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News from the Chairman

As is always the case, activities continue at their usual frenetic pace. We continue to work closely with colleagues in the Scottish Government and the MOD on veterans' matters, and we are undertaking a strategic review of Veterans Scotland.

Key points include the need to persuade the Scottish Government to continue with the Scottish Veterans' Fund after the present tranche of cash runs out

next year, the increasingly-important work around the so-called 'welfare pathway' (there will be some announcements on this topic later this year) and need to report at the AGM on the progress of the review of Veterans Scotland.



Ron Smith
Chairman

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Nautical Welfare Guide

As some readers may recall Seafarers UK launched the Nautical Welfare Guide back in October at an evening reception at Portcullis House, Westminster.

The online version of the Nautical Welfare Guide has now been produced and is available via the Seafarers UK website www.seafarers-uk.org/nautical-welfare-guide. The guide has been produced under the auspices of the Maritime Charities Funding Group (MCFG), which comprises Seafarers UK, The Merchant Navy Welfare Board, Seamen's Hospital Society, Numast Welfare Funds, ITF Seafarers Trust Fund and the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

These organisations have come together to progress a number of initiatives which will benefit the whole maritime community and to signpost the various forms of help available to Seafarers.

Director General Barry Bryant said, "The guide is an invaluable resource for organisations that come into contact with seafarers. They now have at their fingertips an up-to-date array of charities

that support a range of needs. Research has shown that the number of seafarers needing charitable help is set to rise – this guide will help charity staff find the right type of help when it is needed."

From now on the online version of the Nautical Welfare Guide will be the primary method by which you can search for information on the UK Maritime Charity community.

Veterans Scotland Key Dates

Veterans Scotland AGM
15 October

MoD consultation paper
'The Nation's Commitment' reports
31st October



"The guide is an invaluable resource for organisations that come into contact with seafarers."

Improving Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities

Poppyscotland's recent research into the employment needs of disabled and vulnerable veterans indicates that some ex-Service men and women face significant barriers in their attempts to access employment on exiting the Forces. Those struggling with physical and mental illness could be considered to be doubly disadvantaged.

The study, believed to be the first of its kind in the UK revealed a serious shortage of specialist advice for Service leavers and a lack of support in how to claim benefits. In addition it shows that Scottish veterans are more disadvantaged than their counterparts in England and Wales, being: 10% more likely to become homeless, 8% more likely to have mental health problems, 5% more likely to have financial problems and 3% more likely to struggle with alcohol problems.

The report contains a number of recommendations to improve employability services for vulnerable and disabled veterans. Poppyscotland will work with colleagues from Veterans Scotland, the MOD and the Scottish Government to create a work plan to take this work forward.

“Scottish veterans are more disadvantaged than their counterparts in England and Wales”

The full report is available online at www.poppyscotland.org.uk or telephone **0131 5501568** for a copy of the executive summary.



Forgotten Pensions



In the current climate of credit crunches and the rising costs of living, are you getting all they are entitled to?

Veterans who have served in the Armed Forces since 1975 and did not qualify for an immediate pension may be entitled to a Preserved Pension.

Background

Prior to 6 April 1975 there was no provision for a preservation of pension benefits and service personnel who left the Armed Forces had to have completed 16 years from age 21 (Officers) or 22 years from age 18 (Other ranks) to be eligible for a pension. Those who left before that date, without completing the above criteria, had no pension entitlement unless they were medically retired.

The rules changed on 06 April 1975 for pensions to be preserved for payment at age 60 for all those discharged over the age of 26 with a minimum of 5 years service. On 06 April 1988, the qualifying period was reduced from 5 to 2 years and the age criterion

was dropped, in 1978. Preserved pensions have to be claimed at age 60 or at age 65 if service began after 5 April 2006.

Early Payment

Preserved Pensions may be paid early, subject to consideration by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA), if a Veteran has become permanently unable to work full-time, in any capacity, through ill-health, and this condition will continue until preserved pension age. Early payment of the pension may be subject to review and stopped if it is considered that the criterion for payment was no longer met.

