



WORKING FOR SCOTTISH VETERANS

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Chairman's Farewell Thoughts

In writing this short article for the Veterans Scotland Newsletter, it would be all too easy, since this is my last - indeed, my farewell contribution - to dwell upon the past.

Whilst I do claim the right to review some of the things we have achieved over the last few years, it would be remiss of me not to point out also the opportunities which now present themselves to Veterans Scotland and its member charities to better the plight of those veterans who so richly deserve our – and the Nation's – support.

Starting locally, the Pillar Structure, set in place over four years ago, has continued to provide both tangible and intangible benefits to those we support: in practical terms, we have a common housing application form, a good website and we are better able jointly to determine research priorities in order fully to understand fully our target clients. Less tangibly, the "working together" ethos of Veterans Scotland has benefited immensely our colleagues who work in our member charities: we share information, discuss issues of joint interest and obtain joint solutions in a better way than we did before.

Moreover, Veterans Scotland has clearly set out its stall as the coordinating body for Service and ex-Service Charities in Scotland. As you all know, I have insisted, strongly supported by the Veterans Scotland Executive Committee, that Veterans Scotland is there to advise, coordinate, encourage joint working and to represent the collective Scottish view to the UK and Scottish Governments. Veterans Scotland is most definitely not in the business of seeking to interpose itself between Scottish veterans' charities and government, nor do we seek to control or

dominate our individual member charities: Veterans Scotland is about "jointery" to use the military term, and I believe we have walked that particular tightrope with some skill over the last three-and-a-half years.

As you know, we now sit as full members by right of the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO) Executive in London, and we have at the same time built strong and independent links with the MOD's Pensions, Compensation and Veterans' Unit, as well as with the Scottish Government's Armed Forces and Veterans Issues Team. We are first point of call for matters affecting Scottish Veterans and our member charities, and we act as a clearing house; we disseminate virtually all that we receive, primarily in order to keep you informed of what is going on.

Looking to the future, I think things are going to get even more exciting. We have, of course, the sobering impact of casualties from Afghanistan, and many of my colleagues are working hard to assist in any way they can. Equally importantly, we are aware of long-term problems in the veteran cohort in Scotland around mental health, drug and substance misuse, unemployment and other social and medical issues. Again, I pay tribute to my colleagues in VS member charities who are grappling ably with the implications of these issues.

But the news is not all sad and depressing. We are fortunate to be in the middle of an upswing in public support of our Armed Forces not witnessed in over a generation: that deserved respect and affection rubs off onto we veterans also. The public generally is more interested in problems which affect our veterans, and people are more willing to give time and



"We are first point of call for matters affecting Scottish Veterans and our member charities."

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Chairman's Farewell Thoughts (cont...)

financial support to helping us to solve the challenges we face. The recent announcement of Big Lottery UK Funding for Service leavers and veterans is a case in point. You may also be interested to know that my colleagues and I at Veterans Scotland are working with the Big Lottery Fund (Scotland) to secure funding to assist our work with veterans.

I do need to say a few "thank you's". Whilst I pay tribute to the unstinting support I have received from all of my colleagues during my tenure, I want particularly to thank our President, Sir Alistair Irwin, for his sage advice and guidance, so freely given, and his encouragement to me when matters seemed to be too complex to solve. In addition, I want to thank Bob McFarlane, my trusty "right arm" whose work and dedication to the cause of veterans has been truly magnificent.

I believe now that I am handing over Veterans Scotland as an organisation that is "fit for purpose". As you know, we have just completed a strategic review of Veterans Scotland, and my successor will now take the outcome of that review and move it forward over the next weeks and months.

Finally, if you do not know already, I am handing over my chairmanship to Colonel Martin Gibson, lately chief executive of Erskine. Martin brings a wealth of experience to this role, and I could not think of a better person to take up the burden; I know you will give Martin all of your support and encouragement.

Farewell.



Ron Smith
Chairman

"Looking to the future, I think things are going to get even more exciting."



Our New Chairman COLONEL MARTIN GIBSON OBE DL

Martin Gibson was born in Edinburgh and educated at Fettes College, before joining The Royal Scots in 1965. After attending RMA Sandhurst he was commissioned into his Regiment in 1967, joining the 1st Battalion in Osnabruck, Germany.

Martin was both Adjutant and Commanding Officer of 1st Battalion The Royal Scots, commanding in the armoured infantry role in Germany and on operations in Northern Ireland. During his service he was lucky to soldier in Libya, Turkey, France, Germany, Denmark, Norway and the United States as well as in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He is a former Chief of Staff of the Army in Scotland. Martin won the Institute of Directors Scotland 2006 Voluntary Director of the Year Award.

