

**WEST LANCASHIRE ARMED FORCES
COMMUNITY COVENANT WORKING GROUP**

HELD: Wednesday, 24 July 2019

Start: 10.00 am

Finish: 12.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor: T Devine (Chairman)

Councillors: J Gordon

In attendance: James Matthews (Skelmersdale Veterans)
Ian Gaskell (Wigan Athletic)
Alan Lewis (Skelmersdale Veterans)
Sarah Holt (DWP)
Alison Bunn (Royal British Legion)
Chris Craig (Fighting Minds)
Rosa Hart (RAFA)
County Councillor Nikki Hennessy
Mr P Hennessy
Councillor J Monaghan (WL Ark)
Jimmy McDermott (SWLICAN)

Officers: Sue Griffiths, Principal Member Services Officer
Stephen Kent, Leisure Operations Manager
Paul Waring, Senior Housing Officer

1 INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Ian Barber (Lancashire Hub), Jeanette Newman (Healthwatch Lancashire), Guy Simpson (Lancashire Citizens Advice) and Alan Welsh (Chamber of Commerce).

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

AGREED That the minutes of the last meeting of the Working Group be approved as a correct record.

4 FIGHTING MINDS

The meeting received a presentation from Chris Craig from Fighting Minds, an organisation designed to assist service leavers and veterans who may face a barrier to the workplace as a result of any disability or medical condition.

He presented statistics (approximate) in relation to:-

- veterans/service leavers in the UK,
- ex forces homeless persons in London
- prisoners in the UK believed to be ex forces
- ex forces seeking help for service related issues
- custodial entries identifying as ex forces since January 2019
- percentage of veterans of working age

He explained how there was limited knowledge in the public domain about the current activities of HM forces in particular the engagement across the globe in defence of the UK, its foreign interests and allies as well as providing humanitarian relief to the 3 world and engagement with isolated communities.

He referred to the lack of understanding of veterans former role by new colleagues can cause isolation and resentment. Futhermore, 50% of approximately 7,000,000 veterans/service leavers in employment in the UK were in low paid or routine occupations that did not make full use of their skills.

He went on to refer to the percentage of personnel who served in Iraq and Afganistan who had tested positive to PTSD and of those who had received an official mental health diagnosis.

Chris advised that his organisation would go into the workplace and assist veterans/service leavers to “steady the ship” and referred to the Government’s Access to Work Scheme.

Questions and queries were raised in relation to:-

- client numbers
- funding
- local GP’s/Dentists (veterans packs). Posters etc. (tick box)/CCG’s referral process
- 2021 Census – information on veterans in order to support users to meet their commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant

The Chairman expressed thanks to Chris for attending the meeting and his presentation.

- AGREED
- A. That a copy of the presentation be circulated to members of the Working Group.
 - B. That a meeting with the CCG be arranged in order to discuss issues raised at the meeting.

5 ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Working Group received a presentation from Alison Bunn from the Royal British Legion. She explained that the strands of the work of the organisation were,

Campaigning, Remembrance and Services/Support.

In referring to the campaigning element she highlighted recent promotions such as “Count them In” inclusion of veteran data in the 2021 census referred to earlier in the meeting and “stop the service charge” referring to Commonwealth personnel visa fees.

Remembrance Sunday and the poppy appeal is a strand of work, leading the nation in commemorating and honouring those who have served or sacrificed.

Services and support comprise information and advice; general; specialist and a handyman service.

She indicated that there were 16 area teams who work with public and private sector organisations and referred to the Veterans Gateway (a single point of contact providing 24/7 support).

Questions and queries were raised on the following matters:-

- Veteran friendly GP's/hospitals
- Front-line staff training
- Admiral nurses

The Chairman expressed thanks Alison for attending the meeting and making a presentation.

AGREED That the presentation be noted.

6 **WALKING FOOTBALL**

The Working Group received a presentation from Alan Lewis from the Skelmersdale Veterans Association on the walking football project in Skelmersdale. He explained that it had been established with the assistance from Wigan Athletic Football Club and that the team met on a weekly basis with currently around 8-9 players.

He indicated that the main aims of the team was to get people together and that the current age range was around 55-74 and that they were looking for younger members and for the initiative to be expanded to other parts of the Borough.

Ian Gaskell from Wigan Athletic FC advised that initiatives such as this assisted with residents health and wellbeing and loneliness and isolation issues.

Questions and queries were raised on the following matters:-

- The availability of grants for these type of initiatives
- Street games/MUGA's
- Establishing associations with e.g. Fire Service etc.

- Advertising the availability of the project

The Chairman expressed thanks to Alan and Ian for their attendance and presentation.

AGREED That the presentation be noted.

7 ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Armed Forces Champion on the Covenant's Action Plan.

During the ensuing discussion it was proposed that a separate meeting be arranged with a small team in order to refresh the Action Plan and to include outcomes and indicators.

- AGREED A. That a meeting be arranged for September 2019 to refresh the Action Plan and to look at possible outcomes and indicators to be included within the Plan and that any proposed amendments to the Plan be submitted to the next meeting of the Working Group.
- B. That membership of the small team be appointed by the Armed Forces Champion.

8 COMMUNITY COVENANT GRANT FUNDING

The Armed Forces Champion reported upon the current funding streams from the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Schemes.

AGREED That the report be noted.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items under this heading.