For more information on preserved pensions visit www.veterans-uk.info To find out if they are entitled to a pension, veterans should call the **JPAC Enquiry Service** on **0141 224 3600** or email JPAC@spva.mod.uk

Uncharted Territory: The Mental Well Being of Scotland's Veterans

In May Poppyscotland and the Scottish Association for Mental Health jointly hosted a conference at Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh to raise awareness of the mental health problems faced by veterans in Scotland. The event was the first of its kind and was sponsored by the Scottish Government. At the event Alex Neil MSP launched 'Life Force', a guide for those who come into contact with veterans through their work.

The aim of the conference was to raise awareness, share expertise and help develop services for veterans and their families throughout Scotland. Speakers from a range of organisations, including the Scottish Government, the Ministry of Defence, the NHS and veterans' charities highlighted the range of psychological issues ex-Servicemen and women may face after returning from the Forces, as

well as providing guidance on the kind of support and mental health care that these veterans require. Two veterans, William Sutherland and Steve Beedie, addressed the conference to share their own experiences of mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Copies of 'Life Force' can be obtained from the secretary of Veterans Scotland on request.

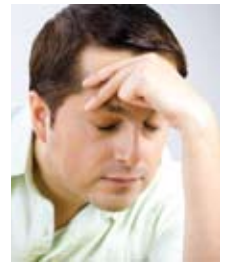
Helping Veterans Overcome Alcohol Dependency

Veterans in Inverclyde who experience problems through persistent alcohol misuse can now access the specialist support and advice they need at the recently established Gateways Project in Greenock.

Gateways; a joint venture between Poppyscotland and the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) employs a dedicated Veterans' Bridgeworker to help ex-Servicemen and women access alcohol support services to meet their specific needs and help bring about positive change in their drinking behaviour.

Billy Watson, SAMH Chief Executive said, "We know that many ex-servicemen and women find it difficult to readjust to civilian life, which can make them more likely to turn to alcohol and drugs as a way of coping. The pilot service in Inverclyde will support veterans in their recovery from alcohol problems and provide ourselves and Poppyscotland with the information we need to shape the future of veterans' services throughout Scotland"

The Gateways Project is at **7/8 Broomhill Way, Greenock PA15 4HE** Telephone **01475 806013**.



Canine Partners

Canine Partners is a relatively new member of Veteran Scotland. The charity provides assistance dogs for people with disabilities, most of whom are in wheelchairs. One such person is ex-service personnel Julia who was partnered with the aptly named Sarge in 2006.



Julia says, "Now three years later we are an expert team, everyone in the village I live knows him. They don't see the wheelchair anymore they just see the dog. Conversations get started and I feel proud to tell people what Sarge can do and don't feel self conscious anymore about my disability.

"Having Sarge as a Canine Partner has transformed my life totally! The medical condition that I have causes me to have great pain in my back and legs. Before Sarge I would lie in bed and not get up due to the pain.

"I was medically retired because of my condition, with Sarge I have been able to

re-start a Psychology degree which I have now finished. I also teach IT skills to other disabled adults on a voluntary basis at a local college. I certainly could not have done this without his support."

Canine Partners would welcome applications from anyone within the veterans' community who feel they would be assisted by having a canine partner or who would like to volunteer their time and energy to this wonderful charity. Please contact **Annemarie Devlin** on **08454 811915** or

Scotland@caninepartners.co.uk. For more information or to apply online please go to **www.caninepartners.co.uk**.

New Flats Fit For Heroes Opened in Edinburgh



Nine outstanding new one bedroom flats for Veterans are being opened today by the Housing and Communities Minister, Alex Neil MSP in Gilmerton, South Edinburgh. The flats, developed by Scottish Veterans' Residences (SVR) and Hillcrest Housing Association will provide high quality, affordable housing for veterans.

"If Scottish Veterans hadn't been there, I would be dead by now", Donald is quite clear about where he would be without SVR. He thinks his only option would have been suicide. "SVR helped me to calm down, find work and now a house."

