

Annual Report – Chairman’s Introduction

There can be no doubt that this has been a most tumultuous ending to the financial year. It seems difficult now to imagine a world without social distancing, Zoom conferences and regular briefings from the Government; yet we have had to embrace these challenges in a very short period of time.

As I write this report, the UK is very cautiously inching out of lockdown, however I think we all now realise that we will be living with some form of restriction for a number of months to come. The challenges we face are not yet over. In the light of this continued uncertainty, we have taken the difficult decision to hold our AGM remotely, after the postponement of our previous date. Our usual reports will be issued online and we will conduct our voting digitally as well. The AGM is our opportunity to come together and celebrate the achievements of the last year, and consider the forthcoming one. We are disappointed that we will not have the opportunity to see you all personally in the foreseeable future, but we look forward to a time when we are once again given the green light to come together.

Despite all the challenges faced by our staff, I think it is important to first mention how impressed I have been with the way the whole organisation has adapted to the new normal. Staff quickly settled into working from home, with barely a pause in output. Video conferencing has become the new norm for staff meetings, and we have held our first Zoom Wessex RFCA Board Meeting. If nothing else, this crisis has helped to focus our minds on new and innovative ways in which technology can help us continue to deliver a high quality service to our customers. I am certain that this new found knowledge will help us for years to come.

Clearly, however, Covid-19 has a huge impact on the activities of both the Reserves and the Cadets. Reserves have ceased regular parade nights, however, a number have been mobilised to help support the NHS in their response to Covid-19 and also to deploy on UN operations in Cyprus and NATO operations in Estonia. Cadets have suspended all face-to-face activities until September at the earliest, with all activities including Summer Camps and overseas trips cancelled. However both the Reserves and Cadets are embracing technology to continue to provide outstanding training, and we have seen parade nights, training and even promotions taking place over Zoom.

In the Estates side of our work, it has been business as usual, both at county and regional level. Our aim has been to maintain a compliant estate that is ready for use as soon as possible after the Reserves and cadets are given the green light to resume face-to-face training. We have also made our contribution to the COVID-19 response by providing accommodation for testing teams in Bristol and Exeter, supporting the RAF recruiting team in Exmouth, offering parking and treatment locations to the NHS in Plymouth and Taunton and providing minibuses to the Army.

All of our face-to-face engagement activities have been cancelled or postponed for the foreseeable future, however we hope to resume these as soon as possible. We are hoping that a return to some semblance of normality may occur before October, so we are able to recognise the very best in our community through the Lord-Lieutenants' Awards. We are currently in full planning mode for these events, with an awareness that fully live events may not be possible. We have a number of contingencies in place, and will inform you of our final decision.

You are aware that the MOD conducted a Tailored Review of the RFCAs last year; the report was published last December. The RFCAs will form a single Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), with a stronger national head office and regional delivery organisations. We are now in a 2 year implementation phase. Most staff will see little change to the way in which they work, and it is hoped that the significant and valuable contribution made by our volunteer memberships will be retained in an appropriate form.

In closing I would like to wish you and your families the very best in these challenging times, and hope to see you all soon.