

Cross-Party Group on The Armed Forces and Veterans Community

25 February 2025 at 6:00pm in The Scottish Parliament and on-line.

Minute

Chair: Maurice Corry

Convenor: Maurice Golden MSP

Attendees: ~36 participants (mix of in-room and online); MSPs joined later due to proceedings in the parliamentary chamber.

Agenda item 1; Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Chair Maurice Corry welcomed attendees, highlighting the purpose and value of the Cross Party Group (CPG) as a conduit between veterans' organisations and Scottish Parliament.
- Noted the announcement of a UK Government increase in defence spending to 2.5% of GDP in response to international conflict zones and geopolitical shifts.
- Emphasis was placed on improving recognition and support for military families, with references to lessons learned since Bosnia and Korea.
- The Chair shared personal updates on projects involving military families in Argyll and Bute, including early years education initiatives linked to Clyde Naval Base.
- MSP Russell Findlay (standing in for Convener Maurice Golden) acknowledged the CPG's growing influence and highlighted the importance of political engagement with veteran organisations.
- Noted that Stage 3 of the Scottish Budget debate delayed broader MSP attendance.

Agenda Item 2; Approval of Previous Minutes

- Minutes of the previous meeting of 27 November 2024 (Agenda Item 2) were reviewed and approved without amendments.

Agenda Item 3 – Support when leaving the Services:

a. Employment Preparation – Career Transition Partnership (CTP)

Presenter: Lisa Whitson, CTP / Forces Employment Charity

- CTP supports over 14,000 service leavers annually, with services beginning two years pre-discharge and continuing two years post-discharge.
- Currently transitioning delivery to Reed in Partnership after Right Management lost the contract; minor implementation issues are being resolved.
- Services include:
 - Employment workshops, CV support, resettlement planning
 - Funded vocational training and sector-specific career pathways
 - Support for medical, housing, financial advice, and life skills
- CTP employment fairs (e.g., at Murrayfield and upcoming in Elgin and Edinburgh) provide valuable employer-service leaver engagement.
- Key concerns raised:
 - Registration with GPs in Scotland post-service (emphasis on early sign-up)
 - Better promotion of careers information and guidance in light of platform changes

b. Employment Support Post-Service – Forces Employment Charity

Presenters: James Murphy (Director of Veterans & Families Employment) and Leanne Bonner (Scotland Representative)

- Forces Employment Charity supports all veterans (regardless of rank), military families, reservists, justice-involved veterans, and children from service families.
- Key programmes:
 - **OpOFFER** – extended employability support beyond CTP provision
 - **TechVets** – pathways into cybersecurity/IT with free self-paced training
 - **Executive Programme** – for career progression into senior/executive roles
 - **HeroPreneurs** – business mentoring for veterans pursuing entrepreneurship
- Emphasis on employer engagement and career progression, not just job placement.
- Common barriers addressed: fragmented spousal careers, confidence issues, lack of accessible childcare, and portability of qualification
- Concerns were raised by RAF Families Federation and attendees regarding:
 - Childcare availability and funding differences across the UK
 - Portability of teaching and nursery qualifications

- MSPs confirmed these are live issues in Parliament and are being explored, including discussions around General Teaching Council Scotland requirements.
- Highlighted need for transitional support for families moving between UK regions.

c. Networking with Employers – Officers Association Scotland (OAS)

Speaker (on behalf): Jim Wilson

- OAS focuses on employability support and benevolence for commissioned officers and warrant officers.
- Organises regular networking events (~100 attendees and 30 employers per event), open to all ranks informally.
- Key partners include Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Qualifications Authority.
- Discussion initiated around replicating such structured networking and employability programmes for non-commissioned personnel.

d. Subsequent Discussions

- James Murphy confirmed that the Forces Employment Charity's Executive Programme is open to all ranks, addressing concerns about exclusivity in support for commissioned officers only.
- A participant proposed developing a grassroots networking forum to connect veterans with employers and services—well received with support from the Forces Employment Charity to assist further.

