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NW RFCA

RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION FOR
THE NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND AND THE ISLE OF MAN

AGM 2024

Chair's Report



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Introduction



Brigadier (Retired) Tom O'Brien CBE TD VR DL

“Change is upon us”

I used the following headings in my last two AGM Introductions; in 2022: “**Change is on the horizon**” and last year: “**Challenges Ahead**”. Now for 2024, my strapline is “**Change is upon us**”. I will cover my reasoning for this shortly.

At last year’s AGM we welcomed our new President - Mr Mark Blundell (the current Lord-Lieutenant of Merseyside) into his role. Mark will be our President until he retires in December 2025.

There have also been some changes in key single Service personnel. At the back end of 2023, Commodore Phil Waterhouse ADC retired from the Royal Navy (RN). He had been the Naval Regional Commander Northern England & the Isle of Man for 7 years. We wish Phil a belated happy retirement from the RN and wish him all the best in his new role as Group Corporate Affairs Director, APCL Group and congratulations on his appointment as Chair of Mersey Maritime. Commodore Phil has been succeeded by Commodore Tom Knowles ADC RN and we wish him every success during his tenure.

Also, on the move this summer is Colonel Darren Doherty – the Army Commander North West. Colonel Darren will have completed nearly two and a half years in post and given great support to the NW RFCA. We wish Darren well in retirement and every success in his future endeavours. With the Army Regional Point of Command (RPOC) structures change, NW RFCA will be working with RPOC North (based in Catterick) under the command of Colonel Peter Stitt. I know that

the Chief Executive and his Senior Leadership team have enjoyed working with both Headquarters and the respective commanders over recent years and the relationships which have been built are very strong.

I also wish to mention Wing Commander Steven Chaskin, who finished his Reserve service (44 years Regular/Reserve) on 15 May as Officer Commanding 611 (West Lancashire) Squadron RAuxAF based in RAF Woodvale. Steve has been an enormous supporter of the Association and has represented the RAF at many engagement events across the North West. Steve: we wish you every success for the future. Lastly, a farewell to one of our own: Commandant Altcar Training Camp (Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Black) who departs the Association on well-earned retirement in a couple of weeks’ time. Gordon has been in post for 11 years. He is no stranger to Altcar as he was the Commanding Officer of the Army Training Unit (North) in a Reserve role prior to assuming the Commandant post. Altcar has never been busier and the success of providing Defence outputs to the single Services (Reserves, Cadets, and Regular personnel) and other government departments has been a great example of inspirational leadership.



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The many letters of gratitude from across Defence and wider bear testament to his outstanding passion and drive to keep Altcar very much as the “Jewel in the Crown”. I am sure you will all wish Gordon and his family all the very best in retirement; he will be missed. We welcome Maj (Retd) Carl Gardner as his successor.

The Financial Year 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 has been difficult in its management. Particularly, under the Grant-in-Aid allocation from the Reserve Forces & Cadets branch in the MOD, we saw in-year pressures from an increased pay-rise for the staff (above the 1.9% that we had been told to bid for), the National Living Wage increase for Skill Zone (2) and Administrative grade staff, the results of the Council of Reserve Forces’ & Cadets’ Association (CRFCA) led benchmarking exercise which saw some minor increases for some staff and the Government’s direction for a small one-off payment to all Ministry of Defence Civil/Crown Servants. That all said, we have managed to claw back this overspend from the reserves held by CRFCA and this puts us in a good place as we reached year-end in March 2024. The challenges for the financial year that has just commenced and for future years will continue to be one of reduction in our budgets. We have already scoped and implemented considerable reductions. With our staff costs currently being in the region of 83% of our Grant-in-Aid allocation the cuts will be hard felt and I am sorry to say that the support we have maintained to our customers – our tri-Services Reserve and Cadet Forces may be reduced.



Just one effect of these budget cuts is that I have had to postpone and may have to cancel our President’s Dinner which would have been held the night before this AGM. We have also had to undertake the 2024 AGM virtually. Additional cost savings may well have to be made to overtime, meetings, travel and subsistence budgets; needless to say, we will maintain a close eye on our budget expenditure. We are all aware that all Government Departments have taken a hit financially and for the MOD, the continuing conflict in the Ukraine causes many pressures. In short - the Board and I, in conjunction with the salaried-staff, will continue to try and undertake the same support as in recent years; with less funding available, further unpalatable measures may well have to be implemented by the NW RFCA Board.

So, back to my strapline for this year being: “Change is upon us”. Like last year, I wish to update you on a couple of “Change Programmes” that will not only affect us as an Association but also with have some knock-on effects to our customers.

In no particular order:

- **The Tailored Review (Sullivan Report).** Those of you who have been observant over the last couple of years – and as mentioned in the Chair’s report of 2021, 2022 and again last year - will be aware of the outcomes of the Tailored Review, where the main decision by the MOD (one of 78 recommendations), was for the CRFCA and the 13 Associations to be regularised (classified) and streamlined into a Single Executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). Whilst this should have been implemented with the Initial Operating Capability (IOC) on 1 April 2022, this recommendation of the Reform Programme continues to be “paused” by the MOD until after the general election. The main reason for this “pause” was the MOD were told that securing a legislative slot in the 4th session of Parliament, to enact the necessary primary legislation required, to establish an NDPB from the 13 Associations was highly unlikely. A fresh bid for parliamentary time may be considered after the general election and, perhaps, be included as part of the next review of the Armed Forces Bill in 2026. As stated last year - the “So What” for the RFCAs, their staff, Boards and membership is to continue delivering our mandated outputs – VE, Cadets and Youth and Engagement. NW RFCA will continue to:

