



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL ARMED FORCES STEERING GROUP
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Armed Forces Steering Group meeting held on
Tuesday, 7 March 2023 at 10.00 am.

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors - Armed Forces Steering Group Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Webber (Chair) Councillor C Middle
Councillor D Parkin Councillor C Preedy

Officers in attendance

Mr C Davies, Corporate Policy & Consultation Manager
Mr J Ireland, Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer
Ms Rhiannon Seymour, Monuments and Memorials Officer
Ms J Harris, Homefinder Manager

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed all Members and Officers to the Armed Forces Working Group Committee meeting.

An Apology of absence was received from County Borough Councillor S Bradwick and Officer Mr C Richards.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declaration of interest pertaining to the agenda.

3 MINUTES AND ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Armed Forces Steering Group held on the 29th September 2022, subject to it being noted that;

- JI to contact Cllr Parkin in respect of an update in relation to the Lighthouse Project.
- JI to drop information leaflets and Directory at the Community Centre.

- In respect of Leisure Services for Veterans and the Armed Forces, CD met with the Leisure Asset Manager (JP) and have developed a leisure leaflet which Ji will share with the Committee in his presentation.

4 UPDATE ON MONUMENTS AND WAR MEMORIALS - RHIANNON SEYMOUR

Members received a verbal update from RS the Monuments and Memorials Officer who came in to post in April 2022 and works as part of the Heritage team.

RS gave an outline of her role and commented that when she started there wasn't a comprehensive list of War Memorials within the County and therefore, she created one herself and populated the information on to a Map and on a Spreadsheet to show where each War Memorial is located. Also, she has visited most of the War Memorials and has taken photographs of them in order to create a photographic database as well as a written database for those who wish to view them.

Furthermore, a note has been made of those which need any work doing and also RS is in the process of writing up a condition report on all of the War Memorials which is in line with how the War Memorials Trust, who also record the condition of the War Memorials. This information has been uploaded on the War Memorials Trust online for easy accessibility.

Members were advised that a Spreadsheet has been created with a list of the War Memorials whereby minor works need to be carried out on them and sent to the Highways department to action.

Members learned that there are currently 113 War Memorials at present, however, more are being discovered and it is anticipated that the number will continue to increase.

RS reported that she has met with members of the Community and has received a number of queries via email relating to War Memorials which she is dealing with accordingly/ Also, she is making herself known that to the Community that she is easily contactable should they have any queries and concerns in the future.

Members were advised that a project plan is currently in process on how to facilitate the evolution of Memorialisation into the digital age we're currently in and this will help to ensure War Memorials and the War and those who fought is kept within the collective memory.

In relation to War Memorials which are sometimes concealed in buildings and churches, the Chair advised that it may be beneficial to speak with

the local Member to ask them if they hold any information on these, as they may have some knowledge of War Memorials in their Ward.

With regard to the War Memorial located in Porth which has got a severe area of weathering to one side and some of the names have become eligible, RS advised that due to costings to reface the stone she has proposed to have a Flint that is close by the War Memorial which will contain a list of all of the names so that it is visible for the public to view. Also, she advised that a QR Code be placed alongside this which will allow information on memorialization to be even more accessible. Furthermore, she commented that the idea is to roll this out to all of the War Memorials within the County in the future and to undertake a community project to obtain any information that members of the public may hold regarding these, which was very much welcomed by the Committee.

In respect of a query raised by a Member regarding War Graves, RS reported that this not something that she currently deals with, however, any information received regarding these can still be included in the QR Codes which will be located close by the War Memorials in the Community.

The Chair thanked RS for her update to Committee.

The Armed Forces Steering Group **RESOLVED** to:

- Note verbal update
- Receive further updates on the Digitalisation project at future meetings

5 UPDATE FROM THE ARMED FORCES LIAISON OFFICER FOR RCT/MT (INCLUDING VETERANS ADVICE SERVICE) - (JAMIE IRELAND)

Jl shared a PowerPoint presentation which provided an update on the projects being undertaken by MT and RCT along with an update on the support available to Veterans as part of Veterans Advice Service.

