

**ghCross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on
The Armed Forces and Veterans Community
Meeting 14 Jan 2020 Minutes**

Attending:

MSP's: Bill Bowman, Gordon Lindhurst, Jackie Bailie, Maurice Corry (Convenor) and Michelle Ballantyne; a total of 5 MSP's.

There were 56 non-MSP members attending.

Apologies had been received from Richard Lyall MSP.

Opening Remarks

The Convenor welcomed all attending, thanking them for their attendance and noting that this was a large attendance; he wished everyone a happy New Year. He noted the sad news of the recent death of Bill Murray, Chairman of the charity Soldiers Off The Streets, and who was known to many.

He invited all attending to introduce themselves, recognising there were a number of new faces attending.

Minutes of previous meeting:

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 10 Sep 2019 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Briefings:

The Convenor noted a busy agenda and asked the first speakers to discuss the role of the cadet organisations in Scotland. Colonel Alan Middleton, Scotland Cadet Expansion Officer and Deputy Commandant of the West Lowlands Battalion of the Army Cadet Force, introduced the important part played by these uniformed youth organisations. He described the 'Cadet Experience' which includes the attainment of SQA Awards, the development of Teamwork and Leadership skills and the way the Cadet training is aligned with A Curriculum for Excellence.

Colonel Middleton then handed over to three Cadets and their training staff to talk about their personal experiences. The opportunities available in the Cadets are significant and largely unheralded; in particular the very clear sense of belonging and personal development were discussed. For these three presenters their life changing experience was very evident and moving; the benefit of cadet involvement in Schools was highlighted and the positive impact recognised.

A number of issues relating to recruitment of adult volunteers was discussed and the development of recognised qualifications for them was considered, as well as the idea of liaising with veterans organisations. Adult Volunteer recruitment was identified as a top priority for the Cadet organisations. There followed some discussion on the negative perception of the Cadet organisations in some areas and how the social value and benefits of them could be presented to reduce that.

The Convenor thanked all the presenters and summed up that the opportunities presented by Cadet organisations should not be underestimated and he encouraged all to consider the part they could play in helping to support them.

Following the Cadet presentation, Sophie Mifsud from the Defence Transition Services spoke about their role. Having been set up, the DTS went live in November

2019 and their main task is to support those transitioning from the Services, they will work closely with the Veterans Welfare Service and have a remit to assist up to 2 years after discharge. Individuals will be referred to them whilst in service but may also be referred by Third Sector partner organisations. Whilst starting at a small level, they are currently handling some 16 cases in Scotland, there is scope to expand as demand develops. The Convenor thanked Sophie for her update and recognised the important part that DTS will play in support of veterans during transition.

The Secretary provided a brief update on Terms of Reference for local authority champions, this is work in progress with the Scottish Government and will seek a common understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant across Scotland.

Conclusion

Before drawing the meeting to a close, the Convenor invited Ian Stewart from the Lothian Veterans Centre and the Veterans Community Café to talk about the activities that they carry out. The Convenor also asked Ian Cumming from Erskine to update the meeting on the stage they are on extending centres like the Erskine Reid McEwan Centre across Scotland.

The Convenor thanked all of the speakers, in particular the Cadets, for what was a most informative meeting; he closed the meeting at around 8:10pm.

Next Meetings: Future meetings are scheduled to take place on: 21 Apr 20; 16 Jun 20 and 15 Sep 20.