



# Monmouthshire Armed Forces Forum Minutes

Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023 – Online via Microsoft Teams

Present	Joe Skidmore – MCC, Lisa Rawlings – AFCLO, Cllr Peter Strong – MCC, David Bell – RSRM Regimental Secretary, Matt Phillips – MCC, Marc Lawson – MCC, Ryan Coleman – MCC, Kirsty Gronow – Poppy Factory, Mary Shipton – RNA, Damon Rees – Veterans NHS Wales, Stephen Griffiths – MCC Housing, Sadie Baldwin – AFF, Trevor Scott – SSAFA, Sarah Mallaghan – DWP, Callee Andrew – Connect Assist
1. Welcome & Introductions	<p>JS welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for their continued support for the AFC within Monmouthshire. JS introduced the incoming Elected Member Armed Forces Champion, Cllr. Peter Strong.</p> <p>The group introduced themselves in the chat.</p>
2. Apologies	No apologies were received.
3. Minutes of previous meeting & matters arising	The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed upon as a true and accurate record of events.
4. Update – Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer	<p>LR spoke to her presentation. The key points from this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The 2021 Census identified the Veteran population for Gwent at around 21,527. The split across Gwent is Caerphilly are highest with 29.5%, Newport: 23.9%, Monmouthshire: 19.6%, Torfaen: 17.1%, and Blaenau Gwent 9.6%</li> <li>▪ The Armed Forces Covenant is further enshrined into law, ensuring public bodies take ‘due regard’ to areas of Housing, Education, and Healthcare</li> <li>▪ Welsh Government will be delivering sessions to LAs to cover what this means for education and housing departments</li> <li>▪ LR has been successful with different grants to support Veterans in Gwent – these are being used to support the Veteran Hubs and provide coach trips to historical and significant venues. Contact LR for details on attendance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 16<sup>th</sup> March – Yeovilton Fleet Air Museum</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 13<sup>th</sup> April – RAF Cosford Museum</li> <li>○ 30<sup>th</sup> May – Imperial War Museum</li> <li>○ 24<sup>th</sup> June – National Armed Forces Day, Newport</li> <li>○ 25<sup>th</sup> July – Tenby</li> <li>○ 8<sup>th</sup> August – National Memorial Arboretum</li> <li>○ 5<sup>th</sup> September – London</li> </ul>
<p>5. Update – Monmouthshire Veterans’ Support Hub</p>	<p>JS gave an update on the establishment and growth of the Monmouthshire Veterans’ Support Hub. It opened on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022 and takes place every Monday morning between 10 – 12 in Abergavenny library.</p> <p>The Monmouthshire Veterans’ Support Hub aims to provide high-quality, timely, person-centred support to the Armed Forces Community by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developing a greater awareness of the support/services available to the AFC in their local community</li> <li>▪ Providing individuals with the confidence, knowledge, and skills to access timely and relevant support that meets their needs</li> <li>▪ Reinforcing people’s self-reliance, confidence, esteem, and empowerment with the view of improving health outcomes and longer-term well-being</li> <li>▪ Creating a safe space for the AFC to create friendship networks and support structures</li> <li>▪ Offering opportunities to engage with the local community and undertake collaborative activities</li> </ul> <p>The group will be supported by a multi-agency approach, with relevant individuals from local associations and charities available to provide confidential support. The group is currently in its infancy and has pulled on the wealth of experience from Veterans NHS Wales, ABUHB, RBL, and others to ensure that all those attending feel safe and comfortable and that the appropriate governance structures, sustainability and success monitoring are put into place.</p> <p>The venue is a local authority building that has breakout spaces and separate rooms should it be necessary for a Veteran to engage in 1:1 with a specialist and to host any scheduled training sessions.</p> <p>The Hub is going from strength to strength with increasing numbers, this includes new members and regular attendees. All three services are represented. Information is key – individuals accessing the hub are building confidence to seek support from those organisations who are frequenting the hub.</p>



The group are in the process of getting a constitution and is seeking a new venue to accommodate the growth and expand the current offer. JS and LR will continue to support the group to explore funding opportunities and help make the group self-funding / sustainable.

