

Cross-Party Group on The Armed Forces and Veterans Community

Minute of a meeting held in the Scottish Parliament and on-line

Tuesday 25 January 2023 at 6:00pm

Agenda item 1

Introductions and Opening Remarks Maurice Golden MSP (Convenor). Mr Golden thanked all attending, noting that this was a hybrid meeting in-person and remote; he recognised the additional reach that holding the meeting on-line provides, enabling greater attendance and contribution. Regrettably he noted that Maurice Corry, the Chair of the group, had taken ill on route but that he hoped to join on-line later.

Agenda item 2

Confirmation of attendance. A list of those attending is attached at Annex A. The meeting, with 3 MSP's attending, was quorate.

Agenda item 3

Minutes of the previous meeting, 25 Oct 2022. The minute of the meeting which took place on 25 Oct had been circulated and were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising that were not due to be discussed under later agenda items.

Agenda item 4

Meeting the Obligations to the Armed Forces Covenant. Mark Horsham, the Armed Forces and Veterans Champion for South Lanarkshire, and Veterans Scotland's Informing Scotland Project Officer, was invited to speak on the topic of Meeting the Obligations to The Armed Forces Covenant.

Mark indicated that he had attended a recent '10 Years of the Covenant' Conference in London, which had been organised by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT). This conference, and further guidance that has been provided by the MOD Covenant Team was clarifying the obligations that statutory organisations have in respect of the Covenant. That said, whilst there is an awareness that there is a covenant, the detail of it, and it's implications for statutory organisations and for members of the Armed Forces and Veterans Community are often misunderstood.

At local authority level in Scotland, following the council elections in May 2022 we have seen 20 new local authority champions taking up the role. The Scottish Government had recently provided a role description for Champions, incorporating the recent introduction of the legal obligations placed on statutory organisations. It was noted that this put the emphasis at local authority on Education and Housing; this was queried given the important part that local authorities play in Health and Social Care.

Mark summarised the recommendations included in the Covenant Tool Kit which recognises that local authority champions are likely to have this role in addition to other responsibilities. The recommendations include that local authorities should consider allocating a council officer to support the post holder, that the council should develop and monitor a Covenant Action Plan; this would identify priorities that are required. It is recommended that an Annual Covenant Report is provided to a full council meeting. Significantly, the priorities that will be identified by councils will be driven by the make-up of the Armed Forces and Veterans Community within their area.

The Convenor thanked Mark for his update, during the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- Councils would benefit from gaining a good understanding of the composition of the Armed Forces and Veterans Community within their area; particularly as there could be significant numbers not identified.
- Data may be collected through various means such as housing applications or through SEEMIS. Councils should be encouraged to consider other means by which such data can be collected which will help in developing the picture.
- Consideration should be given to collating data; as an example a system such as the 'Tell Us Once' process could help this.
- Councils should review the training provided for front line staff. It is desirable that such training should be consistent.
- Councils may wish to consider the different (but overlapping) responsibilities they have for Civic Recognition and for other Covenant obligations.
- The role of the Champion can be an advisory one; the Champion should not be expected to case-work all matters raised by members of the Armed forces and Veterans Community, but may act in an advisory capacity for other councillors.

It was agreed that this was an important topic and one which should be revisited at a future meeting.

Agenda item 5

Cost of Living Impact on Veterans and Service Charities. The discussions and observations from the previous meeting remained valid. A number of organisations provided updates on progress they were making, initiatives they were taking forward and their experiences. These included:

- Opening their own centres as Warm Hubs (both for veterans and for the wider community).
- Preparing and providing food parcels for those on extremely low incomes.
- Gaining Food Handling Qualifications – in order to prepare warm meals for clients.
- Giving advice on other places and organisations from which veterans may receive support.
- Installing clothes washing machines so that those on extremely low incomes may not have to incur household laundry costs.
- An increase in enquiries about Armed Forces Compensation Scheme reviews.

- Young serving families were being affected.
- If an individual presents with a single issue, there may be other underlying issues that need to be supported.

Agenda item 6

Open Forum including brief updates from members: Those attending were invited to provide brief updates:

- Jason Schroeder from Scottish Men's Sheds Association highlighted that more veterans were attending, with some 15% of new members having a Service background. An application for funding had been made to the Covenant Trust Fund, whilst Scottish Government funding was being withdrawn. A petition of MSPs was in place and a letter, signed by 40 MSPs had been sent to the Finance Secretary. Jason indicated that many of the initiatives discussed in Item 5 were being introduced across the organisation.
- Joyce MacMillan identified that she had been in touch with many hospitals and GP surgeries in order to identify those that employ veterans. She would extend this research across Scotland and report back at a future meeting.
- It was reported that Defence Transition Services had appointed Joanne Shepherd in Scotland, and that Louise Briggs has taken over from Kate McCulloch (moved to VWS).

Topics for Future Meetings: Topics for consideration that have been suggested include: Employment; Spousal Recruitment; Health; Housing; Female Veterans Issues and the provision of Early Years Education. It has also been suggested that we invite the Scottish Veterans Commissioner and The Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans to provide updates.

Date of next meetings:

March 30th (Thu)

June 20th (Tue) including AGM

October 18th (Wed)

Annex A to
CPG Minute
25 Jan 2023

**Attendance List Cross Party Group on The Armed Forces and Veterans
Community 25 Jan 2023**

MSPs

Douglas Lumsden MSP On Line

Graeme Dey MSP In Person

Maurice Golden MSP (Convenor) In Person

Attending on Line

Attending in Person

Alistair Halliday On Line

Alistair Ferrier In Person

Allana Kyle On Line

Alistair Gemmell In Person

Claire Biggar On Line

Bill Bowman In Person

David Devenny On Line

Bob Hawkins In Person

Donald Mack On Line

David Gibson In Person

Dorinda Wolfe Murray On Line

Eric Fraser In Person

Emma Perrin On Line

Fiona Maxwell In Person

Graham Meacher On Line

Gavin Davey In Person

James Castle On Line

Ian Stewart In Person

Jason Schroeder In Person

Kari Magee On Line

Jim Wilson In Person

Kevin Wood On Line

Joyce MacMillan In Person

Leanne Bonner On Line

Maria Corretge In Person

Lesley Iannarelli On Line

Mark Horsham In Person

Malcolm Farrow On Line

Melody Grayson In Person

Marie Crombie On Line

Morevain Martin In Person

Martin McNally On Line

Ned Kelly In Person

Maurice Corry (Chair) On Line

Scott Muir In Person

Moira Bayne On Line

Susie Hamilton In Person

Nathaniel Cooper On Line

Nicoletta Primo On Line

Robyn Pattison On Line

Thomas McBarnet On Line

Tommy Douglas On Line

Wendy Brown On Line