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- Work in accordance with Reserve Forces Act 1996, RFCA Regulations, the Financial Framework and the CRFCA/RFCA Framework Agreement – as now.
 - Deliver those recommendations of the Sullivan Review that do not need primary legislation as part of a wider continuous improvement initiative.
 - Support and influence the on-going change initiatives and studies – for example the Benchmarking Review, the Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) VfM Review of the Reserve and Cadet Estate and the Reserve Estate Optimisation Programme (REOP) - more on these three programmes are detailed below.
 - **The Reserve Estate Optimisation (REO) Programme.** This work continues and the Chief Executive and Head Estate are engaged with the REO team. Whilst Defence tries to wrestle with the fundamental question of “What does it want from its Reserves?” there is potentially some good news for North West. On 3 July 2023 a MOD Combined Judgement Panel (CJP) conducted a Multi Criteria Decision Analysis Process scoring four criteria (**enables collaboration, supports resilience, enhances capability, estate betterment**) to identify the location for the first Defence Collaboration Hub (DCH) - across the United Kingdom. It was determined that a DCH split solution which would potentially see a DCH Main base established in Haldane Barracks in Greater Manchester with the DCH Rear – based in Altcar Training Camp. Scoping is being based around the following construct:
 - DCH Main - Haldane Barracks: A DCH is best described as creating military points of presence across the country to facilitate the dispersed, digitally enabled mobilisation of a warfighting echelon at scale and pace. The DCH will strengthen Defence’s ability to respond effectively to Resilience tasks, while providing a focal point to modernised Reserve recruitment, training, and Regular and Reserve integration across the Services. It is hoped that by using modern ways of working, the DCH will support growth in innovation, enable Defences Industrial Strategy and potentially demonstrate a more efficient use of the Defence Estate by allowing cross Government synergy in major cities.
 - DCH Rear, will provide multi-agency training support and sustainment, to enable the deployment of a DCH Forward. It will consist of a large multi-agency training facility, supported with accommodation and an additional c120 transit bed spaces using modular construction techniques.
- This could be excellent news for investment in two main areas of the VE estate. The key is funding and whilst the project currently remains unfunded, an independent scoping study of Altcar Training Camp has already taken place by a civilian contractor who has undertaken a full condition survey with a potential mix of new build and refurbishment options.

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- MOD RF&C Engagement Review. Defence Relationship Management (DRM) is now in its 10th year of service delivery. In that time the organisation has delivered over 11,600 Armed Forces Covenants and more than 7200 Employer Recognition Scheme Awards. Defence has decided this anniversary provides an opportunity to conduct an Engagement Review focused on what the MOD needs from DRM looking out to 2030 and beyond. This will allow our customer (the MOD & single Services) the opportunity to confirm their Reserves & Cadets related Employer Engagement requirements, whilst also taking account of the need to include the ongoing embryonic work across Defence looking at the 'Strategic Reserve' requirements that support the National Defence Plan.

ACDS (RF&C) stated: 'Cognisant that DRM celebrates its 10th anniversary in April, this review is timely in helping to make recommendations to prepare and shape DRM for its continued success over the next 10 years.'



Next Steps. The MOD Study Team Leader, Gp Capt Simon Briggs, was tasked to draw together a 'Recommendations Paper' for ACDS (RF&C) and Chief of Defence People (CDP) outlining which elements of DRM's operating model and organisational design need to be looked at in greater detail to underpin achieving that 'success over the next 10 years'. This is good news and presented an opportunity for NW RFCA to play an active role working collaboratively with MOD to influence how DRM operates and delivers over the coming decade. NW RFCA engaged with and provided our thoughts to Gp Capt Briggs following which CDP considered and agreed to the recommendations paper. This outlines further work required, not only to shape the Engagement Community, but also how we conduct our business for the next decade. We now have a few months to delve into the recommendations and refine an implementation plan in time for the next financial year (starting 1st April 2025).

- Job Evaluation and Benchmarking Review. This review was completed with all 4 phases looking at all grades across the CRFCA and Associations. As expected, not everyone was a "winner", but the recommendations were by and large implemented. This saw a small increase for some grades across the Association.



Introduction



- Move to The Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS). As way of a refresher - The maintenance of the Volunteer Estate (VE) was included in scope of the FDIS Programme (which came into fruition from December 2021 to April 2022) across the MODs Built Estate. A VE VfM Study was conducted and the MOD agreed on Option 4: The FDIS Built Estate contractual arrangements are adopted with CRFCA managing four amended regional contracts in respect of VE. This option would see the CRFCA managing the amended contracts and enabling the effective discharge of the CRFCA statutory Estates Management function. The CRFCA becomes the equivalent of a DIO Regional Delivery Region and RFCAs, the DIO Service Delivery Areas. An In-Service Date for all Associations was re-amended to 1 August 2024 and NW RFCA (and another 7 Associations) will work with VIVO Defence Services who will provide Hard FM services. Work has commenced and engagement with VIVO is well advanced.

In March just gone, on behalf of the President and Vice-Presidents in their roles of His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenants and the Lieutenant Governor of the Isle of Man, I and my Vice-Chairs screened the nominations for this year's awards. The number of submissions were at a record high - c186. The screening board once again were humbled by the submissions, which shows the amazing work undertaken across our Cadets, Reserves, civilian staff working in units and the Veteran communities. Last year's award ceremonies were well organised and delivered to a very high standard

with the usual style and panache; it remains the highlight of our year to see the awardees on the night receiving their framed certificates with their close families in attendance.

So back to my strapline – “Change is upon us”. The challenging financial climate we are all facing will continue with us for the near future. Be under no illusion it will be challenging but I remain of the view that the NW RFCA must be innovative and creative in delivering Defence outputs, with the funding we are allocated, across both the Reserves and Cadets. But at the same time very clear with Defence on what we cannot do!

In conclusion, I wish to thank our President, Vice-Presidents, Board Members, Volunteers, salaried staff and yourselves for your continued support to the Association throughout 2023 and into 2024. I, and the staff of NW RFCA, remain continually amazed at the number of days and hours that many members of the Association – as Volunteers - continue to put into the Association's work- much of it unnoticed. To the salaried staff - I thank you for your dedication and hard work. The support by the wider membership is very much appreciated and it makes our work that much easier knowing that we have a hugely supportive group of Volunteers who we can rely on to further the Association's aims and outputs – ultimately in trying to create the best possible environment for our constituents: the Reservist and Cadets.

I do hope you enjoy the report

Cadets



Introduction

The theme of “Change being upon us” continues at pace. As we forge ahead into 2024, the changing landscape, pillar outputs and lived experience of our tri-Service Cadets and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, has been shaped by challenging financial pressures which are set to continue into the new Financial Year and beyond. The move of Preston, Army Headquarters North West to RPOC North, the transfer of our Volunteer Estate (FDIS) to VIVO – both with In-Service Dates (ISD) of 1 Aug 2024 - and continued pressure on the Defence Training Estate, conspire to add to the changes we face on all fronts as we strive to adapt and adjust to the new world order here in the North West.

Despite these challenges, recruitment and growth continues at pace with all cadet organisations reporting a continuous increase in Cadets and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, as new skills are gained and friendships established. Moreover, for our young people, the benefits of improved self-confidence, life skills and leadership development they will receive will last a lifetime.

