

Notes from the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Reserve Forces and Cadets held in Room C, 1 Parliament on 21st November 2017 at 1700 hours

Speaker: Major General Ranald Munro CBE TD VR –Assistant Chief of Defence Staff, Reserve Forces and Cadets

Subject: Inaugural Meeting followed by and MOD response to the 2016/17 External Scrutiny Team Report

Attendance:

Madeleine Moon MP – Joint Chair Lord Rogan Lord Freeman Lord Jones Jim Fitzpatrick MP Lewis D’Ambra - Office of Madeleine Moon MP Clerks: Colonel (Retd) Hugh Purcell GL RFCA (Honorary Clerk) Kate Peyton GL RFCA	Maj Gen R Munro CBE TD VR – RF&C MOD Brig Gerhard Wheeler – RF&C MOD Maj Gen J H Gordon CB CBE – Chief Executive CRFCA Nick Allan RNR – RF&C MOD Charles Perrett - Schools Cadet Expansion Officer GL RFCA Kris Wadia Mark Demery – GL RFCA
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Madeleine Moon MP, joint chair of the Group, opened the inaugural meeting in this Parliament.

AFTERNOTE: Confirmation of the registration of the Group has been received from the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

While other events had kept members of both Houses busy, recruitment into the military remained important and she welcomed Major General Ranald Munro (**RM**) and the MOD team.

RM introduced himself and his team, explained that he was a serving Reservist, then referred to the Francois Report which chimed with the RFCA’s External Scrutiny Team (EST) Report, noting that the challenging environment for recruiting into the Armed forces was likely to persist. Since the EST Report the RN and RAF had made a positive start, their reserves were well recruited with the Army falling just below its Phase 2 trained strength requirement. However, there was a risk to growth due to the lack of money and therefore to the huge strategic gains should they cut badly. It was therefore important to retain successful programmes such as the RN Officer Programme as well as recognising the importance of mobilised service and the utility that the Reserve provided. Officer recruitment was at some 99% of target, but the female to male and BAME ratios were not yet good enough and he expected these demographics to feed through over time. Meanwhile the MOD would provide the Group with exact numbers.

The estate was a key enabler in support of both the regular and reserve components, the priority being the delivery of operational capability. The RN, which had put much of its FR20 money into infrastructure, was about to embark on an major project in Cardiff, the RAF accommodated most of its reserve squadrons on air bases behind the wire whereas the Army had bifurcated its regular and reserve estate. There was an armed forces rationalisation programme of real estate in the UK and the reserve estate laydown was being re-scoped. This would be delivered through a reserve basing programme.

Pressures were being felt across the whole force, including the cadets. While the latter was not a Manifesto commitment, the MOD had retained its 1 star post, which continued to be mirrored by the three Services. The schools Cadet Expansion Programme was doing well and the Cadet Commission would come into force on 1 December.

Jim Fitzpatrick MP asked if cadets featured in the General's responsibilities and how the pressures on their budgets fitted into the overall pressures the MOD was under. **RM** replied that the whole force was under pressure in terms of the money available and how it was spent. Although the reserves and cadets were no longer part of the manifesto commitment the MOD was still marching to the original beat. Because cadets were important they had persuaded the 1* Regular to stay on as a reservist; it was important to maintain this rank, not least because of the size of the Cadet Expansion Programme.

Lord Jones, who is also the president of the Welsh ACFA, said he was astounded by the quality of leadership in the cadets in Wales and that more cadets were to be encouraged. He believed any employer would be impressed with their discipline, confidence and training. The Reserves also had an important role to play in society and more of them were needed too.

Lord Rogan asked about the cadet commission, the first new commission for 150 years. **RM** reiterated that as the cadets were important there was a team dedicated to them at the MOD headed by a 1*. He said there was a need to recognise the adult volunteer, to remove the anomaly of the Type B commission in the Army cadets and to bring more uniformity to the three organisations. The Cadet Strategy was also helping and the three Services were working closely together while maintaining the unique ethos of each organisation.

The initial findings of the Northampton Study into the social impact of the cadet forces, released in the autumn, had been positive and had evidenced that the value they delivered was vastly greater than their annual cost. All of this linked to the Independent Commission's Report which had highlighted the need to connect to society through the reserve and the cadets. He would like to see more cadets joining the Reserve and Regular components, but they could only be influenced to do this and not recruited overtly.

Lord Freeman asked about the implications of the Flexible Employment Strategy. **RM** replied that the military needed access to talent, could not afford to lose talent and that this strategy made it more inclusive and was the right thing to do. It allowed a Regular to 'dial down', but only after discussion with and the agreement of their superiors, and as ACDS RF&C he set the policy for the reserves to dial up, remembering that a Regular could be called back at any time.

The Chair stated that numbers of MPs interested in reserves and cadets had shrunk after each election and only a few MPs were actively interested. Others were blind to them and some even felt intimidated finding rank and access policy a barrier. This was despite nearly all having cadets and/or reserves in their constituency. **RM** agreed to produce a list of all the sites so that MPs could be exhorted to visit at weekends or on a Friday if back in their constituency. **RM** also suggested Open days; it was also noted that the RFCAs wrote to all their MPs, that Reserves day would provide a good opportunity and that visits generally provided excellent photo opportunities and good publicity.

AFTERNOTE: Min AF aspires for every MP to be invited to visit their local Reserve Centre on or around Reserves Day. Given that the rules changed only last year so that advance permission was needed for any kind of contact with politicians down to the level of local Councillor, it is hoped that direction expected from the MOD will smooth this path.

The Chair was concerned that pay of reserves did not reflect the hours worked, that there were still complaints about the lack of air cadet flying and that she had never been invited to visit her local Sea cadet unit. **RM** thought the former was probably explained by the fact that reserves were the only part of the force paid by segments of a day rather than for 8 hours a day and that their role was often unfairly compared with those on FTRS or ADC contracts. Access to flying, meanwhile, had been improving slowly and there was more working

with civilian aviation organisations to help overcome the challenge of loss of RAF air qualified adults. This also highlighted the need to attract and retain more adults.

The chair in closing the meeting stated that many MPs had had enough of cuts, that there needed to be much better engagement with the military and she thanked RM for engaging. **RM**, acknowledging that the interest of the APPG was vital, would put a site access programme together.

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