Jl provided Members with an overview in relation to the following;

- Armed Forces Council Teams
- Veteran Support Groups
- Census Data
- Cost of Living
- Supporting Armed Forces Children
- Veteran Advice Service
- Employer Support
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Priority Treatment

- What's Next

Members were provided with an update in respect of the Valleys Veterans' which was founded over 10 years ago as an informal support group for PTSD sufferers and is now a vibrant hub with more than 140 active participants. The hub provides activities that include a weekly Breakfast Club support for Valleys Veterans with PTSD, a form completion day on Wednesdays to assist Veterans with any forms that they may have received for completion, and also daily equine activities at the adjacent yard that attract up to a dozen regular daily participants. Also, the Taff Ely Veterans' hub which was setup prior to Covid provides a weekly Breakfast Group every Wednesday 10am till 12pm and support which includes RCT Veteran advice for around 20 attendees every week and the numbers continue to grow. Also, officers from SSAFA are in attendance to provide support to Veterans' regarding financial difficulties. Furthermore, the Cynon Valley Veteran's hub also provides a weekly Breakfast Group every Monday 10am till 12pm and advice is provided to Veterans in relation to War Pensions.

Members learned that there is a Combined Armed Forces and Breakfast Club provided at JD Wetherspoons, Aberdare on the 1st Saturday of every month and at the Pick and Shovel Inn, Treforest on the 3rd Saturday of every month.

Jl advised Members of the new Woody's Lodge Veterans Support Hub that's been setup in conjunction with RCT to provide extra support to Armed Forces Veterans and community. Members were informed that the Hub meets at the Bowls Pavilion at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, Pontypridd, every Saturday, from 10am until noon, and has been running successfully for four consecutive weeks and up to 10 Veterans were in attendance on its opening day. Also, free parking is available for all Veterans who wish to attend, and Members of the Committee are welcome to come along to the next event which is being held on 18th March to offer support to the group.

Members were advised that the Council is launching a new Armed Forces Veterans LGBTQ+ group on Friday March 31, in partnership with the charity Fighting with Pride. The LGBTQ+ Veterans group will also meet on a weekly basis, alternating between Cardiff Castle and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Furthermore, they were reminded that RCT is in the top 100 Stonewall Employers.

Jl Advised Members that in relation to the Council's 'Veteran's Connected' project, there are reportedly 69 Veterans have now hired Tablets for use in the Merthyr area, and also, 19 Veterans in Cwm Taf area have undertaken the digital training course which is being provided under the scheme.

Jl touched on the Veterans in Wales 2021 Consensus data and provided Members with a snapshot of the results.

A Member queried how these figures compare against other local Authorities and asked if can be provided at a future meeting. In response, it was reported that this information is available and can be circulated to Members of the Committee.

Action: CD to circulate figures in comparison against other local Authorities.

In respect of the Cost of Living Support for Veterans, Members were provided with an update on each of the below which are available to them;

- Royal British Legion
- Veterans Rail Card
- Free bus travel
- Veterans burial fees
- Free Swimming
- Free use of Leisure Facilities
- Council Support Scheme
- Discretionary Housing Payment
- Severe Mental Impairment Council Tax
- Food and Fuel Banks
- Defence Discount Card / Blue Light

Jl advised Members of the support being provided to our Armed Forces children by SSCE Cymru and highlighted that there is a new role in post by RCT Council which will further support the team. Also, he advised that as part of the new role we'll be looking to achieve the School Armed Forces Friendly School Award through SSCE Cymru and the first two schools to receive the award are Cwmclydach and Llwynypia Primary School.

Members were advised of the Veteran Advice service which provides free, impartial, dedicated information, advice and support to members of the Armed Forces Community within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Also, the service covers a range of areas, including Benefits, Adult Social Care, Finances, and Employment. To date, 1490 referrals have been received and 40% of referrals have originating from Veterans Support Group such as Valleys Veterans and Taf Ely Veteran Group. Furthermore, Jl advised that he will be looking to build closer working relations with the Veterans Gateway who are a Call Centre and deal with calls from Veterans throughout the UK and ensure that these are referred on to the appropriate charity and organisation.

Members were pleased to hear that RCT receive the Gold Award in the Employer Recognition Scheme for its commitment to defence by proactively supporting the Armed Forces and inspiring others to do the same.

Jl gave an overview of each of the following partnerships in relation to supporting Armed Forces Veterans in our community;

- Cwm Taf Armed Forces Panel
- Armed Forces Officers Meeting
- Staff Armed Forces Group
- Welsh Government
- AFLO good practice
- Sub Groups

Members learned that there are two cenotaphs in the UK, one of which is located in Aberdare and is approaching its 100 Year Anniversary, and also, it's the 5th Welsh Anniversary in Pontypridd.

