

**Cross Party Group at the Scottish Parliament on ARMED FORCES VETERANS**

**Minutes of the meeting held at the Scottish Parliament on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

*APPROVED AT THE MEETING OF THE GROUP HELD ON 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012*

**Present**

Alex Fergusson MSP – Convener

Keith Brown MSP – Minister with responsibility for Veterans Affairs

Annabel Ewing MSP

Jamie McGrigor MSP

Nanette Milne MSP

Richard Lyle MSP

Andrew Lorimer – Veteran

Graham Dunlop – Royal Marines Association

Ian Ballantyne – Scottish veterans Housing Association

Ian McGregor – Poppyscotland

James Trolland – Veteran

Jane Lorimer – Veteran

Jeremy Purvis

Pat McKinnon – Thistle Foundation

Ross Swinton – Veteran

Steve Conway – Erskine

Maurice Coray – Councilor – Argyle & Bute

Alister Murphy – Scottish Government Resilience Division

**Apologies**

Hugh Henry MSP

Jackson Carlaw MSP

Willie Rennie MSP

Jackie Bailie MSP

Martin Gibson – Veterans Scotland

Kevin Gray – RBLs

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#### **BUSINESS.**

1. The minutes of the CPG of 25<sup>th</sup> April 2012 (previously circulated) were agreed as a true record with the following exception
2. Page 6 paragraph e vii to read “The cost of alcohol within messes needs to be urgently addressed.”
3. The convenor began by reminding those present that the purpose of the CPG was to inform MSP’s on matters affecting veterans and was not a forum for airing individual problems or for promoting organisations.
4. Alex Fergusson introduced Keith Brown MSP – the Minister with responsibility for veteran’s affairs within the Scottish Government. KB made the following points by way of introduction
  - a. The Scottish Government unequivocally endorsed the UK Government Commitment to the Armed Forces and Veterans and the Military Covenant
  - b. This has been demonstrated by
    - i. Several excellent debates in the Parliament where a variety of issues were discussed
    - ii. The recent Commitments Paper where the Scottish Government laid out its future strategy with regard to veterans.
    - iii. Scottish Governments positive input to the MOD Annual Report to UK Parliament
    - iv. The excellent work of the Cross Party Group where a variety of issues were discussed
    - v. Scottish Government support to Veterans Scotland as the coordinating voice of the veteran in Scotland
    - vi. The Scottish Veterans Fund which has to date distributed £400,000 to over 60 organisations working with veterans. The Minister announced that the Fund would continue for another year.
  - c. KB indicated his pleasure that so much progress had been made from what was a depressing position in 2007 within the veteran’s world.
  - d. KB had in the course of his business, met many people associated with veteran’s affairs throughout the UK overseas and it was gratifying to hear that Scotland was held up as good example of coordinated and effective work. A visit to Canada was being planned to look at how

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they handle veteran's affairs as they have been through a period of change and are now possibly the best example of good practise.

- e. KB emphasised that more can and will be done however it was important that a vigorous assessment of need was required prior to new initiatives being launched.
- f. KB had been trying for some time to gain MOD approval for a visit to Afghanistan when Scottish troops were on rotation. To date this had not been forthcoming. The CPG endorsed the need for such a moral enhancing visit.

#### 5. The Minister than took questions from the CPG:

- a. Ross Swinton (RS) made the point that there were issues of trust when veterans presented to agencies with problems. He felt more use could be made of veterans within the agencies when dealing with problems. This was endorsed by James Tolland. In response KB indicated much was being done to ensure that those officials who came into contact were briefed on the life of a serviceman/woman and the problems they faced. This was very evident with the work being done through NHS Inform where there was a dedicated section within the website dealing with veterans. This was supported by a comprehensive leaflet aimed at Healthcare professionals informing them about veterans and their lifestyle.
- b. Andrew Lorimer (AL) recounted his personal experiences and those of the members of an adhoc group he ran for veterans in East Lothian. KB responded by saying it was right to look at experiences across the whole spectrum.
- c. Jane Lorimer (JL) made the point that veteran's families must not be ignored when discussing or formulating policy. KB fully endorsed this sentiment.
- d. Steve Conway raised the thorny subject of tracking those in need when they left the service. This has been an on-going issue for the CPG for many years. The Secretary informed that an exercise was carried out in 2011 by MOD whereby the postcodes of those leaving the Service were gathered and distributed. This information had proved invaluable when taken alongside the work done by the Scottish Government on the distribution of veterans drawn from the NHS database.

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There was no intention for the MOD to repeat the exercise. The veterans Agency was the only organisation able to access discharge information.

- e. The CPG discussed housing issues and KB made two points relating to MOD schemes which his officials were investigating.
  - i. The Long Service Advance of Pay LSAP scheme introduced in the 1970's whereby a service person with a reasonable length to time to serve could access £8,000 to assist in house purchase. The amount to be paid back over the remaining years of service. The amount of £8k was generous at the time however it has remained static when house prices have risen dramatically.
  - ii. There was a scheme whereby service personnel in England could access a grant to buy a house but which was not available to those in Scotland
- f. Richard Lyle, who had been a councillor for 30 years prior to becoming an MSP, was very annoyed that the rules which existed throughout Scotland some time ago whereby servicemen/women automatically went to the top of housing lists had been eroded to such an extent that only a very few councils operated any form of scheme to support those leaving the service.
- g. Ian Ballantyne informed that veterans Scotland had embarked on a comprehensive review of veterans housing needs in Scotland which would report in March 2013.

6. KB was thanked for his excellent input to the discussion.

7. There was no further business and the meeting closed at 1855hrs.

8. Next meetings

DATE	TIME	SUBJECT
28 NOVEMBER 2012	1730 for 1800	Welfare Reform
30 January 2013	1730 for 1800	Health & Wellbeing
17 <sup>th</sup> April 2013	1730 for 1800	Housing
12 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	1730 for 1800	Employment

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AGM date to be confirmed		
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