NW Cadet Organisation	Cadet and CFAVs	CFAVs	Cadets
SCC	2859	1186	1673
ACF	5081	1052	4029
ATC/CCF (RAF)	5567	932	4635
CCF (ARMY)	3088	269	2819
TOTAL	16,595	3,439	13,156

* Data captured by NW-Cadet and Youth 01 Mar 2024



Sea Cadets Corps

Over the past few months, the Sea Cadets have been undertaking an exercise called “Refining our Offer”. This retains the focus on delivering the ‘Future Ready’ strategy for Sea Cadets but also lightens the load on Volunteers by adjusting (marginally) elements of the Sea Cadets Experience and addressing the inevitable current squeeze on funding across the charity. This will, for example, result in a reduction of competitions being offered within the SCC.

The SCC ‘centre of excellence’ classroom building has now been completed at Altcar and there are plans to place a dedicated Sea Cadet Armoury on the site. The support of Altcar Training Camp and NW RFCA Estate team in taking this work forward has been invaluable.



Cadets

The Sea Cadets have also been working closely with the RFCA Engagement teams (REEDs) across the region, capitalising on opportunities brought about by changes to advocacy and support of Armed Forces Covenant Businesses to Cadets and Volunteers. This has taken many forms with the Area Officer North West SCC, Charles Bagot-Jewitt DL speaking at a number of RFCA sponsored events and the SCC planning an 'on the water' fundraising dinner for disadvantaged young people as a result. Of particular note has been the redecoration of the Huyton SCC Unit by the Forshaw Group and provision of off-shore bursaries provided by Peel Ports and Hatfields, which have arisen from Covenant activity.



Flag changes have also seen personality changes with the retirement of Commodore Phil Waterhouse in December 2023 and the appointment of the new Naval Regional Commander Northern England and Isle of Man (NRC NE & IoM), Commodore Tom Knowles ADC.



Army Cadet Force

In October 2023, The Army Cadet Force welcomed a new North West Colonel Cadets, Catherine Harrison, who took up her appointment succeeding Colonel Ian Holmes upon his retirement. Formerly the Commandant Greater Manchester ACF, Catherine is no stranger to NW RFCA and builds upon her predecessor's good work with her regional leadership experience and transformational ideas, underpinned by her day job as Director of People, Culture and Inclusion at Lancaster University. Across the Counties, the ACF appointed four new Commandants; Colonels Gavin Jones, Joanne Eccles, Paul Smillie and Alastair Richmond.

Annual Camps were enjoyed by 1409 NW England & Isle of Man ACF Cadets spanning Otterburn, Strensall and Sennybridge. Fieldcraft, Drill, First Aid and Adventure Training were the most popular activities. Overseas, international partnerships have also created opportunities for North West Cadets and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers with Greater Manchester ACF supporting two of their establishment to India and thirty members to Gibraltar where an enduring link between GM and GIB ACFs is developing year on year.



Cadets



Air Training Corps

The Air Training Corps (ATC) continued to deliver an exciting and challenging programme of events and routine training throughout the North West. Cadets from Cumbria & Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside Wings have all been enjoying the offer, whether it is found in the training rooms in their squadrons or further afield in training centres or on RAF Stations.

Many of these cadets will find themselves receiving honours at our Lord-Lieutenant's award ceremonies with appointments as Lord-Lieutenant's Cadets a significant honour in itself. In Merseyside, Flight Sergeant Olivia Byrne (ATC) and Sergeant Major Aiden Bowie (ACF) are the current incumbents and have accompanied the Lord-Lieutenant to a range of activities, including the ceremony to celebrate ATC Sunday in February.

A significant and possibly unexpected success was achieved by a team from two squadrons (2348 (Maghull) Sqn and 1128 (Crosby) Sqn) in the CADSAAM (Cadet Skill at Arms) meeting in October. In their first entry to the competition, the under-18 team won the Attack and Reorg competition, the over-18 team won the Rifle Pairs and the under-18's won the Falling Plate. In addition, the over-18's were placed 2nd in the Champion Team while Flight Sergeant Byrne was runner up as Champion Cadet. If the ATC were underestimated before in terms of shooting, it is safe to say that is unlikely to be the case next time.

Moving forward

2024 tri-Service Cadet leads have positively responded to "Change being upon us" with the theme of smarter working and collaboration in FY2024/2025, the objectives being to build greater efficiency, capitalise on value for money public funds and to maximise ROI. Inter-county collaboration themes include administration best practices, Smart Camp AC 24 and developing a standard adventure training package with one provider for AT 25, whilst regional tri-Service competitions, MSSC access and use of ACF weapons and tri-Service Cadet-engagement plans with AFC signatories are all currently being scoped.

Finally, on behalf of North West Cadets and Youth, I echo the Chair in his opening remarks in saying farewell – and sincere thanks - to Colonel Darren Doherty, the Army Commander North West. Colonel Darren has been a champion of NW tri-Service Cadets during his tenure (starting as an Air Cadet at school in this region), but was ever present at each of the county Annual Camps and Lord-Lieutenant Awards, always taking a keen interest in the Cadets and the families supporting them.

We also say farewell and thank you to Major Tony Kirkpatrick, Cadet Executive Officer Cheshire and Isle of Man Army Cadet Force (formerly CEO Merseyside ACF) for his 19 years' service to NW RFCA, his dedication to the cadet movement and his sage advice and leadership to the PSS. We wish him a very happy retirement.



CADSAAM winning team

Cadets



School Cadet Expansion Programme

Moving on from “Phase 3” of the joint DfE/MOD Cadet Expansion Programme (CEP) which focussed on the sustainment of units and growth in Cadet numbers. The School Cadet Expansion Officers (SCEOs) were working to the CEP Directive for “Phase 3” which focussed on sustainment and growth of the Contingents. The North West has 47 CCF Contingents across our area.

The School Cadet Expansion Officers (SCEOs) were working to the CEP Directive for “Phase 3” which focussed on sustainment and growth of the Contingents. Central to this is the Government’s ambition to increase the number of cadets in school units from c.43,000 to 60,000 (by 2024). SCEO contracts were due to end March 2024 but due to the vital support they are offering schools, it has been confirmed that the contacts are enduring until at least 2032, therefore offering security to the post holders.

This extension will see a small change in title from “Expansion” to “Engagement” officers and they will be working to a new updated directive in due course.