In addition, Members were advised of the continued works in relation to providing support to Armed Forces Veterans which includes the continuation to honour and mark key Armed Forces Events and providing further training to front line staff on due regard duty. Also, that a Facebook page has recently been launched in relation to Cwm Taf Armed Forces Covenant which has close to 100 Members who have already joined.

Members were reminded that a level of communication has been received from the Veterans' Commissioner for Wales

Veterans' Commissioner for Wales whereby a level of communication has been received from him and that we will extend an invitation to him to discuss issues in respect of Armed Forces Veterans in our community.

Members were informed that Jl is attending the Army Infantry Battle School on the 22nd March and that he attended the Royal Welsh Event last year. Also, on 1st April, Jl is attending an Event to give his presentation to the 160 Brigade Resilience Team deal with the manning of the operations rooms when there is joint command launched within Wales, which is particularly important as following the success of this to be able to utilise our AFLOS within the MOD to present to the reservice to make them aware of the Armed Forces Covenant and the support they can have from local Authorities.

In respect of mass signing whereby organisations are invited to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant, it was mentioned that it may be a good opportunity to next hold this at the 100 year Anniversary of the Cenotaph in Aberdare.

In respect of the statistics from the calls made by residents who are Veterans in the community, the Chair asked if a full breakdown of the analysis could be provided to Committee.

Action: JI to provide a full breakdown of the statistics to Committee.

The Cwm Taf Armed Forces Covenant Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- Note presentation.

6 UPDATE FROM JOANNE HARRIS - COMMUNITY HOUSING

JH shared a PowerPoint presentation in respect of HomefinderRCT who are based in Sardis House, Pontypridd and deal with applicants who apply for Housing and in particular those who are Veterans.

JH outlined the history of Homefinder which was established in 2012 and reported that a number of Housing Associations were included in the process which has grown over the years and RCT manage the administration of the Housing applications received from local residents.

Members were provided with a list of the 11 Housing Association Partnerships who are looking to build on new sites in the future which is positive especially as there is a high demand for Housing and also the supply is very limited.

JH reported that Homefinder operates a Choice Based Lettings scheme and commented that there are currently just under 5,000 applications registered and there has been a shift in demand over the last 12 months due to a number of applications becoming more urgent. Also, Members were provided with details in relation to applications that are placed into specific banding based on housing circumstances, properties that are being advertised each week via Homefinders website and details on the applicants that register an interest in the advertised properties by placing a 'bid'.

Members were advised that information is kept with regards to the number of Veterans registered with Homefinder and there are priority categories in the allocation scheme for Veterans whereby Band A is the highest level of priority that can be given at any time.

In response to a query raised in relation to Armed Forces families who have been through a breakup and whether support is being provided to these families, JH reported that they would be supported, however, it may be that they would fall under another priority category in the allocation scheme depending on the circumstances and not necessarily under this category.

Members were provided with a summary of the number of applicants who are currently registered which stands at 138 broken down by age groups and priority banding, and also the numbers of their preferred areas of choice and property allocations to Veterans by year.

The Chair asked do we know of any cases over the last 12 months whereby Armed Forces Personnel have made contact with RCT prior to being discharged saying that they are going to be homeless, or whether they need further support in Housing. In response, JH commented that she would speak to colleagues and ask if they hold this information and will report back to committee.

Action: JH to provide the Committee with information in relation to Veterans post discharge from Homefinder within the last 6 months.

The Chair advised that there is a need to invite the Housing Association for Cwm Taf along to future meetings of the Armed Forces Covenant Panel meetings as there is currently a lack of presence from them.

Action: CD to invite the Housing Association for Cwm Taf to future meetings of the Armed Forces Covenant Panel meeting.

JH provided Members with details on how to access Homefinder which can be done via the online website, by telephone or in person which appointments can be booked.

The Chair thanked her for her informative presentation.

The Armed Forces Steering Group **RESOLVED** to;

- Note Presentation

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members agreed that the next meeting of the Armed Forces Steering Group is to be held at the Valleys Veterans and for a Site Visit to take place at the site following the meeting.

This meeting closed at 11.31 am

**M Webber
Chairperson**