Martin joins Veteran Scotland following a highly successful tenure as the CEO of Erskine. He brings to his new role a wealth of experience and knowledge about the Third Sector in Scotland particularly with respect to veterans affairs.

Martin is married to Lesley and lives in Edinburgh. They have a son and daughter.

His interests include gardening, travel, game shooting and following rugby.

Presidents View

As will be evident from the contents of this latest edition we have been through an interesting and productive time since the last newsletter.

There is a real sense that a maturing Veterans Scotland has now come of age. By any measure it has established itself as a major player in the veterans arena in Scotland, not for its own sake but for the general benefit of all the individual member charities. The approach by the BIG Lottery fund is just the latest (and arguably the most exciting) development that could not easily have been possible if VS had not been there to catch the ball on behalf of us all.

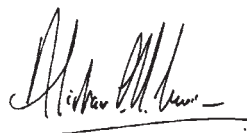
I feel it important to stress that VS has no ambitions for itself other than to do what it can for the collective cause. Indeed with only three part-time office bearers (President, Chairman and Administrator) it is in any case strictly limited in what it can undertake. In fact it has only been with the willing support and engagement of the individual members of the Executive Committee, and the Pillar heads in particular, that it has been possible to do so much. A continuing big thank you to all of them.

At the risk of being unnecessarily provocative, we have all noticed the slow but steady increase in new charities entering the arena. Some, such as Help for Heroes are seriously big fish; others are minnows, some of which are more perfectly formed than others. From one point of view there are already too many veterans charities, increasing the risk of overlap and donor fatigue and confusion; each new one could be said to be making things incrementally more difficult. From another point of view the newer charities can be seen as very good things bringing in new money and filling gaps in the provision of welfare. VS has no official fixed view on this and in any case there is no practical way of stopping new operations emerging even if we wanted to. But in reflecting on the new boys on the block, the more established charities might usefully ask themselves how it was

that collectively they had left gaps in welfare provision that others felt that they had to fill. I for one look forward to the day when every angle is properly covered by a combination of government and third sector provision, when those who step forward to help can use their enthusiasm and energy to add to the schemes already in place rather than creating new ones. The day will come all the sooner if we all, big and small alike, search out the gaps and take steps to plug them.

This newsletter is published more or less at the same time as our Chairman Ron Smith leaves us to take up an appointment in London. The logistics make it impossible for him to continue with VS and so with reluctance on both sides we bid him farewell. He takes with him our grateful thanks for his prodigious efforts on our behalf. We could not have had a better man to take us so effectively into our present position and he has done all of us proud. I know that you will all join me in wishing him well and in thanking him most warmly for a fine job well done. Because there is so much of great importance going on just now it was important to fill Ron's boots immediately; I am delighted to report that Colonel Martin Gibson OBE DL has accepted the Executive Committee's invitation to step in as Interim Chairman until later in the year. Colonel Gibson, lately Chief Executive of Erskine, is very familiar with the veterans scene and with very many of the players so he is very well placed to take forward the work initiated by Ron Smith. Welcome to the new Chairman.

So it is seconds out for the next round on the life of Veterans Scotland – good luck to us all.



Sir Alistair Irwin
President, Veterans Scotland



“Ron takes with him our grateful thanks for his prodigious efforts on our behalf”

Care

Overview

It's all change in the Care Pillar over the last six to nine months. Chairmanship of the Pillar moved from Martin Gibson to Jim Panton as part of their handover of the Chief Executive role at Erskine. At about the same time Combat Stress changed their representation in the group in the aftermath of Toby Elliot handing over his Chief Executive role, and Care Pillar responsibility, to David Hill. SSAFA Forces Help had also just replaced Gordon Lester with Cathy Walker, Deputy Controller – Branch Support, as a Director on the Veteran Scotland (VS) Board and member of the Care Pillar. Jerome Church remains in situ from BLESMA, although we were pleased to welcome their National Welfare Officer, Heather Nicholson, to the last Care Pillar meeting.

Further positive change is expected over the coming months as the report from the VS Strategy Group is adopted. The proposal within that very positively suggests a wider representation in the Care Pillar's work (potentially to be called the "Care Working Group"), and highlights Scottish War Blinded amongst others as possible additions.



