

Minutes All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Reserve Forces and Cadets held in Room T Portcullis House at 1700 hours on 8 July 2014

Guest Speakers: Major General John Crackett (MOD) and David Watson (No 10)

Attendance:

Major General Crackett - ACDS RF&C (MoD)
David Watson - Civil Servant No 10

Julian Brazier MP - Chairman
Madeline Moon MP - Vice-Chair

Viscount Simon
James Arbuthnot MP
James Gray MP
Mark Lancaster MP
Julian Lewis MP
Rory Stewart MP
Andrew Sealous MP

Keith Mans
Fleur Thomas - Defence Relationship Management Organisation (RFCA)
Major Johnny Longbottom (HAC) - Chief Of Staff for the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust

Colonel (Retd) Hugh Purcell - Honorary Clerk
Kate Peyton - Secretary
Felicity Cowell - Secretary

The Chairman began the meeting with the AGM and the following was agreed:

Chair Julian Brazier¹ - Con
Vice- Chairs Sir Tony Baldry – Con
Madeleine Moon – Lab
Andrew Miller – Lab
James Gray - Con
Treasurer David Crausby – Lab
Secretaries Dr Therese Coffey – Con
Robert Ffello - Lab

The Chairman welcomed Major General Crackett, who had an impressive background in business and was now the senior Reservist Officer in the MoD, and David Watson, a Civil Servant from No 10. Each would address the group on Employer Engagement in Future Force 2020.

John Crackett highlighted the increased importance being placed on Reservists and the concern to improve their employability and the Reservist/employer relationship. In the three-way relationship between the Reservist, his family, his employer and the Service, while family did not always come first, one had always been wary about how one treated one's employer. The MOD had developed a good understanding during the Green Paper process and

¹ Julian Brazier has been appointed a minister of State in the MOD and Madeleine Moon has taken over as Chair.

a supportive employer base was vital to the successful recruitment of future Reservists. An agreement was needed that benefitted the employee and kept the employer enthusiastic and welcoming to Reservists in their workplace. Despite some 70% of employers thinking Reservists could bring value to their business, many thought that the costs outweighed the benefits, so it was important to balance the Proposition to reduce the disadvantages to the employer and develop an honest relationship between employers and the MOD.

A big benefit of the Proposition for employers has been the value of training in the Reserves. For a minority this might be the direct transfer of skills, such as casualty training and experience that a trauma nurse might have received when serving in Afghanistan. For many, this would be leadership skills from training as an officer or NCO. But virtually all Reservists benefit from learning and practising skills such as teamwork, communication, self-discipline and respect for others. Their employers had been entitled to financial assistance when a Reservist was mobilised, including costs towards overtime and advertising and there was an additional benefit of attendance on relevant courses organised by the MOD. One new incentive for SMEs would be a flat allowance of £500 available per month or on a pro rata basis for days mobilised and new secondary legislation would come into effect on 1 October. This incentive would address some of the issues that SMEs faced for which they could not currently be recompensed, such as the difficulty in producing receipts. It was also intended to give better feedback to employers on what their Reservist had accomplished and there was an ongoing accreditation process involving NVQ and CIPD.

There would be a Recognition Scheme involving a number of different elements, including relevant information, benefits and points of contact, but first employers needed to be made aware of what being a Reservist actually meant and what a Reservist did, and both needed access to the SaBRE website for up to date information and Q&A. Employers would have greater certainty and predictability by being given advance notice of when an individual was required by providing them with a full calendar of training days for the year, which was expected to average 40. Employers would also be given as much notice as possible for mobilisations – the extreme would be 28 days but they would aim for 9 months. The Scheme would also include the right of Reservists/employers to appeal against mobilisation, e.g., if an individual was needed when about to close a contract, but they would try to work around this.

The Defence Relationship Management Organisation, which would manage strategic employer relationships, had been established in April and was making good progress and the Defence Reform Act, which had received Royal assent in April, would come into effect on 1 October.