"I got a lot of support from the staff and my fellow residents, many of them had been through similar experiences in their lives... Everybody fits in at SVR, you notice when people are down, it is a big family which is helpful when you first arrive."

Donald served for nine years with the Second Battalion Scots Guards seeing active service in the Falklands Campaign in 1982. Donald struggled to adjust to life after leaving the Army in 1984. "I came to Whitefoord House in 1995, I had nowhere else to go. When I came to Whitefoord House I had problems with aggression and post traumatic stress from my time in the Falklands. I got a lot of support from the staff and my fellow residents, many of them had been through similar experiences in their lives."

In 2005 Donald moved from a room in the residence to an independent flat at Whitefoord House, where the support of the SVR staff

"The tenants at Gilmerton are a mixture of couples and single men and women, from all parts of the country. They each have their own story to tell."



was still available, and now he finds that newer residents often come to him with their problems. "Everybody fits in at SVR, you notice when people are down, it is a big family which is helpful when you first arrive."

The flats have been developed in partnership with Hillcrest Housing Association from the ruined stable block on the site of a former nursing home owned by SVR. With the aid of a housing association grant and financial support from The Scottish War Blinded, The RAF Benevolent Fund and Seafarers UK, SVR and Hillcrest have created a development of outstanding flats which are available to the veterans' community at a very affordable rent.

The tenants at Gilmerton are a mixture of couples and single men and women, from all parts of the country. They each have their own story to tell.

Donald is now ready to make a break away from Whitefoord House altogether and is looking forward to moving in to a smart new flat with a garden. He commented "I can't wait to start my new life. For me this is like emigrating from being a soldier to being a civilian. I'm looking forward to dealing with life by myself, although I know there is back-up there if I need it. I'm finally ready to be a civvy."

Housing and Communities Minister Alex Neil said:

"The Scottish Government is doing all it can to help our war veterans, heroes that deserve our lasting gratitude.

"Through their sacrifice we take for granted the freedoms they won for us, often at a terrible cost.

"This new housing development by Scottish Veterans Residences will allow these brave men and women to have a comfortable, affordable home."

Houses for Heroes Appeal

The month of May saw a number of key events for the Houses for Heroes Appeal.

On 5 May the ground was broken for the start of Phase 2 of the Appeal, the build of Poppy Court the ten new flats being built on Association-owned land at New Scone just to the North East of Perth.

The name Poppy Court has been agreed by Perth and Kinross District Council to recognise the massive support to the Appeal, and to this phase in particular, from Poppyscotland. Other major donors to this phase, and to who we are enormously grateful, are The Robertson Trust, The Gannochy Trust, The Charles Hayward Foundation and The Percy Bilton Trust. The flats are being built by A & J Stephen (Builders) Ltd of Perth as part of an affordable housing scheme

and are due to be completed and be ready for occupation in May 2010.

On 16 May Lord Selkirk of Douglas, the President of the Association, assisted by Mrs Mary Sweeney, Secretary of our North Lanarkshire District Committee, formerly opened Hamilton Court, the four flats built at Motherwell to a very high standard by Ross & Laidlaw and Sons Ltd of Rutherglen as Phase 1 of the Appeal.

The successful completion of this phase was only made possible by the support of, and donations from, Scottish War Blinded, The MacRobert Trust, Poppyscotland and the three Service Charities, Seafarers UK, The Army Benevolent Fund and The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund.

On 21 May a Tender Board met to open the tenders received for Phase 4a, the full refurbishment and alteration to wheelchair standard of two 1950s bungalows owned by the Association in Airdrie. Work is planned to start in July with completion in October and to be followed by Phase 4b, the building of two new bungalows in the extensive gardens to the rear.