Latest Activities

In the meantime, the most recent Care Pillar meeting took place early in March and for the first time broke south of the Border to convene at the Combat Stress HQ in Leatherhead. Thanks go to David Hill for hosting the meeting there and for the chance for some of those attending to have a short tour of their very impressive facility as well as seeing the plans for their upcoming re-developments. The following brief updates from the four organisations represented at the meeting were provided:

Combat Stress: As they approach the end of the activities linked to the 90th anniversary David Hill updated the group on their plans to launch a significant Capital Appeal, called "The Enemy Within", in mid-March. The main purpose of this appeal would be fund the expansion of their "Community Outreach" programme across the UK. The setup and implementation of their two outreach teams in Scotland (East and West Coast focused) is well underway, thanks to funding from the Scottish Government. The Combat Stress contract with the NHS in Scotland has now been in place for a year and progress with providing services under the contract is positive.

BLESMA: Heather Nicholson gave an update which highlighted the key role that BLESMA is playing in the recent review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) and their support to individuals who are appealing compensation awards. BLESMA are also providing some early and limited support to injured soldiers and families in Selly Oak and have welfare officer visits to Headley Court on a regular basis. They are also currently working on the challenge of ensuring that the latest State Of The Art (SOTA) Prosthetics are eventually made available to all limbless veterans.

SSAFA Forces Help: Cathy Walker highlighted the excellent support that their homes near Selly Oak and Headley Court are providing for families of injured

personnel – funded solely by SSAFA FH. They are also working with the Officers Association researching the wider requirements for transition support for personnel leaving the Armed Forces. The SSAFA FH Scottish Resources Committee (SRC) relationship with Central Office is constantly being looked at to ensure that the appropriate level of devolution is in place to recognise the differences that exist for SSAFA's services in Scotland. The SRC recently hosted a well attended reception at the Scottish Parliament to highlight 125 years of SSAFA activities.

Erskine: The Personnel Recovery Centre at Erskine's Edinburgh home, running the Pathfinder Trial for the Army Recovery Capability Programme throughout the UK, has now been running for over 6 months. After a slightly slow start in August 2009, early challenges were identified and the necessary adjustments made. Heading into 2010, the progress being made is very encouraging with the centre running at capacity. The provision of Care through the remaining 376 beds run by Erskine has seen a run of "very good" and

"The progress being made is very encouraging with the centre running at capacity."

"excellent" (the much sought after grade 6) assessments from the Care Commission as well as a Scottish Care Home Manager of the year award, in the last six months. An emphasis is also being placed onto the employment and disabled employment element of Erskine's work within the five "Social Firms" running on the Bishopton Estate. Plans for the re-building of the 56 Cottages at Bishopton are now well underway with the first six completed and occupied. A "Supported Transition" trial is taking place with the objective of linking the employment and cottage services in support of those just leaving the forces.

Veterans First Point

Since opening in April 2009, the Veterans First Point (V1P) project in Edinburgh is proving extremely popular as a support centre for veterans and their families, offering a wide range of social and welfare support and specialist mental health care and treatment for veterans.

The project, jointly funded by the Scottish Government, NHS Lothian and MoD has been able to assist veterans and their families with finding accommodation, exploring education and employment opportunities, giving advice on benefits and welfare as veterans and their families make the transition to civilian life.

Our specialist mental health team, which includes a veterans therapist, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, nurse and counsellor, offer tailored support for veterans experiencing a range of mental health problems and illnesses including stress, depression, sleeping disorders, overcoming anger and adjusting to war memories.

A further key to the success of V1P is our employment of veterans as peer support workers. The team of peer support workers are trained to use their own experiences to help and support other veterans who may be experiencing problems and difficulties.

The centre runs a daily drop in service **Monday to Friday 1pm to 4.30pm** where veterans can simply drop in to use computers, get advice and signposting information or meet with one of the peer support workers.

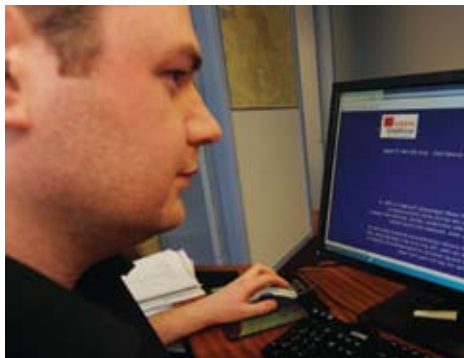
Our Internet site - **www.veteransfirstpoint.org.uk** provides a wide range of advice on all the services that veterans may require. Alternatively, contact the office on **0131 220 9920** for further information.