All of the above was either in the process of being put in place or would be soon and he emphasised that Reservists were fit, motivated, self-disciplined and capable, that 80% of employers believed they should support Reservists in employment and he asked all to consider and then support this proposition and the future plans.

The Chairman, in thanking **John Crackett**, also thanked Greater London RFCA for coordinating the solemn Drumhead Service at the Royal Hospital Chelsea on the 28th June to remember those who volunteered to serve in WW1 and their work to produce the book 'Stepping Forward', which they had presented to HM The Queen on the day.

David Watson said that Government had no right to ask an employer to do what it was not prepared to do itself and had been working on ways to demonstrate its commitment to increasing its employment of Reservists. The Civil Service needed to employ them as the norm, not the exception, in order to prove to employers that it valued Reservists, and the Head of the Civil Service had challenged all PUSs to achieve 1% in their Departments by 2015. This would encourage the employment of Reservists across the UK and they were establishing a component of the fast track system to help achieve this goal at a faster rate. There had been significant improvements in HR departments, with the fastest progress in HMRC, which had increased paid special leave from 11 to 15 days and was allowing an additional 5 days for the first year of service and a further 5 days for Reservists to actively respond to a civil contingency - an example had been the flooding in January. Other Departments were now being challenged to match HMRC's commitment and similar policies were expected to be implemented across other parts of the Civil Service. The Ministry of Justice had recently abolished the restriction that prevented prison officers from joining the Reserve and in many ways they would make good Reservists. The Department of Work and Pensions was tackling anomalies in the benefits system and implementing any necessary changes to the Job Seekers Allowance. The Department of Health was determined to crack the issues around releasing health professionals for mobilisation and the financial difficulties attached to their replacement.

The Chairman, in thanking **David Watson**, said he was extremely encouraged; he then introduced a former colleague, Keith Mans.

Keith Mans explained that Hampshire County Council HR was supportive and making sure that those they wanted to employ were aware from the start that being a Reservist was seen as positive and that they would be encouraged to stay in service. A number of activities were run from within the Council offices to encourage enlistment and the Army held routine demonstrations involving soldiers coming into the Council, engaging with the community and increasing local knowledge of the unit. The Council offer included 2 weeks' paid leave a year and those who attended a course were encouraged to enter it in their PDR. Advice was provided to Reservists and those on training or operations were encouraged to keep in contact with their families and employer. This was not only good for the individual but encouraged employers to understand the life of a Reservist. They also ensured that on return a Reservist had a period of time to be reintroduced to their job.

The Chairman thanked all speakers and asked for questions.

James Arbuthnot MP questioned the legal protection for an employee's career path, promotion and pay and thought that reduced opportunity for promotion due to mobilisation might discourage individuals from joining. **JC** responded by highlighting that Reservists had access to employment tribunals without having to wait as long as the average person, but that research had found little enthusiasm for more employment protection. They did not wish more legislative restrictions placed on Reservists or employers as it would be disproportionate compared to other legislation, such as maternity leave, and would only discourage Reserve service amongst employers. As there was insufficient evidence for a significant change in the law, they had created a specific website to help Reservists who believed they had been disadvantaged at work, which would assist in establishing a real evidence base and improve case management.

Madeline Moon MP thought the website an excellent idea but questioned how MOD would ensure Reservists could build relationships with unsupportive local authorities. She thought that there was little engagement by either Reserves or cadets other than at events such as Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Sunday. **JC** responded that changing the public attitude to Reservists would help overcome this, but perceptions would only be changed by persistent engagement to influence future generations, legal changes and media encouragement. He acknowledged that this was not something that could be accomplished overnight, but something MOD would continue to work towards. **David Watson** added that one way to establish closer relationships between Reservists and communities was to identify Reserve units that had the greatest recruiting need and engaging them directly with their local authority, holding training at local Council offices. If this approach proved successful, they would roll it out across the nation. **Colonel Purcell** emphasised the importance of engagement 'in the round' and building relationships, which inevitably took time. Building relationships and creating new opportunities required the continual review of processes, procedures and ways of working and the many outcomes from engagement could not best be delivered through the stovepipe approach that the Services had adopted. Fusing data held by the various departments would be a start and greater emphasis needed to be placed on outcomes rather than judging success by the measurement of activity. **The Chairman** thought that having Reservists in Civil Service roles would help, as would a larger role for the RFCAs, who employed specialists who remained in post for more than just a couple of years. **Keith Mans** thought the Community Covenant a good way to bring people together as one thing local authorities didn't have was manpower. Having a large group of people readily available to take on tasks such as flood protection would demonstrate to the wider population that there were full-time and part-time military who were living within their communities.

