

Cross Party Group at the Scottish Parliament on ARMED FORCES VETERANS

Minutes of the meeting held at the Scottish Parliament on 30th January 2013

Present

MSP	Other Attendees
Alex Fergusson – Convenor (AF)	Dawn Harris – Manor Hall Trauma Centre
Hugh Henry (HH)	Councillor John Patrick - Falkirk
Bruce Crawford (BC)	Baillie Fergus Woods – Stirling Council
Jamie McGrigor (JM)	Gary Gray – West of Scotland VAPC
Annabel Ewing (AE)	David McGrath – East of Scotland VAPC
Nanette Milne (NM)	Neil Robinson(NR) – RBLs Pensions Advisor
Alex Johnston (AJ)	Ally Gemmill – ASAP Stirling
Michael McMahon (MMc)	Ian McGregor(IM) - Poppyscotland
Richard Lyall (RL)	Peter Minshall - SVGCA
Jackson Carlaw (JC)	Ross Swinton - Veteran
Richard Lyle (RL)	Pat McKinnon Thistle Foundation
Jackie Bailey	Walter Logan – Scottish Prison Service
Dennis Robertson (DR)	
	Speakers
Robert McFarlane – Secretary to CPG	Dr Nicola Fear - Reader in Epidemiology Academic Centre for Defence Mental Health King's College London
	Dr Lucy Abraham Clinical Lead – Veterans First Point Edinburgh

Business.

1. The Convenor opened the meeting at 1800hrs and introduced;

Dr Nicola Fear - Reader in Epidemiology, Academic Centre for Defence Mental Health, King's College London

Dr Lucy Abraham – Clinical Lead – Veterans First Point Edinburgh

2. The minutes of the CPG meeting of 28th November 2012 were approved as a true record.
3. The focus of the meeting was Veteran’s Health & Wellbeing
4. Dr Fear’s presentation has been forwarded to CPG members under separate cover. The following are the major points from her presentation;
 - a. Kings College have worked with a cohort of around 17500 servicemen/women for many years and use this cohort to measure the effects of military life. Around 1500 people within the cohort have transitioned to civilian life and thus the data applies across the cohort
 - b. There are still problems within the military relating to alcohol misuse although major steps have been taken to reduce the problem. Worryingly there is a higher incidence of alcohol misuse among females as opposed to males.

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- c. Mental health issues are more prevalent in the Reservist Community than in the regular Military and higher than the general population
5. Dr Abraham then picked up the thread and presented on the effects of Military Service on families. The major points for her presentation were;
 - a. There are real issues which affect families when the Military deploy. These obviously have an effect with civil society where families live.
 - b. It is important that civil society is made aware of how military service affects families particularly children who may present with difficulties at school or elsewhere.
 - c. There are concerns about the long term effects of deployment among children
6. It can be seen that the major impact to Scotland and the services provided by Scottish Government from both presentations are;
 - a. The problems associated with alcohol misuse will, if not handled within the Armed Forces prior to a discharge, transfer to the civilian world with the obvious knock on effects to NHS and other services.
 - b. The issues surrounding alcohol misuse within the reservist community are worrying and again will impact on local services.
 - c. The increase in Mental Health issues within the reservist community which are higher than those in the general population are very worrying especially as the Army is moving to have 30% of its manpower supplied from its reservists by 2020.
7. **General Discussion**
 - a. Points raised
 - i. ***There needs to be some meaningful research carried out among Reservists on the effects of military service on their lives and on the lives of their families.***
 - ii. There is still a perceived stigma among veterans to admitting mental health problems. This is a carryover from the military culture where to show signs of weakness are frowned upon. Much is being done to improve matters however there remains a need to educate servicemen/women that there is nothing to fear about admitting health problems.
 - iii. There is still much to be done to ensure a seamless transfer of records from military to civilian services particularly when there are health & wellbeing issues.
 - iv. There were 183 veterans in prison at the time of the meeting whose crimes were predominantly related to alcohol and drug misuse.
 - v. Much is being done in service to reduce the effects of trauma relating to action in the field with specialist mental health teams deployed.
 - vi. The Military are aware of the issues relating to alcohol misuse and actions are underway to mitigate the problem. (see previous minutes regarding alcohol misuse)

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8. The Convenor closed the meeting and expressed his thanks for the work undertaken on behalf of the CPG by the outgoing Secretary.
9. The next meeting will be held on 17th April when the focus will be on Housing.