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13th September 2024

**WESSEX RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024
HELD AT TAUNTON RACECOURSE, TAUNTON AND HOSTED ON ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY 11th SEPTEMBER 2024**

MINUTES

Present

Mr A Campbell	President
Mr M Saddiq	Incoming President
Maj R Wharton TD**	Chair
Rear Admiral C Snow (representing Vice President)	Vice-President
Colonel E T Bolitho OBE	Vice-President
Mr R Deeks (representing Vice President)	Vice-President
Mr M Dooley	Vice President
Mrs P Golding OBE	Vice-President
Colonel J Thompson TD DL	Chair City & County of Bristol
Air Commodore J C Bessell RAF DL	Chair Cornwall
Commander J Allen RD	Chair Devon
Brigadier D R Wilson CBE	Chair Dorset
Lieutenant Colonel J Penhale	Chair Gloucestershire
Brigadier N C Beacom QVRM TD VR DL	Chair Somerset
Colonel M Wills MBE	Chair Wiltshire
Mr P Wright FCIB	Chair Finance Committee
Colonel P G Mitchell MSc CEng MRAS ae psc+	Chair Cadets Committee
Major General W J O'Leary QVRM TD DL	Chair Engagement Committee
Mr S Whitbourn CFIPD FCIM FILM MRUSIDSS	Chair REEG
Captain S C Jameson RD RNR	Vice Chair Naval
Major C Kedward RMR	Vice Chair Marine
Colonel M Palmer	Commander HQSW

In Attendance

Brigadier N R Holmes and 20 members of the Association Executive and 89 members of the Association in person and online.

Keynote Speakers for Defence Insight Brief

- Maritime - Captain Carl Necker RN, Captain RNR Units (South).
- Army - Brigadier Steve Rayson, Deputy Comd Home Command.
- RAF - Wing Commander Steve Fry, SO1 Reserves Strat Plans Projects.

ITEM	DETAIL
(a)	(b)
1	<p>PRESIDENT'S OPENING REMARKS</p> <p>Mr Campbell welcomed everyone to the AGM and thanked them for attending.</p> <p>It has been a tremendous honour to have been given this, my second year, as President of the Wessex Reserve Forces and Cadets Association. Having been in post as the Lord-Lieutenant for Dorset for over ten and a half years, I retired on the fourth of this month which puts me a full week outside my 'sell-by-date' by the time of the AGM. To me the Wessex RFCA, along with the nation's other RFCA's, is an essential factor in the defence of our country and will become an ever more vital factor as we move forward into the deteriorating and uncertain defence landscape developing in Europe and across our world. Our defence assumptions since the cold war have been jolted into a rude awakening by recent events and action is needed further secure our country and its citizens against aggression.</p> <p>However, more pertinent to the task at hand, there have been a great many achievements this year, many of which are reported in this excellent Annual Report produced by the team. I commend this to you and know that the Chair, Robert Wharton, will highlight the key successes in his Report at the AGM. At that meeting, I also look forward to hearing about the work the association has done to revise its strategic approach ensuring we remain relevant to those we are here to support and serve.</p> <p>I know our Reserve Forces are an integral part of our national military capability and I have been delighted to see that Reservists from across the West County have been supporting operations abroad and in the UK such as supporting the training of Ukrainian Reservists. I am aware that recruiting and retention within our Armed Forces is a challenge so delighted we have chosen to focus on them during our insight briefing taking place at our AGM.</p> <p>It is great to see our Cadet Forces continue to flourish and I am pleased numbers are now back above pre-COVID levels. I remain in awe of our adult volunteers and professional support staff who are instrumental in enabling the cadet experience and I encourage you all to take any and every opportunity to thank them for their enthusiasm and dedication. The study into management of the Volunteer Estate we heard about at last year's AGM has now concluded and as I am sure you are all aware, as recommended within that study, we have now transitioned to the new model. This means an external contractor, Vivo Defence Services, is now responsible for maintaining our estate. While this does represent a significant change, I am cautiously optimistic it may ultimately benefit our reserves and cadets while also allowing our team to better manage the estate and assure the contract.</p> <p>You will all be aware that the nations finances are stretched so will not be surprised to hear that our association has had to find some savings. In addition, we have had to find additional funds to pay for necessary statutory work on the estate, such as installing new fire doors. Despite this, we have been able to complete some impressive projects around the South West benefitting our reserves and cadets though as our reserves are depleting, I anticipate development projects in the future may necessarily be on a more modest scale.</p> <p>I have been amazed by the breadth of activity conducted by our engagement team and I draw your attention to the articles in this report, perhaps most notably around employer engagement. As you will see, record numbers of companies are signing the Armed Forces Covenant and working up through the Employer Recognition Scheme. Maintaining that 'licence to operate' for our reserves and cadet force adult volunteers, both amongst employers and within the wider community, is vital and a key role for our membership.</p> <p>I know my fellow Lord-Lieutenants are much looking forward to hosting their South West awards ceremonies this year and I will be sorry not to be in post by then. They are a highlight</p>