There have been some Contingent closures in the last 12 months, but there have also been new Contingents approved as part of Phase 3, “business as usual”. There are 4 schools currently engaged by the single Services in the hope of further Contingents being approved.

CURRENT NUMBERS	
Pre CEP	16 Contingents
CEP Units Opened	
CEP 100 (2012-2015)	4
May 16	4
November 16	2
May 17	5
November 17	3
May 18	7
November 18	5
CEP Phase 3 (“Business as Usual”)	6
CEP Breakdown by Service	
Army	18
Royal Navy	5
Royal Marine	2
Royal Air Force	8
CCF Contingents by County	
Lancashire	10
Greater Manchester	14
Cheshire	9
Merseyside	11
Cumbria	2
Isle of Man	1



Altcar Training Camp



Altcar Team and Supporting Services

The past 12 months have been an extremely busy period for the Altcar staff who have gone above and beyond to support site users. Whatever the issue, the staff at Altcar have been willing to apply a fix or solution to ensure that customer engagement is high. Altcar has received several compliments from our site users throughout the year; for units and individuals to take the time to correspond after they have left the site is indeed testament to the facilities and staff.

Weather and Impact on Site Business

The 2023/2024 year has come with several challenges. Flooding across the site according to the Range Liaison Officer and two local farmers, is the worst they have seen in the last 28 years. Wet weather and high winds have been challenging in terms of providing a safe place to train. Ditch clearance has been a struggle and generators and pumps have been used extensively with very little effect. Range Control has ensured that range firing points have been maintained to ensure live operational and live firing training can continue. An excellent effort with over half a million rounds fired down the Altcar Ranges over the period from January to April 2024.



Various Altcar Site Business

Fire risk assessments

A passive fire survey revealed that Altcar was carrying a fire risk. In order to mitigate the risk, all site fire plans were reviewed, risk assessments were updated, whole site fire extinguishers were exchanged and every unit looking to sleep on site must now undergo a mandatory fire brief before they are allocated accommodation.

M Range

A significant amount of range engineering and configuration was applied to 'M' range in order to retain its Close Quarter Marksmanship (CQM) status. The local 75 Royal Engineer Regiment (75 RE) carried out the process of fitting 'Ballistic Blocks' configured to the correct range specification – a vast task which underwent significant scrutiny and inspection. The range effort has provided operational shooting opportunities which may have been lost had 75 RE not intervened. Thank you for your ensuring support.



Classrooms

I reported last year that Altcar received 6 classrooms which were replacements for the original Nissen Huts which were dismantled and removed from site. 75 RE took on the task of preparing the ground and installing the 6 new classrooms. At the time of writing this report I am pleased to say that an additional 6 classrooms have been ordered and ground work has commenced for their installation. This is a significant contribution to this site and these additions add value to those multiple units using the site looking for classroom space.

Altcar Training Camp

Parade Square

The parade square at Altcar has been heavily used over the last year. With the addition of the overhead cover stanchions, overhead cover dais, flood lights and some tarmacking repairs, the parade square has been reinvigorated.

Red Rose Club/Welfare Facility

Altcar was fortunate enough to secure funding through the lived experience application process where it secured 15 x Chesterfield Settees. A small library and reading room has been created to the rear of the Red Rose Club. Additional seating has been placed around the facility, including some high tables for those who want to work on their laptops. The facility also benefitted from the installation of a ramp and two disabled toilets.

Altcar Gate Guardian

Altcar is now the proud custodian of a 25 pounder Artillery piece which stands proudly at the front entrance to the Main Camp. Refurbished by 101 REME, 127 Sqn.

Significant Events

Small Arms Service Corps (SASC)

These include Altcar facilitating the Small Arms Service Corps (SASC) support/courses for the Royal Tank Regiment who have been stood-up to support Operation Interflex (Ukraine). Both 42 and 43 Cdo RM have used the range extensively having fired 36,000 down a number of ranges on one particular day. The Royal Marines have fired a quarter of a million rounds down the range complex this year.

Land Training Area & Ranges (LTAR)

Altcar would like to place on record a big thanks to the Commander at Headquarters North West for his support as Range Authorising Officer and for his professional support along with that of his LTAR's for their enduring efforts to ensure the ranges are safe and compliant. The LTAR has had a particular challenging year trying to consolidate a full range status for Altcar.

Ranges - Move Fast & Shoot Slow

Altcar has hosted a number of units this year – for a number of Regular Units, the visit to Altcar this reporting year was a first and from their individual feedback, it won't be their last visit to Altcar Training Camp. This is mainly down to the Range Liaison Officer Gerry Allen, his Range ethos and team effort. So much so that Gerry attracted a very special soldier to his ranges – no other than the Regimental Shooting Team Captain of 5 Rifles, Sgt Daniel Stanton. A special individual with an impressive shooting portfolio, we were delighted to host him at Altcar Training Camp. He is the world's number 1:

- Top sniper in the UK since 2013 (he has never lost a UK Sniper Competition since 2013).
- Top shot in the Rifles Regiment for the last 12 years.
- Captain of the British Army Combat Shooting Team (BACST) since 2014.
- Won the Kazakhstan International Sniper Competition in 2013.
- Won the American International Sniper Competition in 2014.
- Won the Australian Sniper World Championships 2015.
- Top International shot UK 2016 – still unbeaten.
- Won the Canadian International Small Arms Competition 2019.



Altcar Training Camp



VIP Visits

Altcar was fortunate enough to secure two 2* visits to the site. Major General Richard Clements, Director Army Basing and Infrastructure and Major General Tom Bewick, General Officer Commanding, Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command. Both visits were useful and mutually beneficial.

Commandant's Retirement & Final Report

The Commandant at Altcar Training Camp, Lt Col Gordon Black, is retiring in June 2024 with a combined service supporting Defence for 44 years. In his tenth and final AGM report, he would like to take this opportunity to thank the NW RFCA, the Altcar Team, lodger units and all service support elements including the MGS and Aramark for their continued patronage and endeavours. Their support throughout the years has been outstanding.