Army Recovery Centre: "Just resting – honest, Sarge!"

Information Empowers

A new website geared specifically to the needs of the military community is up and running, offering one-click access to over 1,200 support organisations that provide information on housing, homelessness, health, disability, employment and benefits.



StartHere is a valuable resource for case workers and individuals alike, being a gateway to a plethora of online information from the NHS; voluntary organisations; prisons, probation service as well as Armed Forces and veterans' charities.

The initiative is led by The Royal British Legion and includes Poppyscotland amongst its many partners from across the United Kingdom. The Royal British Legion recognised the need to streamline access to organisations that offer help to serving and ex-Serving personnel and their families.

Gary Gray, Head of Charitable Services at Poppyscotland, said, "Often the key to solving a problem is finding the right

information and organisation to help. StartHere provides an up-to-date map with clear and easy signposting so that people can find the relevant information simply, quickly and effectively. It gives the user choice on how to tackle the major issues in their lives and is the ultimate one-stop resource for busy case workers as well as individuals who may wish to look for available assistance themselves".

StartHere can be accessed on the following organisations' websites: Poppyscotland, The Royal British Legion, Service Personnel & Veterans Agency, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, Combat Stress, The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations and Veterans Scotland.

Civvy Street, Developing Veterans' Employment Potential

On return to civilian life, veterans have a number of important life decisions to make but their choice of employment is likely to be the most challenging and that which will have significant impact down the line.

Getting the right employment advice at the right time can make the difference between opting for the first available job, or holding out for the career of choice using the skills and experience gained in the Forces. For many the path to the right career will involve an element of re-training.

The recently launched Civvy Street website provides access to information on resettlement, learning and work for personnel who are leaving or have already left the Armed Forces, complementing the services of employment agencies like the Career Transition Partnership.

Civvy Street is not just for Service leavers; however, the site is open to spouses,

partners and working age dependants of anyone who has served, and offers useful information at any stage of working life, including:

- an interactive CV builder
- contact with a professional careers adviser
- online learning programmes
- access to funds to undertake training
- job search facilities, including an online careers fair

Unlike a number of national websites which give token reference to Scottish information, Civvy Street has a bespoke Scottish site which is updated by people with a local knowledge of training and employment issues for veterans.

Visit www.civvystreet.org

Civvy Street is a partnership initiative between The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland.



Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund Operations in Scotland

Scotland, largely because of its position in the north of the UK with easy access to sea lines of communication in the North Atlantic and North Sea, has been a key location from which to mount airborne operations since before the Second World War. This, coupled with relatively unrestricted low flying areas offers a prime location for fast jet operations.

Perhaps as a result of the excitement of flying, many RAF personnel are recruited from Scotland and following service retire back to their home areas. With large air force bases located at Leuchars, Kinloss, Lossiemouth and Prestwick, the retention of a Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund office in Scotland makes good sense. The Fund has operated from Edinburgh for over 50 years and the current Director also oversees Fund operations in Northern Ireland and Northern England as far south as the Humber.

Last year, the Fund donated **£40,000 to Scottish Veterans' Residences** to help provide flats in Gilmerton, Edinburgh. The Fund also donated **£100,000 to the Scottish Veterans' Garden City Association** to help provide housing for disabled veterans in Motherwell. SVGCA is the largest provider of disabled housing for veterans in the UK and the Fund has agreed, in principle, to make similar donations to SVGCA for the next four years to contribute towards their exciting new building programme.

The second largest donation ever made by the Fund was that of **£750,000 to Erskine** last year. This sum was a contribution towards the annual care costs of our RAF residents and towards the extension of the Erskine Edinburgh home that was opened a few months ago. As a result of all this support, Erskine agreed to name one of the wings, Trenchard House, after the founder of

the Royal Air Force, Lord Trenchard, whose grandson, the current Lord Trenchard, is now Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The RAF Benevolent Fund deals with over **7,500 cases** per year, spends **£500,000** on electrically powered vehicles, owns **260 Housing Trust properties** and has built and equipped **27 Child Care Centres on RAF stations** at a cost of over **£13 million** and spends **£2 million** annually on care home fees.

Recognising the changing needs of our serving personnel and veterans, we provide free relationship counselling for serving couples through **RELATE** and operate a fast track advice service on debt and money matters through **Citizens Advice Bureaux**. We have recently invested **£100,000** with Poppy Scotland to launch a similar service across Scotland.