Cross Party Group Update

Network of local champions to be established

The Cross-Party Group has written an open letter to leaders of all councils in Scotland to propose the idea of appointing a 'Veterans' Champion' for each council area. The Champion would serve as a link for veterans, veterans' charities, the CPG, Parliament and Government to create a more interconnected and robust system of support for veterans. We are happy to report that this proposal has received widespread support, with many councils already suggesting names and nominating councillors. The newly appointed Veterans' Champions will also be invited to join us in the Parliament in the autumn for an inaugural event that will be a reception in conjunction with the 2009 Scottish Poppy Appeal.

Recent Action on Housing

On behalf of the Cross Party Group, Jeremy Purvis, MSP, submitted an FOI request to all local authorities to enquire into their treatment of veterans.

It was found that despite Poppy Scotland's report that two thirds of homeless veteran housing applications were from veterans who had left the service more than 5 years prior, only three local authorities ask the applicants if they have previously served in the Armed Forces. Therefore, while many local authorities place service members leaving tied accommodation in a priority status, the majority of veterans in need of accommodation are not qualified for this.

In addition, zero local authorities have advice staff specifically trained to give advice to veterans.

It is therefore doubtful that the "careful consideration [that] should be given to assessing the potential vulnerability of any applicant with a service background" that the Government advised in its 2009 circular is actually being applied and there is an increased chance that vulnerable veterans may be missing out on being given priority status, which they are entitled to.



"zero local authorities have advice staff specifically trained to give advice to veterans"



The Unique Nature of Service

Cross Party Group Submission

The unique nature of military service is such that it cannot be considered 'just another job.' When thinking of sacrifices made by military personnel, many outside of the military family only see the threat to one's life that is present in combat. There are, however, many other sacrifices that are made that are unique to military service and should be taken into account when supporting veterans in their civilian roles.

"The unique nature of military service is such that it cannot be considered 'just another job'."

Military personnel not only risk their lives to voluntarily fill a role that the majority of citizens are either unwilling or unable to fulfil, but they also give up certain civilian rights, such as the right to overtime pay, form a trade union or federation, and to take an active part in the affairs of any political organisation, party or movement. In addition, once one has served there is always a liability of being recalled to military service (and sent to war) even after retirement from the service and transfer to civilian status.

It is these sacrifices, in addition to the fact that service men and women often encounter circumstances that can later be detrimental to their physical and mental health (as well as their families'), that should oblige the

nation to show its gratitude and appreciation by ensuring that the well-being of veterans and their families is a top priority through various benefit mechanisms.

This has been done to an extent as priority health services have been given to veterans whose ailments are related to their service. Additionally, the Scottish Government has issued guidance on the treatment of veterans in applications for social housing, which provides priority status to veterans who are made vulnerable as a result of leaving the Armed Forces. While these provisions are taking care of veterans who have been disadvantaged as a result of their service, the Cross-Party Group believes that it is not adequate in honouring all veterans for their service. In addition, the CPG discovered that only 7.5% of councils offer concessions based on one's veteran status.

Therefore, we recommend that the Government, taking into full consideration the unique nature of military service and the sacrifices made by service men and women, revise its guidance on housing so that one's veteran status will act as a 'tiebreak' when competing for social housing with a person who has an equivalent allocation of application points. We also would look to the Government to encourage councils to give concessions on things such as bus passes, etc. to veterans.



Gardening Leave

Work on the Stovehouse Repair Project is due to start next month and Gardening Leave have employed Major (Rtd) Hugh (Stevie) McAulay of 6 SCOTS as Clerk of Works.

The Stovehouse, an 84 metre long Victorian greenhouse has been leased by Gardening Leave for 25 years and is situated in the Ornamental Gardens at Auchincruive where veterans from Hollybush House, the Combat Stress treatment centre come to help grow vegetables for the kitchens at Hollybush, and tend Scotland's only National Collection of poppies.

Repairing the Stovehouse will be a 'team effort' and veterans, volunteers and professional tradesmen such as glaziers, will be joined by serving personnel (tomorrow's veterans) when operational duties allow, to help get the Stovehouse wind and watertight so Gardening Leave's veterans can use it for painting, woodwork, growing bonsai trees and other therapeutic activities during their time at Gardening Leave.

Follow our progress at www.gardeningleave.org.