Infrastructure



In August 2024, the Association and the Infrastructure Department will welcome in the most significant change to the way that property management and maintenance services are provided to the Volunteer Estate in more than 115 years. The introduction of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) on 1 August 2024 will see the Infrastructure Department transition from being a delivery agency responsible for reactive maintenance, statutory and mandatory inspections and tests, (SMIT), and additional works services such as renovations, refurbishments and new buildings, to an assurance body that monitors the estate and the works being undertaken by the new prime contractor – VIVO Defence Services (VIVO). VIVO currently manage the Built Estate contract, which supplies Hard FM services to the Regular Estate across a footprint covering eight of the 13 RFCAs – the Central region. The new Volunteer Estate contract will mirror this geographic laydown that we, our sister RFCAs and Council of RFCAs in London are now busy planning for, laying down the new organisation which will underpin our responsibilities in this new environment.

The first changes that will start to become obvious are that we will have to adapt our people to a new structure for the Infrastructure Department. This which differs greatly from our current laydown, not least due to the increase in the number of personnel required to deliver against our new objectives. As you can see from the organisational chart below, there are key differences in how the department is resourced and we have started the process of filling these vacant spaces. A guiding principle has been that the changes will not force anyone out of a job but there will be fundamental differences to the work that our people will have to carry out. This will challenge us to carefully select individuals who can adapt to the FDIS construct, but we are extremely lucky to already have a fantastic pool of people in the Department and the wider Association who can look to the opportunities created.

As at the date of publication, we have appointed our Head of Estate, Lee Delaney, as well as our Senior Estate Managers – Mark Byrne and Gary Oakford – who all took up their posts in May.

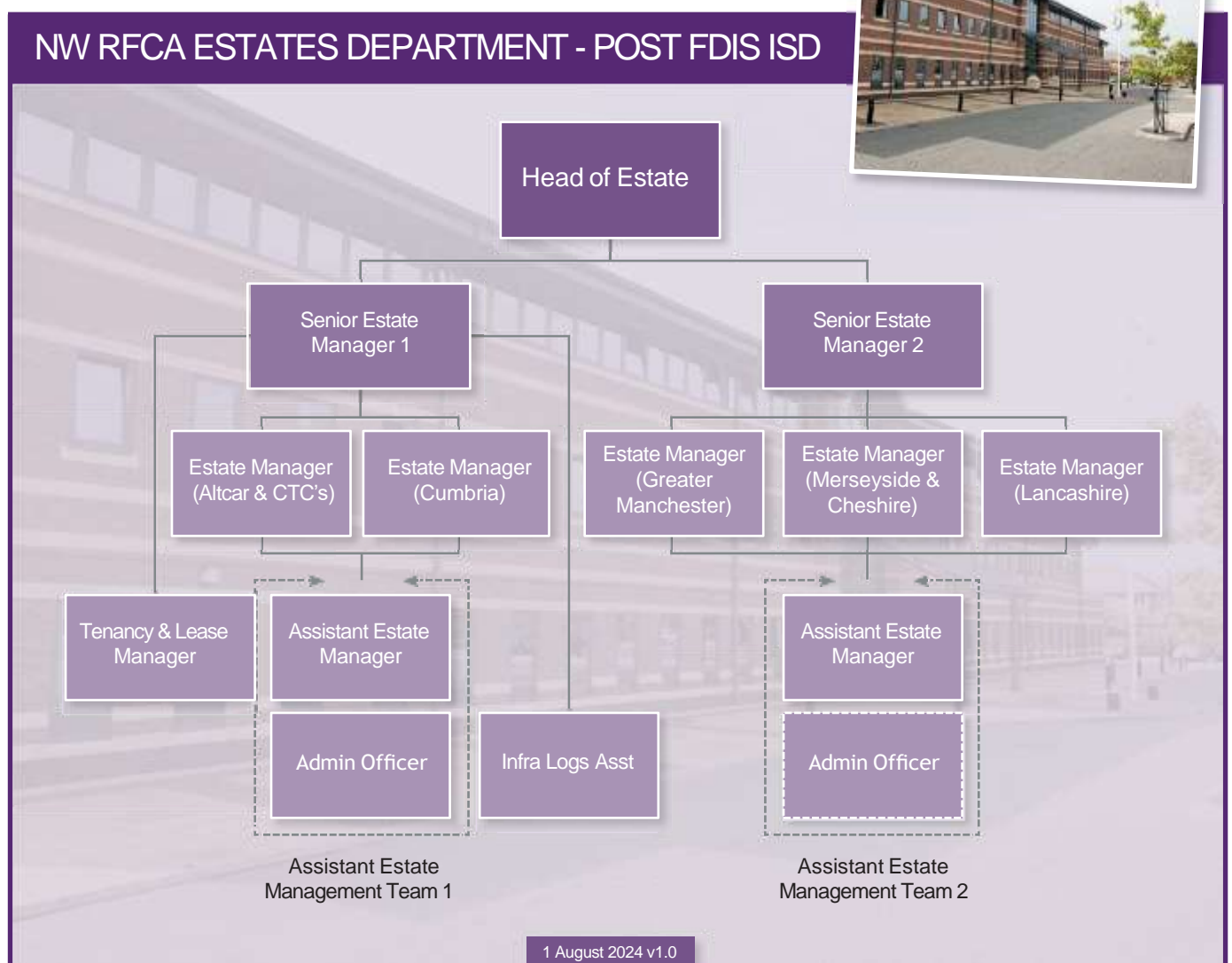
Infrastructure

Three of our five Estate Managers have also been selected and they, along with the remainder of the appointments, will take up their new roles from 1 July to ensure they are ready for FDIS implementation on 1 August 2024.

This recruiting strategy allows the maximum opportunity for current staff to apply for higher grades while being safe in the knowledge that if they are not successful in gaining promotion, there will still be a position available at their current grade.

The introduction of FDIS to the Volunteer Estate will herald a completely new way of working for this Association's customer base and will be echoed across the country.

We don't believe that our Reserve and Cadet locations will be disadvantaged by this new scheme and there is cause for optimism that it will allow a more focussed response to infrastructure issues and needs but of course it remains to be seen how this will positively improve the Volunteer Estate over the coming months and years. What the Infrastructure Department and our 'chain of command' can continue to promise, is we will remain a strong voice for the North West and we will challenge VIVO and Defence to deliver the best possible service for our region.



Employer Engagement

Our team members are invaluable

The past 12 months has been another busy period of Defence Engagement for the team. We have welcomed two new staff members into the team, Sue Thomson and Joe Dodd both of whom have settled in quickly and bring new ideas and talent to the team. The team continues to engage ever more closely with the region's Local Authorities, businesses, Reserve and Cadet units and wider communities.