	<p>of the year and great opportunities to bring parts of the community together to celebrate the amazing achievements of our reserves and cadets as they receive their meritorious service awards. They are also an opportunity to present the Silver Employer Recognition Scheme certificates</p> <p>I will close by reinforcing how grateful I am to our volunteer members for their valued support. Thanks also to the professional team in Taunton and through the counties for their professionalism and commitment. I know these are uncertain and challenging times but am confident your association is well placed to flourish as a force for good across the region. I have enjoyed my association with the Wessex RFCA tremendously. I will miss my connection with such a dedicated group of hard-working individuals in support the defence of our nation. It has been a tremendous honour.</p>
2	<p>APOLOGIES AND MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING</p> <p>Apologies were received from 77 members who were unable to attend.</p> <p>The Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 14th September 2023 were distributed prior to the meeting.</p> <p>We seek approval that these represent a true record of proceedings.</p> <p>Proposer: Colonel O J H Chamberlain QVRM TD* DL</p> <p>Seconder: Major C Kedward RMR</p> <p>Motion carried.</p> <p>The Chair invited the President to sign the Minutes.</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>There are no matters arising from last year's AGM minutes.</p>
3	<p>CHAIR'S REPORT</p> <p>Good morning Lord-Lieutenants, General, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our annual general meeting. I am conscious that I am addressing here our members of the Association however I am delighted to say we also have a number of employers who help stand up for our Association and hold gold and silver awards. We also have in our midst number of the Armed Forces champions from local authorities in the south-west. This is the first time that those 2 categories of persons have come to this meeting and I hope you will find it useful and we can expand on your presence in the future.</p> <p>I would like to hope that our members have all read and ingested before breakfast our annual report which has a great deal of information in it. However in the expectation that cups of coffee came before reading report I will summarise some of the main points I had.</p> <p>The report is there to look back on the year we have had and what a year it has been. I think there have been more changes we have had to cope with than in any other year I can remember while on this board. We have also had an absolutely unique opportunity in the history of RFCAs in that you kindly put the mantle chairmanship on me last September but by the end of that month the Chief Executive had retired (Welcome Steve!!) And Brigadier Nev was not due to start until January 2024. And since we were both new in post that gave us the unique opportunity to question and change anything and everything.</p>

So what happened – the mice ran amock after you retired Steve and during some very informal meetings it became clear that many of us would like to see some changes. Hannah Owen our Deputy Chief Executive held us all together, thank you Hannah. The year started with a lot of unanswered questions and doubts. We were relieved when it was confirmed that the proposal to make us a non-departmental public body was to be put on hold for the foreseeable future.

However the proposal that The future Defence infrastructure system (FDIS) was going to go ahead gave our estates team a lot to think about as to how that would be implemented and how their jobs would be changed. I am delighted to say that after the implementation on first August the picture is much more clear and the situation is settling well. The net result is that our customers when they have a problem on their site ring a helpdesk in Manchester who then instruct a contractor to fix the problem. Our estates team monitor and quality control the work which is done. It has enabled us to move from “a fix on fail” proposition to a “fix first time”. In the long run I think that will improve the quality of our estate but there is a history of many years of underspend and it will take a long time to catch up.

The reserves in our patch have had success in getting their people onto mobilised operations which is after all the purpose of their existence. The reserves nationally continue to be heavily engaged in assisting the training of Ukrainian troops. However the “living package” offered to reservists still has many defects despite recent changes and the net effect is that there are more people leaving by the back door than there are coming in the front door. I will not bang on about the delays in the recruitment process but they are still very much there. I hope the current strategic Defence review will address some of this but I have my doubts that it will go that far down the chain.

Our engagement team have had an absolutely cracking year and indeed have done so much that we are looking to ensure that we do not spread ourselves too thin. The Armed Forces Day in Falmouth was one of the biggest events they took part in with great success and I congratulate Rachel Brannagan and her team. Stephen Whitbourn has arranged some extremely interesting visits for employers and he has got more in the pipeline. Our biggest commitment in organising the Lord-Lieutenant awards in our 7 counties continues to soak up a lot of effort made more difficult with strict financial constraints put upon us.

