

Cross-Party Group on The Armed Forces and Veterans Community

21 February 2024

Minute

Present

MSPs

Maurice Golden MSP, Russell Findlay MSP.

Invited guests

Non-MSP Group Members

Adrian Kirk, Alison Howard, Alistair Ferrier, Alistair Gemmell, Beverly Bergman, Callum Lancashire, Carolyn Caddick, Claire Armstrong, Dave Devenney, Debbi McCall, Debs Dickson, Dougie Morgan, Emma Perrin, Eric Fraser, Fiona Maxwell, Fiona McDonald, Gavin Phillip, Ian Cumming, Jason Schroeder, Jim Wilson, John Lewis, Jon Crouch, Joyce MacMillan, Julie McIlroy, Kate Campbell, Liza Jarvis, Mark Downie, Mark Horsham Councillor, Meg Thomas, Meresa Lewis, Mo Torau, Deborah Moretti, Pauline Cherrington, Pauline Winchester Councillor, Robyn Pattison, Ron McKail Councillor, Ryan MacDonald, Simon Wright, Tracy Bryant, Vicky Brindley, Walter Gallacher, William Bowman.

Apologies

Item 1

Introductions and Opening Remarks

Maurice Golden MSP (Convenor) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that Maurice Corry (Chair) was unable to attend this meeting due to work commitments. With 2 MSP members attending and a further 43 non-MSP members attending, the Convenor was pleased to confirm that the meeting was quorate.

Agenda item 2

The Minute from the previous meeting, which took place on 7 November 2023, had been distributed for consideration by the members. It was agreed that the minute provided an accurate record of the meeting.

Agenda item 3

The role and function of Drop In Centres.

Tracy Bryant, CEO of the Association of Service Drop In Centres (ASDIC), provided an overview of their work and membership. There are some 170 member organisations of ASDIC, representing some 220 individual centres across the UK. The value of such Drop in Centres was recognised by the CPG.

Dave Devenney from Community Veterans Support provided an update on the work that they carry out at the Pearce Institute in Glasgow. Whilst their focus is on members of the veteran community, they have extended their remit to include people from the local community. Dave had identified that engaging with the wider community had proved valuable to the veterans that attended and made the Centre an integral part of the community. Dave gave examples of the activities that they carry out.

Debs Dickson from the Erskine Reid McEwan Activity Centre (ERMAC) gave an insight into the work they carry out there. They provide a full programme of activities five days a week. Examples of their activities include model making, pottery, photography and computer training. The value to all of the veterans, and their families, whether living within the Erskine site or further afield was significant.

There followed a short discussion about the different styles of Drop in Centres, however it was recognised that the way that the centres run comes down to the enthusiasm and commitment of the individuals that manage them and to their veterans.

Agenda item 4

The role and function of Local Authority Armed Forces and Veterans Champions.

Councillor Ron McKail, Armed Forces and Veterans Champion for Aberdeenshire gave an informative and detailed briefing on the work that has been carried out in his local authority area. A copy of his speaking notes is attached at Annex A.

Councillor Mark Horsham, Armed Forces and Veterans Champion for South Lanarkshire, provided a similar update and confirmed that his work and the Council's recognition of their obligations to the Armed Forces Covenant were recently reviewed and accepted formally during a full Council meeting. A copy of a record of that meeting is attached at Annex B.

A short discussion, recognising the work carried out by local authority champions, took place. There was some discussion about how accessible some champions are and members of the CPG concurred that this could vary between local authorities.

Agenda item 5

The Role and Function of the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) Scotland.

Carolyn Caddick, Chair of VAPC Scotland, updated the meeting on the function and role of the VAPC. There followed a short discussion on the topic.

Agenda item 6

Open Forum

- **Topics for Future Meetings were discussed (see below).**

Date of next meetings:

- **Future meetings are confirmed as:**
 - **19 June**
 - **18 September**
 - **27 November**

Further topics that have been suggested for future meetings include: Data following Census 2022; Health; Housing and Employment. Any further suggestions that members feel should be considered would be welcomed.

Update on Veterans Matters – Aberdeenshire Council

- **Veterans Aberdeenshire Meetings**

The first meeting of 2024 will take place on Friday 8th March. Speakers include Graeme Dey, MSP and Minister for Veterans, Ray Watt, Regional Engagement Director HRFCA, Shirley Lumby, Branch Admin Co-ordinator SSAFA and Caroline Micklewright, Honorary Research Fellow Exeter University.

- **Veterans Champions Meeting – 1st February 2024**

A meeting of Public Sector Veterans Champions took place on 1st February via Teams. This was the first meeting of Veterans Champions.

Those who attended included:

- Cllr Ron McKail, Aberdeenshire Council
- David Cameron, Lord Provost Aberdeen City Council
- Alasdair Pattinson, NHSG
- Keith Colver, Scottish Ambulance Service
- Catherine Cook, Aberdeen University
- Cllr Ronnie Proctor, Angus Council
- Cllr Allison Duncan, Shetland Islands Council

Cllr Ron McKail organised the meeting and welcomed all those who attended. To begin the conversation, everyone introduced themselves explaining their role and activity as Armed Forces/ Veterans Champion for their respective organisation, noting key work and projects being undertaken.

It was recognised that the meeting of Champions provided an opportunity to learn and share good practice and examples. It was recognised that due to the nature of the organisations each had their own priority work in terms of veterans e.g. veterans see housing as a major issue in respect of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils.

The Job Description – Armed Forces Champion (Scottish Government) was circulated to all and everyone considered the profile reflected the role accurately. The NHSG job profile for the Champion is to be shared with the Group.

It was agreed to hold future meetings, with meetings twice a year.

- **Veterans Housing Scotland**

Aberdeenshire Council is hosting an event for Veterans Housing Scotland on Monday 18th March at it's HQ, Woodhill House, Aberdeen. The Provost, Cllr Judy Whyte, will host the event.

- **Freedom of Aberdeenshire for The Royal Regiment of Scotland – 11th/12th May 2024**

The Provost, Cllr July Whyte, will be granting the Royal Regiment of Scotland Freedom of Aberdeenshire. The Ceremony and Parade will take place in Peterhead on Saturday 11th May. The event will take place between 11am and 3pm and will be promoted widely. There will be a large military community celebration alongside the ceremony and parade including Armed Forces charities, all Cadet organisations and military associations.

On 12th May, the Royal Regiment of Scotland will exercise its Freedom by marching through Alford in the morning and Laurencekirk in the afternoon.

The Army is also working with our secondary schools in these areas on STEM issues, teambuilding and leadership on the run up the celebratory weekend.

- **Re-Assessment for Employers Recognition Gold Award – Aberdeenshire Council**

The Council will be re-assessed in Spring this year for its Gold Award.

Cllr Ron McKail

Depute Provost Aberdeenshire Council

Armed Forces & Veterans Champion

17 February 2024