Focussing on youth, we have, in partnership with Fife Council, contributed **£35,000** towards the building of a Multi User Games Area at Leuchars. We believe that by working to relieve stress at home base, we are helping to relieve stress in our people engaged in front line operations.

Delivering over **£20 million** of support each year, the RAF Benevolent Fund continues to set the pace in looking after the welfare needs of its RAF veterans and serving personnel. For more information, please contact:

Bob Kemp
Director Scotland
RAF Benevolent Fund
20 Queen Street
Edinburgh EH2 1JX



“Recognising the changing needs of our serving personnel and veterans, we provide free relationship counselling for serving couples through RELATE and operate a fast track advice service on debt and money matters through Citizens Advice Bureaux.”



Army Benevolent Fund - The Soldiers' Charity

ABF The Soldiers' Charity is the new name for a very old friend to soldiers, ex-soldiers and their families.

The Army Benevolent Fund had been in existence since 1944 successfully supporting those from the Army family who were in need of assistance but there was a growing awareness that in order to meet the needs of the future we had to shine up our image.

One of the problems was to gain the attention of serving soldiers as fundraisers and it was found that a majority were unaware of what the word benevolent actually meant.

They were unsure of what we actually did and how they could be involved in the work of the charity.

The answer was a new name and a new image but absolutely no change in what we do of providing assistance to soldiers, ex-soldiers and their families, in time of need.

ABF expects to spend nearly £600,000 in Scotland this year.

“One of the problems was to gain the attention of serving soldiers as fundraisers and it was found that a majority were unaware of what the word benevolent actually meant.”

The Maritime Charities Funding Group

While Seafarers UK, as the leading charity for the whole maritime community across the United Kingdom, sits on the Veterans Scotland executive representing Royal and Merchant Navy interests, it also plays a major role in the Maritime Charities Funding Group (MCFG), together with other large nautical organisations and charities such as Trinity House, the Merchant Navy Welfare Board and Nautilus UK.

Their vision is to ensure that they all share a common appreciation of the special needs of the country's seafaring communities, such that they can then target their grants most effectively. In

2006/7 they co-funded a major research programme to launch the 'Supporting Seafarers' Conference, the results of which have enabled them to design and resource other programmes to address generic need across the whole sector.

The MCFG has agreed to contribute £60,000 over three years to join PoppyScotland and the RAFBF in a major project offering advice and guidance to veterans, and this will ensure the inclusion of Merchant Navy personnel alongside their RN colleagues

Welfare Pathway - Fife Pilot

The Scottish Pilot of the Welfare Pathway was launched in Fife on 17th March. The Armed Forces Community Welfare Pathway is not a physical but a conceptual pathway, which provides the Armed Forces Community (all Service Personnel, veterans, their families and widow(er)s) with a means of more easily and effectively accessing the help and advice they may need.

The Pathway does not replace existing signposting mechanisms but seeks to reinforce them by ensuring that people don't slip through the net. Members of the Armed Forces Community seeking help and advice will be directed to the most appropriate area to meet their needs. Fife Council the contact number is – **08451 55 00 33**. This is the number for

“The Pathway does not replace existing signposting mechanisms but seeks to reinforce them by ensuring that people don't slip through the net.”

Housing Advice however, operators have been instructed to cascade calls accordingly within the Council if the enquiry is not related to housing matters.

National numbers for those seeking help and advice are:

National Point of Contact :

0800 0 22 33 66

In-Service

**RN
02392 583 806**

**ARMY
01722 436569**

**RAF
01494 496344**

**Ex Service Veterans UK
0800 169 2277**

Housing

Considerable work has been ongoing throughout the housing field over recent months both within individual member organisations and concurrently with the Scottish Government. Individual ex-service housing providers activities are shown below:

Scottish Veterans Residences (SVR) and Scottish Veterans Housing Association (SVHA)

There is general acceptance, supported by statistics from the Scottish Government, that there is a high preponderance of ex-service men and women presenting themselves as homeless to the local authorities in the west of Scotland.

In an endeavour to address this problem, SVHA through the good offices of the Glasgow Homeless Partnership has been in discussion with west of Scotland based local authorities and put forward a proposal to provide flats/houses on a core and cluster model with integrated 24 hour support available on site and based around a sustainable community ethos.

SVHA has identified a possible site for this proposed development in the east end of Glasgow and we are presently in discussions with City Property (Glasgow) LLP to identify a likely cost for the land (if possible for them to look at Planning Advice Notice 74 paragraph 21, which allows local authorities to grant the land to a charitable organisation at best free or at least at a reduced cost). As yet we have made no formal approaches to Glasgow City Council.