That leads me onto money. Frankly we got away pretty lightly with budget cuts in the year in question and thanks to the team for their tight management and indeed a surplus at the end of the year. However we have been told that next year will be much more tough and we are likely to suffer budget constraints of nearer 10%. We will be looking carefully at how we manage that.

That leads me nicely back to the future and those mice that ran amock last autumn. The result has been some extremely hard work by a strategy working group led by Air Commodore John Bessell and I would like to thank him publicly and his committee for the intensive work they have put in with weekly meetings over a couple of months. The purpose of that work was to review who we think we are, what we should be doing and how we should do it. I will say no more now because there is a presentation on this after the insight brief. I will only say that I see the outcomes as extremely positive and extremely beneficial for the future of your organisation.

The Chief Executive and I would be very happy to take questions and we have with us today a number of subject matter experts who will answer when necessary.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen and we look forward to your questions.

MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Chief Executive introduced the Members' Business Forum, he advised that the Defence Insight Briefs which will follow will cover Reserves and we will introduce our revised strategy toward the end of the morning and kindly asked for any questions on those areas be held until later. But if there were any observations or questions on any other areas, perhaps the estate, cadets, engagement or such like, now is your time,

He outlined that 1 question had been pre-submitted.

Colonel Rex Stephenson: Will the value and use of the RFCAs in promoting the mobilisation and operational use of the Volunteer Reserves be included in the forthcoming Defence Review.

Brigadier Adam Fraser-Hitchen, Chief Operating Officer Council of RFCAs: You will be aware of the Strategic Defence Review which is in the offing. The CRFCA on behalf of the RFCAs is tightly tied in with the early moves of that SDR articulating what we do and why we do it. You will be conscious that we have responsibility in the engagement, the volunteer estate and of course with cadets and youth. What we are doing is adding value to the why. If we are not engaged with our employers we have no reserve. It is as simple as that because favourable forward facing employers of reserves are certainly not going to release left of mobilisation. If and when our reserves are mobilised, I suspect, without a really close relationship employers will be reticent to allow their people to be mobilised again in one way or another so that connective tissue with employers is important but also the wider links to society are absolutely key. On the Volunteer estate this is not the management of the estate from a buildings perspective this is about providing the reserves with a place to gather, to equip, to form teams and to deploy from. This is a lily pad for the mobilisation of reserves. I don't think I need to remind any of the audience on this point that the cadets and youth are our reserve and regular forces of tomorrow. In terms of timelines all the single services and CRFCA are providing a high level of input into the draft proposition to RF&C SDR input next week.

Further questions asked by members were:

Colonel Lance Ranson: I would like to say how impressed I am to hear how the Estates Department and also the Finance Department have adapted to what must be a completely new system for the management of the training estate. Can I ask how our customers are feeling about the new level of service they are being offered.

Brigadier Neville Holmes, Chief Executive: We are only 5 weeks into the contract so the level of fidelity on what is actually happening and what is being done at the users level is a little bit vague at the moment. We have our first site infrastructure management meeting next week so we haven't had that conversation yet.

Peter Wallace, Director Volunteer Estate, Council of RFCAs: We do not have any substantive data on customer feedback yet. The first quarter performance review meeting with the suppliers has not been held yet. Monthly suppliers alliance meetings are held and the feedback from them is that the Helpdesk experience is proving very positive to the users. There are no particular concerns that we are hearing from customers.

Colonel Edward Bolitho: On the subject of the Non Departmental Public Body which was going to lead to some quite big changes and I know a lot of work has already been done and some improvements made. What has happened to all these changes and are they going to continue.

Brigadier Neville Holmes, Chief Executive: About 5 years ago the Sullivan Review made 80 recommendations one of which was that the RFCAs should move from being an arm's length body to a Non Departmental Public Body, in order to get that on the Statute Book it needs to