Madeleine Moon asked about the contribution the universities might make. **John Crackett** said that the MOD planned to have 35,000 trained Reservists, 30,000 in the Army and 3,000 in each of the other Services, but the university officer training organisations were viewed as a separate entity as students did not qualify as trained manpower. They were, however, focusing on students when looking at potential recruits, whether they could make them a better offer and how they could extract better value out of the OTC by moving more into the Reserve. However, not all students want to join OTCs, which anyway were already oversubscribed.

James Gray MP asked whether the plan for a 2-month officer training package at Sandhurst had gone ahead. **JC** replied that it had and so far 30 individuals had taken part and another pilot would run this summer. Having recognised that different people lead different lives, the course catered for the many trainees who were students that might not see the benefits of attending the long course and drop out. Their conclusion was that the Zero to Hero programme was working, helped by the fact that students got paid for the two months and the encouragement to add the training to one's CV. **The Chairman** added he had just visited the course and witnessed its success. One individual with no military background had joined having seen the opportunity advertised on their work notice board, which went to show that engaging with all types of people could prove successful and was something MOD should do more of.

Julian Lewis MP suggested that to improve public awareness and attitudes towards Reservists a badge, along the lines of the Veterans Badge, should be created that would offer prestige and provide recognition. This was warmly received and **John Crackett** agreed to follow the idea up. It was thought that while taking away the post nominal TD had been a mistake, it was now an integrated Army. **David Watson** suggested a virtual badge that a Reservist could add to their profile on LinkedIn would help make their status clear to prospective employers. **James Gray MP** thought that this might create security problems and needed further research. **David Watson** acknowledged that this was something they had considered and were looking into.

Rory Stewart MP thought that what he had heard was an exciting message which must be kept spinning.

The Chairman raised the state of the current system for recruiting and that he was getting the message from units that it was still stuck. He acknowledged that new software would be received next year but for now too much potential manpower was being wasted. He highlighted two problems; firstly, students made up 20% of the US and Australian Armed Forces, a much larger percentage than in the UK and UK students were bizarrely placed in the same category as the unemployed, which might explain why they were not being recruited. Secondly, personal development reports were designed for the Regular cohort and not best suited to the Reservist or for showing to an employer. Good practice could be found in Australia where greater use was made of providing reports on operational deployments and attendance at courses by using the email system. **JC** responded that they needed to be careful how reports were produced and promulgated, but agreed that any content needed to be formatted for, and relevant to, the current or potential employer.

James Gray MP questioned how Reservists could help the Regular cohort maintain continuity and knowledge of operations which, in his opinion, would otherwise be quickly lost. **Keith Mans** added that he thought some 60% of those who had attended RMAS eight years or more ago had now left. **John Crackett** explained that the issue had been recognised and as a result a focus was being put on better communication packages for the Regulars to explain the Reserves, rather than just handing out a leaflet and new relationships were now forming.

The Chairman agreed that communication was key and highlighted the importance of keeping full-time and part-time Servicemen together to retain enthusiasm for staying in the Services; tailored employment packages and geographic stability. If a Service person was settled with their family in a certain area they might be reluctant to move; however, if their comrades who had joined another unit elsewhere provided encouragement, the said individual was more likely to remain in a Service and move on with them.

The Chairman thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

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