In an endeavour to identify the cost of developing this model and therefore be in a position to address its viability for us, we have drawn up a proposed model for the site in question and have produced a full cost survey by our Chartered Quantity Surveyors. The cost of the overall project, which could provide 52 one and two bedroom flats/houses for these vulnerable ex-service people, would be circa £6M.

As ever, the key to the success of this project is the funding of it. SVHA is not in a position to fund the complete development in isolation but with the use of its own reserves including the support of the ex-service charitable funds and trusts and would expect to be able to raise at least 60% of the project costs. On the assumption that this type of proposed development is viewed by the Scottish Housing Investment Division as meeting the criteria and current priority, and those local authorities in the west of Scotland see a need for such a development, SVHA would be seeking a Housing Association Grant (HAG) for the project for 40% of the build costs (circa £2.3M). In the overall pot of funding available this does not look a huge amount but we are acutely aware of the other housing pressures on local authorities

In the current financial climate it is unlikely that one individual local authority would be in a position to fund HAG for the whole project so as the benefit is for the generic west coast of Scotland, SVHA is seeking support to developing an agreement to Top Slice HAG funding for this project in order to make the funding available to allow this vital development to proceed.

Scottish Veterans Garden City Association Inc (SVGCA)

New Builds.

- The first 4 houses in Motherwell were completed in December 2008 and were officially opened in May 2009. They comprised a block of 4 2-bedroomed flats. All four flats have sufficiently wide access internally for wheelchair users and the two upper flats have special reinforcement in the stairwells to support chairlifts. The occupants comprise a young married ex-Argyll in his early twenties severely injured in Afghanistan, a veteran who lost an eye and part of a leg in an accident and 2 other veterans, all of

whom have created a great spirit of neighbourliness and who all go out fishing together once a week in the summer. They have also created excellent harmony with the locals in the District comprising residents of the neighbouring tower blocks among others.

- SVGCA converted two void houses in Airdrie to provide for full wheelchair access and one of the new tenants here had previously lost a leg. They plan to build a further two new houses in the garden ground behind these Airdrie houses, commencing this summer. The planning application goes before Committee on 25th February and they are reasonably optimistic of a satisfactory outcome.
- They have made huge progress with the 10 single floor flats in Scone. These comprise 5 ground-floor and 5 1st floor 2-bedroomed flats. Handover is planned for 29th March 2010. The houses were inspected by Lt. General Sir Alastair Irwin and Major David Noble (President and Chairman of Poppyscotland respectively). Poppyscotland had provided special funding arrangements to assist with the build cost. Upstairs flats all have wet-floor showers and again the stairwell walls are capable of



supporting chairlifts.

- The Penicuik contract for 4 houses in the gardens of the existing 4 SVGCA houses was awarded in October and work commenced in December amid legal issues on specific location of boundaries. Progress has been sorely hampered by the snow over the year-end and New Year. The build programme will provide 2 2-bedroomed bungalows with a pair of semidetached 2-bedroomed bungalows between them.
- In Dundee, progress on the refurbishment of all 36 houses restarted in October with 2 houses and the contract for the next 3 has just been awarded. The remaining 14 houses include plans to convert 4 of the semi-detached 2 and 3 bedroomed houses into wheelchair accessible homes. This will bring the percentage of SVGCA houses with proper wheelchair access to over 5% compared to under 2% in 2007.
- The next phase is likely to involve provision of about 5 houses in the Highland/Morayshire area and negotiations are progressing with a contractor to possibly allocate land to us for 5 houses. At the same time, approaches to Defence Estates via conference call meeting at Kinloss have provided them with our note of interest in being allocated a site formerly occupied by houses on the

RAF Kinloss Airbase, but has since been decommissioned and sterilised of services. The DE are insistent on achieving market value for this transaction, but there is evidence of DE gifting land to SPACES in Catterick for a very similar project.

House Condition Surveys

- All houses in the Association's ownership which are managed in small groups by local Committees, are being subjected to condition surveys in line with the requirement by the Scottish Government for the Social Housing Sector's preparation for the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) achievement by 2015. Whilst this is voluntary for the Private Sector, it makes sense to bring our housing to an equitable standard to the SHQS to minimise voids caused through discrimination against poor quality of housing.

Haig Housing Trust (HHT)

Haig Homes as Registered Social Landlord in England found that the regulatory demands from that status were increasingly in conflict with their charitable charter. This was further complicated by the writ only regulatory in England but being used as a method, albeit inappropriately, to exercise control over housing in Scotland, Wales,

Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. HHT was established therefore to provide a vehicle which repeated the charitable objects of Haig Homes broadly but modernised and more free to pursue them without the previous inappropriate restrictions.