	<p>find time in Parliament and whether it will get high enough priority in this Parliament we do not know. 68 of the 80 recommendations from the Sullivan Review have already been delivered, 10 cannot be delivered until we are Non Departmental Public Body and the remaining 2 are in progress. Many of the recommendations were tightening up and improving up on existing processes. We do not anticipate any changes in the next couple of years and we are in a good place,</p>
5	<p>APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS</p> <p>A list of new Members, and the various changes that have occurred, are contained in the AGM Booklet.</p> <p>In accordance with Clause 5 of the Scheme for the Association, it is necessary for these appointments to be approved en bloc before the election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs/County Chairs to allow the new members the right to vote.</p> <p>Proposer: Colonel P G Mitchell MSc CEng MRAeS ae psc+</p> <p>Seconder: Major General B O’Leary QVRM TD DL</p> <p>Motion carried.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed the new Members and thanked them warmly for volunteering their services or agreeing to be representatives of their respective authorities. He stressed how much their support is valued including, when required, their help and advice.</p> <p>All members were elected en-bloc.</p>
6	<p>ELECTION OF THE CHAIR</p> <p>The President explained, that in accordance with Clause 10 of the Scheme for the Association, the Chair had to be elected or re-elected each year. Major Robert Wharton has agreed to be Chair.</p> <p>Proposer: Brigadier D R Wilson CBE</p> <p>Seconder: Mr P Wright FCIB</p> <p>Motion carried</p> <p>Robert Wharton was thanked for his service as Chair over the last year and wished well for the forthcoming year.</p>
7	<p>ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRS AND COUNTY CHAIRS</p> <p>The Chair reminded Members that Vice-Chairs and County Chairs had to be elected or re-elected every year. All Vice-Chairs and County Chairs have expressed a wish to be re-elected however we anticipate there may be some changes in the next 12 months.</p> <p>A complete list of Vice-Chairs and County Chairs has been distributed in the AGM booklet.</p> <p>Propose that all Vice-Chairs/County Chairs are elected together, en bloc.</p> <p>Proposer: Colonel M Palmer</p>

	<p>Seconded: Colonel J Cummings</p> <p>Motion carried.</p> <p>The Chair thanked all the Vice-Chairs and County Chairs for their continued service and sound advice throughout the year.</p>
8	<p>EMPOWERMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION BOARD</p> <p>The Scheme of Association for Wessex RFCA requires that the Association Board must be given express authority to exercise the Association's statutory powers and duties without prior reference to the membership.</p> <p>I propose the Motion that the Board be authorised to:</p> <p>Exercise the powers conferred, and the duties imposed on the Association by the Reserve Forces Act 1996, as amended, and the Regulations made thereunder, and to deliver the requirements set by Service Level Agreements entered into by the Council of RFCAs, in support of the Services, without prior reference to the Association, save that this delegation does not extend to any decision relating to the future existence, independence or autonomy of the Association.</p> <p>Seconded: Colonel S Frost</p> <p>Motion carried.</p> <p>The President thanked the membership for their vote of confidence in the Board and assured them that the Board will continue to govern the Association with due diligence under the leadership of the Chair.</p>
9	<p>HANDOVER OF PRESIDENT</p> <p>The Chair thanked the President for his support and leadership during his tenure and explained that the Presidency now moves to the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Mr Mohamed Saddiq.</p> <p>Mr Saddiq said that he was honoured to be taking over the Presidency and was looking forward to the year ahead. He thanked Mr Campbell for his dedicated service both as Lord-Lieutenant of Dorset and as President of Wx RFCA and wished him a long and happy retirement and he welcomed Mr Dooley, the new Lord Lieutenant for Dorset.</p>
10	<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>The 2025 AGM will be held on Wednesday 24 September 2025 at Taunton Racecourse.</p>



BRIGADIER N R HOLMES MBE
Chief Executive
Wessex RFCA



MAJOR R WHARTON
Chair
Wessex RFCA

Annex:

A. List of Vice-Chairs and County Chairs.

Distribution:

Association Board

Wx RFCA Website

LIST OF VICE-CHAIR AND COUNTY CHAIRS

CHAIR FOR ER-ELECTION

Major (Retd) Robert Wharton TD**	Chair
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VICE-CHAIRS FOR RE-ELECTION

Captain Sue Jameson RD RNR	Vice-Chair Navy
Major Chris Kedward RMR	Vice-Chair Marine
Air Commodore John Bessell RAF DL	Vice-Chair Air

COUNTY CHAIRS FOR RE-ELECTION

Colonel (Retd) Jane Thompson TD DL	Chair City & County of Bristol
Air Commodore John Bessell RAF DL	Chair Cornwall
Commander (Retd) Jane Allen RD	Chair Devon
Brigadier (Retd) Donald Wilson CBE	Chair Dorset
Lieutenant Colonel Jon Penhale	Chair Gloucestershire
Brigadier (Retd) Nigel Beacom QVRM TD VR DL	Chair Somerset
Colonel (Retd) Martyn Wills MBE	Chair Wiltshire