NW RFCA Regional Employer Engagement Directors 2024
(L to R- Joe Dodd, Jan Cox, Louisa Blakemore and Gary Oakford)



NW RFCA Employer Engagement Administrative Officers 2024
(L to R- Liz Lloyd-Young and Sue Thomson)

Cadet Force Engagement

We have seen good success this year with the team bringing together Cadet units and business through apprenticeships, unit visits, support to local business and supporting Cadet Force Adult Volunteers. The Sea Cadet Corps has benefitted most from introductions to business to date, as the NW SCC lead, Commander Charlie Bagot-Jewitt is full time and can dedicate time and resources to meeting with business connections. The Army Cadet Force is catching up and we are working with the Royal Air Force Air Cadet leadership to bring along both Cadet organisations. It is our intention in 2025 to try and align many more community Cadets with local businesses.



Employer Engagement

Armed Forces Covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme

We have seen the number of national Armed Forces Covenant signings exceed 11,700 with 1161 in the North West. In 2024, the team has submitted 26 new ERS Gold applications and to date 47 ERS Silver applications have been approved. The numbers continue to grow and it is clear the appetite for businesses supporting the Defence Community also continues to grow.

Armed Forces Covenant numbers, National and Regional April 2024

National ERS Gold Award Holder – 829
National ERS Silver Award Holder – 1,377
National ERS Bronze Award Holder – 5,114
Covenants signed across UK – 11,727
Covenants signed in NW – 1,161

No of Employer Recognition Scheme award holders in the North West



Employer Engagement

Unit support and much more

In 2023 – 2024 we have continued to introduce Cadet leads to employers as we know Cadets will make great apprentices. We have worked with Local Authorities, the Isle of Man Government, joined Chambers of Commerce, worked alongside Veterans organisations, regional businesses, hosted business breakfasts, hosted unit visits, organised award ceremonies and have enjoyed hybrid working. We have introduced a series of engagement team briefings to units where we go out and tell them what support we can offer to them, their employers, Cadets, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and members of the Reserve Forces and ask them what they want from us. These visits have proven to be very useful and are certainly an enabler to bring units and employers closer together in line with Ministry of Defence direction.

His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenants' and Lieutenant Governor's Awards

NW RFCA has had another record breaking year where we have received 186 Lord-Lieutenants' and Lieutenant Governor's Awards submissions from units, service charities and individuals. It's fantastic to see the continued growth of these high profile awards and we very much look forward to supporting the King's representatives present the awards at their county award ceremonies.

In closing

You'll be reading this as we are now well into planning the Lord-Lieutenant's Awards across the North West. If you've never been to one of our events, please get in touch and come along – we'd be delighted to host you and you'll be amazed at just how connected we are within the North West and all to the benefit of the region's Defence Community. We will deliver the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver and Gold Awards in October and November respectively and look forward to working with a new batch of Armed Forces Supportive employers.



Communications



Social Media

Last year we worked with a digital marketing agency to produce paid social media campaigns to boost online applications for the Army Reserve in the North West. In October, we ran a four-week campaign with 156 Regiment RLC that generated 235 leads and saw huge success in terms of reach and engagement. In January this year, we launched a similar recruitment campaign for 103 Regiment RA that ran on Facebook and Instagram. This two-weekend campaign generated 113 expressions of interest in joining the reserves, with six applications already submitted and 16 in progress. Pending budget approval, we will continue to use paid social media campaigns to support our North West reserve units.

The NW RFCA continues to grow our audiences organically on social media channels with Cadets and Reserve case studies, video content, sustainability content and Employer Engagement posts proving to be popular content. We will continue to monitor our social media analytics to enable us to be more strategic with our approach.



Video Creation

Following on from the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Awards last year, we worked with a video production agency to produce a series of six case studies from the following organisations:

- Story Contracting
- Peel Ports
- Merseyside Fire & Rescue
- OCU
- University of Cumbria
- Pinnacle Risk Consultancy

These videos were subsequently shared across all our social media platforms. They received 17,000 views and saw high engagement rates of over 8%.

To support Armed Forces Week in June this year, we have worked with Royal Navy Reservists and Royal Marine Reservists at HMS Eaglet in Liverpool to produce engaging video content highlighting their incredible reserve experiences. These will be shared via our website and social media channels.



Communications

New Website

We have worked with Buchanan Drive, a website agency and joined forces with Hi RFCA and NI RFCA to develop a new cost effective website template which is due to be launched this summer. The website focuses on an enhanced user experience, meets industry-leading standards in terms of security and supports efficient content management. Ultimately, the new website will enable us to showcase our services much more effectively.

His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenants' and Lieutenant Governor's Awards

The annual presentations of His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenants' and Lieutenant Governor's Awards, continue to be our flagship community engagement events in the region. Last year, we captured award recipient video testimonials and interviews to further support the success of the award ceremonies. This not only captured the celebrations of the evening on social media but they also promoted the various award categories available for the wider Armed Forces community.

Do you have a story you'd like to share?

Share your story and help to raise awareness of Reserves and Cadets in the North West and Isle of Man. Our social media channels, e-newsletter, website and press database can help to amplify your message. Email: nw-comms@rfca.mod.uk



NorthWestRFCA



North West Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association



NWRFC



Alternative Venues

Overview

Alternative Venues has had its most successful year since we started hiring out the Volunteer Estate to third parties. One of the biggest income earners has been Unit Base Parking. This is due to the buoyancy in the TV and filming industry in the North West. The Home Office (Immigration Enforcement) started using Stockport Army Reserve Centre in September 2023; they are now wanting to continue using the site as their main training hub for the North.

New staff

Emily Mason joined the team as a Business Development Executive Officer in November 2023, bringing the number to 3 full time members of staff.

Filming

The acclaimed Netflix drama 'Fool Me Once', was a frequent visitor to Haldane Barracks, Salford during 2023. During filming, two Army Reservists were lucky enough to debut as extras on set.

In addition, BBC Series 'Time', spent 10 days dressing and filming the second series of the drama at Jubilee Barracks St Helens. It has been fabulous to support TV production across our North West area.

Financial

I am pleased to report the income generated by Alternative Venues in 2023/2024 is £718,417.56 the breakdown is as follows: Hirings - £590,733.62, Mast - £99,890.02, Altcar Ranges - £27,793.92. This is a fantastic achievement by all involved in AV.

We have two sites that will receive more than £18,000 as their 30% share of Regionally Generated Income raised solely from hirings, with two more that will receive over £10,000.00.

