

Minutes of All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Reserve Forces and Cadets held in Committee Room 17 at at 1700 hours on 18 March 2014

Guest Speakers: Major General Kevin Abraham, Director General Army Reform and Major General Ranald Munro, Deputy Commander Land Forces.

Attendance:

Julian Brazier MP - Chairman James Gray MP - Vice-Chair Madeleine Moon MP - Vice-Chair Lord Crathorne Lord Freeman Lord Rogan James Arbutnot MP Penny Mordaunt MP Andrew Selous MP Sarah Newton MP Julian Lewis MP Tobias Ellwood MP Thomas Docherty MP Jack Lopresti MP	Major General Kevin Abraham (DGAR) Major General Ranald Munro (DCLF) Brigadier Mark van der Lande – Head Reserve Forces & Cadets (Hd RF&C) Lieutenant Colonel Jason Carr – CGS Office Johnny Longbottom – Chief of Staff, Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust Clerks: Colonel (Retd) Hugh Purcell - Honorary Clerk Kate Peyton
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The Chairman welcomed Major General Abraham, Director General Army Reform and Major General Munro, Deputy Commander Land Forces (the senior reservist in the Army). Each would speak for five minutes on how implementation of the Army 2020 Plan was progressing; points from the floor would follow.

DGAR started with the need to distinguish between Regular Army cuts and revitalisation and betterment of the Army Reserve, the latter having logic and evidence behind it, which justified it in its own right. It was the right thing to do in the circumstances envisaged in Army 2020. Military forces provided military capability, a combination of Manning, Equipment, Training and Sustainment (METS) underpinned by a common ethos and all four elements needed addressing in order to deliver a revitalised capable Reserve as set out in the Independent Commission’s Report.

Significant money had already been invested re-equipping the volunteer reservist with uniform, equipment, weaponry and vehicles and ensuring the right kit was available for training. There had been a major reset of how they intended to train reservists individually and, importantly, collectively in companies or battalions, against the redesigned tasks and liabilities that would potentially fall on the Army Reserve as part of the Army 2020 design. Army 2020 envisaged the delivery of integration through a pairing mechanism that would generate structure, resilience and mass, either in training or on operations. Training constituted a significant part of the offer to the volunteer part-time soldier and new opportunities had already been provided for them to develop as part-time professionals and around 24 company/sub-unit overseas exercises had been conducted in places such as Kenya with more being run this year. This constituted a major new offer in terms of location, type of training and the opportunity to train alongside their paired Regular counterpart.

Sustainment was a different proposition, as a significant proportion of reservists had to balance the needs of civil employment with their military part time employment and ‘families’ who were more dispersed than in Regular units. Managing this, as laid out in the White Paper, required a significant reset in the way employers were engaged.

Manning was a necessary condition to delivering a revitalised and better Amy Reserve, but equipment, training and sustainment were just as important. The target to grow to 30k trained soldiers by the end of the FY 2018 was ambitious and the Defence Secretary had placed an incremental growth profile before Parliament (as a written statement) in December 2013; innovative ways were now being sought to achieve it.

The Chairman thanked DGAR, who handed over to DCLF.

DCLF having visited training, now had anecdotal and empirical evidence regarding METS. The message he was receiving was that it was getting better at all levels and reservists could already see improvements in areas such as overseas training exercises, equipment and vehicles. They could also see that they were now a valued part of the integrated Army moving towards Army 2020. It had been unfortunate that recruitment had begun against the background of Army redundancies and the recovery from Afghanistan and Germany, but there was now clear evidence of green shoots.

The first operational pairing between the London Regiment and the Irish Guards in Cyprus was going well and he would see their integration happening on the ground for himself when he visits in May. A cohort of High Readiness Reserves (Signals) had been mobilised for the floods and 7 Rifles, who had been en route to train on Salisbury Plain, had turned back willingly to help, using man training days i.e. without the need for formal mobilisation. This was good use of local reservists who wanted to be used to help local people. 230 reserves were currently being prepared for Afghanistan.

