions in all Colleges and Universities across Scotland; to date, most have signed up and we anticipate this having a positive impact on the way that service leavers and veterans take up FE and HE places, as well as improving the number of opportunities for employment in FE/HE establishments.
- The Reid McEwan Activity Centre Erskine: Ian Cumming from Erskine gave an overview of the work carried out at the Reid McEwan Activity Centre which provides a focus for activities as well as rekindling a sense of purpose and comradeship across many veterans. The long term aim is to establish similar Centres in other locations across Scotland.

### 24 April 2019:

Attended by 4 MSPs and 50 non-MSPs; topics discussed:

- The Veterans Employment Strategy Group Update: Mark Bibbey provided an update on progress of the work being done by this group. This included focussing on some of the key recommendations in the SVC's report into Employability and translating it into action.
- The Career Transition Partnership: Trish Mullen from CTP spoke about the way that they prepare Service men and women for transition on discharge and highlighted a number of the resources that are available including Career Consultant Support, Resettlement Guides, Industry Guides, a monthly Employment Bulletin and other support available on line.
- The Leuchars Military Co-Working Hub: Sarah Stone discussed the facilities currently available at Leuchars in which spouses are enabled to continue to make an economic contribution as they are posted, thus achieving greater spousal employment. She described plans to develop a network of such hubs across the UK.
- The Lothian Armed Forces and Veterans Project: Aileen Hill described the work that the LAFVP does to encourage employers across the Lothians to recruit Service leavers and to encourage work experience programmes.
- Recruitment of veterans to the NHS: Neil Murray, Head of Recruitment Services for NHS Lothian, discussed the work they are doing to promote the recruitment of Service leavers and veterans as well as Reservists, and their families. Suggested initiatives include guaranteed interview schemes, work experience placements and developing networks of veterans within NHS Lothian.
- Promoting the Employment of Veterans: Andrew Jackson from Salute My Jobs, and Scottish Veterans Employment and Training Services, provided an update on the conference that had taken place earlier that day; this indicated that employers are supportive of employing service leavers and recognise many of the skills and attitudes that are common to many. What was clear from the conference was that the positive benefits that veterans can bring to employers should be promoted better and the image presented in the media is not representative of the vast majority of veterans.
- Horse Time: Sue Brewis gave a presentation on the work carried out by Horse Time, which delivers equine therapy near Coldstream.

**11 June 2019:**

Attended by 8 MSPs and 49 non-MSPs; topics discussed:

- A Strategy for Our Veterans – an Update
- The Unforgotten Forces Consortium: Gary Gray and Glen Macdonald from Poppyscotland provided an insight into the collaborative work being carried out by the 16 organisations that are part of the Unforgotten Forces consortium. This project, funded by the Aged Veterans Fund, is making a difference to the lives of many older veterans.

- Forces Families Jobs: Sarah Baade and Lisa Thipthorp described this project which seeks to provide details of employment opportunities that are open specifically for spouses of serving personnel.
- The Garelochhead Station Trust
- A Great Scottish breakfast
- Northern Ireland Historic Inquiries and Prosecutions

### **10 September 2019:**

Attended by 6 MSPs and 47 non-MSPs; topics discussed:

- Scottish Veterans Commissioner's Update
- Cadets in Scotland
- The Positive Pathways Programme
- Proposals for Future meetings in 2020
- Included AGM

So all in all it has been a busy year, with very positive levels of attendance at the CPG. The focus over the next 12 months will be on the way that the Strategy for Our Veterans is developed and delivered in Scotland.

### **Scottish Veterans Commissioner:**

Charlie Wallace, the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, provided an update on his, and his predecessors, reports and the Scottish Government's progress against those reports. In synopsis, whilst there are some areas that need to move forward, progress is being made and he is liaising with both the Veterans Minister and other Scottish Government departments to monitor this.

### **Cadets in Scotland**

Robbie Gibson, Chief Executive of Lowland RFCA, provided a short brief on Cadets and it was agreed the next meeting would include an opportunity for some Cadets to brief the Group themselves and to consider the valuable contribution made by the Cadet organisations.

### **Positive Pathways Programme:**

Emma Gration from Defence Medical Welfare Services provided an update on the Positive Pathways funding, for which organisations could bid for £35,000 per year for up to 2 years to promote employment for veterans.

There being no further business the meeting closed at about 8:00pm.

**Next Meetings:** Future meetings will take place on: 14 Jan 20; 21 Apr 20; 16 Jun 20 and 15 Sep 20.