

## Written evidence submitted by the RAF Families Federation (DIS0017)

Pete Wishart MP  
Chair  
Scottish Affairs Select Committee

Dear Pete

### **RAF Families Federation Response to Scottish Affairs Select Committee**

Following my appearance at the Scottish Affairs Select Committee Enquiry on Defence in Scotland on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022, the RAF Families Federation was asked to submit further evidence on the following points:

- The effects base closures and redeployments have on service personnel and their families
- Whether the consolidation of bases creating fewer but larger sites is a good or a bad thing from the perspective of service personnel and their families and why
- How well the MoD manages base closures and the support it offers to affected personnel and their families
- How the support the MoD provides to personnel and their families affected by base closures could be improved
- How effectively the MoD supports military personnel and their families when moving bases between England and Scotland and vice versa
- How the process of moving bases between England and Scotland (and vice versa) could be improved
- Share the work done by Beverley Bergman at Glasgow University about the long-term mental health needs of veterans
- Share the Families Federation report about healthcare for mobile military families.

I have answered as many of these questions below as possible, where we have had qualitative or quantitative evidence in recent years:

### **Whether the consolidation of bases creating fewer but larger sites is a good or a bad thing from the perspective of service personnel and their families and why**

This is actually a difficult question to answer without specific examples. It is fair to say that larger bases offer an opportunity of scale that can support a wider range of amenities, however rapid expansion can be demanding on housing, local school places and childcare. This may mean more people living further from units, which for some may impact on their sense of 'inclusion' in the service community – however we have also heard from families who have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of living slightly further away, in civilian communities, and sometimes in higher quality private rental accommodation.

### **How well the MoD manages base closures and the support it offers to affected personnel and their families**

The main area where personnel and families have raised issues with us on base closures is uncertainty around timings. This is a hugely challenging area, as often there are significant

strategic decisions being made involving other bases, which determine final timescales for closure. Whilst we understand the difficulties involved, the uncertainty around when closure and moves may happen does cause real difficulties – particularly with education and partner employment choices (e.g. whether to start an educational course that is due to be 2 or 3 years long when there is no clarity if you are remaining in an area.)

### **How effectively the MoD supports military personnel and their families when moving bases between England and Scotland and vice versa**

The quality of information available to personnel and families moving between England and Scotland has improved in recent years. Groups chaired by the MOD with responsibilities for areas such as education, health and partner employment have sought to ensure up-to-date and relevant information is available in advance showing the differences between systems, and what people may wish to consider before moving. This has been much aided by the 'Welcome to Scotland' guide produced by the Scottish Government. One good practice example is the recent work done by 'Team Lossie' to engage with a large group of personnel and families at a Lincolnshire based squadron that is due to move up to Lossiemouth, where local representatives from education, health and the local council visited Lincolnshire to talk to families.

### **How the process of moving bases between England and Scotland (and vice versa) could be improved**

In addition to the 'good practice' example I have highlight wrt Lossiemouth above, having career managers and Chain of Command routinely directly personnel and families to the 'Welcome to Scotland' website, and the service Family Federations when they are posted between the countries as 'standard practice' would be helpful in providing up-to-date and comprehensive information.

### **Share the work done by Beverley Bergman at Glasgow University about the long-term mental health needs of veterans**

I would like to commend to the Committee the work done by Dr Beverley Bergman at the University of Glasgow in this area. Her large cohort studies provide hugely valuable data, and as an Army veteran herself she is an experienced and well connected research lead:

- [20220209 Beverley Bergman University of Glasgow Vet Suicide.pdf](#)
- **Summary:** What is already known about this subject? There is no consensus as to whether military service increases the risk of suicide, although the majority of studies support the view that there is no clear evidence of increased risk.
- What are the new findings? This new study confirms that there is no overall increase in risk compared with the wider population, although older women veterans remain at increased risk. The interval between leaving service and suicide was around 20 years. The previously reported increase in early service leavers is explained by differences in socioeconomic status.

How might this impact on policy or clinical practice in the foreseeable future? ►

Strategies aimed at prevention of suicide in veterans should concentrate on support for middle-aged veterans, particularly those with known mental health problems, rather than those who have recently left service

- [Non-fatal self-harm in Scottish military veterans: a retrospective cohort study of 57,000 veterans and 173,000 matched non-veterans | SpringerLink](#)
- **Summary:** Findings show that the highest risks of non-fatal self-harm are in veterans with the shortest service, including those who did not complete training, and in the oldest and youngest birth cohorts, whilst veterans who had served for longest are at reduced risk. This pattern is not consistent with a causal role for military service but instead suggests that the risk in early service leavers reflects other vulnerabilities such as adverse childhood events.

There is an important association between mental health disorder, in particular PTSD, and self-harm in Early Service Leaving veterans. Although overall, less than one-fifth of those who died from suicide had a previous record of self-harm, and this risk is higher in older veterans, suggesting that failed suicide attempts in middle age contribute to the increased risk of self-harm. This underlines the importance of treating every self-harm episode in this older age group as a 'red flag'. The higher risk of self-harm in the most recent birth cohort warrants further investigation. Recommendations are that specific inquiry into self-harm should be made in all veterans who present with mental health conditions, and especially those with PTSD who left service prematurely.

### **Share the Families Federation report about healthcare for mobile military families**

This report is due to be published on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2022 and will be sent to the Select Committee on the launch date.

I am more than happy to answer any further queries that Committee members may have.

**Maria Lyle**

**Maria Lyle – Director, RAF Families Federation**

*February 2022*