One immediate objective was to remove existing housing out with England from Haig Homes into HHT. The Transfer of the Edinburgh and Glasgow estates to HHT has been completed. The Scotland Committee is now part of the HHT management and answers to its Board.

More broadly, HHT is able to consider a range of means of delivering its charitable objectives other than simply owning and letting housing stock. In London for example, as a Pilot Scheme, a small block of single room flats has been rented to sub-let to single service leavers from the Armed Forces to help them to adapt to civilian life and to find work. Limited backup from HHT is mainly pointing them to where the help they need can be addressed by the appropriate ex-service or public organisation. Again as a policy of identifying and tackling specific needs eg the pressure to house Gurkha families, and given the expected scale of that demand, may have to consider an increase in the owned estate, perhaps in commercial partnership.

Erskine Houses



Re-building Programme

Erskine has recently committed to an extensive rebuilding programme for the existing cottages on the Erskine estate.

“Work is expected to complete by the end of 2013.”

Work will be undertaken in a six phase programme and is expected to complete by the end of 2013.

Phase 1 was commenced in April 2009 (photographs enclosed) with the building of six new three apartment properties to enable the subsequent phases of the project. The work was undertaken by Mactaggart & Mickel and was completed on 24 October 2009. Veterans moved from existing properties in early November 2009 to allow demolition ahead of the commencement of Phase 2 in April 2010.

The 6 semi-detached houses will provide dining kitchens, excellent levels of storage including built-in wardrobes in all the bedrooms and south facing living rooms with large windows to maximise the amount of sunlight. Planned in accordance with the principles of Housing for Varying Needs, the new houses will provide barrier free access to the front and back doors, level access wet floor shower room and all rooms have been designed to accommodate furniture and other associated activity spaces.

Erskine's commitment to replacing all existing occupied properties has been made possible as a result of a £400K grant from Scottish War Blinded and a £3 million legacy from the estate of the late Mrs McCallum. The Phase 1 properties are located in McCallum Way in recognition of the legacy funding for the project.

The environmental impact has been taken into consideration and as a result the new homes will be constructed from a breathing wall timber frame with recycled newspaper insulation and have A-rated condensing boilers to help keep fuel bills low and reduce carbon emissions. There

is also a whole house ventilation system which will provide fresh, filtered air into each home.

Erskine's Director of Operations Keith Taylor said: "This project demonstrates Erskine's commitment to provide state of the art housing to veterans. As our Service personnel display the highest levels of bravery and courage on operations throughout the world it is only right that we, as a military charity, are able to provide quality accommodation should they need us in the future."

Housing Strategy

Following the recent review of Erskine's Housing Strategy, a pilot project is currently being introduced with the intention of making Erskine's housing provision more relevant to the needs of younger Veterans and their families.

The Supported Transition Project (STP) was introduced in February 2010 with the aim of helping Veterans who are about to leave, or have just left, the forces and who face significant barriers to successful transition to civilian life. This may be through either not qualifying for resettlement support due to length of service or by virtue of disability or other disadvantage/vulnerability.

A small number of existing properties are being used for this project and will be allocated to qualifying Veterans, and their families. Allocations will be for a period not exceeding two years during which time Erskine will offer training and/or employment within its Social Firms along with support in other areas where required and signposting to services provided by other ex-Service charities and agencies.

Erskine will be allocating properties under the STP from mid March 2010 and anyone meeting the allocation criteria can apply directly to the Project Coordinator, Malcolm Rodger, on 0141 814 4692.

New Scottish Housing Bill

Veterans Scotland is represented on the Ministerial Sounding Board for this new legislation and already several changes to the Bill have been accepted to the overall

benefit of the ex-service and serving Armed forces community. Further discussions are ongoing and a full brief will be disseminated to all members in due course.

Scottish Housing Guide Leaflet

This guide has been developed for people leaving the Armed Forces and ex-service personnel. Veterans Scotland have been represented at all levels in developing this guide and it is now on general distribution and on the appropriate websites. It poses questions that people are likely to ask and gives solutions and how to get further information along with the various contact details necessary. A short example of the tenor of the Leaflet is shown below:

'Deciding where to live is one of the most important choices you and your family will need to make on leaving the armed forces. It is never too early to think about where you will set up home. Whether you are due to leave in a year, a couple of months or have already left, there is support out there to help you. This leaflet sets out your housing options in Scotland and answers some of the questions you might have. It also gives you information about where you can go for further advice and support.'

