

Cross-Party Group on The Armed Forces and Veterans Community

22 September 2021 at 6:00pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Maurice Golden
Douglas Lumsden

Non-MSP Group Members

Aileen Hill	WWTW
Alistair Ferrier	SDS
Ally Gemmell	ASAP
Ben Parker	Housing Options Scotland
Beverly Bergman	University of Glasgow
Charles Wallace	Scottish Veterans Commissioner
Christine Haddow	Edinburgh Napier University
Col Tony Phillips	HQ 51 Bde
Colin Vooght	Lowland RFCA
Fiona MacDonald	Bravehound
Fiona Maxwell	Reading Force
Frankie Caldwell	DTS
Gary Gray	Poppyscotland
Graeme Meacher	SSAFA
Ian Cumming	Erskine
Ian Stewart	Lothian Veterans Centre
Jim Castle	Glasgow Caledonian University
Jim Wilson	Veterans Scotland
Joe Stanfield	RAFA
Joyce Macmillan	FVUK
Karen Elliot	RNA
Kari Magee	NHS Highland
Kevin Gray	VHS
Leanne Bonner	RFEA
Maj Lee Baines	HQ 51 Bde
Mark Horsham	Veterans Champion
Martin Nadin	SVR
Maura Lynch	SG Health
Maurice Corry	Chair
Mike Ellicot	FiMT

Richard Baker	Sight Scotland Veterans
Ross Thomson	Poppyscotland
Sophie Mifsud	DTS
Stephen Elliot	Veterans Housing Scotland
Tony Carruthers	Housing Options Scotland
Vanessa Plumley	RAFFF
Wendy Quinn	NFF

Apologies

Apologies had been intimated by Jackie Baillie, Jackson Carlaw

Agenda items 1 and 2: Welcome, Introductions and Attendance.

The Chair introduced the meeting by welcoming all attending and reiterating his enthusiasm to continue to support the CPG. He gave all those attending the opportunity to introduce themselves and state which organisation they represented. It was agreed that there should be no change to the purpose of the Group and that membership continues to be open to MSP's and others with an interest in the Armed Forces and Veterans Community in Scotland.

Agenda item 3: Minutes of the meeting of 30 June 2021:

Two amendments had been included in the draft minutes that had been circulated, reflecting attendance by Martin Nadin and the important part played by veterans' charities in the social care system. Although Ministers had been invited to talk about the Social Care consultation, they were unable to attend this meeting; however an opportunity to provide feedback from veterans charities to that consultation has been scheduled for 19 Oct.

Agenda item 4: Covid Update:

The Secretary provided a brief update on the impact that the pandemic was having on Service charities. There did not appear to have been any significant change to the updates provided previously with organisations continuing to identify loneliness and social isolation among their clients. This was being managed through 'remote visiting' and maintaining connections with veterans through IT, social media and telephone.

Whilst many charities are reporting loss of income, there is a corresponding reduction in expenditure and claims for Covid grants such as furlough payments. Although this means that most charities expect to remain financially viable, there is an adverse impact on the volume of support that they can provide.

The matter of 'Covid passports' was discussed and the potential impact of delays that could come about if members of the armed forces were supporting 'cross-border' roles. This would be followed up by Douglas Lumsden and Maurice Golden.

Subsequent discussion recognised the very valuable part played by the armed forces in supporting other organisations, such as the Scottish Ambulance Service, in the delivery of services during the pandemic.

Agenda item 5: Afghanistan Situation

The impact of the situation in Afghanistan was discussed. It was agreed that a paper that had been prepared by NHS Highland would be circulated after the meeting; the paper provides a useful synopsis of the background to the situation and affect that it may have on veterans and on family members, as well as some useful further guidance and points of contact for further support. The Convenor was grateful to Kari Magee from NHS Highland for this paper.

During the discussion, the topic of moral injury was identified and a briefing note on this is also attached.

Agenda item 6: Housing

Charlie Wallace, Scottish Veterans Commissioner, provided an update on his reports. These focus on the period during which personnel leave the Services and transition to civilian life. Preparation for transition is key and securing appropriate housing is an important part of this transition; in this and in other parts of transition he recognised that the UK and Scottish Governments need to work better together. The Commissioner's reports are available on-line, or hard copies may be available from the Commissioners office.

Subsequent discussions recognised the overlap between the Commissioner's reports and the experience of a range of Service charities. It was however recognised that a number of issues can present some time after discharge, in some cases up to 25 years later. Several Service charities confirmed that they have a good working relationship with the serving community but recognised the need for wider society to be better informed about service life and the impact it may have on individuals and families.

There is scope to improve the identification of potentially vulnerable service leavers prior to discharge, thus ensuring that where necessary they receive support to fit back into society.

Kevin Gray from Veterans Housing Scotland reported that they endorse the findings in the Commissioners report on housing. They are working to improve the accessibility to affordable homes through nomination rights, shared equity, and working with RSL's and local authorities. He identified good collaboration across the veterans sector. The Veterans Scotland Homelessness Report is due soon and it is

hoped that the recommendations from that report will be available for the next meeting of this CPG.

Access to accommodation for vulnerable service leavers has improved with the developments at SVR and at Erskine. The important part that Housing Options Scotland are playing in informing veterans of their accommodation options and assisting them in navigating the route to housing was recognised.

Agenda Item 7: The Men's Sheds Association

The Secretary had spoken with Jason Shroeder who was unfortunately unable to connect to this meeting; he was going to talk on the Men's Sheds Association. It is hoped he will be available for the next meeting.

Item 8: AOB

Karen Elliot raised the topic of SPARKO TV, a means of enabling video links via TV; it was agreed that this would be discussed at the next meeting.

The Chair noted that this would be Sophie Mifsud's last meeting as she is leaving DTS. He thanks her for the valuable contribution that she has made and that DTS continues to make to improve the process of transition for service leavers who are identified as being vulnerable. Whilst a successor is yet to be identified, Frankie Caldwell will fill the post in the interim.

Dates of future meetings:

Dates for future meetings were identified as:

- **25 Jan 22**
- **13 Apr 22**
- **22 Jun 22**
- **20 Sep 22**

It is hoped that such meetings will take place within the Scottish Parliament building, however this is subject to pandemic restrictions.