Agenda Item 4: Enabling Employment Pathways

a. Opportunities in Cyber: Presenter: Andrew Jackson – Salute my Jobs

- Described barriers to veteran employability:
 - Lack of visibility of opportunities
 - Difficulty translating military skills into commercial equivalents
 - Experience requirements from employers
- SaluteMyJob runs a **Cybersecurity Pathways Programme**, partnering with IBM and Abertay University, focusing on employer-led training and recruitment.
- Model applied successfully to tech roles and adaptable to other sectors (e.g., logistics, construction, healthcare).
- Recommendation: **collaborate across agencies** to scale similar models and broaden opportunity access for veterans and families.

b. Opportunities in Health: Presenter: Ed Challis NHS Scotland

- Ed confirmed that there is an interest in ex-Service personnel and their families seeking employment in the NHS, although he recognised that the potential opportunities were not well understood.
- The NHS employ some 180,000 staff in a huge variety of roles.
- This complexity is being eased somewhat by promoting roles that are held by members of the Armed Forces and Veterans Community, this provides an insight into potential roles for others.
- It must be recognised that there are significant geographic differences between Health Boards in Scotland, this results in different levels of opportunity.
- Since its inception in May 23, the NHS focus has run seventeen webinars where we've looked at 140 participants. There are 65 NHS 'ambassadors' across NHS Boards.

c. Employer Recognition Scheme: Colin Vooght LRFCA

- Colin talked about the Employer Recognition Scheme, which promotes the benefits of service in the Armed Forces, whether regular or reserve to employers.
- Colin recognised that employers are more positive about employing former service personnel than was the case when he started in the role 12 years ago.
- In addition to promoting the value of service in the armed forces, both regular and reserve, the RFCA's also highlight the value of service in the Cadets, and the skills learned by Cadets as well as adult instructors.

d. There followed some discussion on how the template model for developing skills in cyber-security might extend to other sectors.

Agenda Item 5: Open Forum Discussion

Subsequent open discussion recognised that there is a need for greater collaboration between organisations to promote a strong and consistent message about the value of employing members of the armed forces and veterans community. Common themes should be identified and shared, thus ensuring that the importance of promoting a positive message about service is provided and recognising the skills that are learned whilst serving.

Agenda Item 6: Dates of next meeting.

Future meetings will be held on:

Wed 4 June, Tue 16 Sep and Wed 26 Nov.

Key Actions Arising

- **MSPs to follow up on:**
 - Portability of teaching and nursery qualifications
 - Childcare funding and provision disparities
- **CTP to improve visibility of career information and employer pathways on new platform**
- **Forces Employment Charity to:**
 - Promote Executive Programme access for all ranks
 - Explore collaboration with grassroots proposals for networking forums
- **SaluteMyJob/CPG to explore cross-agency collaboration on employment pathway models**
- **Further discussion suggested: Potential expansion of structured networking support for non-commissioned personnel similar to OAS model**

Attendance List - 25 Feb 2025

On Line			In Person		
1	Alethea McHardy	PGR	1	Russel Finlay	MSP
2	Alistair Ferrier	SDS	2	Maurice Golden	MSP Convenor
3	Alistair Gemmell	Falkirk CAB Perth &			
4	Bailie Chris Ahern	Kinross	3	Maurice Corry	Chair
5	Biggar, Claire	ENU	4	Jim Wilson	Secretary
6	Chris Smith				
7	Dave Devenney	CVS	5	Andrew Jackson	SMJ
8	Edward Challis	SG Health	6	Barbara Spence	SACRO
9	Fiona MacDonald	Bravehound Reading	7	Beverly Bergman	Uni Glasgow
10	Fiona Maxwell	Force	8	Bill Bowman	self
11	James Murphy	FEC DTS	9	Colin Vooght	LRFCA
12	Joanne Shepherd	Veterans UK	10	Emma Gration	RAFBF
13	Julie McIlroy	SVC AOW and	11	Joyce MacMillan	self
14	Karen Elliot	RNA	12	Leanne Bonner	FEC
15	Lisa Whitson	CTP S	13	Lucy James	SACRO
16	Mark Horsham	Lanarkshire VS Health &	14	Maria Corretege	NHS Lothian
17	Martin Bell	WB	15	Mark Downie	SPS
18	Mary Spence	SVC	16	Mo Torau	CVU
19	Meg Thomas	FCS	17	Tony Carruthers	HOS
20	Morevain Martin	GST			
21	Murray Leith	UWS			
22	Sally Stimson				
23	Sandra Cheyne	SDS			
24	Stacey Denyer				
25	Stephen Elliot	VHS			
26	Vanessa Plumley	RAFFF			
27	Wendy Brown	SSAFA			
27	On Line		17	In Person	44 Total
					2 MSPs