6. Presentation – Ryan Coleman – MCC Cost of Living Support

Ryan Coleman from MCC spoke to the group on the cost of living crisis and provided a summary of the increase in demand for support and those in difficult financial positions. The Pandemic meant many people were furloughed, especially across Monmouthshire due to the tourism sector and many people still haven't managed to recover financially. Incomes have pretty much stayed the same, but the price of most things has increased. CAB has noted a significant increase in individuals seeking support.

Proportionately those working are more likely to be in poverty. A recent survey undertaken in December found that 1 in 5 families have children who are going without meals.

[Money Matters - Cost of Living Support - Monmouthshire](#)

Anyone can fall behind with bills and get into debt, but it's never too late to seek help and advice. The cost of living crisis is making it harder than ever to make ends meet. You may have concerns about your income or are having difficulty paying your bills or your rent, but there is help and advice available to assist you.

[Warm Welcome Spaces - Monmouthshire](#)

Our 'warm welcome' spaces across Monmouthshire offer somewhere you can spend time without spending money.

Every year, billions of pounds of money are unclaimed by people who are eligible due to reasons such as stigma or uncertainty. [Pension Credit: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/> - Advicelink Cymru [Advicelink Cymru - Citizens Advice](#)

A comment was made regarding the RBL Everyday Needs Grant and there is a 3-week wait. If in a crisis, we advise contacting the info line.

<p>7. Update – Partner Organisations</p>	<p><b>SSAFA – Trevor Scott</b>  Operating SEW – 52 active cases. 7 case workers (operate approx. 3 cases per worker) – not coping with the number of referrals we are receiving. Shortage of case workers – Veterans made ideal case workers and the ask is whether anyone would be willing to become a case worker.</p> <p>Veterans approaching SSAFA for grants for training/education – have there been many approaches? If SSAFA is currently at capacity, the Poppy Factory could support these requests for training/education costs</p> <p><b>Kirsty Gronow – The Poppy Factory</b>  Recently returned to full-time work. Need more referrals. The new families programme will start in April. A funding application has been submitted for a navigator programme – which would be a one-stop shop for Veterans, referrals will come from Defence hospitals or NHS to support the individual to ‘navigate life’ in essence. A shift in focus for the Poppy Factory to put resources into Wales</p> <p><b>Sadie Baldwin – AFF</b>  Recent issues are the cost of living crisis and housing/accommodation issues. People are reluctant to turn the heating on. VISAs and citizenship issues – assistance with overseas personnel.</p> <p><b>Damon Rees – Veterans NHS Wales</b>  Meeting targets currently from point of referral to assessment. The role is well received – peer mentor funded by and embedded within health services to support Veterans.</p> <p>Therapy Garden – Damon is continuing to develop the garden, recently successful in £1k of funding. Developing group work sessions on bushcraft, and walking/talking therapy.</p> <p><b>Sarah Mallaghan – DWP</b>  Three Armed Forces champion roles across Wales. Advisor visiting Monmouthshire Hub regularly – can support with claims, barriers, disabilities, etc. Can support transitioning.  <a href="mailto:wales.armedforceschampions@dpw.gov.uk">wales.armedforceschampions@dpw.gov.uk</a></p> <p><b>David Bell – RMRE / Regimental Museum</b>  New CO – Gareth Stockman will be taking over. Freedom parade in Monmouth on 25<sup>th</sup> March. The regimental museum opens on 1<sup>st</sup> April – 2-5 pm</p> <p><b>Marc Lawson – MCC</b>  Promotion of MCC Jobs page – MCC is an Armed Forces-friendly employer There are roles available which are remote or agile so no requirement for applicants to live in the area: <a href="https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/jobs-employment/">https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/jobs-employment/</a></p> <p>Feel free to share the email address (<a href="mailto:work4@monmouthshire.gov.uk">work4@monmouthshire.gov.uk</a>) for advice and support in applying for roles.</p>
<p>8. AOB</p>	<p>No other business was raised.</p>

9. Date of Next Meeting	Dates for the next meetings will be arranged during: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ June 2023</li><li>▪ December 2023</li></ul>
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