I'm not sure what my housing options are

Your options depend on where you want to live, your needs and your situation. These options could include renting a property privately or through a council, housing association (sometimes known as a registered social landlord) or an ex-service charity, or buying a property.

How do I apply for a council or housing association house?

You need to fill in a housing application form. You can get this from the council or housing association. Your council will be able to give you a list of housing associations in their area. In some areas you only have to fill out one application form for all social housing in that area, in others you may need to fill out more than one.

At the end of the leaflet are all the contact details for whatever option a

The Firm Base Forum

Defence is firmly a Reserved Matter (where the power to make laws and policy has been retained by the UK Parliament at Westminster) but a range of other issues relating to the Armed Forces and their people are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

These include amongst others: Health, Housing, Education, Social Work, Sport and the Arts, the Courts and the Legal system and the Environment. All of these are important to those serving in the Armed Forces in Scotland, their dependants and those who have retired from the Services in Scotland (the Veterans) whether gaining access to a doctor or welfare services, securing a school place for children or simply going about daily business.

In early 2008, the UK Government asked all departments and the Devolved Administrations what more could be done to demonstrate the Nation's commitment to the Armed Forces and gratitude for

their service and sacrifice. The Service Personnel Command Paper (SPCP) set out a comprehensive framework for further work. The SPCP looked specifically towards ending any disadvantage to the Services, their families and Veterans; while countering any difficulties stemming from the requirement for Servicemen to remain mobile and identifying areas where special treatment might be needed. Second, SPCP set out how the Nation would better support and recognise those who have been wounded in the service of their country. For the last 2 years, substantial effort has gone into delivering against the vision of SPCP.

As part of this endeavour, a number of mechanisms exist for the three Services to interact with Scottish Government on matters of mutual interest. Senior Officers of the three Services formally briefed the Scottish Government last year and there is an aspiration to make this an annual event. Routine business is conducted

between Officials and the Services' Headquarters. In addition, building on the operational framework the Army call the 'Firm Base' (A secure environment, at home and overseas, that sustains the Armed Forces, enables training for and deployment on operations and ensures the consent and support of the public and host nations), the 'Firm Base Forum' provides the opportunity for formal dialogue and detailed work on a flexible agenda, addressing issues encountered by Scottish Government and the Services in Scotland. As we stand, the Firm Base Forum meets twice a year in October and April under the chairmanship of one of the Single Service Heads (in annual rotation) in company with representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces' and Veterans' Issues Team (AFVIT) from Scottish Government, the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association (RFCA), Veterans Scotland and other subject matter experts as necessary.

General Information

Armed Forces day celebrations will be held at various venues in Scotland on dates around the 26th June - which is the official AFD.

RBLS TRAVEL AID

The RBLS is promoting an initiative called TravelAid to enable relatives and next of kin of injured servicemen and women living in Scotland to have easier access to their loved ones while they are being treated in hospitals in England. Funding has been secured from the Scottish Veterans Fund for the production and publication of a brochure which will be made available through RBLS Unit Welfare officers, Chaplains and anywhere else necessary to publicise the initiative.

Scottish Veterans Fund

The Scottish Government has made awards to the following projects from the Scottish Veterans Fund for the year 2010/11:

- OA Scotland/RFEA – web based employment networking forum
- Lady Haig Poppy Factory – Interactive mobile museum to educate children on the value of remembrance.
- Poppyscotland – to fund a conference to discuss and highlight the problems affecting disabled and vulnerable ex servicemen and woman seeking employment.
- Poppyscotland – phase 3 of the "Sowing the Seeds" education project.
- Scottish Veterans Residences – to celebrate through a remembrance service 125 years of service to Scottish Veterans.
- Mark Wright Project – outdoor activity programme

- Thistle Foundation – Veterans lifestyle management courses
- Erskine – Supported transition to Civvy street pilot programme.
- RBLS – VeteransAid brochure.
- RBLS – War Memorial project and competition in schools.
- Veterans Scotland – Final phase of the "Veterans Hub" project

New general Secretary at RBLS

George Ross has been appointed as General Secretary of the Royal British Legion Scotland in March. George retired from the King's Own Scottish Borderers in 1994 and has worked for RBLS since then in a variety of positions. He brings to his new position a wealth of experience in Veterans Affairs which can only be to the benefit of the veterans community in Scotland.