Defence Infrastructure Organisation

In July 2023, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation took back charge of Dale Barracks in Cheshire and Fulwood and Weeton Barracks in Lancashire.

Summary

The team is extremely happy and proud of how AV has performed this year. The income generated is testament to the work of the AV department and importantly the continued support of the teams at each site. The team is excited and looking forward to the next financial year.



(scene filmed at Jubilee Barracks)



Finance

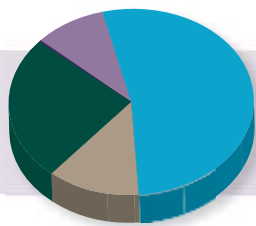
The Association began the financial year 2023/2024 with a budget allocation of £9.2M. In addition to this the Association had receipts in advance of £1.4M to fund various projects.






The budget increased by £4.48M during the year to reflect new projects and priorities, the funding available for the year totaled £15.1M (excluding RGI). In year allocations included £405.6K for safe & legal works, £345k for salary enhancements and allowances, £2.56M for new capital projects, £752K for revenue projects and £10K for additional Injured Service Personnel adaptations. The Receipts In Advance carried forward into FY 2024/2025 amount to £737K.

The Association's accounts represent income from 13 distinct funding streams. The consolidated accounts for FY 2023/2024 have been audited. The Association has received final confirmation of the audit, the Financial Return and Audit Findings report which were signed off prior to the Finance Advisory Board held on 13th May 2024. The Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure reports are included at page 22.

The pie charts below illustrate both the summary of income and how this has been allocated to our outputs with 26% earmarked for Estates Management and 25% allocated to infrastructure (primarily rents and rates).

Regionally Generated Income - Distribution

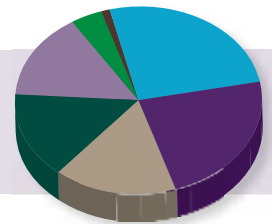






 Refunds to units for use of facilities for hiring to 3rd parties	£190,730
 Maintenance Works to the Estate	£43,857
Grants 2 - 4	£0.00
 Business Development and Alternative Venues costs	£90,463
 Costs associated with Association properties	£1,434
 AV hiring costs	£33,389

In addition to the funding provided, NWRFCA has generated £1.85M of income. £590.7K was generated primarily through the work of the Alternative Venues (AV) team. The AV team have worked tirelessly bringing the level of RGI raised higher than pre Covid times. In FY 2023/2024 the Association received REOP funds from CRFCA to the value of £545.9K, this was held within RGI. Examples of how the funding is used are outlined below:



Trust grants awarded in 2023/24



 Stretford Road Trust	£11,950
 Macclesfield Drill Hall Trust	£17,169
 NW Army Cadet Force Trust Fund	£19,200
 Congleton Drill Hall Trust	£3,039
 Blackpool Drill Hall	£10,810
 Sir Alan Jones	£11,222
 Crosby Road	£800
Total	£74,190

Finance

The North West of England and the Isle of Man Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Financial Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2024 Income & Expenditure Account

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
<u>Income</u>				
Funding via Council of RFCAs	14,436,791		10,784,458	
Funding received direct from funders	-		-	
Receipts generated by the RFCA	1,305,016		721,843	
Total income		15,741,807		11,506,301
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Estates Management				
Statutory & Mandatory	1,164,325		819,328	
Planned Maintenance	96,657		103,853	
Reactive Maintenance	1,575,419		1,447,075	
Incidental Work	22,796		-	
Life Cycle Replacement	27,422		-	
Condition Grade Improvement	289,570		177,123	
Injections / Projects RDEL and MNW	740,396		585,321	
Works in Aid of Disposal	-		-	
Prof Fees / Ext Assistance	9,498		9,308	
Sub total		3,926,083		3,142,008
Capital Expenditure				
Land & Buildings	-		-	
Purchase of Vehicles	-		-	
Assets in the Course of Construction	2,841,633		2,877,534	
Sub total		2,841,633		2,877,534
Staff Costs				
LE NI Civ Staff Pay	2,707,259		2,505,250	
UK NI Civ ERNIC	282,408		257,635	
LE Civ Ind Staff Pay	415,153		359,272	
UK Ind Civ ERNIC	39,814		30,372	
Non PCSPS Pens Payments	336,376		310,732	
Redundancy Payments	-		-	
Sub total		3,781,010		3,463,261

Finance

The North West of England and the Isle of Man Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Financial Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2024 Income & Expenditure Account - continued

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
Infrastructure				
Heating Oil	-		-	
Gas	1,118		2,900	
Electricity	653,083		227,354	
Water & Sewage	-		-	
Estate & FMS Accom Stores	310,355		295,553	
Energy Cons & Env Chge	308,925		288,062	
Rates / NDR	1,502,028		1,339,256	
Sub-Letting Costs	218,638		171,978	
Rents / Leases / Alarms / Lettings	460,192		341,542	
Sub total		3,454,339		2,666,645
IT & Comms				
IT Minor Equipment HW / SW	21,607		47,696	
IT Maintenance Services & Contracts	11,691		1,823	
Line & Tel Rental	44,602		27,051	
Sub total		77,900		76,570
Transport & Movement				
Lease of Vehicles	-		-	
Vehicle Maint	53,626		57,878	
Fuel (Non Utilities)	5,863		7,141	
Depreciation	237,279		251,385	
Loss on Sale of Vehicles	3,469		382	
Sub total		300,237		316,786
Recruiting Support				
Employer Support (DRM)	43,096		59,732	
Recruiting Support	4,981		3,171	
Sub total		48,077		62,903
Grants				
CRFCA Payment	-		(139,000)	
ACF Travel & Consolidated Grants	383,329		291,622	
Payments to Welfare Association	11,636		175,447	
TA Establishment & Band Grant	36,302		28,225	
FAuxAF Admin & PR	-		-	
Sub total		431,267		356,294

Finance

The North West of England and the Isle of Man Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Financial Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2024 Income & Expenditure Account - continued

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
Administration				
Office / General Administration	59,165		36,102	
Education / Training	6,671		12,953	
Professional Fees	10,500		10,080	
Legal Costs	4,420		17,558	
Insurance	4,792		4,002	
Travel & Subsistence	76,767		99,957	
Entertainment	-		-	
Sub total		162,315		180,652
HR Support				
HR & Recruiting - Civilian Assoc Staff	43,577		24,891	
Sub total		43,577		24,891
Total Expenditure		15,066,438		13,167,544
Excess income / (expenditure) for the year		<u>675,369</u>		<u>(1,661,243)</u>