There was confidence that the Recruiting Partnership with Capita would reach the 2500 total inflow requirement this year. The numbers had been re-profiled to be more realistic and to build momentum towards 30k by 2018. The application process had been simplified in terms of the access to the website and simplified forms and the successful regional pilot run before Christmas was continuing this year. Applicants could visit an Army Reserve Centre, be taken through the electronic application process and then booked into a selection centre. What was taking 79 days had been reduced to a few hours and further modifications were ongoing.

Other news was that the Commander Land Forces (CLF) had recently set out his intent regarding Basing, which recognised the need for a more pragmatic approach march to the target in order to avoid possible instances of self-harm.

Visitors to Kenya had seen Regular/Reserve integration, e.g., 3 PWR and 1 R ANGLIAN, going well and reports from the Regular and the Reserve Commanding officers about achieving CT Level 2 training were positive.

The Royal Artillery was ensuring that reservists could fire during their two week camp and that Combat Support and Combat Service Support capability directors had introduced two-week consolidated reserve courses, which in many cases were designed to be integrated with Regular and Reserve attendance. This was a huge and important step forward in professionalising the Reserve which should not be underestimated.

The Army is being pragmatic about Sustainment and pushing the policy envelope to make sure they could deliver the capability spoken about by General Abraham; an example was the four reservists currently on the regular troop commander course in Bovington. In sum, much was happening with METS to enable 30k Phase 2 trained reservists to join and to build mutual Regular / Reserve confidence in an integrated army, but there was still a requirement to inform the public what the Reserve was about and the role of the Army going forward in the post-Afghanistan period.

The Chairman thanked DCLF and introduced Brigadier Mark van der Lande and Lieutenant Colonel Jason Kerr to the group.

Sarah Newton MP, encouraged by the presentations, asked how they would deliver the different approach needed to reservists' mental health and possible post-traumatic stress. A second question concerned the loss of the Rifles base in Truro, which removed the opportunity for people in Cornwall to serve the country in their Army. Although encouraged that there might be flexibility, she underlined the importance of a review as the proposals for people in Devon and Cornwall were unworkable and this risked losing the keen and the good who would serve future generations. **DCLF** responded that there was opportunity within the CLF intent for units to prove that they could recruit as far as the market would bear. Proof of the ability to recruit could result in a pragmatic refinement to the direction of travel, a refinement that was not a U-turn. **The Chairman** added that decisions to close Centres had been thought through using robust criteria; however it will be interesting to see how the plan evolves to changing circumstances. On mental health, **DCLF** said that despite King's College evidencing the rates of mental illness within the Army being lower than in the general population, they were working to produce a pathway for the Regulars and Reserves which would ensure everyone was looked after physically or mentally and no one fell through any cracks. **DGAR** added that they had to reduce the number of transitions needed for a reservist to mobilise. It was more demanding and complex than for a Regular who lived within a battalion and a reservist often had to transition from employment and family to a unit that was not their own unit, then reverse the process when leaving.

James Gray MP was delighted by the news on METS, but thought a high percentage of reservists were not fully deployable, which meant starting from a lower base than first thought. He also questioned whether the assessment centres had the capacity to train 30k reservists by 2018, as Pirbright ran only one 12-slot weekend course a month, a total capacity for the South of England of 144 soldiers per year. **DGAR** said the numbers of reservists' medically unfit or limited in their deployability was a challenge also for the Regular Army but needed to be reduced. The Army has now set equivalent medical recruitment standards, which would prevent people joining 'broken' which had happened in the past. Also, much had been learnt from Iraq and Afghanistan about how to return people to full fitness and 30k reservists would not be required at once. **DCLF** assured the APPG that there was capacity and flex to deliver the recruiting targets. Of the 100 that started the application process in January, 39% had been rejected and of the 61% still in the pipeline, 32 were active and 27 pending; the aim was to reduce this conversion rate of 12-1 to 8-1. The introduction of recruit mentoring teams was also important in helping to reduce wastage and time spent in the pipeline.

Andrew Selous MP asked if the Army could learn anything about recruitment from his local radio station, Heart, which had run several high quality and effective adverts for the RAF Reserve. **DGAR** replied that the September cycle had only used local radio but the current cycle was using TV too, to get more national exposure. Although it was early days there were positive indications that this cycle of marketing was working better than in September. **DCLF** added that although TV advertising was useful, it made society aware of what the Army was about, they also needed to advertise at local and regional level. **Brigadier van der Lande** had conducted his own litmus test and most of the young people who worked for him had heard the local radio marketing.

