

Cross-Party Group on The Armed Forces and Veterans Community

27 November 2024 at 6:00pm in The Scottish Parliament and on-line.

Minute

Attendance: 27 individuals attended in person, a further 34 on line. MSP's in attendance included: Edward Mountain; Russell Finlay; Maurice Golden; Sharon Doway and Stephen Kerr.

Apologies

Agenda item 1

Introductions and Opening Remarks Maurice Golden MSP (Convenor) and Maurice Corry (Chair).

Agenda item 2

Minutes of the previous meeting, 18 September 2024. Were accepted as an accurate record

Agenda item 3

Caroline Cooke and Isabel Summers, Forces in Mind Trust

- **Ex-Service personnel in the Criminal Justice System research report**

[20240326-Summary-Report-Nacro-Ex-service-Personnel-Report.pdf](#)

Caroline and Isobel provided an update on the report; this indicated six cross-cutting barriers which reduce the likelihood of veterans identifying their ex-Service status. These include:

- **Reluctance to seek help;**
- **Lack of understanding about why they were being asked to identify as having served in the Armed Forces;**
- **Complex landscape and lack of awareness of available support in the community;**
- **Capacity and knowledge of professionals;**
- **Use of language when asking about service history;**
- **Shame influencing decisions to identify/ take up support.**

There followed some discussion about what might be done to ameliorate these barriers.

Agenda item 4

Mary Keeling, Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre

- Ex-Service personnel and the Justice System: policy and research summaries

Mary highlighted the wide range of research that has been conducted into ex-service personnel in the Justice System. She highlighted the consistent trend that ex-Service personnel in the Justice System are likely to be male, older, have received longer sentences and be convicted of violent or sex offences. Pre-service behaviour and adverse childhood experiences contributed to levels of engagement.

There was some discussion about the level and accuracy of data that is available.

Agenda Item 5

Susie Hamilton - Scottish Veterans Commissioner

- Veterans and the Law Report

<https://www.scottishveteranscommissioner.org/report-veterans-and-the-law>

Susie Hamilton briefed the group on her report, which had been published in October. During her research she had visited 5 prisons and spoken with some 50 veterans in custody, as well as a range of ViCSOs. This had given her a good insight into the position although she indicated that there are still gaps in the data; data recorded by Scottish Government is available at: [Prison Statistics Interactive Analysis Tool](#).

The value of the work of ViCSOs was recognised although it varies across different prisons. It is recognised that a link is now established between Nova Scotland and Police Scotland.

Agenda Item 6

Alistair Halliday – CEO Forces Employment Charity

- Op NOVA in Scotland

Alistair provided an update on the background to Operation NOVA (as it is called in England) which has been in place for 10 years having been funded by NHS England. Currently there are some 1560 individuals in the Op NOVA system.

In Scotland the project is referred to as 'NOVA Scotland' and is managed by Scott Muir, although an additional member of staff is being sought. NOVA Scotland is working at capacity currently, with some 35 individuals being assisted.

A copy of Alistair's presentation is attached.

There followed some discussion on Agenda Items 3 to 6, during which the following questions were considered:

- What are the needs of veterans that Criminal Justice Social Work may need to know?
- How might we improve the way that the network of organisations support the needs of veterans in the Justice System?
- How can we ensure that Police Scotland reduce the barriers to identifying veterans.
- Is it possible to identify the period of time taken between leaving the Services and engagement with the Justice System?

Agenda item 7

Emma Perrin - Devolved Nations Manager Army Families Federation

- **Update on the Tri-Service Family Federations' recent work**

Emma presented on the work of the three Families Federations, how they work and how they interact with each other for the benefit of the families that make up the Armed Forces Community. She highlighted the range of matters that the Families Federations are involved in, and how they represent them.

The impact of the interpretation of Council Tax rules, and in particular if a quarter should be regarded as a second home, ie be in the same category as a holiday home, for Council Tax purposes and therefore attract up to 200% even when unoccupied due to deployment. During the subsequent discussion, it was recommended that such matters could be managed on a case by case basis through the relevant Local Authority Armed Forces and Veterans Champion.

A copy of Emma's presentation is attached.

Agenda item 8

Alistair Ferrier (SDS) and Lou Kinnear (Highland Council)

- **The Role and Work of the Military Liaison Group (MLG)**

Lou and Alistair briefed the meeting on the work of Skills Development Scotland and of the MLG, this is the group within Highland Council's Covenant Group which focusses on the way that Education is provided for the Armed Forces and Veterans Community. The MLG has established close ties with all relevant agencies as well as with the serving communities.

During the presentation, they elaborated on some of the issues faced by members of the Armed Forces and Veterans Community when accessing education, these and how they are supported are contained in the presentation which is attached.

During the subsequent discussions, the difficulty in accessing appropriate childcare was highlighted as a particular issue, in particular early morning childcare.

A copy of their presentation is attached.

AOB

There was some discussion on the frequency of CPG meetings, the consensus was that 4 meetings per year was right. Members were invited to suggest topics for discussion at future meetings. It was recognised that the next Scottish Election will have taken place by May 2026, and it was suggested that a review of the CPG's activities should take place by then.

Dates of next meetings: TBC, however the routine of quarterly meetings seemed to suit most members.

In addition to the MSP's identified above, the meeting was attended by:

Attended on-line		Attended in person	
Adrian Kirk	Care after Combat University of Glasgow	Alistair Ferrier	SDS
Alethea McHardy	CAB	Alistair Halliday	FEC
Alistair Gemmell	Self	Amber Pemberton	FiMT
Bill Bowman		Anna Wright	AFCFT University of Glasgow
Chloe Aldridge	Self	Beverly Bergman Cameron Livingston	SACRO
Chloe Mackay	Combat Stress Perth & Kinross Champion	Caroline Cooke	FiMT
Chris Ahern	Fife Champion	Carolyn Caddick	VAPC
Derek Noble		Dorinda Wolfe	
Dougie Beattie	Erskine	Murray	FirstLight Trust
Eric Fraser	RNRMC	Emma Parrin Emma Watson	AFF
Fiona Maxwell	Reading Force	Mack	VS
Ian Cumming	Erskine Care after Combat	Gavin Davey	RAFBF
Jane Jones	Self	Isabel Summers	FiMT
Joyce MacMillan	NHS Highland	Jim Wilson	VS (Secretary)
Kari Magee	D&G Council	Julie McIlroy	SVC Office
Liz Manson	Female Veterans Research	Kate Thomas	VAPC
Liza Jarvis	Poppyscotland	Leanne Bonner	FEC
Lyndsey Wallace	FCS	Lou Kinnear	Highland Council
Meg Thomas		Marie Crombie	Fares 4 Free

Moira Bayne	HOS	Mark Downie	Shared Parenting Scotland FiMT Research Centre
Patricia Clark		Mary Keeling	
Pauline Cherrington	LVC	Mary Spence	SACRO
Pauline Winchester	Midlothian Champion	Maurice Corry	Argyll & Bute Council (Chair)
Rebecca O'Hanlon		Murray Leith	UWS
Ryan MacDonald	GHH	Scott Muir	NOVA Scotland
Sally Coulthard	DGS	Susie Hamilton	SVC Office
Shaun Cauvin	VS		
Steve Burton	BLESMA		
Vanessa Plumley	RAFFF		
Walter Gallacher	SSAFA		
Wendy Brown	SSAFA		
	Argyll & Bute Champion		
William Sinclair			
Yasmin			
Jankowski-Doyle	Self		
33		26	