Finance

The North West of England and the Isle of Man Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Financial Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2024 Balance Sheet

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
Non Current Assets				
Motor Vehicles	860,703		771,054	
		<u>860,703</u>		<u>771,054</u>
Current Assets				
Bank	3,336,415		3,498,375	
Petty Cash	600		600	
Sundry Debtors	1,143,754		302,158	
Prepayments & Accrued Income	162,309		160,036	
		<u>4,643,078</u>		<u>3,961,169</u>
Current Liabilities				
Sundry Creditors	465,051		68,710	
Accruals / Deferred Income	824,317		495,138	
Advance Receipts	736,965		1,393,098	
		<u>2,026,333</u>		<u>1,956,946</u>
Total Assets Less Total Liabilities		<u><u>3,477,448</u></u>		<u><u>2,775,277</u></u>
Financed By				
General Reserves	2,616,745		2,004,223	
Capital Reserves	860,703		771,054	
		<u><u>3,477,448</u></u>		<u><u>2,775,277</u></u>



Conclusion



Mr Mark Blundell (President NW RFCA and Lord-Lieutenant Merseyside)

“To be the essential, effective and enduring partner that supports Reserves, Cadets and the wider Armed Forces community”.

I have started off my conclusion to this year’s AGM report with the Vision of the RFCAs which I think is very clear. I have noted with interest the Chair’s Introduction and his strapline - “Change is upon us”. I am well aware that the Ministry of Defence never seems to stand still and is always

going through change programmes. Whether it is the single services or the supporting organisations – no department is immune to frequent change. I am encouraged though to read how the Association is adapting, as best it can to this change.

Understanding the financial pressure being faced, I too am saddened that the AGM this year has had to be held virtually; I and my fellow Vice-Presidents much enjoy the opportunity to be together with representation from the single services and our volunteer membership, along with some of the association salaried staff; I hope that for next year we can go back to face to face. The Chair’s Report for AGM 2024 has brought you up to speed with a short snapshot into the scope and variety of work undertaken by the salaried staff, and the volunteer membership, in support of the wider Reserve and Cadet community across the North West of England and the Isle of Man; there is much going on.

What is clear to me is that the Association has demonstrated resilience and adaptability which has ensured our continued support to our tri-Service Reserve Forces and Cadets. We are grateful for the dedication and commitment from our staff, and the unwavering support of our stakeholders. This has been pivotal in delivering a number of important outcomes across the region.

The importance of a well-recruited, well supported Armed Forces Reserve, in the era of continued conflict in Europe, is self-evident. However, it has to be said that while recruitment of Reservists is a real focus across the single Services, recruitment numbers are just not matching the outflow. This is worrying especially at a time when we are seeking to build reliance on their skills to complement our regular forces, including the RAF and Royal Navy.

Turning now to the Cadets: the value to society of young people in the Cadet Forces (SCC, ACF, RAF AC and the CCF) with a strong sense of community, self-discipline and respect for others, has long been formally recognised and is growing in popularity (with a big “thank you” to our wonderful and dedicated Cadet Force Adult Volunteers). I was privileged to witness just one example of this when I visited Merseyside ACF at their annual camp at Sennybridge, (in Wales), last summer and saw first-hand the quite excellent work that goes on to support those that have chosen a Cadet path.

The overlap between business, education and service in our units (both Reserve and Cadets) is becoming even greater, as public spending remains under pressure and the attraction – to the benefit of all – for greater collaboration becomes an imperative. This collaboration must be across the 3 main pillars of the Associations outputs – Cadets & Youth, the Estate and Engagement (both community and corporate). We must continue to foster these partnerships to create a resilient and interconnected network that benefits both our organisation and the community. This will ultimately connect Defence with society.

I also want to mention the tremendous support that Altcar Training Camp, through the leadership of the retiring Commandant (Gordon Black), has made to supporting wider Defence. The shortage of space across the UK’s Defence Training Estate has put more pressure on ranges and training areas and Altcar has, again, met all the demands that have

Conclusion

been made of it. It is extraordinary that just over 300,000 rounds were fired down the ranges in January – March this year; and the camp is full to capacity every weekend and, with the summer Cadet camps almost upon us, there is not a spare bed at the 702-bed hotel in the coming weeks!

I would like to mention and thank our volunteer membership. It remains humbling to see the considerable help and advice from an extended network of volunteers who collectively provide unparalleled expertise and experience. These volunteers – many of you who are reading this report – are the lifeblood of the RFCAs and are an invaluable means by which we connect to communities. In this continued period of change we will continue to rely on you to act as ambassadors on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, but more locally here in the NW – for NW RFCA and for the reservists and cadets whom we support. We are going to require individuals from all backgrounds, with diversity of experience and thought, to deliver in the coming years. My sincere thanks to you all.

I also want to mention the work undertaken by the various organisations and units that have submitted applications for “Our Awards”. I want to thank the cadet, reserve, not to forget the veterans, leaders and champions for their time in writing and submitting citations. These can really make a difference and we should give praise where it is due. As your President I know my fellow Vice-Presidents would also echo my sentiments that these awards continue to acknowledge the quite outstanding work that is undertaken in our community. I remain of the firm view that we cannot thank our amazing volunteers often enough.



Penultimately, Defence continues to be affected by a number of factors including the economy and I am aware that the Defence Plan directs MOD to do more to realise efficiencies within the whole Defence system, particularly in infrastructure, equipment, and technology programmes. We, as an Arm's Length Body, are not immune to these efficiencies, and so another challenging year with reduced resources is upon us. A general election with potentially a new Government will mean Defence will be challenged. The World is unstable. With all these problems, I know the Association continues to give its best in supporting Defence under the respective Service Level Agreements and all – regardless of grade - have once again stepped up to the mark.

In summary: I am grateful to have been supported by my fellow Vice-Presidents and all those in the Association. I believe that there are opportunities ahead of us and I am confident that we, as NW RFCA, will adapt and deliver, as we have so many times before, and will continue to be a Crown Service that the people of the UK can rely on.

All the very best for the coming year; and my sincere thanks for your support.





✉ nw-info@rfca.mod.uk

🌐 nwrzca.org.uk

📘 NorthWestRFCA

🏠 North West Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association

📷 NWRZCA



NW RFCA

RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION FOR
THE NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND AND THE ISLE OF MAN



ARMED FORCES
COVENANT