Thomas Docherty MP had come across a static stand for reserve medics that he thought dated and he wanted to know what steps were being taking to increase physical interaction. He also asked about the progress of cyber recruiting and if lessons could be learnt from the US. **DCLF** was disappointed that he had walked past something that did not excite and they were making efforts to ensure a uniform approach, although some things worked better in some regions than others. On cyber recruiting they needed to be more flexible in standards and terms of service and were looking at a new policy. However, this would take time to generate. This is a tri-service issue, not just one for the Army. **DGAR** said one way to recruit was to ask large employers if they could conduct recruitment activity in the workplace. This would be profitable in a number of ways, firstly because they knew the demographic composition of their workforce and secondly to reduce any uncertainty about whether or not an employer was supportive (many felt hesitant about revealing their reservist status, or joining the Reserve because they worried about the attitude of their civilian employer).

Penny Mordaunt MP thought there was little integration between the Services' recruitment campaigns and asked if enquiries not suited to one were passed onto another. She also understood that while the duty of care to the individual was very important, one of the challenges in the current process was getting quick access to medical records though GPs. **Brigadier van der Lande** said that marketing was done on a single Service basis, but the recruiters did talk to each other and MoD now had a marketing expert looking at better Defence- wide co-ordination. **The Chairman** remarked that a big difference between the Navy and the Army was that the former had retained a Reserve personnel branch while the Army had to run it all from its Regular personnel branch.

Julian Lewis MP, encouraged by reading in the Press of the attractive financial incentives offered to Regulars to transfer to the Reserve, asked if they were also available to someone coming in off the street and the steps being made to publicise this. He was also interested in the take up from the ethnic minorities. **DGAR** said that a number of the incentives for those leaving the Regulars to join the Reserve introduced last year would increase; recognition of the requirement to grow the number of transfers. They had also introduced a new enlistment bonus for Direct Entry with associated payments on completion of Phases 1 and 2 training. So far 750 Regulars had transferred, which was better than the historical figure. **DCLF** said that transferring was now seen as credible action and the Reserve needed this manpower with its expertise. However, the current incentive of £300 on being enlisted, £1000 after successful completion of each Phase (1 and 2) and officers receiving £5000 while useful now might not always be needed. **Brigadier van der Lande** added that with effect 1 April 2014 all Reservists would become members of the Reserves pension scheme alongside their Regular counterparts. **The Chairman** said that the last figures he had seen for ethnic minorities showed the Reserves performing better than the Regulars, with the British ethnic minority about 2 points ahead, but this was still not good enough.

Tobias Ellwood MP asked whether an accountant might work out that a fully mobilised Reserve Unit such as the HAC could more expensive when mobilised than a unit such as 6 Rifles, as supplementing the income of City types could be expensive. He had also had to forgo bounty every year because he was unable to attend annual camp and would they look at a qualifying period of 3 x 4 training day periods as an alternative. **DGAR** responded that there was not a significant difference between the generic cost of the HAC and 6 Rifles, but after

some high profile expensive mobilisations, including from the HAC, the MOD were reviewing capping the maximum amount. The White Paper had announced that the criteria for the training bounty would change from attendance, to preparedness to operate on an individual basis. **DCLF** felt strongly that the level of a civilian salary should not be a barrier to joining the Reserves and while more intelligent mobilisation in the future might be more selective in which Reserves are mobilised for which operational in-role tasks, such high-earning individuals bring high level civilian KSE for potential stability ops and are connected in and with important opinion-forming elements of wider civilian society.

Madeleine Moon MP asked what was being done with regard to the devolved administrations and to better understand the breadth of what SMEs had to offer. **DCLF/DGAR** said that they were working closely with the devolved administrations and with the RFCAs to make sure they knew who was who regionally and to get the Regional Force Brigades to make the connections they needed to be made. **Brigadier van der Lande** added that both the Scottish and the Welsh administrations were now giving 12 days paid leave to their reservists.

Col (Retd.) Hugh Purcell OBE DL, Honorary Clerk to the APPG RF&C.